

THE LUST OF HATE

Guy Boothby

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INTRODUCTION. MY CHANCE IN LIFE.

LET me begin by explaining that I have set myself the task of telling this story for two sufficient reasons. The first, because I consider that it presents as good a warning to a young fellow as he could anywhere find, against allowing himself to be deluded by a false hatred into committing a sin that at any other time he would consider in every way contemptible and cowardly; and the second, because I think it just possible that it may serve to set others on their guard against one of the most unscrupulous men, if man he is—of which I begin to have my doubts—who ever wore shoe leather. If the first should prove of no avail, I can console myself with the reflection that I have at least done my best, and, at any rate, can have wrought no harm; if the second is not required, well, in that case, I think I shall have satisfactorily proved to my reader, whoever he may be, what a truly lucky man he may consider himself never to have fallen into Dr. Nikola's clutches. What stroke "of ill fortune brought me into this fiend's power I suppose I shall never be able to discover. One thing, however, is very certain, that is that I have no sort of desire ever to see or hear of him again. Sometimes when I lie in bed at night, and my dear wife—the truest and noblest woman, I verily believe, who ever came into this world for a man's comfort and consolation—is sleeping by my side, I think of all the curious adventures I have passed through in the last two years, and then fall to wondering how on earth I managed to come out of them alive, to say nothing of doing so with so much happiness as is now my portion. This sort of moralising, however, is not telling my tale; so if you will excuse me, kind reader, I will bring myself to my bearings and plunge into my narrative forthwith.

By way of commencement I must tell you something of myself and my antecedents. My name is Gilbert Pennethorne; my mother was a Tregenna. and if you remember the old adage—"By Tre—, Pol— and Pen— You may know the Cornishmen," you will see that I may claim to be Cornish to the backbone.

My father, as far back as I can recollect him, was a highly respectable, but decidedly choleric, gentleman of the old school, who clung to his black silk stock and high-rolled collar long after both had ceased to be the fashion,

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and for a like reason had for modern innovations much the same hatred as the stage coachman was supposed to entertain for railway engines. Many were the absurd situations this animosity led him into. Of his six children—two boys and four girls—I was perhaps the least fortunate in his favour. For some reason or another—perhaps because I was the youngest, and my advent into the world had cost my mother her life—he could scarcely bring himself at any time to treat me with ordinary civility. In consequence I never ventured near him unless I was absolutely compelled to do so. I went my way, he went his—and as a result we knew but little of each other, and liked what we saw still less. Looking back upon it now, I can see that mine must have been an extraordinary childhood.

To outsiders my disposition was friendly almost to the borders of demonstrativeness; in my own home, where an equivalent temperament might surely have been looked for, I was morose, quick to take offence, and at times sullen even to brutishness. This my father, to whom opposition of any kind was as hateful as the Reform Bill, met with an equal spirit. Ridicule and carping criticism, for which he had an extraordinary aptitude, became my daily portion, and when these failed to effect their purpose, corporal punishment followed sure and sharp. As a result I detested my home as cordially as I loathed my parent, and was never so happy as when at school—an unnatural feeling, as you will admit, in one so young. From Eton I went up to Oxford, where my former ill luck pursued me. Owing to a misunderstanding I had the misfortune to incur the enmity of my college authorities during my first term, and, in company with two others, was ignominiously "sent down" at the outset of my second year. This was the opportunity my family had been looking for from the moment I was breeched, and they were quick to take advantage of it. My debts were heavy, for I had never felt the obligation to stint myself, and in consequence my father's anger rose in proportion to the swiftness with which the bills arrived. As the result of half an hour's one-sided conversation in the library, with a thunder-shower pattering a melancholy accompaniment upon the window panes, I received a cheque for five thousand pounds with which to meet my University liabilities, an uncomplimentary review of my life, past and present, and a curt announcement that I need never trouble the parental roof with my society in the future. I took him at his word, pocketed the cheque, expressed a hypocritical regret that I had caused him so much anxiety; went up to my room and collected my belongings; then, having bidden my sisters farewell in icy state in the drawing-room, took my seat in the dog-cart, and was driven to the station to catch the express to town. A month later I was on my way to Australia with a draft for two thousand pounds in my pocket, and the smallest possible notion of what I was going to do with myself when I reached the Antipodes.

In its customary fashion ill luck pursued me from the very moment I set foot on Australian soil. I landed in Melbourne at a particularly unfortunate time, and within a month had lost half my capital in a plausible, but ultimately unprofitable, mining venture. The balance I took with me into the bush, only to lose it there as easily as I had done the first in town. The aspect of affairs then changed completely. The so-called friends I had hitherto made deserted me with but one exception. That one, however, curiously enough the least respectable of the lot, exerted himself on my behalf to such good purpose that he obtained for me the position of storekeeper on a Murrumbidgee sheep station. I embraced the opportunity with alacrity, and for eighteen months continued in the same employment, working with a certain amount of pleasure to myself, and, I believe, some satisfaction to my employers. How long I should have remained there I cannot say, but when the Banyah Creek gold field was proclaimed, I caught the fever, abandoned my employment, and started off, with my swag upon my back, to try my fortune. This turned out so poorly that less than seven weeks found me desperate, my savings departed, and my claim,—which I must in honesty confess showed but small prospects of success—seized for a debt by a rascally Jew storekeeper upon the Field. A month later a new rush swept away the inhabitants, and Banyah Creek was deserted. Not wishing to be left behind I followed the general inclination, and in something under a fortnight was prostrated at death's door by an attack of fever, to which I should probably have succumbed had it not been for the kindness of a misanthrope of the field, an old miner, Ben Garman by name. This extraordinary individual, who had tried his luck on every gold-field of importance in the five colonies and was as yet as far off making his fortune as when he had first taken a shovel in his hand, found me lying unconscious alongside the creek. He carried me to his tent, and, neglecting his claim, set to work to nurse me back to life again. It was not until I had turned the corner and was convalescent that I discovered the curiosity my benefactor really was. His personal

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appearance was as peculiar as his mode of life. He was very short, very broad, very red faced, wore a long grey beard, had bristling, white eye-brows, enormous ears, and the largest hands and feet I have ever seen on a human being. Where he had hailed from originally he was unable himself to say. His earliest recollection was playing with another small boy upon the beach of one of the innumerable bays of Sydney harbour; but how he had got there, whether his parents had just emigrated, or whether they had been out long enough for him to have been born in the colony were points of which he pronounced himself entirely ignorant. He detested women, though he could not explain the reason of his antipathy, and there were not two other men upon the field with whom he was on even the barest speaking terms. How it came about that he took such a fancy to me puzzled me then and has continued to do so ever since, for, as far as I could see, save a certain leaning towards the solitary in life, we had not a single bond in common. As it was, however, we were friends without being intimate, and companions by day and night without knowing more than the merest outside rind of each other's lives.

As soon as I was able to get about again I began to wonder what on earth I should do with myself next. I had not a halfpenny in the world, and even on a gold field it is necessary to eat if one desires to live, and to have the wherewithal to pay if one desires to eat. I therefore placed the matter before my companion and ask his advice. He gave it with his usual candour, and in doing so solved my difficulty for me once and for all.

"Stay with me, lad," he said, "and help me to work the claim. What with the rheumatiz and the lumbago I'm none so spry as I used to be, and there's gold enough in the old shaft yonder to make the fortunes of both of us when once we can get at it."

Naturally I lost no time in closing with his offer, and the following morning found me in the bowels of the earth as hard at work with pick and shovel as my weakness would permit. Unfortunately, however, for our dream of wealth, the mine did not prove as brilliant an investment as its owner had predicted for it, and six week's labour showed us the futility of proceeding further. Accordingly we abandoned it, packed our swags, and set off for a mountain range away to the southward, on prospecting thoughts intent. Finding nothing to suit us there, we migrated into the west, where we tried our hands at a variety of employments for another eighteen months or thereabouts. At length, on the Diamantina River, in Western Queensland, we parted company, myself to take a position of storekeeper on Markapurlie station in the same neighbourhood, and Ben to try his luck on a new field that had just come into existence near the New South Wales border.

For something like three years we neither saw nor heard anything of each other. Whether Ben had succeeded on the field to which he had proceeded when he had said "good-bye" to me, or whether, as usual, he had been left stranded, I could only guess. My own life, on the other hand, was uneventful in the extreme.

From morning till night I kept the station books, served out rations to boundary riders and other station hands, and, in the intervals, thought of my old life, and wondered whether it would ever be my lot to set foot in England again. So far I had been one of Fate's failures, but though I did not know it, I was nearer fortune's money bag than I had ever been in my life before.

The manager of Markapurlie was a man named Bertrand, an upstart and a bully of the first water. He had never taken kindly to me nor I to him. Every possible means that fell in his way of annoying me he employed; and, if the truth must be told, I paid his tyranny back with interest. He seldom spoke save to find fault; I never addressed him except in a tone of contempt which must have been infinitely galling to a man of his suspicious antecedents. That he was only waiting his chance to rid himself of me was as plain as the nose upon his face, and for this very reason I took especial care so to arrange my work that it should always fail to give him the opportunity he desired. The crash, however, was not to be averted, and it came even sooner than I expected.

One hot day, towards the end of summer, I had been out to one of the boundary rider's huts with the month's supply of rations, and, for the reason that I had a long distance to travel, did not reach the station till late in the afternoon. As I drove up to the little cluster of buildings beside the lagoon I noticed a small crowd collected round

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the store door. Among those present I could distinguish the manager, one of the overseers (a man of Bartrand's own kidney, and therefore his especial crony), two or three of the hands, and as the reason of their presence there, what looked like the body of a man lying upon the ground at their feet. Having handed my horses over to the black boy at the stockyard, I strode across to see what might be going forward. Something in my heart told me I was vitally concerned in it, and bade me be prepared for any emergency.

Beaching the group I glanced at the man upon the ground, and then almost shouted my surprise aloud. He was none other than Ben Garman, but oh, how changed! His once stalwart frame shrunk to half its former size, his face was pinched and haggard to a degree that frightened me, and, as I looked, I knew there could be no doubt about one thing, the man was as ill as a man could well be and yet be called alive.

Pushing the crowd unceremoniously aside, I knelt down and spoke to him. He was mumbling something to himself and evidently did not recognise me.

"Ben," I cried, "Ben, old man, don't you remember Gilbert Pennethorne? Tell me what's wrong with you, old fellow."

But he only rolled his head and muttered something about "*five hundred paces north-west from the creek and just in a line with the blasted gum.*"

Realizing that it was quite useless talking to him, and that if I wished to prolong his life I must get him to bed as soon as possible, I requested one of the men standing by to lend a hand and help me to carry him into my hut. This was evidently the chance Bartrand wanted.

"To the devil with such foolery," he cried. "You, Johnstone, stand back and let the man alone. I'll not have him malingering here, I tell you. I know his little game, and yours too, Pennethorne, and I warn you, if you take him into your hut I'll give you the sack that instant, and so you remember what *I* say."

"But you surely don't want the man to die?" I cried, astonished almost beyond the roach of words at his barbarity. "Can't you see how ill he is? Examine him for yourself. He is delirious now, and if he's not looked to he'll be dead in a few hours."

"And a good job too," said the manager brutally. "For my part, I believe he's only shamming. Any way I'm not going to have him doctored here. If he's as ill as you say I'll send him up to the Mail Change, and they can doctor him there. He looks as if he had enough money about him to pay Gibbs his footing."

As Garman was in rags and his condition evidenced the keenest poverty, this sally was treated as a fine joke by the overseer and the understrappers, who roared with laughter, and swore that they had never heard anything better in their lives. It roused my blood, however, to boiling pitch, and I resolved that, come what might, I would not desert my friend.

"If you send him away to the Mail Change," I cried, looking Bartrand square in the eye, "where you hope they won't take him in—and, even if they do, you know they'll not take the trouble to nurse him—you'll be as much a murderer as the man who stabs another to the heart, and so I tell you to your face."

Bartrand came a step closer to me, with his fists clenched and his face showing as white with passion as his tanned skin would permit.

"You call me a murderer, you dog?" he hissed. "Then, by God, I'll act up to what I've been threatening to do these months past and clear you off the place at once. Pack up your traps and make yourself scarce within an hour, or, by the Lord Harry, I'll forget—myself and take my boot to you. I've had enough of your fine gentleman airs, my

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dandy, and I tell you the place will smell sweeter when you're out of it."

I saw his dodge, and understood why he had behaved towards Ben in such a scurvy fashion. But not wanting to let him see that I was upset by his behaviour, I looked him straight in the face as coolly as I knew how and said—

"So you're going to get rid of me because I'm man enough to want to save the life of an old friend, Mr. Bartrand, are you? Well, then, let me tell you that you're a meaner hound than even I took you for, and that is saying a great deal. However, since you wish me to be off I'll go."

"If you don't want to be pitched into the Creek yonder you'll go without giving me any more of your lip," he answered. "I tell you I'm standing just about all I can carry now. If we weren't in Australia, but across the water in some countries I've known, you'd have been dangling from that gum tree over yonder by this time."

I paid no attention to this threat, but, still keeping as calm as I possibly could, requested him to inform me if I was to consider myself discharged.

"You bet you are," said he, "and I'll not be happy till I've seen your back on the sand ridge yonder."

"Then," said I, "I'll go without more words. But I'll trouble you for my cheque before I do so. Also for a month's wages in lieu of notice."

Without answering he stepped over Ben's prostrate form and proceeded into the store. I went to my hut and rolled up my swag. This done, I returned to the office, to find them hoisting Ben into the tray buggy which was to take him to the Mail Change, twenty miles distant. The manager stood in the verandah with a cheque in his hand. When I approached he handed it to me with an ill-concealed grin of satisfaction on his face.

"There is your money, and I'll have your receipt," he said. Then, pointing to a heap of harness beyond the verandah rails, he continued, "Your riding saddle is yonder, and also your pack saddles and bridles. I've sent a black boy down for your horses. When they come up you can clear out as fast as you please. If I catch you on the run again look out, that's all."

"I'll not trouble you, never fear," I answered. "I have no desire to see you or Markapurlie again as long as I live. But before I go I've got something to say to you, and I want these men to hear it. I want them to know that I consider you a mean, lying, contemptible murderer. And, what's more, I'm going to let them see me cowhide you within an inch of your rascally life."

I held a long green-hide *quirt* in my hand, and as I spoke I advanced upon him, making it whistle in the air. But surprised as he was at my audacity he was sufficiently quick to frustrate my intention. Bushing in at me he attempted to seize the hand that held the whip, but he did not affect his purpose until I had given him a smart cut with it across the face. Then, seeing that he meant fighting, for I will do him the justice to say that he was no coward, I threw the thong away and gave him battle with my fists. He was not the sort of foe to be taken lightly. The man had a peculiar knack of his own, and, what was more, he was as hard as whalebone and almost as pliable. However he had not the advantage of the training I had had, nor was he as powerful a man. I let him have it straight from the shoulder as often and as hard as he would take it, and three times he measured his full length in the dust. Each time he came up with a fresh mark upon his face, and I can tell you the sight did me good. My blood was thoroughly afire by this time, and the only thing that could cool it was the touch of his face against my fist. At last I caught him on the point of the jaw and he went down all of a heap and lay like a log, just as he had fallen, breathing heavily. The overseer went across to him, and kneeling by his side, lifted his head.

"I believe you've killed him," said he, turning to me with an evil look upon his face.

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"Don't you believe it," I answered. "It would have saved the hangman a job if I had, for, you take my word for it, he'll live to be hung yet."

I was right in my first assertion, for in a few moments the manager opened his eyes and looked about him in a dazed fashion. Seeing this I went off to the stock yard and saddled my horses, then, with a last look at the station and my late antagonist, who at that moment was being escorted by the overseer to his own residence, I climbed into my saddle, and, taking the leading rein of the pack horse from the black boy's hand, set off over the sand hills in the direction taken by the cart containing poor Ben.

Beaching the Mail Change—a miserable iron building of four rooms, standing in the centre of a stretch of the dreariest plain a man could well imagine—I interviewed the proprietor and engaged a room in which to nurse my sick friend back to life. Having done this I put Ben to bed and endeavoured to discover what on earth was the matter with him. At that moment I verily believe I would have given anything I possessed, or should have been likely to possess, for five minutes' conversation with a doctor. I had never seen a case of the kind before, and was hopelessly fogged as to what course I should pursue in treating it. To my thinking it looked like typhoid, and having heard that in such cases milk should be the only diet, I bespoke a goat from the landlord's herd and relegated her to Ben's exclusive use.

My chief prayer for the next month was that it might never be necessary for me to pass through such an awful time again. For three weeks I fought with the disease night and day, one moment cheered by a gleam of hope, the next despairing entirely of success. All the time I was quite aware that I was being spied upon, and that all my sayings and doings were reported to the manager by my landlord when he took over the weekly mail bag. But as I had no desire to hide anything, and nothing, save Ben's progress, to tell, this gave me but the smallest concern. Being no longer in his employ, Bartrand could do me no further mischief, and so long as I paid the extortionate charge demanded by the proprietor of the shanty for board and residence, I knew he would have no fault to find with my presence there.

Somewhere or another I remembered to have read that, in the malady from which I believed my old friend was suffering, on or about the twenty-first day the crisis is reached, and afterwards a change should be observable. My suspicions proved correct, for on that very day Ben became conscious, and after that his condition began perceptibly to improve. For nearly a week, though still as feeble as a month-old child, he mended rapidly. Then, for some mysterious reason he suffered a relapse, lost ground as fast as he had gained it, and on the twelfth day, counting from the one mentioned above, I saw that his case was hopeless, and realised that all my endeavours had been in vain.

How well I remember that miserable afternoon! It had been scorchingly hot ever since sunrise, and the little room in which I watched beside the sick man's bed was like a furnace. From my window I could see the stretch of sunbaked plain rising and falling away towards the horizon in endless monotony. In the adjoining bar I could hear the voices of the landlord and three bushmen who, according to custom, had come over to drink themselves into delirium on their hard-earned savings, and were facilitating the business with all possible despatch. On the bed poor Ben tumbled and tossed, talking wildly to himself and repeating over and over again the same words I had heard him utter that afternoon at Markapurlie—"five hundred paces north-west from the creek, and just in a line with the Hasted gum." What he meant by it was more than I could tell, but I was soon to discover, and that discovery was destined to bring me as near the pit of damnation as it is possible for a man to get without actually falling into it.

A little before sundown I left the bedroom and went out into the verandah. The heat and the closeness of the sick room had not had a good effect upon me, and I felt wretchedly sick and ill. I sat down on a bench and took in the hopeless view. A quarter of a mile away across the plain a couple of wild turkeys were feeding, at the same time keeping a sharp look-out about them, and on the very edge of the north-eastern horizon a small cloud of dust proclaimed the coming of the mail coach, which I knew had been expected since sunrise that morning. I watched

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it as it loomed larger and larger, and did not return to my patient until the clumsy, lumbering concern, drawn by five panting horses, had pulled up before the hostelry. It was the driver's custom to pass the night at the Change, and to go on again at daylight the following morning.

When I had seen the horses unharnessed and had spoken to the driver, who was an old friend, I made my way back to Ben's room. To my delight I found him conscious once more. I sat down beside the bed and told him how glad I was to see that his senses had returned to him.

"Ay, old lad," he answered feebly, "I know ye. But I shan't do so for long. I'm done for now, and I know it. This time to-morrow old Ben will know for hisself what truth there is in the yarns the sky-pilots spin us about heaven and hell."

"Don't you believe it, Ben," I answered, feeling that although I agreed with him it was my duty to endeavour to cheer him up. "You're worth a good many dead -men yet. You're not going out this trip by a great deal. We shall have you packing your swag for a new rush before you can look round. I'll be helping sink a good shaft inside a month."

"Never again," he answered; "the only shaft I shall ever have anything to do with now will be six by two, and when I'm once down in it I'll never see daylight again."

"Well you're not going to talk any more now. Try and have a nap if you can. Sleep's what you want to bring your strength back."

"I shall have enough and to spare of that directly," he answered. "No, lad, I want to talk to you. I've got something on my mind that I must say while I've the strength to do it."

But I wouldn't hear him.

"If you don't try to get to sleep," I said, "I shall clear out and leave you. I'll hear what you've got to say later on.. There will be plenty of time for that by and bye."

"As you please," he replied resignedly. "It's for you to choose. If you'd only listen, I could tell you what will make you the richest man on earth. If I die without telling you, you'll only have yourself to thank for it. Now do you want me to go to sleep?"

"Yes, I do!" I said, thinking the poor fellow was growing delirious again. "I want you to try more than ever. When you wake up again I'll promise to listen as long as you like."

He did not argue the point any further, but laid his head down on his pillow again, and in a few moments was dozing quietly.

When he woke again the lamp on the ricketty deal table near the bed had been lit some time. I had been reading a Sydney paper which I had picked up in the bar, and was quite unprepared for the choking cry with which he attracted my attention. Throwing down the paper I went across to the bed and asked him how he felt.

"Mortal bad," was his answer. "It won't be long now afore I'm gone. Laddie, I must say what I've got to say quickly, and you must listen with all your ears."

"I'll listen, never fear," I replied, hoping that my acquiescence might soothe him. "What is it you have upon your mind? You know I'll do anything I can to help you."

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"I know that, laddie. You've been a good friend to me, an' now, please God, I'm going to do a good stroke for you. Help me to sit up a bit."

I lifted him up by placing my arm under his shoulders, and, when I had propped the pillows behind him, took my seat again.

"You remember the time I left you to go and try my luck on that new field down South, don't you?"

I nodded.

"Well, I went down there and worked like a galley slave for three months, only to come off the field a poorer man than I went on to it. It was never any good, and the whole rush was a fraud. Having found this out I set off by myself from Kalamam Township into the West, thinking I would prospect round a bit before I tackled another place. Leaving the Darling behind me I struck out for the Boolga Range, always having had a sort of notion that there was gold in that part of the country if only folk could get at it."

He panted, and for a few moments I thought he would be unable to finish his story. Large beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead, and he gasped for breath, as a fish does when first taken from the water. Then he pulled himself together and continued:

"Well, for three months I lived among those lonely hills, for all the world like a black fellow, never seeing a soul for the whole of that time. You must remember that for what's to come. Gully after gully, and hill after hill I tried, but all in vain. In some places there were prospects, but when I worked at them they never came to anything. But one day, just as I was thinking of turning back, just by chance I struck the right spot. When I sampled it I could hardly believe my eyes. I tell you this, laddie," here his voice sunk to a whisper as he said impressively, "there's gold enough there to set us both up as millionaires a dozen times over."

I looked at him in amazement. Was this delirium? or had he really found what he had averred? I was going to question him, but he held up his hand to me to be silent.

"Don't talk," he said; "I haven't much time left. See that there's nobody at the door."

I crossed and opened the door leading into the main passage of the dwelling. Was it only fancy, or did I really hear someone tip-toeing away? At any rate whether anybody had been eavesdropping or not, the passage was empty enough when I looked into it. Having taken my seat at the bedside again, Ben placed his clammy hand upon my arm and said—

"As soon as I found what I'd got, I covered up all traces of my work and cut across country to find you. I sent you a letter from Thargomindah telling you to chuck up your billet and meet me on the road, but I suppose you never received it?"

I shook my head. If only I had done so what a vast difference it might have made in both our lives.

"Well," continued Ben, with increased difficulty, "as no letter came I made my way west as best I could, to find you. On Cooper's Creek I was taken ill, and a precious hard time I had of it.. Every day I was getting worse, and by the time I reached Markapurlie I was done for, as you know."

"But what did you want with me?" *I* asked, surprised that he should have taken so much trouble to find me when Fortune was staring him in the face.

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"I wanted you to stand in with me, lad. I wanted a little capital to start work on, and I reckoned as you'd been so long in one place, you'd probably have saved a bit. Now it's all done for as far as I'm concerned. It seems a bit rough, don't it, that after hunting for the right spot all my life long, I should have found it just when it's no use to me? Howsoever, it's there for you, laddie, and I don't know but what you'll make better use of it than I should have done. Now listen here."

He drew me still closer to him and whispered in my ear--

"As soon as I'm gone make tracks for the Booiga Range. Don't waste a minute. You ought to do it in three weeks, travelling across country with good horses. Find the head of the creek, and follow it down till you reach the point where it branches off to the east and leaves the hills. There are three big rocks at the bend, and half a mile or so due south from them there's a big dead gum, struck by lightning, maybe. Step five hundred paces from the rocks up the hillside fair north-west, and that should bring you level with the blasted gum. Here's a bit of paper with it all planned out so that you can't make a mistake."

He pulled out half a sheet of greasy note-paper from his bosom and gave it to me.

"It don't look much there; but you mark my words, it will prove to be the biggest gold mine on earth, and that's saying a deal! Peg out your claim as soon as you get there, and then apply to Government in the usual way for the Discoverer's Eight. And may you make your fortune out of it for your kindness to a poor old man."

He laid his head back, exhausted with so much talking, and closed his eyes. Nearly half-an-hour went by before he spoke again. Then he said wearily,--

"Laddie, I won't be sorry when it's all over. But still I can't help thinking I would like to have seen that mine."

He died almost on the stroke of midnight, and we buried him next day on the little sandhill at the back of the grog shanty. That I was much affected by the poor old man's decease it would be idle to deny, even if I desired to do so. The old fellow had been a good mate to me, and, as far as I knew, I was the only friend he had in the world. In leaving me his secret, I inherited all he died possessed of. But if that turned out as he had led me to expect it would do, *I* should, indeed, be a made man. In order, however, to prevent a disappointment that would be too crushing, I determined to place no faith in it. My luck had hitherto been so bad that it seemed impossible it could ever change. To tell the truth, I was feeling far too ill by this time to think much about anything outside myself. During the last few days my appetite had completely vanished, my head ached almost to distraction, and my condition generally betokened the approach of a high fever.

As we left the grave and prepared to return to the house, I reeled. Gibbs, the landlord, put his arm round me to steady me.

"Come, hold up," he said, not unkindly. "Bite on the bullet, my lad. We shall have to doctor you next if this is the way you are going on."

I felt too ill to reply, so I held my tongue and concentrated all my energies on the difficult task of walking home. When I reached the house I was put to bed, and Gibbs and his slatternly wife took it in turns to wait upon me. That night I lost consciousness, and remember nothing further of what happened until I came to my senses, in the same room and bed which had been occupied by Ben, some three weeks later. I was so weak then that I felt more of a desire to die and be done with it, than to continue the fight for existence. But my constitution was an extraordinary one, I suppose, for little by little I regained my strength, until, at the end of six weeks, I was able to leave my bed and hobble into the verandah. All this time the story of Ben's mine had been simmering in my brain. The chart he had given me lay where I had placed it before I was taken ill, namely, in my shirt pocket, and one morning I took it out and studied it carefully. What was it worth? Millions or nothing? But that was a question for

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the future to decide.

Before putting it back into its hiding place I turned it over and glanced at the back. To my surprise there was a large blot there that I felt prepared to swear had not been upon it when Ben had given it to me. The idea disquieted me exceedingly. I cudgelled my brains to find some explanation for it, but in vain. One thought made me gasp with fright. Had it been abstracted from my pocket during my illness? If this were so I might be forestalled. I consoled myself, however, with the reflection that, even if it had been examined by strangers, no harm would be done, for beyond the bare points of the compass it contained no description of the place, or where it was situated; only the plan of a creek, a dotted line running five hundred paces north–west and a black spot indicating a blasted gum tree. As Ben had given me my directions in a whisper, I was convinced in my own mind that it was quite impossible for anyone else to share my secret.

A week later I settled my account with Gibbs, and having purchased sufficient stores from him to carry me on my way, saddled my horses and set off across country for the Boolga Range. I was still weak, but my strength was daily coming back to me. By the time I reached my destination I felt I should be fit for anything. It was a long and wearisome journey, and it was not until I had been a month on the road that I sighted the range some fifty miles or so ahead of me. The day following I camped about ten miles due north of it, and had the satisfaction of knowing that next morning, all being well, I should be at my destination. By this time the idea of the mine, and the possibility of the riches that awaited me, had grown upon me to such an extent that I could think of nothing else. It occupied my waking thoughts, and was the continual subject of my dreams by night. A thousand times or more, as I made my way south, I planned what I would do with my vast wealth when I should have obtained it, and to such a pitch did this notion at last bring me that the vaguest thought that my journey might after all be fruitless hurt me like positive pain.

That night's camp, so short a distance from my Eldorado, was an extraordinary one. My anxiety was so great that I could not sleep, but spent the greater part of the night tramping about near my fire, watching the eastern heavens and wishing for day. As soon as the first sign of light was in the sky I ran up my horses, saddled them, and without waiting to cook a breakfast, set off for the hills which I could see rising like a faint blue cloud above the tree tops to the south. Little more than half–an–hour's ride from my camp brought me to the creek, which I followed to the spot indicated on the chart. My horses would not travel fast enough to keep pace with my impatience. My heart beat so furiously that I felt as if I should choke, and when I found the course of the stream trending off in a south–easterly direction, I felt as if another hour's suspense must inevitably terminate my existence.

Ahead of me I could see the top of the range rising quite distinctly above the timber, and every moment I expected to burst upon the plain which Ben had described to me. When I did, I almost fell from my saddle in sheer terror. The plain was certainly there, the trend of the river, the rocks and the hillside were just as they had been described to me, but there was one vital difference—the whole place was covered with tents, and alive with men. *The field had been discovered, and now, in all human probability, my claim was gone.* The very thought shook me like the ague. Like a madman I pressed my heels into my horse's sides, crossed the creek and began to climb the hill. Pegged–out claims and a thousand miners, busy as ants in an ant heap, surrounded me on every side. I estimated my five hundred paces from the rocks on the creek bank, and pushed on until I had the blasted gum, mentioned on the chart, bearing due south. Hereabouts, to my despair, the claims were even thicker than before—not an inch of ground was left unoccupied.

Suddenly, straight before me, from a shaft head on the exact spot described by Ben, appeared the face of a man I should have known anywhere in the world—it was the face of my old enemy Bertrand. Directly I saw it the whole miserable truth dawned upon me, and I understood as clearly as daylight how I had been duped.

Springing from my saddle and leaving my animals to stray where they would, I dashed across the intervening space and caught him just as he emerged from the shaft. He recognised me instantly, and turned as pale as death.

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In my rage I could have strangled him where he stood, as easily as I would have done a chicken.

"Thief and murderer," I cried, beside myself with rage and not heeding who might be standing by. "Give up the mine you have stolen from me. Give up the mine, or, as I live, I'll kill you."

He could not answer, for the reason that my grip upon his throat was throttling him. But the noise he made brought his men to his assistance. By main force they dragged me off, almost foaming at the mouth. For the time being I was a maniac, unconscious of everything save that I wanted to kill the man who had stolen from me the one great chance of my life.

"Come, come, young fellow, easy does it," cried an old miner, who had come up with, the crowd to enquire the reason of the excitement. "What's all this about? What has he done to you?"

Without a second's thought I sprang upon a barrel and addressed them. Speaking with all the eloquence at my command, I first asked them if there was anyone present who remembered me. There was a dead silence for nearly a minute, then a burly miner standing at the back of the crowd shouted that he did. He had worked a claim next door to mine at Banyan Creek, he said, and was prepared to swear to my identity whenever I might wish him to do so. I asked him if he could tell me the name of my partner on that field, and he instantly answered "Old Ben Garman." My identity and my friendship with Ben having been thus established, I described Ben's arrival at Markapurlie, and Bartrand's treatment of us both. I went on to tell them how I had nursed the old man until he died, and how on his deathbed he had told me of the rich find he had made in the Boolga Ranges. I gave the exact distances, and flourished the chart before their faces so that all might see it. I next described Gibbs as one of Bartrand's tools, and commented upon the ink-stain, on the back of the plan which had aroused my curiosity after my illness. This done, I openly taxed Bartrand with having stolen my secret, and dared him to deny it. As if in confirmation of my accusation, it was then remembered by those present that he had been the first man upon the field, and, moreover, that he had settled on the exact spot marked upon my plan. After this, the crowd began to imagine that there might really be something in the charge I had brought against the fellow. Bartrand, I discovered later, had followed his old Queensland tactics, and by his bullying had made himself objectionable upon the field. For this reason the miners were not prejudiced in his favour.

In the middle of our dispute, and just at the moment when ominous cries of "Lynch him" were beginning to go up, there was a commotion behind us, and presently the Commissioner, accompanied by an escort of troopers, put in an appearance, and enquired the reason of the crowd. Having been informed, the great man beckoned me to him and led me down the hill to the tent, which at that time was used as a Court House. Here I was confronted with Bartrand, and ordered to tell my tale. I did so, making the most I could of the facts at my disposal. The Commissioner listened attentively, and when I had finished turned to Bartrand.

"Where did you receive the information which led you to make your way to this particular spot?" he asked.

"From the same person who gave this man his," coolly replied Bartrand. "If Mr. Pennethorne had given me an opportunity, I would willingly have made this explanation earlier. But on the hill yonder he did all the talking, and I was permitted no chance to get in a word."

"You mean to say then," said the Commissioner in his grave, matter-of-fact way, "that this Ben Garman supplied you with the information that led you to this spot—prior to seeing Mr. Pennethorne."

"That is exactly what I *do* mean," replied Bartrand quickly. "Mr. Pennethorne, who at that time was in my employment as storekeeper upon Markapurlie Station, was out at one of the boundary riders' huts distributing rations when Garman arrived. The latter was feeling very ill, and not knowing how long he might be able to get about, was most anxious to find sufficient capital to test this mine without delay. After enquiry I agreed to invest the money he required, and we had just settled the matter in amicable fashion when he fell upon the ground in a

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dead faint. Almost at the same instant Mr. Pennethorne put in an appearance and behaved in a most unseemly manner. Unless his motives are revenge, I cannot conceive, your worship, why I should have been set upon in this fashion."

The Commissioner turned to me.

"What have you to say to this?" he asked.

"Only that he lies," I answered furiously. "He lies in every particular. He has been my enemy from the very first moment I set eyes upon him, and I feel as certain as that I am standing before you now, that Ben Garman did not reveal to him his secret. I nursed the old man on his deathbed, and if he had confided his secret to any one he would have been certain to tell me. But he impressed upon me the fact that he had not done so. When he was dead I became seriously ill in my turn, and the information that led to this man's taking up the claim was stolen from me, I feel convinced, while I was in my delirium. The man is a bully and a liar, and not satisfied with that record, he has made himself a thief."

"Hush, hush, my man," said the Commissioner, soothingly. "You must not talk in that way here. Now be off, both of you, let me hear of no quarrelling, and to-morrow I will give my decision."

We bowed and left him, each hating the other like poison, as you may be sure.

Next morning a trooper discovered me camped by the Creek, and conducted me to the Commissioner's presence. I found him alone, and when I was ushered in he asked me to sit down.

"Mr. Pennethorne," said he, when the trooper had departed, "I have sent for you to talk to you about the charge you have brought against the proprietor of the 'Wheel of Fortune' mine on the hillside yonder. After mature consideration, I'm afraid I cannot further consider your case. You must see for yourself that you have nothing at all to substantiate the charge you make beyond your own bald assertion. If, as you say, you have been swindled, yours is indeed a stroke of bad luck, for the mine is a magnificent property; but if, on the other hand—as I must perforce believe, since he was first upon the field—Bartrand's statement is a true one, then I can only think you have acted most unwisely in behaving as you have done. If you will be guided by me, you will let the matter drop. Personally I do not see that you can do anything else. Bartrand evidently received the news before you did, and, as I said just now, in proof of that we have the fact that he was first on the field. There is no gainsaying that."

"But I was ill and could not come," I burst out. "I tell you he stole from me the information that enabled him to get here at all."

"Pardon me, I do not know that. And now it only remains for me to ask you to remember that we can have no disturbance here."

"I will make no disturbance," I answered. "You need have no fear of that. If I cannot get possession of my property by fair means I shall try elsewhere."

"That does not concern me," he replied. "Only, I think on the evidence you have at present in your possession you'll be wasting your time and your money. By the way, your name is Gilbert Pennethorne, is it not?"

"Yes," I said, without much interest, "and much good it has ever done me."

"I ask the question because there's an advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* which seems to be addressed to you. Here it is!"

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He took up a paper and pointed to a few lines in the "agony" column. When he handed it to me I read the following:—

"If Gilbert Pennethorne, third son of the late Sir Anthony William Pennethorne, Bart., of Polton—Penna, in the County of Cornwall, England, at present believed to be resident in Australia, will apply at the office of Messrs. Grey and Dawkett, solicitors, Maoquarie Street, Sydney, he will hear of something to his advantage."

I looked at the paper in a dazed sort of fashion, and then, having thanked the Commissioner for his kindness, withdrew. In less than two hours I was on my way to Sydney to interview Messrs. Grey and Dawkett. On arriving I discovered their office, and when I had established my identity, learned from them that my father had died suddenly while out hunting, six months before, and that by his will I had benefited to the extent of five thousand pounds sterling.

Three days later the excitement and bitter disappointment through which I had lately passed brought on a relapse of my old illness, and for nearly a fortnight I hovered between life and death in the Sydney Hospital. When I left that charitable institution it was to learn that Bartrand was the sole possessor of what was considered the richest gold mine in the world, and that he, after putting it into the hands of reliable officers, had left Australia for London.

As soon as I was quite strong again I packed up my traps, and, with the lust of murder in my heart, booked a passage in a P. and O. liner, and followed him.

CHAPTER I. ENGLAND ONCE MORE.

WHEN I reached England, the icy hand of winter was upon the land. The streets were banked feet high with snow, and the Thames at London Bridge was nothing but a mass of floating ice upon which an active man could have passed from shore to shore. Poor homeless wretches were to be seen sheltering themselves in every nook and cranny, and the morning papers teemed with gruesome descriptions of dead bodies found in drifts, of damage done to property, and of trains delayed and snowed up in every conceivable part of the country. Such a winter had not been experienced for years, and when I arrived and realised what it meant for myself, I could not but comment on my madness in having left an Australian summer to participate in such a direful state of things.

Immediately on arrival I made my way to Blankerton's Hotel, off the Strand, and installed myself there. It was a nice, quiet place, and suited me admirably. The voyage home from Australia had done me a world of good—that is to say as far as my bodily health was concerned—but it was doubtful whether it had relieved my brain of any of the pressure recent events in Australia had placed upon it. Though nearly three months had elapsed since my terrible disappointment in the Boolga Ranges, I had not been able to reconcile myself to it; and as the monotonous existence on board ship allowed me more leisure, it probably induced me to brood upon it more than I should otherwise have done. At any rate, my first thought on reaching London was that I was in the same City with my enemy, and my second to wonder how I could best get even with him. All day and all night this idea held possession of my brain. I could think of nothing but my hatred of the man, and as often as I saw his name mentioned in the columns of the Press, the more vehement my desire to punish him became. Looking back on it now it seems to me that *I* could not have been quite right in my head at that time, though to all intents and purposes I was as rational a being as ever stepped in shoe leather. In proof of what I mean, I can remember, times out of number, talking sensibly and calmly enough in the smoking room, and then going upstairs to my bedroom and leaning out of my window, from which a glimpse of the Strand was obtainable, to watch the constant stream of passers by and to wonder if Bartrand were among the number. I would imagine myself meeting him and enticing him into one of those dark passages leading from the gas-lit thoroughfare, and then, when I had revealed my identity, drawing a knife from my sleeve and stabbing him to his treacherous heart. On another occasion I spent hours concocting a most ingenious plan for luring him on to the Embankment late at night, and arranging

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that my steps to my hotel, feeling about as miserable as it would be possible for a man to be. What did life contain for me now? I asked myself this question for the hundredth time, as I walked up the sombre street; and the answer was, *Nothing*—absolutely nothing. By judiciously investing the amount I had inherited under my father's will I had secured to myself an income approaching two hundred pounds a year, but beyond that I had not a penny in the world. I had been sick to death of Australia for some years before I had thought of leaving it, and my last great disappointment had not furnished me with any desire to return to it. On the other hand I had seen too much of the world to be able to settle down to an office life in England, and my enfeebled constitution, even had I desired to do so, would have effectively debarred me from enlisting in the Army. What, therefore, was to become of me—for I could not entertain the prospect of settling down to a sort of vegetable existence on my small income—I could not see. "Oh, if only I had not been taken ill after Ben's death," I said to myself again and again; "what might I not then have done?" As it was, that scoundrel Bartrand had made millions out of what was really my property, and as a result I was a genteel pauper without a hope of any sort in the world. As the recollection of my disappointment came into my mind, I ground my teeth and cursed him; and for the rest of my walk occupied myself thinking of the different ways in which I might compass his destruction, and at the same time hating myself for lacking the necessary pluck to put any one of them into execution.

As I reached the entrance to my hotel a paper boy came round the corner crying his wares.

"'Ere yer are, sir; 'orrible murder in the West End," he said, running to meet me; and, wanting something to occupy me until breakfast should be ready, I bought a copy and went in and seated myself by the hall fire to read it. On the second page was a column with the following headline, in large type:—

"SHOCKING TRAGEDY IN THE WEST END." Feeling in the humour for this sort of literature, I began to read. The details were as follows:—

"It is our unfortunate duty to convey to the world this morning the details of a ghastly tragedy which occurred last night in the West End. The victim was Major-General Charles Brackington, the well-known M.P. for Pollingworth, whose speech on the Short Service Extension Bill only last week created such a sensation among military men. So far the whole affair is shrouded in mystery, but, it is believed, the police are in possession of a clue which will ultimately assist them in their identification of the assassin. From inquiries made we learn that Major-General Brackington last night visited the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in company with his wife and daughter, and having escorted them to Chester Square, where his residence is situated, drove back to the Veteran Club, of which he is one of the oldest and most distinguished members. There he remained in conversation with some brother officers until a quarter past twelve o'clock, when he hailed a passing hansom and bade the man drive him home. This order was given in the hearing of one of the Club servants, whose evidence should prove of importance later on. From the time he left the Club until half-past one o'clock nothing more was seen of the unfortunate gentleman. Then Police-Sergeant Maccinochie, while passing along Piccadilly, discovered a man lying in the centre of the road almost opposite the gates of the Royal Academy. Calling the constable on the beat to his assistance, he carried the body to the nearest gas lamp and examined it. To his horror he recognised Major-General Brackington, with whose features he was well acquainted. Life, however, was extinct. Though convinced of this fact, he nevertheless obtained a cab and drove straightway to Charing Cross Hospital, where his suspicions were confirmed. One singular circumstance was then discovered—with the exception of the left eyebrow, which had been cut completely away, evidently with some exceedingly sharp instrument, there was not a wound of any sort or description upon the body. Death, so the medical authorities asserted, had been caused by an overdose of some anaesthetic, though how administered it was impossible to say. The police are now engaged endeavouring to discover the cabman, whom it is stated, the Club servant feels sure he can identify."

With a feeling of interest, for which I could not at all account, seeing that both the Victim and the cabman, whom the police seemed determined to associate with the crime, were quite unknown to me, I re-read the paragraph, and then went in to breakfast. While I was eating I turned the page of the paper, and propping it against the cruet stand, scanned the fashionable intelligence. Sandwiched in between the news of the betrothal of the eldest son of a

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duke, and the demise of a well-known actress, was a paragraph which stirred me to the depths of my being. It ran as follows:—

"It is stated on reliable authority that Mr. Richard Bartrand, the well-known Australian millionaire, has purchased from the executors of the late Earl of Mount Chennington the magnificent property known as Chennington Castle in Shropshire, including several farms, with excellent fishing and shooting."

I crushed the paper up and threw it angrily away from me. So he was going to pose as a county magnate, was he—this swindler and liar!—and upon the wealth he has filched from me? If he had been before me then, I think I could have found it in my heart to kill him where he stood, regardless of the consequences.

After breakfast I went for another walk, this time in a westerly direction. As I passed along the crowded pavements I thought of the bad luck which had attended me all my life. From the moment I entered the world nothing seemed to have prospered that I had taken in hand. As a boy I was notorious for my ill-luck at games; as a man good fortune was always conspicuously absent from my business ventures; and when at last a chance for making up for it did come in my way, success was stolen from me just as I was about to grasp it.

Turning into Pall Mall, I made my way in the direction of St. James's Street, intending to turn thence into Piccadilly. As I passed the Minerva Club the door swung open, and to my astonishment my eldest brother, who had succeeded to the baronetcy and estates on my father's death, came down the steps. That he recognised me there could be no doubt. He could not have helped seeing me even if he had wished to do so, and for a moment, I felt certain, he did not know what to do. He and I had never been on good terms, and when I realised that, in spite of my many years' absence from home, he was not inclined to offer me a welcome, I made as if I would pass on. He, however, hastened after me, and caught me before I could turn the corner.

"Gilbert," he said, holding out his hand, but speaking without either emotion or surprise, "this is very unexpected. I had no notion you were in England. How long is it since you arrived?"

"I reached London yesterday," I answered, with a corresponding coolness, as I took his hand. For, as I have said, there was that in his face which betrayed no pleasure at seeing me.

He was silent for half a minute or so, and I could see that he was wondering how he could best get rid of me.

"You have heard of our father's death, I suppose?" he said at last.

"I learnt the news in Sydney," I replied. "I have also received the five thousand pounds he left me."

He made no comment upon the smallness of the amount in proportion to the large sums received by himself and the rest of the family, nor did he refer in any other way to our parent's decease. Any one watching us might have been excused had they taken us for casual acquaintances, so cool and distant were we with one another. Presently I enquired, for politeness sake, after his wife, who was the daughter of the Marquis of Belgravia, and whom I had, so far, never seen.

"Ethelberta unfortunately is not very well at present," he answered. "Sir James Peckleton has ordered her complete rest and quiet, and I regret, for that reason, I shall not be able to see as much of you as I otherwise should have hoped to do. Is it your intention to remain very long in England?"

"I have no notion," I replied, truthfully. "I maybe here a week—a year—or for the rest of my life. But you need not be afraid, I shall not force my society upon you. From your cordial welcome home, I gather that the less you see of me the more you will appreciate the relationship we bear to one another. Good morning."

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Without more words I turned upon my heel and strolled on down the street, leaving him looking very uncomfortable upon the pavement. There and then I registered a vow that, come what might, I would have no more to do with my own family.

Leaving Pall Mall behind me, I turned up St. James's Street and made my way into Piccadilly. In spite of the slippery roads, the streets were well filled with carriages, and almost opposite Burlington House I noticed a stylish brougham drawn up beside the footpath. Just as I reached it the owner left the shop before which it was standing, and crossed the pavement towards it. Notwithstanding the expensive fur coat he wore, the highly polished top hat, and his stylish appearance generally, I knew him at once for *Bartrand, my greatest enemy on earth*. He did not see me, for which I could not help feeling thankful; but I had seen him, and the remembrance of his face haunted me for the rest of my walk. The brougham, the horses, even the obsequious servants, should have been mine. I was the just, lawful owner of them all.

After dinner that evening I was sitting in the smoking room looking into the fire and, as usual, brooding over my unfortunate career, when an elderly gentleman, seated in an armchair opposite me, laid his paper on his knee and addressed me.

"It's a very strange thing about these murders," he said, shaking his head. "I don't understand it at all. Major-General Brackington last night, and now Lord Beryworth this morning."

"Do you mean to say there has been another murder of the same kind to-day?" I enquired, with a little shudder as I thought how nearly his subject coincided with the idea in my own head.

"I do," he answered. "The facts of the case are as follows:--At eleven o'clock this morning the peer in question, who, you must remember, was for many years Governor of one of our Australian capitals, walked down the Strand in company with the Duke of Garth and Sir Charles Mandervan. Beaching Norfolk Street he bade his friends 'good-bye,' and left them. From that time until a quarter past one o'clock, when some children went in to play in Dahlia Court, Camden Town, and found the body of an elderly gentleman lying upon the ground in a peculiar position, he was not seen again. Frightened at their discovery, the youngsters ran out and informed the policeman on the beat, who returned with them to the spot indicated. When he got there he discovered that life had been extinct for some time."

"But what reason have the authorities for connecting this case with that of Major - General Braekington?"

"Well, in the first place, on account of the similarity in the victims' ranks; and in the second, because the same extraordinary anaesthetic seems to have been the agent in both cases; and thirdly, for the reason that the same peculiar mutilation was practised. When Lord Beryworth was found, his left eyebrow had been cut completely away. Strange, is it not?"

"Horrible, I call it," I answered with a shudder. "It is to be hoped the police will soon run the murderer to earth."

If I had only known what I do now I wonder if I should have uttered that sentiment with so much fervour? I very much doubt it.

The following evening, for some reason or another, certainly not any desire for enjoyment, I visited a theatre. The name or nature of the piece performed I cannot now remember. I only know that I sat in the pit, in the front row, somewhere about the middle, and that I was so hemmed in by the tune the curtain went up, that I could not move hand or foot. After the little introductory piece was finished the more expensive parts of the house began to fill, and I watched with a bitter sort of envy the gaiety and enjoyment of those before me. My own life seemed one perpetually unpleasant dream, in which I had to watch the happiness of the world and yet take no share in it myself. But unhappy as I thought myself then, my cup of sorrow was as yet far from being full. Fate had arranged

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that it should be filled to overflowing, and that I should drink it to the very dregs.

Five minutes before the curtain rose on the play of the evening, there was a stir in one of the principal boxes on the prompt side of the side of the house, and a moment later two ladies and three gentlemen entered. "Who the ladies, and two of the gentlemen were I had no notion; the third man, however, I had no difficulty in recognising, he was Bartrand. As I saw him a tremour ran through me, and every inch of my body quivered under the intensity of my emotion. For the rest of the evening I paid no attention to the play, but sat watching my enemy, and writhing with fury every time he stooped to speak to those with whom he sat, or to glance superciliously round the house. On his shirt front he wore an enormous diamond, which sparkled and glittered like an evil eye. So much did it fascinate me that I could not withdraw my eyes from it, and as I watched I felt my hands twitching to be about its owner's throat.

When the play came to an end, and the audience began to file out of the theatre into the street, I hastened to the front to see my enemy emerge. He was standing on the steps, with his friends, putting on his gloves, while he waited for his carriage to come up. I remained in the crowd, and watched him as a cat watches a bird. Presently a magnificent landau, drawn by the same beautiful pair of thoroughbred horses I had seen in the morning, drew up before the portico. The footman opened the door, and the man I hated with such a deadly fervour escorted his friends across the pavement and, having placed them inside, got in himself. As the vehicle rolled away the bitterest curse my brain could frame followed it. Oh, if only I could have found some way of revenging myself upon him, how gladly I would have seized upon it.

Leaving the theatre I strolled down the street, not caring very much where I went. A little snow was falling, and the air was bitterly cold. I passed along the Strand, and not feeling at all like bed, turned off to my left hand, and made my way towards Oxford Street. I was still thinking of Bartrand, and it seemed to me that, as I thought, my hatred became more and more intense. The very idea of living in the same city with him, of breathing the same air, of seeing the same sights and meeting the same people was hideously repulsive to me. *I* wanted him out of the world, but I wanted to do the deed myself, to punish him with my own hand; I wanted to see him lying before me with his sightless eyes turned up to the skies, and his blood crimsoning the snow, and to be able to assure myself that at last he was dead, and that I, the man he had wronged, had killed him. What would it matter? Supposing I were hung for his murder! To have punished him would surely have been worth that. At any rate I should have been content.

When I reached Oxford Street I again turned to my left hand, and walked along the pavement as far as the Tottenham Court Road, thence down the Charing Cross Road into Shaftesbury Avenue. By this time the snow was falling thick and fast. Poor homeless wretches were crouched in every sheltered corner, and once a tall man, thin and ragged as a scarecrow, rose from a doorway, where he had been huddled up beside a woman, and hurried after me.

"Kind gentleman," he said in a voice that at any other time could not have failed to touch my heart, "for the love of God, I implore you to help me. I am starving, and so is my wife in the doorway yonder. We are dying of cold and hunger. We have not touched bite or sup for nearly forty-eight hours, and unless you can spare us the price of a night's lodging and a little food I assure you she will not see morning."

I stopped and faced him.

"What will you do for it?" I asked, with a note in my voice that frightened even myself. "I must have a bargain. If I give you money, what will you do for it?"

"Anything," the poor wretch replied. "Give me money, and I swear I will do anything you may like to ask me."

"Anything?" I cried. "That is a large word. Will you commit murder?"

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I looked fixedly at him, and under the intensity of my gaze he half shrunk away from me.

"Murder?" he echoed faintly.

"Murder? Yes, murder," I cried, hysterically. "I want murder done. Nothing else will satisfy me. Kill me the man I'll show you, and you shall have all you want. Are you prepared to do so much to save your life?"

He wrung his hands and moaned. Then he pulled himself together.

"Yes, I'll do anything," he answered hoarsely. ¹¹ Give me the money; let me have food first."

As he spoke his wife rose from the doorstep, and came swiftly across the snow towards us. She must have been a fine-looking woman in her day; now her face, with its ghastly, lead-coloured complexion and dark, staring eyes was indescribably horrible. On her head she wore the ruins of a fashionable bonnet.

"Come away!" she cried, seizing the man fiercely by the arm. "Can't you see that you are talking to the Devil, and that he's luring your soul to hell? Come away, my husband, I say, and leave him! If we are to die, let us do it here in the clean snow like honest folk, not on the scaffold with ropes round our necks. There is your answer, Devil!"

As she said this she raised her right hand and struck me a blow full and fair upon the mouth. I felt the blood trickle down my lip.

"Take that, Devil," she shouted; "and now take your temptations elsewhere, for you've met your match here."

As if I were really the person she alluded to, I picked up my heels and ran down the street as hard as I could go, not heeding where I went, but only conscious that at last I had spoken my evil thoughts aloud. Was I awake, or was I dreaming? It all seemed like some horrible nightmare, and yet I could feel the hard pavement under my feet, and my face was cold as ice under the cutting wind.

Just as I reached Piccadilly Circus a clock somewhere in the neighbourhood struck *one*. Then it dawned upon me that I had been walking for two hours. I stood for a moment by the big fountain, and then crossed the road, and was about to make my way down the continuation of Regent Street into Waterloo Place, when I heard the shrill sound of a policeman's whistle. Almost immediately I saw an officer on the other side of the road dash down the pavement. I followed him, intent upon finding out what had occasioned the call for assistance. Bound into Jermyn Street sped the man ahead of me, and close at his heels I followed. For something like three minutes we continued our headlong career, and it was not until we had reached Bury Street that we sounded a halt. Here we discovered a group of men standing on the pavement watching another man, who was kneeling beside a body upon the ground. He was examining it with the assistance of his lantern.

"What's the matter, mate?" inquired the officer whom I had followed from Piccadilly. "What have you got there?"

"A chap I found lying in the road yonder," replied the policeman upon his knees. "Have a look at him, and then be off for a stretcher. I fancy he's dead; but, anyway, we'd best get him to the hospital as soon as maybe."

My guide knelt down, and turned his light full upon the victim's face. I peered over his shoulder in company with the other bystanders. The face we saw before us was the countenance of a gentleman, and also of a well-to-do member of society. He was clothed in evening dress, over which he wore a heavy and expensive fur coat. An opera hat lay in the gutter, where it had probably been blown by the wind, and an umbrella marked the spot where the body had been found in the centre of the street. As far as could be gathered without examining it, there was no sign of blood about the corpse; one thing, however, was painfully evident—*the left eyebrow had been severed from the face in toto*. From the cleanness of the cut the operation must have been performed with an exceedingly

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sharp instrument.

A more weird and ghastly sight than that snow-covered pavement, with the flakes falling thick and fast upon it, the greasy road, the oilskinned policemen, the curious bystanders, and the silent figure on the ground, could scarcely be imagined. I watched until the man I had followed returned with an ambulance stretcher, and then accompanied the mournful *cortege* a hundred yards or so on its way to the hospital. Then, being tired of the matter, I branched off the track, and prepared to make my way back to my hotel as fast as my legs would take me.

My thoughts were oppressed with what I had seen. There was a grim fascination about the recollection of the incident that haunted me continually, and which I could not dispel, try how I would. I pictured Bartrand lying in the snow exactly as I had seen the other, and fancied myself coming up and finding him. At that moment I was passing Charing Cross Railway Station. With the exception of a policeman sauntering slowly along on the other side of the street, a drunken man staggering in the road, and a hansom cab approaching us from Trafalgar Square, I had the street to myself. London slept while the snow fell, and murder was being done in her public thoroughfares. The hansom came closer, and for some inscrutable reason I found myself beginning to take a personal interest in it. This interest became even greater when, with a spluttering and sliding of feet, the horse came to a sudden standstill alongside the footpath where I stood. Next moment a man attired in a thick cloak threw open the apron and sprang out.

"Mr. Pennethorne, I believe?" he said, stopping me, and at the same time raising his hat.

"That is my name," I answered shortly, wondering how he knew me and what on earth he wanted. "What can I do for you?"

He signed to his driver to go, and then, turning to me, said, at the same time placing his gloved hand upon my arm in a confidential way:

"I am charmed to make your acquaintance. May I have the pleasure of walking a little way with you? I should be glad of your society, and I can then tell you my business."

His voice was soft and musical, and he spoke with a peculiar languor that was not without its charm. But as I could not understand what he wanted with me, I put the question to him as plainly as I could without being absolutely rude, and awaited his answer. He gave utterance to a queer little laugh before he replied:

"I want the pleasure of your company at supper for one thing," he said. "And I want to be allowed to help you in a certain matter in which you are vitally interested, for another. The two taken together should, I think, induce you to give me your attention."

"But I don't know you," I blurted out. "To the best of my belief I have never set eyes on you before. What business, therefore, can you have with me?"

"You shall know all in good time," he answered. "In the meantime let me introduce myself. My name is Nikola. I am a doctor by profession, a scientist by choice. I have few friends in London, but those I have are the best that a man could desire. I spend my life in the way that pleases me most; that is to say, in the study of human nature. I have been watching you since you arrived in England, and have come to the conclusion that you are a man after my own heart. If you will sup with me as I propose, I don't doubt but that we shall agree admirably, and what is more to the point, perhaps, we shall be able to do each other services of inestimable value. I may say candidly that it lies in your power to furnish me with something I am in search of. I, on my part, will, in all probability, be able to put in your way what you most desire in the world."

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I stopped in my walk and faced him. Owing to the broad brim of his hat, and the high collar of his cape, I could scarcely see his face. But his eyes rivetted my attention at once.

"And that is?" I said.

"Revenge," he answered, simply. "Believe me, my dear Mr. Pennethorne, I am perfectly acquainted with your story. You have been wronged; you desire to avenge yourself upon your enemy. It is a very natural wish, and if you will sup with me as I propose, I don't doubt but that I can put the power you seek into your hands. Do you agree?"

All my scruples vanished before that magic word *revenge*, and, strange as it may seem, without more ado I consented to his proposal. He walked into the road and, taking a whistle from his pocket, blew three *staccato* notes upon it. A moment later the hansom from which he had jumped to accost me appeared round a corner and came rapidly towards us. When it pulled up at the kerb, and the apron had been opened, this peculiar individual invited me to take my place in it, which I immediately did. He followed my example, and sat down beside me, and then, without any direction to the driver, we set off up the street.

For upwards of half-an-hour we drove on without stopping, but in which direction we were proceeding I could not for the life of me discover. The wheels were rubber-tyred and made no noise upon the snow-strewn road; my companion scarcely spoke, and the only sound to be heard was the peculiar bumping noise made by the springs, the soft *pad-pad* of the horse's hoofs, and an occasional grunt of encouragement from the driver. At last it became evident that we were approaching our destination. The horse's pace slackened; I detected the sharp ring of his shoes on a paved crossing, and presently we passed under an archway and came to a standstill.

"Here we are at last, Mr. Pennethorne," said my mysterious conductor. "Allow me to lift the glass and open the apron."

He did so, and then we alighted. To my surprise we stood in a square courtyard, surrounded on all sides by lofty buildings. Behind the cab was a large archway, and at the further end of it the gate through which we had evidently entered. The houses were in total darkness, but the light of the cab lamps was sufficient to show me a door standing open on my left hand.

"I'm afraid you must be very cold, Mr. Pennethorne," said Nikola, for by that name I shall henceforth call him, as he alighted, "but if you will follow me I think I can promise that you shall soon be as warm as toast."

As he spoke he led the way across the courtyard towards the door I have just mentioned. When he reached it he struck a match and advanced into the building. The passage was a narrow one, and from its appearance, and that of the place generally, I surmised that the building had once been used as a factory of some kind. Half-way down the passage a narrow wooden staircase led up to the second floor, and in Indian file we ascended it. On reaching the first landing my guide opened a door which stood opposite him, and immediately a bright light illumined the passage.

"Enter, Mr. Pennethorne, and let me make you welcome to my poor abode," said Nikola, placing his hand upon my shoulder and gently pushing me before him.

I complied with his request, half expecting to find the room poorly furnished. To my surprise, however, it was as luxuriously appointed as any I had ever seen. At least a dozen valuable pictures—I presume they must have been valuable, though personally I know but little about such things—decorated the walls; a large and quaintly-carved cabinet stood in one corner and held a multitude of china vases, bowls, plates, and other knick-knacks; a massive oak sideboard occupied a space along one wall and supported a quantity of silver plate; while the corresponding space upon the opposite wall was filled by a bookcase reaching to within a few inches of the ceiling, and

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crammed with works of every sort and description. A heavy pile carpet, so soft that our movements made no sound upon it, covered the floor; luxurious chairs and couches were scattered about here and there, while in an alcove at the farther end was an ingenious apparatus for conducting chemical researches. Supper was laid on the table in the centre, and when we had warmed ourselves at the fire that glowed in the grate, we sat down to it. As if to add still further to my surprise, when the silver covers of the dishes were lifted, everything was found to be smoking hot. How this had been managed I could not tell, for our arrival at that particular moment could not have been foretold with any chance of certainty, and *I* had seen no servant enter the room. But I was very hungry, and as the supper before me was the best *I* had sat down to for years, you may suppose I was but little inclined to waste time on a matter of such trivial importance.

When we had finished and I had imbibed the better part of two bottles of Heidseck, which my host had assiduously pressed upon me, we left the table and ensconced ourselves in chairs on either side of the hearth. Then, for the first time, I was able to take thorough stock of my companion. He was a man of perhaps a little above middle height, broad shouldered, but slimly built. His elegant proportions, however, gave but a small idea of the enormous strength I afterwards discovered him to possess. His hair and eyes were black as night, his complexion was a dark olive hue, confirming that suspicion of foreign extraction which his name suggested, but of which his speech afforded no trace. He was attired in faultless evening dress, the dark colour of which heightened the extraordinary pallor of his complexion.

"You have a queer home here, Dr. Nikola!" I said, as I accepted the cheroot he offered me.

"Perhaps it is a little out of the common," he answered, with one of his queer smiles; "but then that is easily accounted for. Unlike the general run of human beings, I am not gregarious. In other words, I am very much averse to what is called the society of my fellow man; I prefer, under most circumstances, to live alone. At times, of course, that is not possible. But the idea of living in a flat, shall we say, with perhaps a couple of families above me, as many on either side, and the same number below; or in an hotel or a boarding-house, in which I am compelled to eat my meals in company with half-a-hundred total strangers, is absolutely repulsive to me. I cannot bear it, and therefore I choose my abode elsewhere. A private dwelling-house I might, of course, take, but that would necessitate servants and other incumbrances; this building suits my purposes admirably. As you may have noticed, it was once a boot and shoe factory; but after the proprietor committed suicide by cutting his throat—which, by the way, he did in this very room—the business failed; and until I fell across it, it was supposed to be haunted, and, in consequence, has remained untenanted."

"But do you mean to say you live here alone?" I enquired, surprised at the queerness of the idea.

"In a certain sense, yes—in another, no. That is, I have a deaf and dumb Chinese servant who attends to my simple wants, and a cat who for years has never left me."

"You surprise me more and more!"

"And why? Considering that I know China better than you know that part of London situated, shall we say, between Blackfriars Bridge and Charing Cross, and have spent many years of my life here, the first should not astonish you. And as I am warmly attached to my cat, who has accompanied me in all my wanderings about the globe, I cannot see that you should be surprised at the other. Perhaps you would like to see both?"

As may be supposed, I jumped eagerly at the opportunity; and upon my saying so, Nikola pressed a knob in the wall at his side. He had hardly taken his finger away before my ear detected the shuffling of feet in the passage outside. Next moment the door opened, and in walked the most hideous man I have ever yet beheld in my life. In Australia I had met many queer specimens of the Chinese race, but never one whose countenance approached in repulsiveness that of the man Nikola employed as his servant. In stature he was taller than his master, possibly a couple or three inches above six feet, and broad in proportion. His eyes squinted inwardly, his face was wrinkled

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and seamed in every direction, his nose had plainly been slit at some time or another, and I noticed that his left ear was missing from his head. He was dressed in his native costume, but when he turned round I noticed that his pigtail had been shorn off at the roots.

"You are evidently puzzled about something," said Nikola, who had been watching my face.

"I must confess I am," I answered. "It is this. If he is deaf and dumb, as you say, how did he hear the bell you rang, and also how do you communicate your orders to him?"

"This knob," replied Nikola, placing his finger on the bell-push, "releases a smaller shutter and reveals a disc that signifies that I desire his services. "When I wish to give him instructions I speak to him in his own language, and he answers it. It is very simple."

"But you said just now that he is deaf and dumb," I cried, thinking I had caught him in an equivocation. "If so, how can he hear or speak?"

"So he is," replied my host, looking at me as he spoke, with an amused smile upon his face. "Quite deaf and dumb."

"Then how can you make him hear. And how does he reply?"

"As I say, by word of mouth. Allow me to explain. You argue that because the poor fellow has no tongue wherewith to speak, and his ears are incapable of hearing what you say to him, that it is impossible for him to carry on a conversation. So far as your meaning goes, you are right. But you must remember that, while no sound can come from his lips, it is still possible for the words to be framed. In that case our eyes take the place of our ears, and thus the difficulty is solved. The principle is a simple one, and a visit to any modern deaf and dumb school in London will show you its efficacy. Surely you are not going to ask me to believe you have not heard of the system before?"

"Of course I have heard of it," I answered, "but in this case the circumstances are so different."

"Simply because the man is a Chinaman—that is all. If his skin were white instead of yellow, and he wore English dress and parted his hair in the middle, you would find nothing extraordinary in it. At any rate, perpetual silence on the part of a servant and physical inability to tittle-tattle of the affairs one would wish kept a secret, is a luxury few men can boast."

"I agree with you; but how did the poor fellow come to lose his faculties?"

"To let you into that secret would necessitate the narration of a long and, I fear to you, uninteresting story. Suffice that he was the confidential servant of the Viceroy of Kweichow until he was detected in an amiable plot to assassinate his master with poisoned rice. He was at once condemned to die by *ling-chi* or the death of a thousand cuts, but by the exercise of a little influence which, fortunately for him, I was able to bring to bear, I managed to get him off."

"I wonder you care to have a man capable of concocting such a plot about you," I said.

"And why? Because the poor devil desired to kill the man he hated, is it certain that he should wish to terminate the existence of his benefactor, for whom he has a great affection? Moreover, he is a really good cook, understands my likes and dislikes, never grumbles, and is quite conscious that if he left me he would never get another situation in the world. In the nineteenth century, when good servants are so difficult to procure, the man is worth a gold mine—a Wheel of Fortune, if you like."

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"You would argue, then," I said, disregarding the latter part of his speech, "that if a man hates another he is justified in endeavouring to rid the world of him?"

"Necessarily it must depend entirely on the circumstances of the case," replied Nikola, leaning back in his chair and steadfastly regarding me. "When a man attempts to do, or succeeds in doing, me an injury, I invariably repay him in his own coin. Presume, for instance, that a man were to rob you of what you loved best, and considered most worth having, in the world—the affection of your wife, shall we say?—in that case, if you were a man of spirit you would feel justified in meting out to him the punishment he deserved, either in the shape of a duel, or severe personal chastisement. If he shot at you in any country but England, you would shoot at him. Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth, was the old Hebrew law, and whatever may be said against it, fundamentally it was a just one."

I thought of Bartrand, and wished I could apply the principle to him.

"I fear, however," continued Nikola, after a moment's pause, "that in personal matters the men of the present day are not so brave as they once were. They shelter themselves too much behind the law of the land. A man slanders you; instead of thrashing him you bring an action against him for libel, and claim damages in money. A man runs away with your wife; you proclaim your shame in open court, and take gold from your enemy for the affront he has put upon your honour. If a man thrashes you in a public place, you don't strike him back; on the contrary, you consult your solicitor, and take your case before a magistrate, who binds him over to keep the peace. If, after all is said and done, you look closely into the matter, what is crime? A very pliable term, I fancy. For instance, a duke may commit an offence, and escape scot free, when, for the same thing, only under a different name, a costermonger would be sent to gaol for five years. And *vice versa*. A subaltern in a crack regiment may run up tailors' bills—or any others, for that matter—for several thousands of pounds and decamp without paying a halfpenny of the money, never having intended to do so from the very beginning, while if a chimney sweep were to purloin a bunch of radishes from a tray outside a greengrocer's window, he would probably be sent to gaol for three months. And yet both are stealing, though I must confess society regards them with very different eyes. Let clergymen and other righteous men say what they will, the world in its heart rather admires the man who has the pluck to swindle, but he must do so on a big scale, and he must do so successfully, or he must pay the penalty of failure. Your own case, with which, as I said earlier, I am quite familiar, is one in point. Everyone who has heard of it, and who knows anything of the man, feels certain that Bartrand stole from you the information which has made him the millionaire he is. But does it make any difference in the world's treatment of him? None whatever. And why? Because he swindled successfully. In the same way they regard you as a very poor sort of fellow for submitting to his injustice."

"Curse him!"

"Exactly. But, you see, the fact remains. Bartrand has a house in Park Lane and a castle in Shropshire. The Duke of Glendower dined with him the night before last, and one of the members of the Cabinet will do so on Saturday next. Yesterday he purchased a racing stable and a stud, for which he paid twenty thousand pounds cash; while I am told that next year he intends building a yacht that shall be the finest craft of her class in British waters. It is settled that he is to be presented at the next levee, and already he is in the first swim of the fashionable world. If he can only win the Derby this year, there is nothing he might not aspire to. In ten years, if his money lasts and he is still alive, he will be a peer of the realm and founding a new family."

"He *must not* live as long. Oh, if I could only meet him face to face and repay him for his treachery!"

"And why not? What is there to prevent you? You can walk to his house any morning and ask to see him. If you give the butler a fictitious name and a tip he will admit you. Then, when you get into the library, you can state your grievance and, having done so, shoot him dead."

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I uttered a little involuntary cry of anger. Deeply as I hated the man, it was not possible for me seriously to contemplate murdering him in cold blood. Besides—no, no; such a scheme could not be thought of for a moment.

"You don't like the idea?" said Nikola, with that easy *nonchalance* which characterised him. "Well, I don't wonder at it; it's *bizarre*, to say the least of it. You would probably be caught and hanged, and hanging is an inartistic termination to the career of even an unsuccessful man. Besides, in that case, *you* would have lost your money and your life; he only his life, so that the balance would still be in his favour. No; what you want is something a little more subtle, a little more artistic. You want a scheme that will enable you to put him out of the way, and, at the same time, one that will place you in possession of the money that is really yours. Therefore it must be done without any *esclandre*. Now I don't doubt you would be surprised if I were to tell you that in the event of his death you would find yourself his sole heir."

"His sole heir?" I cried. "You must be mad to say such a thing."

"With due respect, no more mad than you are," said this extraordinary man. I have seen the will for myself—never mind how I managed it—and I know that what I say is correct. After all, it is very feasible. The man, for the reason that he has wronged you, hates you like poison, and while he lives you may be sure you will never see a penny of his fortune. But he is also superstitious, and believing, as he does, that he stands a chance of eternal punishment for swindling you as he did, he is going to endeavour to obtain a mitigation of his sentence by leaving you at his death what he has not been able to spend during his lifetime. If you die first, so much the worse for him; but I imagine he is willing to risk that."

I rose from my chair, this time thoroughly angered.

"Dr. Nikola," I said, "this is a subject upon which I feel very deeply. I have no desire to jest about it."

"I am not jesting, my friend, I assure you," returned Nikola, and, as he said so, he went to an *escritoire* in the corner. "In proof that what I say is the truth, here is a rough draft of his will, made yesterday. You are at liberty to peruse it if you care to do so, and as you are familiar with his writing, you can judge for yourself of its worth."

I took the paper from his hand and sat down with it in my chair again. It certainly was what he had described, and in it I was named as sole and undivided heir to all his vast wealth. As I read, my anger rose higher and higher. From this paper it was evident that the man knew he had swindled me, and it was also apparent that he was resolved to enjoy the fruits of his villainy throughout his life, and to leave me what he could not use when he died, and when I would, in all human probability, be too old to enjoy it. I glanced at the paper again, and then handed it back to Nikola, and waited for him to speak. He watched me attentively for a few seconds, and then said in a voice so soft and low that I could scarcely hear it—

"You Bee, if Bartrand were to be removed after he had signed that you would benefit at once."

I did not answer. Nikola waited for a few moments and then continued in the same low tone—

"You hate the man. He has wronged you deeply. He stole your secret while you were not in a position to defend yourself, and I think he would have killed you had he dared to do so. Now he is enjoying the fortune which should be yours. He is one of the richest men in the world—with your money. He has made himself a name in England, even in this short space of time—with your money. He is already a patron of sport, of the drama, and of art of every sort—with your money. If you attempt to dispute his possession, he will crush you like a worm. Now the question for your consideration is: Do you hate him sufficiently to take advantage of an opportunity to kill him if one should come in your way?"

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He had roused my hate to such a pitch that before I could control myself I had hissed out "Yes!" He heard it, and when I was about to protest that I did not mean it, held up his hand to me to be silent.

"Listen to me," he said. "I tell you candidly that it is in my power to help you. If you really wish to rid yourself of this man, I can arrange it for you in such a way that it will be impossible for any one to suspect you. The chance of detection is absolutely *nil*. You will be as safe from the law as you are at this minute. And remember this, when you have rid yourself of him, his wealth will be yours to enjoy just as you please. Think of his money—think of the power it gives, think of the delight of knowing that you have punished the man who has wronged you so shamefully. Are you prepared to risk so much?"

My God! I can remember the horror of that moment even now. As I write these words I seem to feel again the throbbing of the pulses in my temples, the wild turmoil in my brain, the whirling mist before my eyes. In extenuation, I can only hope that I was, for the time being, insane. Shameful as it may be to say so, I know that while Nikola was speaking, I hungered for that man's death as a starving cur craves for food.

"I don't want his money," *I* cried, as if in some small extenuation of the unutterable shame of my decision. "I only want to punish him—to be revenged upon him."

"You consent, then?" he said quietly, pulling his chair a little closer, and looking at me in a strange fashion.

As his eyes met mine all my own will seemed to leave me. I was powerless to say anything but "Yes, I consent."

Nikola rose to his feet instantly, and with an alertness that surprised me after his previous langour.

"Very good," he said; "now that that is settled, we can get to business. If you will listen attentively, I will explain exactly how it is to be done."

CHAPTER II. A GREUSOME TALE.

"THERE are three things to be borne in mind," said Nikola, when *I* had recovered myself a little: "the first is the dependent point, namely, that the man has to be, well, shall we call it, relieved of the responsibility of his existence! Secondly, the deed must be done at once; and, thirdly, it must be accomplished in such a manner that no suspicion is aroused against you. Now, to you who know the world, and England in particular, *I* need scarcely explain that there are very few ways in which this can be done. *If* you desire to follow the melodramatic course, you will decoy your enemy to an empty house and stab him there; in that case, however, there will, in all probability, be a tramp taking refuge in the coal cellar who will overhear you, the marks of blood on the floor will give evidence against you, and—what will be worse than all—there will be the body to dispose of. *It* that procedure does not meet with your approval, you might follow him about night after night until you find an opportunity of effecting your purpose in some deserted thoroughfare; but then you must take into consideration the fact that there will always be the chance of his calling out, or in other ways attracting the attention of the neighbourhood, or of someone coming round the corner before you have quite finished. A railway train has been tried repeatedly, but never with success; for there is an increased difficulty in getting rid of the body, while porters and ticket collectors have a peculiar memory for faces, and history shows that whatever care you may take you are bound to be discovered sooner or later. In his own house the man is as secure, or more so, than he would be in the Tower of London; and even if you did manage to reach him there, the betting would be something like a million to one that you would be detected. No; none of these things are worthy of our consideration. I came to this conclusion in another and similar case in which my assistance was invoked three months ago. If one wants to succeed in murder, as in anything else, one must endeavour to be original."

"For heaven's sake, man, choose your words less carefully!" *I* cried, with a sudden fierceness for which I could

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not afterwards account. "You talk as if we were discussing an ordinary business transaction."

"And are we not?" he replied calmly, paying no attention to my outburst of temper. "I am inclined to think we are. You desire to revenge yourself upon a man who has wronged you. For a consideration I find you the means of doing it. You want—I supply. Surely supply and demand constitute the component parts of an ordinary business transaction?"

"You said nothing just now about a consideration. What is it to be?"

"We will discuss that directly."

"No, not directly. Now! I must know everything before I hear more of your plans."

"By all means let us discuss it then. Properly speaking, I suppose I should demand your soul as my price, and write the bond with a pen dipped in your blood. But, though you may doubt it, I am not Mephistopheles. My terms are fifty thousand pounds, to be paid down within six months of your coming in to your money. I think you will admit that that is a small enough sum to charge for helping a man to obtain possession of nearly two millions. I don't doubt our friend Bartrand would pay three times as much to be allowed to remain on in Park Lane. What do you think?"

The mere mention of Bartrand's name roused me again to fury.

"You shall have the money," I cried. "And much good may it do you. Come what may, I will not touch a penny of it myself. I want to punish him, not to get his fortune. Now what is your scheme?"

"Pardon me, one thing at a time if you please."

He crossed to the escritoire standing in the corner of the room, and from a drawer took a sheet of paper. Having glanced at it he brought it to me with a pen and ink.

"Bead it, and when you have done so, sign. We will then proceed to business."

I glanced at it, and discovered that it was a legally drawn up promise to pay Dr. Antonio Nikola fifty thousand pounds within six months of my succeeding to the property of Richard Bartrand, of Park Lane, London, and Chennington Castle, Shropshire, should such an event ever occur. Dipping the pen into the ink I signed what he had written, and then waited for him to continue. He folded up the paper with great deliberation, returned it to its place in the escritoire, and then seated himself opposite me again.

"Now I am with you hand and glove," he said with a faint smile upon his sallow face. "Listen to my arrangement. In considering the question of murder I have thought of houses, trains, street stabbings, poisonings, burnings, drowning, shipwreck, dynamite, and even electricity; and from practical experience I have arrived at the conclusion that the only sure way in which you can rid yourself of an enemy is to do the deed in a hansom cab."

"A hansom cab?" I cried. "You must be mad. How can that be safe at all?"

"Believe me, it is not only the safest, but has been proved to be the most successful. I will explain more fully, then you will be able to judge of the beautiful simplicity of my plan for yourself. The cab I have constructed myself after weeks of labour, in this very house; it is downstairs now; if you will accompany me we will go and see it."

He rose from his chair, took up the lamp that stood upon the table, and signed to me to follow him. I did so, down the stairs by which he had ascended, and along the passage to a large room at the rear of the building. Folding

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doors opened from it into the yard, and, standing in the centre of this barn-like apartment, its shafts resting on an iron trestle, was, a hansom cab of the latest pattern, fitted with all the most up-to-date improvements.

"Examine it," said Nikola, "and I think you will be compelled to admit that it is as beautiful a vehicle as any man could wish to ride in; get inside and try it for yourself."

While he held the lamp aloft I climbed in and seated myself upon the soft cushions. The inside was lined with Russia leather, and was in every way exquisitely fitted. A curious electric lamp of rather a cumbersome pattern, I thought, was fixed on the back in such a position as to be well above the rider's head. A match-box furnished the bottom of one window, and a cigar-cutter the other; the panels on either side of the apron were decorated with mirrors; the wheels were rubber tyred, and each of the windows had small blinds of heavy stamped leather. Altogether it was most comfortable and complete.

"What do you think of it?" said Nikola, when I had finished my scrutiny.

"It's exactly like any other hansom," I answered. "Except that it is finished in a more expensive style than the average cab, I don't see any difference at all."

"There you refer to it's chief charm," replied Nikola, with a grim chuckle. "If it *were* different in any way to the ordinary hansom, detection would be easy. As it is I am prepared to defy even an expert to discover the mechanism without pulling it to pieces."

"What is the mechanism, then, and what purpose does it serve?"

"I will explain."

He placed the lamp he held in his hand upon a bracket on the wall, and then approached the vehicle.

"In the first place examine these cushions," he said, pointing to the interior. "You have doubtless remarked their softness. If you study them closely you will observe that they are pneumatic. The only difference is that the air used is the strongest anaesthetic known to science. The glass in front, as you will observe now that I have lowered it, fits into a slot in the apron when the latter is closed, and thus, by a simple process, the interior becomes air-tight. "When this has been done the driver has but to press this knob, which at first sight would appear to be part of the nickel rein-support, and a valve opens on either side of the interior—in the match-box in the right window, in the cigar-cutter in the left; the gas escapes, fills the cab, and the result is—well, I will leave you to imagine the result for yourself."

"And then?" I muttered hoarsely, scarcely able to speak distinctly, so overcome was I by the horrible exactness and ingenuity of this murderous affair.

"Then the driver places his foot upon this treadle, which, you see, is made to look as if it works the iron support that upholds the vehicle when resting, the seat immediately revolves and the bottom turns over, thus allowing the body to drop through on to the road. Its very simplicity is its charm. Having carried out your plan you have but to find a deserted street, drive along it, depress the lever, and be rid of your fare when and where you please. By that time he will be far past calling out, and you can drive quietly home, conscious that your work is accomplished. Now what do you think of my invention?"

For a few moments I did not answer, but sat upon an upturned box close by, my head buried in my hands.

The agony of that minute no man will ever understand. Shame for myself for listening, loathing of my demoniacal companion for tempting me, hatred of Bartrand, and desire for revenge, all struggled within me for the mastery. I

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could scarcely breathe; the air of that hateful room seemed to suffocate me. At last I rose to my feet, and as I did so another burst of fury seized me.

"Monster! Murderer!" I cried, turning like a madman on Nikola, who was testing the appliances of his awful invention with a smile of quiet satisfaction on his face. "Let me go, I will not succumb to your temptations. Show me the way out of this house, or I will kill you."

Sobs shook my being to its very core. A violent fit of hysteria had seized me, and under its influence I was not responsible for what I said or did.

Nikola turned from the cab as calmly as if it had been an ordinary hansom which he was examining with a view to purchase, and, concentrating his gaze upon me as he spoke, said quietly:

"My dear Pennethorne, you are exciting yourself. Pray endeavour to be calm. Believe me, there is nothing to be gained by talking in that eccentric fashion. Sit down again and pull yourself together."

As I looked into his face all my strength seemed to go from me. Without a second's hesitation I sat down as he commanded me, and stared in a stupid, dazed fashion at the floor. I no longer had any will of my own. Of course I can see now that he had hypnotised me; but his methods must have been more deadly than I have ever seen exercised before, for he did not insist upon my looking into his eyes for any length of time, nor did he make any passes before my face as I had seen professional mesmerists do. He simply glanced at me—perhaps a little more fixedly than usual—and all my will was immediately taken from me. When I was calm he spoke again.

"You are better now," he said, "so we can talk. You must pay particular attention to what I am going to say, and what I tell you to do you will do to the letter. To begin with, you will now go back to your hotel, and, as soon as you reach it, go to bed. You will sleep without waking till four o'clock this afternoon; then you will dress and go for a walk. During that walk you will think of the man who has wronged you, and the more you think of him the fiercer your hatred for him will become. At six o'clock you will return to your hotel and dine, going to sleep again in the smoking-room till ten. When the clock has struck you will wake, take a hansom, and drive to 23, Great Gunter Street, Soho. Arriving at the house, you will ask for Levi Solomon, to whom you will be at once conducted. He will look after you until I can communicate with you again. That is your programme for the day. I order you not to fail in any single particular of it. Now you had better be off. It is nearly six o'clock."

I rose from my seat and followed him out into the passage like a dog; thence we made our way into the yard. To my surprise a cab was standing waiting for us, the lamps glaring like fierce eyes into the dark archway which led into the street.

"Get in," said Nikola, opening the apron. "My man will drive you to your hotel. On no account give him a gratuity, for I do not countenance it, and he knows my principle. Good night."

I obeyed him mechanically, still without emotion, and when I was seated the cab drove out into the street.

Throughout the journey back to the hotel I sat in the corner trying to think, and not succeeding. I was only conscious that, whatever happened, I must obey Nikola in all he had told me to do. Nothing else seemed of any importance.

On approaching my residence, I wondered how I should obtain admittance; but, as it turned out, that proved an easy matter, for when I arrived the servants were already up and about, and the front door stood open. Disregarding the stare of astonishment with which I was greeted, I went upstairs to my room, and in less than ten minutes was in bed and fast

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Strangely enough, considering the excitement of the previous twenty-four hours, my sleep was dreamless. It seemed only a few minutes from the time I closed my eyes till I was awake again, yet the hands of my watch had stood at half-past six a.m. when I went to bed, and when I opened my eyes again they chronicled four o'clock exactly. So far I had fulfilled Nikola's instructions to the letter. Without hesitation I rose from my bed, dressed myself carefully, and when I was ready, donned my overcoat and went out for a walk.

The evening was bitterly cold, and heavy snow was falling. To keep myself warm I hurried along, and as I went I found my thoughts reverting continually to Bartrand. I remembered my life at Markapurlie, and the cat-and-dog existence I had passed there with him. Then the memory of poor old Ben's arrival at the station came back to me as distinctly as if it had been but yesterday, and with its coming the manager's brutality roused me afresh. I thought of the fight we had had, and then of the long weeks of nursing at the wretched Mail Change on the plains. In my mind's eye I seemed to see poor old Ben sitting up in bed telling me his secret, and when I was once more convalescent, went over, day by day, my journey to the Boolga Ranges, and dreamt again the dreams of wealth that had occupied my brain then, only to find myself robbed of my fortune at the end. Now the man who had stolen my chance in life was one of the richest men in England. He had in his possession all that is popularly supposed to make life worth the living, and while he entertained royalty, bought racehorses and yachts, and enjoyed every advantage in life at my expense, left me to get along as best I might. I might die of starvation in the gutter for all he would care. At that moment I was passing a newsagent's stall. On a board before the door, setting forth the contents of an evening newspaper, was a line that brought me up all standing with surprise, as the sailors say. "*Bartrand's Generosity. —A Gift to the People,*" it ran. I went inside, bought a copy of the paper, and stood in the light of the doorway to read the paragraph. It was as follows:—

"Mr. Richard Bartrand, the well-known Australian millionaire, has, so we are informed, written to the London County Council offering to make a free gift to the city of that large area of ground recently occupied by Montgomery House, of which he has lately become the possessor. The donor makes but one stipulation, and that is that it shall be converted into public gardens, and shall be known in the future as Bartrand Park. As the ground in question was purchased at auction by the millionaire last week for the large sum of fifty thousand pounds, the generosity of this gift cannot be overestimated."

To the surprise of the newsagent I crushed the paper up, threw it on the ground, and rushed from the shop in a blind rage. What right had he to pose as a public benefactor, who was only a swindler and a robber? What right had he to make gifts of fifty thousand pounds to the people, when it was only by his villainy he had obtained the money? But ah! I chuckled to myself, before many hours were over I should be even with him, and then we would see what would happen. A hatred more intense, more bitter, than I could ever have believed one man could entertain for another, filled my breast. Under its influence all my scruples vanished, and I wanted nothing but to cry quits with my enemy.

For more than half an hour I hurried along, scarcely heeding where I went, thinking only of my hatred, and gloating over the hideous revenge I was about to take. That I was doing all this under Nikola's hypnotic influence I now feel certain; but at the time I seemed to be acting on my own initiative, and Nikola to be only playing the part of the *deus ex machina*.

At last I began to weary of my walk, so, hailing a hansom, I directed the driver to convey me back to my hotel. As I passed through the hall the clock over the billiard-room door struck six, and on hearing it I became aware that in one other particular I had fulfilled Nikola's orders. After dinner I went into the smoking-room, and, seating myself in an easy chair before the fire, lit a cigar. Before I had half smoked it I was fast asleep, dreaming that I was once more in Australia and tossing on a bed of sickness in the Mail Change at Markapurlie. A more vivid dream it would be impossible to imagine. I saw myself, pale and haggard, lying upon the bed, unconscious of what was passing around me. I saw Bartrand and Gibbs standing looking down at me. Then the former came closer, and bent over me. Next moment he had taken a paper from the pocket of my shirt, and carried it with him into the adjoining bar. A few minutes later he returned with it and replaced it in the pocket. As he did so he

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turned to the landlord, who stood watching him from the doorway, and said—"You're sure he's delirious, that he's not shamming?"

"Shamming? Poor beggar," answered Gibbs, who after all was not such a bad fellow at heart. "Take a good look at him and see for yourself. I hope I may never be as near gone as he is now."

"So much the better," said Bartrand with a sneer, as he stepped away from the bed. "We'll save him the trouble of making us his legatees."

"You don't mean to steal the poor beggar's secret, surely?" replied Gibbs. "I wouldn't have told you if I'd thought that."

"More fool you then," said Bartrand. "Of course I'm not going to *steal* it) only to borrow it. Such chances don't come twice in a lifetime. But are you sure of your facts? Are you certain the old fellow said there was gold enough there to make both of them millionaires half-a-dozen times over?"

"As certain as I'm sitting here," answered Gibbs.

"Very good; then I'm off to-night for the Boolga Ranges. In ten days I'll have the matter settled, and by the time that dog there gets on to his feet again we'll both be on the high road to fortune."

"And I'm only to have a quarter of what you get? It's not fair, Bartrand."

Bartrand stepped up to him with that nasty, bullying look on his face that I knew so well of old.

"Look here, my friend," he said, "You know Richard Bartrand, don't you? And you also know what I can tell about you. I offer you a fourth of the mine for your information, but I don't give it to you for the reason that I'm afraid of you, for I'm not. Remember I know enough of your doings in this grog shanty to hang you a dozen times over; and, by the Lord Harry, if you make yourself a nuisance to me I'll put those on your track who'll set you swinging. Stand fast by me and I'll treat you fair and square, but get up to any hanky-panky and I'll put such a stopper on your mouth that you'll never be able to open it again."

Gibbs leaned against the door with a face like lead. It was evident that however much he hated Bartrand he feared him a good deal more. A prettier pair of rogues it would have been difficult to find in a long day's march.

"You needn't be afraid, Mr. Bartrand," he said at last, but this time in no certain voice. "I'll not split on you as long as you treat me fairly. You've been a good friend to me in the past, and I know you mean me well though you speak so plain."

"I know the sort of man with whom I have to deal, you see," returned Bartrand with another nasty sneer. "Now I must get my horse and be off. I've a lot to do if I want to get away to-night."

He went out into the verandah and unhitched his reins from the nails on which they were hanging.

"Let me have word directly that carrion in there comes to himself again," he said, as he got into the saddle. "And be sure you never breathe a word to him that I've been over. I'll let you know all that goes on as soon as we've got our claim fixed up. In the meantime, mum's the word. Good-bye."

Gibbs bade him good-bye, and when he had watched him canter off across the plain returned to the room where I lay. Evidently his conscience was reproving him, for he stood by my bed for some minutes looking down at me in silence. Then he heaved a little sigh and said under his breath, "You miserable beggar, how little you know what

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is happening, but I'm bothered if I don't think after all that you're a dashed sight happier than I am. I'm beginning to wish I'd not given you away to that devil. The remembrance of it will haunt me all my life long."

I woke up with his last speech ringing in my ears, and for a moment could scarcely believe my own eyes. I had imagined myself back in the bush, and to wake up in the smoking room of a London hotel was a surprise for which I was not prepared. The clock over the door was just striking eleven as I rose to my feet and went out into the hall. Taking my coat down from a peg I put it on, and then, donning my hat and turning up my collar, went out into the street. Snow was still falling, and the night was bitterly cold. As I walked I thought again of the dream from which I had just wakened. It seemed more like a vision intended for my guidance than the mere imagining of an over-excited brain. How much would I not have given to know if it was only imagination, or whether I had been permitted to see a representation of what had really happened? This question, however, I could not of course answer.

On reaching the Strand I hailed a hansom and bade the driver convey me with all speed to 28, Great Gunter Street, Soho.

"Twenty-three, Great Gunter Street?" repeated the man, staring at me in surprise. "You don't surely mean that, sir?"

"I do," I answered. "If you don't like the job I can easily find another man."

"Oh, I'll take you there, never fear, sir," replied the man; "but I didn't know perhaps whether you was aware what sort of a crib it is. It's not the shop gentlemen goes to as a general rule at night time, except maybe they're after a dog as has been stole, or the like."

"So it's that sort of place is it?" I answered.

"Well, I don't know that it matters. I'm able to take care of myself."

As I said this I got into the vehicle, and in half a minute we were driving down the Strand in the direction of Soho. In something under a quarter of an hour we had left Leicester Square behind us, crossed Shaftesbury Avenue, and turned into Great Gunter Street. It proved to be exactly what the driver had insinuated, neither a respectable nor a savoury neighbourhood; and when I saw it and its inhabitants I ceased to wonder at his hesitation. When he had proceeded half-way down the street he pulled his horse up before the entrance to what looked like a dark alley leading into a court. Realising that this must be my destination I opened the apron and sprang out.

"Number 23 is somewhere hereabouts, sir," said the driver, who seemed to derive a certain amount of satisfaction from his ignorance of the locality. "I don't doubt but what one of these boys will be able to tell you exactly."

I paid him his fare and sixpence over for his civility, and then turned to question a filthy little gutter urchin, who, with bare feet and chattering teeth, was standing beside me.

"Where is 23, my lad?" I inquired. "Can you take me to it?"

"Twenty-three, sir?" said the boy. "That's where Crooked Billy lives, sir. You come along with me and I'll show you the way."

"Go ahead then," I answered, and the boy thereupon bolted into the darkness of the alley before which we had been standing. I followed him as quickly as I could, but it was a matter of some difficulty, for the court was as black as the Pit of Tophet, and seemed to twist and turn in every conceivable direction. A more unprepossessing place it would have been difficult to find. Half-way down I heard the boy cry out "' Hold up, mother!" and before

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I could stop I found myself in collision with a woman who, besides being unsteady on her legs, reeked abominably of gin. Disengaging myself, to the accompaniment of her curses, I sped after my leader, and a moment later emerged into the open court itself. The snow had ceased, and the three-quarter moon, sailing along through swift flying clouds, showed me the surrounding houses. In one or two windows, lights were burning, revealing sights which almost made my flesh creep with loathing. In one I could see a woman sewing as if for her very life by the light of a solitary candle stuck in a bottle, while two little children lay asleep, half-clad, on a heap of straw and rags in the corner. On my right I had a glimpse of another room, where the dead body of a man was stretched upon a mattress on the floor, with two old hags seated at a table beside it, drinking gin from a black bottle, turn and turn about. The wind whistled mournfully among the roof tops; the snow had been trodden into a disgusting slush everywhere, save close against the walls, where it still showed white as silver; while the reflection of the moon gleamed in the icy puddles golden as a spade guinea.

"This is number 23," said my conductor, pointing to the door before which he stood.

I rewarded him, and then turned my attention to the door indicated.

Having rapped with my knuckles upon the panel, I waited for it to be opened to me. But those inside were in no hurry, and for this reason some minutes elapsed before I heard anyone moving about; then there came the sound of shuffling feet, and next moment the door was opened an inch or two, and a female voice inquired with an oath—which I will omit—what was wanted and who was wanting it.

To the first query I replied by asking if Levi Solomon lived there, and, if he did, whether I could see him. The second I shirked altogether. In answer I was informed that Levi Solomon did reside there, and that if I was the gentleman who had called to see him about a hansom cab I was to come in at once.

The door was opened to me, and I immediately stepped into the grimmest, most evil-smelling passage it has ever been my ill luck to set foot in. The walls were soiled and stained almost beyond recognition; the floor was littered with orange peel, paper, cabbage leaves, and garbage of all sorts and descriptions, while the stench that greeted me baffles description. I have never smelled anything like it before, and I hope I may never do so again.

The most I can say for the old lady who admitted me is that she matched her surroundings. She was short almost to dwarfishness, well-nigh bald, and had lost her left eye. Her dress consisted of a ragged skirt, and in place of a body—I believe that is the technical expression—she wore a man's coat, which gave a finishing touch of comicality to the peculiar outline of her figure. As soon as she saw that I had entered, she bade me shut the door behind me and follow her. This I did by means of a dilapidated staircase, in which almost every step was taken at the risk of one's life, to the second floor. Having arrived there, she knocked upon a door facing her; and I noticed that it was not until she had been ordered to enter that she ventured to turn the handle.

"The gentleman what has come about the 'ansom keb," she said, as she ushered me into the room.

The apartment was lit by two candles stuck in their own wax upon a little deal table, and by their rays I could distinguish the man I had come in search of standing by the fireplace awaiting me. He did not greet me until he had made certain, by listening at the keyhole, that the old woman had gone downstairs. He was a quaint little fellow, Jewish from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. He had the nose of his race, little beady eyes as sharp as gimlets, and a long beard which a little washing might have made white. He was dressed in a black frock coat two sizes too large for him, black trousers that would have fitted a man three times his size, and boots that had been patched and otherwise repaired till their original maker would not have known them again.

"Mr. Pennethorne, I presume," he began, rubbing his hands together and speaking as if he had a bad cold in his head. "I am delighted to see you. I am sorry that I cannot ask you to sit down, but I have no chair to give you. For the same reason I cannot offer you refreshment. Have you had a good look at me?"

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My surprise at this abrupt question prevented my replying for a moment; then I insinuated that I thought I should know him again, after which, with a muttered "That's all right," he blew out one of the candles, remarking that, as we now knew each other, we could conduct our business quite as well with half the light.

"I received word from our mutual acquaintance Dr. Nikola this morning," he began, when the illumination had been thus curtailed, "that you would be coming to see me. Of course I did not ask the business, for Dr. Nikola is my friend, and I obey and trust him to the letter. By his instructions I am to fit you with a disguise, and then to take you to the place where you will discover a certain hansom cab awaiting you."

I nodded. At the very mention of the cab my old hatred of Bartrand sprang up again, and I began to question the Jew as to where we were to find it and what I was to do when I had got it. But this impetuosity did not meet with his approval.

"My young friend, you must not be in such a hurry," he said, wagging his head deprecatingly at me.

"We shall have to be sure we make no mistake, otherwise the doctor would not be pleased, and I should not like to risk that. Have you known Dr. Nikola very long?"

"I met him this morning for the first time in my life," I answered, realising on what intimate terms we now stood, considering the length of our acquaintance.

"If that is so you have much to learn regarding him," the Jew replied. "Let us be very careful that we do not risk his displeasure. Now we will get to work, for it is nearly time for us to be going."

As he spoke he crossed to a cupboard in the corner of the room, and took from it some garments which he placed upon the table in the centre.

"Here we have the very identical things," he said, "and when you've got them on, you'll be as smart a cabby as any that mounts his box in the streets of London. Try this and see how it suits you."

He handed me a bushy black beard, which worked on springs, and assisted me to fasten it to my face. When it was made secure he stepped back and examined it critically; then with a muttered "that will do," turned to the garments on the table, and selected from the heap a tarpaulin 'cape, such as cabmen wear in wet weather. This I fixed round my shoulders. A sou'wester was next placed upon my head, and when this was done, as far as I was concerned, we were ready to be off. My curious acquaintance was not long in making his toilet, and five minutes later found us passing out of the filthy alley into Great Gunter Street once more.

"I'll go first," said the Jew. "You follow two or three paces behind me. It's just as well we should not be seen together."

I accordingly took up my position a few steps in the rear, and in this fashion dodged along behind him, until we reached the corner of Wardour and Pultney Streets. Here my guide stopped and looked about him. Evidently what he wanted was not forthcoming, for he began to grow uneasy, and stamped up and down the pavement, looking eagerly in each direction. All the time I did not venture to approach him. I was considering what I was about to do. I thought of my father, and my brother and sisters, and wondered what they would have thought if they could have known to what a pass I had fallen. What would my poor mother have said if she had lived? But she, as far as I could learn from those who had known her, had been a gentle Christian woman, and if she had lived I should in all probability never have left England. In that case I should not have known Bartrand, and this revenge would then not have been necessary. By what small chances are our destinies shaped out for us!

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At last the rattle of wheels sounded, and a moment later a smart hansom cab, which I recognised as that shown me by Nikola at his house that morning, drove down the street and pulled up at the corner where we stood. The lamps glowed brightly in the frosty air, and it was evident the horse was one of spirit, for he tossed his head and pawed the ground with impatience to be off again.

The driver descended from his perch, while the Jew went to the horse's head. The other was a tall fellow, and until he came into the light of the lamps I could not see his face. To my surprise, he did not speak, but stood fumbling in the pocket of his oilskin for something, which proved to be a letter. This he handed to me.

I opened it and scanned its contents. It was, of course, from Nikola.

"dear—Everything is arranged, and I send you this, with the cab, by my servant, who, as you know, will not reveal anything. As soon as you receive it, mount and drive to Fall Mall. Be opposite the Monolith Club punctually at 11.30 and once there, keep your eyes open for the man we want. I will arrange that he shall leave exactly as the clock chimes, and will also see that he takes your cab. When you have dropped your fare in a quiet street, drive as fast as you can go to Hogarth Square, and wait at, or near, the second lamppost on the left-hand side. I will pick you up there, and will arrange the rest. The man in question has been entertaining a distinguished company, including two dukes and a Cabinet Minister, at dinner this evening, but I have arranged to meet and amuse him at twelve. May good luck attend you.

" Yours, N."

I stuffed the note into my pocket and then glanced at my watch. It was exactly a quarter-past eleven, so if I wanted to be at the rendezvous at the time stated it was necessary that I should start at once. Without more ado, I climbed on to the seat at the back, wound the rug I found there round my legs, put on the badge the Chinaman handed up to me, and, whipping up the horse, much to the Jew's consternation, drove off down the street at a rapid pace. As I turned into Great Windmill Street snow began to fall again, and I gave an evil chuckle as I reflected that even the forces of Nature were assisting me in my murderous intentions. In my heart I had no pity for the man whom I was about to kill. He had robbed me as cruelly as one man could rob another, and now I was going to repay him for his treachery.

CHAPTER III. THE LUST OF HATE.

THE cab horse was a fine animal, and spun along to such good purpose that when I turned from Waterloo Place into Pall Mall I had, contrary to my expectations, still some few minutes to spare. Now that the actual moment for putting into effect the threats I had so often uttered against the man who had wronged me so cruelly, had arrived, strange to say I was seized with a sudden and inexplicable feeling of compassion for him. Badly as he had injured me, and desirous as I was of repaying him for his treachery, I discovered I could not bring myself to do what I had arranged without reluctance. If it had been a matter of fair fighting, with the certainty of no one interfering between us, it would have been a totally different matter, and I could have gone into it with a light heart; but now to decoy him to his death by the aid of Nikola's science was an act of cowardice at which my whole nature revolted.

Feeling half inclined to put off—if not for ever, at least for that evening the dastardly deed I had had arranged for me—I drove slowly down the street, quite unable to resist the temptation of seeing the man whom, if I wished to do so, I could kill so easily. In the event of his hailing me as had been arranged, I would reply that I was engaged, and leave him to find another vehicle, unconscious of the narrowness of his escape. At any cost I would not let him set foot in my conveyance. While I was thus arguing with myself I was drawing closer and closer to the Monolith Club. Already I could discern the stalwart form of the commissioner standing upon the steps under the great lamp. At the moment that I approached, two men left the building arm in arm, but neither of them was the

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man I wanted. Little by little their steps died away in the distance, and so nicely had I timed my arrival that the clock at the Palace ahead chimed the half-hour exactly as I came opposite the steps. At the same instant the doors of the Club opened, and Bartrand and another man, whom I recognised instantly as Nikola, came out. The mere sight of the man I hated shattered all my plans in an instant. In the presence of the extraordinary individual accompanying him I had not sufficient pluck to cry "engaged"; so, when the commissionaire hailed me, there was nothing for it but to drive across the road and pull up alongside the pavement, as we had previously arranged.

"You're in luck's way, Bartrand," cried Nikola, glancing at my horse, which was tossing his head and pawing the ground as if eager to be off again; "that's a rare good nag of yours, cabby. He's worth an extra fare."

I grunted something in reply, I cannot remember what. The mere sight of Bartrand standing there on the pavement scanning the horse, had roused all my old antipathy; and, as I have said, my good resolves were cast to the winds like so much chaff.

"Well, for the present, *au revoir*, my dear fellow," said Nikola, shaking hands with his victim. "I will meet you at the house in half-an-hour, and if you care about it you can have your revenge then; now you had better be going. Twenty-eight, Saxeburgh Street, cabby, and don't be long about it."

I touched my hat and opened the apron for Bartrand to step inside. When he had done so he ordered me to lower the glass, and not be long in getting him to his destination or I'd hear of it at the other end. He little thought how literally I might interpret the command.

Leaving Nikola standing on the pavement looking after us, I shook up my horse and drove rapidly down the street. My whole body was tingling with exultation; but that it would have attracted attention and spoiled my revenge, I felt I could have shouted my joy aloud. Here I was with my enemy in my power; by lifting the shutter in the roof of the cab I could see him lolling inside—thinking, doubtless, of his wealth, and little dreaming how close he was to the poor fellow he had wronged so cruelly. The knowledge that by simply pressing the spring under my hand I could destroy him in five seconds, and then choosing a quiet street could tip him out and be done with him for ever, intoxicated me like the finest wine. No one would suspect, and Nikola, for his own sake, would never betray me. While I was thinking in this fashion, and gloating over what I was about to do, I allowed my horse to dawdle a little. Instantly an umbrella was thrust up through the shutter and I was ordered, in the devil's name, to drive faster.

"Ah! my fine fellow," I said to myself, "you little know how near you are to the master by whom you swear. Wait a few moments until I've had a little more pleasure out of your company, and then we'll see what I can do for you."

On reaching Piccadilly I turned west, and for some distance followed the proper route for Saxeburgh Street. All the time I was thinking, thinking, and thinking of what I was about to do. He was at my mercy; any instant I could make him a dead man, and the cream of the jest was that he did not know it. My fingers played with the fatal knob, and once I almost pressed it. The touch of the cold steel sent a thrill through me, and at the same instant one of the most extraordinary events of my life occurred. I am almost chary of relating it, lest my readers may feel inclined to believe that I am endeavouring to gull them with the impossible. But, even at the risk of that happening, I must tell my story as it occurred to me. As I put my hand for the last time upon the knob there rose before my eyes, out of the half dark, a woman's face, and looked at me. At first I could scarcely believe my own eyes. I rubbed them and looked again. It was still there, apparently hanging in mid-air above the horse I was driving. It was not, if one may judge by the photographs of famous beauties, a perfect face, but there was that in it that made it to me the most captivating I had ever seen in my life — I refer to the expression of gentleness and womanly goodness that animated it. The contour of the face was oval, the mouth small and well-shaped, and the eyes large, true, and unflinching. Though it only appeared before me for a few seconds, I had time to take thorough stock of it, and to remember every feature. It seemed to be looking straight at me, and the mouth to be

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saying as plainly as any words could speak—"Think of what you are doing, Gilbert Pennethorne; remember the shame of it, and be true to yourself." Then she faded away; and, as she went, a veil that had been covering my eyes for months seemed now to drop from them, and I saw myself for what I really was—a coward and a would-be murderer.

We were then passing down a side street, in which—fortunately for what I was about to do—there was not a single person of any sort to be seen. Happen what might, I would now stop the cab and tell the man inside who I was and with what purpose I had picked him up. Then he should go free, and in letting him understand that I had spared his life I would have ray revenge. With this intention I pulled my horse up, and, unwrapping my rug from my knees, descended from my perch. I had drawn up the glass before dismounting, the better to be able to talk to him.

"Mr. Bartrand," I said, when I had reached the pavement, at the same time pulling off my false beard and my sou'wester, "this business has gone far enough, and I am now going to tell you who I am and what I wanted with you. Do you know me?"

Either he was asleep or he was too surprised at seeing me before him to speak, at any rate he offered no reply to my question.

"Mr. Bartrand," I began again, "I ask you if you are aware who I am?"

Still no answer was vouchsafed to me, and immediately an overwhelming fear took possession of me. I sprang upon the step and tore open the apron. What I saw inside made me recoil with terror. In the corner, his head thrown back and his whole body rigid, lay the unfortunate man I had first determined to kill, but had since decided to spare. *I ran my hands, all trembling with terror, over his body. The man was dead—and I had killed him.* By some mischance I must have pressed the spring which opened the valve, and thus the awful result had been achieved. Though years have elapsed since it happened, I can feel the agony of that moment as plainly now as if it was but yesterday.

When I understood that the man was really dead, and that I was his murderer—branded henceforth with the mark of Cain—I sat down on the pavement in a cold sweat of terror, trembling in every limb. The face of the whole world had changed within the past few minutes—now I knew I could never be like other men again. Already the fatal noose was tightening round my neck.

While these thoughts were racing through my brain, my ears, now preternaturally sharp, had detected the ring of a footstep on the pavement a hundred yards or so away. Instantly I sprang to my feet, my mind alert and nimble, my whole body instinct with the thought of self-preservation. Whatever happened I must not be caught, red-handed, with the body of the murdered man in my possession. At any risk I must rid myself of that, and speedily, too.

Climbing to my perch again I started my horse off at a rapid pace in the same direction in which I had been proceeding when I had made my awful discovery. On reaching the first cross-roads I branched off to the right, and, discovering that to be a busy thoroughfare, turned to the left again. Never before had my fellow-man inspired me with such terror. At last I found a deserted street, and was in the act of pressing the lever with my foot when a door in a house just ahead of me opened, and a party of ladies and gentlemen issued from it. Some went in one direction, others in a contrary, and I was between both. To drop the body where they could see it would be worse than madness, so, almost cursing them for interrupting me, I lashed my horse and darted round the first available corner. Once more I found a quiet place, but this time I was interrupted by a cab turning into the street and coming along behind me. The third time, however, was more successful. I looked carefully about me. The street was empty in front and behind. On either side were rows of respectable middle-class houses, with never a light in a window or a policeman to be seen.

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Trembling like a leaf, I stopped the cab, and when I had made sure that there was no one looking, placed my foot upon the lever. So perfect was the mechanism that it acted instantly, and, what was better still, without noise. Next moment Bartrand was lying upon his back in the centre of the road. As soon as his weight released it the bottom of the vehicle rose, and I heard the spring click as it took its place again. Before I drove on I turned and looked at him where he lay so still and cold on the pure white snow, and thought of the day at Markapurlie, when he had turned me off the station for wanting to doctor poor Ben Garman, and also of the morning when I had denounced him to the miners on the Boolga Bange, after I had discovered that he had stolen my secret and appropriated my wealth. How little either of us thought then what the end of our hatred was to be! If I had been told on the first day we had met that I should murder him, and that he would ultimately be found lying dead in the centre of a London street, I very much doubt if either of us would have believed it possible. But how horribly true it was!

As to what I was now, there could be no question. The ghastly verdict was self-evident, and the word rang in my brain with a significance I had never imagined it to possess before. It seemed to be written upon the houses, to be printed upon the snow-curdled sky. Even the roll of the wheels beneath me proclaimed me a murderer. Until that time I had had no real conception of what that grisly word meant. Now I knew it for the most awful in the whole range of our English language.

All this time I had been driving aimlessly on and on, having no care where *I* went, conscious only that I must put as great a distance as possible between myself and the damning evidence of my crime. Then a reaction set in, and I became aware that to continue driving in this half-coherent fashion was neither politic nor sensible, so I pulled myself together and tried to think what I had better do. The question for my consideration was whether I should hasten to Hogarth Square as arranged and hand the cab over to Nikola, or whether I should endeavour to dispose of it in some other way, and not go near that dreadful man again. One thing was indisputable: whatever I did, I must do quickly. It was nearly one o'clock by this time, and if I wanted to see him at the rendezvous I must hurry, or he would have gone before I reached it. In that case, what should I do with the cab?

After anxious thought I came to the conclusion that I had better find him and hand him his terrible property. Then, if I wished to give him the slip, I could lead him to suppose I intended returning to my hotel, and afterwards act as I might deem best for my own safety. This once decided, I turned the vehicle round, whipped up the horse, and set off for Hogarth Square as fast as I could go. It was a long journey, for several times I missed my way and had to retrace my steps; but at last I accomplished it and drove into the Square. Sure enough at the second lamp-post on the left hand side, where he had appointed to meet me, three men were standing beside a hansom cab, and from the way they peered about, it was evident they were anxiously awaiting the arrival of someone. One I could see at first glance was Nikola, the other was probably his Chinese servant, the man who had brought me the cab earlier in the evening, but the third's identity I could not guess. Nor did I waste time trying.

As I approached them Nikola held up his hand as a signal to me to stop, and I immediately pulled up and got down. Not a question did he ask about my success or otherwise, but took from the second cab a bowler hat and a top coat, which I recognised as the garments I had left at Levi Solomon's that evening.

"Put these on," he said, "and then come with me as quickly as you can. I have a lot to say to you."

I did as he ordered me, and when my sou'wester and cape had been tossed into the empty cab, he beckoned me to follow him down the square. His servant had meanwhile driven that awful cab away.

"Now, what have you to tell me?" he asked, when we had walked a little distance along the pavement.

I stopped and faced him with a face, I'll be bound, as ashen as that of a corpse.

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"I have done your fiendish bidding," I hissed. "I am—God help me—unintentionally what you have made me—a murderer."

"Then the man is dead, is he?" replied Nikola, with icy calmness. "That is satisfactory. Now we have to divert suspicion from yourself. All things considered, I think you had better go straight back to your hotel, and keep quiet there until I communicate with you. You need have no fear as to your safety. No one will suspect you. Hitherto we have been most successful in eluding detection."

As he spoke, the memory of the other murders which had shocked all London flashed through my brain, and instantly I realised everything. The victims, so the medical men stated, had in each case been killed by some anesthetic: they had been found in the centre of the road, as if dropped from a vehicle, while their faces had all been mutilated in the same uncanny fashion. I turned and looked at the man by my side, and then, in an unaccountable fit of rage, threw myself upon him. The men who actually did the deeds were innocent—here was the real murderer—the man who had instigated and egged them on to crime. He had led my soul into hell, but he should not escape scot free.

The suddenness of my passion took him completely by surprise, but only for an instant. Then, with a quick movement of his hands, he caught my wrists, and held me in a grip of iron. I was disarmed and powerless, and he knew it, and laughed mockingly.

"So you would try and add me to your list, would you, Mr. Gilbert Pennethorne? Be thankful that I am mercifully inclined, and do not punish you as you deserve."

Without another word he threw me from him, with the ease of a practised wrestler, and I fell upon the pavement as if I had been shot. The shock brought me to my senses, and I rose an altogether different man, though still hating him with a tenfold loathing as the cause of all my misery. Having once rid himself of me however, he, seemed to think no more of the matter.

"Now be off to your hotel," he said sharply, "and don't stir from it until I communicate with you. By making this fuss you might have hung yourself, to say nothing of implicating me. To-morrow morning I will let you know what is best to be done. In the meantime, remain indoors, feign ill health, and don't see any strangers on any pretext whatever."

He stood at the corner of the Square, and watched me till I had turned the corner, as cool and diabolical a figure as the Author of all Evil himself. I only looked back once, and then walked briskly on until I reached Piccadilly Circus, where I halted and gazed about me in a sort of dim confused wonderment at my position. What a variety of events had occurred since the previous night, when I had stood in the same place, and had heard the policeman's whistle sound from Jermyn Street, in proclamation of the second mysterious murder! How little I had then thought that within twenty-four hours I should be in the same peril as the murderer of the man I had seen lying under the light of the policeman's lantern! Perhaps even at this moment Bartrand's body had been discovered, and a hue and cry was on foot for the man who had done the deed. With this thought in my mind, a greater terror than I had yet felt came over me, and I set off as hard as I could go down a bye-street into Trafalgar Square, thence by way of Northumberland Avenue on to the Embankment. Once there I leant upon the coping and looked down at the dark water slipping along so silently on its way to the sea. Here was my chance if only I had the pluck to avail myself of it. Life had now no hope left for me. Why should I not throw myself over, and so escape the fate that must inevitably await me if I lived? One moment's courage, a little struggling in the icy water, a last choking cry, and then it would all be over and done with, and those who had the misfortune to call themselves my kinsmen would be spared the mortification of seeing me standing in a felon's dock. I craned my neck still further over the side, and looked at the blocks of ice as they went by, knocking against each other with a faint musical sound that sounded like the tinkling of tiny bells. I remembered the depth of the river, and pictured my sodden body stranded on to the mud by the ebbing tide somewhere near the sea. I could fancy the conjectures

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that would be made concerning it. Would anyone connect me with—but there, I could not go on. Nor could I do what I had proposed. Desperate as was my case, I found I still clung to life with a tenacity that even crime itself could not lessen. No; by hook or crook I must get out of England to some place where nobody would know me, and where I could begin a new life. By cunning it could surely be managed. But in that case I knew I must not go back to my hotel, and run the risk of seeing Nikola again. I distrusted his powers of saving me; and, if I fell once more under his influence, goodness alone knew what I might not be made to do. No; I would make some excuse to the landlord to account for my absence, and then creep quietly out of England in such a way that no one would suspect me. But how was it to be managed? To remain in London would be to run endless risks. Anyone might recognise me, and then capture would be inevitable. I turned out my pockets and counted my money. Fortunately, I had cashed a cheque only the day before, and now had nearly forty pounds in notes and gold in my purse; not very much, it is true, but amply sufficient for my present needs. The question was: Where should I go? Australia, the United States, South America, South Africa? Which of these places would be safest? The first and second I rejected without consideration. The first I had tried, the second I had no desire to visit. Chili, the Argentine, or Bechuanaland? It all depended on the boats. To whichever place a vessel sailed first, to that place I would go.

Casting one last glance at the ice-bound water below me, and with a shudder at the thought of what I had contemplated doing when I first arrived upon the Embankment, I made my way back into the Strand. It was now close upon three o'clock, and already a few people were abroad. If I were not out of London within a few hours, I might be caught. I would go directly I had decided what it was imperative I should know. Up one street and down another I toiled until at last I came upon what I wanted, a small restaurant in a back street, devoted to the interests of the early arrivals at Covent Garden Market. It was only a tiny place, shabby in the extreme, but as it just suited my purpose, I walked boldly in, and ordered a cup of cocoa and a plate of sausages. While they were being prepared I seated myself in one of the small compartments along the opposite wall, and with my head upon my hands tried to think coherently. When the proprietor brought me the food, I asked him if he could oblige me with the loan of writing materials. He glanced at me rather queerly, I thought, but did not hesitate to do what I asked. When he had gone again I dipped the pen into the ink and wrote a note to the proprietor of my hotel, telling him that I had been suddenly taken out of town by important business, and asking him to forward my boxes, within a week, to the cloak room, Aberdeen railway station, labelled "*to be called for.*" I chose Aberdeen for the reason that it was a long distance from London, and also because it struck me that if enquiries were made by the police it would draw attention off my real route, which would certainly not be in that direction. I then wrote a cheque for the amount of my account, enclosed it, and having done so sealed up the letter and put it in my pocket. On an adjoining table I espied a newspaper, which I made haste to secure. Turning to the column where the shipping advertisements were displayed, I searched the list for a vessel outward bound to one of the ports I had chosen. I discovered that to Chili or any of the South American Republics there would not be a boat sailing for at least a week to come. When I turned to South Africa I was more fortunate; a craft named the *Fiji Princess* was advertised to sail from Southampton for Cape Town at 11 a.m. on this self-same day. She was of 4,000 tons burden, but had only accommodation for ten first-class passengers and fifty in the steerage. What pleased me better still, she would only call at Teneriffe on the way. The steerage fare was fifteen pounds, and it was by this class I determined to travel. My mind once made up, the next thing to decide was how to reach Southampton without incurring suspicion. To catch the boat this could only be done by rail, and to further increase my store of knowledge I had again to borrow from the proprietor of the restaurant. From the tune table he lent me I found that a train left Waterloo every morning at six o'clock, which would get me to the docks before nine o'clock, thus allowing me two full hours in which to make my preparations and to get on board in comfortable time; that is, supposing she sailed at the hour stated. But I had still three hours to put in in London before the train would start, and how to occupy them without running any risk I could not tell. It was quite impossible for me to remain where I was, and yet to go out and walk about the streets would be dangerous in the extreme. In that time Nikola might get hold of me again, and I believe I dreaded that more than even falling into the clutches of the law. Suddenly I was struck by what seemed a splendid idea. What if I walked out of London to some station along the line where the train would pick me up? In that case no one would be able to remember seeing me start from Waterloo, and I should be believed to be still in London. The thought was no sooner born in my brain than I picked up my hat and prepared to be off.

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When I paid at the counter for my meal, and also for the note paper with which the proprietor had obliged me, I strode out of the restaurant and down the street into the Strand again. Surbiton, I reflected, was twelve miles from Waterloo, and, besides being quiet, it was also one of the places at which I had noticed that the train was advertised to call. I had almost three hours before me in which to do the distance, and if I walked at the rate of five miles an hour it was evident I should accomplish it with ease. To Surbiton, therefore, I would go.

Having made my way back to Charing Cross, I passed down Whitehall and over Westminster Bridge to the Lambeth Palace Road. Under the influence of my new excitement I felt easier in my mind than I had been since I made my awful discovery three hours before, but still not easy enough to be able to pass a policeman without a shudder. Strangely enough, considering that I had had no sleep at all, and had been moving about all night, I was not conscious of the least fatigue, but strode along the pavement at a swinging pace, probably doing more than I had intended when I had first set out. The snow had ceased, but a nasty fog was rising from the river to take its place. I pictured the state of London when day should break, and devoutly thanked Heaven that I should be well out of it by that time. I could imagine the newsboys running about the streets with cries of "Another 'orrible murder! A millionaire the victim." I seemed to see the boards stuck before shop doors with the same ghastly headline, and I could realise the consternation of the town, when it awoke to find the mysterious assassin still at work in its midst. Then would follow the inquest. The porter at the Monolith Club would be called upon to give evidence, and would affirm that he had seen the deceased gentleman step into a smart hansom, driven by a cabman dressed in an oilskin cape and a sou'wester, and would probably remember having noticed that the cabby was a gruff fellow with a bushy, black beard. The next witnesses would be the finders of the body, and after that the same verdict would be returned—"Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown"—as had been given in the previous cases.

If only Nikola remained faithful to me I should probably have time to get out of England before the police could stop me, and, once among the miners of the Band, I should be able to arrange matters in such a way that recognition would be almost an impossibility. With a sigh of relief at this comfortable thought, I pushed on a little faster along the Wandsworth Road until I reached Clapham Junction Station. As I did so I looked at my watch. It was just a quarter to four, and already the footpaths were becoming dotted with pedestrians.

Leaving Clapham Junction behind me, I passed along the Lavender Hill Road, through Wandsworth, and struck out along the road to West Hill, then across Putney Heath, through Kingston Vale, and so into Kingston. From that quaint old riverside town to Surbiton is but a step, and exactly as the church clocks in the latter place were chiming a quarter to six, I stood on the platform of the railway station prepared to board my train when it should come in sight. The last four miles had been done at a fast pace, and by the time I had taken my ticket I was completely worn out. My anxiety was so keen that I could not sit down, but waited until I should be safely on board the train. The cries of the newsboys seemed still to be ringing in my ears—"Another 'orrible murder! Discovery of the body of a famous millionaire!"

To while away the time I went out of the station again and explored the deserted streets, passing houses in which the owners still lay fast asleep, little dreaming of the miserable man who was tramping along in the cold outside. A biting north wind blew over the snow, and chilled me to the marrow. The leaden hand of despair was pressing hard upon my heart, and when I looked at the rows of trim, matter-of-fact residences *on* either side of me, and thought of the gulf that separated their inmates from myself, I groaned aloud in abject misery.

At five minutes to the hour I returned to the station, and, just as I reached it, punctual almost to the tick of the clock, the train made its appearance round the bend of the line. With the solitary exception of an old man I was the only passenger from this station; and, as soon as I had discovered an empty third-class compartment, I got in and stowed myself away in a corner. Almost before the train was out of the station I was fast asleep, dreaming of Nikola and of the horrible events of the night just past. Once more I drove the cab along the snow-covered streets; once more that strange woman's face rose before me in warning; and once more I descended from my seat to make the horrible discovery that my enemy was dead. In my agony I must have shrieked aloud, for the noise I

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made woke me up. An elderly man, possibly a successful country butcher from his appearance, who must have got in at some station we had stopped at while I slept, was sitting in the corner opposite, watching me.

"You have been having a pretty bad nightmare these last few minutes, I should say, mister," he observed, with a smile. "I was just going to give you a shake up when you woke yourself by screaming out like that."

An awful fear came over me. Was it possible that in my sleep I had revealed my secret?

"I am sorry I disturbed you," I said, faintly, "but I am subject to bad dreams. Have I been talking very much?"

"Not so far as I've heard," he answered; "but you've been moaning and groaning as if you'd got something on your mind that you wanted to tell pretty bad."

"I've just got over a severe illness," I replied, relieved beyond measure to hear that I had kept my dreadful secret to myself, "and I suppose that accounts for the uneasy way in which I sleep."

My companion looked at me rather searchingly for a few seconds, and then began to fumble in his greatcoat pocket for something. Presently he produced a large spirit flask.

"Let me give you a drop of whiskey," he said, kindly. "It will cheer you up, and you look as if you want it right down bad."

He poured about half a wineglassful into the little nickel-plated cup that fitted the bottom of the flask, and handed it to me. I thanked him sincerely, and tossed it off at one gulp. It was neat spirit, and ran through my veins like so much fire. Though it burnt my throat pretty severely, it did me a world of good, and in a few moments I was sufficiently recovered to talk reasonably enough.

At nine o'clock almost to the minute we drew up at Southampton Docks, and then, bidding my fellow passenger good morning, I quickly quitted the station. Before I left London I had carefully noted the address of the steamship company's agents, and, having ascertained the direction of their office, I made my way towards it. Early as was the hour I found it open, and upon being interrogated by the clerk behind the counter, stated my desire to book as steerage passenger for Cape Town by the steamer *Fiji Princess*, which they advertised as leaving the docks that day. The clerk looked at me with some surprise when I said "steerage," but, whatever he may have thought, he offered no comment upon it.

"What is your name?" he inquired, dipping his pen in the ink.

I had anticipated this question, and replied "George Wrexford" as promptly as if it had really been my patronymic.

Having paid the amount demanded, and received my ticket in exchange, I asked what time it would be necessary for me to be on board.

"Half-past ten without fail," he answered. "She will cast off punctually at eleven; and I give you fair warning Captain Hawkins does not wait for anything or anybody."

I thanked him for his courtesy and left the office, buttoning up my ticket in my pocket as I went down the steps. In four hours at most, all being well, I should be safely out of England; and, for a little while, a free man. By half-past nine I had purchased a small outfit, and also the few odds and ends—such as bedding and mess utensils—that I should require on the voyage. This done I hunted about till I found a small restaurant, again in a back street, which I entered and ordered breakfast. As soon as I smelt the cooking I found that I was ravenous, and twice I had to call for more before my hunger was

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Towards the end of my meal a paper boy put in an appearance, and my heart well-nigh stopped when I heard the girl beyond the counter enquire if there was "any startling news this morning."

"Nother terrible murder in London," answered the lad with fiendish glibness; and as he spoke my over-taxed strength gave way, and I fell back in my chair in a dead faint.

I suppose for a few moments I must have quite lost consciousness, for I can recollect nothing until I opened my eyes and found a small crowd collected round me, somebody sponging my forehead, and two people chafing my hands.

"How do you feel now?" enquired the nervous little man who had first come to my assistance.

"Better, thank you," I replied, at the same time endeavouring to sit up. "Very much better. What has been the matter with me?"

"A bit of a faint, that's all," another answered. "Are you subject to them?"

"I've been very ill lately," I said, giving them the same reply as I had done to the man in the train, "and I suppose I overtaxed my strength a little this morning. But, thanks to your kindness, I feel ever so much better now."

As soon as I had recovered sufficiently, I paid my bill, and, having again sincerely thanked those who had assisted me, left the shop and hurried off to the docks as fast as I could go. It was now some few minutes after ten o'clock.

The *Fiji Princess* was a fair-sized vessel of an old-fashioned type, and very heavily laden; indeed, so heavy was she that she looked almost unsafe beside the great American liner near which she was berthed.

Having clambered on board I enquired my way to the steerage quarters, which were forward, then stowed away my things and endeavoured to make myself as comfortable as circumstances would permit in the place which was to be my home for the next five weeks or so. For prudence sake I remained below until I heard the whistle sound and could tell by the shaking that the steamship was moving. Then, when I had satisfied myself that we were really under way, I climbed the gangway that led to the deck and looked about me. Slowly as we were moving, we were already a hundred yards from the wharf side, and in a few minutes would be well out in Southampton Water. Eight aft a small crowd of passengers were grouped at the stern railings, waving their handkerchiefs and hats to a similar group ashore. Forward we were less demonstrative, for, as I soon discovered, the steerage passengers consisted only of myself, a circumstance which you may be very sure I did not by any means regret.

By mid-day we were in the Solent, and by lunch time the Isle of Wight lay over our taffrail. Now, unless I was stopped at Teneriffe, I was certain of a month's respite from the law. And when I realised this I went to my berth and, sinner as I was, knelt down and offered up the heartiest prayer of gratitude I have ever in my life given utterance to.

CHAPTER IV. A STRANGE COINCIDENCE.

If any man is desirous of properly understanding the feelings of gratitude and relief which filled my breast as the *Fiji Princess* steamed down channel that first afternoon out from Southampton, he must begin by endeavouring to imagine himself placed in the same unenviable position. For all I knew to the contrary, even while I stood leaning on the bulwarks watching the coast line away to starboard, some unlucky chance might be giving the police a clue to my identity, and the hue-and-cry already have begun. When I came to consider my actions during the past twenty-four hours, I seemed to be giving my enemies innumerable opportunities of discovering my whereabouts. My letter to the manager of the hotel, which I had posted in the Strand after leaving the Covent Garden restaurant,

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would furnish proof that I was in town before five o'clock—the time at which the box was cleared on the morning of the murder. Then, having ascertained that much, they would in all probability call at the hotel, and in instituting enquiries there, be permitted a perusal of the letter I had written to the manager that morning. Whether they would believe that I had gone north, as I desired they should suppose, was difficult to say; but in either case they would be almost certain to have all the southern seaports watched. I fancied, however, that my quickness in getting out of England would puzzle them a little, even if it did not baffle them altogether.

Unfortunately, the *Fiji Princess* had been the only vessel of importance sailing from Southampton on that particular day, and owing to the paucity of steerage passengers, I felt sure the clerk who gave me my ticket would remember me sufficiently well to be able to assist in the work of identification. Other witnesses against me would be the porters at Surbiton railway station, who had seen me arrive, tired and dispirited, after my long walk; the old man who had given me whiskey on the journey down; and the people in the restaurant where I had been taken ill would probably recognise me from the description. However, it was in my favour that I was here on the deck of the steamer, if not devoid of anxiety, at least free from the clutches of the law for the present.

The afternoon was perfectly fine, though bitterly cold; overhead stretched a blue sky, with scarcely a cloud from horizon to horizon; the sea was green as grass, and almost as smooth as a millpond. Since luncheon I had seen nothing of the passengers, nor had I troubled to inquire if the vessel carried her full complement. The saloon was situated right aft in the poop, the skipper had his cabin next to the chart room on the hurricane deck, and the officers theirs on either side of the engine-room, in the alley ways below. My quarters — I had them all to myself, as I said in the last chapter—were as roomy and comfortable as a man could expect for the passage—money I paid, and when I had made friends with the cook and his mate, I knew I should get through the voyage in comparative comfort.

At this point I am brought to the narration of the most uncanny portion of my story: a coincidence so strange that it seems almost impossible it can be true, and one for which I have never been able, in any way, to account. Yet, strange as it may appear, it must be told; and that it is true, have I not the best and sweetest evidence any man could desire in the world? It came about in this way. In the middle of the first afternoon, as already described, I was sitting smoking on the fore hatch, and at the same time talking to the chief steward. He had been to sea, so he told me, since he was quite a lad; and, as I soon discovered, had seen some strange adventures in almost every part of the globe. It soon turned out, as is generally the way, that I knew several men with whom he was acquainted, and in a few minutes we were upon the most friendly terms. From the sea our conversation changed to China, and in illustration of the character of the waterside people of that peculiar,., country, my companion narrated a story about a shipmate who had put off in a sampan to board his boat lying in Hong Kong harbour, and had never been seen or heard of again.

"It was a queer thing," he said impressively, as he shook the ashes out of his pipe and re-charged it, "as queer a thing as ever a man heard of. I spent the evening with the chap myself, and before we said 'good-bye' we arranged to go up to Happy Valley the Sunday morning following. But he never turned up, nor have I ever set eyes on him from that time to this. Whether he was murdered by the sampan's crew or whether he fell overboard and was drowned in the harbour, I don't suppose will ever be known."

"A very strange thing," I said, as bravely as I could, and instantly thought of the bond I had in common with that sampan's crew.

"Aye, strange; very strange," replied the steward, shaking his head solemnly; "but there's many strange things done now—a-days. Look at these here murders that have been going on in London lately. I reckon it would be a wise man as could put an explanation on them."

All my blood seemed to rush to my head, and my heart for a second stood still. I suffered agonies of apprehension lest he should notice my state and have his suspicions aroused, but he was evidently too much engrossed with his

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subject to pay any attention to my appearance. I knew I must say something, but my tongue was cleaving to the roof of my mouth. It was some moments before I found my voice, and then I said as innocently as possible—

"They are certainly peculiar, are they not? Have you any theory to account for them?"

This was plainly a question to his taste, and it soon became evident that he had discussed the subject in all its bearings on several occasions before.

"Do you want to know what I think?" he began slowly, fixing me with an eye that he seemed to imagine bored through me like an augur. "Well, what I think is that the Anarchists are at the bottom of it all, and I'll tell you for why. Look at the class of men who were killed. Who was the first? A Major-General in the army, wasn't he? Who was the second? A member of the House of Lords. Who was the third?"

He looked so searchingly at me that I felt myself quailing before his glance as if he had detected me in my guilt. Who could tell him better than I who the last victim was?

"And the third—well, he was one of these rich men as fattens on Society and the workin' man, was he not?"

He pounded his open hand with his fist in the true fashion, and his eyes constantly challenged me to refute his statements if I were in a position to do so. But— heaven help me!—thankful as I would have been to do it, I was not able to gainsay him. Instead, I sat before him like a criminal in the dock, conscious of the danger I was running, yet unable for the life of me to avert it. Still, however, my tormentor did not notice my condition, but returned to the charge with renewed vigour. What he lacked in argument he made up in vehemence. And for nearly an hour I had to sit and bear the brunt of both.

"Now, I'll ask you a question," he said for the twentieth time, after he had paused to watch the effect of his last point. "Who do the Anarchists mostly go for? Why for what we may call, for the sake of argument, the leaders of Society—generals, peers, and millionaires. Those are the people, therefore, that they want to be **rid of.**"

"You think then," I said, "that these—these crimes were the work of a party instead of an individual?"

He half closed his eyes and looked at me with an expression upon his face that seemed to implore me to contradict him.

"You know what I think," he said; then with fine conceit, "If only other folk had as much *savee* as we have, the fellows who did the work would have been laid by the heels by this time. As it is they'll never catch them—no, not till the moon's made of cream cheese."

With this avowal of his settled opinion he took himself off, and left me sitting on the hatch, hoping with all my heart and soul that, if in this lay my chance of safety, the world might long retain its present opinion. While I was ruminating on what he had said, and feeling that I would give five years of my life to know exactly how matters stood ashore, I chanced to look up at the little covered way on the hurricane deck below the bridge. My heart seemed to stand still. For the moment I thought I must be asleep and dreaming, for there, gazing across the sea, was the same woman's face I had seen suspended in mid-air above my cab on the previous night. Astonishing as it may seem, there could be no possible doubt about it—I recognised the expressive eyes, the sweet mouth, and the soft, wavy hair as plainly as if I had known her all my life long.

Thinking it was still only a creation of my own fancy, and that in a moment it would fade away as before, I stared hard at it, resolved, while I had the chance, to still further impress every feature upon my memory. But it did not vanish as I expected. I rubbed my eyes in an endeavour to find out if I were awake or asleep, but that made no difference. She still remained. I was quite convinced by this time, however, that she was flesh and blood. But who

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could she be, and where had I really seen her face before? For something like five minutes I watched her, and then for the first time she looked down at the deck where I sat. Suddenly she caught sight of me, and almost at the same instant I saw her give a little start of astonishment. Evidently she had also seen me in some other place, but could no more recall it than myself.

As soon as she had recovered from her astonishment she glanced round the waste of water again and then moved away. But even when she had left me I could not for the life of me rid myself of my feeling of astonishment. I reviewed my past life in an attempt to remember where I had met her, but still without success. While I was wondering, my friend the chief steward came along the deck again. I accosted him, and asked if he could tell me the name of the lady with the wavy brown hair whom I could see talking to the captain at the door of the chart house. He looked in the direction indicated, and then said:

"Her name is Maybourne—Miss Agnes Maybourne. Her father is a big mine owner at the Cape, so I'm told. Her mother died about a year ago, I heard the skipper telling a lady aft this morning, and it seems the poor young thing felt the loss terribly. She's been home for a trip with an old uncle to try and cheer her up a bit, and now they are on their way back home again."

"Thank you very much," I said. "I have been puzzling over her face for some time. She's exactly like someone I've met some time or other, but where, I can't remember."

On this introduction the steward favoured me with a long account of a cousin of his—a steward on board an Atlantic liner—who, it would appear, was always being mistaken for other people; to such a length did this misfortune carry him that he was once arrested in Liverpool on suspicion of being a famous forger who was then at large. Whether he was sentenced and served a term of penal servitude, or whether the mistake was discovered and he was acquitted, I cannot now remember; but I have a faint recollection that my friend described it as a case that baffled the ingenuity of Scotland Yard, and raised more than one new point of law, which he, of course, was alone able to set right in a satisfactory manner.

Needless to say, Miss Maybourne's face continued to excite my wonder and curiosity for the remainder of the afternoon; and when I saw her the following morning promenading the hurricane deck in the company of a dignified grey-haired gentleman, with a clean-shaven, shrewd face, who I set down to be her uncle, I discovered that my interest had in no way abated. This wonderment and mystification kept me company for longer than I liked, and it was not until we were bidding "good-bye" to the Channel that I determined to give up brooding over it and think about something else.

Once Old England was properly behind us, and we were out on the open ocean, experiencing the beauties of a true Atlantic swell, and wondering what our portion was to be in the Bay of Biscay, my old nervousness returned upon me. This will be scarcely a matter for wonder when you reflect that every day we were drawing nearer our first port of call, and at Teneriffe I should know whether or not the police had discovered the route I had taken. If they had, I should certainly be arrested as soon as the vessel came to anchor, and be detained in the Portuguese prison until an officer should arrive from England to take charge of me and conduct me home for trial. Again and again I pictured that return, the mortification of my relatives, and the excitement of the Press; and several times I calmly deliberated with myself as to whether the best course for me to pursue would not be to drop quietly overboard some dark night, and thus prevent the degradation that would be my portion if I were taken home and placed upon my trial. However, had I but known it, I might have spared myself all this anxiety, for the future had something in store for me which I had never taken into consideration, and which was destined to upset all my calculations in a most unexpected fashion.

How strange a thing is Fate, and by what small circumstances are the currents of our lives diverted! If I had not had my match-box in my pocket on the occasion I am about to describe, what a very different tale I should have had to tell. You must bear with me if I dwell upon it, for it is the one little bit of that portion of my life that I love

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to remember. It all came about in this way: On the evening in question I was standing smoking against the port bulwarks between the fore rigging and the steps leading to the hurricane deck. What the exact time was I cannot remember. It may have been eight, and it might possibly have been half-past; one thing, at any rate, is certain: dinner was over in the saloon, for some of the passengers were promenading the hurricane deck. My pipe was very nearly done, and, having nothing better to do, I was beginning to think of turning in, when the second officer came out of the alley way and asked me for a match. He was a civil young fellow of two or three-and-twenty, and when I had furnished him with what he wanted, we fell into conversation. In the course of our yarning he mentioned the name of the ship upon which he had served his apprenticeship. Then, for the first time for many years, I remembered that I had a cousin who had also spent some years aboard her. I mentioned his name, and to my surprise he remembered him perfectly.

"Blakeley," he cried; "Charley Blakeley, do you mean? Why, I knew him as well as I knew any man! As fine a fellow as ever stepped. We made three voyages to China and back together. I've got a photograph of him in my berth now. Come along and see it."

On this invitation I followed him from my own part of the vessel, down the alley way, past the engine-room, to his quarters, which were situated at the end, and looked over the after spar deck that separated the poop from the hurricane deck. When I had seen the picture I stood at the door talking to him for some minutes, and while thus engaged saw two ladies and a gentleman come out of the saloon and go up the ladder to the deck above our heads. From where I stood I could hear their voices distinctly, and could not help envying them their happiness. How different was it to my miserable lot!

Suddenly there rang out a woman's scream, followed by another, and then a man's voice shouting frantically, "Help, help! Miss Maybourne has fallen overboard."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before I had left the alley way, crossed the well, and was climbing the ladder that led to the poop. A second or two later I was at the taffrail, had thrown off my coat, mounted the rail, and, catching sight of a figure struggling among the cream of the wake astern, had plunged in after her. The whole thing, from the time the first shriek was uttered until I had risen to the surface, and was blowing the water from my mouth and looking about me for the girl, could not have taken more than twenty seconds, and yet in it I seemed to live a lifetime. Ahead of me the great ship towered up to the heavens; all round me was the black bosom of the ocean, with the stars looking down at it in their winking grandeur.

For some moments after I had come to the surface I could see nothing of the girl I had jumped overboard to rescue. She seemed to have quite disappeared. Then, while on the summit of a wave, I caught a glimpse of her, and, putting forth all my strength, swam towards her. Eternities elapsed before I reached her. When I did I came carefully up alongside, and put my left arm under her shoulders to sustain her. She was quite sensible, and, strangely enough, not in the least frightened.

"Can you swim?" I asked, anxiously, as I began to tread water.

"A little, but not very well," she answered. "I'm afraid I am getting rather tired."

"Lean upon me," I answered. "Try not to be afraid; they will lower a boat in a few moments, and pick us up."

She said no more, but fought hard to keep herself afloat. The weight upon my arm was almost more than I could bear, and I began to fear that if the rescue boat did not soon pick us up they might have their row for nothing. Then my ears caught the chirp of oars, and the voice of the second officer encouraging his men in their search for us.

"If you can hold on for another three or four minutes," I said in gasps to my companion, "all will be well."

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"I will try," she answered, bravely; "but I fear I shall not be able to. My strength is quite gone."

Her clothes were sodden with water, and added greatly to the weight I had to support. Not once, but half – a – dozen times, seas, cold as ice, broke over us; and once I was compelled to let go my hold of her. When I rose to the surface again some seconds elapsed before I could find her. She had sunk, and by the time I had dived and got my arm round her again she was quite unconscious. The boat was now about thirty yards distant from us, and already the men in her had sighted us and were pulling with all their strength to our assistance. In another minute or so they would be alongside, but the question was whether I could hold out so long. A minute contained sixty seconds, and each second was an eternity of waiting.

When they were near enough to hear my voice I called to them with all my strength to make haste. I saw the bows of the boat come closer and closer, and could distinctly distinguish the hissing of the water under her bows.

"If you can hold on for a few seconds longer," shouted the officer in command, "we'll get you aboard."

I heard the men on the starboard side throw in their oars. I saw the man in the bows lean forward to catch hold of us, and I remember saying, "Lift the lady; I can hold on," and then the boat seemed to fade away, the icy cold water rose higher and higher, and I felt myself sinking down, down, down, calmly and quietly into the black sea, just fading out of life as happily as a little child falls asleep.

When I came to my senses again I found myself lying in a bunk in a cabin which was certainly not my own. The appointments were decidedly comfortable, if not luxurious; a neat white-and-gold washstand stood against the bulkhead, with a large mirror suspended above it. Under the porthole, which was shaded with a small red curtain, was a cushioned locker, and at one end of this locker a handy contrivance for hanging clothes. Two men—one a young fellow about my own age, and the other the elderly gentlemen with whom I had often seen Miss Maybourne walking—were standing beside me watching me eagerly. When they saw that I had recovered consciousness they seemed to consider it a matter for congratulation.

"So you know us again, do you?" said the younger man, whom I now recognised as the ship's doctor. "How do you feel in yourself?"

"Not very bright just at present," I answered truthfully. "But I've no doubt I shall be all right in an hour or two." Then, when a recollection of what had occasioned my illness came over me, I said, "How is Miss Maybourne? I hope they got her on board safely?"

"Thanks to you, my dear sir, they did," said the old gentleman, who I discovered later was her uncle, as I had suspected. "I am glad to be able to tell you that she is now making rapid progress towards recovery. You must get well too, and hear what the entire ship has to say about your bravery."

"I hope they'll say nothing," I answered. "Anybody could have done it. And now, how long have I been lying here?"

"Since they brought you on board last night—about twelve hours. You were unconscious for such a long time that we were beginning to grow uneasy about you. But, thank goodness, our clever doctor here has brought you round at last."

The young medico resolved to stop this flow of flattery and small talk, so he bade me sit up and try to swallow some beef tea he had had prepared for me. With his assistance I raised myself, and when I had polished off as much of the food as I was able to manage, he made me lie down once more and try to get to sleep again. I did exactly as I was ordered, and, in less time than it takes to tell, was in the land of Nod. It was not until I was up and about again that I learnt the history of the rescue. Immediately Miss Maybourne's shriek had roused the ship, and I

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had sprung overboard to her assistance, the chief officer, who was on the bridge, ran to the engine-room telegraph and gave the signal to stop the vessel; the second officer by this time, with commendable activity, had accompanied the carpenter, who among others had heard the alarm, to one of the quarter boats, and had her ready for lowering by the time a crew was collected. At first they had some difficulty in discovering us, but once they did so they lost no time in picking us up. Miss Maybourne was quite unconscious when they took her from my arms, and I believe as soon as I felt myself relieved of her weight I too lost my senses and began to sink. A boat-hook, however, soon brought me to the surface. Directly we reached the ship's deck the captain gave orders that I should be conveyed to an empty cabin at the end of the saloon, and it was here that I found myself when I returned to consciousness.

For what length of time I slept after the doctor and Miss Maybourne's uncle left the cabin I cannot say. I only know that when I woke the former would not hear of my getting up as I desired to do, but bade me make the best of a bad job and remain where I was until he examined me the following morning. It must have been after breakfast that he came to see me, for I heard the bell go, and half an hour later the voices of the passengers die away as they left the table and went on deck.

"Good morning, Mr. Wrexford," he said, as he shut the door behind him and came over to the bunk. "How are you feeling to-day? Pretty well, I hope?"

"I feel quite myself again," I answered. "I want to get up. This lying in bed is dreary work."

"I daresay you find it so. Anyway, I'll not stop you from getting up now, if you're so minded; that is provided you eat a good breakfast first."

"I think I can meet you on that ground," I said with a laugh. "I'm as hungry as a hunter. I hope they're going to give me something pretty soon."

"I can satisfy you up on that point," he replied. "I saw the steward preparing the tray as I came through the saloon. Yes, you must hurry up and get on deck, for the ladies are dying to shake you by the hand. I suppose you're not aware that you are the hero of the hour?"

"I'm sorry to hear it," I said in all sincerity. "There has been a terrible lot of fuss made over a very simple action."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow, there hasn't been anything said yet. You wait till old Manstone gets hold of you. He would have said his say yesterday but for my preventing him, and ever since then he has been bottling it up for you when you're well enough to receive it."

"Who is this Mr. Manstone of whom you speak? I don't think I know him."

"Why you *must* remember, he's Miss Maybourne's uncle—the old gentleman who was in here with me yesterday when you came to your senses again. You must have seen him walking with her on deck—a fine, military-looking old chap, with a big grey moustache."

"Now that you describe him, I remember him perfectly," I said; "but I had never heard his name before. I wish you'd tell him from me that I don't want anything more said about the matter. If they want to reward me, let them do it by forgetting all about it. They couldn't do anything that would please me more."

"Why, what a modest chap you are, to be sure," said the doctor. "Most men would want the Royal Humane Society's medal, and some would even aspire to purses of sovereigns."

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"Very probably. But down on my luck, as I am, I don't want either. The less notoriety I derive, the happier man I shall be. To change the subject, I hope Miss Maybourne is better?"

"Oh, she's almost herself again now. I expect to have her up and about again to-day. Surely you will not mind receiving her thanks?"

"I should not be so churlish, I hope," I remarked; "but all the same, I would rather she said nothing about the matter. That is the worst part of doing anything a little out of the ordinary: one must always be thanked, and praised, and made a fuss of till one begins to regret ever having committed an action that could produce such disastrous results."

"Come, come, you're looking at the matter in a very dismal light, I must say," he cried. "Nine out of every ten men, I'm certain, would have given their ears for the chance you had of rescuing Agnes Maybourne. That it should have come to a man who can't appreciate his good fortune seems like the irony of Fate."

I was about to reply to his jesting speech in a similar strain when there was a tap at the door, and a steward entered bearing a tray. The smell of the food was as good as a tonic to me, and when the doctor had propped me up so that I could get at it in comfort, I set to work. He then left me to myself while he went to see his other patient—the lady of whom we had just been speaking—promising to return in a quarter of an hour to help me dress.

I had just finished my meal, and was placing the tray upon the floor in such a way that the things upon it could not be spilt if the vessel should roll, when there came another tap at the door, and in response to my cry "come in," the captain of the ship appeared, and behind him the elderly gentleman whom the doctor had described to me as Miss Maybourne's uncle, under whose care she was travelling to South Africa.

"Good morning, Mr. Wrexford," said the captain, politely, as he advanced towards me and held out his hand. "I hope you are feeling better?"

"I am perfectly well again now, thank you," I replied. "The doctor is going to let me get up in a few minutes, and then I shall be ready to return to my old quarters forward."

"And that is the very matter I have come in to see you about," said the skipper. "First, however, I must tell you what the entire ship's company, both passengers and crew, think of your bravery the night before last. It was as nobly done, sir, as anything I have ever seen, and I heartily congratulate you upon it."

"Thank you very much," I answered; "but I must really ask you to say no more about it. I have already been thanked ever so much more than I deserve."

"That could not be," impetuously broke in Mr. Manstone, who had not spoken hitherto. "On my own behalf and that of my niece I, too, thank you most heartily; and you may rest assured I shall take care that a full and proper account of it is given my brother when I reach South Africa."

"Until we do so, I hope, Mr. Wrexford," said the skipper, "that you will take up your quarters in this cabin, and consider yourself a saloon passenger. I'm sure the owners would wish it, and for my part I shall be proud to have you among us."

"And I say 'Hear, hear!' to that," added Mr. Manstone.

For a moment I hardly knew what to say. I was touched by his kindness in making the offer, but in my position I could not dream of accepting it. This notoriety was likely to do me quite enough harm as it was.

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"I thank you," I said at last, "and I hope you will fully understand how grateful I am to you for the kindness which prompts the offer. But I think I will remain in my old quarters forward, if you have no objection. I am quite comfortable there; and as I made my choice on principle at the beginning, I think, with your permission, I would rather not change it now."

"But my dear sir," began the captain, "you *must* let us show our appreciation in some practical form. We could never let you off quietly, as you seem to wish."

"You have already done more than enough," I answered. "You have told me what you thought of my action, and you have also made me this offer, the value of which, you may be quite sure, I fully appreciate. I have felt compelled to decline it, and under those circumstances I think it would be best to let the subject drop."

"You are too modest by half, Mr. Wrexford," said Miss Maybourne's uncle. "Far too modest."

For some time the two gentlemen did their best to persuade me to forego my decision, but, hard as they tried, they did not succeed. There were so many reasons why I should not take up my residence among the first saloon passengers aft, and as I reviewed them in my mind, I became more than ever convinced that it would be madness for me to forego my resolution.

When they discovered that I was not to be moved—they shook hands again, and then left me. Five minutes later the doctor came in to help me dress. He carried a bundle of clothes in his arms, and when he had shut the door behind him he threw them on the locker under the porthole.

"Your own clothes, I'm sorry to say, Wrexford," he began, "are completely spoiled; so if you'll allow me, I'm going to lend you these till you can see about some more. We are men of pretty much the same build, so what fits me should fit you, and *vice versa*. Now, if you're ready, let me give you a hand to dress, for I want to get you on deck into the fresh air as soon as possible."

Half an hour later I was ready to leave my cabin. The doctor's clothes fitted me admirably, and after I had given a look round to see that I had not left anything behind me, I followed the medico out into the saloon. Fortunately, there were very few people about, but, to my horror, those who were there would insist upon shaking hands with me, and telling me what they thought of my action before they would let me escape. To add to my discomfort, when I left the saloon and passed along the spar deck towards my own quarters I had to run the gauntlet of the rest of the passengers, who clustered round me, and overwhelmed me with a chorus of congratulations on my recovery. I doubt very much if ever there was more fuss made over an act of common humanity than that made by the passengers of the *Fiji Princess* over mine. If I had saved the lives of the whole ship's company, captain and stokers included, there could not have been more said about it.

Beaching my own quarters forward I went down to my berth, in search of a pipe and a pouch of tobacco, and when I had found them, sat myself down on the fore-hatch and began to smoke. It was a lovely morning, a merry breeze hummed in the shrouds, and the great steamer was ploughing her way along with an exhilarating motion that brought my strength back quicker than any doctor's physic. On the bridge my old friend the second officer was pacing up and down, and when he saw me he came to the rail, and waved his hand in welcome.

The chief steward also found me out, and embraced the opportunity for telling me that my conduct reminded him of a cousin's exploits in the Hooghly, which said narrative I felt constrained to swallow with a few grains of salt. When he left me I sat where I was and thought how pleasant it was, after all, to find that there were still people in the world with sufficiently generous natures to appreciate a fellow creature's actions. One question, however, haunted me continually: What would the folk aboard this ship say when they knew my secret? And, above all, what would Miss Agnes Maybourne think when she should come to hear it?

CHAPTER V. THE WRECK OF THE "FIJI PRINCESS"

That afternoon I was sitting in my usual place on the fore-hatch, smoking and thinking about our next port of call, and what a miserable figure I should cut before the ship's company if by any chance I should be arrested there, when I became conscious that someone had come along the hurricane deck and was leaning on the rails gazing down at me. I looked up, to discover that it was none other than Miss Maybourne. Directly she saw that I was aware of her presence she moved towards the ladder on the port side and came down it towards where I sat. Her dress was of some dark-blue material, probably serge, and was cut in such a fashion that it showed her beautiful figure to the very best advantage. A sweeter picture of an English maiden of gentle birth than she presented as she came down the steps it would have been difficult to find. Kindness and sincerity were the chief characteristics of her face, and I felt a thrill of pride run through me as I reflected that she owed her life to me.

When she came up to where I stood, for I had risen on seeing her approaching me, she held out her hand with a frank gesture, and said, as she looked me in the eyes:

"Mr. Wrexford, you saved my life the night before last, and this is the first opportunity I have had of expressing my gratitude to you. I cannot tell you how grateful I am, but I ask you to believe that so long as I live I shall never cease to bless you for your heroism."

To return an answer to such a speech would not seem a difficult matter at first thought, and yet I found it harder than I would at any other time have imagined. To let her see that I did not want to be thanked, and at the same time not to appear churlish, was a very difficult matter. However, I stumbled out some sort of a reply, and then asked her how she had managed to fall overboard in that extraordinary fashion.

"I really cannot tell you," she answered, without hesitation. "I was leaning against the rails of the hurricane deck talking to Miss Dursley and Mr. Spicer, when something behind me gave way, and then over I went backwards into the water. Oh, you can't imagine the feeling of utter helplessness that came over me as I rose to the surface and saw the great ship steaming away. Then you nobly sprang in to my assistance, and once more hope came into my heart. But for you I might now be dead, floating about in the depths of that great sea. Oh! it is an awful thought."

She trembled like a leaf at the notion, and swept her pretty hands across her face as if to brush away the thought of such a thing.

"It was a very narrow escape," I said. "I must confess myself that I thought the boat would never reach us. And yet how cool and collected you were!"

"It would have meant certain death to have been anything else," she answered. "My father will be indeed grateful to you when he hears of your bravery. I am his only child, and if anything were to happen to me I don't think he would survive the shock."

"I am very grateful to Providence for Laving given me such an opportunity of averting so terrible a sorrow," I said. "But I fear, like everyone else, you attach too much importance to what I did. I simply acted as any other decent man would have done had he been placed in a similar position."

"You do not do yourself justice," she said. "But, at any rate, you have the satisfaction of knowing, if it is any satisfaction to you, that Agnes Maybourne owes her life to you, and that she will never forget the service you have rendered her."

The conversation was growing embarrassing, so I turned it into another channel as soon as possible. At the same

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time I wanted to find out something which had been puzzling me ever since I had first seen her face, and that was where I had met her before. When I put the question she looked at me in surprise.

"Do you know, Mr. Wrexford," she said, "that I was going to ask you that self-same question? And for rather a strange reason. On the night before we sailed, you must understand, I was sleeping at the house of an aunt who lives a few miles outside Southampton. I went to bed at ten o'clock, after a rather exciting day, feeling very tired. Almost as soon as my head was upon the pillow I fell asleep, and did not wake again until about half-past twelve o'clock, when I suddenly found myself wide awake sitting up in bed, with a man's pale and agonised face staring at me from the opposite wall. For a few moments I thought I must be still asleep and dreaming, or else seeing a phantom. Almost before I could have counted five it faded away, and I saw no more of it. From that time forward, like yourself, I was haunted with the desire to remember if I had ever seen the man's face before, and, if so, where. You may imagine my surprise, therefore, when I found the owner of it sitting before me on the hatch of the very steamer that was to take me to South Africa. Can you account for it?"

"Not in the least," I answered. "Mine was very much the same sort of experience, only that I was wide awake and driving down a prosaic London street when it happened. I, too, was endeavouring to puzzle it out the other day when I looked up and found you standing on the deck above me. It seems most uncanny."

"It may have been a warning from Providence to us which we have not the wit to understand."

"A warning it certainly was," I said truthfully, but hardly in the fashion she meant. "And one of the most extraordinary ever vouchsafed to mortal man."

"A fortunate one for me," she answered with a smile, and then offering me her dainty little hand, she bade me "good-bye," and went up the steps again to the hurricane deck.

From that time forward I saw a good deal of Miss Maybourne; so much so that we soon found ourselves upon comparatively intimate terms. Though I believe to others she was inclined to be a little haughty, to me she was invariably kindness and courtesy itself. Nothing could have been more pleasant than her manner when we were together; and you may be very sure, after all that I had lately passed through, I could properly appreciate her treatment of me. To be taken out of my miserable state of depression, and, after so many years of ill fortune, to be treated with consideration and respect, made me feel towards her as I had never done towards a woman in my life before. I could have fallen at her feet and kissed her shoes in gratitude for the luxury of my conversation with her. It was the luckiest chance for both of us when I went aft that night to see that photograph in the second officer's cabin. Had I not been there I should in all probability never have heard Miss Maybourne's shriek as she went over the side, and in that case she would most certainly have been drowned; for I knew that, unaided and weighed down by her wet clothes as she was, she could never have kept afloat till the boat reached her. Strange as it may seem, I could not help deriving a sort of satisfaction from this thought. It was evident that my refusal to accept the captain's kind offer to take possession, for the rest of the voyage, of the vacant berth aft, had created a little surprise among the passengers. Still, I believe it prejudiced the majority in my favour. At any rate, I soon discovered that my humble position forward was to make no sort of difference in their treatment of me; and many an enjoyable pipe I smoked, and twice as many talks I had with one and another, sitting on the cable range, or leaning over the bows watching the vessel's nose cutting its way through the clear green water.

One morning, after breakfast, I was forward watching the effect just mentioned, and, as usual, thinking what my sensations would be if I should be arrested at Teneriffe, when I heard footsteps behind me. On looking round I discovered Miss Maybourne and the skipper coming towards me.

"Good morning, Mr. Wrexford," said the former, holding out her hand. "What a constant student of nature you are, to be sure. Every morning lately I have seen you standing where you are now, looking across the sea. My curiosity could hold out no longer, so this morning I asked Captain Hawkins to escort me up here in order that I

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might ask you what you see."

"I'm afraid you will hardly be repaid for your trouble, Miss Maybourne," I answered with a smile, as the captain, after shaking hands with me and wishing me good morning, left us to speak to one of the officers who had come forward in search of him.

"But surely you must see something—King Neptune, or at least a mermaid," she persisted. "You are always watching the water."

"Perhaps I do see *something*," I answered bitterly. "Yes; I think you are right. When I look over the sea like that I am watching a man's wasted life. I see him starting on his race with everything in his favour that the world can give. I see a school career of mediocrity, and a university life devoid of any sort of success; I can see a continuity of profitless wanderings about the world in the past, and I am beginning to believe that I can make out another just commencing. Disgrace behind, and disgrace ahead; I think that is the picture I have before me when I look across the sea, Miss Maybourne. It is an engrossing, but hardly a pretty one, is it?"

"You are referring to your own life, I suppose?" she said, quietly. "Well, all I can say is that, from what I have seen of you, I should consider that you are hardly the man to do yourself justice."

"God forbid," I answered. "If I were to do that it would be impossible for me to live. No; I endeavour, as far as I am able, to forget what my past has been."

She approached a step closer to me, and placed her little white hand on my arm as it lay on the bulwark before her.

"Mr. Wrexford," she said, with an earnestness I had not hitherto noticed in her, "I hope you will not consider me impertinent if I say that I should like to know your history. Believe me, I do not say this out of any idle curiosity, but because I hope and believe that it may be in my power to help you. Remember what a debt of gratitude I owe you for your bravery the other night. I cannot believe that a man who would risk his life, as you did then, can be the sort of man you have just depicted. Do you feel that you can trust me sufficiently to tell me about yourself?"

"What there is to tell, with certain reservations, of course, you shall hear. There is no one to whom I would confess so readily as to yourself. I will not insult you by asking you to let what I tell you remain *a*, secret between us, but I *will* ask you to try not to judge me too harshly."

"You may be sure I shall not do that," she replied; and then realising what her words implied, she hung her head with a pretty show of confusion. I saw what was passing in her mind, and to help her out of her difficulty plunged into the story of my miserable career. I told her of my old home in Cornwall, of my mother's death, and my father's antipathy to me on that account. On my Eton and Oxford life I dwelt but lightly, winding up with the reason of my being "sent down," and the troubles at home that followed close upon it. I described my bush life in Australia, and told her of the great disappointment to which I had been subjected over the gold mine, suppressing Bartrand's name, and saying nothing of the hatred I had entertained for him.

"After that," I said in conclusion, "I decided that I was tired of Australia, and, having inherited a little money from my father, came home, intending to get something to do and settle down in London. But I very soon tired of England, as I tired of every other place and hence my reason for going out to seek my fortune in South Africa. Now I think I have given you a pretty good idea of my past. It's not an edifying history, is it? It seems to me a parson might moralise very satisfactorily upon it."

"It is very, very sad," she answered. "Oh, Mr. Wrexford, how bitterly you must regret your wasted opportunities."

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"Regret!" I said. "The saddest word in the English language. Yes, I think I do regret."

"You only 'think?' Are you not sure? From your tale one would suppose you were very sorry."

"Yes, I think I regret. But how can I be certain? The probabilities are that if *I* had my chance over again I should do exactly the same. As Gordon, the Australian poet, sings:—

" For good undone, and gifts misspent and resolutions vain,

'Tis somewhat late to trouble. This I know—

I should live the same life, if I had to live again;

And the chances are I go where most men go.'

"It's not a pretty thought, perhaps, to think that one's bad actions are the outcome of a bad nature, but one is compelled to own that it is true."

"You mustn't talk like that, Mr. Wrexford," she cried; "indeed, you mustn't. In all probability you have a long life before you; and who knows what the future may have in store for you? All this trouble that you have suffered may be but to fit you for some great success in after life."

"There can never be any success for me, Miss Maybourne," I said, more bitterly than I believe I had spoken yet. "There is no chance at all of that. Success and I parted company long since, and can never be reconciled to each other again. To the end of my days I shall be a lonely, homeless man, without ambition, without hope, and without faith in any single thing. God knows I am paying dearly for all I have done and all that I have failed to do."

"But there is still time for you to retrieve everything. Surely that must be the happiest thought in this frail world of ours. God, in His mercy, gives us a chance to atone for whatever we have done amiss. Believe me, I can quite realize what you feel about yourself. But at the same time, from what I have seen of you, I expect you make more of it than it really deserves."

"No, no; I can never paint what I have done in black enough colours. I am a man eternally disgraced. You try to comfort me in your infinite compassion, but you can never take away from me, try how you will, the awful skeleton that keeps me company night and day—I mean the recollection of the past."

She looked at me with tears of compassion in her lovely eyes. I glanced at her face and then turned away and stared across the sea. Never in my life before had hope seemed so dead in my heart. Now, for the first time, I realized in all its naked horror the effect of the dastardly deed I had committed. Henceforward I was a social leper, condemned to walk the world, crying, "Unclean! unclean!"

"I am so sorry—so very sorry for you," Miss Maybourne said, after the little pause that followed my last speech. "You cannot guess how much your story has affected me. It is so very terrible to see a man so richly endowed as yourself cast down with such despair. You *must* fight against it, Mr. Wrexford. It cannot be as bad as you think."

"I am afraid I am past all fighting now, Miss Maybourne," I answered. "But I will try, if you bid me do so."

As I spoke I looked at her again. This time her eyes met mine fearlessly, but as they did so a faint blush suffused her face.

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"I bid you try," she said very softly. "God give you grace, and grant you may succeed."

"If anything can make me succeed," I replied, "it will be your good wishes. I will do my best, and man cannot do more. You have cheered me up wonderfully, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

"You must not do that. I hope now I shall not see you looking any more across the sea in the same way that you were this morning. You are to cheer up, and I shall insist that you report progress to me every day. If I discover any relapse, remember, I shall not spare you, and my anger will be terrible. Now good-bye; I see my uncle signalling to me from the hurricane deck. It is time for me to read to him."

"Good-bye," I said, "and may God bless you for your kindness to one who really stood in want of it."

After that conversation I set myself to take a more hopeful view of my situation. I told myself that, provided I managed to reach my destination undetected, I would work as never man ever worked before to make an honourable place for myself among those with whom my lot should be cast. The whole of the remainder of my life I vowed, God helping me, should be devoted to the service of my fellow creatures, and then on the strength of their respect and esteem I would be able to face whatever punishment Providence should decree as the result of my sin. In the strength of this firm resolve I found myself becoming a happier man than I had been for years past.

By this time we had left Madeira behind us, and were fast approaching Teneriffe. In another day and a half, at the longest calculation, I should know my fate.

That night I had been smoking for some time on the fo'c'sle, but after supper, feeling tired, had gone to my bunk at an earlier hour than usual. For some reason my dreams were the reverse of good, and more than once I woke in a fright, imagining myself in danger. To such a state of nervousness did this fright at last bring me that, unable to sleep any longer, I got out of bed and dressed myself. When I was fully attired I sought the deck, to discover a fine starlight night with a nice breeze blowing. I made my way to my usual spot forward, and, leaning on the bulwark, looked down at the sea. We were now in the region of phosphorescent water, and the liquid round the boat's cutwater sparkled and glimmered as if decked with a million diamonds. In the apex of the bows the look-out stood, while black and silent behind him the great ship showed twice its real size in the darkness. The lamps shone brilliantly from the port and starboard lighthouses, and I could just manage to distinguish the officer of the watch pacing up and down the bridge with the regularity of an automaton. There was something about the silence, and that swift rushing through the water—for we must have been doing a good sixteen knots—that was most exhilarating. For something like an hour I stood and enjoyed it. My nervousness soon left me, and to my delight I found that I was beginning to feel sleepy again. At the end of the time stated I made my way towards the ladder leading from the topgallant fo'c'sle to the spar deck, intending to go below, but just as I reached it a man appeared from the shadow of the alley way, approached the bell, and struck three strokes—half—past one—upon it. At the same instant the look-out called "All's well!" The words were scarcely out of his mouth before there was a shuddering and grinding crash forward, then a sudden stoppage and heeling over of the great craft, and after that a dead, ghastly silence, in which the beating of one's heart could be distinctly heard.

The confusion of the next few minutes can be better imagined than described. The vessel had slipped off and cleared herself from the obstruction whatever it was that had caught her, and was now going on her way again, but at reduced speed. I heard the skipper open his cabin door and run up the ladder to the bridge shouting, "What has happened?" The officer of the watch replied, but at the same instant the sailors and firemen off duty came pouring out of the fo'c'sle shouting, "She's sinking! She's sinking!" The engine-room telegraph had meanwhile been rung, and the ship was perceptibly stopping. I stood where I was, wondering all the time what I had better do.

"Everyman to his station," bellowed the skipper, coming to the rails of the bridge, and tunneling his mouth with his hands so that his voice might be heard above the din. "Be steady, men, and remember that the first man who

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gives any trouble I shall shoot without warning." Then, turning to the chief officer, he signed to him to take the carpenter and hasten forward in an endeavour to ascertain the nature of the injuries the vessel had received.

By this time all the passengers were on deck, the women pale and trembling, and the men endeavouring to calm and reassure them as well as they were able. I made my way up the ladder to the hurricane deck, and as I did so felt the vessel give a heavy lurch, and then sink a little deeper in the water. A moment later the chief officer and carpenter crossed the well and hurried up the ladder to the bridge. We all waited in silence for the verdict that meant life or death to everybody.

"Ladies and gentleman," said the skipper, coming down from the bridge, after a short conversation with them, and approaching the anxious group by the chart room door, "I am sorry to have to tell you that the ship has struck a rock, and in a short time will be no longer habitable for us. I want, however, to reassure you. There is ample boat accommodation for twice the number of our ship's company, so that you need have no possible fear about leaving her. How long it will be before we must go I cannot say. There is a strong bulkhead between us and the water which may stand long enough for us to reach Teneriffe, which is only about a hundred miles distant. I think, however, it would be better for us to be prepared for any emergency. The ladies will therefore remain on deck, while the gentlemen go down to their cabins and bring them such warm clothing as they can find. The night is cold, and in case we may have to take to the boats before morning it will be well for everybody to make themselves as warm as possible."

Without more ado the male portion of the passengers ran down the stairway to the saloon like so many rabbits, I following at their heels to see if I could be of assistance. Into the cabins we rushed at random, collecting such articles of apparel as we could find, and carrying them on deck with all possible haste. The necessity for speed was so great that we did not pause to make selection or to inquire as to ownership, but took what we could lay our hands on and were thankful for the find. In the cabin I entered I noticed a pair of cork jackets pushed under a bunk. I dragged them out, and heaped them on the top of the other things I had collected. Then a sudden inspiration seized me. On the rack in the saloon I had noticed a large flask. I took possession of it, and then, collecting the other things I had found, ran on deck again. I could not have been gone half a minute, but even in that short space of time a change had come over the ship. Her bows were lower in the water, and I trembled when I thought of the result of the strain on the bulkhead. I found Miss Maybourne standing just where I had first seen her, at a little distance from the others, aft of the chart-room and beside the engine-room skylight. She was fully dressed, and had a little girl of eight with her, the only daughter of a widow named Bailey, of whom she was very fond.

"Miss Maybourne," I cried, throwing down the things I had brought on the deck as I spoke, and selecting a thick jacket from the heap, "I found these clothes in a cabin. I don't know who they belong to, but you must put on as much as you can wear."

She obeyed me willingly enough, and when I had buttoned the last garment up I insisted on her putting on one of the cork lifebelts. As soon as she was clothed I put another garment on the child, and then attached the second lifebelt to her body. It was too big for her to wear, but fastened round her shoulders I knew it would answer the same purpose.

"But yourself, Mr. Wrexford?" cried Miss Maybourne, who saw my condition. "You must find a cork jacket for yourself, or you will be drowned."

At the very instant that I was going to answer her the vessel gave a sudden pitch, and before the boats could be lowered or anything be done for the preservation of the passengers, she began to sink rapidly. Seeing that it was hopeless to wait for the boats, I dragged my two companions to the ladder leading to the after spar deck. When I reached it, I tore down the rail just at the spot where Miss Maybourne had fallen overboard on the Spanish coast a few nights before, and, this done, bade them jump into the sea without losing time. Miss Maybourne did so

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without a second thought; the child, however, hung back, and cried piteously for mercy. But, with the ship sinking so rapidly under us, to hesitate I knew was to be lost, so I caught her by the waist, and, regardless of her screams, threw her over the side. Then, without waiting to see her rise again, I dived in myself. The whole business, from the moment of the first crash to the tune of our springing overboard, had not lasted five minutes. One thing was self-evident—the bulkhead could not have possessed the strength with which it had been credited.

On coming to the surface again I shook myself and looked about me. Behind me was the great vessel, with her decks by this time almost on a level with the water. In another instant she would be gone. True enough, before I had time to take half a dozen strokes there was a terrific explosion, and next instant I was being sucked down and down by the sinking ship. How far I went, or how long I was beneath the waves, I have no possible idea. I only know that if it had lasted much longer I should never have lived to reach the surface again or to tell this tale. But after a little while I found myself rising to the surface, surrounded by wreckage of all sorts and descriptions.

On reaching the top, I looked about me for the boats, which I felt sure I should discover; but, to my surprise, I could not distinguish one. Was it possible that the entire company of the vessel could have gone down with her? The thought was a terrible one, and almost unnerved me. I raised myself in the water as well as I was able, and as I did so I caught sight of two people within a few yards of me. I swam towards them, and to my joy discovered that they were Miss Maybourne and the child upon whom I had fastened the cork life-preservers a few minutes before.

"Oh, Mr. Wrexford," cried Miss Maybourne, in an agonised voice. "What are we to do? This poor child is either dead, or nearly so, and I can see no signs of any boat at all."

"We must continue swimming for a little while," I answered, "and then we may perhaps be picked up. Surely we cannot be the only survivors?"

"My poor, poor uncle!" she cried. "Can he have perished! Oh, it is too awful!"

The cork lifebelts were keeping them up famously, and on that score I felt no anxiety at all. But still the situation was about as desperate as it well could be. I had not the least notion of where we were, and I knew that unless we were picked up we should be better drowned at once than continue to float until we died of starvation. However, I was not going to frighten my only conscious companion by such gloomy anticipations, so I passed my arm round the child's waist and bade Miss Maybourne strike out for the spot where the ill-fated *Fiji Princess* had gone down. At the same time I asked her to keep her eyes open for a boat, or at least a spar of some sort, upon which we could support ourselves until we could find some safer refuge. On the horrors of that ghastly swim it will not be necessary for me to dilate. I must leave my readers to imagine them for themselves. Suffice it that for nearly a quarter of an hour we paddled aimlessly about here and there. But look as we might, not a sign of any other living soul from aboard that ship could we discover, nor anything large enough upon which three people could rest. At last, just as I was beginning to despair of saving the lives of those whom Providence had so plainly entrusted to my care, I saw ahead of us a large white object, which, upon nearer approach, proved to be one of the overturned lifeboats. I conveyed the good news to Miss Maybourne, and then, with a new burst of energy, swam towards it and caught hold of the keel. She was a big craft, and, to my delight, rode high enough out of the water to afford us a resting-place. To pull myself and the child I carried on to her, and to drag Miss Maybourne up after me, was the work of a very few moments. Once there, we knew we were safe for the present.

CHAPTER VI. THE SALVAGES.

FOR some minutes we lay upon the bottom of the up-turned boat too exhausted to speak. I still held the unconscious form of little Esther Bailey in my arms, and protected her, as well as I was able, from the marauding seas. Though the waves about us upheld many evidences of the terrible catastrophe, such as gratings, broken

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spars, portions of boat gear, still, to my astonishment, I could discover no signs of any bodies. Once, however, –I was successful in obtaining possession of something which I knew would be worth its weight in gold to us: it was an oar, part of the equipment of one of the quarter boats I imagined; half the blade was missing, but with what remained it would still be possible for us to propel the boat on which we had taken refuge.

"What a terrible position was ours, lodged on the bottom of that overturned lifeboat, icy seas breaking upon us every few seconds, the knowledge of our gallant ship, with all our friends aboard, lying fathoms deep below the surface of the waves, and the remembrance that the same fate might be ours at any moment; no possible notion of where we were, no provisions or means of sustaining life, and but small chance of being picked up by any passing boat!

It was Miss Maybourne who spoke first, and, as usual, her conversation was not about herself.

"Mr. Wrexford," she said, and her teeth chattered as she spoke, "at any risk something must be done for that poor child you hold in your arms, she will die else. Do you think we could manage to get her up further on to the boat and then try to chafe her back to consciousness?"

"By all means let us try," I answered, "though I fear it will prove a difficult matter. She seems very far gone, poor little mite."

With the utmost care I clambered further up the boat till I sat with my burden astride the keel. In the darkness we could scarcely see each other, but once the child was placed between us we set to work rubbing her face and hands and trying by every means in our power to restore consciousness. Suddenly a great thought occurred to me. I remembered the flask I had taken from the cabin where I had found the clothes. In an instant I had dived my hand into my pocket in search of it, almost trembling with fear lest by any chance it should have slipped out when I had dived overboard, but to my delight it was still there. I had pulled it out and unscrewed the stopper before anyone could have counted a dozen, taking the precaution to taste it in order to see that it was all right before I handed it to Miss Maybourne. It was filled with the finest French brandy, and, having discovered this, I bade her take a good drink at it. When she had done so I put it to the child's mouth and forced a small quantity between her lips.

"Surely you are going to drink some yourself," said my companion, as she saw me screw on the top and replace it in my pocket.

But I was not going to do anything of the sort. I did not need it so vitally as my charges, and I knew that there was not enough in the bottle to justify me in wasting even a drop. I explained this and then asked her if she felt any warmer.

"Much warmer," she answered, "and I think Esther here feels better too. Let us chafe her hands again."

We did so, and in a few minutes had the satisfaction of hearing the poor mite utter a little moan. In less than an hour she was conscious once more, but so weak that it seemed as if the first breath of wind that came our way would blow the life out of her tiny body. Poor little soul, if it was such a terrible experience for us, what must it have been for her?

What length of time elapsed from the time– of our heading the boat before daylight came to cheer us I cannot say, but, cramped up as we were, the darkness seemed to last for centuries. For periods of something like half an hour at a time we sat without speaking, thinking of all that had happened since darkness had fallen the night before, and remembering the rush and agony of those last few dreadful minutes on board, and the awful fact that all those whom we had seen so well and strong only a few hours before were now cold and lifeless for ever. Twice I took out my flask and insisted on Miss Maybourne and the child swallowing a portion of the spirit. Had I not brought

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that with me, I really believe neither of them would have seen another sunrise.

Suddenly Miss Maybourne turned to me.

"Listen, Air. Wrexford," she cried. "What is that booming noise? Is it thunder?"

I did as she commanded, but for some moments could hear nothing save the splashing of the waves upon the boat's planks. Then a dull, sullen noise reached my ears that might very well have been mistaken for the booming of thunder at a great distance. Thunder it certainly was, but not of the kind my companion imagined. It was the thunder of surf, and that being so, I knew there must be land at no great distance from us. I told her my conjecture, and then we set ourselves to wait, with what patience we could command, for daylight.

What a strange and, I might almost say, weird dawn that was! It was like the beginning of a new life under strangely altered conditions. The first shafts of light found us still clinging to the keel of the overturned boat, gazing hopelessly about us. When it was light enough to discern our features, we two elder ones looked at each other, and were horrified to observe the change which the terrible sufferings of the night had wrought in our countenances. Miss Maybourne's face was white and drawn, and she looked years older than her real age. I could see by the way she glanced at me that I also was changed. The poor little girl Esther hardly noticed either of us, but lay curled up as close as possible to her sister in misfortune.

As the light widened, the breeze, which had been just perceptible all night, died away, and the sea became as calm as a mill pond. I looked about me for something to explain the noise of breakers we had heard, but at first could see nothing. When, however, I turned my head to the west I almost shouted in my surprise, for, scarcely a mile distant from us, was a comparatively large island, surrounded by three or four reef-like smaller ones. On the larger island a peak rose ragged and rough to a height of something like five hundred feet, and upon the shore, on all sides, I could plainly discern the surf breaking upon the rocks. As soon as I saw it I turned excitedly to Miss Maybourne.

"We're saved!" I cried, pointing in the direction of the island; "look there—look there!"

She turned round on the boat as well as she was able and when she saw the land, stared at it for some moments in silence. Then with a cry, "Thank God!" she dropped her head on to her hands and I could see her shoulders shaken by convulsive sobs. I did my best to console her, but she soon recovered of her own accord, and addressed herself to me again.

"These must be the Salvage Islands of which the Captain was speaking at dinner last night," she said. "How can we reach the shore? Whatever happens, we must not drift past them."

"Have no fear," I answered; "I will not let that happen, come what may."

So saying, I shifted my position to get a better purchase of the water, and then using the broken oar began to paddle in the direction of the biggest island. It was terribly hard work, and a very few moments showed me that after all the horrors of the night I was as weak as a kitten. But by patience and perseverance I at last got the boat's head round and began to lessen the distance that separated us. At the end of nearly half an hour we were within an hundred yards of the shore. By this time I had decided on a landing-place. It was a little bit of open sandy beach, perhaps sixty yards long, without rocks, and boasting less surf than any other part of the island I could see. In addition to these advantages it was nearer, and I noted that that particular side of the island looked more sheltered than the others.

Towards this haven of refuge I accordingly made my way, hoping that I should not find any unexpected danger lurking there when I should be too close in to be able to get out again. It was most necessary for every reason that

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we should save the boat from damage, for by her aid alone could we hope to make our way out to passing ships, or, if the worst came, to strike out on our own account for the Canary Islands. That the rocks we were now making were the Salvage Group, as Miss Maybourne had said, I had no doubt in my own mind, though how the skipper came to be steering such a course was more than I could tell.

At last we were so close that I could see the sandy bottom quite distinctly only a fathom or so below us. A better landing-place no man could have wished for. When we were near enough to make it safe I slid off the boat into the water, which was just up to my hips, and began to push her in before me. Having grounded her I took Miss Maybourne in my arms and carried her out of the water up on to the beach and then went back for the child. My heart was so full of gratitude at being on dry land again and having saved the two lives entrusted to my care that I could have burst into tears on the least encouragement.

Having got my charges safely ashore, I waded into the water again to have a look at the boat and, if possible, to discover what had made her capsize. She was so precious to us that I dared not leave her for an instant. To my delight she looked as sound as the day she had been turned out of the shipwright's yard, and I felt if once I could turn her over she would carry us as well as any boat ever built. But how to do that, full of water as she was, was a problem I could not for the life of me solve. Miss Maybourne's wits, however, were sharper than mine and helped me out of the difficulty.

"There is a rope in her bows, Mr. Wrexford," she cried; "why not drive the oar into the sand and fasten her to that? then when the tide goes out—you see it is nearly full now—she will be left high and dry, the water will have run out of her, and then you will be able to do whatever you please to her."

"You've solved the difficulty for me in a very simple fashion," I answered. "What a duffer I was not to have thought of that."

"The mouse can help the lion sometimes, you see," she replied, with a wan little smile that went to my heart.

Having got my party safely ashore, and made my boat fast to the oar, as proposed by Miss Maybourne, the next thing to be done was to discover a suitable spot where we might fix our camp, and then to endeavour to find some sort of food upon which we might sustain our lives until we should be rescued. I explained my intentions to my elder companion, and then, leaving them on the beach together, climbed the hill-side to explore. On the other sides of the island the peak rose almost precipitously from the beach, and upon the side on which we stood it was, in many places, pretty stiff climbing. At last, however, to my great delight, on a small plateau some thirty yards long by twenty deep, I discovered a cave that looked as if it would suit my purpose to perfection. It was not a large affair, but quite big enough to hold the woman and the child even when lying at full length. To add to my satisfaction, the little strip of land outside was covered with a coarse grass, a quantity of which I gathered and spread about in the cave to serve as a bed. — This, with a few armfuls of dry seaweed, which I knew I should be able to obtain on the beach, made an excellent couch.

What, however, troubled me more than anything else, was the fear that the island might contain no fresh water. But my doubts on that head were soon set at rest, for on the hillside, a little below the plateau on which I had discovered the cave, was a fair-sized pool, formed by a hollow in a rock, which, when I tasted it, I found to contain water, a little brackish it is true, but still quite drinkable. There was an abundance of fuel everywhere, and if only I could manage to find some shell fish on the rocks, or hit upon some way of catching the fish swimming in the bay, I thought we might manage to keep ourselves alive until we were picked up by some passing boat.

Descending to the beach again, I told Miss Maybourne of my discoveries, and then taking poor little Esther in my arms we set off up the hill towards the cave. On reaching it I made them as comfortable as I could and then descended to the shore again in search of food.

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Leaving the little sandy bay where we had landed, I tramped along as far as some large rocks I could see a couple of hundred yards or so to my left hand. As I went I thought of the strangeness of my position. How inscrutable are the ways of Providence! However much I might have hated Bartrand, had I not met Nikola I should in all probability never have attempted to revenge myself on him. In that case I should not have been compelled to fly from England at a moment's notice, and should certainly not have sailed aboard the *Fiji Princess*. Presuming, therefore, that all would have gone on without me as it had done with me, Miss Maybourne would have been drowned off the coast of Spain, and the *Fiji Princess* would have gone to the bottom and nobody have been left to tell the tale. It was a curious thought, and one that sent a strange thrill through me to think what good had indirectly resulted from my misfortune.

Beaching the rocks mentioned above, I clambered on to them and began my search for limpets. Once more Fate was kind to me. The stones abounded with the mollusks, the majority of which were of larger sizes than I had met with in my life before. In considerably less than five minutes I had detached a larger supply than our little party would be able to consume all day.

My harvest gathered, I filled my handkerchief and set off for the plateau again. About half-way I looked up, to find Miss Maybourne standing at the cave mouth watching me. Directly she saw me approaching, she waved her hand to encourage me, and that little gesture set my heart beating like a wheat-flail. It was the first dawning of a knowledge that was soon to give me the greatest pain I had ever yet known in my life.

On reaching the plateau, I hastened towards her and placed my spoils at her feet.

"Fortune is indeed kind to us," I said. "See what splendid limpets *I* have obtained from the rocks down yonder. I was beginning to be afraid lest there should be nothing edible on the island."

"But how are we to cook them?" she answered, with a little shudder, for I must confess the things did not look appetising. "I could not eat them raw."

"I have no intention that you shall," I cried, reassuringly. "I am going to light a fire and cook them for you."

"But how can you light a fire? Have you any matches dry enough?"

I took from my waistcoat pocket a little Japanese match-box, the lid of which closed with a strong spring, and opened it in some trepidation. So much depended on the discovery I was about to make. With a trembling hand I pressed back the lid, and tipped the contents into my palm. Fortunately, the strength of the spring and the tight fit of the cover rendered the box almost water-tight, and for this reason the dozen or so matches it contained were only a little damp. In their present state, however, they were quite useless.

"I think," I said, turning them over and examining them closely, "that if I place them in a dry spot they will soon be fit for use."

"Let me do it for you," she said, holding out her hand. "You have done everything so far. Why should I not be allowed to help you?"

"I shall be only too glad to let you," I answered. "I want to cut the fish out of their shells and prepare them for the fire."

So saying, I handed over the precious matches to her care; and then, taking my clasp knife from my pocket, set about my work. When it was finished, and I had prepared an ample meal for three people, I placed it in a safe place in the cave, and then set about collecting a supply of fuel for the fire.

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When this work was done I determined to climb to a point of vantage and search the offing for a sail. Just as I was starting, however, Miss Maybourne called to me to know where I was going. I informed her of my errand, and she immediately asked permission to accompany me. I told her that I should be very glad of her company, and when she had looked into the cave at the little child, who was still fast asleep, we set off together.

From the encampment we climbed the hill-side for a hundred feet or so, and then, reaching another small plateau, turned our attention to the sea. Side by side we looked across the expanse of blue water for the sail that was to bring deliverance to us. But no sign of any vessel could be seen—only a flock of seagulls screeching round the rocks below us, and another wheeling roundabout in the blue sky above our heads.

"Nothing there," I said bitterly. "Not a single sail of any kind."

A fit of anger, as sudden as the squall that ruffles the surface of a mountain lake, rose in my breast against Fate. I shook my fist fiercely at the plane of water softly heaving in the sunlight, and but for my companion's presence could have cursed our fate aloud. I suppose Miss Maybourne must have understood, for she came a little closer to me and laid her hand soothingly upon my arm.

"Mr. Wrexford," she said, "surely you who have hitherto been so brave are not going to give way now, just because we cannot see a ship the first time we look for one. No! No! I know you too well, and I cannot believe that."

"You shame me, Miss Maybourne," I replied, recovering myself directly. "Upon my word, you do. I don't know what made me give way like that. I am worse than a baby."

"I won't have you call yourself names either. It was because you are tired and a little run down," she answered. "You have done too much. Oh, Mr. Wrexford, I want you to grant me a favour. I want you to kneel with me while I thank God for His great mercy in sparing our lives. We owe everything to Him. Without His help where should we be now?"

"I will kneel with you with pleasure," I said, "if you wish it, but I am not worthy. I have been too great a sinner for God to listen to me."

"Hush! I cannot let you say that," she went on. "Whatever your past may have been, God will hear you and forgive you if you pray aright. Remember, too, that in my eyes you have atoned for all your past by your care of us last night. Come, let us kneel down here."

So saying, she dropped on to her knees on that little plateau, and without a second's hesitation I followed her example. It must have been a strange sight for the gulls, that lovely girl and myself kneeling, side by side, on that windy hillside. Overhead rose the rugged peak of the mountain, below us was the surf-bound beach, and on all sides the treacherous sea from which we had so lately been delivered. What were the exact words of the prayer Miss Maybourne sent up to the Throne of Grace I cannot now remember; I only know it seemed to me the most beautiful expression of thankfulness for the past, and supplication for guidance and help in the future that it would be possible for a human being to give utterance to. When she had finished we rose, and having given a final glance round, went down the hill again. On reaching our camping-place she went to the cave to ascertain how little Esther was, while I sought the spot where she had set the matches to dry. To my delight they were now ready for use. So placing them back in my box as if they were the greatest treasures I possessed on earth—as they really were just then—I went across to the fire I had built up. Then striking one of the matches upon a stone I lit the grass beneath the sticks, and in less time than it takes to tell had the satisfaction of seeing a fine bonfire blazing before me. This done, I crossed to the cave to obtain the fish I had placed there.

On entering, I discovered Miss Maybourne kneeling beside the child.

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"How is she now?" I enquired, surprised at discovering the poor little mite still asleep upon the bed of grass.

"She is unconscious again," answered Miss Maybourne, large tears standing in her beautiful eyes as she spoke.

"Oh, Mr. Wrexford, what can we do to save her life?"

"Alas! I cannot tell," I replied. "Shall we give her some more brandy? I have still a little left in the flask."

"We might try it," she said. "But I fear it will not be much use. What the poor little thing needs most is a doctor's science and proper nursing. Oh! if I only knew what is really the matter, I might be able to do something for her. But, as it is, I feel powerless to help her at all."

"At any rate, let us try the effect of a few sips of this," I said, as I took the flask from my pocket. "Even if it does no good, it cannot possibly do any harm."

I knelt beside her, and having opened the little child's mouth, poured into it a few drops of the precious spirit. We then set to work and chafed her hands as briskly as possible, and in a few minutes were rewarded by seeing the mite open her eyes and look about her.

"Thank God," said Miss Maybourne, devoutly. "Oh, Esther darling, do you know me? Do you remember Aggie?"

To show that she understood what was said to her, the little one extended her hand and placed it in that of her friend. The action was so full of trust and confidence that it brought the tears to my eyes.

"How do you feel now, darling?" asked her friend, as she lifted the little sufferer into a more comfortable position.

"A pain here," faltered Esther, placing her hand on the side of her head. Then looking round the cave as if in search of someone, she said, "Miss Maybourne, where is mother?"

At this point my pluck forsook me altogether, and seizing the fish for which I had come, I dashed from the cave without waiting to hear what answer the brave girl would give her. When she joined me, ten minutes later, large tears were running down her cheeks. She made no attempt to hide them from me, but came across to where I knelt by the fire, and said, in a choking voice:

"I have been preparing that poor child for the sad news she must soon hear, and I cannot tell you how miserable it has made me. Do you really think in your own heart that we are the only people who escaped from that ill-fated vessel? Isn't it just possible that some other boat may have been lowered, and that the child's mother may be among those who got away in her? Tell me exactly what you think, without hiding anything from me, I implore you."

"Of course it may be *just* possible, as you say, that a boat *did* get away; but I must confess that I think it is most, unlikely. Had such a thing occurred, we should have been almost certain to have seen her, and in that case we should have been able to attract her attention, and she would have picked us up. No, Miss Maybourne. I wish I could comfort you with such an assurance; but I fear it would be cruel to buoy you up with any false hopes, only to have them more cruelly shattered later on. I'm afraid we must accustom ourselves to the awful thought that the *Fiji Princess* and all her company, with the exception of ourselves, have met a watery grave. Why I should have been saved when so many worthier people perished I cannot imagine."

"To save us, Mr. Wrexford," she answered. "Think what you are saying, and remember that but for you we should not be here now."

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"I thank God, then, for the opportunity He gave me," I answered; and what I said I meant from the very bottom of my heart.

Whatever she may have thought of my speech, she vouchsafed no reply to it; but on looking up a moment later, I discovered that her face was suffused with a beautiful blush that was more eloquent than any words. After that I turned my attention to the meal which I was preparing, and gave her time to recover herself a little.

Having no pot in which to cook the fish, I had to use the largest of the shells I had discovered. These did not prove altogether a good substitute, but as they were all I had got, I had to make the best of them or go without.

When the mussels were sufficiently done, I lifted them off the fire and invited my companion to taste the dish. She did so, and the grimace which followed told me that she was not overpleased at the result. I followed her example, and felt obliged to confess that they made but poor fare to support life upon.

"If we cannot get something better, I don't know what we shall do," she cried. "These things are too horrible."

"Perhaps I may be able to hit upon a way of catching some fish," I said; "or it is just possible I may be able to get a trap and catch some birds. There is no knowing what I may not be able to do with a little practice. In the meantime, you must endeavour to swallow as much of this mess as possible, and try to get the little one in the cave there to do the same."

Putting some of the fish into another shell, I gave it to her, and she carried it off to her sick friend. After I had scraped and washed it carefully, I filled a larger shell with pure water from the pool and gave it to them to drink. When they had finished their meal—and it was not much that they ate—I called Miss Maybourne outside and informed her that I was going to build up a large fire, after which I should set off on a tramp round the island to see if I could discover anything better to eat. While I was away, I advised her to dry her own and the child's things by the blaze, for though we had been some time under the influence of the hot sun, still our garments could not be said to be anything like dry. She promised to do as I wished, and when I had piled what remained of my heap of fuel upon the fire I made my way down to the shore, and then set off for a tramp round the island.

My first call was at the group of rocks from which I had gathered the shellfish of which my companion had so strongly disapproved. I wanted to see if I could discover a place where it would be possible for me to construct some sort of a trap for fish. But though I searched diligently, nothing suitable could I find. At last I had to give it up in despair, and set ray brain to work on another plan for stocking my larder. That fish were plentiful I could see by looking over the edges of the rocks, but how I was to capture them was by no means so plain. I think at that moment I would have given a year of my life for the worst hook and line I had used as a boy among the sticklebacks of Polton Penna.

Leaving the rocks behind me, I turned the point and made for, the brow of a low hill that overlooked the sea on the further side. I had noticed that the sea birds gathered here in greater numbers than elsewhere, and when I reached the cliff, to my surprise and delight, I found the ground literally covered with nests. Indeed, it was a matter of some difficulty to move without treading upon the eggs. My delight can scarcely be overestimated, for here was a new food supply, and one that, while it would be unlikely to give out for some weeks to come, would be infinitely preferable to the wretched limpets upon which we had almost made up our minds we should have to subsist. I hastened to fill my handkerchief and pockets with the spoil, and when I could stuff in no more, continued my walk in a much easier, and consequently more thankful, frame of mind.

As I tramped along, glancing ever and anon at the sea, the sordid details of my past life rose before me. When I considered it, I felt almost staggered by the change that had come over me. It seemed scarcely possible that so short a time could have passed since I had plotted against Bartrand and had been so miserable in London. In my present state of usefulness, I felt as if centuries had elapsed since then, instead of barely a couple of weeks, as was

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really the case. I wondered what would be said in England when the news got into the papers, as I supposed it inevitably must, that I had found a watery grave in the ill-fated *Fiji Princess*. Would there be anyone to regret me? I very much doubted it. One hope occurred to me. Perhaps, under cover of the supposition that I was dead, I might manage to outwit the law after all, and then an opportunity would be afforded me of beginning a new life in a strange land—the land that was the home of Agnes Maybourne.

From a consideration of this important chance I fell to thinking of the girl herself. Could it have been for the reason that I was ultimately to save her life that Fate had raised her face before my eyes to warn me that miserable night in London? It looked very much like it. If, however, that was the beginning, what was the sequel to be? for surely it could not be intended that Fate, having brought me so far, should suddenly abandon me at the end. "Oh! if I were only clean handed like my fellow-men," I cried, in miserable self-abasement, "how happy might I not be!" For I must mention here that in my own mind I had quite come to the conclusion that Agnes Maybourne entertained a liking for me. And, God knows, I on my side had discovered that I loved her better than my own soul. What was to be the end of it all? That the future alone could decide.

The other side of the island—that is to say, the side exactly opposite that upon which we had landed—was almost precipitous, and at the foot of the cliffs, extending for some distance out into the sea, were a number of small islets, upon which the seas broke with never-easing violence. I searched that offing, as I had done the other, for a sail, but was no better rewarded. As soon as I had made certain that there was nothing in sight, I turned upon my tracks and hastened back to the plateau as fast as I could go. For some reason or another, I experienced a great dread lest by any chance something ill might have befallen my charges. But when I reached the beach below the plateau and looked up, to see the fire still burning brightly and Miss Maybourne moving about between it and the cave, I was reassured.

The tide by this time had gone out, and the lifeboat lay high and dry upon the beach. Before rejoining my companions I made my way towards her.

To roll her over into her proper position was only a matter of small difficulty now that the water was out of her, and once this was accomplished I was able to satisfy myself as to her condition. As far as I could gather, there was nothing amiss with her, even her oars lay fastened to the thwarts as usual. How she could have got into the water was a mystery I could not solve for the life of me. I examined her most carefully, and having done so, found some pieces of wood to act as rollers, and dragged her up the beach till I had got her well above high water mark. After that I picked up my parcel of eggs and climbed the hill to the plateau. It was now well on into the afternoon, and I had still much to do before nightfall.'

When I showed Miss Maybourne the eggs I had found, she expressed her great satisfaction, and we immediately cooked a couple to be ready against the little sufferer's waking.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in carrying drift wood from the beach to the plateau; for I had determined to keep a good flare burning all night, in case any ships might happen to pass, and think it worth their while to stand off and on till daylight should show them the reason of it. When I had stacked it ready to my hand there was yet another supply of grass to be cut, with which to improve the bed-places in the cave. Then my own couch had to be prepared somewhere within call. After which there was the evening meal to cook. By the time this was done, darkness had fallen, and our first night on the island had commenced.

When I bade Miss Maybourne "good night" she was kind enough to express her thanks a second time for the trouble I had taken. As if the better to give point to her gratitude, she held out her hand to me. I took it and raised it to my lips. She did not attempt to stop me, and then, with another "good night," she passed into the cave, and I was left alone.

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For hours I sat watching my blaze and listening to the rumbling of the surf upon the shore. The night was as still as a night could well be. Not even a breath of wind was stirring. When I laid myself down in my corner between the rocks near the cave's mouth, and fell asleep, it was to dream of Agnes Maybourne and the happiness that might have been mine but for the one dread thing which had made it quite impossible.

CHAPTER VII. A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT.

LONG before daylight I was awake, thinking of our unenviable position, and wishing for the ladies' sakes that I could do something to improve it. But, as far as I could see, I had done everything that was possible by mortal man. Somehow, though I valued their eggs above gold, I had no fancy for the sea-birds themselves. What I wanted most was a contrivance with which to capture some of the fish in the bay. A line I could easily make by unravelling the painter of the lifeboat; the hook, however, beat me. A hair-pin would have done admirably; but, unfortunately, Miss Maybourne's hair covered her shoulders just as she had run up from her cabin on hearing the first alarm. An ordinary pin would have been invaluable; but among the three of us we could not muster even one. Just as daylight broke, however, I solved my difficulty in the simplest fashion possible, and could have kicked myself round the island, if it had been possible, for my stupidity in not having thought of it sooner. In my tie I wore a long gold pin, with an escutcheon top, which had been given me in Australia years before. The remembrance of it no sooner came into my mind than I had whipped it out of the tie, and had bent the point into a fair-sized hook. This done, I rose from my couch between the rocks, and having replenished the fire, which still showed a red glow, hastened down the hill side to where the boat lay upon the sands. From the painter I extracted sufficient strands to make a line some thirty feet long, and to this I attached my hook. I very much doubt if a fish were ever honoured before with so grand a hook.

Just as the sun's first rays were shooting up beyond the placid sea line, and the sea and heavens were fast changing from a pure pearl grey to every known colour of the rainbow, I pushed the boat into the water, and rowed out for half a mile or so. Then, having baited my hook with mussel, I threw it overboard, and seating myself, line in hand, in the stern, awaited results. I looked at the island, showing so clear and rugged in the bright morning light, and thought of Miss Maybourne and the sick child. If the truth must be confessed, I believe I was happier then, even in such straits and upon so inhospitable a shore, than I had ever been before. When I thought of Bartrand, as I had last seen him, lying stretched out in the snow in that quiet street, and remembered my struggle with Nikola in Golden Square, my walk through sleeping London to Surbiton, and my journey to Southampton, it all seemed like some horrible dream, the effects of which I was at last beginning to rid myself. It was hard to believe that I had really gone through it all; that I, the man now fishing so quietly in this boat, in whom Miss Maybourne believed so much, was in reality Gilbert Pennethorne, the perpetrator of one of the mysterious murders which had entirely baffled the ingenuity of the London police. I could not help wondering what she would say if anyone should tell her the true history of the man in whom she placed such implicit confidence. Would she credit it or not?

While I was thinking of this, I felt a sharp tug upon my line, and when I drew it in, I found, to my delight, a nice fish impaled upon the hook. Having released him and placed him securely at the bottom of the boat, I did not lose a moment in throwing the line overboard again. Within a quarter of an hour I had landed five splendid fellows, and was as pleased with my success as if I had just been created Lord Chancellor of England. To-day, at any rate, I told myself, Miss Maybourne and the little girl should have a nice breakfast.

Arriving at the beach I sprang out, and, using the same means as before, drew my boat up out of reach of the tide. Then, taking my prizes with me, I made my way up the hill-side to the plateau. Just as I reached it, Miss Maybourne made her appearance from the cave and came towards me.

"Look!" I cried, holding up the fish as I spoke, "Are these not beauties?"

"They are indeed splendid," she answered. "But how did you manage to obtain them? I thought you said last night

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that you could think of no way of making a hook?"

"So I did. But since then I have remembered the gold pin I wore in my tie. I found that it made a most excellent hook, and with its assistance I managed to get hold of these gentlemen. But, in my triumph, I am forgetting to enquire how you and your little friend are this morning. You were fairly comfortable in the cave, I hope?"

"Quite comfortable, thank you," she answered, gravely. "But poor little Esther is no better this morning. In fact, if anything, I fancy she is worse. She was delirious for some time in the night, and now she is in a comatose condition that frightens me more than her former restlessness. It goes to my heart to see her in this state."

"Is there nothing we can do for her, I wonder?" I said, as I prepared my fish for the fire.

"I fear we are powerless," replied Miss Maybourne. "The only thing I can imagine to be the matter with her is that she must have been struck by something when we were sucked under by the sinking ship. She complains continually of pains in her head."

"In that case, I fear there is nothing for it but to wait patiently for some ship, with a doctor on board, to come in sight and take us off."

"In the meantime, she may die. Oh, poor little Esther! Mr. Wrexford, this helplessness is too terrible."

What could I say to comfort her? In my own mind I saw no hope. Unless a vessel hove in sight, and she chanced to carry a doctor, the child must inevitably die. As soon as the breakfast was cooked, I went into the cave and looked at her. I found the little thing stretched upon the grass I had thrown down for a bed. She was unconscious, as Miss Maybourne had said, and was breathing heavily. Her pulse was almost unnoticeable, and occasionally she moaned a little, as if in pain. It was a sight that would have touched the most callous of men, and in spite of that one sinister episode in my career, I was far from being such a Nero.

At midday there was no change perceptible in her condition. By the middle of the afternoon she was worse. Miss Maybourne and myself took it in turns to watch by her side; in the intervals, we climbed the hill and scanned the offing for a sail. Our vigilance, however, was never rewarded—the sea was as devoid of ships as our future seemed of hope.

After a day which had seemed an eternity, the second night of our captivity on the island came round. A more exquisite evening could scarcely be imagined. I had been watching by the sick child's side the greater part of the afternoon, and feeling that, if I remained on shore, Miss Maybourne would discover how low-spirited I was, I took the boat and rowed out into the bay, to try and obtain some fish for our supper. This was not a matter of much difficulty, and in less than a quarter of an hour I had hauled on board more than we could possibly have eaten in three meals. When I had finished, I sat in my boat watching the sunset effects upon the island. It was indeed a scene to remember, and the picture of it, as I saw it then, rises before me now as clearly as if it were but yesterday.

To right and left of the points which sheltered the bay, the deep green of the sea was changed to creaming froth, where the surf caught the rocks; but in the little indentation which we had made our home the wavelets rippled on the sand with the softest rhythm possible. The sky was cloudless, the air warmer than it had been for days past. The glow of sunset imparted to the western cliffs a peculiar shade of pink, the beauty of which was accentuated by the deep shadows cast by the beetling crags. On the hillside, directly opposite where my boat was anchored, I could see the plateau, and on it my fire burning brightly. I thought of the brave woman nursing the sick child in the cave, and of the difference she had made in my lonely life.

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"Oh, God!" I cried, "if only You had let me see the chance that was to be mine some day, how easy it would have been for me to have ordered Nikola and his temptation to stand behind me. Now I see my happiness too late, and am consequently undone for ever."

As I thought of that sinister man and the influence he had exercised upon my life, I felt a thrill of horror pass over me. It seemed dreadful to think that he was still at large, unsuspected, and in all probability working some sort of evil on another unfortunate individual.

In my mind's eye I could see again that cold, impassive face, with its snake-like eyes, and hear that insinuating voice uttering once more that terrible temptation. Surely, I thought, the dread enemy of mankind must be just such another as Dr. Nikola.

When the sun had disappeared below the sea line, the colour of the ocean had changed from all the dazzling tints of the king-opal to a sombre coal-black hue, and myriads of stars were beginning to make their appearance in the sky, I turned my boat's head, and pulled towards the shore again. A great melancholy had settled upon me, a vague sense of some impending catastrophe, of which, try how I would, I found I could not rid myself.

On reaching the plateau, I made my way to the cave, and looked in. I discovered Miss Maybourne kneeling beside the child on the grass. As soon as she saw me she rose and led me out into the open.

"Mr. Wrexford," she said, "the end is quite close now, I feel sure. The poor little thing is growing weaker every moment. Oh, it is too terrible to think that she must die because we have not the means to save her."

I did my best to comfort her, but it was some time before I achieved any sort of success. When she had in a measure recovered her composure, I accompanied her back to the cave and examined the little sufferer for myself. Alas! one glance showed me how very close the end was. Already the child's face and hands were cold and clammy, her respiration was gradually becoming more and more difficult. She was still unconscious, and once I almost thought she was dead.

All through that dreadful night she lingered on. Miss Maybourne remained with her until close upon midnight, when I relieved her. Shortly before sunrise I went to the mouth of the cave and looked out. The stars were almost gone from the sky, and the world was very still. When I returned, I thought the child had suddenly grown strangely quiet, and knelt down to examine her. The first grey shafts of dawn showed me that at last the end had come. Death had claimed his victim. Henceforth we need feel no more concern for poor little Esther—her sufferings were over. She had gone to join her mother and the little ones who had lost their lives two days before. Having convinced myself that what I imagined was correct, I reverently closed the little eyes and crossed the frail hands upon her breast, and then went out into the fresh air. The sun was in the act of making his appearance above the peak, and all our little world was bathed in his glory. I looked across to the place between the rocks where I usually slept, and saw Miss Maybourne rising from her rest. My presence outside the cave must have told her my news, for she came swiftly across to where I stood.

"It is all over," she said, very quietly. "I can see by your face that the end has come."

I nodded. For the life of me, I could not have spoken just then. The sight of that agonised face before me and the thought of the dead child lying in the cave behind me deprived me of speech entirely. Miss Maybourne noticed my condition, and simply said, "Take me to her." I did as she commanded, and together we went back to the chamber of death. When we reached it, my companion stood for a few moments looking at the peaceful little figure on the couch of grass, and then knelt down beside it. I followed her example. Then, holding my hand in hers, she prayed for the child from whose body the soul had just departed; then for ourselves still left upon the island. When she had finished, we rose, and, after a final glance at our dead companion, went out into the open air again.

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By this time I had got so much into the habit of searching the sea for ships that I did it almost unconsciously. As I passed the cave I glanced out across the waste of water. Then I stood stock still, hardly able to believe the evidence of my eyes. There, fast rising above the horizon, were the Bails of a full-rigged ship. Miss Maybourne saw them as soon as I did, and together we stood staring at the vessel with all our eyes. My companion was the first to

"Do you think she will come near enough to see us," she cried, in a voice I hardly recognized, so agitated was it.

"She must be made to see us," I answered, fiercely. "Come what may, she must not pass us."

"What are you going to do? How are you going to prevent it? Tell me, and let me help you if I can."

A notion had seized me, and I determined to put it into practice without an instant's delay.

"Let us collect all the wood we can find and then make a large bonfire. When that has been done, we must launch the boat and pull out to intercept her. If she sees the flare she will make her way here, and if she does not, we may be able to catch her before she gets out of our reach. Thus in either case we shall be saved."

Without another word we set to work collecting wood. By the time the hull of the vessel was above the horizon we had accumulated a sufficient quantity to make a large beacon. We did not set fire to it at once, however, for the reason that I had no desire to waste my smoke before those on board the ship would be able to distinguish it from the light clouds hovering about the peaks above. But before we could dream of leaving the island there were two other matters to be attended to. The first was to fill up the mouth of the cave with stones, for there was no time to dig a grave, and so convert it into a rough sepulchre; the second was to cook and eat our breakfast. It was certain we should require all our strength for the undertaking, and to attempt such a long row on an empty stomach would, I knew, be worse than madness. These things I explained to Miss Maybourne, who willingly volunteered to officiate as cook while I set about the work first mentioned. In something less than a quarter of an hour I had rolled several large rocks into the mouth of the cave, and upon these had placed others until the entrance was effectually barricaded. By the time this work was completed it was necessary to light the bonfire. This I did, setting fire to the dry grass at the bottom with a log from the blaze at which Miss Maybourne had just been cooking. In a few minutes we had a flare the flames of which could not have been less than twenty feet in height.

We ate our breakfast with our eyes fixed continually upon the advancing ship. So far she seemed to be heading directly for the island, but my fear was that she might change her course without discovering our beacon, and in that case be out of range before we could attract her attention. Our meal finished therefore, I led Miss Maybourne down the hill to the beach, and then between us we pushed the lifeboat into the water. My intention was to row out a few miles and endeavour to get into such a position that whatever course the vessel steered she could not help but see us.

As soon as we had pushed off from the shore I turned the boat's head, and, taking up the oars, set to work to pull out to sea. It was not altogether an easy task, for the boat was a heavy one and the morning was strangely warm. The sky overhead was innocent of cloud, but away to the west it presented a hazy appearance; the look of which I did not altogether like. However, I stuck to my work, all the time keeping my eyes fixed on the rapidly advancing ship. She presented a fine appearance, and it was evident she was a vessel of about three thousand tons. I hoped she would turn out to belong to our own nationality, though under the circumstances any other would prove equally acceptable. At present she was distant from us about six miles, and as she was still heading directly for the island I began to feel certain she had observed our signal. For this reason I pointed my boat's head straight for her and continued to pull with all the strength I possessed. Suddenly Miss Maybourne uttered a little cry, and seeing her staring in a new direction I turned in my seat to discover what had occasioned it.

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"She is leaving us," cried my companion, in agonized tones, pointing to the vessel we had been attempting to intercept. "Look, look, Mr. Wrexford, she is leaving us!"

There was no need for her to bid me look, I was watching the ship with all my eyes. Heaven alone knows how supreme was the agony of that moment. She had gone about, and for this reason it was plain that those on board had not seen our signal. Now, unless I could manage to attract her attention! it would be most unlikely that she would see us. In that case we might die upon the island without a chance of escape. At any cost we must intercept her. I accordingly resumed my seat again and began to pull wildly after her. Fortunately the breeze was light and the sea smooth, otherwise *I* should have made no headway at all. But when all was said and done, with both wind and tide in my favour, it was but little that I could accomplish. The boat, as I have already said, was a large and heavy one, and my strength was perhaps a little undermined by all I had gone through in the last two or three days. But, knowing what depended on it, *I* toiled at the oars like a galley slave, while Miss Maybourne kept her eyes fixed upon the retreating ship. At the end of an hour I was obliged to give up the race as hopeless. My strength was quite exhausted, and our hoped-for saviour was just showing hull down upon the horizon. Realizing this I dropped my head on to my hands like the coward I was and resigned myself to my despair. For the moment I think I must have forgotten that I was a man, I remembered only the fact that a chance had been given us of escaping from our prison, and that just as we were about to grasp it, it was snatched away again. Our fate seemed too cruel to be endured by mortal man.

"Courage, friend, courage," said Miss Maybourne, as she noticed my condition. "Bitter as our disappointment has been we have not done with hope yet. Because that vessel did not chance to rescue us it does not follow that another may not do so. Had we not better be getting back to the island? It is no use our remaining here now that the ship is out of sight."

I saw the wisdom contained in her remark, and accordingly pulled myself together and set to work to turn the boat's head in the direction we had come. But when we had *gone-about*, my dismay may be imagined at discovering that a thick fog had obscured the island, and was fast bearing down upon us. Those on board the vessel we had been chasing must have seen it approaching, and have thought it advisable to give the island and its treacherous surroundings as wide a berth as possible.

"Can you see the land at all, Mr. Wrexford?" asked Miss Maybourne, who had herself been staring in the direction in which our bows were pointing.

"I must confess I can see nothing of it," I answered. "But if we continue in this direction and keep our ears open for the sound of the surf, there can be no doubt as to our being able to make our way back to the bay."

"How thick the fog is," she continued, "and how quickly it has come up! It makes me feel more nervous than even the thought of that ship forsaking us."

I stared at her in complete surprise. To think of Miss Maybourne, whom I had always found so cool and collected in moments of danger, talking of feeling nervous! I rallied her on the subject as I pulled along, and in a few moments she had forgotten her fear.

While I pulled along I tried to figure out what distance we could be from the island. When we discovered that the vessel had turned her back on us I had been rowing for something like half an hour.

At the rate we had been travelling that would have carried us about a couple of miles from the shore. After we had noticed the change in her course we had probably pulled another four at most. That being so, we should now be between five and six miles from land—two hours' hard work in my present condition. To add to the unpleasantness of our position, the fog by this time had completely enveloped us, and to enable you to judge how dense it was I may say that I could only just distinguish my companion sitting in the stern of the boat. Still,

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however, I pulled on, pausing every now and again to listen for the noise of the surf breaking on the shore.

The silence was intense; the only sound we could hear was the tinkling of the water as it dripped off the ends of the oars. There was something indescribably awful about the utter absence of noise. It was like the peace which precedes some great calamity. It stretched the nerves to breaking pitch. Indeed, once when I allowed myself to think what our fate would be if by any chance we should miss the island, I had such a shock as almost deprived me of my power of thinking for some minutes.

For at least an hour and a half I pulled on, keeping her head as nearly as possible in the same direction, and expecting every moment to hear the roar of the breakers ahead. The fog still remained as thick as ever, and each time I paused in my work to listen the same dead silence greeted me as before. Once more I turned to my work, and pulled on without stopping for another quarter of an hour. Still no sound of the kind we hoped to hear came to us. The island seemed as difficult to find in that fog as the proverbial needle in the bundle of hay.

The agony of mind I suffered was enough to turn a man's brain. If only the fog would lift and let us have a glimpse of where we were, it would have been a different matter, but no such luck. It continued as thick as ever, wreathing and circling about us like the smoke from the infernal regions. At last I drew in my oars and arranged them by my side. Under the circumstances it was no use wasting what remained of my strength by useless exertion.

From that time forward—that is to say for at least six hours—we drifted on and on, the fog remaining as dense as when we had first encountered it. Throughout that time we kept our ears continually strained for a sound that might guide us, but always without success. By this time it must have been considerably past three in the afternoon, and for all we knew to the contrary we might still be miles and miles out of our reckoning. All through this agonizing period, however, Miss Maybourne did not once complain, but bore herself with a quiet bravery that would have shamed the veriest coward into at least an affectation of courage. How bitterly I now reproached myself for having left the island to pursue that vessel I must leave you to imagine. But for that suicidal act of folly we might now be on dry land, if not perhaps as luxuriously housed as we should have liked, at least safer than we were now. The responsibility for that act of madness rested entirely upon my shoulders, and the burden of that knowledge was my continual punishment.

At last I was roused from my bitter thoughts by my companion exclaiming that she thought the fog was lifting a little in one particular quarter. I looked in the direction indicated and had to admit that the atmosphere certainly seemed to be clearer there than elsewhere. Still, however, there was no noise of breakers to be heard.

The light in the quarter pointed out by my companion was destined to be the signal for the fog's departure, and in less than a quarter of an hour, starting from the time of our first observing it, the whole expanse of sea, from horizon to horizon, stood revealed to us. We sprang to our feet almost simultaneously, and searched the ocean for the island. But to our horror it was not to be seen. *We were alone on the open sea without either water or food, any real knowledge of where we were, or without being able to tell from which quarter we might expect assistance to come.* A more dreadful situation could scarcely be imagined, and when I considered the sex and weakness of my companion, and reflected what such a fate would mean for her, I could have cursed myself for the stupidity which had brought it all about.

For some moments after we had made our terrible discovery, neither of us spoke. Then our glances met and we read our terror in each other's eyes.

"What are we to do? What can we do?" cried Miss Maybourne, running her eyes round the horizon and then meeting my gaze again.

I shook my head and tried to think before I answered her.

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"For the moment I am as powerless as yourself to say," I replied. "Even if we could fix the direction, goodness only knows how far we are from the island. We may be only distant ten miles or so, or we may be twenty. It must be nearly four o'clock by this time, and in another four hours at most darkness will be falling; under cover of the night we may miss it again. On the other hand we cannot exist here without food or water. Oh, Miss Maybourne, to what straits have I brought you through my stupidity. If we had stayed on the island instead of putting off on this fool's chase you would be safe now."

"You must not blame yourself, Mr. Wrexford," she answered. "Indeed you must not! It is not just, for I was quite as anxious as yourself to try and intercept the vessel. That we did not succeed is not our fault, and in any case I will not let you reproach yourself."

"Alas! I cannot help it," I replied. "And your generosity only makes me do so the more."

"In that case I shall cease to be generous," she said. "We will see how that plan works. Come, come, my friend, let us look our situation in the face and see what is best to be done. Believe me, I have no fear. God will protect us in the future as He has done in the past."

I looked at the noble girl as she said this, and took heart from the smile upon her face. If she could be so brave, surely I, who called myself a man, must not prove myself a coward. I pulled myself together and prepared to discuss the question as she desired. But it was the knowledge of our utter helplessness that discounted every hope. We had no food, we had no water. True, we might pull on; but if we did, in which direction should we proceed? To go east would be to find ourselves, if we lived so long—the chances against which were a thousand to one—on the most unhealthy part of the long coast line of Africa. To pull west would only be to get further out into mid-ocean, where, if we were not picked up within forty-eight hours, assistance would no longer be of any use to us. The Canary Islands, I knew, lay somewhere, say a hundred miles, to the southward, but we could not pall that distance without food or water, and even if we had a favourable breeze, we had no sail to take advantage of it. To make matters worse, the fishing line and hook I had manufactured for myself out of my scarf-pin, had been left on the island. Surely any man or woman might be excused for feeling melancholy under the pressure of such overwhelming misfortunes.

While we were thus considering our position the sun was sinking lower and lower to his rest, and would soon be below the horizon altogether. The sea was still as calm as a mill-pond, not a breath of air disturbed its placid surface. We sat just as we had done all day: Miss Maybourne in the stern, myself amidships. The oars lay on either side of me, useless as the rudder, the yoke lines had scarcely been touched since the ship had turned her back on us. When I look back on that awful time now, every detail of the boat, from the rowlocks to the grating on the bottom, seems impressed on my memory with a faithfulness that is almost a pain. I can see Miss Maybourne sitting motionless in the stern, her elbows on her knees and her face buried in her hands.

At last to rouse her and take her out of herself, I began to talk. What I said I cannot recollect, nor can I even recall the subject of my conversation. I know, however, that I continued to talk and insisted upon her answering me. In this way we passed three times until darkness fell and the stars came out. For the past hour I had been suffering agonies of thirst, and I knew, instinctively, that my companion must be doing the same. I followed her example and dabbled my hands in the water alongside. The coolness, however, while proving infinitely refreshing to my parched skin, only helped to intensify my desire for something to drink. I searched the heavens in the hope of discovering a cloud that might bring us rain, but without success.

"Courage," said Miss Maybourne again, as she noticed me drop my head on to my hands in my despair. "As I said just now, we are in God's hands; and I feel certain we shall be saved at last."

As if in mockery of her faith I noticed that her voice had lost its usually clear ring, and that it was lower than I had ever hitherto heard it. But there was a note of conviction in it that showed me how firm her belief was. For my

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own part I must confess that I had long since given up all hope. In the face of so many calamitous circumstances it seemed impossible that we could be saved. My obvious duty there was to endeavour by every means in my power to make death as easy as possible for the woman I loved.

In the same tedious fashion hour after hour went by and still we remained as we were, floating idly upon the bosom of the deep. Twice I tried to persuade Miss Maybourne to lie down at the bottom of the boat and attempt to obtain some sleep, but she would not hear of such a thing. For myself I could not have closed my eyes for five minutes, even if by doing so I could have saved my life. Every faculty was strained to breaking pitch, and I was continually watching and listening for something, though what I expected to see or hear I could not have told if I had been asked. I pray to God that I may never again be called upon to spend such another absolutely despairing night.

CHAPTER VIII. WE ARE SAVED!

THE calm with which we had so far been favoured was not, however, destined to be as permanent as we imagined, for towards the middle of the night the wind got up, and the sea, from being as smooth as glass, became more boisterous than I altogether liked. Miss Maybourne, who now seemed to be sunk into the lethargy from which she had roused me, lifted her head from her hands, and at intervals glanced over her shoulder apprehensively at the advancing waves. One thing was very evident: it would never do to let our boat drift broadside on to the seas, so I got out the oars again, and to distract my companion's thoughts, invited her to take the helm. She did as I requested, but without any sign of the eagerness she had hitherto displayed. Then, for something like an hour, we struggled on in this crab-like fashion. It was Herculean labour, and every minute found my strength becoming more and more exhausted. The power of the wind was momentarily increasing, and with it the waves were assuming more threatening proportions. To say that I did not like the look of affairs would be to put my feelings very mildly. To tell the truth, I was too worn out to think of anything, save what our fate would be if by any chance we should be on the edge of an hurricane. However, I knew it would not do to meet trouble half-way, so by sheer force of will I rivetted my attention upon the boat, and in thus endeavouring to avert the evil of the present, found sufficient occupation to prevent me from cross-questioning the future.

Suddenly Miss Maybourne, who, as I have said, had for some time been sitting in a constrained attitude in the stern, sprang to her feet with a choking cry.

"Mr. Wrexford," she said, in a voice that at any other time I should not have recognised as hers, "I must have something to drink or I shall go mad."

Fearing she might fall overboard in her excitement, I leapt up, seized her in my arms, and dragged her down to her seat again. Had I not done so, I cannot say what might not have happened.

"Let me go," she moaned. "Oh, for Heaven's sake, let me go! You don't know what agony I am suffering."

I could very well guess, for I had my own feelings to guide me. But it was my duty to try and cheer her at any cost, and upon this work I concentrated all my energies, at the same time keeping the boat's head in such a position that the racing seas should not overwhelm her—no light work, I can assure you. When at last I *did* succeed in calming her, she sat staring straight ahead of her like a woman turned to stone. It was pitiful to see a woman, who had hitherto been so brave, brought so low. I put my arm round her waist the better to hold her, and, as I did so, watched the black seas, with their tips of snowy foam, come hissing towards us. Overhead the stars shone brightly, and still not a vestige of a cloud was to be seen. It seemed like doubting Providence to believe that, after all the dangers from which we had been preserved since we had left England, we were destined to die of starvation in an open boat in mid-Atlantic. And yet how like it it looked.

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After that one outburst of despair Miss Maybourne gave no more trouble, and when she had been sitting motionless beside me for an hour or thereabouts fell fast asleep, her head resting on my arm. Weak and suffering as I was, I was not so far gone as to be unable to feel a thrill of delight at this close contact with the woman I loved. What would I not have given to have been able to take her in my arms and have comforted her properly!—to have told her of my love, and, in the event of her returning it, to have faced King Death side by side as lovers. With her hand in mine Death would not surely be so very terrible. However, such a thing could not be thought of. I was a criminal, a murderer flying from justice; and it would have been an act of the basest sacrilege on my part to have spoken a word to her of the affection which by this time had come to be part and parcel of my life. For this reason I had to crush it and keep it down; and, if by any chance we should be rescued, I would have to leave her and go out to hide myself in the world without allowing her ever to suspect the thoughts I had had in my mind concerning her. God knows, in this alone I had suffered punishment enough for the sin I had unintentionally committed.

At last the eastern stars began to lose something of their brilliance, and within a short period of my noticing this change, the wind, which had been sensibly moderating for some time past, dropped to a mere zephyr, and then died away completely. With its departure the violence of the waves subsided, and the ocean was soon, if not so smooth as on the previous day, at least sufficiently so to prevent our feeling any further anxiety on the score of the boat's safety.

One by one the stars died out of the sky, and a faint grey light, almost dove-coloured in its softness, took their place. In this light our boat looked double her real size, but such a lonely speck upon that waste of water that it would have made the heart of the boldest man sink into his shoes with fear. From the above-mentioned hue the colour quickly turned to the palest turquoise, and again to the softest pink. From pink it grew into a kaleidoscope of changing tints until the sun rose like a ball of gold above the sea-line—and day was born to us. In the whole course of my experience I never remember to have seen a more glorious sunrise. How different was it in its joyous lightness and freshness to the figures presented by the two miserable occupants of that lonely boat!

At last Miss Maybourne opened her eyes, and, having glanced round her, sat up. My arm, when she did so, was so cramped and stiff that for a moment I could scarcely bear to move it. She noticed this, and tried to express her regret, but her tongue refused to obey her commands. Seeing this, with an inarticulate sound she dropped her head on to her hands once more. To restore some animation into my cramped limbs, I rose and endeavoured to make my way to the bows of the boat. But, to my dismay, I discovered that I was as weak as a month-old child. My legs refused to support the weight of my body, and with a groan I sank down on the thwart where I had previously been rowing.

For upwards of half an hour we remained as we were, without speaking. Then I suddenly chanced to look along the sea-line to the westward. The atmosphere was so clear that the horizon stood out like a pencilled line. I looked, rubbed my eyes, and looked again. Could I be dreaming, or was it a delusion conjured up by an overtaxed brain. I shut my eyes for a moment, then opened them, and looked again. No, there could be no mistake about it this time. *A ship was in sight, and heading directly for us!* Oh, the excitement of that moment, the delirious joy, the wild, almost cruel, hope that seized me! But, mad with longing though I was, I had still sufficient presence of mind left to say nothing about my discovery to Miss Maybourne until I was sure of my facts. She was sitting with her back towards it, and therefore could not see it. So, while there was any chance of the vessel leaving us, I was not going to excite her hopes, only to have them blighted again. There would be plenty of time to tell her when she was close enough to see us.

For what seemed an eternity I kept my eyes fixed upon the advancing vessel, watching her rise higher and higher above the waves. She was a large steamer, almost twice the size of the ill-fated *Fiji Princess*. A long trail of smoke issued from her funnels; and at last, so close did she come, I could distinguish the water frothing at her bows with the naked eye. When she was not more than three miles distant, I sprang to my feet.

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"We're saved, Miss Maybourne!" I cried frantically, finding my voice and strength as suddenly as I had lost them. "We're saved! Oh, thank God, thank God!"

She turned her head as I spoke, and looked steadily in the direction I pointed for nearly a minute. Then, with a little sigh, she fell upon the gunwale in a dead faint. I sprang to her assistance, and, kneeling at her feet, chafed her hands and called her by name, and implored her to speak to me. But in spite of my exertions, she did not open her eyes. When a quarter of an hour had elapsed, and she was still insensible, I began to wonder what I should do. To remain attending to her might mean that we should miss our deliverer. In that case we should both die. At any cost, and now more than ever, I knew I must attract the steamer's attention. She was not more than a mile behind us by this time, and, if I could only make her see us, she would be alongside in a few minutes. For this reason I tore off my coat, and, attaching it to an oar, began to wave it frantically above my head. Next moment a long whistle came across the waves to me. It was a signal that our boat had been observed, and never did a sound seem more musical to a human ear. On hearing it, I stood up again, and, shading my eyes with my hands, watched her approach, my heart beating like a piston-rod. Closer and closer she came, until I could easily read the name, *King of Carthage*, upon her bows. When she was less than a hundred yards distant, an officer on the bridge came to the railings, and hailed us.

"Boat, ahoy!" he cried. "Do you think you can manage to pull alongside? or shall we send assistance to you?"

In reply—for I could not trust my voice to speak—I got out my oars, and began to row towards her. Short as was the distance, it took me some time to accomplish it. Seeing this, the same officer again hailed me, and bade me make fast the line that was about to be thrown to me. The words were hardly out of his mouth before the line in question came whistling about my ears. I seized it as a drowning man is said to clutch at a straw, and, clambering forward, secured it to the ring in the bows. When that was done, I heard an order given, and willing hands pulled us quickly alongside.

By the time we reached it the gangway had been lowered, and a couple of men were standing at the foot of it ready to receive us. I remember leaning over to fend her off, and I also have a good recollection of seeing one of the men—the ship's doctor I afterwards discovered him to be—step into the boat.

"Can you walk up the steps yourself, or would you like to be carried?" he asked, as I sank down on the thwart again.

"Carry the lady," I answered huskily; "I can manage to get up myself. Take her quickly, or she will die."

I saw him pick Miss Maybourne up, and, assisted by the quartermaster who had accompanied him, carry her up the ladder. I attempted to follow, only to discover how weak I really was. By the exercise of sheer will, however, I managed to scramble up, holding on to the rail, and so gained the deck. Even after all this lapse of time I can distinctly see the crowd of eager faces pressed round the top of the ladder to catch a glimpse of us, and I can hear again the murmurs of sympathy that went up as we made our appearance. After that all seems a blank, and I can only believe what I am told—namely, that I looked round me in a dazed sort of fashion, and then fell in a dead faint upon the deck.

When I recovered consciousness again, I had to think for a moment before I could understand what had happened. I found myself in a handsomely-furnished cabin that I had never seen before. For an instant I imagined myself back again on the ill-fated *Fiji Princess*. Then a tall, red-bearded man—the same who had carried Miss Maybourne up from the boat—entered, and came towards me. Through the door, which he had left open, I could see the awning-covered promenade-deck outside. As soon as I saw him I tried to sit up on the velvet-cushioned locker upon which I had been placed, but he bade me be content to lie still for a little while.

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"You will be far better where you are," he said. "What you want is rest and quiet. Take a few sips of this, and then lie down again and try to get to sleep. You have some arrears to make up in that line, or I'm mistaken."

He handed me a glass from the tray above my couch, and held it for me while I drank. When I had finished I laid myself down again, and, instead of obeying him, began to question him as to where I was. But once more I was forestalled, this time by the entrance of a steward carrying a bowl of broth on a tray.

"You see we're determined, one way or another, to close your mouth," he said, with a laugh. "But this stuff is too hot for you at present. We'll put it down here to cool, and in the meantime I'll answer not more than half-a-dozen questions. Fire away, if you feel inclined."

I took him at his word, and put the one question of all others I was longing to have answered.

"How is the lady who was rescued with me?"

"Doing as well as can be expected, poor soul," he replied. "She's being well looked after, so you need not be anxious about her. You must have had a terrible time in that boat, to judge from the effects produced. Now, what is the next question?"

"I want to know what ship this is, and how far we were from the Salvages when you picked us up?"

"This vessel is *The King of Carthage*—Captain Blockman in command. I'm afraid I can't answer your last question offhand, for the reason that, being the doctor, I have nothing to do with the navigation of the ship; but I'll soon find out for you."

He left the cabin, and went to the foot of the ladder that led to the bridge. I heard him call the officer of the watch, and say something to him. Presently he returned.

"The Salvages lie about seventy miles due nor'-nor'-east of our present position," he said.

"Nor'-nor'-east?" I cried. "Then I was even further out in my calculations than I expected."

"Why do you ask about the Salvages?"

"Because it was on a rock off those islands that our ship, the *Fiji Princess*, was lost. We put off from the island to try and catch a sailing vessel that came in sight yesterday morning. A dense fog came on, however, and during the time it lasted we lost both the ship we went out to stop and also our island. Ever since then we have been drifting without food or water."

"You have indeed had a terrible experience. But you've a splendid constitution, and you'll soon get over the effects of it. And now tell me, were no others saved from the wreck?"

"As far as we could tell, with the exception of our three selves, not a single soul."

"You say 'three selves,' but we only rescued the lady and yourself. What, then, became of the third?"

"The third was a child about eight years old. The poor little thing must have been hurt internally when we were sucked under by the sinking ship, and her condition was probably not improved by the long exposure we had to endure on the bottom of the boat from which you rescued us. She scarcely recovered consciousness, and died on the island a short time before we left it in our attempt to catch the vessel I spoke of just now."

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"I never heard a sadder case," said the doctor. "You are indeed to be pitied. I wonder the lady, your companion, came through it alive. By the way, the skipper was asking me just now if I knew your names."

"The lady is Miss Maybourne, whose father is a well-known man at the Cape, I believe."

"Surely not Cornelius Maybourne, the mining man?"

"Yes, she is his daughter. He will be in a terrible state when the *Fiji Princess* is reported missing."

"I expect he will; but, fortunately, we shall be in Cape Town almost as soon as she would have been, and he will find that his daughter, thanks to your care, is safe and sound. Now I am not going to let you talk any more. First, take as much of this broth as you can manage, and then lie down and try to get to sleep again. As I said just now, I prophesy that in a few days you'll be up and about, feeling no ill-effects from your terrible adventure."

I obeyed him, and drank the broth. When I had done so I laid down again, and in a very short time was once more in the Land of Nod. When I opened my eyes again the cabin was almost dark. The doctor was still in attendance, and, as soon as he saw that I was awake, asked me if I would like to get up for a little while. I answered that I should be only too glad to do so; and when he had helped me to dress, I took possession of a chair on the promenade-deck outside. It was just dinner-time in the saloon, and by the orders of the Captain, who came personally to enquire how I was, I was served with a meal on deck. Nothing could have exceeded the kindness and thoughtfulness of the officers and passengers. The latter, though anxious to hear our story from my own lips, refrained from bothering me with questions; and thinking quiet would conduce to my recovery, allowed me to have the use of that end of the deck unmolested. As soon as I could do so, I enquired once more after Miss Maybourne, and was relieved to hear that she was making most satisfactory progress towards recovery. After dinner the Captain came up, and seating himself in a chair beside me, asked a few questions concerning the foundering of the *Fiji Princess*, which information, I presumed, he required for his log.

"You have placed Mr. Maybourne very deeply in your debt," he said, after a little further conversation; "and I don't doubt but there will be many who will envy your good fortune in having conferred so signal a service upon his daughter. By the way, you have not told us your own name."

My heart gave a great jump, and for the moment I seemed to feel myself blushing to the roots of my hair. After the great kindness I had already received from everyone on board the vessel, it seemed worse than ungrateful to deceive them. But I dared not tell the truth. For all I knew to the contrary, my name might have been proclaimed everywhere in England before they left.

"My name is Wrexford," I said, feeling about as guilty as a man could well do.

"Any relation to the Wrexfords of Shrewsbury?" asked the Captain with mild curiosity.

"Not that I'm aware of," I answered. "I have been living out of England for many years, and have no knowledge of my relations."

"It's not a common name," continued the skipper; "that is why I ask. Sir George Wrexford is one of our directors, and a splendid fellow. I thought it was just possible that you might be some connection of his. Now, if you will excuse me, I'll be off. Take my advice and turn in early. I'm sorry to say we're carrying our full complement of passengers, so that I cannot give you a proper berth; but I've ordered a bed to be made up for you in my chart-room, where you have been all day to-day. If you can manage to make yourself comfortable there it is quite at your service."

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"It is very kind of you to put yourself to so much inconvenience," I answered. "I fear by the time we reach Cape Town I shall have caused you a considerable amount of trouble."

"Not at all! Not at all!" the hospitable skipper replied, as he rose to go. "I'm only too glad to have picked you up. It's our duty to do what we can for each other, for we none of us know when we may be placed in a similar plight ourselves."

After he left me, I was not long in following the good advice he had given me; and when I had once reached my couch, fell into a dreamless sleep, from which I did not wake until after eight o'clock next morning. Indeed, I don't know that I should have waked even then, had I not been disturbed by the noise made by someone entering the cabin. It proved to be the doctor.

"How are you feeling this morning?" he asked, when he had felt my pulse.

"Ever so much better," I replied. "In fact, I think I'm quite myself again. How is Miss Maybourne?"

"Still progressing satisfactorily," he answered. "She bids me give you her kind regards. She has been most constant in her enquiries after your welfare."

I don't know whether my face had revealed my secret, or whether it was only supposition on his part, but he looked at me pretty hard for a moment, and then laughed outright.

"You may not know it," he said, "but when all's said and done, you're a jolly lucky fellow."

I sighed, and hesitated a moment before I replied.

"I'm afraid you're mistaken," I said. "Luck and I have never been companions. I doubt if there is a man in this world whose career has been more devoid of good fortune than mine. As a boy, I was unlucky in everything I undertook. If I played cricket, I was always either bowled for a duck's egg, or run out just as I was beginning to score. If there was an accident in the football field, when I was playing, I was invariably the sufferer. I left Oxford under a cloud, because I could not explain something that I knew to be a mistake on the part of the authorities. I quarrelled with my family on the same misunderstanding. I was once on the verge of becoming a millionaire, but illness prevented my taking advantage of my opportunity; and while I was thus delayed another man stepped in and forestalled me. I had a legacy, but it brought me nothing but ill-luck, and has finally driven me out of England!"

"And since then the tide of ill-fortune has turned," he said. "A beautiful and wealthy girl falls overboard—you dive in, and rescue her. I have heard about that, you see. The ship you are travelling by goes to the bottom—you save your own and the same girl's life. Then, as if that is not enough, you try your luck a third time; and, just as a terrible fate seems to be going to settle you for good and all, we heave in sight and rescue you. Now you have Miss Maybourne's gratitude, which would strike most men as a more than desirable possession, and at the same time you will have her father's."

"And, by the peculiar irony of fate, both come to me when I am quite powerless to take advantage of them."

"Come, come, you mustn't let yourself down like this. You know very well what the end of it all will be, if you spend your life believing yourself to be a marked man."

"You mean that I shall lose my reason? No, no! you needn't be afraid of that. I come of a hard-headed race that has not been in the habit of stocking asylums."

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"I am glad of that. Now what do you say to getting up? I'll have your breakfast sent to you in here, and after you've eaten it, I'll introduce you to some of the passengers. On the whole, they are a nice lot, and very much interested in my two patients."

I thanked him, and, to show how very much better I felt, sprang out of bed and began to dress. True to his promise, my breakfast was brought to me by a steward, and I partook of it on the chart-room table. Just as I finished the doctor reappeared, and, after a little conversation, we left the cabin and proceeded out on to the deck together. Here we found the majority of the passengers promenading, or seated in their chairs. Among them I noticed two clergymen, two or three elderly gentlemen of the colonial merchant type, a couple of dapper young fellows whom I set down in my own mind as belonging to the military profession, the usual number of elderly ladies, half a dozen younger ones, of more or less fascinating appearances, and the same number of children. As soon as they saw me several of those seated rose and came to meet us. The doctor performed the necessary introductions, and in a few minutes I found myself seated in a comfortable deck-chair receiving innumerable congratulations on my recovery. Strange to say, I did not dislike their sympathy as much as I had imagined I should do. There was something so spontaneous and unaffected about it that I would have defied even the most sensitive to take offence. To my astonishment, I discovered that no less than three were personal friends of Miss Maybourne's, though all confessed to having failed in recognising her when the boat came alongside. For the greater part of the morning I remained chatting in my chair, and by mid-day felt so much stronger that, on the doctor's suggestion, I ventured to accompany him down to the saloon for lunch. The *King of Carthage* was a finer vessel in every way than the ill-fated *Fiji Princess*. Her saloon was situated amidships, and could have contained the other twice over comfortably. The appointments generally were on a scale of great magnificence; and, from what I saw at lunch, the living was on a scale to correspond. I sat at a small table presided over by the doctor, and situated near the foot of the companion ladder. In the pauses of the meal I looked round at the fine paintings let into the panels between the ports, at the thick carpet upon the floor, the glass dome overhead, and then at the alley-ways leading to the cabins at either end. In which direction did Miss Maybourne's cabin lie, I wondered. The doctor must have guessed what was passing in my mind, for he nodded his head towards the after-alley on the starboard side, and from that time forward I found my eyes continually reverting to it.

Luncheon over, I returned to the promenade-deck, and, after a smoke--the first in which I had indulged since we left the island--acted on the doctor's advice, and went to my cabin to lie down for an hour or so.

When I returned to the deck, afternoon tea was going forward, and a chair having been found for me, I was invited to take a cup. "While I was drinking it, the skipper put in an appearance. He waited until I had finished, and then said he would like to show me something if I would accompany him along the deck to his private cabin. When we reached it, he opened the door and invited me to enter. I did so, and, as I crossed the threshold, gave a little start of surprise, for Miss Maybourne was there, lying upon the locker.

"Why, Miss Maybourne!" I cried, in complete astonishment, "this is a pleasant surprise. I had no idea you were about again. I hope you are feeling stronger."

"Much stronger," she answered. "I expect I shall soon be quite myself again, now that I have once made a start. Mr. Wrexford, I asked Captain Blockman to let me see you in here for the first time, in order that I might have an opportunity of expressing my gratitude to you before we face the passengers. You cannot imagine how grateful I am to you for all you have done for me since that awful night when the *Fiji Princess* went down. How can I ever repay you for it?"

"By becoming yourself again as quickly as possible," I answered; "I ask no better payment."

I thought she looked at me in rather a strange way as I said this; but it was not until some time later that I knew the reason of it. At the time I would have given worlds to have spoken the thoughts that were in my mind; but that being impossible, I had to hold my tongue, though my heart should break under the strain. We were both silent for

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a little while, and then Miss Maybourne took my hand, and I could see that she was steeling herself to ask me some question, and was not quite certain what answer she would receive to it.

"Mr. Wrexford," she began, and there was a little falter in her voice as she spoke, "you told me on board the *Fiji Princess* that you were going to South Africa to try and obtain employment. You must forgive my saying anything about it, but I also gathered from what you told me that you would arrive there without influence of any sort. Now, I want you to promise me that you will let papa help you. I'm sure he will be only too grateful for the chance. It would be a kindness to him, for he will remember that, but for you, he would never have seen me again."

"I did not do it for the sake of reward, Miss Maybourne," I answered, with an outburst of foolish pride that was not very becoming to me.

"Who knows that better than I?" she replied, her face flushing at the thought that she had offended me. "But you must not be angry with me. It would be kind of you to let me show my gratitude in some way. Papa would be so glad to give you letters of introduction, or to introduce you personally to people of influence, and then there is nothing you might not be able to do. You will let him help you, won't you?"

If she could only have known what she was asking of me! To be introduced to the prominent people of the colony was the very last thing in the world I wanted. My desire was to not only attract as little attention as might be, but also to get up country and beyond the reach of civilization as quickly as possible.

However, I was not going to make Miss Maybourne unhappy on the first day of her convalescence, so I promised to consider the matter, and to let her know my decision before we reached Cape Town. By this compromise I hoped to be able to hit upon some way out of the difficulty before then.

From that day forward the voyage was as pleasant as it would be possible for one to be. Delicate as was our position on board, we were not allowed for one moment to feel that we were not upon the same footing as those who had paid heavily for their accommodation. The officers and passengers vied with each other in showing us kindnesses, and, as may be imagined, we were not slow to express our gratitude.

Day after day slipped quickly by, and each one brought us nearer and nearer to our destination. As the distance lessened my old fears returned upon me. After all the attention I had received from our fellow-travellers, after Miss Maybourne's gracious behaviour towards me, it will be readily imagined how much I dreaded the chance of exposure. How much better, I asked myself, would it not be to drop quietly overboard while my secret was still undiscovered, than to stay on board and be proclaimed a murderer before them all?

On the evening prior to our reaching Cape Town I was leaning on the rails of the promenade deck, just below the bridge, when Miss Maybourne left a lady with whom she had been conversing, and came and stood beside me. The evening was cool, and for this reason she had thrown a lace mantilla, lent her by one of the passengers, over her head, and had draped it round her shapely neck. It gave her an infinitely charming appearance; indeed, in my eyes, she appeared the most beautiful of all God's creatures— a being to be loved and longed for beyond all her sex.

"And so to-morrow, after all our adventures, we shall be in Cape Town," she said. "Have you thought of the promise you gave me a fortnight ago?"

"What promise was that?" I asked, though I knew full well to what she alluded.

"To let papa find you some employment. I *do* hope you will allow him to do so."

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I looked at her as she stood beside me, one little hand resting on the rail and her beautiful eyes gazing across the starlit sea, and thought how hard it was to resist her. But at any cost I could not remain in Cape Town. Every hour I spent there would bring me into greater danger.

"I *have* been thinking it over as I promised," I said, "and I have come to the conclusion that it would not be wise for me to accept your offer. I have told you repeatedly, Miss Maybourne, that I am not like other men. God knows how heartily I repent my foolish past. But repentance, however sincere, will not take away the stain. I want to get away from civilization as far and as quickly as possible. For this reason immediately we arrive I shall start for the Transvaal, and once there shall endeavour to carve out a new name and a new life for myself. This time, Providence helping me, it shall be a life of honour."

"God grant you may succeed!" she said, but so softly that I could scarcely hear it.

"May I tell myself that I have your good wishes, Miss Maybourne?" I asked, with, I believe, a little tremor in my voice.

"Every good wish I have is yours," she replied. "I should be worse than ungrateful, after all you have done for me, if I did not take an interest in your future."

Then I did a thing for which it was long before I could forgive myself. Heaven alone knows what induced me to do it; but if my life had depended on it I could not have acted otherwise. I took her hand in mine and drew her a little closer to me.

"Agnes," I said, very softly, as she turned her beautiful face towards me, "to-morrow we shall be separated, perhaps never to meet again. After tonight it is possible, if not probable, that we shall not have another opportunity of being alone together. You don't know what your companionship has been to me. Before I met you, I was desperate. My life was not worth living; but you have changed it all—you have made me a better man. You have taught me to love you, and in that love I have found my belief in all that is good—even, I believe, a faith in God. Oh, Agnes, Agnes! I am not worthy to touch the ground you have walked on, but I love you as I shall never love woman again!"

She was trembling violently, but she did not speak. Her silence had the effect, however, of bringing me to myself, and it showed me my conduct in all its naked baseness.

"Forgive me," I whispered; "it was vile of me to have insulted you with this avowal. Forget—and forgive, if you can—that I ever spoke the words. Remember me only as a man, the most miserable in the whole world, who would count it heaven to be allowed to lay down his life for you or those you love. Oh, Agnes! is it possible that you can forgive me?"

This time she answered without hesitation.

"I have nothing to forgive," she said, looking up into my face with those proud, fearless eyes that seemed to hold all the truth in the world; "I am proud beyond measure to think you love me."

When I heard these precious words, I could have fallen at her feet and kissed the hem of her dress; but I dared not speak, lest I should forget myself in my joy, and say something for which I should never be able to atone. Agnes, however, was braver than I.

"Mr. Wrexford," she said, "you have told me that you love me, and now you are reproaching yourself for having done so. Is it because, as you say, you are poor? Do you think so badly of me as to imagine that that could make any difference to me?"

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"I could not think so badly of you if I tried," I answered.

"You have said that you love me?"

"And I mean it. I love you as I believe man never loved woman before—certainly as I shall never love again."

Then, lowering her head so that I could not see her face, she whispered—

"Will it make you happier if I say that I love you?"

Her voice was soft as the breath of the evening rustling some tiny leaf, but it made my heart leap with a delight I had never known before, and then sink deeper and deeper down with a greater shame.

"God forbid!" I cried, almost fiercely. "You must not love me. You shall not do so. I am not worthy even that you should think of me."

"You are worthy of a great deal more," she answered. "Oh, why will you so continually reproach yourself?"

"Because, Agnes, my conscience will not let me be silent," I cried. "Because, Agnes, you do not know the shame of my life."

"I will not let you say 'shame,'" she replied. "Have I not grown to know you better than you know yourself?"

How little she knew of me! How little she guessed what I was! We were both silent again, and for nearly five minutes. I was the first to speak. And it took all the pluck of which I was master to say what was in my mind.

"Agnes," I began, "this must be the end of such talk between us. God knows, if I were able in honour to do so, I would take your love, and hold you against the world. But, as things are, to do that would be to proclaim myself the most despicable villain in existence. You must not ask me why. I could not tell you. But some day, if by chance you should hear the world's verdict, try to remember that, whatever I may have been, I did my best to behave like a man of honour to you."

She did not answer, but dropped her head on to her hands and sobbed as if her heart would break. Then, regaining her composure a little, she stood up again and faced me. Holding out her hand, she said:

"You have told me that you love me. I have said that I love you. You say that we must part. Let it be so. You know best. May God have mercy on us both!"

I tried to say "Amen," but my voice refused to serve me, and as I turned and looked across the sea I felt the hot salt tears rolling down my cheeks. By the time I recovered my self-possession she had left me and had gone below.

CHAPTER IX. SOUTH AFRICA.

EVEN o'clock next morning found us entering Table Bay, our eventful journey accomplished. Overhead towered the famous mountain from which the Bay derives its name, its top shrouded in its cloth. At its foot reposed the town with which my destiny seemed so vitally connected, and which I was approaching with so much trepidation. As I stood on the promenade deck and watched the land open out before me, my sensations would have formed a good problem for a student of character. With a perception rendered abnormally acute by my fear, I could discern the boat of the port authorities putting off to us long before I should, at any other time, have been able to see it. It

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had yet to be discovered whether or not it contained a police official in search of me. As I watched her dipping her nose into the seas, and then tossing the spray off from either bow, in her haste to get to us, she seemed to me to be like a bloodhound on my track. The closer she came the more violently my heart began to beat, until it was as much as I could do to breathe. If only I could be certain that she was conveying an officer to arrest me, I felt I might find pluck enough to drop overboard and so end the pursuit for good and all. But I did not know, and the doubt upon the point decided me to remain where I was and brave the upshot.

As I watched her, I heard a footstep upon the deck behind me. I turned my head to find that it was Miss Maybourne. She came up beside me, and having glanced ashore at the city nestling at the foot of the great mountain, and then at the launch coming out to meet us, turned to address me.

"Mr. Wrexford," she began, "I am going to ask you to do me a great favour, and I want you to promise me to grant it before I tell you what it is."

"I'm afraid I can hardly do that," I answered. "But if you will tell me what it is, I will promise to do it for you if it is in any way possible."

"It is this," she said: "I want you, in the event of my father not meeting me, to take me home. Oh don't say no, Mr. Wrexford, I want you so much to do it. Surely you will not deny me the last request I make to you?"

She looked so pleadingly into my face that, as usual, it required all my courage not to give way to her. But the risk was too great for me even to contemplate such a thing for a moment. My rescue of the daughter of Cornelius Maybourne, and my presence in Cape Town, would soon leak out, and then it would be only a matter of hours before I should be arrested. Whatever my own inclinations may have been, I felt there was nothing for it but for me to refuse.

"I am not my own master in this matter," I replied, with a bitterness which must have shown her how much in earnest I was. "It is impossible that I can remain so long in the place. There are the most vital reasons in the world against it. I can only ask you to believe that."

I saw large tears rise in her eyes, though she turned hurriedly away in the hope that I should not see them. To see her weep, however, was more than I could bear, and under the influence of her trouble my resolutions began to give way. After all, if I *was* destined to be arrested, I might just as well be taken at Mr. Maybourne's house as elsewhere—perhaps better. Besides, it was more than likely, in the event of no warrant having been issued, Mr. Maybourne, whose influence, I had been told, was enormous in the colony, might prove just the very friend of all others I wanted. At any rate, if I were not taken before the time came for going ashore, I would do as she wished. I told her this, and she immediately thanked me and went down below again.

Just as I announced my decision the launch came alongside, and a moment later her passengers were ascending the accommodation ladder, which had been lowered to receive them. They were three in number, and included—so I was told by a gentleman who stood beside me—the harbour master, the officer of health, and another individual, about whose identity my informant was not quite assured. I looked at the last-named with no little apprehension; my nervousness endowed him with all the attributes of a police official, and my mind's eye could almost discover the manacles reposing in his coat pocket. I trust I may never pass through such another agonizing few minutes as I experienced then. I saw the party step on to the spar deck, where they shook hands with the purser and the chief officer, and watched them as they ascended to the promenade deck and made their way towards the bridge. Here they were received by the skipper. I leaned against the rails, sick with fear and trembling in every limb, expecting every moment to feel a heavy hand upon my shoulder, and to hear a stern voice saying in my ear—"Gilbert Pennethorne, I arrest you on a charge of murder."

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But minute after minute went by, and still no one came to speak the fatal words. The ship, which had been brought to a standstill to pick up the boat, had now got under weigh again, and we were approaching closer and closer to the docks. In less than half an hour I should know my fate.

As soon as we were safely installed in dock, and everyone was looking after his or her luggage, saying "good-bye" and preparing to go ashore, I began to look about me for Miss Maybourne. Having found her we went to the chart-room together to bid the Captain "good-bye," and to thank him for the hospitality and kindness he had shown us. The doctor had next to be discovered, and when he had been assured of our gratitude, we made enquiries for Mr. Maybourne. It soon became evident that he was not on board, so, taking his daughter under my protection, we said our final farewells and went down the gangway. For the first time in my life I set foot on South African soil.

The Custom House once passed, and the authorities convinced that we had nothing to declare, I hailed a cab and invited Miss Maybourne to instruct the driver in which direction he was to proceed. Half an hour later we had left the city behind us, and were driving through the suburbs in the direction of Mr. Maybourne's residence. After following a pretty road for something like a mile, on either side of which I noticed a number of stately residences, we found ourselves confronted with a pair of large iron gates, behind which was a neat lodge. But for the difference in the vegetation, it might very well have been the entrance to an English park. Through the trees ahead I could distinguish, as we rolled along the well-kept drive, the chimneys of a noble residence; but I was quite unprepared for the picture which burst upon my view when we turned a corner and had the whole house before us. Unlike most South African dwellings, it was a building of three stories, surmounted by a tower. Broad verandahs ran round each floor, and the importance of the building was enhanced by the fact that it stood on a fine terrace, which again led down by a broad flight of steps to the flower gardens and orangery. A more delightful home could scarcely be imagined; and when I saw it, I ceased to wonder that Miss Maybourne had so often expressed a preference for South Africa as compared with England.

When the cab drew up at the front door I jumped out, and was about to help my companion to alight when I heard the front door open, and next moment a tall, fine-looking man, about sixty years of age, crossed the verandah and came down the steps. At first he regarded me with a stare of surprise, but before he could ask me my business, Miss Maybourne had descended from the vehicle and was in his arms. Not desiring to interrupt them in their greetings I strolled down the path. But I was not permitted to go far before I heard my name called. I turned, and went back to have my hand nearly shaken off by Mr. Maybourne.

"My daughter says you have saved her life," he cried. "I'll not ask questions now, but I thank you, sir—from the bottom of my heart I thank you. God knows you have done me a service the value of which no man can estimate."

The warmth of his manner was so much above what I had expected that it left me without power to reply.

"Come in, come in," he continued in a voice that fairly shook with emotion. "Oh, let us thank God for this happy day!"

He placed his arm round his daughter's waist, and drew her to him as if he would not let her move from his side again. I followed a few steps behind, and should have entered the house had I not been recalled by the cabman, who ventured to remind me that he had not yet been paid.

I instantly put my hand into my pocket, only to have the fact recalled to me that I possessed no money at all. All my capital had gone to the bottom in the *Fiji Princess*, and I was absolutely penniless. The position was an embarrassing one, and I was just reflecting what I had better do, when I heard Mr. Maybourne come out into the verandah again. He must have divined my difficulty, for without hesitation he discharged the debt, and, apologizing for not having thought of it, led me into the house.

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Passing through an elegantly-furnished hall we entered the dining-room. Here breakfast was laid, and it was evidently from that meal that Mr. Maybourne had jumped up to receive us.

"Now, Mr. Wrexford," he cried, pointing to a chair, "sit yourself down yonder, and let me hear everything from the beginning to the end. Heaven knows I can hardly believe my good fortune. Half an hour ago I was the most miserable man under the sun; now that I have got my darling back safe and sound, I believe I am the happiest."

"Had you then heard of the wreck of the *'Fiji Princess?'*" I enquired.

"Here is a telegram I received last night," he said, handing me a paper he had taken from his pocket. "You see it is from Teneriffe, and says that nothing has yet been heard of the vessel which was then more than a fortnight overdue. Agnes tells me that you were rescued by the *King of Carthage*. I understood she was expected about mid-day to-day, and I had resolved to visit her as soon as she got into dock, in order to enquire if they had any tidings to report regarding the lost vessel. How little I expected to find that you were safe on board her, Aggie!. Mr. Wrexford, you can have no idea of the agony I have suffered this week past."

"On the contrary," I answered, "I think I can very well imagine it."

"And now tell me your story. I must not be cheated of a single detail."

I saw from the way he looked at me that he expected me to do the narrating, so I did so, commencing with the striking of the vessel on the rock, and winding up with an account of our rescue by the *King of Carthage*. He listened with rapt attention until I had finished, and then turned to his daughter.

"Has Mr. Wrexford told me everything?" he asked with a smile.

"No," she answered. "He has not told you half enough. He has not told you that when I fell overboard one night, when we were off the Spanish coast, he sprang over after me and held me up until a boat came to our assistance. He has not told you that when the vessel sank he gave his own life-belt up to me, nor has he given you any idea of his constant kindness and self-sacrifice all through that dreadful time."

Mr. Maybourne rose from his chair as she finished speaking, and came round to where I sat. Holding out his hand to me, he said, with tears standing in his eyes:

"Mr. Wrexford, you are a brave man, and from the bottom of my heart I thank you. You have saved my girl, and brought her home safe to me; as long as I live I shall not be able to repay the debt I owe you. Remember, however, that henceforth I am your truest friend."

But I must draw a curtain over this scene. If I go into any further details I shall break down again as I did then. Suffice it that Mr. Maybourne refused to hear of my leaving his house as I proposed, but insisted that I should remain as his guest until I had decided what I intended to do with myself.

"For the future you must look upon this as your home in South Africa," he said. "I seem powerless to express my gratitude to you as I should like. But a time may come when I may even be able to do that."

"You have more than repaid me, I'm sure," I replied. "I have every reason to be deeply grateful to you for the way you have received me."

He replied in his former strain, and when he had done so, the conversation turned upon those who had been lost in the ill-fated *Fiji Princess*. It was easy to see that his brother-in-law's death cut him to the quick.

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After luncheon that day I found myself alone with Mr. Maybourne. I was not sorry for this, as I wanted to sound him as to my future movements. As I have so often said, I had no sort of desire to remain in Cape Town, and judged that the sooner I was up country, and out of civilization, the better it would be for me.

"You must forgive my being frank with you, Mr. Wrexford," said my host, as we lit cigars preparatory to drawing our chairs into the verandah; "but I have gathered from what you yourself have said and from what my daughter has told me, that you are visiting South Africa on the chance of obtaining some sort of employment. Is this so?"

"That is exactly why I am here," I said. "I am most anxious to find something to do as soon as possible."

"In what direction will you seek it?" he asked. "What is your inclination? Remember, I may be able to help you."

"I am not at all particular," I answered. "I have knocked about the world a good deal, and I can turn my hand to most things. But if a choice were permitted me, I fancy I should prefer mining of some sort to anything else."

"Indeed! I had no idea you understood that sort of work."

"I have done a good deal of it," I replied, with a little touch of pride, for which next moment I found it difficult to account, considering the result to which it had brought me.

He asked one or two practical questions, which I was fortunately able to answer to his satisfaction, and then was silent for a couple of minutes or so. At last he consulted his pocket-book, and then turned to me

"I fancy, Mr. Wrexford," he said, "that you have come in the nick of time for both of us. We may be able to do each other mutual services."

"I am very glad to hear that," I answered. "But in what possible way can I help you?"

"Well, the matter stands like this," he said. "As you are doubtless aware, my business is mostly in connection with mining, both in this colony and its neighbours. Well, information has lately reached me concerning what promises to prove a first-class property in Mashonaland, eighty-five miles from Buluwayo. The mine has been excellently reported on, and is now being got into good going order. It only needs a capable manager at its head to do really well. Of course such a man is easily procured in a country where every man seems to be engaged in mining, more or less; and yet—for that very self-same reason I am unable to make a selection. The available men all know too much, and I have private reasons for wishing this mine to be well looked after. Now the question is, would you care for the post?"

Needless to say, I embraced the opportunity in much the same manner as a hungry trout jumps at a fly. If I could only manage to get up there without being caught the appointment would suit me in every way. Mr. Maybourne seemed as pleased at my acceptance of it as I was at his offer; and when, after a little further conversation—in which I received many useful hints and no small amount of advice—it was revealed to his daughter, she struck me as being even more delighted than either her father or myself. I noticed that Mr. Maybourne looked at her rather anxiously for a moment as if he suspected there might be some sort of understanding between us, but whatever he may have thought he kept it to himself. He need, however, have had no fear on that score. Circumstances had placed an insurmountable barrier between myself and any thought of marriage with his daughter.

As the result of our conversation, and at my special desire, it was arranged that I should start for my post on the following day. Nobody could have been more eager than I was to be out in the wilds. But, with it all, my heart felt sad when I thought that after tomorrow I might never see the woman I so ardently loved again. Since the previous night, when on the promenade-deck of the steamer I had told her of my love, neither of us had referred in any

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way to the subject. So remote was the chance that I should ever be able to make her my wife that I determined, so far as possible, to prevent myself from giving any thought to the idea. But I was not destined after all to leave without referring to the matter.

That evening after dinner we were sitting in the verandah outside the drawing-room, when the butler came to inform Mr. Maybourne that a neighbour had called to see him. Asking us to excuse him for a few moments he left us and went into the house. When we were alone together I spoke to my companion of her father's kindness, and told her how much I appreciated it. She uttered a little sigh, and as this seemed such an extraordinary answer to my speech, I enquired the reason of it.

"You say you are going away to-morrow," she answered, "and yet you ask me why I sigh! Cannot you guess?"

"Agnes," I said, "you know I have no option but to go. Do not let us go over the ground we covered last night. It would be best not for both our sakes; you must see that yourself."

"You know that I love you, and I know that you love me—and yet you can go away so calmly. What can your love be worth?"

"You know what it is worth," I answered vehemently, roused out of myself by this accusation. "And if ever the chance occurs again of proving it you will be afforded another example. I cannot say more."

"And is it always to be like this, Gilbert," she asked, for the first time calling me by my Christian name. "Are we to be separated all our lives?"

"God knows—I fear so," I murmured, though it cut me to the heart to have to say the words.

She bowed her head on her hands with a little moan, while I, feeling that I should not be able to control myself much longer, sprang to my feet and went across to the verandah rails. For something like five minutes I stood looking into the dark garden, then I pulled myself together as well as I was able and went back to my chair.

"Agnes," I said, as I took possession of her little hand, "you cannot guess what it costs me to tell you how impossible it is for me ever to link my lot with yours. The reason why I cannot tell you. My secret is the bitterest one a man can have to keep, and it must remain locked in my own breast for all time. Had I met you earlier it might have been very different—but now our ways must be separate for ever. Don't think more hardly of me than you can help, dear. Remember only that as long as I live I shall call no other woman wife. Henceforward I will try to be worthy of the interest you have felt in me. No one shall ever have the right to say ought against me; and, if by any chance you hear good of me in the dark days to come, you will know that it is for love of you I rule my life. May God bless and keep you always."

She held up her sweet face to me, and I kissed her on the lips. Then Mr. Maybourne returned to the verandah; and, half-an-hour later, feeling that father and daughter would like a little time alone together before they retired to rest, I begged them to excuse me, and on a pretence of feeling tired went to my room.

Next morning after breakfast I drove with Mr. Maybourne into Cape Town, where I made the few purchases necessary for my journey. In extension of the kindness he had so far shown me, he insisted on advancing me half my first year's salary—a piece of generosity for which you may be sure I was not ungrateful, seeing that I had not a halfpenny in the world to call my own. Out of this sum I paid the steamship company for my passage—much against their wish—obtained a ready-made rig out suitable for the rough life I should henceforth live, also a revolver, a rifle, and among other things a small gold locket which I wished to give to Agnes as a keepsake and remembrance of myself.

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At twelve o'clock I returned to the house, and, after lunch, prepared to bid the woman I loved "good-bye." Of that scene I cannot attempt to give you any description—the pain is too keen even now. Suffice it that when I left the house I carried with me, in addition to a sorrow that I thought would last me all my life, a little square parcel which, on opening, I found to contain a photo of herself in a Russia leather case. How I prized that little present I will leave you to

Two hours later I was in the train bound for Johannesburg.

CHAPTER X. I TELL MY STORY.

SIX months had elapsed since I had left Cape Town, and on looking back on them now I have to confess that they constituted the happiest period of my life up to that time. I had an excellent appointment, an interesting, if not all-absorbing, occupation, comfortable quarters, and the most agreeable of companions any man could desire to be associated with. I was as far removed from civilization as the most misanthropic of men, living by civilized employment, could hope to get. Our nearest town, if by such a name a few scattered huts could be dignified, was nearly fifty miles distant, our mails only reached us once a week, and our stores once every three months. As I had never left the mine for half a day during the whole of the time I had been on it, I had seen no strange faces, and by reason of the distance and the unsettled nature of the country, scarcely half-a-dozen had seen mine.

"The Pride of the South," as the mine had been somewhat grandiloquently christened by its discoverer, was proving a better property than had even been expected, and to my astonishment, for I had made haste to purchase shares in it, my luck had turned, and I found myself standing an excellent chance of becoming a rich man.

One thing surprised me more and more every day, and that was my freedom from arrest; how it had come about that I was permitted to remain at large so long I could not understand. When I had first come up to Rhodesia I had found a danger in everything about me. In the rustling of the coarse veldt grass at night, the sighing of the wind through the trees, and even the shadows of the mine buildings and machinery. But when week after week and month after month went by and still no notice was taken of me by the police, my fears began to abate until, at the time of which I am about to speak, I hardly thought of the matter at all. When I did I hastened to put it away from me in much the same way as I would have done the remembrance of some unpleasant dream of the previous week. One consolation, almost cruel in its uncertainty, was always with me. If suspicion had not so far fallen on me in England, it would be unlikely, I argued, ever to do so; and in the joy of this thought I began to dream dreams of the happiness that might possibly be mine in the future. Was it to be wondered at therefore that my work was pleasant to me and that the wording of Mr. Maybourne's letters of praise seemed sweeter in my ears than the strains of the loveliest music could have been. It was evident that my star was in the ascendant, but, though I could not guess it then, my troubles were by no means over; and, as I was soon to find out, I was on the edge of the bitterest period of all my life.

Almost on the day that celebrated my seventh month in Mr. Maybourne's employ, I received a letter from him announcing his intention of starting for Rhodesia in a week's time, and stating that while in our neighbourhood he would embrace the opportunity of visiting "The Pride of the South." In the postscript he informed me that his daughter had decided to accompany him, and for this reason he would be glad if I would do my best to make my quarters as comfortable as possible in preparation for her. He, himself, he continued, was far too old a traveller to be worth considering.

I was standing at the engine-room door, talking to one of the men, when the store-keeper brought me my mail. After I had read my chief's letter, I felt a thrill go through me that I could hardly have diagnosed for pleasure or pain. I felt it difficult to believe that in a few weeks' time I should see Agnes again, be able to look into her face, and hear the gentle accents of her voice. The portrait she had given me of herself I carried continually about with me; and, as a proof of the inspection it received, I may say that it was already beginning to show decided signs of

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wear. Mr. Maybourne had done well in asking me to see to her comfort. I told myself I would begin my preparations at once, and it should go hard with me if she were not pleased with my arrangements when she arrived.

"While I was mentally running my eye over what I should do, Mackinnon, my big Scotch overseer, came up from the shaft's mouth to where I stood, and reported that some timbering which I had been hurrying forward was ready for inspection. After we had visited it and I had signified my approval, I informed him of our employer's contemplated visit, and wound up by saying that his daughter would accompany him. He shook his head solemnly when he heard this.

"A foolish thing," he said, in his slow, matter-of-fact way, "a very foolish thing. This country's nae fit for a lady at present, as Mr. Maybourne kens well eno'. An' what's more, there'll be trouble among the boys (natives) before vera long. He'd best be out of it."

"My dear fellow," I said, a little testily I fear, for I did not care to hear him throw cold water on Mr. Maybourne's visit in this fashion, "you're always thinking the natives are going to give trouble, but you must confess that what you prophesy never cornea off."

He shook his head more sagely than before.

"Ye can say what ye please," he said, "I'm nae settin' up for a prophet, but I canna help but see what's put plain before my eyes. As the proverb says —'Forewarned is forearmed.' There's been trouble an' discontent all through this country—side for months past, an' if Mr. Maybourne brings his daughter up here—well, he'll have to run the risk of mischief happenin' to the lass. It's no business o' mine, however. As the proverb says—' Let the wilful gang their own gait.'"

Accustomed as he was to look on the gloomy side of things, I could not but remember that he had been in the country a longer time than I had, and that he had also had a better experience of the treacherous Matabele than I could boast.

"In your opinion, then," I said, "I had better endeavour to dissuade Mr. Maybourne from coming up?"

"Nae! Nae! I'm na' sayin' that at all. Let him come by all means since he's set on it. But I'm not going to say I think he's wise in bringing the girl."

With this ambiguous answer I had to be content. I must confess, however, that I went back to the house feeling a little uneasy in my mind. Ought I to write and warn Mr. Maybourne, or should I leave the matter to chance? As I did not intend to send off my—mail until the following day, I determined to sleep on it.

In the morning I discovered that my fears had entirely vanished. The boys we employed were going about their duties in much the same manner as usual, and the half—dozen natives who had come in during the course of the day in the hope of obtaining employment, seemed so peaceably inclined that I felt compelled to dismiss Mackinnon's suspicions from my mind as groundless, and determined on no account to alarm my friends in such needlessly silly fashion.

How well I remember Mr. and Miss Maybourne's arrival! It was on a Wednesday, exactly three weeks after my conversation with Mackinnon just recorded, that a boy appeared with a note from the old gentleman to me. It was written from the township, and stated that they had got so far and would be with me during the afternoon. From that time forward I was in a fever of impatience. Over and over again I examined my preparations with a critical eye, discussed the meals with the cook to make sure that he had not forgotten a single particular, drilled my servants in their duties until I had brought them as near perfection as it was possible for me to get them, and in

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one way and another fussed about generally until it was time for my guests to arrive. I had fitted up my own bedroom for Miss Maybourne, and made it as comfortable as the limited means at my disposal would allow. Her father would occupy the overseer's room, that individual sharing a tent with me at the back.

The sun was just sinking to his rest below the horizon when I espied a cloud of dust on the western veldt. Little by little it grew larger until we could distinctly make out a buggy drawn by a pair of horses. It was travelling at a high rate of speed, and before many minutes were over would be with us. As I watched it my heart began to beat so tumultuously that it seemed as if those around me could not fail to hear it. In the vehicle now approaching was the woman I loved, the woman whom I had made up my mind I should never see again.

Five minutes later the horses had pulled up opposite my verandah and I had shaken hands with my guests and was assisting Agnes to alight. Never before had I seen her look so lovely. She seemed quite to have recovered from the horrors of the shipwreck, and looked even stronger than when I had first seen her on the deck of the *Fiji Princess*, the day we had left Southampton. She greeted me with a fine show of cordiality, but under it it was easy to see that she was as nervous as myself. Having handed the horses and buggy over to a couple of my boys, I led my guests into the house I had prepared for them.

Evidently they had come with the intention of being pleased, for they expressed themselves as surprised and delighted with every arrangement I had made for their comfort. It was a merry party, I can assure you, that sat down to the evening meal that night—so merry, indeed, that under the influence of Agnes' manner even Mackinnon forgot himself and ceased to prophesy ruin and desolation.

When the meal was finished we adjourned to the verandah and lit our pipes. The evening was delightfully cool after the heat of the day, and overhead the stars twinkled in the firmament of heaven like countless lamps, lighting up the sombre veldt till we could see the shadowy outline of trees miles away. The evening breeze rustled the long grass, and across the square the figure of our cook could just be seen, outlined against the ruddy glow of the fire in the hut behind him. How happy I was I must leave you to guess. From where I sat I could catch a glimpse of my darling's face, and see the gleam of her rings as her hand rested on the arm of her chair. The memory of the awful time we had spent together on the island, and in the open boat, came back to me with a feeling that was half pleasure, half pain. When I realized that I was entertaining them in my abode in Rhodesia, it seemed scarcely possible that we could be the same people.

Towards the end of the evening, Mr. Maybourne made an excuse and went into the house, leaving us together. Mackinnon had long since departed. When we were alone, Agnes leant a little forward in her chair, and said:

"Are you pleased to see me, Gilbert?"

"More pleased than I can tell you," I answered, truthfully. "But you must not ask me if I think you were wise to come."

"I can see that you think I was not," she continued. "But how little you understand my motives. I could not ——"

Thinking that perhaps she had said too much, she checked herself suddenly, and for a little while did not speak again. When she did, it was only about the loneliness of my life on the mine, and such like trivial matters. Illogical as men are, though I had hoped, for both our sakes, that she would not venture again on such delicate ground as we had traversed before we said good-bye, I could not help a little sensation of disappointment when she acted up to my advice. I was still more piqued when, a little later, she stated that she felt tired, and holding out her hand, bade me "good-night," and went to her 'com.

Here I can only give utterance to a remark which, I am told, is as old as the hills—and that is, how little we men understand the opposite sex. From that night forward, for the first three or four days of her visit, Agnes' manner

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towards me was as friendly as of old, but I noticed that she made but small difference between her treatment of Mackinnon and the way in which she behaved towards myself. This was more than I could bear, and in consequence my own behaviour towards her changed. I found myself bringing every bit of ingenuity I possessed to bear on an attempt to win her back to the old state. But it was in vain I Whenever I found an opportunity, and hinted at my love for her, she invariably changed the conversation into such a channel that all my intentions were frustrated. In consequence, I exerted myself the more to please until my passion must have been plain to everyone about the place. Prudence, honour, everything that separated me from her was likely to be thrown to the winds. My infatuation for Agnes Maybourne had grown to such a pitch that without her I felt that I could not go on living.

One day, a little more than a week after their arrival, it was my good fortune to accompany her on a riding excursion to a waterfall in the hills, distant some seven or eight miles from the mine. On the way she rallied me playfully on what she called "my unusual quietness." This was more than I could stand, and I determined, as soon as I could find a convenient opportunity, to test my fate and have it settled for good and all.

On reaching our destination, we tied our horses, by their reins, to a tree at the foot of the hill, and climbed up to the falls we had ridden over to explore. After the first impression, created by the wild grandeur of the scene, had passed, I endeavoured to make the opportunity I wanted.

"How strangely little circumstances recall the past. What place does that remind you of?" I asked, pointing to the rocky hill on the other side of the fall.

"Of a good many," she answered, a little artfully, I'm afraid. "I cannot say that it reminds me of one more than another. All things considered, there is a great sameness in South African scenery."

Cleverly as she attempted to turn my question off, I was not to be balked so easily.

"Though the likeness has evidently not impressed you, it reminds me very much of Salvage Island," I said, drawing a step closer to her side. "Half-way up that hill one might well expect to find the plateau and the cave."

"Oh, why do you speak to me of that awful cave," she said, with a shudder; "though I try to forget it, it always gives me a nightmare."

"I am sorry I recalled it to your memory, then," I answered. "I think in spite of the way you have behaved towards me lately, Agnes, you are aware that I would not give you pain for anything. Do you know that?"

As I put this question to her, I looked into her face. She dropped her eyes and whispered "Yes."

Emboldened by my success I resolved to push my fate still further.

"Agnes," I said, "I have been thinking over what I am going to say to you now for some days past, and I believe I am doing right. I want to tell you the story of my life, and then to ask you a question that will decide the happiness of the rest of it. I want you to listen and, when I have done, answer me from the bottom of your heart. Whatever you say I will abide by."

She looked up at me with a startled expression on her face.

"I will listen," she said, "and whatever question you ask I will answer. But think first, Gilbert; do you really wish me to know your secret?"

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"God knows I have as good reasons for wishing you to know as any man could have," I answered. "I can trust you as I can trust no one else in the world. I wish you to hear and judge me. Whatever you say, I will do and abide by it."

She put her little hand in mine, and having done so, seated herself on a boulder. Then, after a little pause, she bade me tell her all.

"In the first place," I said, "I must make a confession that may surprise you. My name is not Wrexford, as I have so long led you to suppose. It is Pennethorne. My father was Sir Anthony Pennethorne, of Polton-Penna, in Cornwall. I was educated at Eton and Oxford; and, as you will now see, I got no good from either. After a college scrape, the blame for which was thrown upon me, my father turned me out of England with a portion of my inheritance. I went to Australia, where I tried my hand at all sorts of employment, gold mining among the number. Details of my life out there, with one exception, would not interest you; so I will get on to the great catastrophe, the results of which were taking me out of England when I first met you. Up to this time ill-luck had constantly pursued me, and I had even known the direst poverty. You may imagine, therefore, what my feelings were when an old friend, a man with whom I had been partner on many gold-fields, told me of a place which he had discovered where, he said, there were prospects of sufficient gold to make us both millionaires half a dozen times over. He, poor fellow, was dying at the time, but he left his secret to me, bidding me take immediate advantage of it. True to my promise, I intended to set off to the place he had found as soon as he was buried, and having discovered it, to apply to Government for right to mine there, but fate was against me, and I was taken seriously ill. For weeks I hovered between life and death. When I recovered I saddled my horse, and, dreaming of all I was going to accomplish with my wealth, when I had obtained it, made my way across country by the chart he had given me. When I arrived at the spot it was only to learn that my greatest enemy in the world, a man who hated me as much as I did him, had filched my secret from me in my delirium, and had appropriated the mine. You cannot imagine my disappointment. I wanted money so badly, and I had counted so much on obtaining this, that I had almost come to believe myself possessed of it. What need to tell the rest? He became enormously rich, and returned to England. In the meantime my father had died, leaving me a sufficient sum, when carefully invested, to just keep me alive. With this to help me I followed my enemy home, resolved, if ever a chance arose, to revenge myself upon him. When I arrived I saw his name everywhere. I found his wealth, his generosity, his success in life, extolled in every paper I picked up; while I, from whom he had stolen that which gave him his power, had barely sufficient to keep me out of the workhouse. You must understand that I had been seriously ill, for the second time, just before I left Australia, and perhaps for this reason—but more so, I believe, on account of the great disappointment to which I had been subjected—I began to brood over my wrongs by day and night, and pine for revenge. I could not eat or sleep for it. Remember, I do not say this in any way to excuse myself, but simply to show you that my mind was undoubtedly not quite itself at the time. At any rate, to such a pitch of hatred did I at length work myself that it was as much as I could do to prevent myself from laying violent hands upon my enemy when I saw him in the public streets. After I had been entertaining the devil in this fashion for longer than was good for me, he in return sent one of his satellites to complete my ruin. That man—such a man as you could not picture to yourself—put before me a scheme for getting even with my enemy, so devilish that at first I could hardly believe he was in earnest. So insiduously did he tempt me, playing upon my hatred and increasing my desire for revenge, that at last I fell into his net as completely *as* he could wish. The means were immediately found for getting my victim into my clutches, and then nothing remained but to work out the hideous crime that had been planned for me."

I stopped for a moment and looked at Agnes, who was cowering with her face in her hands. She did not speak, so I continued my gruesome tale.

"I need not tell you how I got the man in my power, nor in what manner it was arranged that I should kill him. I will content myself with telling you that when I *had* got him, and could have killed him by lifting my little finger, difficult as you may find it to believe it, I saw your face before me imploring me to repent. There and then I determined to throw off my disguise, to let him know who I was, and what I intended to do to him; after that I

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would have bidden him go, and have left him to his own conscience. But, to my horror, when I got down from my box—for I was driving him in a cab—I found that in some devilish fashion my work had been anticipated for me—the man was dead, killed by the same fatal agency that had been given to me to do the deed. Try for one moment to imagine my position. In one instant I stood in that quiet London street, stamped with the brand of Cain. Never again could I be like my fellow men. Henceforth I must know myself for what I was—a murderer, whose proper end should be the gallows. In an agony of terror I got rid of the body—left it in the street in fact—and fled for my very life. While the town was still abed and asleep I tramped away into the country, and at a suburban station caught the earliest train to Southampton. On arrival there I booked my passage in the *Fiji Princess* for South Africa, and went on board. The rest you know. Now, Agnes, that you have heard my wretched story, you can see for yourself why I was so desirous of getting out of civilization as quickly as possible. You can judge for yourself whether I was right or wrong in refusing to allow you to say you loved me. God knows you cannot judge me more harshly than I judge myself.

She looked up at me with terror-stricken eyes.

"But you did not mean to kill the man," she cried. "You repented — you said so just now yourself.

"If it had not been for me the man would not have died," I answered. "No, no! Agnea, you cannot make me out innocent of his death, however hard you try."

A look of fresh life darted into her face. It was as if she had been struck by a brilliant idea that might mean my salvation.

"But how do you know that you killed the man?" she asked. "Are you quite certain that he was dead when you looked at him?"

"Quite certain," I answered. "I examined him most carefully. Besides, I have made enquiries since and elicited the fact that he has never been seen or heard of since that awful night. There have been advertisements in the papers offering rewards for any information concerning him."

She did not reply to this, only sat and rocked herself to and fro, her face once more covered in her hands. I knelt beside her, but did not dare, for very shame, to attempt to comfort her.

"Agnes," I said, "speak to me. If it only be to say how much you loathe me. Your silence cuts me to the heart. Speak to me, tell me my fate, advise me as to what I shall do. I swear by God that whatever you tell me, that I will do without questioning or comment."

Still she did not answer. "When I saw this I rose to my feet, and in my agony must have turned a little from her. This action evidently decided her, for she sprang up from the boulder on which she had hitherto been sitting, and, with a choking cry, fell into my arms and sobbed upon my shoulder.

"Gilbert," she moaned, "come what may, I believe in you. Nothing shall ever convince me that you would have killed the man who so cruelly wronged you. You hated him; you longed to be revenged on him; but you never would have murdered him when it came to the point."

In answer I drew her closer to me.

"Agnes, my good angel," I said; "what can I say to you for the comfort you give me? You have put fresh life into me. If only you believe in me, what do I care for the world? Heaven knows I did not mean to kill the man—but still the fact remains that he is dead, and through my agency. Though morally I am innocent, the law would certainly hold me guilty."

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"You do not mean to say that the police will take you?" she cried, starting away from me with a gesture of horror.

"If I am suspected, there can be no doubt that they will do so. How it happens that I have not been arrested ere this I cannot imagine."

"But, Gilbert, you must not let them find you. You must go away—you must hide yourself."

"It would be no use, they would find me sooner or later, wherever I went."

"Oh, what can you do then? Come what may I shall not let you be taken. Oh God, I could not bear that."

She glanced wildly round, as if she fancied the minions of the law might already be on my track. I endeavoured to soothe her, but in vain. She was thoroughly frightened, and nothing I could say or do would convince her that I was not in immediate danger. At last, to try and bring her to a reasonable frame of mind, I adopted other tactics.

"But, Agnes, we are missing one point that is of vital importance," I said. "Knowing what I am, henceforward everything must be over between us."

"No, no!" she cried, with a sudden change of front. "On the other hand, you have shown me that there is more reason than ever that I *should* love you. If you are in danger, this is the time for me to prove what my affection is worth. Do you value my love so lightly that you deem it only fit for fair weather? When the world is against you, you can see who are your friends."

"God bless you, darling," I said, kissing her sweet upturned face. "You know that there is no one in this world so much to me as you; and for that very reason I cannot consent to link your fate with such a terrible one as mine."

"Gilbert," she said, "if you repulse me now you will make me miserable for life. Oh, why must I plead so hard with you? "Cannot you see that I am in earnest when I say I wish to share your danger with you?"

I was silent for a few moments. In what way could I make her see how base a thing it would be on my part to pull her down into the *maelstrom* of misery that might any day draw me to my doom? At last an idea occurred to me.

"Agnes," I said, "will you agree to a compromise? Will you promise me to take a year to think it over? If at the end of that time I am still at liberty I will go to your father, tell him my story as I have to-day told it to you, and, if he will still have anything to do with me, ask him for your hand. By that time I shall probably know my fate, you will be able to see things more clearly, and I shall not feel that I have taken advantage of your love and sympathy."

"But I want to be with you and to help you now."

"Believe me, you can help me best by agreeing to my proposal. Will you make me happy by consenting to what I wish?"

"If it will please you I will do so," she said, softly.

"God bless you, dear," I answered.

And thus the matter was concluded.

CHAPTER XI. A TERRIBLE SURPRISE.

NEARLY a week had elapsed since I had made my confession to Agnes at the Falls, and in three days it was Mr. Maybourne's intention to set out on his return journey to the South. During the whole of that period not one word had been said by Miss Maybourne regarding my story. But if she did not refer to it in speech it was easy to see that the subject was never absent from her mind. On two occasions I heard her father question her as to the reason of her quietness, and I saw that each time she found it a more difficult task to invent a satisfactory reply. What this meant to me you will readily understand. I could not sleep at night for thinking of it, and not once but a thousand times I bitterly regretted having burdened her mind with my unhappy secret.

Two afternoons prior to our guests' departure I was sitting in my verandah reading the letters which had been brought to the mine by the mailman at midday. Mr. Maybourne was sitting near me, also deep in his correspondence, while his daughter had gone to her own room for the same purpose. When I came to the end of my last epistle I eat with it in my hand, looking out across the veldt, and thinking of all that had happened since I had said good-bye to old England.

From one thing my thoughts turned to another; I thought of my wandering life in Australia, of poor old Ben Garman, of Markapurlie, and last of all of Bartrand. The memory of my hatred for him brought me home again to London, and I saw myself meeting Nikola in the Strand, and then accompanying him home to his extraordinary abode. As I pictured him seated in his armchair in that oddly-furnished room, all my old horror of him flashed back upon me. I seemed to feel the fascination of his eyes just as I had done that night when we visited that murderous cab in the room below.

While I was thinking of him, I heard a footstep on the path that led round the house, and presently Mackinnon appeared before me. He beckoned with his hand, and understanding that he desired to speak to me, I rose from my chair and went out to him.

"What is it?" I enquired, as I approached him, for at that hour he was generally in the depths of the mine. "Has anything gone wrong?"

"That's as ye care to take my words or no," he answered, wheeling about and leading me out of earshot of the house. There was something in his manner that frightened me, though I could not for the life of me have said why. When we reached the fence that separated my garden from the open veldt I stopped, and leaning on the rails, once more asked him why he had called me out.

"I told ye a fortnight ago that there was trouble brewing for us with the natives," he said impressively. "I warned ye a week ago that 'twas no better. Now I tell ye its close upon us, and if we're not prepared, God help us all."

"What do you mean? Don't speak in enigmas, man. Tell me straight out what you are driving at."

"Isn't that what I'm trying to do?" he said. "I tell ye the whole country's in a ferment. The Matabele are out, and in a few hours, if not before, we shall have proof of it."

"Good God, man!" I cried, "how do you know this? And why did you not make me see the importance of it before?"

"'Ye can lead a horse to the water but ye canna make him drink,' says the proverb," he answered. "Ye can tell a man of danger, but ye canna make him see it. An' so 'twas with ye. I told ye my suspicions a fortnight past, but 'twas only this minute I came to know how bad it really was."

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"And how have you come to hear of it now?"

"Step this way an' I'll show ye."

He led me to a small hut near the kitchen. On reaching it, he opened it and showed me a man stretched out upon a bed of sacks and grass. He was a white man, and seemed utterly exhausted.

"This man's name," said Mackinnon, as if he were exhibiting some human curiosity, "is Andrews. He's a prospector, and we've been acquent for years. Now tell your yarn, Andrews, and let Mr. Wrexford here see how bad the matter is."

"I've not much to tell, sir," said the man addressed, sitting up as he spoke. "It came about like this: I am a prospector, and I was out away back on the river there, never dreaming there was mischief in the wind. Then my boys began lo drop hints that there was likely to be trouble, and I'd best keep my weather eye open. At first I didn't believe them, but when I got back to camp at mid-day to-day and found both my servants murdered, my bullocks killed, and my rifles and everything else of value stolen, I guessed who had done it. Fortunately, they had passed on without waiting for me, so I got into the saddle again and came here post haste to warn you. I tell you this, the Matabele are rising. The impi that murdered my men is under one of the king's sons, and by this time they are not twenty miles distant from this spot. There can be no doubt that they are travelling this way. From what my boys told me, Buluwayo is surrounded, while three more impis are travelling night and day with the same object as the one I now warn you of, namely, to cut off the advance of the troops being pushed forward to oppose them from the south."

"Do you mean this? On your oath, are you telling me the truth?"

"God strike me dead if I'm not," he answered, solemnly. "Look at me, sir, I've made my way in here as hard as a man could come, riding for his life. That should be proof enough; but if it isn't, Mr. Mackinnon here will speak for me, I'm sure."

"That I will," said Mackinnon. "I've known you long enough, and always found you a straightforward man."

I

stood for a few moments deep in thought.

"How far do you think they are away from us at the present moment?"

"Not more than twenty miles at most, sir. I left my camp on the river about mid-day, and I've been here about a quarter of an hour. I came in as hard as I could ride; say five hours riding at twelve miles an hour, making a big detour of about twenty miles, to avoid them. That should make between fifteen and twenty miles away now if they did five miles an hour straight across country."

"And you're sure they mean war?"

"There's not a doubt of it, sir. I know the vermin too well by this time not to be certain of that."

"Then I must tell Mr. Maybourne at once. Come with me Mackinnon, and you too, Andrews, if you can manage it. We must hold a council of war and see what's best to be done."

I led them across the small paddock to my office, and then went on to the house in search of my employer. I found him pacing up and down the verandah, looking rather disturbed.

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"Wrexford, my dear fellow," he began, on seeing me, "I have been looking for you. I want a few moments' earnest conversation with you."

"And I with you, sir," I answered.

He led me beyond the verandah before he spoke again.

"You must hear me first. What I want to see you about is as important as life and death to us all. I have received a number of letters by the mail, and one and all warn me that there is likely to be trouble with the Matabele— The Chartered Company have seen it coming, I am told, and are taking all the necessary steps to secure life and property, but there is no knowing when the brutes may not be on us, and what they may not do if they start with the upper hand. Now, you see, if I were alone I should have no hesitation in remaining to see it out—but there is Agnes to consider; and, with a woman in the question, one has to think twice before one ventures upon such a course,"

"That is the very thing I came over to see you about, sir. Serious news has just reached me, and— well, to tell you the truth, we are in danger now, this very minute. If you will step over to my office, I have a man there who has seen the enemy within forty miles of this place, and he tells me they are advancing in our direction even now."

His face, for an instant, became deadly pale, and I noticed that he glanced anxiously at the sitting-room door.

"Steady, Wrexford, for heaven's sake," he said. "Not too loud, or Agnes will hear. We musn't frighten her before we are absolutely obliged. Come to the office and let me see this man for myself."

Together we walked over to my den where Mackinnon and Andrews were awaiting us.

Mr. Maybourne nodded to the former and then looked searchingly at the latter.

"I am told that you have seen the Matabele under arms to-day," he began, coming straight to the point, as was characteristic of him.

"My servants were killed by them, and my camp was looted about forty miles from this office," replied Andrews, meeting Mr. Maybourne's glance without flinching.

"At what number should you estimate them?"

"Roughly speaking, from what I saw of them from a hill nearly a mile distant, I should say they were probably two thousand strong. They were in full war dress, and from what my servants had hinted to me that morning, I gathered that they are led by one of the king's sons."

"You have no doubt in your mind that they are coming this way?"

"I don't think there's a shadow of a doubt about it, sir. They're probably trying to effect a junction with another impi, and then they'll be ready to receive any troops that may come up against them from the South."

"There's something in that," said Mr. Maybourne, reflectively. "And now I am going to ask you the most important question of all, gentlemen. That is, what's to be done? If we abandon this place, the mine and the buildings will be wrecked for certain. At the best we can only reach the township, where we can certainly go into laager, but in my opinion we shall be even worse off there than we are here. What do you say?"

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There could not be any doubt about the matter in my opinion. In the township we should certainly be able to make up a larger force, but our defences could not be made so perfect, while to abandon the mine was an act for which none of us were prepared.

"Very well then," continued Mr. Maybourne, when he had heard that we agreed with him, "in that case the best thing we can do is to form a laager here, and prepare to hold out until the troops that I have been told are on their way up can rescue us. How are we off for arms and ammunition, Wrexford?"

"I will show you," I said, and forthwith led the way through the office into a smaller room at the back. Here I pointed to an arm-rack in which twenty-two Winchester repeating rifles, a couple of Martini-Henris, and about thirty cutlasses were arranged.

"How many men capable of firing a decent shot can we muster?" asked Mr. Maybourne, when he had overhauled the weapons.

"Nineteen white men, including ourselves, and about half-a-dozen natives."

"And how much ammunition have we?"

"I can tell you in a moment," I answered, taking up a book from the table and consulting it. "Here it is. Two thousand cartridges for the repeating rifles, two hundred for the Martinis, and a thousand for the six revolvers I have in this drawer."

"A good supply, and I congratulate you on it. Now let us get to work. Ring the bell, Mr. Mackinnon, and call all the hands up to the house. I'll talk to them, and when I've explained our position, we'll get to work on the laager."

Ten minutes later every man had been informed of his danger, and was taking his share of work upon the barricades. Waggon, cases, sacks of flour, sheets of iron—everything, in fact, which would be likely to give shelter to ourselves and resistance to the enemy was pressed into our service, while all that would be likely to afford cover to the enemy for a hundred yards or so round the house was destroyed. Every tank that could be utilized was carried to the house and filled with water. The cattle were driven in, and when small earthworks had been thrown up and the stores had been stacked in a safe place, we felt we might consider ourselves prepared for a siege. By nightfall we were ready and waiting for the appearance of our foe. Sentries were posted, and in order that the township might be apprised of its danger and also that the troops who were hourly expected, as Mr. Maybourne had informed us, might know of our peril, a man was despatched on a fast horse with a letter to the inhabitants.

Having accompanied Mr. Maybourne round the square, and assured myself that our defences were as perfect as the limited means at our disposal would permit, our store of arms was brought from the office and the distribution commenced. A Winchester repeating rifle and a hundred cartridges, a cutlass, and a revolver, were issued to each white man, and after they were supplied the native boys were called up. To our astonishment and momentary dismay only one put in an appearance. The rest had decamped, doubtless considering discretion the better part of valour. When, however, we saw the stuff of which they were made this did not trouble us very much.

As soon as every man had received his weapons, and had had his post and his duties pointed out to him, Mr. Maybourne and I left them to their own devices, and went up to the house. The former had told his daughter of our danger, and for this reason I was prepared to find her, if not terrified, at least showing some alarm. But to my amazement I discovered her hard at work preparing a meal for the garrison, just as calmly and quietly as if nothing out of the common were occurring. She greeted me with a smile, showed me her puddings boiling on the fire, and pointed to a number of buckets which stood about the verandah. These were filled with some peculiar-looking fluid; and I enquired what it might be. In answer I was told that it was oatmeal and water.

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"If we are to fight," said this daughter of war, "you will find it thirsty work. I shall put these buckets, with mugs, at convenient places, so that you may assuage your thirst if occasion serves."

I noticed also that she had prepared a large quantity of lint in case it should be required, and had arranged a number of mattresses in the verandah. Her courage put fresh heart into me, as without doubt it did into everyone else who saw her. I told her that she was braver than the boldest man amongst us, and she thereupon showed that she still had sufficient of the woman left in her to blush with pleasure at the compliment.

"If the enemy were only forty miles away at midday," said Mr. Maybourne as we carried the men's tea out into the open to them, "they ought to be close at hand now. When we've done our meal we'll post extra sentries; for though I do not for a moment expect they'll attack us in the dark, it would never do to allow ourselves to be surprised."

I agreed with him; and, accordingly, as soon as our tea was finished, men were placed not only at the four corners of the laager, but at equal distances between them. The remainder lay down to rest wherever they could make themselves most comfortable. I found myself about the only exception to the rule; and, do what I would, I could not sleep. Having tried for an hour and a half, and found it still impossible, I went across to the verandah and sat down in one of the cane chairs there. I had not been there many moments before I was joined by Agnes, who seated herself beside me. I reproved her for not resting after her labours of the day.

"I could not sleep," she answered. "Brave as you call me, I am far too nervous to rest. Do you really think the enemy will attack us in the morning?"

"Not knowing their plans, I cannot say," I replied, "but I must confess it looks terribly like it."

"In that case I want you to promise me something, Gilbert."

"What is it?" I asked. "You know there is nothing I would not do for you, Agnes. What am I to promise?"

"That if we are overpowered you will not let me fall into their hands alive. You may think me a coward, but I dread that more than any thought of death."

"Hush! You must not talk like that. Have no fear, we will not let you fall into their bands. You know that there is not a man upon the mine who would not give his life for you."

She leaned a little forward and looked into my face. "I know you would protect me, would you not?"

"Wait and see. The man who touches you, Agnes, will have to do it over my dead body. Do you know that to-night, for some reason or other, I feel more superstitious than I have ever done before. I can't rid myself of the thought that I am near the one vital crisis of my life."

"What do you mean, Gilbert? You frighten me."

"I cannot tell you what I mean, for I don't know myself. I think I'm what the Scotch call *'fey'*"

"I have prayed to God for you," she said. "He who has protected us before will do so again. Let us do our duty and leave the rest to Hun."

"Amen to that," I answered solemnly; and then with a whispered "good-night" she got up and went into the house again.

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Hour after hour I sat on in the verandah, as much unable to sleep as I had been at the beginning. At intervals I made a circuit of the sentries, and convinced myself that no man was sleeping at his post, but for the greater part of the time I sat staring at the winking stars. Though I searched the open space outside the laager over and over again, not a sign of the enemy could I discover. If they were there, they must have been keeping wonderfully quiet. The sighing of the breeze in the long veldt grass was the only sound that I could distinguish.

I heard the clock in the house behind me strike one, two, and then three. By the time the last hour sounded, it was beginning to grow light. From where I sat in the verandah, I could just discern the shadowy outline of the waggons, and distinguish the figures of the sentries as they paced to and fro at their posts.

Thinking it was time to be astir, I rose from my chair and went into the house to help Agnes by lighting the fire for her, and putting the kettles on to boil.

I had just laid the sticks, and was about to set a match to them, when a shot rang out on the northern side of the laager. It was immediately followed by another from the south. I waited to hear no more, but snatched up my rifle from the table and ran out into the open. Before I had crossed the verandah, shots were being fired in all directions, and on reaching my post, I discovered a 'black crowd advancing at a run towards us.

"Steady men, steady," I heard Mr. Maybourne shout as he took up his station. "Don't lose your heads whatever you do. Keep under cover, and don't fire till you're certain your shot will tell."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before the enemy were upon us, brandishing their assegais and shields, and yelling in a manner that would have chilled the blood of the oldest veteran. It was the first time I had ever fired a shot at my fellow man, and for the moment I will confess to feeling afraid. However, that soon passed, and I found myself taking aim, and firing as coolly as the best of them. Though I was hardly conscious that I had pulled the trigger, I saw the man directly in front of me—a fine, tall fellow with a nodding head—dress of feathers—suddenly throw up his arms and fall forward on his face, tearing at the ground with his hands in his death agony. But I was not able to do more than glance at him before two others were upon me. This time I fired with more deliberation than before, with the result that both went down, one after the other, like ninepins. Then for what seemed a year, but must in reality have been about three minutes, I continued to fire, depressing the finger lever between each shot and tipping out the empty cartridge with automatic regularity. In front of my defences a ghastly pile of bodies was fast accumulating, and by craning my neck to right and left, I could discern similar heaps before the shelters of my next-door neighbours.

This desire to ascertain how my friends were getting on was, however, nearly my undoing; for if I had been more intent upon my own concerns, I should have seen a man wriggling along on the ground towards me. Just, however, as he was about to hurl his assegai I caught sight of him, and brought my rifle to the shoulder. Seeing this, he rose to his feet with a jump, and hurled his spear. I dodged with the quickness of lightning, and heard it strike the tire of the wheel behind me. At the same instant I covered him and pulled the trigger. To my horror the rifle did not go off. I had fired my nine shots, and the magazine was empty. But my wits did not desert me for long. Before the savage had time to clamber on to the wheel and raise his knob-kerrie, I was within striking distance, and, swinging my rifle by the barrel high into the air, brought the butt down upon his head with a crash that might have been heard yards away. It crushed in his skull like an egg-shell, and he fell like a log and never moved again.

As he went down a sudden peace descended upon the field, and for a moment or two every man wondered what had happened. The smoke quickly cleared away, and when it did we saw that the foe had retired. I accordingly clambered back to my old position, and looked about me. My throat was like a lime kiln, and my eyes were dry as dust. But I was not going to take any refreshment, though a bucket stood quite close to me, until I had refilled my rifle. This done, I crossed to the bucket, filled the mug and drank its contents with a relish such as I had never known in my life before. When I had handed it to another man, I turned about and endeavoured to take stock of

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our company. From where I stood I could see two men stretched out upon the ground. The one nearest me I knew instantly. It was Mackinnon, and a single glance was sufficient to tell me that he was dead. The other I could not for the moment identify. Mr. Maybourne, I was relieved to see, was unhurt save for a wound on his left hand, which he explained he had received in a hand-to-hand encounter in his corner.

"We've taught the brutes a lesson in all conscience," he said. "I don't fancy they'll be as eager next time. How many men have we lost?"

In order to find out, we walked quickly round our defences, encouraging the garrison as we went, and bidding them replenish the magazines of their rifles while they had the chance.

On the other side of the house we discovered Agnes, busily engaged binding up the wounds of those who had been hurt. She was deadly pale, but her bravery was not a bit diminished. When we got back to our own quarters we had counted three dead men, two placed *hors de combat* by their wounds, and five more or less cut and scratched. Of the enemy we estimated that at least a hundred had fallen before our rifles, never to rise again.

For something like half-an-hour we stood at our posts, waiting to be attacked, but the foe showed no sign of moving. I was just wondering what the next move would be when I heard a shout from the right. I gripped my rifle and peered ahead of me, but there was nothing to be seen save the foe crouching behind their shelters in the distance.

"What is it?" I cried to my right-hand neighbour. "What do they see?"

"A horseman," he replied, "and coming in our direction."

"Is he mad?" I cried, "or doesn't he see his danger?"

My informant did not reply, and a moment later I saw for myself the person referred to. He was mounted on a grey horse, and was riding as fast as his animal could travel in our direction. I turned my eyes away from him for a moment. When I looked again I saw a man rise from behind a bush and hurl a spear at him. The cruel weapon was thrown with unerring aim and struck the horse just behind the saddle. He leapt into the air, and then with a scream of agony that could be heard quite plainly where we all stood watching, dashed frantically towards us. He had not, however, gone a hundred yards before he put his foot into a hole, and fell with a crash to the ground, to lie there motionless. His neck was broken, so we discovered later.

From where I stood, to the place where the man and beast lay, was scarcely eighty yards; thence, on to the spot where the enemy were in ambush, not more than a hundred. For some reason—why, I shall never be able to explain—an irresistible desire to save the injured man came over me. I could not have resisted it, even had I wished to do so. Accordingly, I placed my rifle against the axle, sprang upon the box of the waggon wheel, vaulted over, and ran as hard as I could go towards the victim of the accident. Ahead of me I could distinctly see the nodding plumes of the foe as they crouched behind their enormous shields. They did not, however, move, and I was thus enabled to reach the man's side, and to take him in my arms unmolested. I had not gone ten yards on my return journey, however, before I heard their yells, and knew that they were after me. Fortunately, I had nearly a hundred and twenty yards start; but I had a heavy man to carry, and was quite out of breath. However, I was not going to be beaten, so putting out every ounce of strength I boasted in my body, I raced on. By the time I reached the waggons again, the foe were not fifty yards behind me. A couple of assegais whistled passed my ears as I climbed over the wheel and dropped my burden on the ground, but fortunately neither hit me. So exhausted was I that for a moment I leant against the waggon, unable to move. But the instinct of self-preservation gave me strength, and picking up my rifle I let drive blindly at the nearest of the foe who was already on the wheel before me. I saw the man's forehead open out like a cracked walnut as my shot caught it, and a moment later he fell forward on the tyre—dead. I threw him off in time to shoot the next man as he took his place. Of the following

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five minutes my only recollection is a sense of overpowering heat; a throat and mouth parched like the sands of the Great Sahara; a rifle growing every moment hotter in my hand, and dominating all the necessity of stemming, at any cost, the crowd of black humanity that seemed to be overwhelming me. How long the fight lasted I cannot say. But at last a cheer from the other side of the laager reached me, and almost at the same instant the enemy turned tail and fled for their lives. Then, with an empty rifle at my feet, a dripping cutlass in one hand, and a still smoking revolver in the other, I leant against the waggon and laughed hysterically till I fell fainting to the ground.

CHAPTER XII. THE END.

WHEN I recovered consciousness I found a stranger dressed in uniform kneeling beside me. What was more singular still I was not under the waggon as before, but was lying surrounded by a dozen or so of my comrades in the verandah of my own house. Agnes was kneeling beside me, and her father was holding a basin of water at my feet.

"There is nothing at all to be alarmed about, my dear young lady," the man in uniform was saying as he felt my pulse. "Your friend here will live to fight another day, or a hundred other days for that matter. By this time to-morrow he'll be as well as ever." Then, turning to me, he asked: "how do you feel now?"

I replied that I felt much stronger; and then, looking up at Mr. Maybourne, enquired if we had beaten off the enemy.

"They have been utterly routed," replied the gentleman I addressed. "The credit, however, is due to Captain Haviland and his men; but for their timely arrival I fear we should have been done for. Flesh and blood could not have stood the strain another half hour."

"Stuff and nonsense," said the doctor, for such I afterwards discovered he was, "all the credit is due to yourselves; and, by George, you deserve it. A finer stand was never made in this country, or for that matter in any other."

After a few minutes' rest and another sip of brandy, I managed to get on to my feet. It was a sad sight I had before me. Stretched out in rows beyond the verandah rails were the bodies of the gallant fellows who had been killed—twelve in number. On rough beds placed in the verandah itself and also in the house were the wounded; while on the plain all round beyond the laager might have been seen the bodies of the Matabele dead. On the left of the house the regiment of mounted infantry, who had so opportunely come to our assistance, were unsaddling after chasing the enemy, and preparing to camp.

After I had had a few moments' conversation with the doctor, Mr. Maybourne and Agnes came up to me again, and congratulated me on having saved the stranger's life. The praise they gave me was altogether undeserved, for, as I have already explained, I had done the thing on the spur of the moment without for an instant considering the danger to which I had exposed myself. When they had finished I enquired where the man was, and in reply they led me into the house.

"The doctor says it is quite a hopeless case," said Agnes, turning to me in the doorway; "the poor fellow must have injured his spine when his horse fell with him."

I followed her into the room which had once been my own sleeping apartment. It was now filled with wounded. The man I had brought in lay upon a mattress in the corner by the window, and, with Agnes beside me, I went across to him. Once there I looked down at his face, and then, with a cry that even on pain of death I could not have kept back, I fell against the wall, as Agnes afterwards told me, pallid to the very lips. I don't know how to tell you who I saw there; I don't know how to make you believe it, or how to enable you to appreciate my feelings. One thing was certain, lying on the bed before me, his head bandaged up, and a bushy beard clothing the lower

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half of his face, was *no less a person than Richard Bartrand*—my old enemy and the man I believed myself to have murdered in London so many months before. I could hardly believe my eyes; I stared at him and then looked away—only to look back again half expecting to find him gone. Could this be any mistake? I asked myself. Could it be only a deceiving likeness, or an hallucination of an overtaxed brain? Hardly knowing what I did I dragged Agnes by the wrist out of the house to a quiet corner, where I leant against the wall feeling as if I were going to faint again.

"What is the matter, Gilbert?" she cried. "Oh, what is the matter with you?"

"Matter!" I almost shouted in my joy. "This is the matter. I am free—free—free! Free to marry you—free to do as I please, and live as I please, and go where I please!!! For there in that bed is my old enemy, the man I told you I had killed."

For a second she must have thought me mad, for I noticed she shrank a step away from me, and looked at me with an apprehensive glance. But she soon recovered her composure, and asked if I were certain of what I said.

"As certain as I am that you are standing before me now," I answered. "I should know him anywhere. Where is the doctor?"

A moment later I had found the doctor.

"Doctor," I said, "there is a man in that room yonder whom, I am told, you say has a broken back. He is unconscious. Will he remain so until he dies?"

"Most probably," was the other's matter-of-fact reply as he began to bind up the arm of the man he had been operating on. "Why do you ask?"

"Because it is a matter of the most vital importance that I should speak with him before he dies. All the happiness of my life and another's depends upon it."

"Very well. Don't worry yourself. I'll see what I can do for you. Now go away and be quiet. I'm busy."

I went away as he ordered me, and leant against the verandah rails at the back of the house. My head was swimming, and I could hardly think coherently. Now that Bartrand was alive, every obstacle was cleared away—I was free to marry Agnes as soon as her father would let me; free to do whatever I pleased in the world. The reaction was almost more than I could bear. No words could over-estimate my relief and joy.

Half an hour later the doctor came to me.

"Your man is conscious now," he said. "But you'd better look sharp if you want to ask him anything. He won't last long."

I followed him into the house to the corner where the sick man lay. As soon as he saw me, Bartrand showed with his eyes that he recognized me.

"Pennethorne," he whispered, as I knelt by the bed, "this is a strange meeting. Do you know I've been hunting for you these nine months past?"

"Hunting for me?" I said. "Why, I thought you dead!"

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"I allowed it to be supposed that I was," he answered. "I can tell you, Pennethorne, that money I swindled you out of never brought me an ounce of luck —nor Gibbs either. He turned cocktail and sent his share back to me almost at once. He was drinking himself to death on it, I heard. Now look at me, I'm here—dying in South Africa. They tell me you saved me to-day at the risk of your life."

"Never mind that now," I said. "We've got other things to talk about."

"But I must mind," he answered. "Listen to what I have to tell you, and don't interrupt me. Three nights before I disappeared last winter, I made my will, leaving you everything. It's more than the value of the mine, for I brought off some big speculations with the money, and almost doubled my capital. You may not believe it, but I always felt sorry for you, even when I stole your secret. I'm a pretty bad lot, but I couldn't steal your money and not be a bit sorry. But, funny as it may seem to say so, I hated you all the time too—hated you more than any other man on God's earth. Now you've risked your life for me, and I'm dying in your house. How strangely things turn out, don't they?"

Here the doctor gave him something to drink, and bade me let him be quiet for a few moments. Presently Bartrand recovered his strength, and began again.

"One day, soon after I arrived in London from Australia, I fell in tow with a man named Nikola. I tell you, Pennethorne, if ever you see that man beware of him, for he's the Devil, and nobody else. I tell you he proposed the most fiendish things to me and showed me such a side of human nature that, if I hadn't quarrelled with him and not seen so much of him I should have been driven into a lunatic asylum. I can tell you it's not altogether a life of roses to be a millionaire. About this time I began to get threatening letters from men all over Europe trying to extort money from me for one purpose or another. Eventually Nikola found out that I was the victim of a secret society. How he managed it, the deuce only knows. They wanted money badly, and finally Nikola told me that for half a million he could get me clear. If I did not pay up I'd be dead, he said, in a month. But I wasn't to be frightened like that, so I told him I wouldn't give it. From that time forward attempts were made on my life until my nerve gave way—and in a blue funk I determined to forego the bulk of my wealth and clear out of England in the hopes of beginning a new life elsewhere."

He paused once more for a few moments; his strength was nearly exhausted, and I could see with half an eye that the end was not far distant now. When he spoke again his voice was much weaker, and he seemed to find it difficult to concentrate his ideas.

"Nikola wanted sixty thousand for himself, I suppose for one of his devilments," he said, huskily. "He used every means in his power to induce me to give it to him, but I refused time after time. He showed me his power, tried to hypnotize me even, and finally told me I should be a dead man in a week if I did not let him have the money. I wasn't going to be bluffed, so I declined again. By this time I distrusted my servants, my friends, and everybody with whom I came in contact. I could not sleep, and I could not eat. All my arrangements were made, and I was going to leave England on the Saturday. On the Wednesday Nikola and I were to meet at a house on special business. We saw each other at a club, and I called a hansom, intending to go on and wait for him. I had a dreadful cold, and carried some cough drops in a little silver box in my pocket. He must have got possession of it, and substituted some preparations of his own. Feeling my cough returning, I took one in the cab as I drove along. After that I remember no more till I came round and found myself lying in the middle of the road, half covered with snow, and with a bruise the size of a tea-cup on the back of my head. For some reason of his own Nikola had tried to do for me; and the cabman, frightened at my state, had pitched me out and left me. As soon as I could walk, and it was daylight, I determined to find you at your hotel, in order to hand over to you the money I had stolen from you, and then I was going to bolt from England for my life. But when I reached Blankerton's I was told that you had left. I traced your luggage to Aberdeen; but, though I wasted a week looking, I couldn't find you there. Three months ago I chanced upon a snapshot photograph taken in Cape Town, and reproduced in an American illustrated paper. It represented one of the only two survivors of the *Fiji Princess*, and I recognised you

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immediately, and followed you, first to Cape Town and then, bit by bit, out here. Now listen to me, for I've not much time left. My will is in my coat-pocket; when I'm dead, you can take it out and do as you like with it. You'll find yourself one of the richest men in the world, or I'm mistaken. I can only say I hope you'll have better luck with the money than I have had. I'm glad you've got it again; for, somehow, I'd fixed the idea in my head that I shouldn't rest quietly in my grave unless I restored it to you. One caution! Don't let Nikola get hold of it, that's all—for he's after you, I'm certain. He's been tracking you down these months past; and I've heard he's on his way here. I'm told he thinks I'm dead. He'll be right in his conjecture soon."

"Bartrand," I said, as solemnly as I knew how, "I will not take one halfpenny of the money. I am firmly resolved upon that. Nothing shall ever make me."

"Not take it? But it's your own. I never had any right to it from the beginning. I stole your secret while you were ill."

"That may be; but I'll not touch the money, come what may."

"But I must leave it to somebody."

"Then leave it to the London hospitals. I will not have a penny of it. Good heavens, man, you little know how basely I behaved towards you!"

"I've not time to hear it now, then," he answered. "Quick! let me make anew will while I've strength to sign it."

Pens, paper, and ink were soon forthcoming; and at his instruction Mr. Maybourne and the doctor between them drafted the will. When it was finished the dying man signed it, and then those present witnessed it, and the man lay back and closed his eyes. For a moment I thought he was gone, but I was mistaken. After a silence of about ten minutes he opened his eyes and looked at me.

"Do you remember Markapurlie?" he said. That was all. Then, with a grim smile upon his lips, he died, just as the clock on the wall above his head struck twelve. His last speech, for some reason or other, haunted me for weeks.

Towards sundown that afternoon I was standing in the verandah of my house, watching a fatigue party digging a grave under a tree in the paddock beyond the mine buildings, when a shout from Mr. Maybourne, who was on his way to the office, attracted my attention. "When I reached his side, he pointed to a small speck of dust about a mile to the northward.

"It's a horseman," he cried; "but who can it be?"

"I have no possible notion," I answered; "but we shall very soon see."

The rider, whoever he was, was in no hurry. When he came nearer, we could see that he was cantering along as coolly as if he were riding in Rotten Bow. By the time he was only a hundred yards or so distant, I was trembling with excitement. Though I had never seen the man on horseback before, I should have known his figure anywhere. *It was Dr. Nikola.* There could be no possible doubt about that. Bartrand was quite right when he told me that he was in the neighbourhood.

I heard Mr. Maybourne say something about news from the township, but the real import of his words I did not catch. I seemed to be watching the advancing figure with my whole being. When he reached the laager he sprang from his horse, and then it was that I noticed Mr. Maybourne had left my side and was giving instructions to let him in. I followed to receive him.

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On reaching the inside of our defences, Nikola raised his hat politely to Mr. Maybourne, while he handed his reins to a trooper standing by.

"Mr. Maybourne, I believe," he said. "My name is Nikola. I am afraid I am thrusting myself upon you in a very unseemly fashion, and at a time when you have no desire to be burdened with outsiders. My friendship for our friend Wrexford here must be my excuse. I left Buluwayo at daylight this morning in order to see him."

He held out his hand to me and I found myself unable to do anything but take it. As usual it was as cold as ice. For the moment I was so fascinated by the evil glitter in his eyes that I forgot to wonder how he knew my assumed name. However, I managed to stammer out something by way of a welcome, and then asked how long he had been in South Africa.

"I arrived two months ago," he answered, "and after a week in Cape Town, where I had some business to transact, made my way up here to see you. It appears I have arrived at an awkward moment, but if I can help you in any way I hope you will command my services. I am a tolerable surgeon, and I have the advantage of considerable experience of assegai wounds."

While he was speaking the bell rang for tea, and at Mr. Maybourne's invitation Dr. Nikola accompanied us to where the meal was spread—picnic fashion—on the ground by the kitchen door. Agnes was waiting for us, and I saw her start with surprise when her father introduced the newcomer as Dr. Nikola, a friend of Mr. Wrexford's. She bowed gravely to him, but said nothing. I could see that she knew him for the man Bartrand had warned me against, and for this reason she was by no means prepossessed in his favour.

During the meal Nikola exerted all his talents to please. And such was his devilish—I can only call it by that name—cleverness, that by the time we rose from the meal he had put himself on the best of terms with everyone. Even Agnes seemed to have, for the moment, lost much of her distrust of him. Once out in the open again I drew Nikola away from the others, and having walked him out of earshot of the house, asked the meaning of his visit.

"Is it so hard to guess?" he said, as he seated himself on the pole of a waggon, and favoured me with one of his peculiar smiles. "I should have thought not."

"I have not tried to guess," I answered, having by this time resolved upon my line of action; "and I do not intend to do so. I wish you to tell me."

"My dear Pennethorne—Wrexford, or Wrexford—Pennethorne," he said quietly, "I should advise you not to adopt that tone with me. You know very well why I have put myself to the trouble of running you to earth."

"I have not the least notion," I replied, "and that is the truth. I thought I had done with you when I said good-bye" to you in Golden Square that awful night."

"Nobody can hope to have done with me," he answered, "when they do not act fairly by me."

"Act fairly by you? What do you mean? How have I not acted fairly by you?"

"By running away in that mysterious fashion, when it was agreed between us that I should arrange everything. You might have ruined me."

"Still I do not understand you! How might I have ruined you?"

This time I took him unawares. He looked at me for a moment in sheer surprise.

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"I should advise you to give up this sort of thing," he said, licking his lips in that peculiar cat-like fashion I had noticed in London. "Remember I know everything, and one word in our friend Maybourne's ear, and—well—you know what the result will be. Perhaps he does not know what an illustrious criminal he is purposing to take for a son-in-law."

"One insinuation like that again, Nikola," I cried, "and I'll have you put off this place before you know where you are. *You* dare to call *me* a criminal—you, who plotted and planned the murders that shocked and terrified all England!"

"That I do not admit. I only remember that I assisted you to obtain your revenge on a man who had wronged you. On summing up so judiciously, pray do not forget that point."

Nikola evidently thought he had obtained an advantage, and was quick to improve on it.

"Come, come," he said, "what is the use of our quarrelling like a pair of children? All I want of you is an answer to two simple questions."

"What are your questions?"

"I want to know, first, what you did with Bartrand's body when you got rid of it out of the cab."

"You really wish to know that?"

He nodded.

"Then come with me," I said, "and I'll tell you." I led him into the house, and, having reached the bed in the corner, pulled down the sheet.

He bent over the figure lying there so still, and then started back with a cry of surprise. For a moment I could see that he was *non-plussed* as he had probably not been in his life before, but by the time one could have counted twenty, this singular being was himself again.

"I congratulate you," he said, turning to me and holding out his hand. "The king has come into his own again. You are now one of the richest men in the world, and I can ask my second question."

"Be certain first," I said. "I inherit nothing from Mr. Bartrand."

"What do you mean by that? I happen to know that his will was made in your favour."

"You are quite mistaken. He made a later will this afternoon, leaving all his money and estates to four London hospitals."

Nikola's face went paler than I had ever seen it yet. His thin lips trembled perceptibly. The man was visibly anxious.

"You will excuse my appearing to doubt you, I hope," he said, "but may I see that will?"

I called Mr. Maybourne into the room and asked him if he had any objection to allowing Dr. Nikola to see the paper in question. He handed it to him without hesitation, keeping close to his elbow while he perused it. The Doctor read it slowly from beginning to end, examined the signature, noted the names of the executors, and also of the witnesses, and when he had done so, returned it to Mr. Maybourne with a bow.

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"Thank you," he said, politely. "It is excellently drawn up, and, with your evidence against me, I fear it would be foolish for me to dispute it. In that case, I don't think I need trouble your hospitality any further."

Then, turning to me, he led me from the house across to where his horse was standing.

"Good-bye, Pennethorne," he said. "All I can say of you is that your luck is greater than your cleverness. I am not so *blase* but I can admire a man who can surrender three millions without a sigh. I must confess I am vulgar enough to find that it costs me a pang to lose even my sixty thousand. I wanted it badly. Had my *coup* only come off, and the dead man in there not been such an inveterate ass, I should have had the whole amount of his fortune in my hands by this time, and in six months I would have worked out a scheme that would have paralyzed Europe. As it is, I must look elsewhere for the amount. When you wish to be proud of yourself, try to remember that you have baulked Dr. Nikola in one of his best-planned schemes, and saved probably half-a-million lives by doing so. Believe me, there are far cleverer men than you who have tried to outwit me and failed. I suppose you will marry Miss Maybourne now. Well, I wish you luck with her. If I am a judge of character, she will make you an able wife. In ten years time you will be a commonplace rich man, with scarcely any idea outside your own domestic circle, while I—well the devil himself knows where or what I shall be then. I wonder which will be the happier? Now I must be off. Though you may not think it, I always liked you, and if you had thrown in your lot with me, I might have made something of you. Good-bye."

He held out his hand, and as he did so he looked me full in the face. For the last time I felt the influence of those extraordinary eyes. I took the hand he offered and bade him good-bye with almost a feeling of regret, mad as it may seem to say so, at the thought that in all probability I should never see him again. Next moment he was on his horse's back and out on the veldt making for the westward. I stood and watched him till he was lost in the gathering gloom, and then went slowly back to the house thinking of the change that had come into my life, thanking God for my freedom.

Three months have passed since the events just narrated took place, and I am back in Cape Town again, finishing the writing of this story of the most adventurous period of my life, in Mr. Maybourne's study. To-morrow my wife (for I have been married a week to-day) and I leave South Africa on a trip round the world. What a honeymoon it will be!

"The Pride of the South," you will be glad to hear, has made gallant strides since the late trouble in Rhodesia, and as my shares have quadrupled in value, to say nothing of the other ventures in which I have been associated with my father-in-law, I am making rapid progress towards becoming a rich man. And now it only remains for me to bring my story to a close. By way of an epilogue let me say that no better, sweeter, or more loyal wife than I possess could possibly be desired by any mortal man. I love her with my whole heart and soul, as she loves me, and I can only hope that every masculine reader who may have the patience to wade through these, to me, interminable pages, may prove as fortunate in his choice as I have been. More fortunate, it is certain, he could not be.

THE END.