

clearly as I could have wished. While trying to talk indifferently on other subjects, the door burst open, and in rushed Charley, holding a printed notice in his hand, and apparently intensely amused at something or other.

"Well," said he, "you certainly are a most wonderful fellow when you do once get on horseback. Just listen to this:

"NOTICE.

"If the individual on a white horse, who last night, after issuing from Mr. Ford's park gate, feloniously leaped over the fence of the undersigned, and after prowling near the house, the alarm having been given, made his escape through the flower-garden, doing damage to a large amount, does not wish to figure in a case of justifiable homicide, let him in future keep on the high-road, and a decent distance from the residence of

WILLIAM TRELAWNEY.

"Oh, Frank!" exclaimed Annie, clasping her hands, "what have you done?"

"Done! why, who says it was I?"

"Not you!" said Charley. "Did you not say you rode out yesterday evening on a white horse?"

"I did."

"Did you not say you entered Ford's park by the gate near the house?"

"I certainly said so."

"Well, if you entered by that gate at dusk, you must have also made your exit by it, for all the others are locked at sunset invariably."

"Yes," added Annie, and you evidently *did* go near Trelawney's house, by your confusion when asked about it. I believe that there is more in this escapade than appears on the surface."

"Why, you surely don't doubt me?"

"I don't go quite so far as that, but the whole affair is an excessively strange one. When asked where you were yesterday evening, I remember you hesitated, as though trying to do violence to your truthful principles" (this was rather too bad), "and though you *did* speak the truth, you did it reluctantly."

At this moment the servant ushered in a Mr. Morton, a lawyer of the town, with whom I was acquainted. I saluted him, and wondered what could have brought him away from his business at such an unusual hour. I did not long remain in ignorance.

"While I congratulate you, Mr. Charlton, upon the reputation you have so suddenly acquired as an equestrian, my pleasure in doing so is somewhat lessened by being engaged by Mr. Trelawney to claim on his behalf a considerable sum of money as compensation for the damage you, in your rather eccentric course, did last night to his flower-garden—"

"But—" interrupted I.

"Listen to the end, if you please," said the long-winded old lawyer.

"While my client is, on the one hand, determined to have recourse to the utmost rigor of the law to punish you as a trespasser, should you refuse to meet him in his view of compensation, he is not on the other hand, averse to a

compromise, provided it be immediate."

"I refuse to do any thing of the kind. Let him prove that I was the trespasser, and the law will give him his rights; but I rather fancy he will find it difficult to do that."

"Not at all," said Morton; "and it is for this reason that I advise your accepting his conditions. It appears that the old gentleman, whose jealous guardianship of his daughter is doubtless known to you, was going his evening rounds when you leaped over the fence. Startled at such an extraordinary apparition, he allowed you to approach the house without giving the alarm. It was too dark to recognize the face of the rider, but he described the animal to me as all white. Knowing of only one horse of the kind, I went with him to Gardiner, to whom it belongs, to seek information."

"Ah!" said I, jubilant, seeing a way out of all my troubles; for, of course, the stable-man would *know* that I was not the man. "And what did he hear from Gardiner?"

"Unfortunately Gardiner had been out on the previous evening, and could tell us nothing. The stable-boy, who prepared the horse, described a gentleman of your size and general appearance, rendering the matter more positive by describing the gray great-coat which I knew you to possess. On our return through the stables we found your ride of last night a topic of general conversation. Trelawney therefore pressed me to call on you at once. I did so, and discovered that you had already come here. I then took the liberty of asking your housekeeper to show me your gray coat. The old lady did so, and I found it torn in two places, apparently by brambles, and the skirts bespattered with mould. After transacting some business of importance I came here to see you—a liberty which I know, madam, you will pardon" (this to Annie—"so as to settle this disagreeable affair as soon as possible." Here was a pretty kettle of fish! Was I dreaming? Had I been out for a ride without knowing it? Of course it struck me more than once to deny the whole affair, and relate how I was only joking when I said I had been out riding; but I had been alone the whole previous evening. I hadn't seen or spoken to a soul. How to prove an alibi?—for it was necessary with this evidence against me, combined with my own confession. I hadn't much time for meditation; for no sooner had Morton finished than Annie rose and had her say.

"Well, I think the evidence is pretty conclusive; in fact, you have attempted no denial. I should advise you to settle this claim at once, and in future to avoid excursions, which believe me, do not reflect too creditably upon your reputation." This, with a toss of the head, an exit, and a bang of the door.

I saw only one way out of my difficulties; this was to pay the compensation required by the abominable old Trelawney. And, after allowing the excitement which had been raised by the affair to subside, explain all the circumstances, and show my friends that I had been *amusing* myself (God save the mark!) at their expense. I therefore accompanied the lawyer to his office, and paid into his hands what he considered a fair amount for the damage I was supposed to have done. I own I was puzzled. I certainly had *not* been out for a ride; but *somebody* had; *somebody* must have used my coat; *somebody* must have galloped over Trelawney's garden—perhaps made love to his daughter—and I, miserable victim, paid the damages. I returned home, worried to death. Here was the whole town discussing my misdeeds—misdeeds that I had confessed, that I had paid a certain sum of money to hush up, and which I was perfectly certain I had had no hand in. How I cursed the moment when I had determined to tell a lie! Annie was right about the difficulties surrounding a fib; however, as far as detection was concerned, I was safe enough from *that*; but the consequences! Friend after friend dropped in to hear the details of the affair, and I soon discovered that the prevailing impression on the public mind was, that I had tried to steal an interview with Trelawney's daughter!

Horrified at this slur upon my character, I hurried off to Gardiner's, to try and obtain some clew to the real culprit. What was my disgust at being presented with a bill for the use of a white mare three and a half hours! Nature could bear this no longer. "My good man," said I, as calmly as I could, "I do assure you that it was not I who rode your horse."

"Sir!" said the stable-man, astounded. "Not you? Why, the whole town is ringing with it. You are joking, Mr. Charlton. Why, surely you paid Mr. Trelawney for the damage the horse did; and now you be a-going to refuse payment for the horse, saying as how it warn't you! Oh, Mr. Charlton, you so truthful, too" (the deuce take the fellow!); "you must be dreaming."

In truth I thought so myself; either that or mad. I paid the money—what else could I do?—and then determined to walk out to the scene of my supposed transgressions and study the locality. Being already steeped in falsehood, and having paid the expenses of the expedition, I thought I might as well carry it with a high hand, and so I went to look around me and be prepared to answer all the questions which for the next ten days would doubtless shower upon me.

I arrived about sunset, and commenced my observations. Trelawney's house was situated exactly opposite the park gate, some way back from the