

Mrs. Chilcomb, but I have been a little upset this evening."

"You look it, sir, if you'll pardon the liberty I take in saying so," she returned.

She was about to leave the room when I stopped her.

"Just a moment, Mrs. Chilcomb," I said. "You mentioned when you came into the room that Mr. Brabazon had returned to Redpost House. How did you hear that?"

My housekeeper's countenance was at once transformed from a moody, uncomfortable pucker into a broad confidential smile. I felt that I had all along possessed a treasure, a peripatetic budget of gossip, in Mrs. Chilcomb.

"Well, sir," she replied, "as you are kind enough to ask me—not that you often do the like, sir—I was out marketing just a while back, and I saw a great black coach lumbering along the road. I could scarce believe my eyes, sir, when I saw it stop at the lodge gate of Redpost House. Ah, sir, my poor old heart went back to the day before my unfortunate son took it into his head to 'list for a soldier. That was before your time here, sir."

"Yes," I murmured. "Well?" I felt I had started Mrs. Chilcomb's tongue, and that it would go on wagging until she had tortured me with a long pent-up family history.

"Well, sir, the coach stopped at the lodge gate, and I could see that the man who had stepped off the horse when the seat was in some trouble about getting the coach over the gate was always a strange look and wanted a change of air."