

ment in that direction from Mrs Julia Pride. Under her sympathetic questioning he even told the story of his love for Olive Wilmore—a poor pitiful story, that was never to come to any proper conclusion, so far as he was concerned. And gradually he came to tell her of the remarkable Mrs Farley had made concerning the tracing of her husband to the house of the Carvells, and of his disappearance thereafter.

"You see, Aunt," he went on, "I can't get out of my mind the remembrance of that unfortunate tramp, who, according to my brother, was burnt in my bed. I've tried to think it doesn't concern me; that the man lies there covered up with the earth from which he sprung, and bearing my name. But all sorts of ideas keep cropping up in my mind; I seem to see not this tramp alone, but the husband of Mrs Farley going to the house, and disappearing, too. I know it's absurd, but I can't think that Stephen hid away a complete stranger like that for nothing except to protect me. I don't want to be uncharitable or unsympathetic, but it's not like Stephen.

Mrs Julia Pride paced about the room for a few moments, studying the pattern of the carpet very carefully, and evidently thinking deeply. At last she looked up at Dick, and spoke in her quick, clear, concise fashion.

"There is a mystery, Dick—and I always knew there was one," she said. "Whether you stole the money and spent it or not, I don't know; but it is remarkable that your frank account of what you stole and Stephen's account of what was lost do not coincide. Moreover, I found this Mrs Farley having an altercation with your brother—telling him that she did not trust him. She admitted then that she had traced someone to that house, and had lost him; and, in conversation with her on our journey here, I discovered that a note, left behind by her husband, suggested that he would reach Market Rimstone on the very night of the fire. Curious, to say the least of it, eh?"

"Very," said Dick in a low voice. "Has she got that note; would it tell us anything?"

"Leave it to me, Dick; I'll see what can be done," said Mrs Pride, with a nod. "At all events, for the present you shall remain plain Richard Smith, my boy; if we can call you from the grave in a clean, whole some fashion, we will; if not, you shall remain there. Trust to me, Dick; I'll do my best in any case. I'll come down to your lodgings presently, and tell you if I have discovered anything."

Mrs Julia Pride set to work cautiously. Her guest made her appearance in due course, and somewhat nervously and hesitatingly seated herself at the table, and began her breakfast. Mrs Pride, having already finished, stood in a manly attitude with her back to the fire, and talked with apparent carelessness to her guest.

Gradually she got from her, by delicate questioning, some account of herself and her husband; of their struggles after a bright beginning; of their meeting with Stephen Carvell, and of his promise to make their fortunes for them in a very short space of time. After that, it was the old story of the one side paying everything, in blind confidence, and the other side returning nothing but specious promises; of debts and difficulties looming over them; of the home of which

they had been so proud melting away before their eyes. The story ended with an account of their lives in a sordid London lodging, with the man striving hard to earn something—that should give them bread at least.

"Then one day, Mrs Pride, as I have told you, he disappeared. He went out quite casually one morning, as he had gone so often, to look for work; and he never came back. I waited and watched and longed; but I saw nothing of him. And then, some time later, quite unexpectedly, I found he had left a little note for me, which I had overlooked."

"Have you that note?" asked Mrs Pride quickly.

"I found it only last night," said Esther Farley, with the tears coming into her eyes. "It was the last thing he ever wrote me, and I was afraid I had lost it, or left it behind me in London. Instead of that, I found that in my hurry in leaving town I had thrust it away in my pocket, among some odd things. Here it is." She held out a crumpled scrap of paper to Mrs Julia Pride as she spoke.

"Written in a hurry, and on the first piece of paper he could catch up," was Mrs Pride's comment, as she looked at it. "You won't mind my reading it, my dear, will you?"

Kather Farley waved a hand towards it, and Julia Pride, with a nod, read it over softly to herself.

"My darling wife,

"I am doing the only thing possible—the last thing that is left for me to do. I am going to make an appeal to the man who has been the cause of all our troubles and disasters. I mean to see him face to face if I can; I will wring something out of him, even if I can't melt his heart by the tale of our sufferings. I can't believe he's so bad, but that he will give me some temporary help. I go to-day to find Stephen Carvell, at Market Rimstone; I will not leave him until I can get something from him. I am desperate, and he shall know it; I have everything to gain, and nothing to lose. This is for your comfort in case you should feel too anxious about me. When I return, it shall be with good news; in any case I shall come straight back to you, whatever the result of my journey."

"Yours in love and life.

"James Farley."

"In any case I shall come straight back to you, whatever the result of my journey," said Mrs Julia Pride slowly to herself. "That's conclusive, at any rate; and yet you have never seen him again, eh?"

"Never," said Esther Farley, shaking her head. "It is almost as though Mr Carvell's house had swallowed him up completely."

Mrs Julia Pride decided that it would be well to say nothing regarding her suspicions; in any case, if there was any truth in them, no good purpose would be served by rousing this already distracted woman, and setting her upon the track of Stephen Carvell. Dick had to be thought of, and Dick's interests; and Mrs Pride determined that for the present at least she would play a lone hand, without even consulting the man most interested in the business.

"It wants a woman for this," declared Mrs Pride to herself. "A woman with tact and judgment; a woman with no interest in the case, except to see that justice is done, and that that saintly Stephen Carvell is pulled down from the goodly place he occupies. It's no use going to Dick; he's too headstrong, too impulsive; it's no use going to Stephen, because his policy will be to deny everything, and leave me to prove everything—which I can't. If I could only get Dick to return and face the music; I don't believe that his father would ever prosecute him at all, and we might then find out who is really buried in Dick's place. I should just love to bring Dick in suddenly—spring him upon them all, as it were, and stir that sleepy old Market Rimstone to its depths. But it won't do; I must find someone else with more persuasive powers than I possess."

Mrs Julia Pride, being of a naturally sympathetic temperament, decided that there was but one person who could have had any real influence with Dick, and that person was Miss Olive Wilmore. Quite impossible, of course, to mention such a project to Dick, because that excitable young man would in all probability take the earliest opportunity of making his escape, and of becoming lost

again to everybody he knew. Mrs Pride had to act, and to act quickly; she decided to go back to Market Rimstone that very day.

Behold her, then, marching in a determined fashion into that town, where in the name of Carvell was a power; behold her deciding at the last moment to seek Stephen Carvell, and to see it by chance she could not manage to surprise him into something of a confession. She went to her brother's house, and demanded to see Stephen at once.

To Tuff, who had admitted her, she said nothing; she simply put a finger on her lips to command silence. Stephen Carvell came to her within a moment or two, glancing at her somewhat anxiously out of his narrow eyes.

"My dear Aunt, I did not hope to see you again," he said. "Are you still on the same quest regarding poor Dick?"

"Not exactly," said Mrs Pride coolly. "Things have changed since I saw you, Stephen; I've news for you. Prepare to receive a shock; I've found Dick—alive."

For a moment the man was obviously startled; then, recovering himself, he shrugged his shoulders, and shook his head, pityingly. "My dear Aunt," he said with a faint smile, "I'm afraid your zeal in regard to poor Dick has upset

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existence to the woman
who has to do her own
work, and the work should
be made as light as
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