

taking the letter from my hand, "you are corresponding with those betting men again; you are trying to get uncle's money back that way, and you will only make it worse."

Then I remembered that Sam White was a betting man who had been advertising a good deal lately. I explained to Kate how the thing had happened, and she quietly disposed of my scruples, and satisfied her own curiosity, by seizing the letter, tearing it open, and taking it to the window to read: As she read, her pretty face was puckered up into all kinds of puzzled wrinkles.

"I can make nothing of it, she said, at last, handing me the dead letter."

It was dated the sixteenth of June, the day after the robbery, but bore no address and no signature.

"Respected friend—Have a little job lot of calico prints, ten thousand yards or so, sewable for furmen market. I'll come over and see the on the first, and mind ye have the shiners ready. Ould place, at seven o'clock morning."

"Jem!" cried Kate, when I had finished reading, no light coming to me in the process, "were there any envelopes in the portfolio that was stolen with the notes?"

"Yes, there certainly were a few, and stamped with my name and address on the seal."

"Then the letter is from the thief, and the ten thousand yards of calico are the notes, and he is going to meet somebody on the first, that is to-morrow, to get rid of them."

There was no doubt that Kate was right, and I rose and hugged her on the spot at the joy of her discovery. But, after all, when the first burst of delight was over, how were we the better for this letter? The postmark was Middleton; there was nothing in the letter itself to give any clue to the writer. But if we could find out the person to whom it was addressed and keep a watch on him? The post office people had not been able to find him; but, although Sam White might have no definite address, there was no doubt that he was still in existence. His advertisements appeared in the papers constantly, although the crusade of the police against betting men compelled them to keep out of the way. My former experiences stood me in good stead. I found out a man, an occasional tout, who knew all about him.

"Sam White!" said the man, "why he's going to be wedded this blessed morning." He went on to inform me that White was about marrying a young woman with a lot of money, that he was going to retire from vulgar turf business altogether, and for the future bet only with the aristocracy and at Tattersall's. He was going to Paris for his wedding trip, and a few of his friends were going to the station presently to see him off, and give him a parting cheer.

Making myself out to be in the category of Sam White's friends, I got permission to join the party, and soon after noon the bride and bridegroom made their appearance at the station and were chased into a first-class carriage by the waiting crowd of admirers, who howled and cheered in the most rowdy fashion. The captain did not seem over pleased with the attentions of his friends, and the bride was decidedly frightened. She was a very pleasant looking, pretty young woman, by the way, and in form and features reminded me a good deal of Kate. The opportunity was not to be lost, and jumping upon the carriage step, I thrust the dead letter before him, and telling him it was a matter of life and death, begged him to say what he knew about the writer. He snatched the letter from my hands, crumpled it up, and flung it out of the window, bidding me begone for an impudent rascal. The train moved off amid a salvo of cheers from White's admirers, and I picked up the letter somewhat crestfallen and disconcerted. My friend, the tout, sidled up to me again. "Cut up rather rough with you, did Sam, sir? Set a beggar on horseback, you know. Was it money you wanted of him?"

As a forlorn hope, I showed the man the letter, and asking him if he could make any guess as to the writer, adding that it might be £5 or £10 in his pocket if he could find out.

The man's face brightened, and his whole aspect changed. "I don't know the handwriting myself, but give me three hours and I'll find out all about it."

We made an appointment to meet at my office, and punctual to his time the man appeared. He had found out that Sam White was in the habit of meeting some old fellow, not connected with the turf, on secret business at the Three Pigeons, a public house in one of the lowest quarters of the town, frequented by thieves and other disreputable characters. The landlord of the inn, one Grinrod, a retired prize fighter, was a fierce and dangerous fellow, and my friendly tout confessed that a misunderstanding about a disputed bet had made him afraid to venture near the place,

and he could gather no further information.

The whole day passed away, and nothing more could be done. Kate looked despairingly at me when I told her what had passed. Captain White had gone out of our ken, and out of English jurisdiction altogether; his correspondent was still a mysterious nothing. The clue that had been so marvelously revealed to us, all came to naught. It was enough to make us despair.

There was a dinner party at my uncle's that night—a very grand one. I never saw Uncle Henry more gay or, to all appearance, in better spirits, and yet three days at the outside would see him a ruined man. Among the guests was Major Smith, the chief constable of the town, a bachelor and bon vivant, who was still rather a ladies' man, and not averse to making himself agreeable to Kate. He took her down to dinner, and I kept a watchful eye upon them. A great epergne of flowers was between us, but in the lulls and pauses in the general clatter I could hear what they were saying. He was very fond of talking about the great people he knew, and had been indulging in a long flourish about his old friend and comrade, Lord —, when Kate brought him down to the common level by the question, "Pray Major Smith, do you know a Captain Sam White?"

"White!" cried the major, rather nettled at being cut short. "White! of what regiment?"

"Oh, I don't know that, but he lately lived at Nowland's row."

The major's eyes at once assumed the keen twinkle of the chief of the police.

"Have you been plunging into the betting ring, Miss Brown? Sam White is a dangerous fellow. He has the character, too, of being a secret fence."

That was all that I could hear, for the tide of conversation rose once more, and drowned all individual voices.

I did not enjoy my dinner that evening. I felt that we were on the edge of a precipice. It seemed, indeed, likely enough that Major Smith might soon have the task of hauling us off to prison, on a charge of fraudulent concealment of property. What would become of my aunt—most good-natured and helpless of women—and of Kate? The thought was unendurable.

After the guests were gone, Kate and I had a long and serious consultation together. If the next day passed over our heads without bringing something to light, farewell to hope altogether. It was hardly likely, indeed, that the unknown criminal would keep the appointment he had made, as he had received no reply to his letter. Still, there was the chance that he would.

Would it be possible to get somebody to represent Sam White, and keep the appointment on his behalf? That was out of the question. White was too well-known. Then, although we assumed that the Three Pigeons was the "old place" mentioned in the dead letter, yet we were just as likely to be wrong altogether.

Then Kate's face lighted up, and I saw that she had an idea. "You say that the bride of Captain White was a good deal like me. Well, why should I not make believe to be Mrs. Sam White, and go to keep the appointment on his behalf?" I had a great many objections to urge to such a plan, but one by one Kate overruled them. But I persuaded her to make this addition to her scheme, that I should accompany her in the guise of her husband's clerk, or secretary. Finally we made an appointment to meet at 10 o'clock the following morning, and go to the Three Pigeons.

As we pushed open the swing doors of the Three Pigeons, a strong waft of mingled odors—beer and spirits, flavored with tobacco, and a slight suspicion of wet sawdust—drove against us; a babel of voices, too, surged out, jocose, maudlin, quarrelsome. Kate shrank back and got behind me; for a moment she was not prepared for such an ideal as this. A crowd of people, chiefly women, whose characters it would be a compliment to call doubtful, were clustered about a sloppy, pewter-covered counter, wrangling, laughing, snarling, swearing. The most alarming thing was that, at the sight of us, the noise suddenly ceased, and all eyes were directed toward us. The landlord, a huge, brutal looking man, was bawling out supplies of liquor, rigorously exacting the price before delivery, helped by two slatternly-looking women. He glared at us with hot, bloodshot eyes, and seeing that we hesitated at approaching the drinking counter, fiercely demanded our business. Kate marched up to him with well simulated boldness. "I am Mrs. Captain White," she whispered.

At once the man's countenance changed and assumed a more friendly aspect, and he led the way to an up-stairs room.

"But what do you want?" he said to me, laying his hand on my breast in a threatening way as I was about to follow

Kate. "You've naught to do with the Captain?"

Kate at once explained that I was the captain's new secretary or agent. Her husband was obliged to keep out of the way, owing to police persecution; but he had an important appointment here, and had sent her and his new secretary to transact the business. In confirmation of this, she handed him the dead letter.

Grinrod spelt it over with a cautious, but comprehending face.

"Aye, it's right, no doubt," he said.—"I charge a sovereign for the room, you know." Kate bade me pay this at once, and as soon as the money had passed, Grinrod remembered that a telegram had just come from the captain, which, perhaps, bore upon the matter in hand. He went to the bar and brought back the telegram. Kate opened it and read it, and handed it over to me with a gesture of despair. It was from a friend, Howbent, to Captain White. Three Pigeons, lanconically, "As the do not answer, I shall na come."

Now it seemed that all our trouble and pains had been lost. The unknown would not come forth and be revealed.—Our chance was gone. The landlord looked at us inquiringly. No doubt he had read the telegram, and knew that it was put off.

"Oh, he's not coming, then. Well, why don't you wire him to come over? you can have this room till he comes, only, as it is wanted a deal, I shall charge you another pound for the use of it."

The suggestion was a good one, if we had known to whom to send the message; but, in the latter case, we need not have been going through this disagreeable, dangerous experiment at the Three Pigeons.

"I don't think," I said at last, "that my employer would approve of my sending for this man; it looks like being over anxious about the bargain."

I looked over at Kate who at once took the cue.

"Yes; I am sure my husband would not like it. But if you, my dear Mr. Grinrod, would kindly let him know, without our knowing anything about it—you know what a temper the captain has—that Captain White is here waiting for him, I would pay for the rooms and so on, and should be so much obliged to you."

The irascible, suspicious Grinrod was mollified and subdued by the power of beauty.

"I'll do anything to oblige a lady," he said, and went out to dispatch the message, evidently knowing quite well where to send it.

Never did the hours pass so slowly as those that elapsed while we were waiting at the Three Pigeons for the unknown thief. The landlord came in and out, doing his best to be civil and attentive, talking about horses and handicaps, and asked for advice upon this race and that, until I was afraid he would discover my shallow, superficial knowledge, and detect me as an imposter. The people in the bar yelled, and quarreled and fought; sometimes Grinrod was called out to thrust half a dozen of the most intoxicated, those who could drink no more, into the street.

Twelve o'clock struck from the church-clock opposite, time crept slowly on, still nobody came. Another hour struck, and we began to feel that it was useless to wait longer.

Just then we heard a bell ring and Grinrod bustled in. "He's here, at private door; shall I show'em up?" Kate nodded. The next few minutes seemed an age.

There was a whispered conference at the door; then we heard something on the stairs, thump, thump, thump, as if a piece of furniture were being dragged up. Then the door opened and revealed the cunning, wizened face of Bob Hargreaves.

He had evidently come in hot haste, the perspiration streamed from his face, which he was wiping nervously with his blue cotton handkerchief. He wore the very same costume as when I first saw him, except that the cowskin waistcoat was replaced by one of dirty white cotton. "I'm late, missus," he cried making a kind of awkward salute. "And so the captain wouldn't come; well he'd ought to let me know."

At this moment he caught sight of me. I could withhold myself no longer and rushed eagerly forward. His face became livid, and then green. He turned to escape, but his stick slipped from under him, he came down heavily, his head striking the corner of the table, and lay there insensible.

It was not the time for thinking of legal niceties, and I had no scruples in turning out his pockets at once, making sure that I should find the missing notes. I soon came to a big, greasy pocketbook and opened it, but the notes were not there. A thorough search only revealed in his possession a half-crown, a few coppers, a return third class ticket for Howbent, and a pawnbroker's dupli-

cate for the cowskin waistcoat, pledged for half-a-crown that morning.

I was staggered at this apparent proof of the man's impecuniosity, and certainly the position was an awkward one. Hargreaves, for the moment stunned by the fall, was fast recovering his senses.—On the face of it I had been guilty of an aggravated assault and robbery. And I had not a title of evidence against the man.

"I think we had better get out of this as fast as we can," I said to Kate.—"Hargreaves has been too many for us," and I began cramming his things back into his pocket. "Stop," cried Kate, "Jem, I have been thinking; there is just one chance. Let us steal the pawn-ticket."

The thought that was in her mind also flashed upon me. I slipped the ticket into my pocket. Kate put her arm in mine and we marched boldly down stairs and out of doors; we were in the street before anybody had noticed us. Then we went straight to the pawnbroker's shop and redeemed the cowskin waistcoat, carrying it off to my office, where we carefully examined it.

At first sight there was nothing remarkable in the waistcoat; but Kate's attention was speedily drawn to the elaborate way in which the lining was quilted in, and the pains-taking stitching about it. It was an exciting moment when, after unpicking some of the lining, she brought the corner of a piece of paper to light. It was a bank-note, and bit by bit, as the waistcoat was unpacked, note after note came to light till the whole £10,000 was made up.

You can imagine our joy as we put the missing money into Uncle Henry's hands. He was on the point of calling in an accountant to take charge of his books, and inform his creditors that he could no longer meet his engagements, but the recovered £10,000 put a new aspect on affairs. My uncle's credit was saved.

We sent the cowskin waistcoat to Mr. Hargreaves at Howbent, with a polite note, begging him accept the two-and-seven-pence-half-penny we had paid for its redemption, as compensation for the slight damage we had done to its lining—a damage which his skill in the craft would enable him speedily to repair.—We saw nothing more of him till the end of three months, when a favorable turn of affairs enabled my uncle to repay his loan with interest. Then, Bob was seized with remorse, or some feeling that answers the same purpose, and he confessed to me had stolen the notes that we had so fortunately recovered.—The devil had tempted him, he said; for he had noticed that, when I locked up the safe, I made use of a small key I took from a nail over the fire-place. The temptation to clear £10,000 at a blow was irresistible. He watched me out of the office, and no had difficulty in shooting back the lock of my door with his clasp-knife. There was no risk; for, had he been found in my room, he would have had a plausible excuse ready.—Then he found the key of the safe hanging where I had left it, and was soon in possession of the money he had so recently parted with. He took my portfolio, too, for he had seen me put the list of notes there. He would have gone to London next day and cashed them, had he not heard from me that I had a copy of the list of numbers—may I be forgiven for the falsehood I told on the occasion—but, assuming that the notes would be stopped, he wrote to Captain White, who, from frequent visits to the Continent, and his habit of dealing with large sums of money, was a convenient agent for the purpose. I fancy that Bob had had similar dealings with him before of a like nature, although he solemnly affirmed that he had not. As Robert said, he was no scholar, and had not noticed, in using one of my envelopes—for the sake of economy—that there was any but an ordinary device on the seal. If he had, he would have thought nothing of it; and he was still in wonder as to the way in which we found out his appointment with White. He had sewed the notes up in his cowskin waistcoat the day after he had stolen them; in fact, that was his occupation on the morning of my visit. And he secured a place of safe deposit for his money by pawning the waistcoat on his way to meet Capt. White.

After all, Uncle Henry made a lot of money through being obliged to hold on to his cotton; for it rose suddenly a half-penny a pound, on receipt of disastrous news of the new crop. He behaved very handsomely to Kate on the occasion of our wedding the other day. I often shiver when I think of how nearly I had shipwrecked all prospects of life by a moment's carelessness; and, under Providence, and next to my wife, Kate, I have nobody to thank so much for getting me out of the scrape, as her Majesty's Postmaster General, who sent me that unopened dead letter.

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