

it for there are several points

on which I must confess that I am still in the dark.â€

â€I will soon make it clear to you,â€ said she; â€and Iâ€™d have done so before now if I could haâ€™ve got out from the cellar. If thereâ€™s police-court business over this, youâ€™ll remember that I was the one that stood your friend, and that I was Miss Aliceâ€™s friend too.

â€She was never happy at home, Miss Alice wasnâ€™t, from the time that her father married again. She was slighted like and had no say in anything, but it never really became bad for her until after she met Mr. Fowler at a friendâ€™s house. As well as I could learn, Miss Alice had rights of her own by will, but she was so quiet and patient, she was, that she never said a word about them but just left everything in Mr. Rucastleâ€™s hands. He knew he was safe with her; but when there was a chance of a husband coming forward, who would ask for all that the law would give him, then her father thought it time to put a stop on it. He wanted her to sign a paper, so that whether she married or not, he could use her money. When she wouldnâ€™t do it, he kept on worrying her until she got brain-fever, and for six weeks was at deathâ€™s door. Then she got better at last, all worn to a shadow, and with her beautiful hair cut off; but that didnâ€™t make no change in her young man, and he stuck to her as true as man could be.â€

â€Ah,â€ said Holmes, â€I think that what you have been good enough to tell us makes the matter fairly clear, and that I can deduce all that remains. Mr. Rucastle then, I presume, took to this system of imprisonment?â€

â€Yes, sir.â€

â€And brought Miss Hunter down from London in order to get rid of the disagreeable persistence of Mr. Fowler.â€

â€That was it, sir.â€

â€But Mr. Fowler being a persevering man, as a good seaman should be, blockaded the house, and having met you succeeded by certain arguments, metallic or otherwise, in convincing you that your interests were the same as his.â€

â€Mr. Fowler was a very kind-spoken, free-handed gentleman,â€ said Mrs. Toller serenely.

â€And in this way he managed that your good man should have no want of drink, and that a ladder should be ready at the moment when your master had gone out.â€

â€You have it, sir, just as it happened.â€

â€I am sure we owe you an apology, Mrs. Toller,â€ said Holmes, â€for you have certainly cleared up everything which puzzled us. And here comes the country surgeon and Mrs. Rucastle, so I think, Watson, that we had best escort Miss Hunter back to Winchester, as it seems to me that our locus standi now is rather a questionable one.â€

And thus was solved the mystery of the sinister house with the copper beeches in front of the door. Mr. Rucastle survived, but was always a broken man, kept alive solely through the care of his devoted wife.

They still live with their old servants, who probably know so much of Rucastleâ€™s past life that he finds it difficult to part from them. Mr.

Fowler and Miss Rucastle were married, by special license, in Southampton the day after their flight, and he is now the holder of a government appointment in the island of Mauritius. As to Miss Violet Hunter, my friend Holmes, rather to my disappointment, manifested no further interest in her when once she had ceased to be the centre of one of his problems, and she is now the head of a private school at Walsall, where I believe that she has met with considerable success.

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