

CHAPTER XVI

We found my lady with no light in the room but the reading-lamp. The shade was screwed down so as to overshadow her face. Instead of looking up at us in her usual straightforward way, she sat close at the table, and kept her eyes fixed obstinately on an open book.

“Officer,” she said, “is it important to the inquiry you are conducting, to know beforehand if any person now in this house wishes to leave it?”

“Most important, my lady.”

“I have to tell you, then, that Miss Verinder proposes going to stay with her aunt, Mrs. Ablewhite, of Frizinghall. She has arranged to leave us the first thing to-morrow morning.”

Sergeant Cuff looked at me. I made a step forward to speak to my mistress—and, feeling my heart fail me (if I must own it), took a step back again, and said nothing.

“May I ask your ladyship WHEN Miss Verinder informed you that she was going to her aunt’s?” inquired the Sergeant.

“About an hour since,” answered my mistress.

Sergeant Cuff looked at me once more. They say old people’s hearts are not very easily moved. My heart couldn’t have thumped much harder than it did now, if I had been five-and-twenty again!

“I have no claim, my lady,” says the Sergeant, “to control Miss Verinder’s actions. All I can ask you to do is to put off her departure, if possible, till later in the day. I must go to Frizinghall myself to-morrow morning—and I shall be back by two o’clock, if not before. If Miss Verinder can be kept here till that time, I should wish to say two words to her—unexpectedly—before she goes.”

My lady directed me to give the coachman her orders, that the carriage was not to come for Miss Rachel until two o’clock. “Have you more to say?” she asked of the Sergeant, when this had been done.

“Only one thing, your ladyship. If Miss Verinder is surprised at this change in the arrangements, please not to mention Me as being the cause of putting off her journey.”

My mistress lifted her head suddenly from her book as if she was going to say something—checked herself by a great effort—and, looking back again at the open page, dismissed us with a sign of her hand.

“That’s a wonderful woman,” said Sergeant Cuff, when we were out in the hall again. “But for her self-control, the mystery that puzzles you, Mr. Betteredge, would have been at an end to-night.”

At those words, the truth rushed at last into my stupid old head. For the moment, I suppose I must have gone clean out of my senses. I seized the Sergeant by the collar of his coat, and pinned him against the wall.

“Damn you!” I cried out, “there’s something wrong about Miss Rachel—and you have been hiding it from me all this time!”

Sergeant Cuff looked up at me—flat against the wall—without stirring a hand, or moving a muscle of his melancholy face.

“Ah,” he said, “you’ve guessed it at last.”

My hand dropped from his collar, and my head sunk on my breast. Please to remember, as some excuse for my breaking out as I did, that I had served the family for fifty years. Miss Rachel had climbed upon my knees, and pulled my whiskers, many and many a time when she was a child. Miss Rachel, with all her faults, had been, to my mind, the dearest and prettiest and

best young mistress that ever an old servant waited on, and loved. I begged Sergeant's Cuff's pardon, but I am afraid I did it with watery eyes, and not in a very becoming way.

"Don't distress yourself, Mr. Betteredge," says the Sergeant, with more kindness than I had any right to expect from him. "In my line of life if we were quick at taking offence, we shouldn't be worth salt to our porridge. If it's any comfort to you, collar me again. You don't in the least know how to do it; but I'll overlook your awkwardness in consideration of your feelings."

He curled up at the corners of his lips, and, in his own dreary way, seemed to think he had delivered himself of a very good joke.

I led him into my own little sitting-room, and closed the door.

"Tell me the truth, Sergeant," I said. "What do you suspect? It's no kindness to hide it from me now."

"I don't suspect," said Sergeant Cuff. "I know."

My unlucky temper began to get the better of me again.

"Do you mean to tell me, in plain English," I said, "that Miss Rachel has stolen her own Diamond?"

"Yes," says the Sergeant; "that is what I mean to tell you, in so many words. Miss Verinder has been in secret possession of the Moonstone from first to last; and she has taken Rosanna Spearman into her confidence, because she has calculated on our suspecting Rosanna Spearman of the theft. There is the whole case in a nutshell. Collar me again, Mr. Betteredge. If it's any vent to your feelings, collar me again."

God help me! my feelings were not to be relieved in that way. "Give me your reasons!" That was all I could say to him.

"You shall hear my reasons to-morrow," said the Sergeant. "If Miss Verinder refuses to put off her visit to her aunt (which you will find Miss Verinder will do), I shall be obliged to lay the whole case before your mistress to-morrow. And, as I don't know what may come of it, I shall request you to be present, and to hear what passes on both sides. Let the matter rest for to-night. No, Mr. Betteredge, you don't get a word more on the subject of the Moonstone out of me. There is your table spread for supper. That's one of the many human infirmities which I always treat tenderly. If you will ring the bell, I'll say grace. 'For what we are going to receive——'"

"I wish you a good appetite to it, Sergeant," I said. "My appetite is gone. I'll wait and see you served, and then I'll ask you to excuse me, if I go away, and try to get the better of this by myself."

I saw him served with the best of everything—and I shouldn't have been sorry if the best of everything had choked him. The head gardener (Mr. Begbie) came in at the same time, with his weekly account. The Sergeant got on the subject of roses and the merits of grass walks and gravel walks immediately. I left the two together, and went out with a heavy heart. This was the first trouble I remember for many a long year which wasn't to be blown off by a whiff of tobacco, and which was even beyond the reach of ROBINSON CRUSOE.

Being restless and miserable, and having no particular room to go to, I took a turn on the terrace, and thought it over in peace and quietness by myself. It doesn't much matter what my thoughts were. I felt wretchedly old, and worn out, and unfit for my place—and began to wonder, for the first time in my life, when it would please God to take me. With all this, I held firm, notwithstanding, to my belief in Miss Rachel. If Sergeant Cuff had been Solomon in all his glory, and had told me that my young lady had mixed herself up in a mean and guilty plot, I should have had but one answer for Solomon, wise as he was, "You don't know her; and I do."

My meditations were interrupted by Samuel. He brought me a written message from my mistress.

Going into the house to get a light to read it by, Samuel remarked that there seemed a change coming in the weather. My troubled mind had prevented me from noticing it before. But, now my attention was roused, I heard the dogs uneasy, and the wind moaning low. Looking up at the sky, I saw the rack of clouds getting blacker and blacker, and hurrying faster and faster over a watery moon. Wild weather coming—Samuel was right, wild weather coming.

The message from my lady informed me, that the magistrate at Frizinghall had written to remind her about the three Indians. Early in the coming week, the rogues must needs be released, and left free to follow their own devices. If we had any more questions to ask them, there was no time to lose. Having forgotten to mention this, when she had last seen Sergeant Cuff, my mistress now desired me to supply the omission. The Indians had gone clean out of my head (as they have, no doubt, gone clean out of yours). I didn't see much use in stirring that subject again. However, I obeyed my orders on the spot, as a matter of course.

I found Sergeant Cuff and the gardener, with a bottle of Scotch whisky between them, head over ears in an argument on the growing of roses. The Sergeant was so deeply interested that he held up his hand, and signed to me not to interrupt the discussion, when I came in. As far as I could understand it, the question between them was, whether the white moss rose did, or did not, require to be budded on the dog-rose to make it grow well. Mr. Begbie said, Yes; and Sergeant Cuff said, No. They appealed to me, as hotly as a couple of boys. Knowing nothing whatever about the growing of roses, I steered a middle course—just as her Majesty's judges do, when the scales of justice bother them by hanging even to a hair. "Gentlemen," I remarked, "there is much to be said on both sides." In the temporary lull produced by that impartial sentence, I laid my lady's written message on the table, under the eyes of Sergeant Cuff.

I had got by this time, as nearly as might be, to hate the Sergeant. But truth compels me to acknowledge that, in respect of readiness of mind, he was a wonderful man.

In half a minute after he had read the message, he had looked back into his memory for Superintendent Seegrave's report; had picked out that part of it in which the Indians were concerned; and was ready with his answer. A certain great traveller, who understood the Indians and their language, had figured in Mr. Seegrave's report, hadn't he? Very well. Did I know the gentleman's name and address? Very well again. Would I write them on the back of my lady's message? Much obliged to me. Sergeant Cuff would look that gentleman up, when he went to Frizinghall in the morning.

"Do you expect anything to come of it?" I asked. "Superintendent Seegrave found the Indians as innocent as the babe unborn."

"Superintendent Seegrave has been proved wrong, up to this time, in all his conclusions," answered the Sergeant. "It may be worth while to find out to-morrow whether Superintendent Seegrave was wrong about the Indians as well." With that he turned to Mr. Begbie, and took up the argument again exactly at the place where it had left off. "This question between us is a question of soils and seasons, and patience and pains, Mr. Gardener. Now let me put it to you from another point of view. You take your white moss rose——"

By that time, I had closed the door on them, and was out of hearing of the rest of the dispute.

In the passage, I met Penelope hanging about, and asked what she was waiting for.

She was waiting for her young lady's bell, when her young lady chose to call her back to go on with the packing for the next day's journey. Further inquiry revealed to me, that Miss Rachel had given it as a reason for wanting to go to her aunt at Frizinghall, that the house was unendurable

to her, and that she could bear the odious presence of a policeman under the same roof with herself no longer. On being informed, half an hour since, that her departure would be delayed till two in the afternoon, she had flown into a violent passion. My lady, present at the time, had severely rebuked her, and then (having apparently something to say, which was reserved for her daughter's private ear) had sent Penelope out of the room. My girl was in wretchedly low spirits about the changed state of things in the house. "Nothing goes right, father; nothing is like what it used to be. I feel as if some dreadful misfortune was hanging over us all."

That was my feeling too. But I put a good face on it, before my daughter. Miss Rachel's bell rang while we were talking. Penelope ran up the back stairs to go on with the packing. I went by the other way to the hall, to see what the glass said about the change in the weather.

Just as I approached the swing-door leading into the hall from the servants' offices, it was violently opened from the other side, and Rosanna Spearman ran by me, with a miserable look of pain in her face, and one of her hands pressed hard over her heart, as if the pang was in that quarter. "What's the matter, my girl?" I asked, stopping her. "Are you ill?" "For God's sake, don't speak to me," she answered, and twisted herself out of my hands, and ran on towards the servants' staircase. I called to the cook (who was within hearing) to look after the poor girl. Two other persons proved to be within hearing, as well as the cook. Sergeant Cuff darted softly out of my room, and asked what was the matter. I answered, "Nothing." Mr. Franklin, on the other side, pulled open the swing-door, and beckoning me into the hall, inquired if I had seen anything of Rosanna Spearman.

"She has just passed me, sir, with a very disturbed face, and in a very odd manner."

"I am afraid I am innocently the cause of that disturbance, Betteredge."

"You, sir!"

"I can't explain it," says Mr. Franklin; "but, if the girl IS concerned in the loss of the Diamond, I do really believe she was on the point of confessing everything—to me, of all the people in the world—not two minutes since."

Looking towards the swing-door, as he said those last words, I fancied I saw it opened a little way from the inner side.

Was there anybody listening? The door fell to, before I could get to it. Looking through, the moment after, I thought I saw the tails of Sergeant Cuff's respectable black coat disappearing round the corner of the passage. He knew, as well as I did, that he could expect no more help from me, now that I had discovered the turn which his investigations were really taking. Under those circumstances, it was quite in his character to help himself, and to do it by the underground way.

Not feeling sure that I had really seen the Sergeant—and not desiring to make needless mischief, where, Heaven knows, there was mischief enough going on already—I told Mr. Franklin that I thought one of the dogs had got into the house—and then begged him to describe what had happened between Rosanna and himself.

"Were you passing through the hall, sir?" I asked. "Did you meet her accidentally, when she spoke to you?"

Mr. Franklin pointed to the billiard-table.

"I was knocking the balls about," he said, "and trying to get this miserable business of the Diamond out of my mind. I happened to look up—and there stood Rosanna Spearman at the side of me, like a ghost! Her stealing on me in that way was so strange, that I hardly knew what to do at first. Seeing a very anxious expression in her face, I asked her if she wished to speak to me. She answered, "Yes, if I dare." Knowing what suspicion attached to her, I could only put one

construction on such language as that. I confess it made me uncomfortable. I had no wish to invite the girl's confidence. At the same time, in the difficulties that now beset us, I could hardly feel justified in refusing to listen to her, if she was really bent on speaking to me. It was an awkward position; and I dare say I got out of it awkwardly enough. I said to her, "I don't quite understand you. Is there anything you want me to do?" Mind, Betteredge, I didn't speak unkindly! The poor girl can't help being ugly—I felt that, at the time. The cue was still in my hand, and I went on knocking the balls about, to take off the awkwardness of the thing. As it turned out, I only made matters worse still. I'm afraid I mortified her without meaning it! She suddenly turned away. "He looks at the billiard balls," I heard her say. "Anything rather than look at ME!" Before I could stop her, she had left the hall. I am not quite easy about it, Betteredge. Would you mind telling Rosanna that I meant no unkindness? I have been a little hard on her, perhaps, in my own thoughts—I have almost hoped that the loss of the Diamond might be traced to HER. Not from any ill-will to the poor girl: but——" He stopped there, and going back to the billiard-table, began to knock the balls about once more.

After what had passed between the Sergeant and me, I knew what it was that he had left unspoken as well as he knew it himself.

Nothing but the tracing of the Moonstone to our second housemaid could now raise Miss Rachel above the infamous suspicion that rested on her in the mind of Sergeant Cuff. It was no longer a question of quieting my young lady's nervous excitement; it was a question of proving her innocence. If Rosanna had done nothing to compromise herself, the hope which Mr. Franklin confessed to having felt would have been hard enough on her in all conscience. But this was not the case. She had pretended to be ill, and had gone secretly to Frizinghall. She had been up all night, making something or destroying something, in private. And she had been at the Shivering Sand, that evening, under circumstances which were highly suspicious, to say the least of them. For all these reasons (sorry as I was for Rosanna) I could not but think that Mr. Franklin's way of looking at the matter was neither unnatural nor unreasonable, in Mr. Franklin's position. I said a word to him to that effect.

"Yes, yes!" he said in return. "But there is just a chance—a very poor one, certainly—that Rosanna's conduct may admit of some explanation which we don't see at present. I hate hurting a woman's feelings, Betteredge! Tell the poor creature what I told you to tell her. And if she wants to speak to me—I don't care whether I get into a scrape or not—send her to me in the library." With those kind words he laid down the cue and left me.

Inquiry at the servants' offices informed me that Rosanna had retired to her own room. She had declined all offers of assistance with thanks, and had only asked to be left to rest in quiet. Here, therefore, was an end of any confession on her part (supposing she really had a confession to make) for that night. I reported the result to Mr. Franklin, who, thereupon, left the library, and went up to bed.

I was putting the lights out, and making the windows fast, when Samuel came in with news of the two guests whom I had left in my room.

The argument about the white moss rose had apparently come to an end at last. The gardener had gone home, and Sergeant Cuff was nowhere to be found in the lower regions of the house.

I looked into my room. Quite true—nothing was to be discovered there but a couple of empty tumblers and a strong smell of hot grog. Had the Sergeant gone of his own accord to the bed-chamber that was prepared for him? I went up-stairs to see.

After reaching the second landing, I thought I heard a sound of quiet and regular breathing on my left-hand side. My left-hand side led to the corridor which communicated with Miss Rachel's

room. I looked in, and there, coiled up on three chairs placed right across the passage—there, with a red handkerchief tied round his grizzled head, and his respectable black coat rolled up for a pillow, lay and slept Sergeant Cuff!

He woke, instantly and quietly, like a dog, the moment I approached him.

“Good night, Mr. Betteredge,” he said. “And mind, if you ever take to growing roses, the white moss rose is all the better for not being budded on the dog-rose, whatever the gardener may say to the contrary!”

“What are you doing here?” I asked. “Why are you not in your proper bed?”

“I am not in my proper bed,” answered the Sergeant, “because I am one of the many people in this miserable world who can’t earn their money honestly and easily at the same time. There was a coincidence, this evening, between the period of Rosanna Spearman’s return from the Sands and the period when Miss Verinder stated her resolution to leave the house. Whatever Rosanna may have hidden, it’s clear to my mind that your young lady couldn’t go away until she knew that it WAS hidden. The two must have communicated privately once already to-night. If they try to communicate again, when the house is quiet, I want to be in the way, and stop it. Don’t blame me for upsetting your sleeping arrangements, Mr. Betteredge— blame the Diamond.”

“I wish to God the Diamond had never found its way into this house!” I broke out.

Sergeant Cuff looked with a rueful face at the three chairs on which he had condemned himself to pass the night.

“So do I,” he said, gravely.

CHAPTER XVII

Nothing happened in the night; and (I am happy to add) no attempt at communication between Miss Rachel and Rosanna rewarded the vigilance of Sergeant Cuff.

I had expected the Sergeant to set off for Frizinghall the first thing in the morning. He waited about, however, as if he had something else to do first. I left him to his own devices; and going into the grounds shortly after, met Mr. Franklin on his favourite walk by the shrubbery side.

Before we had exchanged two words, the Sergeant unexpectedly joined us. He made up to Mr. Franklin, who received him, I must own, haughtily enough. “Have you anything to say to me?” was all the return he got for politely wishing Mr. Franklin good morning.

“I have something to say to you, sir,” answered the Sergeant, “on the subject of the inquiry I am conducting here. You detected the turn that inquiry was really taking, yesterday. Naturally enough, in your position, you are shocked and distressed. Naturally enough, also, you visit your own angry sense of your own family scandal upon Me.”

“What do you want?” Mr. Franklin broke in, sharply enough.

“I want to remind you, sir, that I have at any rate, thus far, not been PROVED to be wrong. Bearing that in mind, be pleased to remember, at the same time, that I am an officer of the law acting here under the sanction of the mistress of the house. Under these circumstances, is it, or is it not, your duty as a good citizen, to assist me with any special information which you may happen to possess?”

“I possess no special information,” says Mr. Franklin.

Sergeant Cuff put that answer by him, as if no answer had been made.

“You may save my time, sir, from being wasted on an inquiry at a distance,” he went on, “if you choose to understand me and speak out.”

“I don’t understand you,” answered Mr. Franklin; “and I have nothing to say.”

“One of the female servants (I won’t mention names) spoke to you privately, sir, last night.”

Once more Mr. Franklin cut him short; once more Mr. Franklin answered, “I have nothing to say.”

Standing by in silence, I thought of the movement in the swing-door on the previous evening, and of the coat-tails which I had seen disappearing down the passage. Sergeant Cuff had, no doubt, just heard enough, before I interrupted him, to make him suspect that Rosanna had relieved her mind by confessing something to Mr. Franklin Blake.

This notion had barely struck me—when who should appear at the end of the shrubby walk but Rosanna Spearman in her own proper person! She was followed by Penelope, who was evidently trying to make her retrace her steps to the house. Seeing that Mr. Franklin was not alone, Rosanna came to a standstill, evidently in great perplexity what to do next. Penelope waited behind her. Mr. Franklin saw the girls as soon as I saw them. The Sergeant, with his devilish cunning, took on not to have noticed them at all. All this happened in an instant. Before either Mr. Franklin or I could say a word, Sergeant Cuff struck in smoothly, with an appearance of continuing the previous conversation.

“You needn’t be afraid of harming the girl, sir,” he said to Mr. Franklin, speaking in a loud voice, so that Rosanna might hear him. “On the contrary, I recommend you to honour me with your confidence, if you feel any interest in Rosanna Spearman.”

Mr. Franklin instantly took on not to have noticed the girls either. He answered, speaking loudly on his side:

“I take no interest whatever in Rosanna Spearman.”

I looked towards the end of the walk. All I saw at the distance was that Rosanna suddenly turned round, the moment Mr. Franklin had spoken. Instead of resisting Penelope, as she had done the moment before, she now let my daughter take her by the arm and lead her back to the house.

The breakfast-bell rang as the two girls disappeared—and even Sergeant Cuff was now obliged to give it up as a bad job! He said to me quietly, “I shall go to Frizinghall, Mr. Betteredge; and I shall be back before two.” He went his way without a word more—and for some few hours we were well rid of him.

“You must make it right with Rosanna,” Mr. Franklin said to me, when we were alone. “I seem to be fated to say or do something awkward, before that unlucky girl. You must have seen yourself that Sergeant Cuff laid a trap for both of us. If he could confuse ME, or irritate HER into breaking out, either she or I might have said something which would answer his purpose. On the spur of the moment, I saw no better way out of it than the way I took. It stopped the girl from saying anything, and it showed the Sergeant that I saw through him. He was evidently listening, Betteredge, when I was speaking to you last night.”

He had done worse than listen, as I privately thought to myself. He had remembered my telling him that the girl was in love with Mr. Franklin; and he had calculated on THAT, when he appealed to Mr. Franklin’s interest in Rosanna—in Rosanna’s hearing.

“As to listening, sir,” I remarked (keeping the other point to myself), we shall all be rowing in the same boat if this sort of thing goes on much longer. Prying, and peeping, and listening are the natural occupations of people situated as we are. In another day or two, Mr. Franklin, we shall all be struck dumb together—for this reason, that we shall all be listening to surprise each other’s

secrets, and all know it. Excuse my breaking out, sir. The horrid mystery hanging over us in this house gets into my head like liquor, and makes me wild. I won't forget what you have told me. I'll take the first opportunity of making it right with Rosanna Spearman."

"You haven't said anything to her yet about last night, have you?" Mr. Franklin asked.

"No, sir."

"Then say nothing now. I had better not invite the girl's confidence, with the Sergeant on the look-out to surprise us together. My conduct is not very consistent, Betteredge—is it? I see no way out of this business, which isn't dreadful to think of, unless the Diamond is traced to Rosanna. And yet I can't, and won't, help Sergeant Cuff to find the girl out."

Unreasonable enough, no doubt. But it was my state of mind as well. I thoroughly understood him. If you will, for once in your life, remember that you are mortal, perhaps you will thoroughly understand him too.

The state of things, indoors and out, while Sergeant Cuff was on his way to Frizinghall, was briefly this:

Miss Rachel waited for the time when the carriage was to take her to her aunt's, still obstinately shut up in her own room. My lady and Mr. Franklin breakfasted together. After breakfast, Mr. Franklin took one of his sudden resolutions, and went out precipitately to quiet his mind by a long walk. I was the only person who saw him go; and he told me he should be back before the Sergeant returned. The change in the weather, foreshadowed overnight, had come. Heavy rain had been followed soon after dawn, by high wind. It was blowing fresh, as the day got on. But though the clouds threatened more than once, the rain still held off. It was not a bad day for a walk, if you were young and strong, and could breast the great gusts of wind which came sweeping in from the sea.

I attended my lady after breakfast, and assisted her in the settlement of our household accounts. She only once alluded to the matter of the Moonstone, and that was in the way of forbidding any present mention of it between us. "Wait till that man comes back," she said, meaning the Sergeant. "We MUST speak of it then: we are not obliged to speak of it now."

After leaving my mistress, I found Penelope waiting for me in my room.

"I wish, father, you would come and speak to Rosanna," she said. "I am very uneasy about her."

I suspected what was the matter readily enough. But it is a maxim of mine that men (being superior creatures) are bound to improve women—if they can. When a woman wants me to do anything (my daughter, or not, it doesn't matter), I always insist on knowing why. The oftener you make them rummage their own minds for a reason, the more manageable you will find them in all the relations of life. It isn't their fault (poor wretches!) that they act first and think afterwards; it's the fault of the fools who humour them.

Penelope's reason why, on this occasion, may be given in her own words. "I am afraid, father," she said, "Mr. Franklin has hurt Rosanna cruelly, without intending it."

"What took Rosanna into the shrubbery walk?" I asked.

"Her own madness," says Penelope; "I can call it nothing else. She was bent on speaking to Mr. Franklin, this morning, come what might of it. I did my best to stop her; you saw that. If I could only have got her away before she heard those dreadful words——"

"There! there!" I said, "don't lose your head. I can't call to mind that anything happened to alarm Rosanna."

"Nothing to alarm her, father. But Mr. Franklin said he took no interest whatever in her—and, oh, he said it in such a cruel voice!"

“He said it to stop the Sergeant’s mouth,” I answered.

“I told her that,” says Penelope. “But you see, father (though Mr. Franklin isn’t to blame), he’s been mortifying and disappointing her for weeks and weeks past; and now this comes on the top of it all! She has no right, of course, to expect him to take any interest in her. It’s quite monstrous that she should forget herself and her station in that way. But she seems to have lost pride, and proper feeling, and everything. She frightened me, father, when Mr. Franklin said those words. They seemed to turn her into stone. A sudden quiet came over her, and she has gone about her work, ever since, like a woman in a dream.”

I began to feel a little uneasy. There was something in the way Penelope put it which silenced my superior sense. I called to mind, now my thoughts were directed that way, what had passed between Mr. Franklin and Rosanna overnight. She looked cut to the heart on that occasion; and now, as ill-luck would have it, she had been unavoidably stung again, poor soul, on the tender place. Sad! sad!—all the more sad because the girl had no reason to justify her, and no right to feel it.

I had promised Mr. Franklin to speak to Rosanna, and this seemed the fittest time for keeping my word.

We found the girl sweeping the corridor outside the bedrooms, pale and composed, and neat as ever in her modest print dress. I noticed a curious dimness and dullness in her eyes— not as if she had been crying but as if she had been looking at something too long. Possibly, it was a misty something raised by her own thoughts. There was certainly no object about her to look at which she had not seen already hundreds on hundreds of times.

“Cheer up, Rosanna!” I said. “You mustn’t fret over your own fancies. I have got something to say to you from Mr. Franklin.”

I thereupon put the matter in the right view before her, in the friendliest and most comforting words I could find. My principles, in regard to the other sex, are, as you may have noticed, very severe. But somehow or other, when I come face to face with the women, my practice (I own) is not conformable.

“Mr. Franklin is very kind and considerate. Please to thank him.” That was all the answer she made me.

My daughter had already noticed that Rosanna went about her work like a woman in a dream. I now added to this observation, that she also listened and spoke like a woman in a dream. I doubted if her mind was in a fit condition to take in what I had said to her.

“Are you quite sure, Rosanna, that you understand me?” I asked.

“Quite sure.”

She echoed me, not like a living woman, but like a creature moved by machinery. She went on sweeping all the time. I took away the broom as gently and as kindly as I could.

“Come, come, my girl!” I said, “this is not like yourself. You have got something on your mind. I’m your friend— and I’ll stand your friend, even if you have done wrong. Make a clean breast of it, Rosanna—make a clean breast of it!”

The time had been, when my speaking to her in that way would have brought the tears into her eyes. I could see no change in them now.

“Yes,” she said, “I’ll make a clean breast of it.”

“To my lady?” I asked.

“No.”

“To Mr. Franklin?”

“Yes; to Mr. Franklin.”

I hardly knew what to say to that. She was in no condition to understand the caution against speaking to him in private, which Mr. Franklin had directed me to give her. Feeling my way, little by little, I only told her Mr. Franklin had gone out for a walk.

“It doesn’t matter,” she answered. “I shan’t trouble Mr. Franklin, to-day.”

“Why not speak to my lady?” I said. “The way to relieve your mind is to speak to the merciful and Christian mistress who has always been kind to you.”

She looked at me for a moment with a grave and steady attention, as if she was fixing what I said in her mind. Then she took the broom out of my hands and moved off with it slowly, a little way down the corridor.

“No,” she said, going on with her sweeping, and speaking to herself; “I know a better way of relieving my mind than that.”

“What is it?”

“Please to let me go on with my work.”

Penelope followed her, and offered to help her.

She answered, “No. I want to do my work. Thank you, Penelope.” She looked round at me. “Thank you, Mr. Betteredge.”

There was no moving her—there was nothing more to be said. I signed to Penelope to come away with me. We left her, as we had found her, sweeping the corridor, like a woman in a dream.

“This is a matter for the doctor to look into,” I said. “It’s beyond me.”

My daughter reminded me of Mr. Candy’s illness, owing (as you may remember) to the chill he had caught on the night of the dinner-party. His assistant—a certain Mr. Ezra Jennings—was at our disposal, to be sure. But nobody knew much about him in our parts. He had been engaged by Mr. Candy under rather peculiar circumstances; and, right or wrong, we none of us liked him or trusted him. There were other doctors at Frizinghall. But they were strangers to our house; and Penelope doubted, in Rosanna’s present state, whether strangers might not do her more harm than good.

I thought of speaking to my lady. But, remembering the heavy weight of anxiety which she already had on her mind, I hesitated to add to all the other vexations this new trouble. Still, there was a necessity for doing something. The girl’s state was, to my thinking, downright alarming—and my mistress ought to be informed of it. Unwilling enough, I went to her sitting-room. No one was there. My lady was shut up with Miss Rachel. It was impossible for me to see her till she came out again.

I waited in vain till the clock on the front staircase struck the quarter to two. Five minutes afterwards, I heard my name called, from the drive outside the house. I knew the voice directly. Sergeant Cuff had returned from Frizinghall.

CHAPTER XVIII

Going down to the front door, I met the Sergeant on the steps.

It went against the grain with me, after what had passed between us, to show him that I felt any sort of interest in his proceedings. In spite of myself, however, I felt an interest that there was no resisting. My sense of dignity sank from under me, and out came the words: “What news from Frizinghall?”

“I have seen the Indians,” answered Sergeant Cuff. “And I have found out what Rosanna bought privately in the town, on Thursday last. The Indians will be set free on Wednesday in next week. There isn’t a doubt on my mind, and there isn’t a doubt on Mr. Murthwaite’s mind, that they came to this place to steal the Moonstone. Their calculations were all thrown out, of course, by what happened in the house on Wednesday night; and they have no more to do with the actual loss of the jewel than you have. But I can tell you one thing, Mr. Betteredge— if WE don’t find the Moonstone, THEY will. You have not heard the last of the three jugglers yet.”

Mr. Franklin came back from his walk as the Sergeant said those startling words. Governing his curiosity better than I had governed mine, he passed us without a word, and went on into the house.

As for me, having already dropped my dignity, I determined to have the whole benefit of the sacrifice. “So much for the Indians,” I said. “What about Rosanna next?”

Sergeant Cuff shook his head.

“The mystery in that quarter is thicker than ever,” he said. “I have traced her to a shop at Frizinghall, kept by a linen draper named Maltby. She bought nothing whatever at any of the other drapers’ shops, or at any milliners’ or tailors’ shops; and she bought nothing at Maltby’s but a piece of long cloth. She was very particular in choosing a certain quality. As to quantity, she bought enough to make a nightgown.”

“Whose nightgown?” I asked.

“Her own, to be sure. Between twelve and three, on the Thursday morning, she must have slipped down to your young lady’s room, to settle the hiding of the Moonstone while all the rest of you were in bed. In going back to her own room, her nightgown must have brushed the wet paint on the door. She couldn’t wash out the stain; and she couldn’t safely destroy the nightgown without first providing another like it, to make the inventory of her linen complete.”

“What proves that it was Rosanna’s nightgown?” I objected.

“The material she bought for making the substitute dress,” answered the Sergeant. “If it had been Miss Verinder’s nightgown, she would have had to buy lace, and frilling, and Lord knows what besides; and she wouldn’t have had time to make it in one night. Plain long cloth means a plain servant’s nightgown. No, no, Mr. Betteredge—all that is clear enough. The pinch of the question is—why, after having provided the substitute dress, does she hide the smeared nightgown, instead of destroying it? If the girl won’t speak out, there is only one way of settling the difficulty. The hiding-place at the Shivering Sand must be searched— and the true state of the case will be discovered there.”

“How are you to find the place?” I inquired.

“I am sorry to disappoint you,” said the Sergeant—“but that’s a secret which I mean to keep to myself.”

(Not to irritate your curiosity, as he irritated mine, I may here inform you that he had come back from Frizinghall provided with a search-warrant. His experience in such matters told him that Rosanna was in all probability carrying about her a memorandum of the hiding-place, to guide her, in case she returned to it, under changed circumstances and after a lapse of time. Possessed of this memorandum, the Sergeant would be furnished with all that he could desire.)

“Now, Mr. Betteredge,” he went on, “suppose we drop speculation, and get to business. I told Joyce to have an eye on Rosanna. Where is Joyce?”

Joyce was the Frizinghall policeman, who had been left by Superintendent Seegrave at Sergeant Cuff’s disposal. The clock struck two, as he put the question; and, punctual to the moment, the carriage came round to take Miss Rachel to her aunt’s.

“One thing at a time,” said the Sergeant, stopping me as I was about to send in search of Joyce. “I must attend to Miss Verinder first.”

As the rain was still threatening, it was the close carriage that had been appointed to take Miss Rachel to Frizinghall. Sergeant Cuff beckoned Samuel to come down to him from the rumble behind.

“You will see a friend of mine waiting among the trees, on this side of the lodge gate,” he said. “My friend, without stopping the carriage, will get up into the rumble with you. You have nothing to do but to hold your tongue, and shut your eyes. Otherwise, you will get into trouble.”

With that advice, he sent the footman back to his place. What Samuel thought I don’t know. It was plain, to my mind, that Miss Rachel was to be privately kept in view from the time when she left our house—if she did leave it. A watch set on my young lady! A spy behind her in the rumble of her mother’s carriage! I could have cut my own tongue out for having forgotten myself so far as to speak to Sergeant Cuff.

The first person to come out of the house was my lady. She stood aside, on the top step, posting herself there to see what happened. Not a word did she say, either to the Sergeant or to me. With her lips closed, and her arms folded in the light garden cloak which she had wrapped round her on coming into the air, there she stood, as still as a statue, waiting for her daughter to appear.

In a minute more, Miss Rachel came downstairs—very nicely dressed in some soft yellow stuff, that set off her dark complexion, and clipped her tight (in the form of a jacket) round the waist. She had a smart little straw hat on her head, with a white veil twisted round it. She had primrose-coloured gloves that fitted her hands like a second skin. Her beautiful black hair looked as smooth as satin under her hat. Her little ears were like rosy shells—they had a pearl dangling from each of them. She came swiftly out to us, as straight as a lily on its stem, and as lithe and supple in every movement she made as a young cat. Nothing that I could discover was altered in her pretty face, but her eyes and her lips. Her eyes were brighter and fiercer than I liked to see; and her lips had so completely lost their colour and their smile that I hardly knew them again. She kissed her mother in a hasty and sudden manner on the cheek. She said, “Try to forgive me, mamma”—and then pulled down her veil over her face so vehemently that she tore it. In another moment she had run down the steps, and had rushed into the carriage as if it was a hiding-place.

Sergeant Cuff was just as quick on his side. He put Samuel back, and stood before Miss Rachel, with the open carriage-door in his hand, at the instant when she settled herself in her place.

“What do you want?” says Miss Rachel, from behind her veil.

“I want to say one word to you, miss,” answered the Sergeant, “before you go. I can’t presume to stop your paying a visit to your aunt. I can only venture to say that your leaving us, as things are now, puts an obstacle in the way of my recovering your Diamond. Please to understand that; and now decide for yourself whether you go or stay.”

Miss Rachel never even answered him. “Drive on, James!” she called out to the coachman.

Without another word, the Sergeant shut the carriage-door. Just as he closed it, Mr. Franklin came running down the steps. “Good-bye, Rachel,” he said, holding out his hand.

“Drive on!” cried Miss Rachel, louder than ever, and taking no more notice of Mr. Franklin than she had taken of Sergeant Cuff.

Mr. Franklin stepped back thunderstruck, as well he might be. The coachman, not knowing what to do, looked towards my lady, still standing immovable on the top step. My lady, with anger and sorrow and shame all struggling together in her face, made him a sign to start the

horses, and then turned back hastily into the house. Mr. Franklin, recovering the use of his speech, called after her, as the carriage drove off, "Aunt! you were quite right. Accept my thanks for all your kindness—and let me go."

My lady turned as though to speak to him. Then, as if distrusting herself, waved her hand kindly. "Let me see you, before you leave us, Franklin," she said, in a broken voice—and went on to her own room.

"Do me a last favour, Betteredge," says Mr. Franklin, turning to me, with the tears in his eyes. "Get me away to the train as soon as you can!"

He too went his way into the house. For the moment, Miss Rachel had completely unmanned him. Judge from that, how fond he must have been of her!

Sergeant Cuff and I were left face to face, at the bottom of the steps. The Sergeant stood with his face set towards a gap in the trees, commanding a view of one of the windings of the drive which led from the house. He had his hands in his pockets, and he was softly whistling "The Last Rose of Summer" to himself.

"There's a time for everything," I said savagely enough. "This isn't a time for whistling."

At that moment, the carriage appeared in the distance, through the gap, on its way to the lodge-gate. There was another man, besides Samuel, plainly visible in the rumble behind.

"All right!" said the Sergeant to himself. He turned round to me. "It's no time for whistling, Mr. Betteredge, as you say. It's time to take this business in hand, now, without sparing anybody. We'll begin with Rosanna Spearman. Where is Joyce?"

We both called for Joyce, and received no answer. I sent one of the stable-boys to look for him.

"You heard what I said to Miss Verinder?" remarked the Sergeant, while we were waiting. "And you saw how she received it? I tell her plainly that her leaving us will be an obstacle in the way of my recovering her Diamond—and she leaves, in the face of that statement! Your young lady has got a travelling companion in her mother's carriage, Mr. Betteredge—and the name of it is, the Moonstone."

I said nothing. I only held on like death to my belief in Miss Rachel.

The stable-boy came back, followed—very unwillingly, as it appeared to me— by Joyce.

"Where is Rosanna Spearman?" asked Sergeant Cuff.

"I can't account for it, sir," Joyce began; "and I am very sorry. But somehow or other——"

"Before I went to Frizinghall," said the Sergeant, cutting him short, "I told you to keep your eyes on Rosanna Spearman, without allowing her to discover that she was being watched. Do you mean to tell me that you have let her give you the slip?"

"I am afraid, sir," says Joyce, beginning to tremble, "that I was perhaps a little TOO careful not to let her discover me. There are such a many passages in the lower parts of this house——"

"How long is it since you missed her?"

"Nigh on an hour since, sir."

"You can go back to your regular business at Frizinghall," said the Sergeant, speaking just as composedly as ever, in his usual quiet and dreary way. "I don't think your talents are at all in our line, Mr. Joyce. Your present form of employment is a trifle beyond you. Good morning."

The man slunk off. I find it very difficult to describe how I was affected by the discovery that Rosanna Spearman was missing. I seemed to be in fifty different minds about it, all at the same time. In that state, I stood staring at Sergeant Cuff—and my powers of language quite failed me.

"No, Mr. Betteredge," said the Sergeant, as if he had discovered the uppermost thought in me, and was picking it out to be answered, before all the rest. "Your young friend, Rosanna, won't slip through my fingers so easy as you think. As long as I know where Miss Verinder is, I have

the means at my disposal of tracing Miss Verinder's accomplice. I prevented them from communicating last night. Very good. They will get together at Frizinghall, instead of getting together here. The present inquiry must be simply shifted (rather sooner than I had anticipated) from this house, to the house at which Miss Verinder is visiting. In the meantime, I'm afraid I must trouble you to call the servants together again."

I went round with him to the servants' hall. It is very disgraceful, but it is not the less true, that I had another attack of the detective-fever, when he said those last words. I forgot that I hated Sergeant Cuff. I seized him confidentially by the arm. I said, "For goodness' sake, tell us what you are going to do with the servants now?"

The great Cuff stood stock still, and addressed himself in a kind of melancholy rapture to the empty air.

"If this man," said the Sergeant (apparently meaning me), "only understood the growing of roses he would be the most completely perfect character on the face of creation!" After that strong expression of feeling, he sighed, and put his arm through mine. "This is how it stands," he said, dropping down again to business. "Rosanna has done one of two things. She has either gone direct to Frizinghall (before I can get there), or she has gone first to visit her hiding-place at the Shivering Sand. The first thing to find out is, which of the servants saw the last of her before she left the house."

On instituting this inquiry, it turned out that the last person who had set eyes on Rosanna was Nancy, the kitchenmaid.

Nancy had seen her slip out with a letter in her hand, and stop the butcher's man who had just been delivering some meat at the back door. Nancy had heard her ask the man to post the letter when he got back to Frizinghall. The man had looked at the address, and had said it was a roundabout way of delivering a letter directed to Cobb's Hole, to post it at Frizinghall—and that, moreover, on a Saturday, which would prevent the letter from getting to its destination until Monday morning, Rosanna had answered that the delivery of the letter being delayed till Monday was of no importance. The only thing she wished to be sure of was that the man would do what she told him. The man had promised to do it, and had driven away. Nancy had been called back to her work in the kitchen. And no other person had seen anything afterwards of Rosanna Spearman.

"Well?" I asked, when we were alone again.

"Well," says the Sergeant. "I must go to Frizinghall."

"About the letter, sir?"

"Yes. The memorandum of the hiding-place is in that letter. I must see the address at the post-office. If it is the address I suspect, I shall pay our friend, Mrs. Yolland, another visit on Monday next."

I went with the Sergeant to order the pony-chaise. In the stable-yard we got a new light thrown on the missing girl.

CHAPTER XIX

The news of Rosanna's disappearance had, as it appeared, spread among the out-of-door servants. They too had made their inquiries; and they had just laid hands on a quick little imp, nicknamed "Duffy"—who was occasionally employed in weeding the garden, and who had seen

Rosanna Spearman as lately as half-an-hour since. Duffy was certain that the girl had passed him in the fir-plantation, not walking, but RUNNING, in the direction of the sea-shore.

“Does this boy know the coast hereabouts?” asked Sergeant Cuff.

“He has been born and bred on the coast,” I answered.

“Duffy!” says the Sergeant, “do you want to earn a shilling? If you do, come along with me. Keep the pony-chaise ready, Mr. Betteredge, till I come back.”

He started for the Shivering Sand, at a rate that my legs (though well enough preserved for my time of life) had no hope of matching. Little Duffy, as the way is with the young savages in our parts when they are in high spirits, gave a howl, and trotted off at the Sergeant’s heels.

Here again, I find it impossible to give anything like a clear account of the state of my mind in the interval after Sergeant Cuff had left us. A curious and stupefying restlessness got possession of me. I did a dozen different needless things in and out of the house, not one of which I can now remember. I don’t even know how long it was after the Sergeant had gone to the sands, when Duffy came running back with a message for me. Sergeant Cuff had given the boy a leaf torn out of his pocket-book, on which was written in pencil, “Send me one of Rosanna Spearman’s boots, and be quick about it.”

I despatched the first woman-servant I could find to Rosanna’s room; and I sent the boy back to say that I myself would follow him with the boot.

This, I am well aware, was not the quickest way to take of obeying the directions which I had received. But I was resolved to see for myself what new mystification was going on before I trusted Rosanna’s boot in the Sergeant’s hands. My old notion of screening the girl, if I could, seemed to have come back on me again, at the eleventh hour. This state of feeling (to say nothing of the detective-fever) hurried me off, as soon as I had got the boot, at the nearest approach to a run which a man turned seventy can reasonably hope to make.

As I got near the shore, the clouds gathered black, and the rain came down, drifting in great white sheets of water before the wind. I heard the thunder of the sea on the sand-bank at the mouth of the bay. A little further on, I passed the boy crouching for shelter under the lee of the sand hills. Then I saw the raging sea, and the rollers tumbling in on the sand-bank, and the driven rain sweeping over the waters like a flying garment, and the yellow wilderness of the beach with one solitary black figure standing on it—the figure of Sergeant Cuff.

He waved his hand towards the north, when he first saw me. “Keep on that side!” he shouted. “And come on down here to me!”

I went down to him, choking for breath, with my heart leaping as if it was like to leap out of me. I was past speaking. I had a hundred questions to put to him; and not one of them would pass my lips. His face frightened me. I saw a look in his eyes which was a look of horror. He snatched the boot out of my hand, and set it in a footmark on the sand, bearing south from us as we stood, and pointing straight towards the rocky ledge called the South Spit. The mark was not yet blurred out by the rain—and the girl’s boot fitted it to a hair.

The Sergeant pointed to the boot in the footmark, without saying a word.

I caught at his arm, and tried to speak to him, and failed as I had failed when I tried before. He went on, following the footsteps down and down to where the rocks and the sand joined. The South Spit was just awash with the flowing tide; the waters heaved over the hidden face of the Shivering Sand. Now this way and now that, with an obstinate patience that was dreadful to see, Sergeant Cuff tried the boot in the footsteps, and always found it pointing the same way—straight TO the rocks. Hunt as he might, no sign could he find anywhere of the footsteps walking FROM them.

He gave it up at last. Still keeping silence, he looked again at me; and then he looked out at the waters before us, heaving in deeper and deeper over the quicksand. I looked where he looked—and I saw his thought in his face. A dreadful dumb trembling crawled all over me on a sudden. I fell upon my knees on the beach.

“She has been back at the hiding-place,” I heard the Sergeant say to himself. “Some fatal accident has happened to her on those rocks.”

The girl’s altered looks, and words, and actions—the numbed, deadened way in which she listened to me, and spoke to me—when I had found her sweeping the corridor but a few hours since, rose up in my mind, and warned me, even as the Sergeant spoke, that his guess was wide of the dreadful truth. I tried to tell him of the fear that had frozen me up. I tried to say, “The death she has died, Sergeant, was a death of her own seeking.” No! the words wouldn’t come. The dumb trembling held me in its grip. I couldn’t feel the driving rain. I couldn’t see the rising tide. As in the vision of a dream, the poor lost creature came back before me. I saw her again as I had seen her in the past time—on the morning when I went to fetch her into the house. I heard her again, telling me that the Shivering Sand seemed to draw her to it against her will, and wondering whether her grave was waiting for her THERE. The horror of it struck at me, in some unfathomable way, through my own child. My girl was just her age. My girl, tried as Rosanna was tried, might have lived that miserable life, and died this dreadful death.

The Sergeant kindly lifted me up, and turned me away from the sight of the place where she had perished.

With that relief, I began to fetch my breath again, and to see things about me, as things really were. Looking towards the sand-hills, I saw the men-servants from out-of-doors, and the fisherman, named Yolland, all running down to us together; and all, having taken the alarm, calling out to know if the girl had been found. In the fewest words, the Sergeant showed them the evidence of the footmarks, and told them that a fatal accident must have happened to her. He then picked out the fisherman from the rest, and put a question to him, turning about again towards the sea: “Tell me,” he said. “Could a boat have taken her off, in such weather as this, from those rocks where her footmarks stop?”

The fisherman pointed to the rollers tumbling in on the sand-bank, and to the great waves leaping up in clouds of foam against the headlands on either side of us.

“No boat that ever was built,” he answered, “could have got to her through THAT.”

Sergeant Cuff looked for the last time at the foot-marks on the sand, which the rain was now fast blurring out.

“There,” he said, “is the evidence that she can’t have left this place by land. And here,” he went on, looking at the fisherman, “is the evidence that she can’t have got away by sea.” He stopped, and considered for a minute. “She was seen running towards this place, half an hour before I got here from the house,” he said to Yolland. “Some time has passed since then. Call it, altogether, an hour ago. How high would the water be, at that time, on this side of the rocks?” He pointed to the south side—otherwise, the side which was not filled up by the quicksand.

“As the tide makes to-day,” said the fisherman, “there wouldn’t have been water enough to drown a kitten on that side of the Spit, an hour since.”

Sergeant Cuff turned about northward, towards the quicksand.

“How much on this side?” he asked.

“Less still,” answered Yolland. “The Shivering Sand would have been just awash, and no more.”

The Sergeant turned to me, and said that the accident must have happened on the side of the quicksand. My tongue was loosened at that. "No accident!" I told him. "When she came to this place, she came weary of her life, to end it here."

He started back from me. "How do you know?" he asked. The rest of them crowded round. The Sergeant recovered himself instantly. He put them back from me; he said I was an old man; he said the discovery had shaken me; he said, "Let him alone a little." Then he turned to Yolland, and asked, "Is there any chance of finding her, when the tide ebbs again?" And Yolland answered, "None. What the Sand gets, the Sand keeps for ever." Having said that, the fisherman came a step nearer, and addressed himself to me.

"Mr. Betteredge," he said, "I have a word to say to you about the young woman's death. Four foot out, broadwise, along the side of the Spit, there's a shelf of rock, about half fathom down under the sand. My question is—why didn't she strike that? If she slipped, by accident, from off the Spit, she fell in where there's foothold at the bottom, at a depth that would barely cover her to the waist. She must have waded out, or jumped out, into the Deeps beyond— or she wouldn't be missing now. No accident, sir! The Deeps of the Quicksand have got her. And they have got her by her own act."

After that testimony from a man whose knowledge was to be relied on, the Sergeant was silent. The rest of us, like him, held our peace. With one accord, we all turned back up the slope of the beach.

At the sand-hillocks we were met by the under-groom, running to us from the house. The lad is a good lad, and has an honest respect for me. He handed me a little note, with a decent sorrow in his face. "Penelope sent me with this, Mr. Betteredge," he said. "She found it in Rosanna's room."

It was her last farewell word to the old man who had done his best— thank God, always done his best—to befriend her.

"You have often forgiven me, Mr. Betteredge, in past times. When you next see the Shivering Sand, try to forgive me once more. I have found my grave where my grave was waiting for me. I have lived, and died, sir, grateful for your kindness."

There was no more than that. Little as it was, I hadn't manhood enough to hold up against it. Your tears come easy, when you're young, and beginning the world. Your tears come easy, when you're old, and leaving it. I burst out crying.

Sergeant Cuff took a step nearer to me—meaning kindly, I don't doubt. I shrank back from him. "Don't touch me," I said. "It's the dread of you, that has driven her to it."

"You are wrong, Mr. Betteredge," he answered, quietly. "But there will be time enough to speak of it when we are indoors again."

I followed the rest of them, with the help of the groom's arm. Through the driving rain we went back—to meet the trouble and the terror that were waiting for us at the house.

CHAPTER XX

Those in front had spread the news before us. We found the servants in a state of panic. As we passed my lady's door, it was thrown open violently from the inner side. My mistress came out among us (with Mr. Franklin following, and trying vainly to compose her), quite beside herself with the horror of the thing.

“You are answerable for this!” she cried out, threatening the Sergeant wildly with her hand. “Gabriel! give that wretch his money—and release me from the sight of him!”

The Sergeant was the only one among us who was fit to cope with her— being the only one among us who was in possession of himself.

“I am no more answerable for this distressing calamity, my lady, than you are,” he said. “If, in half an hour from this, you still insist on my leaving the house, I will accept your ladyship’s dismissal, but not your ladyship’s money.”

It was spoken very respectfully, but very firmly at the same time— and it had its effect on my mistress as well as on me. She suffered Mr. Franklin to lead her back into the room. As the door closed on the two, the Sergeant, looking about among the women-servants in his observant way, noticed that while all the rest were merely frightened, Penelope was in tears. “When your father has changed his wet clothes,” he said to her, “come and speak to us, in your father’s room.”

Before the half-hour was out, I had got my dry clothes on, and had lent Sergeant Cuff such change of dress as he required. Penelope came in to us to hear what the Sergeant wanted with her. I don’t think I ever felt what a good dutiful daughter I had, so strongly as I felt it at that moment. I took her and sat her on my knee and I prayed God bless her. She hid her head on my bosom, and put her arms round my neck—and we waited a little while in silence. The poor dead girl must have been at the bottom of it, I think, with my daughter and with me. The Sergeant went to the window, and stood there looking out. I thought it right to thank him for considering us both in this way— and I did.

People in high life have all the luxuries to themselves— among others, the luxury of indulging their feelings. People in low life have no such privilege. Necessity, which spares our betters, has no pity on us. We learn to put our feelings back into ourselves, and to jog on with our duties as patiently as may be. I don’t complain of this—I only notice it. Penelope and I were ready for the Sergeant, as soon as the Sergeant was ready on his side. Asked if she knew what had led her fellow-servant to destroy herself, my daughter answered (as you will foresee) that it was for love of Mr. Franklin Blake. Asked next, if she had mentioned this notion of hers to any other person, Penelope answered, “I have not mentioned it, for Rosanna’s sake.” I felt it necessary to add a word to this. I said, “And for Mr. Franklin’s sake, my dear, as well. If Rosanna HAS died for love of him, it is not with his knowledge or by his fault. Let him leave the house to-day, if he does leave it, without the useless pain of knowing the truth.” Sergeant Cuff said, “Quite right,” and fell silent again; comparing Penelope’s notion (as it seemed to me) with some other notion of his own which he kept to himself.

At the end of the half-hour, my mistress’s bell rang.

On my way to answer it, I met Mr. Franklin coming out of his aunt’s sitting-room. He mentioned that her ladyship was ready to see Sergeant Cuff—in my presence as before—and he added that he himself wanted to say two words to the Sergeant first. On our way back to my room, he stopped, and looked at the railway time-table in the hall.

“Are you really going to leave us, sir?” I asked. “Miss Rachel will surely come right again, if you only give her time?”

“She will come right again,” answered Mr. Franklin, “when she hears that I have gone away, and that she will see me no more.”

I thought he spoke in resentment of my young lady’s treatment of him. But it was not so. My mistress had noticed, from the time when the police first came into the house, that the bare mention of him was enough to set Miss Rachel’s temper in a flame. He had been too fond of his cousin to like to confess this to himself, until the truth had been forced on him, when she drove

off to her aunt's. His eyes once opened in that cruel way which you know of, Mr. Franklin had taken his resolution—the one resolution which a man of any spirit COULD take—to leave the house.

What he had to say to the Sergeant was spoken in my presence. He described her ladyship as willing to acknowledge that she had spoken over-hastily. And he asked if Sergeant Cuff would consent—in that case—to accept his fee, and to leave the matter of the Diamond where the matter stood now. The Sergeant answered, “No, sir. My fee is paid me for doing my duty. I decline to take it, until my duty is done.”

“I don't understand you,” says Mr. Franklin.

“I'll explain myself, sir,” says the Sergeant. “When I came here, I undertook to throw the necessary light on the matter of the missing Diamond. I am now ready, and waiting to redeem my pledge. When I have stated the case to Lady Verinder as the case now stands, and when I have told her plainly what course of action to take for the recovery of the Moonstone, the responsibility will be off my shoulders. Let her ladyship decide, after that, whether she does, or does not, allow me to go on. I shall then have done what I undertook to do—and I'll take my fee.”

In those words Sergeant Cuff reminded us that, even in the Detective Police, a man may have a reputation to lose.

The view he took was so plainly the right one, that there was no more to be said. As I rose to conduct him to my lady's room, he asked if Mr. Franklin wished to be present. Mr. Franklin answered, “Not unless Lady Verinder desires it.” He added, in a whisper to me, as I was following the Sergeant out, “I know what that man is going to say about Rachel; and I am too fond of her to hear it, and keep my temper. Leave me by myself.”

I left him, miserable enough, leaning on the sill of my window, with his face hidden in his hands and Penelope peeping through the door, longing to comfort him. In Mr. Franklin's place, I should have called her in. When you are ill-used by one woman, there is great comfort in telling it to another—because, nine times out of ten, the other always takes your side. Perhaps, when my back was turned, he did call her in? In that case it is only doing my daughter justice to declare that she would stick at nothing, in the way of comforting Mr. Franklin Blake.

In the meantime, Sergeant Cuff and I proceeded to my lady's room.

At the last conference we had held with her, we had found her not over willing to lift her eyes from the book which she had on the table. On this occasion there was a change for the better. She met the Sergeant's eye with an eye that was as steady as his own. The family spirit showed itself in every line of her face; and I knew that Sergeant Cuff would meet his match, when a woman like my mistress was strung up to hear the worst he could say to her.

The first words, when we had taken our seats, were spoken by my lady.

“Sergeant Cuff,” she said, “there was perhaps some excuse for the inconsiderate manner in which I spoke to you half an hour since. I have no wish, however, to claim that excuse. I say, with perfect sincerity, that I regret it, if I wronged you.”

The grace of voice and manner with which she made him that atonement had its due effect on the Sergeant. He requested permission to justify himself—putting his justification as an act of respect to my mistress. It was impossible, he said, that he could be in any way responsible for the calamity, which had shocked us all, for this sufficient reason, that his success in bringing his inquiry to its proper end depended on his neither saying nor doing anything that could alarm Rosanna Spearman. He appealed to me to testify whether he had, or had not, carried that object

out. I could, and did, bear witness that he had. And there, as I thought, the matter might have been judiciously left to come to an end.

Sergeant Cuff, however, took it a step further, evidently (as you shall now judge) with the purpose of forcing the most painful of all possible explanations to take place between her ladyship and himself.

“I have heard a motive assigned for the young woman’s suicide,” said the Sergeant, “which may possibly be the right one. It is a motive quite unconnected with the case which I am conducting here. I am bound to add, however, that my own opinion points the other way. Some unbearable anxiety in connexion with the missing Diamond, has, I believe, driven the poor creature to her own destruction. I don’t pretend to know what that unbearable anxiety may have been. But I think (with your ladyship’s permission) I can lay my hand on a person who is capable of deciding whether I am right or wrong.”

“Is the person now in the house?” my mistress asked, after waiting a little.

“The person has left the house,” my lady.

That answer pointed as straight to Miss Rachel as straight could be. A silence dropped on us which I thought would never come to an end. Lord! how the wind howled, and how the rain drove at the window, as I sat there waiting for one or other of them to speak again!

“Be so good as to express yourself plainly,” said my lady. “Do you refer to my daughter?”

“I do,” said Sergeant Cuff, in so many words.

My mistress had her cheque-book on the table when we entered the room— no doubt to pay the Sergeant his fee. She now put it back in the drawer. It went to my heart to see how her poor hand trembled—the hand that had loaded her old servant with benefits; the hand that, I pray God, may take mine, when my time comes, and I leave my place for ever!

“I had hoped,” said my lady, very slowly and quietly, “to have recompensed your services, and to have parted with you without Miss Verinder’s name having been openly mentioned between us as it has been mentioned now. My nephew has probably said something of this, before you came into my room?”

“Mr. Blake gave his message, my lady. And I gave Mr. Blake a reason——”

“It is needless to tell me your reason. After what you have just said, you know as well as I do that you have gone too far to go back. I owe it to myself, and I owe it to my child, to insist on your remaining here, and to insist on your speaking out.”

The Sergeant looked at his watch.

“If there had been time, my lady,” he answered, “I should have preferred writing my report, instead of communicating it by word of mouth. But, if this inquiry is to go on, time is of too much importance to be wasted in writing. I am ready to go into the matter at once. It is a very painful matter for me to speak of, and for you to hear

There my mistress stopped him once more.

“I may possibly make it less painful to you, and to my good servant and friend here,” she said, “if I set the example of speaking boldly, on my side. You suspect Miss Verinder of deceiving us all, by secreting the Diamond for some purpose of her own? Is that true?”

“Quite true, my lady.”

“Very well. Now, before you begin, I have to tell you, as Miss Verinder’s mother, that she is **ABSOLUTELY INCAPABLE** of doing what you suppose her to have done. Your knowledge of her character dates from a day or two since. My knowledge of her character dates from the beginning of her life. State your suspicion of her as strongly as you please— it is impossible that you can offend me by doing so. I am sure, beforehand, that (with all your experience) the

circumstances have fatally misled you in this case. Mind! I am in possession of no private information. I am as absolutely shut out of my daughter's confidence as you are. My one reason for speaking positively, is the reason you have heard already. I know my child."

She turned to me, and gave me her hand. I kissed it in silence. "You may go on," she said, facing the Sergeant again as steadily as ever.

Sergeant Cuff bowed. My mistress had produced but one effect on him. His hatchet-face softened for a moment, as if he was sorry for her. As to shaking him in his own conviction, it was plain to see that she had not moved him by a single inch. He settled himself in his chair; and he began his vile attack on Miss Rachel's character in these words:

"I must ask your ladyship," he said, "to look this matter in the face, from my point of view as well as from yours. Will you please to suppose yourself coming down here, in my place, and with my experience? and will you allow me to mention very briefly what that experience has been?"

My mistress signed to him that she would do this. The Sergeant went on:

"For the last twenty years," he said, "I have been largely employed in cases of family scandal, acting in the capacity of confidential man. The one result of my domestic practice which has any bearing on the matter now in hand, is a result which I may state in two words. It is well within my experience, that young ladies of rank and position do occasionally have private debts which they dare not acknowledge to their nearest relatives and friends. Sometimes, the milliner and the jeweller are at the bottom of it. Sometimes, the money is wanted for purposes which I don't suspect in this case, and which I won't shock you by mentioning. Bear in mind what I have said, my lady—and now let us see how events in this house have forced me back on my own experience, whether I liked it or not!"

He considered with himself for a moment, and went on— with a horrid clearness that obliged you to understand him; with an abominable justice that favoured nobody.

"My first information relating to the loss of the Moonstone," said the Sergeant, "came to me from Superintendent Seegrave. He proved to my complete satisfaction that he was perfectly incapable of managing the case. The one thing he said which struck me as worth listening to, was this—that Miss Verinder had declined to be questioned by him, and had spoken to him with a perfectly incomprehensible rudeness and contempt. I thought this curious—but I attributed it mainly to some clumsiness on the Superintendent's part which might have offended the young lady. After that, I put it by in my mind, and applied myself, single-handed, to the case. It ended, as you are aware, in the discovery of the smear on the door, and in Mr. Franklin Blake's evidence satisfying me, that this same smear, and the loss of the Diamond, were pieces of the same puzzle. So far, if I suspected anything, I suspected that the Moonstone had been stolen, and that one of the servants might prove to be the thief. Very good. In this state of things, what happens? Miss Verinder suddenly comes out of her room, and speaks to me. I observe three suspicious appearances in that young lady. She is still violently agitated, though more than four-and-twenty hours have passed since the Diamond was lost. She treats me as she has already treated Superintendent Seegrave. And she is mortally offended with Mr. Franklin Blake. Very good again. Here (I say to myself) is a young lady who has lost a valuable jewel—a young lady, also, as my own eyes and ears inform me, who is of an impetuous temperament. Under these circumstances, and with that character, what does she do? She betrays an incomprehensible resentment against Mr. Blake, Mr. Superintendent, and myself—otherwise, the very three people who have all, in their different ways, been trying to help her to recover her lost jewel. Having brought my inquiry to that point—THEN, my lady, and not till then, I begin to look back into my

own mind for my own experience. My own experience explains Miss Verinder's otherwise incomprehensible conduct. It associates her with those other young ladies that I know of. It tells me she has debts she daren't acknowledge, that must be paid. And it sets me asking myself, whether the loss of the Diamond may not mean—that the Diamond must be secretly pledged to pay them. That is the conclusion which my experience draws from plain facts. What does your ladyship's experience say against it?"

"What I have said already," answered my mistress. "The circumstances have misled you."

I said nothing on my side. ROBINSON CRUSOE—God knows how— had got into my muddled old head. If Sergeant Cuff had found himself, at that moment, transported to a desert island, without a man Friday to keep him company, or a ship to take him off— he would have found himself exactly where I wished him to be! (Nota bene:—I am an average good Christian, when you don't push my Christianity too far. And all the rest of you— which is a great comfort—are, in this respect, much the same as I am.)

Sergeant Cuff went on:

"Right or wrong, my lady," he said, "having drawn my conclusion, the next thing to do was to put it to the test. I suggested to your ladyship the examination of all the wardrobes in the house. It was a means of finding the article of dress which had, in all probability, made the smear; and it was a means of putting my conclusion to the test. How did it turn out? Your ladyship consented; Mr. Blake consented; Mr. Ablewhite consented. Miss Verinder alone stopped the whole proceeding by refusing point-blank. That result satisfied me that my view was the right one. If your ladyship and Mr. Betteredge persist in not agreeing with me, you must be blind to what happened before you this very day. In your hearing, I told the young lady that her leaving the house (as things were then) would put an obstacle in the way of my recovering her jewel. You saw yourselves that she drove off in the face of that statement. You saw yourself that, so far from forgiving Mr. Blake for having done more than all the rest of you to put the clue into my hands, she publicly insulted Mr. Blake, on the steps of her mother's house. What do these things mean? If Miss Verinder is not privy to the suppression of the Diamond, what do these things mean?"

This time he looked my way. It was downright frightful to hear him piling up proof after proof against Miss Rachel, and to know, while one was longing to defend her, that there was no disputing the truth of what he said. I am (thank God!) constitutionally superior to reason. This enabled me to hold firm to my lady's view, which was my view also. This roused my spirit, and made me put a bold face on it before Sergeant Cuff. Profit, good friends, I beseech you, by my example. It will save you from many troubles of the vexing sort. Cultivate a superiority to reason, and see how you pare the claws of all the sensible people when they try to scratch you for your own good!

Finding that I made no remark, and that my mistress made no remark, Sergeant Cuff proceeded. Lord! how it did enrage me to notice that he was not in the least put out by our silence!

"There is the case, my lady, as it stands against Miss Verinder alone," he said. "The next thing is to put the case as it stands against Miss Verinder and the deceased Rosanna Spearman taken together. We will go back for a moment, if you please, to your daughter's refusal to let her wardrobe be examined. My mind being made up, after that circumstance, I had two questions to consider next. First, as to the right method of conducting my inquiry. Second, as to whether Miss Verinder had an accomplice among the female servants in the house. After carefully thinking it over, I determined to conduct the inquiry in, what we should call at our office, a highly irregular manner. For this reason: I had a family scandal to deal with, which it was my business to keep

within the family limits. The less noise made, and the fewer strangers employed to help me, the better. As to the usual course of taking people in custody on suspicion, going before the magistrate, and all the rest of it— nothing of the sort was to be thought of, when your ladyship's daughter was (as I believed) at the bottom of the whole business. In this case, I felt that a person of Mr. Betteredge's character and position in the house—knowing the servants as he did, and having the honour of the family at heart—would be safer to take as an assistant than any other person whom I could lay my hand on. I should have tried Mr. Blake as well— but for one obstacle in the way. HE saw the drift of my proceedings at a very early date; and, with his interest in Miss Verinder, any mutual understanding was impossible between him and me. I trouble your ladyship with these particulars to show you that I have kept the family secret within the family circle. I am the only outsider who knows it—and my professional existence depends on holding my tongue.”

Here I felt that my professional existence depended on not holding my tongue. To be held up before my mistress, in my old age, as a sort of deputy-policeman, was, once again, more than my Christianity was strong enough to bear.

“I beg to inform your ladyship,” I said, “that I never, to my knowledge, helped this abominable detective business, in any way, from first to last; and I summon Sergeant Cuff to contradict me, if he dares!”

Having given vent in those words, I felt greatly relieved. Her ladyship honoured me by a little friendly pat on the shoulder. I looked with righteous indignation at the Sergeant, to see what he thought of such a testimony as THAT. The Sergeant looked back like a lamb, and seemed to like me better than ever.

My lady informed him that he might continue his statement. “I understand,” she said, “that you have honestly done your best, in what you believe to be my interest. I am ready to hear what you have to say next.”

“What I have to say next,” answered Sergeant Cuff, “relates to Rosanna Spearman. I recognised the young woman, as your ladyship may remember, when she brought the washing-book into this room. Up to that time I was inclined to doubt whether Miss Verinder had trusted her secret to any one. When I saw Rosanna, I altered my mind. I suspected her at once of being privy to the suppression of the Diamond. The poor creature has met her death by a dreadful end, and I don't want your ladyship to think, now she's gone, that I was unduly hard on her. If this had been a common case of thieving, I should have given Rosanna the benefit of the doubt just as freely as I should have given it to any of the other servants in the house. Our experience of the Reformatory woman is, that when tried in service—and when kindly and judiciously treated—they prove themselves in the majority of cases to be honestly penitent, and honestly worthy of the pains taken with them. But this was not a common case of thieving. It was a case—in my mind—of a deeply planned fraud, with the owner of the Diamond at the bottom of it. Holding this view, the first consideration which naturally presented itself to me, in connection with Rosanna, was this: Would Miss Verinder be satisfied (begging your ladyship's pardon) with leading us all to think that the Moonstone was merely lost? Or would she go a step further, and delude us into believing that the Moonstone was stolen? In the latter event there was Rosanna Spearman—with the character of a thief—ready to her hand; the person of all others to lead your ladyship off, and to lead me off, on a false scent.”

Was it possible (I asked myself) that he could put his case against Miss Rachel and Rosanna in a more horrid point of view than this? It WAS possible, as you shall now see.

“I had another reason for suspecting the deceased woman,” he said, “which appears to me to have been stronger still. Who would be the very person to help Miss Verinder in raising money privately on the Diamond? Rosanna Spearman. No young lady in Miss Verinder’s position could manage such a risky matter as that by herself. A go-between she must have, and who so fit, I ask again, as Rosanna Spearman? Your ladyship’s deceased housemaid was at the top of her profession when she was a thief. She had relations, to my certain knowledge, with one of the few men in London (in the money-lending line) who would advance a large sum on such a notable jewel as the Moonstone, without asking awkward questions, or insisting on awkward conditions. Bear this in mind, my lady; and now let me show you how my suspicions have been justified by Rosanna’s own acts, and by the plain inferences to be drawn from them.”

He thereupon passed the whole of Rosanna’s proceedings under review. You are already as well acquainted with those proceedings as I am; and you will understand how unanswerably this part of his report fixed the guilt of being concerned in the disappearance of the Moonstone on the memory of the poor dead girl. Even my mistress was daunted by what he said now. She made him no answer when he had done. It didn’t seem to matter to the Sergeant whether he was answered or not. On he went (devil take him!), just as steady as ever.

“Having stated the whole case as I understand it,” he said, “I have only to tell your ladyship, now, what I propose to do next. I see two ways of bringing this inquiry successfully to an end. One of those ways I look upon as a certainty. The other, I admit, is a bold experiment, and nothing more. Your ladyship shall decide. Shall we take the certainty first?”

My mistress made him a sign to take his own way, and choose for himself.

“Thank you,” said the Sergeant. “We’ll begin with the certainty, as your ladyship is so good as to leave it to me. Whether Miss Verinder remains at Frizinghall, or whether she returns here, I propose, in either case, to keep a careful watch on all her proceedings— on the people she sees, on the rides and walks she may take, and on the letters she may write and receive.”

“What next?” asked my mistress.

“I shall next,” answered the Sergeant, “request your ladyship’s leave to introduce into the house, as a servant in the place of Rosanna Spearman, a woman accustomed to private inquiries of this sort, for whose discretion I can answer.”

“What next?” repeated my mistress.

“Next,” proceeded the Sergeant, “and last, I propose to send one of my brother-officers to make an arrangement with that money-lender in London, whom I mentioned just now as formerly acquainted with Rosanna Spearman— and whose name and address, your ladyship may rely on it, have been communicated by Rosanna to Miss Verinder. I don’t deny that the course of action I am now suggesting will cost money, and consume time. But the result is certain. We run a line round the Moonstone, and we draw that line closer and closer till we find it in Miss Verinder’s possession, supposing she decides to keep it. If her debts press, and she decides on sending it away, then we have our man ready, and we meet the Moonstone on its arrival in London.”

To hear her own daughter made the subject of such a proposal as this, stung my mistress into speaking angrily for the first time.

“Consider your proposal declined, in every particular,” she said. “And go on to your other way of bringing the inquiry to an end.”

“My other way,” said the Sergeant, going on as easy as ever, “is to try that bold experiment to which I have alluded. I think I have formed a pretty correct estimate of Miss Verinder’s temperament. She is quite capable (according to my belief) of committing a daring fraud. But she

is too hot and impetuous in temper, and too little accustomed to deceit as a habit, to act the hypocrite in small things, and to restrain herself under all provocations. Her feelings, in this case, have repeatedly got beyond her control, at the very time when it was plainly her interest to conceal them. It is on this peculiarity in her character that I now propose to act. I want to give her a great shock suddenly, under circumstances that will touch her to the quick. In plain English, I want to tell Miss Verinder, without a word of warning, of Rosanna's death— on the chance that her own better feelings will hurry her into making a clean breast of it. Does your ladyship accept that alternative?"

My mistress astonished me beyond all power of expression. She answered him on the instant:

"Yes; I do."

"The pony-chaise is ready," said the Sergeant. "I wish your ladyship good morning."

My lady held up her hand, and stopped him at the door.

"My daughter's better feelings shall be appealed to, as you propose," she said. "But I claim the right, as her mother, of putting her to the test myself. You will remain here, if you please; and I will go to Frizinghall."

For once in his life, the great Cuff stood speechless with amazement, like an ordinary man.

My mistress rang the bell, and ordered her water-proof things. It was still pouring with rain; and the close carriage had gone, as you know, with Miss Rachel to Frizinghall. I tried to dissuade her ladyship from facing the severity of the weather. Quite useless! I asked leave to go with her, and hold the umbrella. She wouldn't hear of it. The pony-chaise came round, with the groom in charge. "You may rely on two things," she said to Sergeant Cuff, in the hall. "I will try the experiment on Miss Verinder as boldly as you could try it yourself. And I will inform you of the result, either personally or by letter, before the last train leaves for London to-night."

With that, she stepped into the chaise, and, taking the reins herself, drove off to Frizinghall.