

from Blackwater to Stockbridge with seventy-five thousand pounds in your pocket?"

'To Stockbridge!' echoed the lawyer. 'I find I have made myself very imperfectly understood. I thought I had explained how the sum only carries us as far as Mallingford,—the first stage, as it were, of our journey,—and how our route from Blackwater to Mallingford lies entirely through Sir Thomas Liddell's property.'

'I beg your pardon,' I stammered. 'I fear my thoughts were wandering. So you only go as far as Mallingford to-night?'

'Precisely. I shall get a conveyance from the "Blackwater Arms." And you?'

'O, Jelf sends a trap to meet me at Clayborough! Can I be the bearer of any message from you?'

'You may say, if you please, Mr. Langford, that I wished I could have been your companion all the way, and that I will come over, if possible, before Christmas.'

'Nothing more?'

Mr. Dwerrihouse smiled grimly. 'Well,' he said, 'you may tell my cousin that she need not burn the hall down in my honour this time, and that I shall be obliged if she will order the blue-room chimney to be swept before I arrive.'

'That sounds tragic. Had you a conflagration on the occasion of your last visit to Dumbleton?'

'Something like it. There had been no fire lighted in my bedroom since the spring, the flue was foul, and the rooks had built in it; so when I went up to dress for dinner, I found the room full of smoke, and the chimney on fire. Are we already at Blackwater?'

The train had gradually come to a pause while Mr. Dwerrihouse was speaking, and, on putting my head out of the window, I could see the station some few hundred yards ahead. There was another train before us blocking the way, and the guard was making use of the delay to collect the Blackwater tickets. I had scarcely ascertained our position, when the ruddy-faced official appeared at our carriage-door.

'Tickets, sir!' said he.

'I am for Clayborough,' I replied, holding out the tiny pink card.

He took it; glanced at it by the light of his little lantern; gave it back; looked, as I fancied, somewhat sharply at my fellow-traveller, and disappeared.

'He did not ask for yours,' I said with some surprise.

'They never do,' replied Mr. Dwerrihouse. 'They all know me, and of course I travel free.'

'Blackwater! Blackwater!' cried the porter,

running along the platform beside us, as we glided into the station.

Mr. Dwerrihouse pulled out his deed-box, put his travelling-cap in his pocket, resumed his hat, took down his umbrella and prepared to be gone.

'Many thanks, Mr. Langford, for your society,' he said, with old-fashioned courtesy. 'I wish you good evening.'

'Good evening,' I replied, putting out my hand.

But he either did not see it, or did not choose to see it, and, slightly lifting his hat, stepped out upon the platform. Having done this he moved slowly away, and mingled with the departing crowd.

Leaving forward to watch him out of sight, I trod upon something which proved to be a cigar case. It had fallen, no doubt, from the pocket of his water-proof coat, and was made of dark morocco leather, with a silver monogram on the side. I sprang out of the carriage just as the guard came up to lock me in.

'Is there one minute to spare?' I asked eagerly. 'The gentleman who travelled down with me from town has dropped his cigar-case; he is not yet out of the station!'

'Just a minute and a half, sir,' replied the guard. 'You must be quick.'

'I dashed along the platform as fast as my feet would carry me. It was a large station, and Mr. Dwerrihouse had by this time got more than half way to the farther end.

I, however, saw him distinctly, moving slowly with the stream. Then, as I drew nearer, I saw that he had met some friend,—that they were talking as they walked,—that they presently fell back somewhat from the crowd, and stood aside in earnest conversation. I made straight for the spot where they were waiting. There was a vivid gas-jet just above their heads, and the light fell full upon their faces. I saw both distinctly,—the face of Mr. Dwerrihouse and the face of his companion. Running, breathless, eager as I was, getting in the way of porters and passengers, and fearful every instant lest I should see the train going off without me, I yet observed that the new-comer was considerably younger and shorter than the director, that he was sandy-haired, mustachioed, small-featured, and dressed in a close-cut suit of Scotch tweed. I was now within a few yards of them. I ran against a stout gentleman,—I was nearly knocked down by a luggage truck,—I stumbled over a carpet-bag,—I gained the spot just as the driver's whistle warned me to return.