

about it, quick, before I go to the police and find what is best to be done."

"Police! You wouldn't surely think of sending him to gaol! He left his overcoat behind, you know, as we went down to the boat, and returned for it. And then he broke the box and took the money, you know. It was very wicked and ungrateful, but don't send him to gaol, don't, please, send him to gaol!"

Till that moment I hadn't dreamed that she was taking of Fred. I could scarcely credit it now, but that there was no mistaking her earnestness. The fancy was absurd altogether. Lockyer couldn't be a thief—he was our friend, a gentleman, and a mason. The little woman was evidently crazy.

Oh, no, she wasn't. Didn't I know he had very little money; and didn't I know how reckless he had grown; and didn't I know that he had used a name that was not his own; and didn't I know how much he wanted to grow rich for Charley's sake? Didn't I know, in fact, about the longest string of absurdities ever a reasoning man was pestered with.

She was always obstinate, I told her, and stalked moodily outside. The situation was critical—the most critical I can, on calm reflection, call to mind, as having been mine at any time during an experience covering many vicissitudes. In the whole province, Fred was our sole acquaintance, and Nelly insisted that *he*—but, pshaw, that was out of the question. It was fifteen hundred miles back to the city we had started from, and mail communication was grossly irregular. I had a considerable hotel bill already accrued upon the tariff of the most ruinously expensive cities within Her Majesty's dominions, and I had three very helpless persons, besides myself, to protect and dispose of. To reach the nearest settlement would have cost us £25 for steamer fare alone, and there was just £4 odd in my pocket. It was an ugly fix, and I am devoutly grateful to be out of it.

The telegraph was a new invention in that part of the world, and I employed it. It called Fred back, and it proclaimed our woes among our nearest friends (four weeks distant at the moment) and then it could do no more. Nor could the police; nor could the magistracy; nor could the landlord—his wife improved the occasion by declaring that we desired to swindle her; nor could anybody else we knew of, and in these, the salad days of inexperience, the look-out seemed pitiless all round.

Seemed so to me, walking up the fierce glare of dusty Queen Street, and unconsciously earning a popular reputation for insanity, as the man without an umbrella. Weariness, and heat and thirst, finally combined to recall me to actuality, and a place of rest, shade and refreshment became a necessity imperative. Looking round, I found myself