

### **Brush with a Stranger Part 3 - Mother, Father and Tom**

“For a good ten years. Went bust. Stranger ’round these parts, ain’t you?”

Samuel sagged against the wall. “I was here some time ago,” he said weakly. “The Post Office was all right then. I even knew some of the people who worked there.”

“Didn’t know a feller named William Bankes, did you?”

“William Bankes! Didn’t he—? ”...Samuel was just about to say that William Bankes had turned villain after failing to get the job at the Post Office, which he had got instead, but had then been shot years later, whilst attempting to rob The Mill.

But now, of course, things were different. Samuel wasn’t there to get the job. He would have to be careful.

“Er, No, I didn’t know him,” he said slowly. “Not really, that is. I’d heard of him.”

“Then maybe you heard how he robbed £362.00 from the Post Office when he worked there. That’s why it went broke. Pretty near ruined every family around here.”

Hesketh was looking at him sharply. “I was hoping for a minute maybe you’d know where he is. I lost plenty in that robbery myself. We’d like to get our hands on William Bankes.”

Samuel responded, “Didn’t he have a much younger brother? Seems to me he had a brother named Arthur.”

Samuel and Arthur were both in Mr Helling’s class, the schoolmaster at Church Minshull’s school. He and Arthur had both courted Anne at school, but Arthur was a mean hearted boy, so she had chosen Samuel.

“Art Bankes? Oh, sure, s’pose he’s all right, but he don’t know where his brother went. It’s had a terrible effect on him, too. Took to drink, he did... it’s too bad—and hard on his wife. He married a nice girl.”

Samuel felt the sinking feeling in his stomach again. “Who did he marry?” he demanded hoarsely.

“Girl named Anne Charlesworth,” Hesketh said cheerfully. “She lives up road just the other side of the church in Beech House— Hey! ...where are you going?”

But Samuel had bolted out of the forge. He ran past the empty Post Office and turned up Cross Lane. For a moment he thought of going straight to Anne. Beech House had been given them by her father Thomas Charlesworth as a wedding present. Thomas owned Rosalie Farm and had become a self-made man. Naturally Arthur Bankes would have gotten it if he had married Anne. Samuel wondered whether they had any children.

Then he knew he couldn't face Anne—not yet anyway. He decided to visit his parents who lived at Church Farm and find out more about her. Church Farm was opposite The Brooke Arms, and a Christmas wreath was hanging on the old oak door. There were candles burning in the windows, so Samuel knew someone must be home. There was a loud click as he raised the gate latch and a dark shape jumped out from the Magpie porch and began to growl. Then it hurled itself towards the gate, barking ferociously.

"Alfie!" Samuel shouted. "Alfie, you old fool, stop that! Don't you know me?"

But the dog advanced menacingly and drove him back behind the gate. A dim light appeared as the door opened, and Samuel's father stepped outside to call the dog off. The barking subsided to a low, angry growl. His father held the dog by the collar while Samuel cautiously walked past. He could see that his father did not know him.

"Is the lady of the house in?" he asked. His father waved him toward the door. "Go on in," he said cordially. "I'll chain this dog up. He can be mean with strangers."

His mother, who was waiting in the hallway, obviously did not recognize him. Samuel opened his sample kit and grabbed the first brush that came to hand.

"Good evening, missus," he said politely. "I'm from the Cheshire Brush Company. We're giving out a free sample brush. I thought you might like to have one. No obligation. No obligation at all..."

His voice faltered. His mother smiled at his awkwardness.

"I suppose you'll want to sell me something. I'm not really sure I need any brushes."

"No, I'm... I'm not selling anything," he assured her.

"The owner will be around in a few days. This is just— well, just a Christmas present from the company."

"How nice," she said. "You people never gave away such good brushes before."

"This is a special offer," he said.

His father entered the hall and closed the door.

"Won't you come in for a while and sit down?" his mother said. "You must be tired walking so much."

"Thank you, missus. I don't mind if I do."

He entered the little parlour and put his bag down on the floor. The room looked different somehow, although he could not figure out why.

"I used to know this town pretty well," he said to make conversation. "Knew some of the townspeople. I remember a girl named Anne Charlesworth. She married Arthur Bankes, I heard. You must know them."

"Of course," his mother said. "We know Anne well."

"And Arthur?", he asked tentatively...

"Let's just say. My husband and were surprised that she married into the Bankes family, not the kind of son-in-law the Tom and Esther Charlesworth wanted for Anne. I'm afraid", his mother said.

"Any children?" he asked casually.

"Two—a boy and a girl."