

# BEYOND RECALL

## CHAPTER V.

### STEPS IN THE RIGHT ROAD.

"Are ye a-camin', matey?" asked the burglar, in a hoarse whisper, pausing after a couple of heavy strides forward.

I made no reply. Tragic affrays are common in the papers that one reads of this man being killed or that one badly maimed almost with indifference; but to hear the shot fired which you know may have put a man to death within a few hundred paces is another thing. I could not move, could not speak, for the sickening apprehension of what was going on behind in the place I had but just now escaped from.

"Well, stay where y'are," growled my companion, taking my silence in bad part, and he plunged on with a curse.

Long after he was gone out of hearing, I stood there, expecting some sound—another shot, a cry, a whistle, the approaching footsteps of Hookey or the police—anything to take the place of that void in which I seemed to exist; yet I heard nothing but the throbbing of the blood in my veins, and the occasional pat of a drop falling upon a dead leaf.

I found myself at the palings of the park without knowing how I got there. I must have turned about and gone up the hill mechanically. In the same unconscious way I made my way across Wimbledon and so down into Putney. There I noticed that it was a quarter to six by the clock of the post office. It must have been eight when I got to the house where I lodged in Old Street Road.

My landlady met me on the stairs, a candle in her hand, for the fog here was black, and the darkness greater than at Richmond in the middle of the night.

"Oh, you're come home, are you?" said the woman, blocking the passage. "What's gone of your hat?"

I put my hand to my head and discovered that I was hatless. I did not notice it before.

"And what in the world are you been a-doin' to yourself? You're all of a mess of mud from end to side."

"I must have fallen down," I said, passing her, and going towards my room.

"Oh, well, look here, young man," she called after me, "if you can afford to go out a-sprein' all night you can just manage to pay me what's my dues." She broke off to exclaim, as I went up the next flight of stairs, and the light of her lamp fell upon my feet, "Well, I never; if you ain't got on goloshes. Look here, mister—"

But I had reached my room, and shutting the door, I lost the rest. Still, as I went about to find matches and light my lamp, I heard her talking to the lodgers below in a high voice that was meant for my ear.

I sank down on a chair before the lamp that cast a dim glimmer on the grimy table. I wanted to concentrate my thoughts, to form some clear and distinct idea of what should be done in the crisis to which matters had come. That is what I had been vainly attempting to achieve as I plodded homeward. It seemed as if the fog had got into my mind and blurred all ideas in dense obscurity. As I sat down something in my pocket chinked against the chair. It was the purse given me by Hebe. Even that had gone out of my mind. Now, as I held it in my hand, the soft, cool feel reminded me of her touch. Would these gentle fingers ever clasp my hand again? I asked myself my heart sinking with a dim foreboding that we had parted for ever, that the course I sought to find must lead me far from her. It is in losing a treasure that one realizes all its value. That's the way of the world—to mourn for those a little timely consideration would have kept.

"She never reproached me," I said to myself, still tenderly caressing the purse; "never murmured against the hard fate to which her folly and love have brought her. How soft and low her voice was! How bravely she hoped on when I was sunk in cowardly despair! Oh, what I have lost! If I could but recall those last few hours—only the last minute—that I might leave her at least the hope of better things! What has she to hope for? What signs of tenderness or manly strength have I given her?" In this strain I continued to indulge my remorse for some time, and then, with a heavy sigh, I summoned all my resolution to settle practically what it was I had to do. The better feeling that had come into my heart when I found myself a captive had not left me when I found myself once more free. No; I would make a great effort. I would do what was right. I clung to that idea as the one chance of redeeming myself and retrieving the past. One thing was clear; I must no longer burden her with my misfortunes. I would go away and leave her in peace. I opened the purse and poured out the contents on the table. There was quite a lot of gold. I spread it out on the table. The board, dark before, was luminous now with the glitter of it. I feasted my eyes on it, saying to myself that not a farthing should be misspent; all should be employed to the good end she had in view when she pressed me to accept it. Oh, it should come back to her with rich interest! At that moment the door was burst open rudely, and my landlady came in with her invariable "Look here, young man!" But there she stopped, for her eyes fell on the gold. "She came up to the table in silence and rested her knuckles on it, looking down at the money, her mouth open, and her eyes round with wonder. There she stood, her lips firmly closed, and, bending her brow, looked straight at me.

"Are you a miser or—or what?" she asked in a low tone.

"What does it matter to you what I am?" said I.

"It matters a good bit to me. You haven't paid me for a fortnight, and I've seen you eating dry bread more like a starved dog than a Christian. You've been getting thinner and more haggard and more wild looking every day."

"Take what I owe you," said I pushing a sovereign across the table.

"No, I won't touch it afore I know it's honestly come by. I've managed to keep myself straight in spite of hard times. Nothing can be said against my house, and I ain't going to get myself into trouble for a few shillings."

"Do you think I'm a thief?" I asked, the little blood I had in my veins rushing hot up into my face.

"I know you are—that's more," cried she, her voice raised to a shrill cry, and retorting fierceness for fierceness.

"Don't tell me that's London mud on your sleeves! Look at it—it's yellor! Oh, you don't deceive me! And them goloshes—how did you come by them when you went out in your hobnails?"

I laughed. It was my hungry look that had condemned me, just as my homelessness had damned me in the eyes of the constable.

"I'm sorry to see you laugh, young man," said she, her voice losing its harshness. "I'd rather see you breakin' your heart a-cryin'. I've got a son, Heaven help me! He was a jobbing turner in the Curtain Road same as what you are a carver; and what with the cutting trade and strikes, and a drop of drink, and a gal, and one thing and another, he went wrong. I was hard on him, and that made him worse." She broke off, her thick lips trembling; then swallowing her bitter reflections, she pursued, "And so young man, if this is the first time—and I do think it is, for you ain't given to swearin' and drinkin', and do behave yourself more like a young gent than a cabinet maker, mostly—and so be you're that done by hunger you can't stand it no longer, I'll let you off your rent, and maybe I'll find a few sixpences to get your tools out of pawn, and help you on a bit till you get a bit of a job. But don't you touch a penny of that money. It's the devil's wage and can do you no good."

"It's an angel's gift and will make a man of me," cried I, springing up. "And let me get out of your debt to begin with."

She looked at me steadily and then at the money. I could see by the hardening of her face that she still doubted me; but the bad times weighed in my favor, and she at length took up the sovereign and gave me the change. For all that she couldn't leave the room without protest.

"Mind," says she, "if I find you've been deceivin' me I'll be the first to round on you."

I gathered up the money and put it in my pocket. Then I found an old cap, and went out with a feverish eagerness to be making some practical progress, though yet with no definite object. At the pawnbroker's in Shoreditch I redeemed my tools and the old cricketing suit I had brought with me to London; and I turned into a coffee shop and ate heartily.

It was still night to me. The gas flared from the brackets against the greasy wall. Beyond the windows, where the steam described the smears of yesterday's cleaning, all was black. A boy coming in with a batch of papers under his arm was the only sign that another day was come. Then my heart beat quickly as I thought that those papers told of last night's tragedy—of my escape. When the waitress laid one of them on the table before me I scarcely dared to open it. It was a surprise to see a big headline marking the new murder and burglary; a still greater when I failed to discover a single line referring to it anywhere. I eagerly got another and another paper, searching them through now with the hope of not finding what I sought. Not a word! Then that shot I heard had not taken effect—no murder had been done, and the mere escape of an unmerciful gang of burglars had been thought of insufficient interest to form a paragraph. Well, that was something!

The fog was clearing off when I went out, and the sun shining by the time I got back to my lodgings. It was one of those sudden changes that sometimes occur in November. I washed and changed my clothes, looking like another man for it; then I shouldered my tool bag and went out, feeling that I might not return. My landlady was standing at her parlor door as I passed through the passage. She shook her head, but said nothing. It struck me she suspected I had put on this suit as a disguise. But it was a strange one, if my end was to escape notice. People stared to see a cricketer with an artisan's tool bag on his shoulder. The costume in itself was sufficiently out of keeping with the time of year; but it was warm and dry; that was all I cared about.

I had taken a panel carved in high relief to an art dealer in Cheapside. He promised to put it in the window and sell it if he could. That was months before; since then I had gone week after week past the shop without going in—the sight of my work in the window was sufficiently discouraging. Thither I bent my steps now—for the last time, I expected.

There was a scaffolding in Moorgate Street, and a poster upon it caught my eye; it advertised a cheap line of packets to New York I read it through, and went on, with a presentiment that I should come back to read it again. When I came to the shop in Cheapside I stopped dead short before the window, and could hardly breathe for the bounding of my heart. My panel was gone! For a moment my head turned with a delirious belief that my talent was at last recognised—that my panel was sold—that others might be ordered—that, after all, I might not have to go to New York—that I might still stay near her, and achieve success in the way she hoped for. And why should I not. Was not the field as open and as large in England as in America? Now I had a little money, could I not wait and study and work with hope and confidence, proving to her from time to time that I had turned over a new leaf and recovered my manhood? These and many more wild speculations and hopes were crowded into that one minute, and then they died in an instant, making a dull void in my heart as I crossed the threshold, and caught sight of my panel upside down at the back of the shop amongst empty picture frames.

"We've given it a fair trial, and it's no use," said the shopkeeper; "people don't want that kind of thing. Now if you could turn out something humorous in the animal line and get it reproduced in imitation terra cotta, we could sell 'em by the gross."

I shook my head, and said I would take my panel away, and so I went out into the crowded street, more than before an object of remark by having a panel under one arm; to balance the tool bag over the other shoulder.

Instinctively I went back to the scaffolding in Moorgate Street. I read the poster through slowly. At the foot was the address of London agents in Leadenhall Street. That was close by. Why not go there at once and take a berth? The thing would be finished then. Better than wasting my money in dribblets on a forlorn hope. For her sake I ought to go. That settled it.

I found my way to the shipping agents in

Leadenhall Street. The clerk gaped at me like a fool. A good many unhappy men must have gone into that office too with the same errand as mine; but perhaps I was the first to apply in November dressed in light cricketing flannels!

"I want to go to New-York," I began.

"When?" he asked, closing his mouth at last.

"As soon as I can."

"One of our steamers leaves Liverpool to-morrow."

"That will do."

"But I don't know if there's a berth left."

"Can't you find out?"

"Yes, in half an hour, if you like to pay for a wire."

I paid a shilling, and said I would wait for the reply. He sent a boy to the post with a telegram, and withdrew into an inner office to tell his fellow clerks of the queer customer who wanted to emigrate. Glancing that way, I saw a row of heads with their noses on a level with the top of the ground glass, with which the lower part of the partition was glazed.

There were time tables hanging up against the wall. I occupied myself in learning the times of the trains to Liverpool till the reply telegram was handed in.

"You can have a berth," said the clerk; "but you'll have to be aboard, with all your traps, by ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I shall have plenty of time if I take the last train to-night from St. Pancras."

Then I paid my money, and went out with a feeling that I was going the right road now.

Nearly opposite the agents' was an outfitter's shop, where there seemed to be everything an emigrant might want. I went in there and bought what was necessary, with a box to pack my tools, panel, and everything in. At the man's suggestion, I changed my flannels and canvas shoes for one of the suits I had bought, making use of a dressing room that adjoined the shop. I locked up my chest and took the key, with a guarantee from the outfitter that I should find it aboard the steamer when I reached Liverpool. Here was another step made, and my heart was the lighter for it; and so I went out with something of my old elasticity and buoyancy. But though my hands were unencumbered, and I was no longer in flannels, the passers by regarded me with curiosity. It is seldom one sees a man dressed completely in brand new clothes from cap to boots; the only men I know of that are distinguished in this way are released convicts.

It was long since I had felt so easy at heart—so well pleased with myself. I turned into a chop house and ate a good dinner with real pleasure. By that time it was two o'clock. I knew of a stationer's shop in the City Road where one can sit down and write letters; and thither I bent my steps, resolved to write a letter to my wife. As I walked along, my whole soul warm and tender with love and regrets, I thought out all I would say that might make me merit the forgiveness of past faults which I knew well enough her gentle heart would accord, and encourage her to hope for better things in the future than she had reason to expect from my late conduct. Wrapt in these thoughts I trudged briskly along, taking no notice of the people I passed, and jostling more than one in my haste to get on. On the pavement just outside the North London terminus in Liverpool Street, I nearly knocked a stout old gentleman off the pavement, as he stood with his hands behind him looking at a time bill. With a hurried apology I pushed on, when he called after me—

"Wyndham! Wyndham! Kit Wyndham!"

Then stopping to see who it was that called me, I found myself face to face with my kind old friend, Mr. Lonsdale, the Vicar of—(?)

"Why, you're the very man, of all others, I most want to see," he said. "I've come up to London on your account. This is a providential meeting indeed; most providential!"

"There's nothing wrong!" I said, faltering; for a sudden foreboding of ill overcame me.

"I don't know, my good fellow," he replied. "Let us go into the waiting room of this station, where we may talk it over."

CHAPTER VI.  
ARRESTED.

As we hurried up the steps to the platform, he told me that he had been looking at the bill to find when the next train left for Richmond, and that there was not one for half an hour. This gave definite shape to my apprehensions. "He could have no object in going to Richmond on my account, unless Hebe had sent for him," thought I; and that call must have been made with reference to what had taken place in the past night.

"However," he added, pausing to get breath at the head of the stairs, "now we have met by this happy accident, you may be able to save me that journey, and so enable me to return to—by the next train, and set Mrs. Lonsdale's mind at ease. We never got a telegram before, and it quite upset us as I assure you."

We went into the waiting room and rested ourselves in a quiet corner, and while I waited in patient anxiety the old gentleman explored his pockets one after the other, talking all the while in a low voice.

"We had just finished breakfast," he said "when the despatch was brought to us. Where can I have put it? It's a very thin one. And the moment she saw it, Mrs. Lonsdale said, 'Something's happened to that poor young man, I feel sure.' Ladies, you know, are so prone to make conclusions of that sort. You see Kit, we have not heard a word about you for ten months. Where can I have put it? 'Pooh, pooh, my dear,' said I; 'the young fellow is making his fortune.' I always predicted that Wyndham. He's got his hands full of work, and has no time to think of us." When we are happy, we are prone to be a little careless—a little neglectful; like children who err from want of thought. I must have put it in my other pocket. "Wyndham, you may depend upon it, it is preposterous. I am seldom wrong in gauging character; and from the first I maintained that you were bound to succeed. And here you are, to verify my words, in a suit of clothes that looks as if you had just come out of the tailor's."

"That is it," I broke in; "the buff envelope."

"Dear me, so it is. I thought it was a soap ticket. Now tell me—"

I opened the telegram in an instant; it ran thus:—

"From Major Cleveden: Post Office, Shoreditch.—Have you seen or heard of Mr. Wyndham? Should he arrive in the course of the day, telegraph to me at once. Address as above."

The major to have telegraphed from Shoreditch must clearly have been to my lodgings to find me. The address was known to my wife. Why was he so anxious to find me?

"Can you tell me what it means, Kit?" asked Mr. Lonsdale, as I dropped my hand with the telegram in it on my knee.

"I am trying to think," said I, vaguely. "We could not understand it by any hypothesis, and so I thought it best to come up at once and see the major himself. I've been in a four-wheel cab to the post office, Shoreditch. He is not there; but I am ready to go and find him at Richmond if it is expedient or advisable."

I saw that something must be done to prevent his going there with the telegram and his endless talk, which could not fail to arouse old Thane's suspicion; so, slapping my knee, and as if suddenly remembering a lost fact, I said—

"Why, that must be the Major Cleveden who gave me a commission for an over-manuel."

"Dear me, now, that is strange. What a trifle to cause so much uneasiness. One would have thought it a matter of life and death by his sending a telegram. Progress and science are all very well, but their effect upon quiet, old-fashioned folks is startling in the extreme. So you know the major, eh?"

"I have met him once," I replied.

"So have I, and that's all. I met him last week at the Cedars; I suppose you met him there also?"

"The Cedars?" I said, as if I did not quite understand.

"Yes; the Cedars at Ham. I went there to see an old friend of yours, and a still older friend of mine—Miss Thane. Hebe Thane," he continued in explanation, "for I still pretended not to comprehend. You know that she has left me, and is living with her father, who has come home a millionaire from India."

"No," I said. "It was not a moment to be punctilious about a falsehood."

"You have not heard of that? Well you surprise me. I thought every one must have heard of it. To be sure, though, London is a vast city—a prodigious city. He came home soon after you left and took us all by surprise. Never gave us any warning of his coming. Between you and me, if he had not found her so attractive and charming, he would have gone away as he came and left Hebe still with us. Perhaps I ought not to say this. However he was delighted with the dear girl, and has furnished her with a house and surroundings worthy of a princess. I went to see her last week, as I tell you, and it was there I met Major Cleveden—a most delightful, amiable gentleman, as I daresay you have found him."

"Yes," said I, with a deep earnestness that struck him.

"I am glad you think so; for quite between ourselves, I should not be in the least surprised if he makes Hebe—I mean Miss Thane—his wife."

I raised my eyebrows and shrugged my shoulders as if such a thing were possible, and might very well happen, for all I cared. But in my heart I felt the smart of jealousy.

"I am glad, also, to see that sign of indifference, Wyndham," continued the old man; "and now I will tell you why. Mrs. Lonsdale would persist in upholding that you were attached to our dear girl; that is another of the conclusions that ladies invariably make when they see two young people together. Of course I knew. I said from the first that you were much too sensible to entertain a high regard of that kind for a young lady whose station was considerably above your own. Mrs. Lonsdale even went so far as to maintain that you and our dear Hebe—Miss Thane—had formed a secret engagement, and that you had gone to London to make a fortune in order to be in a position to marry her. It was nonsense, of course; but the worst of such nonsense is that you can never get it out of a lady's head, though I've almost lost my temper with Mrs. Lonsdale upon this subject. And so, you see, when the telegram came she would insist upon it that it referred to some unfortunate escapade you had got into through your attachment to Miss Thane—drawing her conclusions from the telegram being sent by this major. Well, I shall now have the pleasure of undeceiving her when I get home; a pleasure not entirely self congratulatory, but a pleasure arising from the vindication of your character for common sense and straightforwardness. And it is also a pleasure to me to think that no unhappy engagement exists between you and this wealthy young lady, for though your clothes are new and respectable, they do not suggest that appearance which would be necessary to compensate a wife for giving up such tremendous advantages of position and surroundings as Miss Thane now enjoys."

He continued to stream on in this strain, and I ceased to take in more than the mere tone of his monologue; for out of the hum and whirl of the traffic in the street below the hoarse voices of the newsboys dived themselves in tones that struck a new terror into my mind.

"Speshul! Speshul! Extry speshul!" they cried. "Darin' burglary and murder this day."

It now occurred to me for the first time that the events at Ham had taken place too late for publication in the morning papers. I could hear nothing but those cries outside now; the vicar's voice was but an accompanying drone to my ear.

A bookstall was just opposite the waiting room. Presently I saw a boy hang up the contents bill of an evening paper, and I saw in large letters upon it—"Daring Burglary at Ham!—Desperate Encounter—A Policeman Killed!" Every instant I expected the vicar to catch sight of the sheet; but he still droned on, occupied solely with his own opinions and reflections. Suddenly he started up.

"Bless my heart," said he; "five minutes to three. I shall lose my train."

He shook hands hurriedly, and we parted, to my immense satisfaction.

I slipped a penny into a boy's hand and took his paper. There was a tumult in my brain. One thing I recognised—the major had sought me on some pressing occasion connected with the night's events. I must see him, and I should not be likely to find him at my old lodgings. I knew not why, but I felt that every one was looking at me.

I dared not open the paper until I got into South Street, where there were but few people to watch me.

There was, all detailed in full, with the large headline I had expected. A policeman had been shot. The burglars had escaped in the dense fog. The police were in possession of information which would probably lead to the capture of the murderer.

My landlady was standing on her threshold with her hands on her hips. She started at seeing me.

"What, you've changed 'em again!" she said, referring to my clothes. "Look here, young man, if you've deceived me about that money, if you've passed stolen property on to me, I'll round on you; mind that. I said I would, and I will."

"Has any one been here to see me?" I asked, impatiently.

"Yes, there has. He's left a letter for you, and the sooner I get that out of my hands the better pleased I shall be. I've had trouble enough, and I don't want to get into more."

She gave me a letter from her pocket. I tore it open. There was but one line on the sheet of paper. Here it is:—

"Get out of the country at once, if you love her!"—C.

I needed no further incentive. A cab was crawling along the street. I sprang in and told the driver to take me to St. Pancras.

As he turned around I caught a glimpse of my landlady; her lips bunched up; her face as hard as iron. She shook her head at me ominously.

"When's the next train for Liverpool?" I asked a porter as I jumped out of the cab.

"It's running in on the main line now. Look sharp, sharp, sir?"

I got my ticket and ran along the platform. The engine was hissing; the doors were slamming too; a bell rang. I pushed my way through a knot of people waiting to see their friends off, and sprang into a carriage. I was the last one.

"Got your ticket?" asked the guard. I held it up. He nodded and blew his whistle.

"Thank Heaven," I murmured, "she's safe!"

The engine snorted; the train began slowly to move.

"Hold hard there!" called a voice in a tone of authority, and at the same moment the door was burst open and two men presented themselves. I thought I knew the look of one; though he wore a morning suit, he had the unmistakable air of a constable.

"That's him," said he, looking at me.

"Come out, sharp!" said the other.

"What for?" I demanded.

"What for?—why, for murder; that's what for."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

The Queen's Dolls.

Miss Francis Low describes the large collection of dolls dressed by Her Majesty when a girl at Kensington Palace. The article has been read and revised by the Queen, who sent, through Sir Henry Ponsonby, the following memorandum:—"Her Majesty was very much devoted to dolls, and indeed played with them till she was nearly 14 years old. Her favourites were small dolls—small wooden dolls, which she could occupy herself with dressing, and who had a house in which they could be placed. None of Her Majesty's children cared for dolls as she did; but then they had girl companions, which she never had. Miss Victoria Conroy (afterwards Mrs. Hamner) came to see her once a week, and occasionally others played with her, but with these exceptions she was left alone with the companionship of her dolls."

In a postscript Sir Henry Ponsonby adds:—"Since writing the above I have been informed that it is not correct that 'none of Her Majesty's children cared for dolls,' as the four eldest Princesses were very fond of them." In a subsequent note Sir Henry adds:—"The Queen usually dressed the dolls from some costumes she saw either in the theatre or private life." There is, indeed (Miss Low writes), ample evidence in the care and attention lavished upon the dolls of the immense importance with which they were regarded by their Royal little mistress; and an additional and interesting proof of this is to be found in what one might call the "doll's archives." These records are to be found in an ordinary copy-book, now a little yellow with years, on the inside cover of which is written in a childish, straggling, but determined handwriting—"List of my dolls." Then follows in delicate feminine writing the name of the doll, by whom it was dressed, and the character it represented, though this particular is sometimes omitted. When the doll represents an actress, the date and name of the ballet are also given, by means of which one is enabled to determine the date of the dressing, which must have been between 1831 and 1833, when, Sir Henry says, "the dolls were packed away. Of the 132 dolls preserved, the Queen herself dressed no fewer than 32, in a few of which she was helped by Baroness Lehzen, a fact that is scrupulously recorded in the book; and they deserve to be handed down to posterity as an example of the patience and ingenuity and exquisite handiwork of a twelve-year-old princess."

Adventures of a Shipwrecked Crew.

News has, according to the Exchange Telegraph Company, reached London from Japan of the total loss of the British ship North America off the coast between Yokohama and Kobe, during a typhoon, on July 23. Soon after leaving Kobe the wind commenced to rise, and all sails were eventually furled. The gale increased to a typhoon, and every stitch of canvas was blown from the yards. The ship was hoove to, and when night fell it was reckoned she was drifting four miles an hour. Early next morning she struck on the rocks, and the captain (addressing the crew) told them it was now every man for himself. A large crowd of Japanese had collected on the shore, and with their assistance a rope was passed from the ship to a tree and the crew landed in safety. The men met with every kindness, and, to quote the official report by the captain, "they treated us to the best, as if we were distinguished visitors instead of poor shipwrecked sailors." On news of the wreck spreading, the Governor appeared on the scene with a company of soldiers and placed a guard over the cargo which was washing ashore. After a tramp of ten miles across the mountains, the men found a native craft, which took them on to Kobe, where they landed in the clothes given them by the native fishermen.

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I opened the telegram in an instant; it ran thus:—

"From Major Cleveden: Post Office, Shoreditch.—Have you seen or heard of Mr. Wyndham? Should he arrive in the course of the day, telegraph to me at once. Address as above."

The major to have telegraphed from Shoreditch must clearly have been to my lodgings to find me. The address was known to my wife. Why was he so anxious to find me?

"Can you tell me what it means, Kit?" asked Mr. Lonsdale, as I dropped my hand with the telegram in it on my knee.

"I am trying to think," said I, vaguely. "We could not understand it by any hypothesis, and so I thought it best to come up at once and see the major himself. I've been in a four-wheel cab to the post office, Shoreditch. He is not there; but I am ready to go and find him at Richmond if it is expedient or advisable."

I saw that something must be done to prevent his going there with the telegram and his endless talk, which could not fail to arouse old Thane's suspicion; so, slapping my knee, and as if suddenly remembering a lost fact, I said—

"Why, that must be the Major Cleveden who gave me a commission for an over-manuel."

"Dear me, now, that is strange. What a trifle to cause so much uneasiness. One would have thought it a matter of life and death by his sending a telegram. Progress and science are all very well, but their effect upon quiet, old-fashioned folks is startling in the extreme. So you know the major, eh?"

"I have met him once," I replied.

"So have I, and that's all. I met him last week at the Cedars; I suppose you met him there also?"

"The Cedars?" I said, as if I did not quite understand.

"Yes; the Cedars at Ham. I went there to see an old friend of yours, and a still older friend of mine—Miss Thane. Hebe Thane," he continued in explanation, "for I still pretended not to comprehend. You know that she has left me, and is living with her father, who has come home a millionaire from India."

"No," I said. "It was not a moment to be punctilious about a falsehood."

"You have not heard of that? Well you surprise me. I thought every one must have heard of it. To be sure, though, London is a vast city—a prodigious city. He came home soon after you left and took us all by surprise. Never gave us any warning of his coming. Between you and me, if he had not found her so attractive and charming, he would have gone away as he came and left Hebe still with us. Perhaps I ought not to say this. However he was delighted with the dear girl, and has furnished her with a house and surroundings worthy of a princess. I went to see her last week, as I tell you, and it was there I met Major Cleveden—a most delightful, amiable gentleman, as I daresay you have found him."

"Yes," said I, with a deep earnestness that struck him.

"I am glad you think so; for quite between ourselves, I should not be in the least surprised if he makes Hebe—I mean Miss Thane—his wife."

I raised my eyebrows and shrugged my shoulders as if such a thing were possible, and might very well happen, for all I cared. But in my heart I felt the smart of jealousy.

"I am glad, also, to see that sign of indifference, Wyndham," continued the old man; "and now I will tell you why. Mrs. Lonsdale would persist in upholding that you were attached to our dear girl; that is another of the conclusions that ladies invariably make when they see two young people together. Of course I knew. I said from the first that you were much too sensible to entertain a high regard of that kind for a young lady whose station was considerably above your own. Mrs. Lonsdale even went so far as to maintain that you and our dear Hebe—Miss Thane—had formed a secret engagement, and that you had gone to London to make a fortune in order to be in a position to marry her. It was nonsense, of course; but the worst of such nonsense is that you can never get it out of a lady's head, though I've almost lost my temper with Mrs. Lonsdale upon this subject. And so, you see, when the telegram came she would insist upon it that it referred to some unfortunate escapade you had got into through your attachment to Miss Thane—drawing her conclusions from the telegram being sent by this major. Well, I shall now have the pleasure of undeceiving her when I get home; a pleasure not entirely self congratulatory, but a pleasure arising from the vindication of your character for common sense and straightforwardness. And it is also a pleasure to me to think that no unhappy engagement exists between you and this wealthy young lady, for though your clothes are new and respectable, they do not suggest that appearance which would be necessary to compensate a wife for giving up such tremendous advantages of position and surroundings as Miss Thane now enjoys."

He continued to stream on in this strain, and I ceased to take in more than the mere tone of his monologue; for out of the hum and whirl of the traffic in the street below the hoarse voices of the newsboys dived themselves in tones that struck a new terror into my mind.

"Speshul! Speshul! Extry speshul!" they cried. "Darin' burglary and murder this day."

It now occurred to me for the first time that the events at Ham had taken place too late for publication in the morning papers. I could hear nothing but those cries outside now; the vicar's voice was but an accompanying drone to my ear.

A bookstall was just opposite the waiting room. Presently I saw a boy hang up the contents bill of an evening paper, and I saw in large letters upon it—"Daring Burglary at Ham!—