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I walked on, but, looking back, was pleased to observe that my words had astounded them, for they stopped short, looking at each other, the hand of one resting on the shoulder of the other.

Before I went to sleep that night I had a thought which gave me a cue to action, and which I put into effect the very next morning, when Mr. Harbeck came for the copies of the letters.

As I handed him the package I took him to one side, where we could not be overheard.

"Mr. Harbeck," I said, "I have read that letter, and would like to ask you some questions concerning it."

He looked at me keenly for a moment, and then abruptly asked:

"What do you know?"

"Nothing; but I want to know a good deal."

He again scrutinized me as if he would read my thoughts.

"My name is Haswell," I added. He was surprised and interested immediately.

"Is it not Williams?" he asked. "No," I replied. "Mr. Williams is a friend who, being absent from town for some days, prevailed on me, who am only an amateur in the art, to take charge of his business. I have reason to believe that I am the Haswell referred to in that letter."

He did not reply at once, but seemed to be deeply thinking. At last he asked:

"Do you understand that letter?"

"Not at all."

"We ought to compare notes, I imagine," he said, "but I don't want to give away my hand without knowing what I am doing. Let me ask you a question. Why do you think you are the Haswell referred to?"

"You are cautious," I replied, laughing. "On my part, I do not want to play into the hands of a possible opponent. I will ask a question. Are you the 'Jim' or 'Tim' of this letter?"

"No," he replied, promptly. "Now I will ask you another question. Do you know the Atwood mentioned?"

"No; never heard of him before."

"Hum!" he muttered, pondering a moment. "Well, I'm a private detective retained by this Atwood. What does 'her bare foot' mean?"

"That is what I want to know."

"But this letter intimates that you do know."

"All the same, I do not."

Then I told him of the mysterious occurrences, including the visit of the veiled lady, but, from an impulse I did not then stop to examine, concealed my knowledge of her.

"Your story throws but little light on the matter," he said. "Certain valuable papers of the late Mr. Atwood's estate are missing. The present Mr. Atwood suspects a clerk named Holmes, who was in his father's employ. In the effort to trace these missing papers, I have made the acquaintance of a friend of Holmes, and have followed him to New York. The morning I first came here, I saw in his apartment this letter in the handwriting of Holmes, and taking it hurriedly to have it photographed, returning it to its place afterwards."

"Does Mr. Atwood know the meaning of 'her bare foot'?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "I ran over to Philadelphia yesterday to consult him on that point."

"It would seem as if the interests of Mr. Atwood were involved in the mystery troubling me," I said.

"That's just it. It is through you that things will come out if they come at all. I mean to stick very closely to you," he said, with a laugh, as he went off.

It was my custom every evening, if only for a moment, to visit my mother, who, by reason of age and infirmities, was confined to her rooms. On the evening of this day, having no engagement abroad, I sat myself down for a long chat with the old lady—a chat which I knew would be largely reminiscent, as the talk of very old people is apt to be. During the evening, and apropos of nothing, my mother asked:

"You don't remember your Uncle Charles, do you?"

"Very indistinctly."

"No, I suppose not; he ran away from home as a boy, and was back only once after that. He was a sad trial—the black sheep of the family."

"What has brought him to your mind to-night, mother?" I asked.

"I found a paper of his to-day, in a box into which I have not looked for years. Do you remember a very sudden trip I made to Boston when you were about fifteen?"

I did recollect it for it was associated with other events, the memory of which had kept remembrance of her trip alive.

"I went to see your uncle; he was dying in a hospital there. It was at that time that he gave me the paper, and a small writing desk, which he said contained something valuable. He was near his end then and died soon after. I searched the desk thoroughly, but could find nothing, nor could I make anything of the paper. Finally I laid them both away and forgot them until today, when I stumbled on the paper."

She handed it to me. At the first glance the writing seemed to be merely an odd jumble of letters, but a careful scrutiny convinced me that it was in cypher. I told my mother so, and carried it to my room to study it undisturbed.

It was rather from a desire to occupy my mind than with a hope of discovery, that I began the search for the key. At midnight I was about to throw it aside unsolved, when I thought of a simple cypher with which as a boy I amused myself.

What had suggested it was the word "Worcester" written in small characters in one corner of the paper.

Taking the first word of the cypher, "Olep," I guessed it to be "This." On making the effort, it worked out. The method was simplicity itself: Finding the word "this" in Worcester's Dictionary, counting the letters, four, and adding ten, making fourteen, I counted down to the fourteenth word after "this," and taking the third letter of that fourteenth word and the three letters following, I spelled "olep." I had found the method of making the cypher.

The first sentence of my uncle's paper read:

"Olep ca eat tchclhi fo rba rehe otfa."

Having found the method of building the cypher, by reversing it I was enabled to translate the line. And when I did, it can be imagined under what excitement I continued, when it is known that the first line as translated read:

"This is the history of her bare foot."

The morning light was streaming through the windows when I threw myself on the bed successful, but exhausted by my labors.

The history, briefly told, was that my uncle, in his vagrant ramblings over the world, had united fortunes with a man named Atwood, from Philadelphia, and in their travels had reached the city of Pegu, in the Burmah Empire. Seventy miles away were the celebrated ruby mines, and though warned not to do so, since the mines were closely guarded as the possession of the dominant prince, thither they went.

While there, my uncle found what he supposed to be a common stone, but which Atwood, having some knowledge of geology and mineralogy, believed to be a valuable rose ruby. An outcry being raised against their presence, my uncle threw the stone away, for possession by a stranger was sufficient cause for death; but he and his companion were closely searched, and though nothing of value was found upon them, they were placed in confinement for some time. Atwood was the first one freed, and before leaving Pegu, managed to convey to my uncle the information that he was going to Calcutta, and would wait a reasonable time for him there. Some weeks after my uncle was released. On the day he was first at liberty, a native girl who was in association with him—how or why did not appear—came to him with the stone. When my uncle had thrown it away, unobserved by the guards, it had fallen near where this girl was standing, and she had concealed it by the simple method of putting her foot upon it. While my uncle and Atwood were being searched, she had closed her long and flexible toes over it, and without attracting attention, had managed to convey it, held by her toes, to a spot where she could conceal it without detection.

Frightened by its very possession, my uncle, hurriedly departed from Pegu. What became of the native girl was not told, but my uncle reached Calcutta in safety, where he met Atwood and admitted that person's right to a half interest in the stone. They called it "Her