

## *Under Suspicion*

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### CHAPTER I. THE ARREST.

“Uncle Joseph, will you see to the luggage?”

“Certainly, madam,” I replied. I always called my brother’s second wife “madam;” we never quarreled but each thought that the other was the most disagreeable person in the universe; and as we each knew what the other thought, it may be imagined our intercourse was not of a very cordial kind.

I did see to the luggage, and then took tickets for the party for the York Express by the Great Northern Railway.

Fortunately we had a compartment to ourselves, that is, Mrs. Webster, my niece Clara, and myself.

“Clara, my dear, you look as ill as you can look, no one would think that to-morrow was your wedding-day.”

“Do I look ill, mamma?” said Clara, dreamily.

“Yes, my dear, and wretched too. I wonder you’ve not more sense at your age, a girl of twenty-five, and breaking her heart for love of a man who for four years has taken not the slightest notice of you.”

“Why, it was one of the conditions, Mrs. Webster, that he should not write,” I exclaimed.

Clara said nothing, but looked her thanks at her old uncle.

“However, Uncle Joseph, he ought to have come back and taken his dismissal quietly. I have no patience with these poor men blighting a girl’s chance of getting well settled in life in this way; however, thank Goodness, it’s all over now, the four years are gone this three months, and tomorrow you will be the happy wife of a man whose age will command your respect, and whose position will secure you every comfort.”

“And one, mamma, whom nothing on earth but my solemn promise to my poor dear father would make me call husband.”

“Well, my dear, it’s fortunate for your future interests that you made that promise. I’m sure that Mr. Tredgar is a man after my own heart. If I hadn’t other views for my children’s sake, I should have set my cap at him myself.”

“I’m sure, madam, Mr. Tredgar would feel only too much honored if he knew your sentiments; the candid avowal of them is, I think, highly calculated to add to Clara’s happiness under existing circumstances.”

“Well, you know, Uncle Joseph, I am candid to a fault.”

“Decidedly, madam, most decidedly,” I replied, a remark which caused Mrs. Webster to read a yellow-covered novel for some time in silence, though shortly afterwards she dropped asleep.

Clara stole to my side of the carriage, and leaned her head on my shoulder.

“O uncle, I wish I were dead; can it be very wrong to die? I am so wretched, I dread tomorrow; oh! why will not God pity me, and take away my life?”

“My dear Clara, don’t, there’s a good child; it’s wicked to talk in this way: life must be borne; I have felt as you feel, and yet I live, and am not positively unhappy, only a vague, shadowy regret for what might have been stands like a cloud between me and any happiness that might be mine. Yours are keen sufferings, but bear them patiently, and use will dull the pain.”

“But, uncle, why did he not let me hear from him, as mamma says?”

“Because he was a man of honour; the four years were up only last April, and this is but July; who can tell where he is? Wherever he is, he is faithful and true, I know.”

“Oh! uncle, God bless you for those words, I know it too, but what can I do? I cannot delay longer: my poor father’s dying words, my solemn promise to marry this man, my stepmother’s persecutions,—what can I do? Three months have I fought, and now I wish I could lie down and die. O uncle, is there no escape? I have such a dread that he will come back after I am married, and then—oh! it would be worse than his death to see him!—The temptation!—oh! why cannot I die?”

“Poor child! my poor child!” was all I could utter.

Bound by a vow made at her father’s deathbed, she was going the next day to marry a man who was old enough to be her father, and who, but for the fact of his persisting in his claim, spite of her openly expressed dislike of him, was esteemed a very good kind of man.

True, Clara was beautiful and accomplished beyond the average of women of her class, and it would be a struggle to any man to give up such a prize, backed as he was by the assurances of the stepmother that it was only a girlish fancy, and that love coming after marriage was more to be trusted and more lasting than if it came before; I confess I was but a poor counsellor under such circumstances, still I loved her very truly, she was almost as my own daughter, for I was a childless widower, and I would have given my life to save her. But it was impossible, and tomorrow would seal her fate.

It was not a pleasant journey, that. Mrs. Webster read and slept at intervals the whole time, and when she slept Clara nestled close to me.

We arrived at York about six o’clock, and, just as the train was slackening speed into the station,

a guard jumped on to the foot-board, locked or unlocked the door, and remained there until the train stopped.

“Have you all your parcels, madam?”

“All, thank you, Uncle Joseph, except my umbrella—oh! that’s under the seat,” said Mrs. Webster.

“Now, guard, unlock this door.”

“Are you with that young lady, sir?” pointing to my niece.

“Yes, certainly, unlock the door.”

“Better not make a fuss, sir.”

“Fuss! what do you mean?”

The man, who seemed to be looking out for somebody now, asked, “All right, sir?”

“All right,” said the station-master, coming to the door, and opening it; “this way, miss.”

“What does this mean?”

“Step into my office, I daresay it’s all right. Better not say too much out here, you know.”

We followed him through the little crowd of passengers and porters, accompanied by a policeman in uniform. As we passed we heard fragmentary observations of a most pleasing kind.

“Which is it?” said some one.

“It’s the girl, I think.”

“No, it’s the old woman, she looks as if she’d do any one a mischief if it suited her.”

“Old man looks too soft for anything,” and so on.

We went into the office, and I indignantly turned to the station-master.

“What is the meaning of this, sir?”

“Oh! it’s very simple, sir: a telegram has arrived from the police in London, with orders to stop this young lady; here it is.”

I took it, and read it:—

“The young lady looking very ill, dressed in black silk mantle, white straw bonnet with white

flowers, is to be detained at the station till the arrival of the officer by the afternoon mail. She is seated in the middle compartment of the third first-class carriage from the end of the train. Her present name is Clara Webster. To avoid the possibility of mistake, she has a diamond ring on the third finger of the left hand, with the words 'From Herbert' engraved on the inside."

It certainly was a correct description, and the name—there might be two Clara Websters, though.

"Let me see your left hand, dear."

She pulled off her glove, and there was the ring.

"Let me see that ring with the diamond on it."

"Uncle, what does this mean? is anything wrong at home?"

"I'll tell you presently, dear; give me the ring."

She took it off, and gave it to me, and I read "From Herbert," on the inside.

"Why, that's the ring Mr. Langley gave you."

"What has he to do with this?" said Mrs. Webster. "Perhaps he—"

"He what, madam?"

"Perhaps it did not belong to him, I was going to say."

I saw it was no use to struggle; when the officer came down he would explain the mistake.

"Where can we wait?" I said.

"Wait, Uncle Joseph, what for?"

"Madam, this telegram orders the arrest of your daughter, and her detention here till the arrival of an officer from London."

"But what for?"

"I cannot tell you; it is useless to complain now, we must wait."

"I shall do nothing of the kind; I shall at once go and get my brother and Mr. Tredgar to come down."

"Pray don't, madam; there's no occasion to make more noise about this matter than can be helped."

“I shall remain with Clara; you had better go on and say we are coming very shortly.”

“Your instructions don’t include this lady or myself?” I asked.

“Not at all, sir: you are both free to go at any time, but the young lady must stay.”

“Where?”

“Well, sir, I’m sure there’s some mistake, and was so from the moment I saw the young lady, so if you’ll give me your word not to go away, I’ll take you into my house out of the bustle of the station.”

Mrs. Webster went off, and Clara and I went out to the house.

“What can it be, uncle?”

“Can’t say, my dear; it will be something to laugh at bye-and-bye, though it’s not pleasant now.”

“But what about the ring?—do you think it possible, that what mamma said?”

“Possible! my dear, it’s ridiculous. It’s a hundred years old, and I daresay belonged to his mother before he gave it to you.”

“I can’t think what it can be.”

“Don’t think about it. It’s a mistake, that’s all; it will be all cleared up in a few hours. We’ll have some dinner, and pass the time as well as we can.”

“Do you know, uncle, I feel almost glad of this, it seems like a break in the dullness, it puts off my wedding at least a week; mamma herself could not press it for tomorrow after this.”

We had dined, and got to be quite cheerful and laughing over the blunder as we sat at the window, when a rap at the door startled us both.

“Come in.”

A gentleman entered.

“Miss Webster?”

Clara bowed.

“Miss Clara Webster,” he said, reading the name from a letter.

Clara bowed again.

He handed her the letter, which she opened, read, and dropped on the floor, exclaiming,—

“Thank God! thank God! O! uncle, I am so happy,” and then fell into a chair fainting.

I picked up the letter, and calling the people of the house, very soon brought her to, and we were once more alone with the bearer of the note, which ran as follows:—

*“Tredgar Hall.*

“Mr. Francis Tredgar presents his compliments to Miss Webster, and begs to state that he must decline the fulfillment of his promise to make her his wife. The unhappy circumstance of Miss Webster’s public arrest, on the charge of being in possession of a diamond ring, stolen by her former lover, will at once account to her for this decision: Mr. Tredgar’s wife must be above suspicion.

“Mr. Tredgar begs also to inform Miss Webster that the services of his solicitor, Mr. Blake (the bearer), are at her disposal.”

“Well, Mr. Blake,” said I, “you see we shall not require your services; I shall wait the event, and, if it is not cleared up, shall employ my own solicitor in the matter. Will you present my kind regards to Mr. Francis Tredgar, and express my own and my niece’s admiration of his gentlemanly courtesy and kindness? I would write to him if I did not consider that a correspondence with such a miserable, cowardly scoundrel was too utterly degrading to be thought of.”

“I shall faithfully convey your message, sir, and allow me to assure you that I was quite ignorant of the contents of the letter, and that it shall be the last time I will ever bear one from him; and now, as you will not let me help you as his solicitor, allow me to proffer my services as a friend.”

“With all my heart, Mr. Blake, come in here a few minutes before the train comes in, and we shall be glad of your help.”

“Was I not right, uncle dear?” said Clara, as soon as we were alone. “Oh! you can’t tell how happy I am; I can live now. O this glorious mistake! it’s the most fortunate thing that has happened to me in all my life. Now, you *are* glad, uncle, aren’t you?” and she came up to me,

With all Hope’s torches lit in both her eyes,

and kissed me, and would have me speak.

“Yes, darling, I am glad,—more glad than I can find words to tell. Your fate linked to such a man as this scoundrel would have been living death. I am heartily glad, Clara.”

## CHAPTER II. THE OFFICER.

“This way, sir. The young person is in my house; she gave her word not to attempt to leave; the old gentleman is with her.”

This we heard through the door as the station-master came along the passage. Our friend Mr. Blake had arrived some time before.

The station-master entered, and behind him a tall broad-shouldered man, with bushy beard and moustaches concealing all the lower part of his face.

“Will you have a light, sir?” said the station-master to the officer.

“Thank you, no.”

Clara started at the sound of the voice, and laid her hand on mine.

“Now, my good man,” began Mr. Blake, “perhaps you’ll explain this matter; you telegraphed down from London to stop this lady, and here she is. Now, if you please, explain.”

“This gentleman,” I said to the officer, “is my niece’s legal adviser. I assume that it is a mistake, still, we shall be glad of your explanation. You are a detective, I presume?”

“No, sir, I am not, my name is—”

“Herbert! Herbert! my dear Herbert, it is you!”

Clara had gone to him, and he was clasping her in his strong arms, while her face was hidden in his great beard.

“My own! my darling! my own true darling!—she loves me still.”

But why describe their meeting? Mr. Blake said to me at once:

“My dear sir, I am not wanted here, and I doubt if you are,” and we left them.

In half an hour we thought it possible we might be less in the way, and we went in. They sat on the same sofa at a most suspiciously great distance from each other, and looked as happy and foolish as possible.

“And now, my dear Herbert, please explain to us what has taken you at least half an hour to make clear to my niece.”

“Well, my dear uncle,—I may call you ‘uncle?’”

“Oh yes: a month sooner is not much consequence.”

“Don’t, uncle,” said Clara.

“You know how I went away with just enough to pay for my tools, and outfit, and passage. I went to California, to the diggings, and was lucky, got a good claim, worked it, made a little

money, took shares in a machine, worked the claim, improved the machinery, become manager, director, and got rich, started six months ago to come home for Clara, took the fever at Panama, was down for two months there, not able to move hand or foot, and arrived only last night at Liverpool. There I met an old friend, and heard all the news: poor Webster's death, the promise, and the rest, and above all, that tomorrow was the day. I started by the first train to get to London, thinking the marriage would take place there, and that I should be in time. Looking out of the window of the carriage as the trains were passing each other at Peterborough I saw Clara with her mother, I did not see you. I was mad; the trains had both started, I could not get out. There was Clara going from me, and I going from her, as fast as express trains could take us. What could I do? I knew nothing of where she was going, and yet my information was positive that she was going to be married tomorrow, solely because she would keep her promise.

“Can you wonder at my doing as I did? The train did not stop till it reached London, and I found that by the time I had hunted up the address to which you had gone from the servants at home, I should have lost the last train, and not been able to get here till long past midnight. What to do I could not think.

“In the carriage in which I sat somebody had been talking about the murderer Tawell, and the telegraph, the police on the door step, and so on. It all flashed on my mind in an instant.

“I went to the telegraph-office, and looking in, there was only a young lad there.

“I went in, and called him.

““Can you telegraph to York for me?”

““Certainly, sir.”

“I wrote the telegram you saw.

““You must sign this, sir.”

““No I must not, young man,” and I drew him towards me by the shoulder.

““My name's Field, Inspector Field; you understand?”

““Oh! certainly, sir. Did you catch that man the other day? I heard of it from one of our clerks.”

““Oh, yes, caught him safe and sound; he's in Newgate now.”

““Indeed, sir,” said the lad.

““You'll send that at once; the train's due in less than an hour. I'll see you do it.”

“He did send it, and as I heard the click, click, click, it was like the throb of a new heart circulating fiery blood in my arteries, for I knew it would enable me to see you, Clara, dear, and



then I came down, as you see, by this train, and feel disposed now to embrace all the telegraph clerks in the kingdom.”

“Well, young man, it’s a dangerous game; I suppose you’re aware it’s an offence not lightly punished to pretend you’re an officer of police,” said Mr. Blake.

“My dear Mr. Blake, if it was death on the instant of discovery and I was in the same strait, I should do the same thing over again.”

“You must find a prosecutor, Mr. Blake,” said Clara, “and as I, the principal person concerned, am not going to prosecute the officer, I think he will escape.”

“But why,” said I, “did you not telegraph to Clara direct?”

“Because I feared that Mrs. Webster might possibly have prevented our meeting.”

Mr. Blake left us with his eyes twinkling, and muttered something to me about “servitude for life.”

A month after that I had the pleasure of giving away my niece to Herbert, and in two months more I had the pleasure of reading in the *Times* the announcement of the marriage of Mrs. Webster to Francis Tredgar, Esq., of Tredgar Hall, to which ceremony I need scarcely say I was not invited.

Clara and Herbert and I live together, and to this day he is spoken of amongst his intimates as Herbert Langley, “that active and intelligent officer.”

*Once a Week*, June 17, 1865

*The Manchester [VT] Journal*, July 25, 1865

*The Cleveland Leader*, July 29, 1865

*The Potter Journal* [Coudersport, PA], August 8, 1865

*The Howard Union* [Glasgow, MO], August 24, 1865

*Detroit [MI] Free Press*, September 16, 1865

*Bradford* [Towanda, PA] *Reporter*, September 21, 1865

*North Branch Democrat* [Tunkhannock, PA], November 8, 1865

*The Elk Advocate* [Ridgway, Elk County, PA], November 11, 1865

*The Cadiz* [OH] *Sentinel*, December 13, 1865

*The Holt County* [Oregon, MO] *Sentinel*, January 5, 1866

*The Vinton Record* [M'Arthur, Vinton County, OH] April 5, 1866

*The Daily State Journal* [Alexandria, VA], February 8, 1873

*Burlington* [VT] *Weekly Free Press*, March 14, 1873

[Wilmington] *Delaware State Journal*, March 15, 1873

*Wood County Reporter* [Grand Rapids, MI], April 3, 1873

*Spirit of the Age* [Woodstock, VT], June 5, 1873