

*“Pray, Sir, Are you a Gentleman?”*

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March, 1860, I went to London for a couple of days on business.

Turning the corner of Chancery Lane, I unexpectedly encountered my friend, Frank Stonhouse. I call him my friend, though there was a disparity in our ages,—he being forty-five, I thirty years old. He, moreover, was a married man with a family; I an itinerant animal, without encumbrances, called a bachelor. Still we were very much attached to each other. After an exclamation of surprise and pleasure, Frank rapidly said, “I am very busy now, but you must come and dine with me at 7 o’clock.”

“Very well,” replied I, and we parted.

As my tale will, I fear, be a long one, I must not be prolix in starting, especially as this is but a kind of preface. So fancy, good reader, dinner over—ladies gone to the drawing room—a most luxurious dessert on the table, and some Madeira.

“Charles,” said my friend Frank to me, “I have not opened fresh Port for you, because I fancy I recollect your partiality for Madeira; but I will do so in a moment if you wish it.”

“Oh no, thank you,” replied I, “this is perfection in the shape of wine, and I assure you that owing to it I shall soon feel happier; indeed, as happy as a prince, were it not for one thing which I cannot shake off.”

“And what is that, Charles?” asked Frank.

“Why, the fact is, that about a month ago I was foolish enough to bind myself by a promise to write six tales. They must be finished by the 31<sup>st</sup>. I have only written three, and what on earth I can say in the other three is more than I can imagine: now do help me, there’s a good fellow, and then I shall have a load off my mind.”

“Help you! Not I. Why, you can get out of your predicament easily enough.—Remember Truth is stranger than fiction, and you who have lived three years in London, and have been a fair average rover so far through life, can be at no loss for adventures in which you have borne a considerable share, and which, therefore, you can readily describe. Write about your London experience.”

“Well, I would do so if I were writing for a periodical, but I am writing for friends who have often heard me repeat whatever was amusing in my London life that would bear narration. Now, do help me, Frank.”

The Madeira was beginning to soften Frank’s heart; I let it work.

“Charles,” said he, after a time, “I will tell you a true tale concerning myself. No one has ever yet heard a word of it. Promise me faithfully not only that you will never reveal my name in connection with it, but that you will so disguise it as to render detection

impossible, and moreover, that you will never again, in conversation with me, allude to the subject.”

I promised, wondering what was coming. Two or three times Frank stopped in the course of his story. With difficulty I induced him to continue. In fact, if I had not pretended to wish for another bottle of Madeira (of which I took care he should drink the greater part), I never should have elicited what I wanted. I knew full well that I should have a headache next morning, but I also knew that one headache and a good story from another person were to be preferred to the three headaches I should probably get in composing a story myself. I was astonished at the following: of course parts of it came out in the shape of question and answer, parts easily, parts on the contrary, in broken sentences. To avoid all that, I shall make my friend Frank Stonhouse appear to write the tale connectedly throughout. He, as chief actor, speaks in the first person. I vanish, good reader, entirely from the scene, and beg you to listen to Frank.

“Pray, sir, are you a gentleman?” What a strange question to be asked. It never but once before in my life was put to me, and then at school by a bigger boy than myself, whom I immediately knocked down—but coming from a young lady’s lips what could it mean? What was I to answer? Be it known, then, that in the year 18—, I, a young man just called to the bar, had, in spite of the remonstrance of an angry porter, jumped into the first-class carriage of an express train starting at Reigate to London, when it was actually in motion. Seated alone in the carriage was a young lady, about nineteen years old; very pretty, light hair, blue eyes, &c. She was evidently in distress, and I fancied wished me elsewhere. After the lapse of a few moments the question was repeated by my fair interrogator—“Pray, sir, are you a gentleman?” I was about to answer in a bantering tone and manner, when it struck me that her voice had almost faltered as she spoke, and that whatever her motive was she was at any rate in earnest.

“Madam,” I replied, “your question is a strange one, but I believe that I may say I am a gentleman; still, if you will tell me what you mean by a gentleman, I will answer you with greater certainty than at present I am able to do.”

“Sir, my idea of a gentleman is that of one who not only will not take advantage of a lady in distress, but will assist her to the utmost of his power.”

“Then, madam, I can assure you I am a gentleman.”

“Then, sir, will you be kind enough to put your head out of the opposite window, and not look back till I call you.”

I rose to obey, wondering what it could mean, and almost glancing at her to see if she were a robber in disguise. All that she had with her in the carriage was a large bundle.

“Stop, sir,” she said, “it is perhaps but right that I should tell you this much. I am running away from my home near Reigate. It is a matter of worse than life and death with me. The train does not stop between Reigate and London, but I shall most infallibly be

pursued by the electric telegraph, and detected at the terminus, unless I can contrive by disguising myself to deceive those who will search for me. I give you the word of a lady, that in doing what I am driven to do I am not acting in any way wrongly—more I cannot tell you.”

She burst into tears, and after a hysterical sob or two, she said pointing to the window, “And now, sir, will you be kind enough to prove yourself a gentleman, and accede to my request—I am going to change my dress.

I at once arose, and I can safely aver that the longest ten minutes I ever spent in my life were occupied in gazing with head and shoulders out of the railway carriage on the surrounding scenery. So little, however, did my eyes or my brain take in what was passing before me that I could not on my oath have stated whether we passed through a wilderness, green fields, towns, or the sea. At length I was told to look round. I did. Where could the lady have gone? Before me sat a tearfully-laughing very juvenile middy—costume quite correct—hair short—cap jauntily set on the head. A mass of curls lay in the fair boy’s lap.

“Thank you, sir,” she said. “You will never fully know what a kindness you have rendered me, and probably we shall never meet again, For your name I will not ask, but if you will give me anything belonging to you to remind me of this hour, I shall be obliged.”

I pulled out a small shilling likeness of myself destined for a young nephew of mine, and a lock of my hair, which was wrapped up with it. Without opening the parcel, I said “Madam, that may serve to remind you hereafter of what certainly has been the strangest chapter in my hitherto not unvaried life.”

She put the parcel in her waistcoat pocket, took a pearl ring off her finger and gave it to me, with a lock of her hair, saying, “Keep that, then, to recall today. In ten minutes we shall part forever.”

For a time both of us were silent. At last I said, “Madam if [you] think that, alone as you are, and probably unaccustomed to London, you can escape the detectives at the station, you are mistaken. I could tell at a glance (to borrow a phrase from your profession,) that you were sailing under false colors.”

“Indeed,” said she somewhat startled; “well, if you will extend your kindness to seeing me clear of the station, I shall be more than ever your debtor for life.”

“Then there is no time to be lost, the train is slackening speed. Put both your delicate hands at once deep into the pockets of your monkey-jacket—they are not like those of a sailor. Lean back in a careless way; and wait, let me dirty your boots by treading on them. Now put one foot on the seat opposite to you; never mind the clean cushion; throw the other leg negligently over the arm by your side. Don’t dream of speaking; I will talk if necessary. Whistle, if you can, when we stop. Give me your ticket.”

It was marked from Dover to London.—Capital, thought I; wonder how she got it. Mine was a season ticket.

“Tickets, sir, please.”

I handed both. The middy whistled.—The guard and policeman actually looked under the carriage seats. A long time the train was delayed before it moved into the station. At length it did.

“Now, follow me,” I said, “roll in your walk, if you can, mind you keep your hands in your pockets.”

“Cab, sir.”

“Yes, now then, in with you, Jack.”

“Where to, sir?”

“Hyde Park Corner.” I thought I would name a distant place to give my friend breathing time. We moved forward a few paces, and then stopped.

“Now then, Cabby,” said I, “What is the matter?”

“Why, sir, blowed if there ain’t them perlice at the station gate, hexamining of every cab, and the parties inside on ‘em, and be doing the same to those be walking.”

My companion turned deadly pale. I pulled out a flask of neat brandy. “Drink two mouthfuls,—down with it, gulp it down,—anything to give you color.”

At the same time I took out two cigars, lighted them, pushed one into my friend’s mouth.”

“Smoke,” said I, “as hard as you can, your safety depends on it.”

Two detectives looked in at the window. “Where from, sir?”

I blew a volume of smoke into the man’s face, which caused him to rub his eyes and cough. (The middy was puffing literally like blazes.)

“Where from?” replied I. “Why from Dover; what on earth do you want?”

Another discharge of smoke settled the matter.

“All right, sir, beg pardon.”

I gave him a parting volley of smoke.

“Drive on cabman with the gentleman.”

In another minute, after continuing from sheer habit to produce a hazy atmosphere, I looked round. The middy had fainted.—No time yet for thinking, but acting. I used my flask again, then a vigorous pinch. Bye-and-bye the young gentleman came round.

“Well, now you are safe, at least from detection and pursuit, at any rate, for the present; where shall I tell the man to drive you?”

“I don’t know; I wish you would tell me where I can go for two or three days, till I am able to mature my plans.”

“Indeed I cannot.”

“Can you not recommend me to some safe, respectable woman who will not betray me, even though a large reward is offered?”

I shook my head.

“Them surely, you have some lady relations, or lady acquaintances in London, who will take pity on me, or (I had told her I was a barrister), you could conceal me till the end of the week in your chambers, in the Temple.”

“With regard to to the last, you know not what you ask,” I said. “Even were I to give you the key to my chambers, and go into the country, not returning till you had left London, it certainly would come out some day, and then in the eyes of a censorious, wicked world, who judge others by themselves, your character would be irretrievably blasted and ruined, and mine not much improved, though that is of little consequence as I am a man, and society, thank goodness, judges us very leniently, and yet it might be awkward, as I am engaged to be married. With regard to my lady acquaintances, I know many who would take pity on you, as you wish, if you would disclose the facts of the case, but—“

“Oh! I cannot, will not, do that; I would die sooner. Do, *do* help me in my distress.”

“Indeed I do not see what is to be done.”

I looked out the little back window of the cab, stealthily. “Wait a bit,” I said, “there is a fresh difficulty, listen to me speaking to the driver and be prepared to act accordingly.” We both leaned forward. “Don’t look round, cabman, put your hand back, there are two pounds for you as your fare. Take no notice of me whatever, but listen and obey my directions. We are followed, as I have ascertained by looking back several times, by a Hansom. Your number, I expect, is marked plain on the back of your cab.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I thought as much. Well in the Hansom sits a gentleman I wish to avoid. (I knew him to be a detective, but I did not wish to enlighten Cabby) I *must* avoid him.”

“All right, sir. Come up old hoss.”—(Lash, Lash).

“No, no, that won’t do, his horse is better, his cab is lighter than yours. Now attend. Just beyond that large van of Pickford’s which is standing still in the distance, there is a turn to the left which cabmen sometimes take when driving to Hyde Park Corner. It is moreover an unfrequented street. If I mistake not, there is just room for you to get round inside the van. At any rate, you must try it. I will pay for any damage done. The Hansom being broader will be obliged to sweep round outside, and may be stopped a little by the stream of carriages.”

“There is no room for me, sir, there.”

“There is, you must try it. The moment you are round the corner, slacken your pace to a slow walk, and the instant you hear the door slam drive on to Hyde Park Corner at your usual pace. Tell my following friend what you like when you get there.—Now, there is another pound for you. Go at it hard—neck or nothing.”

Cabby obeyed. A bump, a scrape, an oath, a “Now then, stoopid, where are you driving to?” and we were in the smooth water of a quiet street. The pace slackened—we jumped out—I slammed the door—Cabby drove on. We vanished into a shop, and had the inexpressible pleasure of seeing the Hansom roll by, steadily trotting after its fast receding, supposed prey. All this took place in less time than one would occupy in reading the last few lines. I purchased something in the store, made the middy light a fresh cigar, and hailed the first cabman I met, telling him to drive to Notting Hall. Not a word had the middy spoken till now, when I heard—

“And so you cannot assist me, sir?”

“Not a bit more than I have done, and am now doing. I feel I am a match for any detectives, and can give them the slip as you have seen; but what to do at night in London with an unprotected young lady in gentleman’s attire, passes my comprehension.”

“Sir,” she said with animation, “did you, do you, for a moment doubt that I was speaking the truth, when I said that I was not acting wrongly?”

“On my word,” replied I, “I did not, do no doubt you; at any rate, I am convinced that you honestly conceive that circumstances justify your taking the step you have taken.”

“And you would agree with me,” she said, “if you knew them. Now we part. Oblige me by giving me the names of three or four of the first chemists in town, and of three or four respectable married doctors.”

“I will, if you assure me that suicide is not what you are meditating.”

“I give you my word that this is not the case. Circumstances may warrant my doing what I am doing but cannot, in my opinion, justify any sane creature in precipitating himself uncalled for before his Almighty Father.”

I gave her what she requested, and offered her money.

“No, thank you, I have plenty of that; and now, goodbye, sir. God bless you for your kindness to a persecuted, helpless, suffering, but not wicked girl.”

She hysterically pressed my hand for a moment, then recovering herself, said—“Stop the cab, please sir—get out—tell the man to drive on. May God bless you for your kindness.”

I raised her not unwilling hand to her lips, and did as she directed. In another moment I stood alone in Oxford Street.—Well, thought I, is it a dream? Am I a fool? No, it is no dream: you are no fool. You have to the best of your intention acted kindly. It is a mystery; you will never read it. I *will* though, said I to my mind, and forthwith commenced walking to my chambers in the Temple.

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“THREE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD—Whereas, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of this month, a young lady, aged 19, left her home, near Reigate and proceeded in the direction of London—this is to give notice that the above mentioned sum will be paid to any one who will give such information as shall lead to her discovery. She is good-looking, has light hair, blue eyes, and a Grecian nose. Height, about 5ft. 4in. Address, A.B. &c.

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Such was the advertisement which two days after the last mentioned occurrence met my eye in the second column of the *Times*. Poor girl, thought I. In the course of the same week I was again obliged to travel by the railroad which started from London Bridge. I missed my train, and having two hours to wait, I resolved to pay a visit to an old female servant of our family who had married a detective policeman, and lived near London Bridge terminus. I found her at home. Not long after her husband came in. The subject uppermost in my mind was brought forward.

“Curious circumstance that, sir, which occurred on the line the other day, when a young lady managed to escape from us all. Of course, too, you have seen the advertisement in the *Times*. Wish I could discover the runaway; why the £300 would be a small fortune to Sarah and myself.”

“Have you any clue?” I asked.

“Oh, yes, sir! We all but had them. You see, sir, not only was the train examined, but also all the foot passengers and carriages as they left the station. The telegraphic message had been most positive, and £300 reward, which it offered, put us all on the lookout. Unfortunately, I examined the foot-passengers; had I taken the cabs, the young lady, though so well disguised, would not have escaped.”

“Thank Goodness!” muttered I, inwardly, “you did not examine the cabs. Well, but how did she manage to get away?” I asked.

“Why, sir, you will hardly believe it—but dressed as a midshipman, in a cab, with a gentleman—him, I suppose, as was running away with her?”

“But how can you tell it was her?”

“Well, you shall hear it, sir. As soon as all the passengers had left the station we detectives put our heads together. The cab containing the middy was mentioned. By a kind of instinct, I felt that must have been her. But, as it won’t do to act on instinct only, I at once, having ordered a fast Hansom to be in readiness, telegraphed down to Dover—from which place the middy’s ticket had been taken—to know if a naval officer had taken a ticket and paid half-fare by such a train. The answer was “No.” Now a middy is not often very wise, but he is seldom so foolish as to pay full price for his ticket when he knows that, as he is traveling in uniform, he can go at a cheaper rate. I then telegraphed to all the stations between this and Reigate to know if anything unusual had been picked up, anywhere on the line. The answer came back “Yes.”—In one place a bundle containing ladies’ apparel; in another some light colored hair wrapped up in a paper. Without losing a moment I sent off in a Hansom one of my subordinates, with orders to drive face towards Hyde Park Corner till he came up with a four-wheeled cab. No 906, drawn by a grey horse—to keep it in sight till its fare was deposited. If the people in the cab stopped at a private house, to watch the door, and not allow them to leave till I came up; if they were dropped in the road to arrest them both at once and bring them back here. A bold measure, sir, but remember £300 reward, and perfect immunity guaranteed for any illegal arrest made under mistake. Well, will you believe it, that though my man overtook the cab in Fleet street, and followed it to Hyde Park Corner, yet when both the vehicles stopped it was found the birds had flown! How they got away is more than I can imagine; but they had escaped, and that, too, without any connivance of cabby, for my man brought him back here, and, on strict examination, I found out not only did he not know his passengers had escaped, but had actually been bilked by them of his fare. He swore roundly he would summons them on his own account, if he could catch them.

I laughed inwardly.

“Well,” said I, “any success yet?”

“No, sir; but we shall be sure to have the lady soon, if she is above ground.”

“And why not the gentleman also?”

“The fact is, sir, that not only have we a most accurate description of the lady, but the policeman who looked in her side of the cab could tell me how she looked as a middy, and said—which first raised my suspicions—that she smoked like one who had never tried to do so before; the policeman, however the other side of the cab cannot give much account of the gentleman because he smoked to desperately in his face. All he can say is that he was gentlemanly-looking, dark-haired, and about thirty—at any rate, he spoke as if quite as old as that. The policeman is not clever, and yet he thinks he might know the gentleman again, if he saw him.”

I at once resolved to postpone my journey from London Bridge, and then said:

“Can you tell me why the young lady ran away, or who she is?”

I believe I could answer both your questions, sir, but I am not at liberty to do so—I must keep secrets.”

“Very well. It was only curiosity made me ask. Now, I must be going. Good morning, Sarah. Good morning, Mr. Sharp. Mind, if you can catch these people, or hear anything of them which you are at liberty to communicate, pray tell me, for you have quite interested me in the matter, and you detectives are so very clever, I quite delight in hearing your stories.”

“Yes, sir, we are a little clever, we flatter ourselves. I shall be able to give you information in a week, I think. Good morning, sir.”

“TO CARMEN—£500 reward will be given to the cabman who, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of this month, took up a gentleman and a midshipman in or near Fleet Street, if he will come forward and state to what house he drove them, provided such information leads to the discovery of the midshipman. Apply to A.B.&c.”

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Such was the next advertisement on the subject that I saw in the *Times*. Well, thought I, she must be detected now.

Walking down Holborn, a month later, I hailed a Hansom that was passing, and ordered the driver to a house a little distance from London. No sooner did we get clear of the crowded streets, and into a road where a man did not require two pair of hands and four eyes to keep clear of other vehicles, than Jarvey, opening the trapdoor in the roof, over my head, touched his hat, with a “Good morning, sir.”

“Shut that door at once,” I said; “are you drunk, man, and anxious that I should give you into charge?”

“No, sir; but I hope you are very well.”

What could the man mean? There was a curious look in his eyes that plainly said he could fathom me, while, touching him, I was utterly at sea.

“I drove a four-wheel,” he continued, “a short time ago, sir. I hope you and the young *gentleman*—the *middy*, I mean, sir—are quite well. Nice little *boy* that as ever I seed. You may remember I picked you up, sir, in the Strand, about a month ago, and after a bit you got out and left me drive the *middy* on.”

I like your memory, thought I, and then said:

“Well, I fancy I do recollect your face.”

“Thought you would, sir, when I recalled the suckamstances to your mind.”

“Now, them stop, my man. I am getting near the house to which I want to go. Let me get out. I will walk the rest of the way—I don’t see the fun of talking to you through a hole.”

When I stood on the footpath I steadily gazed at the cabby, he ditto at me, with compound interest and a leer.

“Well, now,” I said, “what do you want?”

“Oh, nothink, sir—you’re a gentleman.”

“Do you read the papers, cabby?”

“In course I does, sir, ‘specially the second column of the *Times*.”

“Well, where did you drive the *middy* after I left you?”

“Eccleston Square, and then the young lady—beg pardon, sir, the young gentleman—gave me two sovereigns, and told me to drive away, and not look back.”

“You pretended to drive away?”

“I did, sir.”

“You looked back?”

“I did, sir.”

“You are not rich?”

“I am not, sir.”

“Now just tell me why you have not informed the police?”

“Oh! for several reasons, sir. First place, though I am a poor cabby, I have my feelings and wouldn’t go for to betray a poor gentleman who gave me two sovereigns.”

“Nonsense,” interrupted I.

“Next place, sir, you see, I never likes to press hard upon ladies.”

“Cabby, do you take me for a fool?”

“Third place, you see, sir, I have been in trouble more than once, and I don’t like them perlice, and don’t care to show my face before them for any reason.”

“Well, I can understand *that*,” I said.—“Now there’s a sovereign for you—you don’t mind telling me, I suppose, where the middy went?”

“No, sir, not a bit; but you didn’t hear my forth and chiefest reason for not going to the perlice. Fact is I don’t know where the dickens the middy did go. I did not look back soon enough. I twigged her going towards No. 1 Eccleston Square, and when I looked back she warn’t in sight, so then I drives back to No. 1. A flunky comes to the door, so says I, ‘John, your master has left summat in my cab.’ ‘Go to the dogs!’ said he. ‘Oh, yes,’ said I, ‘by all means; but, now, here is half-a-crown, John Thomas, you tell me who your young master is.’ He pocketed my half crown, and then told me the middy had nothing to do with the house; that he had only asked if Sir Jasper Blaers lived there, and on being told ‘No,’ had bolted round the corner. So then I axed the flunkey to give me back my half crown, or, at any rate, to come and have it out in drink. The mean fellow told me, if I was not off directly, he would give me in charge at once. So, as I seed a Bobby a coming up the square, I drove off. Now, sir, I know as little about the middy as you do. If I knew more, do you think I wouldn’t go to the perlice, and get five hundred pounds instead of this here sovereign—much obliged to you for it all the same. Good morning, sir.”

He drove off.

“Done by a cabman!” was my exclamation. Well, I had done the detectives, that was one consolation.

Six months elapsed, and again I found myself in the detective’s house. Meanwhile the reward for the lady fugitive had been increased to the extraordinary sum of £1,000, , while that for the gentleman had been withdrawn.

“Well, Mr. Sharp, any news yet of the runaway?”

“Not a bit, sir; not a bit. It is extraordinary. I did not think we detectives could be so deceived; and let me tell you, sir, that though the reward in the public papers has been increased to £1,000 yet to us actually £3,000, is offered, only it is not considered prudent

to advertise so large a reward.—You would be surprised if you knew what means had been taken to secure the young lady, and without success. A detective at every station out of London—one at each principal port in England; all the lodging-houses, boarding houses, and public places of assembly in town, have been narrowly watched; a detective has been sent to every county in England to pry about—go to inns, farmhouses, schools, and every place he can legally or illegally put his nose into; false entrapping advertisements inserted in the papers, and actually all to no purpose.—However, we will have her yet. The reward will not be paid unless she is discovered within a year from this date.”

“You will find her, I expect,” said I.

“We shall see, sir,” replied he.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

After a little more conversation I took my departure. Without being in any way able to account for it, or to reason on the subject, I felt I should first stumble on the lady in question. Not many days later, one idle Saturday afternoon, I went with a friend to a private lunatic asylum some little way out of London; he to see a relation confined there, whom he considered it his duty to have a look at now and then; I, out of mere curiosity to inspect such a place. Arrived at the asylum he went off at once with the mistress of the establishment; I, under the charge of a female warden, was taken round such parts as are shown to a visitor. In one room was a girl with long disheveled *dark* hair, and blue eyes, swinging on a rope hanging from the ceiling. She was dressed in Turkish fashion. Strange! Thought I; dark hair, blue eyes. “What is the matter with her?” I inquired.

“Oh, she is mad, but harmless enough; her friends are very rich. She has a fancy for dressing so, and the mistress allows her. At times she is not so bad, and then she lives quite alone with the mistress. She is always worse when she sees strangers, and talks mere nonsense when they are present. Listen to her. She is singing such rubbish now.”

And so she was, but yet there was a method in her jumble of songs, such, I almost fancied, as a person might be driven to used who wished to feign madness. I eyed her intently. She was looking at me with apparent carelessness. “Can it be *she*?” thought I. “Oh, no, it cannot. She would surely recognize me.” At that moment I bethought me of the pearl ring. I lifted up my finger, and deliberately turned round to there full view the conspicuous part of the ring. With a shriek of anything but madness she ran away.

“Oh, she is gone,” said my companion, “to the mistress’ private room. She can go there when she likes.”

I was satisfied, and said nothing, but waited for my friend and the head of the establishment, the latter of whom I intended to see alone. In a minute or two a telegraphic message, stating that I must return to my chambers in town, to a consultation, by the first train, was put into my hands.—I consoled myself with the idea that I would come down

again, on Monday. I inquired the name of the mad girl, made my bow, and in three-quarters of an hour was deep in law in my chambers.

Monday morning found me at Mrs.—’s, near Hanwell.

“Is Mrs.— at home?”

“Yes, sir.”

I sent up my card, and when admitted, I forthwith proceeded to make inquiries about my friend.

“Oh, she was taken away yesterday by her friends. She has been improving lately, and was removed about two o’clock yesterday.”

“Do you know where she came from, or where she has gone?” said I.

“Not at all, sir.”

I saw the woman was telling an untruth, but how could I expose her?

“Do your patients generally come and go in that extraordinary manner?”

“Oh, constantly, when introduced and taken away by a doctor.”

“Then her friend is a medical man?”

“No, sir, I did not say that; her friends brought a medical man with them.

Untruth No. 2, thought I.

“And what is his name, pray?”

“That I must not tell.”

Truth the first and last, I thought.

“I can give you this clue, sir—they went down the line, for I know they took tickets to Exeter.”

“Thank you,” said I, inwardly concluding that that was untruth No. 3, and that therefore (as turned out to be the case) that parties had gone up the line—probably to London. I then became more open, threatened, coaxed, tried to bribe, and at last was told that if I did not leave the house at once, I should be turned out by the men servants.—Out I accordingly chose to go of my own free (?) will. In vain I twisted and turned everything in my mind. The mistress of the establishment was not to blame—I could not bring her

into court, for I dared not prove any interest in the young lady.—Besides, I might have been mistaken, and in that case how foolish I should have looked. I was obliged, again, to fall back on Time, the great solver of mysteries. At length Time came to my relief.

About eighteen months after the last mentioned circumstances I was junior counsel in some trial in London. It was my turn to examine the next witness—a somewhat unimportant one, by-the-bye.

“Miss Evelina Shirlock.”

“Miss Evelina Shirlock” was repeated by the man in office. Forthwith the usual oath was administered in the accustomed rapid, careless manner—“The evidence you shall give,” &c., &c. I had not as yet looked up, for I was running my eye over my brief; but when I did, I was so startled as nearly to jump out—not of my skin, but—of my wog.

Good gracious! More beautiful than ever, and self-possessed, there stood before me in the witness-box my long-lost middy friend.

Now, if a barrister ever loses his presence of mind, he is not fit for his profession. I very nearly, but not quite—never, however, so nearly as then—lost my presence of mind. However, my wits did not quite abandon me. At a glance I saw that the witness did not recognize in a grey curly wig, and with a sedate face, her former ally with dark locks and a merry countenance. At once I thrust deep into my pocket my pearl-ringed hand, tried slightly to change my voice, and began:

“Your name is Evelina Shirlock?”

“Yes.”

“You live at Sun Villa, Regent’s Park?”

“Yes.”

“You are described, I see, as the niece of Sir John and Lady Clanmer, living at the same place?”

“I am.”

“Have you lived there long?” she got confused. No answer.

“Have you lived there long?” I repeated.

“What on earth are you at?” whispered my senior counsel on the same side. “You will bother the girl with your questions, which have nothing to do with the case, that she won’t be able to give the evidence we really want.”

“No, I will not,” I replied; but I saw the lady change color rapidly more than once, sigh, and given tokens of fainting. I put my handkerchief to my face. “My nose is bleeding,” I whispered to my senior. “You examine this witness, I will take the next.”

At once I left the court. The witness did not, I believe, acquit herself in first-rate style, for which I got the blame. My irrelevant questions I attributed to a throbbing head, in corroboration of which my supposed bloody nose did me good service. The evidence, I knew, could not materially affect the case, and I had elicited what I wanted. No sooner was the court up than, having changed my clothes and flung my papers at the astonished clerk’s head, off I drive to Sun Villa, Regent’s Park.

“Is Miss Shirlock at home?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Take my card up, and say I am the gentleman who examined her today in court, and that I wish to see her.”

Quickly, radiant with beauty, she entered, leaning on her aunt’s arm. She shook hands with me.

“Oh, aunt!” she said, “this is the gentleman to whom we are so much indebted, and to whom my warmest thanks are especially owing. But, Mr. Stonhouse, you were too hard upon me in court. When I fancied I began to recognize you, I thought I should have fainted.”

“Indeed, Miss Shirlock, you must make every allowance for my excitement on so unexpectedly meeting you, after having in vain sought you for many a long month.”

Lady Clanmer kindly asked me to dine. Sir John had already started for some Lord Mayor’s feast in the city. Of course I accepted. Dinner over, and a decent time havng been spent at the dessert, the old lady rose, saying:

“I shall leave you two together, for I dare say you have a great deal to talk about.”

We did talk. Each of us told our own story. With her’s you shall forthwith be made acquainted in her own words. Seated by me, she began:

“I am the only child of Mr. and Mrs. Shirlock, of Rokeby Castle, near Reigate.—My father originally was very far from wealthy. All the property and money came from my mother’s side. Unfortunately, I lost my mamma when young. By the marriage settlements, which had been conceived in a most grasping manner by my maternal grandfather, who disliked my father, and which were shamefully worded, it was ordered that if my mother died first, the child or children should inherit all the property (about £10,000 a year) and the house, and that my father should only be allowed £500 per annum for the rest of his life. I mention this as a slight excuse for my poor father’s most

shameful conduct. When I was about seventeen years old he began to get very anxious. He could not realize the idea of coming down from being master of Rokeby Castle and a large fortune to a paltry pittance. He knew that even if I did not assert my legal rights a husband, sooner or later, probably would do so for me. Had he dared, he would have killed me. He often said as much. When I was about eighteen he told me he had found a husband for me whom I must prepare to marry. Now, at that age I really was averse to the idea of matrimony, and when I was introduced to my would-be lord and master, my dislike knew no bounds. After a little time I discovered that my father had entered into an agreement that if Mr. — married me, my husband and myself were to have £1,000 a year, and my father the rest until his death. Mr. — actually bound himself in writing to give up to my father £9,000 a year and Rokeby Castle if my father would make me marry him. Now, the money and the castle I never cared about; my father might have had those with all my heart, as he ought during his lifetime, but to be bought and sold, to be compelled to marry an odious man (for odious he was in every way) to be compelled to marry an odious man, to be made a—”

Miss Shirlock burst into tears. After a time she continued:

“I need hardly say that on discovering the under-plot I resisted more stoutly than ever every entreaty, every threat, every bribe, made use of to induce me to marry Mr. — . Things went on this way till I was nearly nineteen. It was bad enough for me, I confess, but not enough in my opinion to justify a daughter running away from her parent’s roof. About a month before I met you my father sent for me. After a long interview, in which I steadfastly maintained my ground, my father dismissed me, saying with an oath, “You shall see what it is to disobey me—you shall undergo worse than death.” From that moment was closely watched, not allowed to see any one, confined to my room and a stroll with an attendant for an hour a day in our back garden. In a short time I was visited by two medical men, who quickly informed my father that they were satisfied, and would do as he wished. The meaning of that my father next day told me, namely, that for £500 each of the medical gentlemen had signed a certificate stating that I was mad; that he had met with a nice private establishment and an accommodating, easy-conscienced, though hard-dealing mistress, who was utterly devoid of feeling; that in a fortnight’s time, if I did not marry Mr. — , I should be confined for life. “Yes, for life, and in a mad-house, miss!” but I will not repeat his fearful language. My servant was faithful to me, whatever her other faults were. By my request she searched my father’s private papers, and found that things were exactly as he had stated. Long before I had written to my mother’s sister, Lady Clanmer—then living in Paris—but in vain. My letters were all intercepted. What *could* I do but run away? I knew full well I should be telegraphed for, because when not in my room, of which my father kept the key, I was visited by him every quarter of an hour in the garden, just that he might see that I had not escaped. Day after day I had marked the regular running train in which we first met. By a heavy bribe I obtained a midshipman’s dress and a ticket marked Dover to London, from one of the porter’s at the station, who had been in our service. I suppose he got it from his brother, the driver, who had come from Dover. I also begged him to keep an empty first-class carriage for me; and instructed my maid, as soon as she saw the train actually in motion, to return with a scratched face, and say that I knocked her down and ran off to the station. All went right

till you jumped into the carriage after the train had started.—That led to my strange question, “Pray, sir, are you a gentleman?”

We were both silent for a time.

“Well, Miss Middy,” I said, you have enlightened me as to your history down to our first meeting in the train, will you kindly condescend to give me a history of yourself since our parting in a cab?”

“Most willingly,” replied she, smiling through her tears. “You have been quite my preserver. After leaving you I drove near the residence of one of the medical men whose names you had given me, got rid of my cabman” (you little knew, thought I, what a narrow escape you had there), “and went to the doctor. On finding he was at home, I walked straight in, told him my whole history, and threw myself quite on his honor, begging him to conceal me effectually for two years, when I should be of age. After a time, chiefly owing to me, the idea of going into voluntary confinement in a private lunatic asylum was hit upon and matured. There I should never be sought. There I went. The mistress, a kind lady, was of course in the secret. I did just what I liked. Able lawyers were engaged to watch proceedings for me in the outer world. In case of accident I wore a wig of dark hair. All went well till you by chance stumbled on me in the mad house. Your kindness, your good nature, I did not doubt but I did not then want to meet you. That same afternoon I telegraphed Dr. — ; that same night I was in his house and commenced my new duties, to avoid suspicion, as governess of his children. In three months’ time my father died. My legal friends secured my rights for me. My uncle and aunt had come to England. I told them my story. They were horrorstruck, but I thanked God I was a free agent. My next object was to find you. I did not wish to make ourselves too conspicuous, so I refrained from advertising; but in every other way, tried without success, to meet with you. Time after time have I followed in my carriage a cab which, after all, contained the wrong individual. Thank Goodness, at last we met, though it was in a crowded court, and though Mr. Stonhouse, you were a little too hard upon me. And now let me say thank you,” she said, putting her hand confidently into mine.

“Oh, you cannot tell how much I do thank you, for your former kindness to me.”

I soon became very intimate at Sun Villa. On the events of the next year I must not dwell much. They are too painful. Day after day I rode with Miss Shirlock in the park, dined at Lady Clanmer’s house to or three times a week, escorted her and her niece constantly to the opera and theatre, for Sir John did not trouble himself much about such places, and was only too glad to place the ladies under my charge. I neglected my law business to such a degree that even now I am slightly suffering from it. As for *loving* Miss Shirlock, of *that* I never dreamed. One day I said to her:

“Middy (I had learned to call her so), what have you done with the likeness I gave you in the train?”

“Oh, I do not know,” she replied. “I do not want it so much now that I am acquainted with you; my chief reason for keeping it was that I might recognize you again.”

Of course we often laughed and talked about our first meeting. Time after time we used to talk about my engagement.

“Middy, how is it you do not marry? I know Captain Fitzgerald is dying for you—Mr. Carlyon is desperately in love—the Honorable Augustus Bonchurch would give anything to call you his own. Why don’t you make one or other of these gentlemen come forward, or, rather, why do you continue to refuse all your admirers one after the other?”

“Oh, I do not know, Mr. Stonshouse; I do not love them; they are only attracted by my sweet face or fortune.”

“Well, but some are sensible men; why don’t you *try* to love some of them?—yu will in time, if you try?”

“Pshaw!” burst in Middy. “How can you talk such nonsense, and profane the name of love in that way? If I were driven to seek a home, like a very young girl, who had no experience, the case might be different. Even then in a short time I should find out that I had acted wickedly.”

“Well, but Middy—” said I.

“Now, don’t go on in that way, Mr. Special Pleader. You are not holding a brief for which you are paid, so you are not bound to speak what you do not believe.”

In the course of eighteen months, towards the close of the London season, Middy and I were together in the garden, I lying on the grass smoking, she seated near me.

“Middy,” said I, “give me joy; the old relation who stood between me and matrimony is supposed at last to be dying, and probably in the course of six or eight months I shall no longer be a bachelor.”

“What, Frank!” she cried. “What, going to be married?”

“Yes, Middy,” said I, somewhat puzzled. “You know full well I was engaged.”

“Yes, but, but—”

She said no more, but fell on her face fainting.

“Here’s a mess,” thought I, as I rushed to a neighboring friendly fountain. “Here *is* a mess!” exclaimed I, as, on returning with water, I saw that my picture and a locket with hair in it of the same color as mine had, by the fall, been shaken from her bosom and lay beside her. I had often noticed a small gold chain round her neck, which, descending into

the folds of her dress was lost to view; but little fancying what was appended to it, I had thought it intrusive on my part to ask what was on the end of the chain. And she had called me *Frank*, too, for the first time in her life. “Oh, what a mess!” I groaned I. Well, I dashed water in her face. In the course of a few minutes she came round, sat up, replaced my picture and the locket. Her eyes encountered mine; for a very brief space of time we gazed steadily at each other. For once in my life I was fairly at a loss to know what my eyes said. She quickly recovered.

“Let us walk,” she said, “It will do me good.”

Up and down the garden we sauntered for a short time, talking of my wedding, she congratulating me, I answering in monosyllables, and wishing myself anywhere but there. As soon as possible I said good morning, and went out at the garden gate. It were impossible, otherwise I should like to analyze the way in which we shook hands with each other.

“Cab, sir?”

“Yes,” replied I, opening the door and shutting myself in.

“Where to, sir?”

“Oh, *Jerico!*” replied I.

And, now, being alone, I began to meditate. Middy loved me to distraction, that was clear; aye and loved me, too, in the fullest, truest sense of the word, purely and forever. Now for self-examination.

“Where to, sir, did you say?” interrupted cabby, putting his ugly frontispiece round the window.

“*Jericho!*” replied I, angrily. “Can’t you hear?”

Cabby shuffled on his coat, lashed the horse, scratched his head—lashed the horse again. Now for self-examination. And lest the reader should have his or her curiosity excited, and take me for a patent fool, let me at once say that I have not been a barrister for twenty years without having a wholesome dread of putting myself in a witness-box. My self-examinations and answers I keep to myself. Suffice it to say, I have been married fourteen years and have eight children; but, as my income is not large, I should have been just as well pleased with four, if the other four had not come.—Each child, however, added a fresh link in the chain that binds me closely to my affectionate wife, and were she on trial, I defy the united abilities of a hundred horse-power attorney-general and ditto solicitor general to elicit from her that I have been anything but in word or deed, a most kind, tender, and attached husband.

Owing to a crowd of vehicles we came to a stand still in Oxford Street.

“I say, Bill,” exclaimed my driver to a brother Jehu, “have you ever heard of Jericho? Where is it? Gent inside wants to go there.”

“Can’t say, Jim,” responded whip No. 2, “unless it be smack through the city, or other side of the water. Try ‘em both and swear you have lost your way.”

This recalled me to my senses, and made me think of the insane address I had given my driver.

“Cabby, I will go to the Temple instead of Jericho.”

“All right, sir,” said he, evidently much relieved, and such is the sympathy between man (when a good driver) and beast, that the horse evidently was much relieved.

My long lived relation, I need hardly say, did not die that bout, and another season saw Middy and myself again in town together. We met, we were friends, talked to each other, sometimes rode together, but neither of us ever alluded to the garden scene. Each clearly wished, each as evidently dreaded so to do. Somehow or other I was obliged, as I explained to Lady Clanmer and herself to apply more steadily to my increasing practice. Somehow or other, too, when I called, Middy occasionally was not at home, pleading when we met indisposition as her excuse for not receiving me. The chain still hung round her neck: whether or not its appendages were there I could not tell.

“Towards the end of the season my relation at length departed this life. In the following autumn my bride and myself entered our new life and went abroad. Cards, of course, were sent to Lady Clanmer. On our return, I found, forwarded to our new house in Curzon street, Mayfair, from my chambers in the Temple, Middy’s wedding-cards.

Thank goodness she has got over it at last, thought I. She had married the eldest son of a Scotch peer. I knew him. A kind, honest, straightforward man, but not over-gifted wisdom. He and his wife lived in Scotland, hardly ever coming to London. Once after we were both married, Middy and I met.—I danced with her. The chain was still round her neck. I am ashamed to say how deeply I drank that night at supper, without being the slightest degree intoxicated. Port wine had as little effect on me as water. Occasionally, on the birth of one of my children, congratulatory letters passed between her and me. She poor thing, had no children. Every Christmas brought us a hamper of grouse from Scotland; every Christmas took from Curzon street a cod’s head and shoulders, oysters, &c., directed to Middy’s husband. Those presents also occasioned a biennial interchange of letters.

People say that all married persons have a secret corner in their hearts, not at all of necessity a guilty one, which they never, by any chance, betray to their partners for life. Maybe so. All I know is that I never told my wife of my antecedents in connection with Middy.

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“On the 25<sup>th</sup> inst., aged twenty-six, owing to a fall from her horse, Evalina, the beloved wife of —

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I started, dropped the *Times*. Good gracious! Poor Middy then is dead. Hastily I looked around—my wife was not in the room. The paper, properly folded, was quickly placed on the table and off I went to my chambers. Presently I heard a great fuss in my ante-room, and my clerk’s voice expostulating in no mild terms:

“You can’t come in. Well, I tell you, you shan’t come in. My master, Mr. Stonhouse, won’t be disturbed by the like of you.”

I rang my bell.

“Who is that?”

“Some poor woman, sir. She says she must and will see you herself. I have threatened to give her into custody, but she won’t go away, and won’t tell me her business.”

“What is she like?”

“I can hardly tell, but I think, sir, she is a Scotch-woman.”

“Show her in.”

In she came, and asked me if I was indeed Mr. Counsellor Stonehouse, then would I just open that parcel and see if all was right. I recognized Middy’s writing, and opened the packet with trembling hands.

“It is all right,” said I, offering the woman a sovereign, and adding, “can I do any thing else for you?”

“No, sir; many thanks to you, but my traveling expenses have been paid, and as for the rest I would do anything in the wide world for that dear gude leddy, who, when alive, was so kind to me and my puir bairns.”

With that she departed. Again my bell sounded, and the clerk, on intruding his inquisitive face, was told, “Do not let me be disturbed on any account for the next hour.”

The last words I heard before settling down to my reverie were:

“My good woman why could you not give me that parcel instead of taking it to Mr. Stonhouse yourself?”

“Gang to the deil wi’ ye, ye auld fule; do ye think that packet was for the likes of ye to handle; ha, ha, ye auld fule.”

The door was indignantly slammed.—Poor Middy had chosen a coarse-tongued but faithful messenger. The packet contained a letter, my picture, a song, and the chain and locket.

The letter was written of course under the most highly excited feelings, if not actually under the influence of delirium. I put it, the picture, and the song into my fire. The burden of the song (I had often heard her sing it) was “Will she love you as I do?” The locket I dropped into the Thames that night. The chain my eldest daughter wore round her neck. In my pocket-book I have the tress of hair she gave me in the railway carriage when under such strange circumstances we first met.

Frank had finished. For a quarter of an hour neither of us spoke. It was dark. I could not see his face. Once I heard him mutter “Poor, poor Middy.” It might have been poor dear Middy. I am not sure.—Tears, I fancied, were trickling down his cheeks. Not in the slightest degree from a wish to hurt or annoy him, but more from carelessness and heedlessness than anything else, I thought I would try and ascertain his real feelings. In a few moments he said:

“Any more wine, Charles?”

“No, thank you,” replied I; “but Frank, I say, did you ever read *Ivanhoe*, and do you remember just at the end, where Walter Scott says, with reference to *Ivanhoe*, Rebecca, and Rowena, that—”

I had gone too far.

“Temple,” said he sharply, addressing me by my surname, “you said you would have no more wine; if *you* are not going to the ladies, I am.”

He moved towards the door, but returned, took my hand, squeezed it and said “Charlie I did not mean to be so abrupt. I hardly knew what I was saying. I feel a little relieved at having told you this chapter of my life; but mind” whispered he, almost fiercely, “mind, never allude to what I have tonight related.”

We went upstairs—Frank going first—to his dressing room, probably to wash away the traces of emotion. A quarter of an hour later, with his rich tenor voice, he was joining in some merry glee. As I looked at him, I thought how little sometimes do our nearest and dearest relations and friends know of what passes beneath the surface. Oh, how little did I conjecture what was coming when first I heard the commencing words of the story, “Pray, sir, are you a gentleman?”

CHARLES TEMPLE

*Columbia [PA] Spy*, September 21,28, 1861