

The Canadian Bank of Commerce

Head Office: TORONTO

Paid-up Capital, \$15,000,000; Reserve Fund, \$13,500,000

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and void by this capricious unexpected freak of fortune.

The prospect was none the less bitter because it seemed wholly undeserved, and the very suspense and uncertainty as to the precise nature of the blow that might fall at any moment, made it almost unbearable.

It was a relief to the stricken man when Mrs. Pridham entered, and he exclaimed eagerly: "Any news?"

"No, none; except Miss Leach has gone out—which we forbade her to do. What did the detective say about Laurie?"

Mr. Pridham told her what had passed and tried, for his own sake, as well as hers, to infuse a little of the hope with which Mr. Frank Merry's tones had inspired him.

But the hope had evaporated in transition, and they faced each other, at the end, with blank faces, devoid of anything but bewilderment and despair.

"I gave him a good allowance," protested Mr. Pridham; "I never worried him with lectures; he wasn't afraid of me. What troubles could he have been in that he couldn't tell me of? Did I ever grudge the boy anything, Selina?"

"Never," she answered reassuringly. "You can't blame yourself, Horatio. Don't try to—it only makes things worse for you." She paused, then continued: "There's one thing that has occurred to me. This man who was let into the house by Miss Leach—who was he? Could he have had anything to do with Laurie's disappearance? Was he in league with her about something? She refused to speak, but we ought to have made her explain. Now she has gone and—"

The door opened before her sentence was completed, and the butler said: "An inspector wishes to see you, sir."

"SHOW him in," Mr. Pridham commanded. "Selina, you had better go! It is about Miss Leach, of course. I shall tell him nothing about Laurie."

Mrs. Pridham withdrew as the inspector entered and saluted.

The first words he said disconcerted Mr. Pridham exceedingly. "I was on my way here, sir, to call with regard to having some conversation with a young lady who is a member of your household, when one of our men overtook me with two articles which had been found on the road to Woking, about three miles out. Is this hat known to you at all, sir?"

He produced from his pocket a dark green Homburg felt, on the inside of which two small initials were stamped—L. P.

Mr. Pridham took the hat and gazed at it, uncertain what to answer to this leading question. Finally he said slowly: "It is like a hat that my son has sometimes worn."

"And the initials are your son's, I think, sir," said the inspector, in a level voice. "Have you any idea whether Mr. Laurence Pridham might have been passing along the Woking Road within the last twenty-four hours? Has he missed a hat at all?"

"I should say not," replied Mr. Pridham. "My son left here last night to rejoin his regiment at Hounslow."

"Ah, indeed, sir. May I ask whether this photograph is of the young lady who has been staying here recently?"

He handed a photograph of Fenella—Fenella at her prettiest, in a summer dress, smiling under a shady hat, with a tender sweetness in her lips and eyes.

Mr. Pridham looked at it attentively. He felt that some relentless overwhelming disaster was foreshadowed in these two incongruous evidences of a dim misadventure.

For the photograph was soiled and torn, as though it had been trampled, and the hat was discoloured as if it had rested on wet earth.

"It is undoubtedly Miss Leach," he admitted.

Then he turned the photograph, and read the inscription on the back: "With love from your own Fenella."

"It would seem," said the inspector quietly, "that the young lady had given it to someone as a love-token."



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