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# **Haunted Royalties**

**Katherine Cox**

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**Title: Haunted Royalties**

**Author: Katherine Cox**

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**THE SHIFTING SPELL**



# THE SHIFTING SPELL

BY  
LESLIE PROBYN



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# THE SHIFTING SPELL

## CHAPTER I

*How Douglas Stranghurst suddenly came to enjoy an income of £6000 a year, subject to certain conditions. Also of an extremely happy "marriage engagement."*

THIS, the opening chapter, begins in a very curt style! Every member of the Stranghurst family was born in London and started life with five thousand pounds. The youngest brother, George, quarrelled with the eldest brother, James; both of them quarrelled with Douglas, who was an extremely indolent young man; and the two sisters, Augusta and Ethel, having tried to make peace, were naturally left in the cold. Douglas, the indolent, decided to study art upon the Continent, but, being less indolent in spending money than in painting, his £5000 went before he had learned how to paint. This circumstance was not reported by the indolent man to his family in England; neither did he notify them of his marriage—in Belgium—to a rich widow, whose wealth would lapse at her death; and, likewise, no mention was made when he became in due course the father of a boy and a girl. The rich widow died (instead of the boy, or the girl), and the sole consolation which the penniless widower

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obtained was that a charitable family took charge of the children on the very day of the funeral. After a period of toilsome borrowing Douglas left Belgium and arrived in London, with the intention of enabling his own relatives to save themselves from the disgrace of seeing him starve in the streets. This plan began badly, because his quarrelsome eldest brother James refused to lend him a penny and even hinted that he would not mind receiving a temporary loan for himself; moreover, according to James, the two sisters, Augusta and Ethel, had hidden themselves in remote country places, and it would be useless to send letters thither because the lawyers had "tied up" their money in a manner which precluded them from giving any sisterly aid. Thus far, the prospects were so discouraging that Douglas felt greatly depressed when, in continuance of the plan, he enquired after the health of his dear, quarrelsome youngest brother George! A disconcerting expression appeared upon James' face whilst he listened to these brotherly enquiries; once, or twice, he chuckled in a gloating kind of way, and eventually his quarrelsome nature displayed itself in the rude reply: "You only want to get some money from George! Well, your shoe leather will be wasted in climbing up to the attic in which he has lived for years! People say that he is a fabulously rich miser, and they may be right, because money—or something—has certainly turned his brain!"

After this disheartening interview, Douglas returned to his hotel and ruminated despondently as to how long he could remain therein—upon credit. These ruminations decided him to foster confidence at the hotel "office" by exchanging his last sovereign



for nineteen jingling shillings and one expensive cigar; at the "office" they also gave him an envelope, which was so bulky that he sat down in an armchair in order to rejoice at not having been given a bill. For a long time he gazed at the unknown, crabbed handwriting of the address. Curiosity arose indeed concerning the person who had found out that he was stopping at the hotel, but at last he opened the letter. It began: "Douglas, you always were a self-indulgent brute! You have defiled the family . . ." And it ended with the vindictive but mysterious words: "I have watched you for years. You don't believe in the spiritual world—therefore expect punishment from your brother: George." Anger nearly made Douglas fail to see the astounding postscript: "When you have read all that I have written a man will hand you £50. This sum will make you wish for more, and that will be the beginning of your punishment. G. S." The deliberate cruelty of this postscript at once became clear, because not one of the attendants in the hotel "lounge" even looked at Douglas. After a short time, however, a shabbily dressed man sitting in an adjacent chair turned round and handed him a letter, saying: "I think that this is for you, Sir." Intense surprise naturally prevented Douglas from being very attentive: whilst tearing the envelope he merely noticed that the shabby stranger was no longer sitting in the adjacent chair; afterwards, a crisp piece of paper inside the envelope concentrated his entire attention until he had made sure that it really was a Bank of England note for £50, but by that time the stranger had vanished—and then Douglas' joy waned with a growing conviction