

The Silent Sea

Catherine Martin

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Volume I.

Chapter I.

As Miss Paget left the library after seeing that her father's armchair was in the right position and the Venetian blinds adjusted according to the morning light, she glanced at the huge bronze clock that stood on a huge bronze stand in the hall, and saw that it was only half-past nine. At ten she expected a visitor, and ever since she awoke at half-past five she had been so preoccupied with the thought of his arrival that more than once before this she had made quite sure the hour was at last about to strike.

Seeing that she was in error, the lady went back to the library. It was a handsome large room, lined with dark oaken bookcases from ceiling to floor, relieved at intervals with arched recesses lined with mirrors, before which stood vases containing small palms and other evergreen shrubs. This was an arrangement that, like many others which characterized the house, had been carried out according to Miss Paget's own design after she became an heiress and bought Lancaster House.¹ All the people who visited this mansion thought it was a happy contrivance to relieve the severity of so learned-looking a room with the comparative frivolity of mirrors and foliage. Miss Paget shared the opinion, and often had the shrubs changed, so that the effect did not sink into one of those foregone conclusions that after a time make no further claim on the eye. But neither the aesthetic nor the intellectual aspects of the chamber drew a glance or a thought from her at this moment. She had merely returned to see whether there was anything more she might do to anticipate her father's wants. She did not wish to be called away at a critical moment from an interview to which she looked forward with more anxiety than she was willing to admit even to herself. For some time back her father had got into the habit of depending on her to guard his notes from straying and his authorities from being misplaced, in addition to exercising a sedulous care as to his physical well-being.

Mr. Paget was an ex-professor of the dead languages, and a man whose mental horizon was bounded by illusions. Thus, he firmly believed that he was of a painfully sensitive temperament, and that he was devoting the leisure which now embraced his whole life to the cause of unendowed research. In reality his sensitiveness went no deeper than an excessive antipathy to everything he found disagreeable. As for his studies, they were very versatile; and resulted now and then in one of those compilations that are widely reviewed, sometimes bought, and occasionally read. It is well known that in Australia an M.A. of Cambridge can always pass for a man of great erudition, as long as he refrains from explaining wherein his learning consists. As most of the people with whom he comes in contact are profoundly indifferent on the point, there is not much temptation for him to take society into his confidence in the matter. And thus it was that Mr. Paget was invariably spoken of as a man of colossal parts, of profound research, of wide and disinterested learning. As a matter of fact, he was a man of wide reading and some culture, with the smallest modicum of original capacity and a constitutional disinclination to real effort.²

But the reality of things has often no perceptible influence on the masquerade they cut in the tragi-comedy of life. And so it behoved Miss Paget to take her father and his beliefs as seriously as her own identity and the vagaries of the climate to which she had returned after travelling with him for nearly two years in the Old World.

'It is Egyptology that papa is so much interested in just now. . . . He will like to have these big German books³ near him,' she thought, placing certain volumes on the pedestal table. Then she consulted the thermometer that stood upon it, and seeing this registered only 69 degrees,⁴ she thought it prudent to ring for the housemaid and ask her to put a little more coal on the fire. After that she went into the drawing-room and took a strip of crewel-work out of a little Eastern basket full of soft bright skeins of filoselle⁵ and balls of pale yellow floss silk. She sat on a low rocking-chair, threaded her needle, and put a tiny silver thimble on her white tapered finger. As soon as she was equipped in this way for serious and sustained industry, she dropped the strip of crewel-work in her lap and leant back in an engrossing reverie. It is not easy to render a reverie into speech. The best and most that can be done is to give a free translation of the thoughts that follow one another in swift or slow succession.

'A girl--no, a woman of twenty-nine and a bit--and a young man five months short of twenty-one.⁶ It is a story ready made for old gossips and old friends--one of the situations for which the comedians lie in wait--and yet how little I would care if I were only sure. . . . But don't I know well how it was from beginning to end?'

Arrived at this point in her musings, a slow smile broke over Miss Paget's face. It all came up before her like a

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picture, the first time she and her fellow-passenger of less than twenty-one summers had spoken to each other. It was the third day after leaving Plymouth, and she was half reclining on a couch in the big saloon full of gilding and mirrors and velvet-covered impossible chairs.⁷ Enter a tall young man with coal-black hair and dark blue Irish eyes, searching for some missing object.

'Is it this book you are looking for?' she asked, holding up a volume of poems.

It was, but he begged her to keep it if she had been reading it.

'I never read poetry,' she answered, and the next moment she was sorry for having told the truth. He looked so undisguisedly amazed. She remembered having glanced languidly at the title-page, and seeing 'V. Fitz-Gibbon, from his mother,' written in an elegant hand. 'A boy of this age always thinks a woman who is quite different from his mother must be a monster,' she thought.

'Not on board ship, I suppose you mean,' he said, drawing near her. Then he added, not waiting for an answer: 'I hope this rough weather has not made you ill, like most of the other ladies.'

'No, I would be quite well,' she answered, 'if it were not for the magnificent mummies of Dehr-el-Bahari.'⁸

He opened his eyes wide, and then laughed the ready, ringing laugh of a light-hearted boy. He had half an hour before overheard an impressive description from her father on this subject for the third time since coming on board. Miss Paget hardly expected that he would understand the allusion or take it all in so quickly. She spoke, as she rarely did, on the spur of the moment, finding some relief in a spontaneous confession from the strained feeling of irritation the subject had begun to produce.

'You see, it is really a very important discovery, and papa is so much interested in these things,' she said apologetically.

'Yes; and these are in family groups of from six or seven, each mummy with a valuable MS. inside him,' said the young man, his eyes dancing with merriment.

'Oh, for Heaven's sake! don't you begin, too!' she said, raising her hands imploringly. They were good friends from that moment. He declared she was malingering by stopping in the saloon, when there was such a fresh breeze blowing and the sea one mass of immense green waves fringed with foam. They found a sheltered corner in which they established their deck-chairs, and when they were tired of talking they watched the waves. The weather was very rough till they got into the Mediterranean. During this time Mr. Paget was mostly in his own cabin. With the exception of his daughter, hardly a lady was to be seen on deck. All conspired to make the new acquaintances into intimate friends. Miss Paget was slightly acquainted with the young man's mother, though oblivious of his existence till they met on board the Mogul.⁹

And then an unparalleled event in Miss Paget's history took place. She fell in love, absolutely and heartily, with the young man whom she had from the first treated as a boy, to whom a woman of her age could talk with the frank kindness of an elder sister. For a time she resisted the conviction with wondering incredulity. Even now she tried to make herself believe that her affections were not so very deeply pledged.

'I always liked nice boys,' she mused. 'Their faces are not spoiled by cynical airs of knowingness, or of being used up, or any of the disagreeable tell-tale lines that make the faces of male creatures disagreeable to look on as they advance in life. . . . And what fun and good talks we had in these long charmed nights, flooded with white moonlight, as we glided through the Mediterranean and up the Red Sea. . . . And then the delicious excursions together at the ports of call,¹⁰ among the crowds of Arabs, Mahomedans, and Parsees, and rascally traders. Shall I ever forget the king cocoanut we drank in the fruit-market at Colombo, and the furious rush back to the quay, in a double 'ricksha, laden with white ivory elephants? White elephants—were these a good omen?¹¹ Then came the last evening, when we sighted Kangaroo Island. I felt the tears rising fast to my eyes. . . . I suppose they got into my voice as I said: "I am so sorry the voyage has come to an end!"

"Are you really sorry?" he said, bending so as to see my face better.

"But, of course, we need not give up being friends," I added. I should not have said it.

"Are we to be only friends, then?" he said; and hardly waiting to think what I said, I answered:

"Why, what more could we be?"

'Still less should I have said that. . . . And yet it was an exquisite moment, come what may, when he told me that he loved me . . . that he wanted a deeper and a firmer bond than friendship. I can always recall him as he looked then . . . the sort of lover that girls dream and rave of in their teens. . . . Yes, he looks young, even for his age—not a line in his face, not a blurred contour; the perfect mouth, and white sculptural lids.

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'It isn't, of course, such a very unheard-of thing for a woman to marry a man nine or ten years younger than herself. Only, when men are insignificant or commonplace, when they have plebeian noses and small pale eyes and sandy whiskers, what does it matter how young they are? . . . But Victor, with superb good looks and boyish youthfulness! It isn't that I feel old.'

Miss Paget rose and looked at herself with a keen scrutiny in one of several square panels of mirror that were let into an ebony cabinet near her. Notwithstanding her twenty-nine years and a 'bit,' her appearance was exceedingly attractive. She was over the middle height, with a slender upright svelte figure. She had dark eyes and hair, and well-formed features. Her forehead was rather low; the mouth a trifle wide. But she had such exquisite teeth, that this was hardly a defect, more especially when she smiled. In talking she often did so, the predominant expression of her face being humorous. She had beautiful hands and feet, and was always extremely well dressed.

There was a knock at the door, and a servant announced 'Mr. Victor Fitz-Gibbon.' If Miss Paget had seen her own face as she turned to meet the young gentleman announced, she would have perceived that after all one's face in a t t e-^t t e with iitself is never seen at its best. We may love ourselves sincerely--some of us are happy enough to do so--yet the sight of our own cheeks and eyes never makes them flush or brighten as they spontaneously do at the sight of even a foe.

Needless to say, this was no foe who stood holding Miss Paget's hands and looking at her with a bright smile.

'It is good of you to let me come so early, Helen!'

'And it is good of you to want to come.'

'Oh, as for that, my visit is not so very disinterested. You have not forgotten why I asked leave, when we parted, to come this morning?'

'But then, you know, it is two days since we parted on the Mogul.'

'Well, what of that?'

'And two days on land, away from the shoreless waves and moonlight on the waters-----'

'You are going to say something horrid--I see it in your eyes. Don't, Helen!'

'Well, I will not. But I have been sitting here for ages, going over it all. . . . Oh, Victor, it is better not. Don't tempt me.'

'But that's just what I will--all I know. Helen, can you say honestly you don't care for me?'

'No, I cannot. I care for you a great deal--but-----'

Suddenly, in spite of her apparent efforts to keep them back, the tears rose in Miss Paget's eyes--rose and overflowed, so that she was forced to wipe them away repeatedly.

'I am an ungrateful cat to cry at you in this way,' she said, smiling through her tears.

'You are not crying at me, Helen. . . . You are crying because something troubles you. Won't you tell me what it is?'

'I would in a moment--only it is too ridiculous.'

'But, you know, we agreed many times on the Mogul that we liked ridiculous things better than gold, or wisdom, or fine society, or good books.'

'Yes, when they are ridiculous things about other people. . . . But . . . well, we were always good comrades--I will tell you: I cried because I am so old.'

'So old? How absurd! Just look at yourself.'

They were still standing where they met, in front of that ebony cabinet whose mirrors afforded so many opportunities for seeing the reflection of one's face and form. But Miss Paget shrank from the ordeal. She resumed her seat on the rocking-chair, and motioned Victor to an armchair near her.

'Is it that you think I'm too young to know my own mind, Helen?' asked the young man.

'You may know it just now. . . . But in a year--even in a few months-----Oh, Victor, I am afraid!'

There was real emotion in the lady's voice, yet her looks and words were not free from calculation. She knew that her upward, appealing glance, her bright dark eyes dimmed with tears, her doubts and hesitation, would not really rebuff her young suitor. And her consciousness of having purposely led him on to make a declaration of love rendered her all the more anxious to make him feel that she was not too lightly won.

'Then I'll have courage for both of us,' said Victor.

'Yes, reckless courage belongs to early youth.'

'I promise you on my honour to grow older every day,' returned the young man buoyantly.

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A wistful little smile on the lady's face warned him this argument was a two-edged weapon, and he hastened to add:

'And, faith,¹³ I'll grow wise faster even than I put on years.'

'Let us talk of something else for a little, Victor. How does it feel, getting back to enter on a kingdom?'

'It feels as if Uncle Stuart and I would fight like the Kilkenny cats¹⁴ if we have much to do with each other. . . . But, Helen, do you remember my telling you of an old house kin North Terrace with a beautiful garden round it that my mother used to be so fond of?'

'Oh yes—Lindaraxa.¹⁵ Mrs. Sedley,¹⁶ my old friend Mrs. Tillotson's youngest daughter, lived in it at one time.'

'Well, it is to be sold: I want to buy it for my mother, and tell her nothing about it till she returns. I wish you would come and have a look at it with me——'

There was a sound of voices at the door. The handle was turned, and a large matronly-looking lady, something more than middle-aged, bustled in.

'My dear, I felt sure that if I came early enough I should find you at home,' she said, kissing Miss Paget in an emphatic way. Then she made a rapid descent on Victor, seizing both his hands.

'My dear boy, how delighted I am to see you! I have a thousand questions to ask you, and to congratulate you on your good fortune—though, of course, it was a dreadful pity you were not in time to see your poor dear uncle Shaw. mWhere did you get the sad news?'

'Not till I reached Albany.'¹⁷

'And your dear mother, how long is she to stay in England?'

'Probably for six months.'

'Well, and she'll find you with quite a fortune of your own. My dear, I'm afraid you'll turn all the young ladies' heads, and, really, don't you think it's time you stopped growing?'

'I haven't grown any for two years, Mrs. Tillotson,' said Victor, colouring, half vexed and half amused at the imputation.

Miss Paget, though as a rule very self-possessed, also showed slight signs of confusion. Mrs. Tillotson, however, was one of those who go through life much too immersed in affairs to see what is going on under their eyes.

'Not for two years, my dear boy?' she cried, looking at Victor with beaming eyes, while she drew off her tight-fitting pale blue kid gloves, pulling them off like the skin of a banana, and disclosing very white plump hands, each finger loaded with costly rings up to the first joint.

'You see, my dear Helen, I mean to stay for a good long chat this time; we had only a few seconds together yesterday afternoon, and there is something I want to consult you about.' This was in a sort of half-aside to Miss Paget; then, as if there had been no interruption in her discourse with him, Mrs. Tillotson turned to Victor, saying:

'You surely don't mean that you were over six feet high at seventeen?'

'You are figuring me out nearly two years younger than I am,' returned Victor, twirling the points of his young moustache.

'Oh dear! with what alarming speed boys and girls grow up! Haven't you noticed that, Helen?'

'But they are much more interesting grown up; don't you think so?' answered Miss Paget, smiling and trying to look unconcerned.

'Well, I don't know. They are safe over measles and chicken-pox; but then they begin to fall in love, and that's just as bad—often more dangerous.'

'But don't you think it's rather pleasanter?' asked Victor, smiling, though mentally he decided that Mrs. Tillotson had the most infatuated¹⁸ tongue of any old woman in the universe.

'Now, Victor, tell me the truth,' said Mrs. Tillotson solemnly. 'Did you leave the Mogul, in your motherless condition, without getting into some sort of entanglement? Helen, do look how the boy blushes!'

Miss Paget, instead of looking, stooped to pick up her crewel-work and restore it to the basket.

'You know,' continued Mrs. Tillotson, 'the Mogul is noted even among the P. and O. boats for the number of engagements that get made on her. To be sure, very few of them come to anything.'

Victor glanced at his watch and rose to go.

'Must you leave us?' cried Mrs. Tillotson; 'and I've heard so little of your dear mother. I kept thinking of her as

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I walked across the square, and then, when I came in, here were you! Isn't that what they call theosophy,19 or something occult?'

'Oh, I should call it friendship!' returned Victor good-humouredly.

At last he extricated himself from the embarrassing coils of Mrs. Tillotson's random talk. As he was leaving, he said to Miss Paget with unblushing gravity:

'By the way, may I look at that picture in the dining-room we were talking about?'

Miss Paget looked at him inquiringly. As her eyes met his a charming blush overspread her face. Then she asked Mrs. Tillotson to excuse her absence for a few minutes. When they were fairly in the dining-room she turned on Victor with laughing eyes.

'Now, you brazen boy, what picture do you mean?'

'You,' he answered boldly. 'Did you think I was going to be cheated out of even asking when I might see you again? Look here, Helen, can you come and look over Lindaraxa with me to-morrow?'

'Yes, I can.'

'At what hour?'

'Oh, morning will be the best time. It is my day at home20 to-morrow. Say from eleven to twelve.'

'Thank you so much; and in the meantime you will make up your mind to give me a definite answer to-morrow?'

n'Hark, that is a summons for me!' cried Miss Paget, as the shrill sound of an electric bell was heard.

Victor looked at her in amazement.

'Appuyez sur le bouton de sonnette deux fois pour la femme de chambre,'21 said Miss Paget, laughing. 'My father often wants me in the library about one thing or another, and when he rings for the parlour maid it is nearly always the prelude to my being summoned,' she explained; 'so, dear boy, I must go. Yes,22 I promise. I will give you an answer to-morrow.'

'And, Helen, will you promise that no dreadful old woman will turn up?'

'Oh, poor Mrs. Tillotson! you must not be cross at her; she is my habitual Providence,23 when I want an unexacting companion.' Footnotes record differences in wording between book and newspaper forms of the novel. The Note on the Text explains the method of recording.

a. these] those E1 see Introduction, n. 70

b. five] six E1

c. would] should E1

d. on] of E1

e. are] being E1

f. these] those E1

g. in] on Adl

h. to] in Adl

i. itself] one's self E1

j. young] younger Adl

k. in] on Adl

l. Sedley] Selby Adl

m. Where] When Adl

n.

'Hark, that . . . [l. 21] go. Yes,°] 'What sort of answer do you think I am going to give?' said Miss Paget, smiling somewhat nervously.

'Why, a nice Christian little answer, that it takes only three letters to spell.'

'But you know very often the one that is made up of two letters is far wiser.'

'Then please remember that on this occasion you are on no account to be wise.'

'I wonder whether you would be very broken-hearted if I said "No"?''

As Miss Paget spoke, she watched the young man's face curiously. Before he could reply, there was a low knock at the door. It was one of the servants, who came to tell Miss Paget that her father wished to see her in the library.

'Yes, E1

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o. to-morrow.'] to-morrow,' she said, as she bade Victor good-bye. E1
p. promise] promise too Adl promise, too, E1

Chapter II.

Mr. Paget did not long detain his daughter in the library. But when she was disengaged, instead of hastening to join her old friend, Miss Paget went back into the dining-room, and stood looking out on the lawn in front, with wide-open, unseeing eyes. Outwardly she was calm; but, in reality, she felt more deeply moved than she had ever been in the whole previous course of her life. Often had it seemed to her that, in leaving the most impressionable years behind her, without ever having experienced any absorbing affection, a premature atrophy of the heart had fallen on her. But now?

Her girlhood had not been a happy one. She was Mr. Paget's only daughter by a second wife. When he married the second time he was a Professor in the Sydney University, with three daughters of a party-going age by his first wife. The three young ladies bitterly resented the intrusion of a step-mother. They were eager for amusements, for elegant dresses, and for all the forms of social distinction which cannot be enjoyed without money. And the new wife had very little of her own, beyond expectations from a wealthy grandfather. But he belonged to the hardy old stock of pioneers who live for ever. The young step-mother did not, however, live long to be an encumbrance on the family resources. She died a few months after Helen's birth, entrusting the bright-eyed little baby to the special charge of her eldest step-daughter—then in her eighteenth year! Perhaps none of the step-sisters were purposely unkind. Yet Helen's first conscious reflections regarding herself were that she was somehow one of the failures of life, and that she had entered it without any reasonable pretext. And as she reached the dividing-line between girlhood and womanhood existence for a time became harder. The family for the first time fell into money straits. Mr. Paget quarrelled with the Council of the University of Sydney,² and in a sudden access of wounded vanity he resigned his post. For four years he maintained his family as best he could, by private tuition.

The change from an assured position worth over a thousand a year,³ to that of an unsuccessful coach, earning a few precarious hundreds per annum, was a sufficiently bitter one. To make matters worse, the ex-Professor's elder daughters were still all unmarried. Without money and without prospects, without minds to cultivate or amiability to fall back on, with thwarted ambitions and with a well-developed taste for the good things of the world, this stagnant period of straitened means was marked by sordid discomfort, discontent, and bickerings. And this crisis embraced Helen's life from seventeen to twenty-one—the most keenly susceptible and receptive years of a girl's experience. To be shabbily dressed; to go to parties and sit dvery often without a partner, watching other girls dancing; to see happiness only in the eyes of others, when Nature's blossoming time has come, and the physique is most exquisitely alive to enjoyment—this was Helen's lot.

Then the fortunes of the family changed with a rush. Mr. Paget was successful in his application for a professorship in the Adelaide University.⁴ A few months after settling there, the eldest Miss Paget rapturously accepted an offer of marriage from a wealthy man well advanced in years. His hair was white, and his pedigree unknown.⁵ He had acquired the art of writing late in life, but had never learned to spell. There were many who gladly testified that he had been coachman to one of the few people who kept a carriage thirty years before, that he had established a small secondhand shop in one of the streets before it was made.⁶ Be these matters as they may, one thing quite certain now was that he had seven thousand a year, and a handsome residence near town, adorned with pictures which never failed to excite in him a certain respect for art. He could not get over the fact some of the smallest of them were the costliest.

The other two sisters married in less than a year afterwards— one a broker, the other a lawyer: both rather elderly, and both in prosperous circumstances.⁷

Two years after these marriages, Helen's great-grandfather died, at the ripe age of ninety-seven, and her share of his wealth was £3,000 a year. Oh, if it had only come to her earlier! This was the first and most vivid feeling which the news of her fortune awoke. How it would have redeemed her youth from those haunting, miserable memories, which no later gifts of fortune could ever efface!

It is to be feared that neither a course of poverty nor a sudden access of riches is a phase of experience likely to raise an observant human being's opinion of mankind. Miss Paget had been subjected to both ordeals, and it cannot be denied that her nature had suffered from each extreme. Perhaps, if her training had been more delicate

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and loving, or if her disposition had been less egoistic, her estimate of the meanness and vanity and unscrupulous self-seeking that underlie society would have been less unsparing—her mistrust of her fellow-creatures less profound. And even as it was, her first impulses, after coming into her inheritance, were unselfishly generous. She resolved always to be kind and helpful to others—to abjure self-seeking, to be readily touched to action and sympathy by the tragic element in other lives. It needed but little persuasion to make her father give up his professional work and devote himself to those leisurely pursuits which figured in his imagination as laborious study and research. Thus, at twenty-four years of age Miss Paget found herself with a great deal of money to spend, servants to rule, patronage of various kinds to bestow, and with a father, a pseudo-sensitive bookish man, to shield from too promiscuous contact with a society whose less unselected contingencies had, in his estimation, a vulgar trick of being either wearisome or futile—often both.

Miss Paget took up the rôle of mistress of a household maintained on an opulent scale of expenditure, with vague longings for remoteness from the commoner aims of life. Her position increased her sense of individual responsibility, but lessened her opportunities for cleaving to ideal values. How can one reconcile theories of self-sacrifice with the careful supervision of dinner-parties embracing a score of courses and costly delicacies out of season? As mistress of a household of which her father was the head, her most intimate relations were chiefly with elderly friends rather than young people of her own choosing. Of course, elderly people really govern the world; its surface belongs to them; they make its laws and preach its sermons; endow its charities and order its dinners. No doubt this is as it should be, seeing that calm days and the processes of digestion, and the question of a future life are naturally of more moment to them than to the young. It is the instinct of man as he loses the ardour of youth to guard himself against enthusiasms and surprises, to become more acquiescent and prudent; and yet somehow it may be questioned whether to live much with old people is a good moral tonic for the young. At any rate, in Miss Paget's case the plan did not on the whole turn out a success. She became too wise for her years, a little too consciously superior.

She had not been long at the head of a large establishment when she was preternaturally alive to all the small deceits and compromises, deepening into cant and duplicity, that enter so largely into the intercourse of average society. She was shocked when she saw women, who had not a good word for each other apart, rush on meeting into one another's arms; indignant when she realized how entirely in her circle hospitality was based on the give and receive principle. She became Timonesque,⁹ and recorded her impressions much too incisively.

But she was early taken to task and admonished as to her duties and obligations.

'You know, Helen, a girl at the head of a house like yours and papa's has to be as careful as if she were a married woman,' her elder sister said to her solemnly, after some too vivacious speech regarding the perfidy of mankind in general.

'But she need not tell quite so many fibs—having the future of no baby-girls to think of—and surely she need not be as credulous as a married woman,' returned the younger sister, with a little temper.

None of her brothers-in-law seemed to her very admirable apart from their faculty for making money. Indeed, most of the husbands she observed with her relentlessly keen eyes, at this period, were to her as figures in a melodrama, devoid of the more delicate and interesting nuances of human beings.

Nor did the unattached men of her acquaintance appear much more attractive. She was perhaps too much engrossed with her own individuality to be able to get at the best side of others. She was certainly too apt to give expression to her scornful estimate of people in general to become very popular. Yet she enjoyed balls and pretty dresses and expensive forms of amusement. But the contrast between the homage she now received and the neglect that had been her portion when she was much younger and more eager for pleasure poisoned her enjoyment; but she attributed her dissatisfaction to more impersonal grounds. In the midst of entertainments she liked to fancy herself haunted with a sense of anxiety for the greater happiness and morality of the race, to believe that it was the negation of living selfishly in luxurious ease, in a world crowded with lives paralyzed by poverty, which cast a shadow on her enjoyment, and gradually the more abstract motives really moved her. These were days in which her thoughts were permeated with a strong feeling of responsibility for the welfare of others; especially after reading some tale of everyday suffering in the newspapers, or a vehement Socialistic pamphlet,¹⁰ her whole mind would be possessed with the spoiled conditions of society.

At such times, everything around her furnished examples of the reckless waste of those who enjoyed without working; of the cramped, colourless lives of those who worked without enjoying. But how to take away power

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from despots, and gold from capitalists, and sorrow from the lives of women and children? Or, without aspiring to anything great or vague or general, how to rob even one social form of enjoyment of the mortifications of neglect, the stings of disappointment, and the barbs of social inequality?

When overtaken with these moods of rebellion against the existing order of things, it seemed to Miss Paget as if there was no form of recreation or pleasure known to her in society which had not some subtle elements of inequality that poisoned for many all the springs of enjoyment.

At balls and dances she hated to see the way in which girls who had finer dresses or danced better than others, or who were prettier, or wealthier, or enjoyed more social consideration, took full advantage of their good fortune without considering the residuum, who looked on with mingled feelings of humiliation and anger and scorn. Ah, how well she knew the situation!

'If men ask each other to dinner, they are careful to provide the very best fare. But girls ask one another to parties often only to be humiliated,' she would sometimes say on the very scene of action. At other times she would point her moral afterwards.

'Did you notice the Ryerston girls the other evening at their fashionable cousin's birthday ball? They sat in a row like plucked pullets nearly the whole evening without dancing or conversation. They came in from the country, and were introduced to no one. . . . I do believe girls are often meaner than men, if that is possible.'

Such speeches as these—and Miss Paget made many of them during the first year or so that she most frequented Adelaide society—do not endear a girl to either sex; they seldom make her popular with those she attacks, never with those whose side she takes.

At first she had a certain pride in saying that she did not get on well with young people. She would often sit half an evening without accepting any of the partners that came round her for dances. 'There are always some wallflowers. I want to take my proper share of the system,' she would say; and from that she gradually passed on to the neglect of dancing, and devoted a large share of her time and thoughts to works of charity and self-improvement.

She threw herself into movements for social regeneration with the ardour of a neophyte who regards every effort for the moral improvement of society as a sort of root that infallibly promotes the growth of wings. But gradually she found that the 'mutable rank-scented many,'¹¹ who are chosen with such pathetic belief as the most fitting vobjects for the adventures of philanthropists, were for the most part impervious to ideas, and capable of being converted many times with little improvement in their social condition, and no change of morals. Gradually she was overtaken by something of that lassitude of mind, that wsemi-indifference to wide questions, which often falls on women whose ambition and capacity of thought are in advance of their power of action.¹² The pathos and struggles of other lives touched her less keenly. She lost her faculty of quick, generous anger against injustice and wrong-doing. It was all very funny and mixed up, she said; but what was one to do?

In the meantime she developed into the most charming of hostesses. In other matters she still retained the strain of an ambiguous nature. She was moved by the same influences to conflicting issues, according to the mood of the moment; but in social matters she became impeccably consistent. She had unbounded toleration for all the little wiles and hypocrisies and acted falsehoods that used at first to fire her with scorn. From toleration she insensibly passed on to the same practices. Agreeable little falsehoods and polite impositions, simulated enthusiasms and make-believe friendships, entered into the daily current of her xexistence, till at times she could hardly tell whether her sentiments were real or imaginary.

'Ah, but this is real—this is my life!' she cried in a low voice passionately, and the unbidden tears rose in her eyes. 'But will it come to anything?' she asked herself with that mistrust of happiness which ycomes so readily to those zwhose early years are marked by privation and absence of affection. 'And, after all,' she said, 'what right have I to look for a happy ending? Other people lie to me, and I lie to them; but at any rate I can be honest to myself. I know Victor would never have proposed a word of love if I had not led him on with all the arts at my command. And yet I know that in time he may love me well—and who is there on the whole earth that would be a more devoted wife to him than I? But, oh, the endless cackle of foolish women, who have nothing better to do than talking of their neighbours' affairs!'

Here Miss Paget recalled all Mrs. Tillotson's speeches; and at the recollection her heart hardened against her old friend, and she purposely delayed rejoining her for some minutes longer. When she at last returned to the drawing-room, Mrs. Tillotson wore a half-resentful, half-resigned air, something like a parrot in a cage, who

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does not like it, but has got used to it in the course of time. She was a lady of large means but uneasy investments. Since her widowhood her life had been one long panic as to the safety of good mines, modified by high dividends from risky ones. When she was alone there was generally a mine in the unknown regions of Australia round which her thoughts played with varying emotions. And failing this, there were her two sons-in-law—one of them unsound in finance, the other in his lungs. But on this occasion her usual subjects seemed to have failed her.

'It has just come into my head, Helen, that I interrupted you and Victor in some important business. You are both people of considerable means. You have learned to know each other well on the passage. You were, perhaps, buying or selling shares.' Mrs. Tillotson spoke with a long pause between each sentence.

Miss Paget laughed, in spite of herself.

'My dear Mrs. Tillotson, I have not been talking to Mr. Fitz-Gibbon all this time. I have been in to my father, and——'

'Oh, is that it, dear?' said Mrs. Tillotson, her manner thawing at once. 'Well, I should like to have talked a little more with Victor. It is odd, the sort of manner boys get when they come to be nineteen or so. They seem just as smiling and friendly as ever, but, somehow, they don't tell you things as they used to. Now, I did want to know exactly how much a year he'll have when he comes of age. The Masons say he'll have about £2,000 a year. The Sedleys aasay, No—about £1,500. Well, what a pity it seems that his uncle should have kept it from them all this time! Poor dear Mrs. Fitz-Gibbon! she was one of those women that like elegance, flowers, and china and old lace, and silver things with old monograms. But what a fight she has had with the world! And her brothers never forgave her marrying that wild, handsome young Irishman—though, indeed, others thought he was rather a catch for Mary Drummond, being a captain of the Life Guards, and the Governor's nephew and aide-de-camp,¹³ and all.'

Mrs. Tillotson fairly talked herself out of breath. But Helen, instead of allowing her thoughts to play round far different subjects, which was her usual plan when her old friend took up one of her wordy monographs, drank in all she said with eager interest. She knew that Victor, after taking his B.Sc. degree at the Adelaide University, had gone abroad to study metallurgy at Freyberg, with a view to becoming an assayer,¹⁴ and acquiring a good knowledge of general mining. His uncle, he told her, had been an enthusiast about gold-mining, which he regarded as the most important industry of Australia. It was the old gentleman's wish he should make a special study of this subject, but not until the week he started back to Australia, on receiving his uncle's hasty summons, having been away only five months in all, did Victor know he meant to make him his heir. Miss Paget feared that he had, perhaps, a large fortune left to him. It was with a thrill of pleasure she learned that his income was a good deal less than her own. 'At least, people cannot say that it was his bbmoney that allured me,' she thought. And then she began, for the hundredth time within the hour, to plan what her answer should be on the morrow. 'A mail-boat¹⁵ engagement!' How well she knew the shrugs and sneers and endless grimaces—each one an insinuation—with which the words would be spoken; carried from house to house—from one coterie to the other! No, she would not allow the engagement to be made known for some time to come.

'There is such a discrepancy in our years. . . . Let there be a time of probation,' she would say to him; 'say, four or six months—a probation of which no one but our two selves will know anything.'

'My dear, I have been forgetting what made me come so early, so that I would be sure of seeing you,' cried Mrs. Tillotson. 'Do you remember anything of the Mrs. Lindsay who stayed at the Seatons' place three years ago?'

'I remember seeing her with a lovely young girl—her daughter, I think,' answered Miss Paget slowly.

'You don't remember the name of her station,¹⁶ or her postal address?'

'No, I haven't the least idea. There is nothing wrong, I hope.'

'No, but you know the Seatons went away in a great hurry, and I promised Mrs. Seaton faithfully to write to Mrs. Lindsay and explain to her—and now I've lost the address. Of course Mrs. Seaton will write as soon as she gets to England; but that will take so long.'

'Does Mrs. Lindsay always live in the Bush?' asked Miss Paget, more for the sake of making conversation than because of any strong interest in the subject.

'Yes, my dear, and she must have plenty of money, too. But her husband had the oddest notions. He quite turned the cold shoulder to my poor Willy, because he helped to float a mine that had no gold. As if Willy had anything to do with it beyond putting it on the market, and leaving it to Providence and the other brokers! Perhaps he wished his widow to bury herself in the Bush; but her daughter must be growing up now. Why, she is sixteen

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past!

'Sixteen past!' echoed Miss Paget with a curiously wistful intonation in her voice. She had not hitherto found girls of that age very interesting. She thought them for the most part vain, self-centred, and exacting. But just now she felt that she would give all she possessed for the power of putting back the dial-hand of time. . . . Oh, to be quite in the morning of life, and to walk in that enchanted garden of love's young dream,¹⁷ which comes then or not at all! For with the clasp of her lover's hand warm on hers, and with the strong tumult of emotion which had suddenly made her pulses throb, had come the knowledge that love had come to her too late for that unreasoning, credulous, absorbed happiness which it brings to the young. Rather it brought to her anxieties, and doubts, and a horde of restless questions that she could neither answer nor gainsay. She had entered on a game in which the first stake she played was serenity of mind—nay, of conscience itself. Could any coplay be worth playing at such a cost? Alas! she had no longer ddthe power to abide by the cold dictates of reason. She realized with a sudden sense of suffocation that she had been caught in one of those currents which sweep lives on to full consummation or to disaster. . . . And yet—and yet—to disentangle herself from these hopes and fears, these swift, importunate emotions of a hitherto unknown passion. . . . At the thought a strange famine of the soul¹⁸ seized her, in which for the first time she recognised the pallid negation of her previous life. Its monotonous round of small formal duties, the dull interchange of visits with dull women, the surfeit of tiresome details without aim or compensation—all lay before her in the cold light of remorseless disenchantment. . . . Better the tumult of emotion, better suffering, better even irretrievable disaster, than to reach the limit of life without having really lived through all the years. . . . And, after all, why should she give way to fear? Was it not possible that Victor's affection would strengthen rather than wane as the days went on? From this out she must strive to cast fear from her. . . . Above all—above all—she must never let Victor guess the tempestuous unrest into which the bare thought of his defection threw her. . . .

'Now that I think of it, I do believe the Max-Gores would know Mrs. Lindsay's address. I think, my dear, I'll walk across there and see. . . .'

If Mrs. Tillotson had said anything else before she rose to go, it was to unheeding ears. How curious, when one comes to think of it, is this double drama which goes on eewherever two human beings are together! The one so carefully selected—usually commonplace, spoken and acted with robust obviousness. The other silent, inward, searching into the depths of ffthe heart, seldom communicated even in part, never wholly revealed to any living soul.

a. had it] it had Adl E1

b. step-daughter—then in her eighteenth year!] step-daughter, then . . . eighteenth year. Adl step-daughter.

E1 see note 1 for p. 17

c. Council] Senate E1

d. very] Om. E1

e. lot.] lot as a young girl. E1

f. may] might E1

g. fact] fact that Adl E1

h. years] years and a half E1

i. egoistic] egotistic Adl

j. twenty-four°] twenty-five E1

k. days and] days, the E1

l. a little] Om. E1

m. entirely] largely E1

n. Timonesque] a little Timonesque E1

o. much] somewhat E1

p. amusement] amusements Adl

q. enjoyment; but] enjoyment. Only E1

r. entertainments] costly entertainments E1

s. enjoyment, and gradually] enjoyment. Gradually E1

t. These] There E1

u. sit] sit out Adl E1

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- v. objects] subjects E1
- w. semi-indifference] indifference E1
- x. existence] life E1
- y. comes] seems to come E1
- z. whose early . . . of affection] who have known little joy in early life E1
- aa. say] said Adl E1
- bb. money] fortune E1
- cc. play] game E1
- dd. the] any E1
- ee. wherever] whenever Adl
- ff. the heart] life E1

Chapter III.

Though it was still early in August, many of the aearly rose-bushes round the house known as Lindaraxa were covered with blooms. The tremulous shadow of white-stemmed young birches over the roses and countless marguerite bushes made a fascinating picture.

'But the house looks rather old,' said Miss Paget as the two surveyed it from the front.

'Yes, but the garden, Helen, and the name,' replied Victor. 'Lindaraxa--doesn't it call up pictures of dark-eyed donnas stepping out on balconies in the moonlight?'

'But your mother would not live in the garden?'

'She would in the spring and summer, all the autumn, and most part of the winter,' said the young man recklessly.

He was in very high spirits, and broke out every now and then into snatches of song.

'And just here,' he said, pausing at the end of the house where there was a large window half buried in foliage, starred with the white convolvulus, 'what a bnook of loveliness!'

He paused abruptly, looking round with an air of startled wonder.

'What have you discovered?' said Miss Paget, half amused at the sudden change in his face.

'Why, Helen, I have seen this spot in my dreams over and over again. Not the window itself, but what you can see from it.'

He was now standing with his back to the window, looking at the little orange grove opposite to it, and all the shrubs around, with minute scrutiny.

'What did you dream about it, Victor?' asked Miss Paget with growing interest.

They had met at the gate but a few minutes before, and the momentous question of their engagement had not yet been approached. It suddenly occurred to Miss Paget that if Victor had seen in visions of the night¹ the spot in which perhaps her reply would be given, it might be a sign that this, after all, was the turning-point in his life. That it would be the central epoch of her own she could not for a moment doubt.

'Well, you know, it was one of those foolish, aimless dreams that stick to the mind, and yet seem to have no meaning,' answered Victor. 'I just used to see these trees in a sort of semicircle, with a lot of blossoms on them; there isn't much now, you see.'

'No, they're not fruit-bearing; they are a late kind just coming into bud. Well, and then?'

'Well, I just used to see them and a heap of shrubs in flower, some lying across the path; and that and the room I stood in was all the dream. By the way, I wonder if the room is like-----'

He turned to look, but the blind was drawn down.

'Tell me what the room was like, and then we'll compare your dream with the reality when we go into the house,' said Miss Paget eagerly.

'It was a long, narrowish room and rather low, with a wide fireplace and deep recesses on each side of it. There was another window beside the one I looked out of, and that's about all I remember. You see, I didn't go into upholstery in my dream, perhaps because I never notice it when awake.'

'Let us ccome in and look at it now,' said Miss Paget, adding mentally, 'If the room is like the one in his dream, I shall take it as a good omen.'

They rang at the front door, and in a few minutes the caretaker, a small hump-backed woman with large, pathetic eyes, let them in. She seemed a little surprised as she looked from one to the other.

'Have you come for Mrs. North, ma'am?' she said hesitatingly to Miss Paget, the three standing in the hall.

'For Mrs. North? No,' answered Miss Paget wonderingly.

'There is a notice that the place is to be let or sold. We want to have a look at the house, if you please,' said Victor.

'Oh, hasn't the board been taken down? It's let, sir, on a two years' lease to Mrs. North and her daughter, the lady doctor.² I thought as perhaps you was Miss North, ma'am,' she said to Miss Paget.

'No; but she is a friend of mine. When did she return from India?'

'Two months ago, ma'am. The climate tried her terribly, but she's getting on nicely now, I hear. I've only seen

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the mother; Miss North has been to the place twice, but I was away, and it was John that showed her over the house.'

'Excuse us for having troubled you,' said Victor, slipping half a crown into the caretaker's hand.

Now that Lindaraxa was out of the market, he felt surer than ever that it was the place which, of all others, would have best pleased his mother.

'Would you mind letting us look at the sitting-room with the large window on the western side?' said Miss Paget, as the caretaker curtseyed her thanks.

She instantly opened the door, and when they entered, the room corresponded in each particular with the details of Victor's dream. The shape of the chamber, the fireplace with the wide recesses on each side, the second window, which opened into a small conservatory—all were there. Miss Paget was agreeably excited; but Victor thought his dream more foolish than ever.

'If I had been able to buy the place for my mother, there would have been some sense in it; but just to dream of orange blossom, which I cannot stand, and a room in a house taken by people I don't even know!' he said, drawing up the blind and looking out discontentedly.

'You think if you see a room in a dream something should happen in it?' said Miss Paget, smiling. 'Well, who knows? perhaps you'll be one of Miss North's patients.'

'And have an arm taken off when the orange-trees are in blossom. That would be charming!' said Victor with a smile. Then he thrust his hand into his breast-pocket.

'Helen, I have brought you a little souvenir of the East. Do you remember the gem-store where we bought the moonstones in Colombo? Here are some of them in a bracelet—not so nicely set as I should like, but I didn't give the jeweller much time.'

'Oh, how lovely!' cried Miss Paget, her eyes sparkling with pleasure as she looked at the large lustrously gleaming stones, whose soft, dreamy light was enhanced by the keen, incisive sparkle of Brazilian diamonds.³ She clasped the bracelet on her wrist, and then with a sudden impetuous motion bent her head and kissed the stones.

'Helen, tell me,' said Victor, drawing closer to her, 'is it because you are so fond of these moonstones that you kiss them?'

'Yes; and because——'

'Well, because?'

'You gave them to me.' A quick wave of colour rose in her smooth, soft, olive-tinted cheeks as she spoke.

'Ah, now you are going to give me an answer, Helen.'

'Would you, perhaps, like to see the rest of the house, ma'am?' said the caretaker, appearing at the half-open door. The two started guiltily apart. They declined the offer, saying that this room was all they wished to see.

'Come home with me, and I'll tell you there,' said Miss Paget in a low voice as they went out at the gate. On the way to Lancaster House, which stood in the midst of its own grounds on a rise beyond the Torrens, about a mile to the north-west of the city, Victor spoke of the probability of his joining a prospecting party that was spoken of as likely to start for the MacDonnell ranges⁴ in a few weeks.

'It would fgap over the time till I come of age,' he said. 'If I gam in town I hshould of course be in the warehouse; and if there's one thing in the world I hate, it's being stuck on a stool all day like a sick ape.'

'Then I suppose, when you are your own master, you won't remain in partnership with your uncle Stuart?'

'No; I think not. For one thing, I don't believe we should ever agree.'

'I dare say Mr. Drummond is rather wroth that you are your uncle Shaw's sole heir.'

'Oh, I think not; in fact, I don't suppose he even thought of it in that way,' returned Victor.

Miss Paget half smiled, and repeated the words to herself, 'Oh, youth, youth! more beautiful than truth.'⁵ His boyish, whole-hearted belief in almost every human being with whom he came in contact was one of the most marked features of Victor's temperament. 'That sort of confidence in mankind departs with one's early years, and never, never comes back again,' was a thought that had often occurred to her during their intercourse on board the Mogul. The same thought came to her now, for she knew Mr. Stuart Drummond to be a hard, avaricious man with two spendthrift sons and several grown-up daughters.

'You see, Helen,' continued Victor, 'it's partly a question of race, I expect. An Irishman, in Uncle Stuart's eyes, is always a disagreeable blunder.'

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'But you are partly Scotch.'

'Ah, but you don't know how Irish I become when I'm with Uncle Stuart,' said Victor, in a half-penitent tone which made Helen laugh.

'It's the truth I'm speaking,' said Victor seriously. 'Only last night, I know, I drove him half wild with rage.'

'How was that?'

'Well, it began about my advancing two hundred pounds to O'Connor.'

'The violinist?'

'Yes—and my old music-master, who plays Irish melodies in a way that would make a millstone sob.'

'But was it wise to advance him so much?'

'As a business investment, perhaps it was a trifle weak,' replied Victor, with a twinkle in his eyes. 'But you know the sort of chap poor dear old O'Connor is about money. As long as he has any, the very crows are welcome to it. This time he had put his name to a bill⁷ for over £150, not dreaming anything would go wrong. So, for the luxury of signing his name to a dishonest bit of paper, he was going to be sold up, Cremona violin⁸ and all, with his wife ill in bed, and seven youngsters wailing on his bosom.'

'Poor old man!'

'Yes, what could a fellow do but come between him and his signature? But you should have heard Uncle Stuart. By Jove! the old man can slang when he gives his mind to it. Anyone would think that to give money away was the blackest crime on earth. Whereas, when you come to think of it, what is the good of money until it is spent, somehow or other?'

'Perhaps you asked your uncle that question?'

'No. I didn't cheek him in the least when he was talking of the O'Connor affair. I was as meek as the Prodigal Son.⁹ I listened till he was quite at an end about hereditary extravagance—that was me; and an idle, good-for-nothing fiddler—that was O'Connor, etc., etc. And then I said, "Look here, sir! it would be downright ingratitude on my part not to help a fellow-creature in distress. Here am I, without doing an ounce of work for it, coming into a lump sum of £10,000, and over £1,500 a year, as soon as the clock strikes nine on the morning of the 31st of next December." '

'That would annoy him!' said Miss Paget involuntarily.

'How do you know it would?' asked Victor, with some astonishment.

'Well, you know, an old man doesn't always like to see a young one step into so much unearned wealth at one bound,' answered Miss Paget, almost vexed to find herself returning to that theme again.

Victor was silent for a little.

'I wonder if that can be the reason,' he said thoughtfully. 'I thought it was uncle's liver. I know he has suffered from it badly sometimes. He got into an unaccountable scot¹⁰ when I said that. He said the 31st of December had not come yet, which was too obvious to call for remark, and that there's many a slip between the cup and the lip, which is often true. But when he went on to say that I had better not make a pauper of myself before I knew whereabouts I was, I couldn't figure out his meaning anyhow.'

They were by this time walking up through the wide plane-tree avenue that led to the border of the lawn which fronted Miss Paget's home.

'Was all your uncle Shaw's money in the partnership?' asked Miss Paget.

'Nearly all of it—except some in mines. I think he owns the twentieth part of the Colmar Mine, which is paying grand dividends at present. But, of course, Uncle Stuart has always been the managing partner of the warehouse, and much the wealthier of the two.'

'It may be——'

'Well—why do you stop, Helen?'

'Perhaps I shouldn't say it.'

'You should say anything you have a mind to.'

'There may be a crash coming——'

'And me left a penniless spalpeen,¹¹ after all!'

'You would not be penniless as long——'

Miss Paget checked herself.

'Look here, Miss Paget,' said Victor, turning to her with laughing eyes; 'I'll have to take you to sea again. You

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never mutilated your sentences in this way when we paced the deck of the good ship Mogul. You've lost all confidence in me. . . .'

'No. I have not . . . but—well, you wouldn't be penniless as long as I had any money.'

'Helen, that is your answer!'

They paused in the shelter of the trees, and he possessed himself of her right hand.

'But if I thought there was any danger of my becoming penniless, you know, Helen——'

'We won't consider that just now, Victor. . . . And after thinking it over, I am sure it is better there should be no hard and fast engagement for a time.'

'Not till I am twenty-one; that is nearly five months.¹² Surely that is long enough for anything?'

He held her hands in his, looking into her face with frank, affectionate eyes. It was with a strong effort that Miss Paget kept her emotion under control as she replied:

'Until after December no one must know anything of this. . . . After that, Victor, there may be nothing to know. Only if so, our own two selves will always remember that one of us was young enough, and the other foolish enough, to dream an impossible dream.'

Though she struggled hard for composure, her voice vibrated with intense emotion, and tears forced themselves into her eyes. Victor was suddenly and deeply moved. It is true that he was entering on this weighty compact with a heart too little under the influence of the deeper feelings of which his nature was capable. His youth and inexperience and impulsive friendliness had led him too far. But his generosity and good feeling stood him at this crisis in the stead of a more profound affection. He could not realize all that affected Miss Paget, but when he saw her so deeply moved he became conscious of an uneasy apprehension lest he should fail her in some way. A heavier sense of responsibility fell on him. For a little time they were both silent, and then Victor found relief from a vague mistrust and discontent within himself by making a resolution which he knew would entail some sacrifice.

'Dear Helen, I am not half good enough for you,' he said; 'you are ever so much wiser than I am. Now, don't begin to speak of the disparity in our years. It isn't that so much as that you were born wiser.'

'But I've suddenly come to the end of my wisdom; it's a case of arrested development,' said Miss Paget, smiling. 'While you are going to get sager every day—wasn't that what you said yesterday?'

'I'm afraid you have a dreadfully retentive memory,' he said gaily; and then, suddenly relapsing into seriousness: 'But I tell you what, Helen—I won't go away prospecting; I'll go into the warehouse for the next five or six months, and try to understand the business, and be a door-mat to uncle rather than have rows with him. I think that will be more appropriate for an engaged man.'

'Yes; the liveliest door-mat on record, I should think,' said Miss Paget, laughing. The announcement made her very happy.

They were strolling across the lawn, when one or two little decorous shouts and calls behind attracted their attention. It was Mrs. Tillotson, hurrying up the avenue as fast as she could. She was of such an intensely social disposition that she could not bear the sight of two talking in full view of her, without straining every effort to join in the conversation. People who have this vivid partiality for their fellow-creatures seldom pause to inquire whether the feeling is reciprocal.

'I'll say good-bye now, Helen,' said Victor, before the new-comer could reach them. 'This will be a good time to find uncle in his office to talk over my new plan with him. . . . I don't think I could stand another dose of your "habitual providence" just now, but may I come soon again?'

As he lit a cigar and walked into the city, one of the impressions which Victor drew from the history of that morning was that, after all, dreams were an awful fraud. Why had the special view from that special window at Lindaraxa come to him again and again in his dreams, and why, before he had ever seen it, was the form of that special room imprinted on his memory?

'When the mater talks solemnly about "presageful" dreams after this,' he thought with a smile, 'I'll bombard her with this sham one of mine.'

And yet, though life, like an unskilful kdrmatist, is crowded with details that explain nothing,¹³ and full of seemingly significant beginnings that lead nowhere, this foolish dream came to have strangely significant associations.

* * * * *

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'Oh, my dear,' panted Mrs. Tillotson after she had warmly embraced Helen, 'it is so good of you to take such an interest in Mrs. Fitz-Gibbon's boy! But he is nice—now, isn't he? Something so boyish and genuine about him! I am afraid the girls will run after him dreadfully—though it would be like infant-stealing, till he is a few years older. I expect some of them did their best to set their caps at him¹⁴ on the Mogul? But you would be a sort of protection for him. He seems to have quite taken to you. But, my dear, I hope he doesn't bore you by giving you a little too much of his company.'

There was something so cold and strained in Miss Paget's tones, as she replied, that even Mrs. Tillotson noticed the difference. She paused on the lawn, saying:

'Perhaps I had better not come in. I just ran in, in passing, to tell you that I have found Mrs. Lindsay's address. I was afraid you might be giving yourself anxiety in making inquiries. You always take so much trouble for your friends.'

Miss Paget, who had not given the matter a thought, felt a little conscience-smitten, and insisted on Mrs. Tillotson staying for lunch. The lady responded by saying:

'Well, my dear, though I had to put everything on a more economical footing since the last fall in silver,¹⁵ I'll never stint my friendships. Thank goodness! I need not give up my friends, though I put down my carriage;¹⁶ and I know you always enjoy having me—we have such delightful chats!'

- a. early] Om. E1
- b. nook] perfect nook E1
- c. come] go E1
- d. said Miss Paget] he said E1
- e. opened the door] showed them in E1
- f. gap] bridge E1
- g. am] remain E1
- h. should] shall E1
- i. within] with Adl E1
- j. I] I'll Adl E1
- k. dramatist] drama E1
- l. in, in] in, Adl up, in E1
- m. Tillotson] Tillotson's Adl E1
- n. lunch. The lady] lunch, and she E1

Chapter IV.

The lady whose address both when lost and when found had led Mrs. Tillotson to make an early call at Lancaster House was at eleven o'clock on this sunny August morning deep in the perusal of a letter which had that day reached her from an old friend and relative who, like herself, was a widow, and was then living with two young daughters in Mentone.¹

'I am well, dear friend, only that oftener than before I am overtaken by hours of cold, insurmountable languor and indolence in which I can do nothing but remember. Memory, like an implacable little inquisitor, forces me to go down to those soundless deeps of life in which happiness is lost and the soul jeopardized, and the faith with which we consoled ourselves is resolved into beautiful cradle-songs that have lost the power of lulling us to sleep.² Do you know those days in which the rain beats perpetually on the roof, and the wind rises in hollow moans, and we are crushed between two infinities—the days that are dead and those that are to come?³

'But no—you are one of those who, in the face of the bitterest assaults of fate, find a sure standing-ground, a peace which the world can neither give nor take away.⁴ . . . All this morning I was rummaging among old papers and letters. Yours I read in their order one year after the other, and suddenly the story of your life lay before me as if for the first time. We are so blind, mostly going through life half asleep, waking up now and then when there is a noise or a great flash of light, and the reality of things comes home to us only like half-remembered dreams. As I thought of your history, dear Margaret, left almost alone in the world, with the terrible memories of the Indian Mutiny⁵ shadowing your youth like a nightmare—of the long years of nervous prostration that followed, those in which our friendship began and the great happiness of your life a came to you—and then pondered over your sudden cruel bereavement, my heart was very wae.⁶ I came on the first letter you wrote after Doris was born.'

Here Mrs. Lindsay put down the letter and looked fondly at her daughter, a lovely girl past sixteen, who sat near her engrossed in copying the border of an illuminated missal.⁷ After a few moments the mother resumed her reading:

'Ah, what a tender rapture breathes through this little letter! Baby was four weeks old; already she began to notice. "When we put a finger within hers she closes them over it quite fast. . . . Oh what tiny morsels of rose-leaf fingers! Richard looks at them for twenty minutes at a time. 'Think of that third little left finger with a wedding-ring on it one day!' I say to him gravely, and he looks at me reproachfully, as if I were already intriguing for a son-in-law. It is all so exquisitely absurd we laugh till the tears come." '

'Mother, dearie!'

Mrs. Lindsay gave a little start. It was now her turn to be looked at. Her daughter's eyes were fixed on her with puzzled inquiry.

'I have been watching you, and you are almost laughing and crying at the same time. I wish you would laugh only. Is it something sad or merry in that letter, mammy?'

'Perhaps a little of both, dear: not merry exactly, but something that was so long ago.'

'And why isn't it now, mother?'

'Oh, my dear——' the delicate sensitive lips quivered and the voice fell.

The girl came and knelt by her mother's side and stroked her cheeks.

'Mother, I cshould like to know the sort of things that make you merry one time and sad another.'

'When you are older you will understand, Dorrie.'

'Oh, is everything to happen when I am older?' said the girl with a slight accent of weariness.

'No, my child,' said the mother with a little smile; 'you are my own good Doris without waiting for more years.'

'You cunning little mother! Do you know, that is a way of petting and scolding one at the same time! Is it because you are as wise as Nan Ko⁸ that you do two things at once so often?'

'Nan Ko? My dear, has Shung-Loo been telling you about a fresh Mongolian hero?'

'Yes, mamma—one who wrote the story of the "Purple Hair Pin"⁹ in forty volumes!'

'Oh, Doris!'

'Yes, truly; he used to take it about with him on two white elephants, and when the black barbarians saw him

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coming they used to fly.'

'For fear of having it read to them?'

'Not at all, you almost naughty little mother! It was because after hearing it read they had to be good or die, and mostly they had to die. He killed the Red Kalonoa terrible dragon. Where his shadow came the birds stopped singing, and no more garlands could be made. I think it was Nan Ko who taught the people that a grain of sand has a voice as well as a poet.'

'Doris, do you know, I knew a girl once-----' began the mother with smiling seriousness.

'Mamma, is that quite fair?' asked the girl, holding up a rosy forefinger in an admonitory way. 'I have told you quite a new story out of a wise book stopped with red.'¹⁰

'And I am going to tell you an old one about a girl who could remember Chinese fables out of forty volumes, but couldn't learn the French verbs out of one.'

'I believe I know that girl by heart. Don't let us talk of her any more, mamma.'

They smiled fondly in each other's faces, and then the girl went back to her painting of the wide intricate border full of curling tendrils, of stiff, even leaves, of birds with strange beaks and plumages, and in the midst angels now and then, with long lazuline blue robes, with wide gold halos round their heads, and folded pointed wings snow-white, all looking upward and making sweet melody, some on long reed trumpets, others on viols, on cithers, on fantastically curled and many-tubed instruments, whose names are unknown to the laity.

The mother resumed her reading.

'And now Doris has passed her sixteenth birthday. Don't you think, dear Margaret, the time has come when she should see a little more of the human species in her own rank of life? Do not wait till she is seventeen to leave the charmed solitude of Ouranie. Not that it is really a solitude; what with your station people, your little township six miles off, and the settlement of splitters in the Peppermint Ranges, and that wonderful major-domo of yours, Shung-Loo, who is so learned in the old lore of his country and the art of making delicate cakes. Your Doris, with her direct, transparent nature, her charm of quick imagination, her love of woods and birds and flowers, her inheritance of your gift of music and love of art, seems to have found in your surroundings all the nourishment needed hitherto for the harmonious development of early years. But now, has not the time come when you should leave Ouranie? Is it not because of Richard's austere denunciations of the habitual frivolity of our down sex that you have lingered there so long?¹¹

'I have been looking over some of his old letters to me. Dear, noble-hearted Richard! I am glad that though so many of the imperfections of our kind and sex always hung about me, the bond of kinship between us was never ruptured. I think the fact that he first came to know you through me strengthened the bond of relationship into real friendship. But though I revere your dear husband's memory, Margaret, to-day it has been borne in on me that your idolatry of him has led you to remain over-long in the seclusion of the Bush.

' "After all," he writes in one of his letters now before me, "it is no wonder that women exercise so little influence for good in the world. From childhood they live largely in an atmosphere of small intrigues and deceptions and concealed jealousies; first in school, then in society. In school they are subjected to the persistent push of teachers, ambitious for academic degrees and examination passes. Their most precious gifts of spontaneous intuition and direct observation are hopelessly impaired or destroyed, in the worry and drive of acquiring multifarious scraps of knowledge,¹² which egives them neither more balanced capacities nor a wider outlook on life. They are the victims of ideas they cannot digest, of ideals that add nothing to the well-being of the world. . . . When they enter the immense fraud we call society, they are plunged into a frankly cynical scramble as to who shall get the best nuts."

'Well, well, granted that the old seductive, finvincible pagan world in which we live is largely swayed by passions that we do not name in our children's hearing, still it is the only one in which our poor bodies are at home, the one in which we find our happiness or not at all; the world in which your Doris must take her place as a woman among other women. She has been sheltered and reared as within convent walls; and up to a certain age this may be right for girls; but she is now over sixteen. . . . You have told me that if you were taken from her it is to my care, conjointly with her guardian in London, she would be entrusted. You do not say much of your health, but through your later letters there seems to me an increasing detachment from all the things of earth. And do I not know how frail and shaken you were for so many years? Would it not be wiser to lose no time in bringing Doris to what would be her new home, while you are with her to make it familiar and home-like? . . . Pardon me,

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Margaret, if I seem to plead over-much; but to-day, after a separation of seventeen years, reading your letters, so many scores of them, while the wind blows in shrill gusts, and the rain is dashing furiously against the windows, I seem to have renewed our intimacy, to see more clearly into the tenor of your ideas, to perceive that you shrink more and more from the thought of increased communion with your kind. Is it that in these glatter years you have become more and more of a mystic?

Mrs. Lindsay, on reading this question, half folded the closely-written pages and looked out through the open French window into the garden, which on this side of the house came to within a few paces of the veranda. Beyond the garden, forming its eastern boundary, lay a large lake fringed with gum-trees and ti-trees. The surface of the water, faintly hripping and sparkling in the sunlight, was one of the sights which familiarity never rendered less beautiful. This lake was called Gauwari, a native name that signifies great depth¹³—a title justified by the fact that it had never within living memory been greatly diminished. Mrs. Lindsay's eyes rested for a long time on Gauwari; then she looked round the room that they were in, trying to imagine the day on which she should leave Ouranie, the home that she had come to as a bride nearly seventeen years ago. She was conscious of an immobility of disposition which made her shrink from the thought of change and movement as from experiences she lacked strength and will-power to assimilate. And there was yet another link that bound her to Ouranie. She felt that the bond which had been the strongest, deepest influence of her life was here still unbroken, that in the spot which was consecrated to her by so many sacred memories her husband's companionship had not ended with death.

This was a development of feeling that owed nothing to extraneous excitement or to any of the grotesque manifestations usually associated with experiences that seem in any way to make a gap in the barrier that guards the unseen from the material world. Orthodox forms of belief had never appealed to her keenly. Perhaps the shipwreck of all her closest ties in the horrors of the Indian Mutiny disposed her little to find consolation in professions that dwell over-much on the benefits and comforts of the Christian faith, while the renunciation that lies at its core is in practice profoundly denied. It was her misfortune to know Christians solely of the type of those who turn the cross they profess to carry into a sectarian triangle, with which to anathematize the rest of the world, and to secure pews for themselves in this world and that which is to come. Her husband's influence had all been on the side of severance from creeds and formulas.¹⁴

When she was left alone the crisis of her spiritual life came. The conviction that death ends all, that all we are or have the faculty of becoming is annihilated with the last pulsation of the heart, fastened on her like a virulent disease. There are those who can accept the belief calmly, but to Mrs. Lindsay it brought that sense of absolute ruin which we name despair. Then one radiant morning in mid-winter, when the air was full of the breath of violets and jessamine, and the delicate saffron of the dawn still lingered in the east, she knew that her despair was a dark, wild atheism, and that the fuller life into which her husband had passed had quickened her own inner nature as with a breath of healing inspiration.

We are so brow-beaten by the thrones and dominations¹⁵ of the material world that, when we hear of people to whom a message of salvation has come apart from creeds and rituals consecrated by the roll of many centuries, our habitual attitude is one of mistrust, if not hostility. And yet there may be powers which touch human intuitions to the quick, in a mode hidden from the world as completely as the messages that came to Isaiah were hidden from his idolatrous fellow-countrymen.¹⁶

However this may be, Mrs. Lindsay's experience not only rescued her from despair and the gradual decline of all her functions, gave her not only courage to live for her child, but to cherish her life as a personal gift and become serenely happy. Nothing henceforth shook her faith that our present existence, with all its confusion and cruel enigmas, was but a passing phase of experience, and that, if we do not love the world over-much, we may often pass beyond its power, and habitually live above its influence. For some time of late she had been conscious of declining strength. This was brought home to her very forcibly now by the tremulous agitation that seized her at the thought of leaving Ouranie. She had always looked forward to doing so when Doris grew up, and she felt the full force of the argument used by her friend Mme. de Serziac; but it was the matter portion of the letter that finally decided her. This was dated a few days after the earlier portion, and ran:

'Raoul has given us a pleasant surprise. He has obtained a fortnight's leave of absence from his regiment two months earlier than we expected. Yesterday he was prowling round my room, turning over my books and photographs. Presently he came on the last photograph you sent me of yourself and Doris. It was the first time he

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saw it, and—well, he fell in love with her. . . . Over and over again he comes to gaze at the beautiful young face, and says: "Did you ever see such wonderful eyes! and what an exquisite mouth! . . . And I believe I owe her a letter. I don't believe I answered the last note she sent me on my birthday." And then he asks me impatiently when you and Doris are coming on that visit which we have talked about indefinitely for so many years. Well, dear Margaret, I have no after-thought in telling you this, only if our children on meeting. . . . Oh, you will be able to follow the trend of my thoughts. And you will not be surprised if, in the course of a week or two, Doris gets a cousinly little letter from Raoul, congratulating her on her sixteenth birthday. I send you his photo, taken a few days before he left Paris, also some of the girls.'

Mrs. Lindsay opened a small packet that had come with the letter. She looked a long time at the young man's photograph. He was not yet twenty-three, but already there was something in his face of that precocious discontent which one sees in the eyes of those who early plunge into the glittering, vibrant life of great cities. As Mrs. Lindsay examined the picture with a jealous scrutiny, the recollection came to her of the overture in 'Tannhaÿser,' in which the theme of the Pilgrims' march, austere, lofty, and devout, ends in the throbbing, reckless Bacchanalian strain of the Venusberg.¹⁷

And then her eyes rested on her daughter. It was a face to make an old man young.¹⁸ Its deep, untroubled serenity, the amber-coloured wavy hair parted on the forehead, and the classic poise of the neck, perfectly upright on the shoulders, gave it something of a Greek expression.¹⁹ The eyes were extremely beautiful, large, dark and radiant. The eyelashes were, if anything, a little too thick and long. They made a shadow under the eyes which in repose imparted a pathetic gravity to the face, alien to its real expression. The eyebrows, dark and pencilled, were exquisitely pure in arch. The slender creamy throat, and the flower-like bloom of the face, were thrown into strong relief by the close-fitting crimson silk dress she wore. The fond mother took in all these details with inexhaustible pleasure. That sweet, fair young face, with its unmistakable seal of candour and purity, was a feast for her eyes of which she never tired. But as she now regarded her after the lines she had read, a sudden pang shot through her heart. Could she in the nature of things hope to keep Doris long to herself if they entered the busy self-seeking world, so keenly alive to all the gifts of life—gifts in which youth and beauty and money have taken from time immemorial the foremost place?

'But I should be with her to guide and counsel her, to take care that no undue pressure was brought to bear on her,' thought the mother, re-reading the last page of her friend's letter, and then her resolution was taken.

'Mamma, do you know, you look so very serious!' said Doris, who had put away her painting, and now sat on her mother's footstool. 'Your eyes are as big as Red Ridinghood's when the wolf was going to gobble her up.'

'You disrespectful child!' said the mother, smiling, and then smothering a little sigh. 'Do you know, a great deal of this long letter is about you.'

'From Mme. de Serziac?'

'Yes.'

'But what could she find to say about me?' said Doris, opening her eyes wide.

'Ah, one may write a long letter about anything almost—a little puss, a sunflower, a spider catching a fly, a girl sixteen years old.'

'Or the wattle-trees, and the Banksia bushes just coming into flower.'

'Perhaps you think you are like the little Banksia rosebuds?'²⁰

'No, mother, I have no thorns,' said Doris, rubbing her satin soft cheek against her mother's hand.

'What would you say, Doris, to going away from Ouranie, from Australia altogether—far across the seas?'

'On a carpet like Prince Kumar-al-Zaman's,'²¹ mother?'

'I am quite in earnest, dear.'

Doris looked out through the window, and did not at once reply.

'I thought you would be pleased, Doris. . . . We should go to see Mme. de Serziac, and May, and Estella,²² and Raoul.'

'Yes, mother, I should be glad: only it seems as if the time would never come. So many, many years we have spoken of it! If you said, "Doris, put on your hat with the white ostrich-feathers, and your long Su de gloves and come away to Bagdad—tell Shung he need not bring in afternoon tea," then you would see how high I would skip for joy!'

'But, dear, I mean that we should go quite soon now,' said Mrs. Lindsay, a little startled at the sudden

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vehemence in Doris's voice. 'She has thoughts and longings and impatiences, then, which she keeps to herself, just as I have my long memories, my solitary hours of communion and introspection,' thought Mrs. Lindsay. It was a sudden curious glimpse into that unknown incommunicable depth of inner personality which encompasses each human soul, dividing it in some measure from every other—friend from friend, husband from wife; yes, even mother from child.

'How soon, mother?' said Doris, with sudden interest, awaiting her mother's reply with flushing cheeks and lips slightly parted.

'This is the 9th of August,' answered Mrs. Lindsay slowly, and then she consulted a small diary. 'There is a Messageries mail-boat²³ going on the 10th of next month. Suppose we fix that date for our departure, darling?'

'Oh, mamma, next month! And leave everything behind us, except our clothes and Shung-Loo?'

'And our memories, dear,' said Mrs. Lindsay, who was bravely struggling to keep a smiling face. 'We should have to leave a few days before the vessel sailed—say four days—so we have less than four more weeks at Ouranie.'

'And Gauwari and the Silent Sea, mother. But how strange it will be to leave it all, and all the people we know!'

The girl's face had grown suddenly graver.

As for Mrs. Lindsay, she went into her own room, feeling that the emotion with which she was struggling must soon overcome her composure.

- a. came] comes Adl
- b. past sixteen^o] sixteen past Adl
- c. should] would E1
- d. own] Om. Adl E1
- e. gives] give Adl E1
- f. invincible] invincibly Adl E1
- g. latter] later Adl E1
- h. rippling] rippled E1
- i. it] the lake E1
- j. not] not of Adl
- k. However this may be] Be this as it may E1
- l. tremulous] tremendous* Adl
- m. latter] later Adl E1
- n. these] those Adl
- o. should] would E1

Chapter V.

The atime passed very rapidly. Hardly ba day passed cduring this interval without a visit to Buda, the township six miles off, or the Peppermint Ranges, only three miles in an opposite direction from the home station.¹

At the latter, Mrs. Lindsay had formed a little school² for the rather wild and neglected children of the splitters who worked there. Her unvarying love and goodness had exercised a strong influence on the children and parents. She had had a little weatherboard building erected—an edifice bought in town from a builder all ready to be put together³—and here on most days of the week she had assembled the seven or nine children who were old enough to be taught. When unable to go herself, Mrs. Lindsay used to send Doris and the wife of her manager, who lived in a cottage at the opposite side of the garden.

In the township, too, Mrs. Lindsay was a constant and eagerly—looked—for visitor. dNo sight was more welcome to the residents than that of the Ouranie buggy, with the two gray ponies that Doris liked best to drive.

No township could cover a wider area in proportion to its inhabitants than Buda did. The forty nondescript dwellings which composed it were scattered over an incredible number of acres. Perhaps the immense plain on whose borders Buda was pitched had exercised some influence on the imagination of the first selectors.⁴ It would seem a tame and creeping arrangement to be closely packed in view of that measureless expanse of country. But the oldest resident had a different theory. The oldest resident kept a general store and the post—office; thus it will be seen that he had unrivalled opportunities for impressing his own views on the public. eIn respect of the distance that separated the inhabitants, his view was, that when the township was laid out the belief was current that the Government intended to bring the Great Northern line of railway bang through Buda. Thus every man who pitched his tent, or bark hut, or wattle and daub lean—to, or weatherboard cottage, used his own judgment as to the spot that would be fixed on for the railway—station.

'Every man jack of us expected to make his fortune, if only he got his nose against the railway—station, and everyone thought his own opinion sounder than his neighbour's. So here we are, dispersed as far as the boundaries of the township would let us—some far beyond them—and yet not one of us was on the job,'⁵ the storekeeper would say, with a sigh.

The Great Northern Railway passed within four miles of the township, with only a siding at the nearest point thereto. Henceforth Buda was a blighted community,⁶ its sole compensation being that it had a large and life—long grievance.

'To think, ma'am, as you should have to go four miles further on to a melancholy and miserable siding when you expect a friend from town!' the storekeeper was saying to Mrs. Lindsay one fday within ten days of the date she had fixed for her departure.

'It is from the North my friend is coming, and, you know, half a loaf is better than none,' answered Mrs. Lindsay, smiling.

She could not look upon the siding as an insult, a trait which some of the Buda people regarded as the one weakness of her character.

It would only have cost the colony an additional twenty thousand pounds to bring the railway to their door. And what was that out of the millions that were being borrowed?⁷

'It is all very well for them that has horses and buggies,' the storekeeper said to a customer an hour later, as he saw Mrs. Lindsay's trap returning, Doris driving, while her mother and the friend they had gone to meet were deep in conversation.

'I believe it's Mrs. Challoner, the manager's sister, and Miss Doris's old governess,' said the customer, going to the door of the store to get a nearer view.

She had been a servant at Ouranie for some years before she married and settled at Buda, and still took the strongest interest in all that concerned Mrs. Lindsay.

As the buggy drew near the store, Doris stopped the horses, so that they might speak to their old servant, and have some purchases put into the buggy that they made on their way to the siding. They heard how Jemima's second baby had cut his first double—tooth,⁸ and how the first was growing out of gall his clothes.

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'I suppose you don't remember me, ma'am?' said Jemima, glancing at the visitor, a pale little lady with bright, kindly eyes. 'You came to my place with Mrs. Lindsay when you were up nearly two years ago. The moment I saw you I said to the storekeeper, "That is Mrs. Challoner." I was so very sorry to hear of your house being burnt down.'

As they drove away, Mrs. Lindsay promised to come to see Jemima once more before their departure. She stood looking after the buggy with a wistful expression.

'Bless their hearts, it will be an awful miss when they're gone!' she said to the storekeeper. 'I don't never expect to see Mrs. Lindsay back. She is looking dreadful white and thin, to my mind.'

Nor was Jemima alone in this opinion. Mrs. Challoner was much struck with the alteration in her friend's appearance since last seeing her. Mrs. Challoner had married from Ouranie, six years previously, a squatter in the Salt-bush country, who was then in affluent circumstances; but four years ago a terrible drought, followed by the increasing ravages of the rabbits, had almost ruined him.⁹ To crown all, a fire had broken out which levelled the head station to the ground. Mrs. Challoner had visited Ouranie once a year since she left it, and this accident had happened since her previous visit. Mrs. Lindsay had insisted on replacing the furniture, and the Challoners had been able to secure a good dwelling-house at the Colmar mine,¹⁰ which was within four miles of the home station. This was naturally one of the first topics of conversation between the two friends.

'It was most fortunate the house was empty—in fact, it has not been occupied for years, and now we shall be able to leave the district, when the lease of our run expires at Christmas—the date to which we took the place. Oh, my dear, I have had to tell you of so many misfortunes, and now I have to tell you a piece of good news.'

'Mrs. Lucy, has your ship really come in?'¹¹ said Doris, turning to her former governess with a beaming smile.

'My dear, it has really and truly,' answered Mrs. Challoner, with an answering smile. In the old days, Doris, from constantly hearing her mother address Miss Murray as Lucy, had called her Miss Lucy, and the sound of her name on the girl's lips had grown so dear to the ex-governess that she would not allow her to relinquish its use.

The story of the ship which had reached port was soon told. Some years before Mrs. Challoner had entrusted all her savings to her brother-in-law, a broker in Sydney, to invest as he thought most prudent. He had put the money—£500 in all—in Broken Hill shares,¹² while the prospects of the mine were still uncertain; now the investment was worth £6,000 and bringing in an annual income of £600.

'So Robert and his brother will be able to see their mother, after all. We are going to London directly after Christmas,' said Mrs. Challoner.

Doris, on hearing this, said they had better call on the 10th of September.

'The same thought has occurred to me,' said Mrs. Lindsay. 'We are going by a French boat, as I told you, Lucy, because we can so quickly get from Marseilles to Mentone; and the route would be very little longer for you: I feel that the sea will do me good, but I dread a long land journey.'

'And I would teach Euphemia French on the voyage, when there would be no sea-serpents to look at,' put in Doris, with a saucy smile at her mother, who had within the last few weeks been urging her to greater diligence in that language. Euphemia, aged eighteen, was Mrs. Challoner's step-daughter.

'I fear it would be impossible. Robert has to sell off the stock, and he wants his son to come with us. He is now plying in West Australia,'¹³ answered Mrs. Challoner. 'I would ask you to delay your departure, so that we might travel together, dear Mrs. Lindsay, only you need the change, I am sure.'

'And you know, Lucy, when you make up your mind to have your teeth out, it is dreadful to have to wait too long,' answered Mrs. Lindsay in a low voice; and though she tried to maintain a cheerful manner, it became evident to Mrs. Challoner that the prospect of leaving Ouranie was a serious trial to her friend.

'I do not wonder you are loath to leave it, dear Mrs. Lindsay, it is such a lovely, peaceful spot! Oh, the relief of seeing such a place after living at the mine!'

They were now in sight of the home station, which, with its detached groups of houses, looked like a little village. The dwelling-house, with a kitchen and servants' quarters semi-detached behind it, was on a slight rise. On the western side of the large shadowy garden was the manager's house, coach-house, stable and store-rooms. A quarter of a mile to the south-west lay the woolshed, with its pens and yards; near it a long, low dwelling for the shearers, known as the 'men's hut,' and close to this two small cottages for the knock-about hands and their wives. Mrs. Lindsay made a point of having only married men engaged on the station. In a place so remote from

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general society, she was of opinion that it was not good for man to be alone.¹⁴

'Oh, the garden is as full of flowers as ever!' cried Mrs. Challoner, as they drove through part of it to the front of the house. The garden at Ouranie was watered from the lake by a windmill, and this fact speaks volumes to those who know something of the fertility of Australian ground under copious irrigation. To Doris it had always been a charmed region, in which she had spent many hours daily. Early in the winter the first sweet violets began to make their presence known with their penetrating fragrance. A little later the almond-trees were folded in an unbroken wreath of faint pink or moonlight-coloured cups, and the bowls of the white and purple anemones quivered on their slender stalks in a way that made Doris say winter was the dearest season of all.

But as the spring advanced and the great snowy clusters of the guelder-rose tossed themselves in the air, like a juggler throwing a hundred balls aloft in one moment, and the deep Bruckmansia bells,¹⁵ with the delicate tracery of their softly curved rims, were perpetually haunted with the hum of bees, while the vivid tones of crimson and purple passion-flowers made deep snatches of colour on every side, and the stems of the narcissi and jonquils bent under their fragrant loads—these surely were the dearest days of all. Leaves and flowers everywhere, and the whole air rifted with the songs of birds. . . . And yet, as the heat of summer advanced and on every side tall rose-bushes were bent under glowing cataracts of roses, and the ground was strewn with fruits, which were so thickly clustered on each branch that the idlest wind that blew carried some away; when through the crimsoned evening atmosphere, palpitating with intense heat, a long array of water-fowl might be seen winging their flight to the unperishing waters of Gauwari, this season, too, had its own unique charms.

And autumn with its shorter days and cooler nights, with its gray tints stealing softly into the hard blue of the sky, while trees from the old country broke into strange hectic flushes that gradually paled, till the leaves fell to the ground in noiseless showers, this, too, had its own subtle fascination. Myriads of roses still remained, countless asters, delicate vivid verbenas, Gaillardias, and many-coloured verbenas, and geraniums beyond number—all these were feverishly aflame.

Day and night; twilight and dawn; the soft gradations of the Australian year, as the season came and departed; the sonorous voices of the wind when it rose to a great gale on a winter night, the whisperings of the wind through the needle-leaved she-oaks in the summer evenings; the return and departure of migratory birds: all these were entrancing pages in a book of which Doris never wearied. . . . When the old vines, arid-looking as the stems of ancient grass-sticks, began to kindle into gadding tendrils¹⁶ and woolly buds, the girl would watch them, day by day, till in the still warm evenings of September flocks of them would be found transformed into golden green—more like the tips of flames than growing leaves. Later the roof of the wide arcade, that ran through the length of the garden, would be a network of leaves so densely woven that the fiercest sunbeams, beating on its roof, could find no entrance, except as a warm jonquil light, flushing myriads of clusters into perfect ripeness. Where did they all get their wonderful colours—the crimson rose and the ivory-coloured lily, the purple grape and the carmine-flushed peach, all swelling out of tiny oblong buds, at first hardly thicker than a thread? These miracles of nature, yearly renewed, were for Doris never masked by the indifference which so often comes of familiarity. Her early intimacy with nature developed a talent for observation and a faculty for taking pains¹⁷ which became the strongest discipline of her life.

There was so much to learn, and the lore she gathered was more enthralling than any tales of fairy adventures, for underlying all there was a magic which could never be exhausted nor explained.

The vast melancholy waste of illimitable plain, that stretched into the gray distance to the east and north, would make the casual traveller, on reaching Ouranie, keenly realize how lovely it was, with its softly swelling rises, its park-like woods, and wide permanent lake. But no casual observer could know how every tree and nook round the little head station throbbed with life and interest for the solitary child, who from her infancy had learned to keep long vigils on all things that grew and lived around.

She knew when the first broods of the shell parrots would flit through the pale honey-coloured blossoms of the gum-trees, and when the young laughing-jackasses were fledged, and learned to take their first grotesque flights with solemn awkwardness. She had learned when to look for the wild swans and ducks, hatching their young in the coverts of Gauwari, and where the snipe and teal oftenest sought their food. She knew what honeybirds came in pairs when the gum-trees first blossomed, and went away in flocks when the blossoms were over. The full clear notes of the singing honeybird, which her mother likened to the missel-thrush; the rapid chirps of the long-billed kind; the single note long drawn out, with its short note quickly repeated, of the

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fulvous-fronted ones; the grating cry of the black-throated, and the harsh quarrelsome notes of the wattle-bird¹⁸—she recognised them all, and watched them clinging head downwards like little acrobats among the honeyed blooms they rifled with greedy haste if for an hour at a time.

'There must be a mother snipe somewhere in the ti-tree; the father-bird keeps on piping and flying all alone,' she would say, and spend most of a long afternoon down by the lake till she discovered the whereabouts of the mother-bird. She loved to see the eyes of birds in their nests when they caught sight of a human face. No moccasined Indian or Australian black in Kooditcha¹⁹ shoes could tread more softly than she did, when, from day to day, she stole to look at the waterfowls that hatched their young on the borders of the lake. Here she would sit so quietly under the great horizontal arms of an old gum-tree, that oftentimes little birds hopped as near her as if she were a shrub. Here she loved to watch the little blue wrens taking their feeble flight from one tussock of grass to another. They were such poor fliers, but they filled the whole air with their ecstatic roundelays, often ending with clear silvery tinklings like the chime of fairy bells. Mrs. Lindsay had never allowed a shot to be fired in the vicinity since she had come to the station, and this, coupled with its abundant waters and the blossoming gum-trees and wattles, made Gauwari a famous resort for birds.

jjDoris could hardly have said which she liked best to watch: birds kkbuilt their nests or buds llswell on the trees and the spear-like tips of annuals thrusting their way through the mould. Perhaps the mmlast days of August more than any other time nnin the year saw oother linger longest in the garden. It was here that Mrs. Challoner found her on the afternoon of the third day after she had come to Ouranie. Doris was half concealed by the shrubs that grew rather densely on the borders of Gauwari where it formed the garden boundary. Here the ground was perfectly carpeted with violets. Mrs. Lindsay had an old recipe by which she made violet scent, so that very few of these flowers were allowed to wither unseen in the Ouranie garden. Doris was occupied in filling a basket with them when Mrs. Challoner found her, directed to the spot by the movements of the young sheep-dog who was the girl's constant companion.

'I have been looking for you, dear, all over the garden,' said Mrs. Challoner in a very grave voice.

She had come on a grave errand; no less than to warn Doris that her mother's health was very precarious. An hour before she had suddenly fainted, and had lain for nearly twenty minutes in a half-unconscious state. Mrs. Challoner, greatly alarmed, had sent one of the servants to the manager's house to summon her sister-in-law, Mrs. Murray. The two had administered the restoratives usual in fainting-fits,²⁰ and gradually Mrs. Lindsay had recovered. Her first words expressed a wish that Doris should not know.

'I am glad she was not in, she would be so much alarmed, poor darling,' she said tremulously.

The sisters exchanged glances, and then Mrs. Challoner said ppvery gently:

'But is it wise to keep her in ignorance, dear? Do you think this is the old heart trouble?'

'Oh yes; but there is a long interval usually between these attacks; I think this was merely brought on by my inability to sleep well during the last few nights, and a sort of nervous agitation.'

If Mrs. Challoner had given expression to her thought just then she would have urged her friend to prevent her mind from being too much concentrated on the invisible world. It seemed to her that the habit of abstracting herself from outward things had greatly grown on Mrs. Lindsay since she had last seen her. But she shrank from approaching the subject. After a little silence Mrs. Lindsay spoke again:

'Perhaps it would, on the whole, be wiser, Lucy, if you were to open this subject to Doris. I have never taught her to think of death with horror.'

'Of death! But, dear friend, I hope that is still far off,' said Mrs. Challoner with some agitation.

A faint smile hovered over Mrs. Lindsay's worn face.

'The mysterious pass where two cannot walk side by side, and where for an instant souls lose sight of each other,'²¹ she murmured softly. 'It is only for the child's sake I could wish this pass were still a little distance off. . . . But within the last qtwo days it seems as if the power of keeping alive were slowly leaving me. And then I have thought the sea air would be a tonic. I think I wrote too long last night; I was anxious to post a second letter to my friend, Mme. de Serziac, which she will get rra week or ten days before we land. But I'll be more careful after this. Perhaps, Lucy, it will be better, on the whole, that you should speak to Doris. . . . Mrs. Murray will stay with me.'

It was not until she stood face to face with Doris that Mrs. Challoner quite realized the difficulty of her mission. The girl looked so serenely happy, so unconscious of any cloud lurking on the horizon of her young life.

'Have you been looking for me long, dear?' she said blithely; 'well, I'm glad you have come to the violet bank,

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for you look pale, and if you just sit down on this little seat under the wattle—now lean back and hold this posy of violets.'

Doris made Mrs. Challoner lean against the back of the little rustic bench, and put a great handful of violets on her lap, and then went on plucking some more.

'Doris, I came to speak to you about something,' said Mrs. Challoner, a little faintly.

'Ah, you do put me in mind of the old days, when I used to write such shabby little compositions,' said Doris, laughing merrily.

Mrs. Challoner was by nature of a timid, shrinking disposition, extremely faithful and affectionate, yet without much force of character. During the seven years she had lived at Ouranie, she had been more of a companion to Mrs. Lindsay than a governess to Doris, who had been chiefly taught by her mother. Mrs. Challoner was apt to talk at great length and with much animation of things that Doris thought very trifling. Constant intercourse with a mind as unworldly and disinterested as her mother's had unconsciously made the girl a little scornful of themes that take a prominent place in the estimation of the generality of women. She was very fond of Mrs. Challoner, and had got into the habit of petting her a good deal, without attaching much importance to what she said or thought.

Mrs. Challoner, on her part, had always been of opinion that Mrs. Lindsay made Doris's life too happy and beautiful to be a wise preparation for the world in which she must one day live; that she was too sedulously guarded from the commoner influences of human intercourse, untouched by its vanities and frivolities, knowing nothing of its temptations, its passions, its incurable miseries; yet, as the girl's happy laugh rang in her ears, she felt a growing disinclination to fulfil her purpose. She looked at her with dimmed eyes as she sat with her large straw hat on her lap, the basket of violets at her feet, holding up a peremptory finger at her young collie.

'Now, Spot, if you put your cold, inquisitive little nose into that basket, do you know what will happen?'

Spot dashed about, keeping his nose to the ground, and circling round the basket in a somewhat suspicious manner.

'You rogue! I'll leave you on the station, with the other dogs, instead of coming abroad to see the world—Samarcand, and the Valley of Diamonds, and the palaces of Pekin.²² But, Mrs. Lucy dear, you haven't told me what you wanted to speak to me about. Ah, I can guess!' she said, a mischievous glance coming into her eyes.

'What is your guess, ssDoris?' asked Mrs. Challoner, trying to lead up to what she wished to say without being too abrupt.

'You want to tell me that fairy-tales are not really true. That Shung-Loo's stories are made up by mandarins, who are foolish and have no religion.'

'No, dear, that is not what I want to say,' answered Mrs. Challoner with a somewhat discouraged-looking smile.

'Now, Spot, put your nose to the ground and lie down quite still,' cried Doris to the dog, who was in fact gambolling perilously near to the basket full of violets. Spot obeyed, and then Doris turned to Mrs. Challoner. 'I'll give only one more guess— You want to make me quite understand that the Silent Sea is not a sea, but a great barren plain stretching from Buda to your station and the mine, and past that for hundreds of miles, all the way to the Never-never Land?'²³

Mrs. Challoner slowly shook her head, and then Doris saw that her eyes were dim with tears. In truth, Doris's every look and gesture made her old friend's heart ache. The girl was so heart-whole, her radiant young beauty so untouched by care or apprehension, that the thought of revealing to her what might be the great sorrow which would overcast her opening life seemed barbarous and unwise. But Mrs. Challoner's uncommunicative sadness suddenly struck a chord of fear in the girl's heart.

'Ah, you are afraid to tell me! Is it anything about mamma?'

'Yes, dearie.'

'What is it—is she ill? But no, you would have told me at once.'

'She has been ill, Doris, but she is better; what I want to say to you is—oh, my dear, don't look so frightened, I cannot bear it!'

'Tell me, tell me!' cried Doris breathlessly.

'Your mother, darling, has not been strong for years. I don't think you know—indeed, I am sure she has

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concealed from you how ill she often is. About an hour ago she fainted away. It is her heart that is affected. I said to her I thought you ought to know how serious it is.'

'How serious! you mean that perhaps-----' Doris could not put into words the terrible thought that blanched her face. But she maintained her self-possession in a way that surprised Mrs. Challoner. As a matter of fact, vvshe possessed a great fund of firmness and self-reliance. She broke into no tears nor lamentations. During the next few days she kept more constantly with her mother, and insisted on taking her place in the little school for the splitters' children in the Peppermint Ranges, to which Mrs. Challoner accompanied her each forenoon. And so wwthe days passed until the one before that on which they were to leave Ouranie.

- a. time passed] succeeding days went by E1
- b. a day] one E1
- c. during this interval] Om. E1
- d. No sight was] Few sights were E1
- e. In respect of] Regarding E1
- f. day] afternoon E1
- g. all] Om. Adl
- h. their] her E1
- i. out] out nine months ago Adl E1
- j. previous] last E1
- k. at the Colmar mine] near Colmar E1
- l. the] that the Adl
- m. place] house E1
- n. smile. In°] smile on her face. P In E1 see Introduction, n. 89
- o. are] are all Adl
- p. all] Om. E1
- q. Euphemia . . . step-daughter. 'I fear it would be impossible. Robert°] (Euphemia . . . step-daughter.) But there were insuperable obstacles to this arrangement. P 'Robert E1
- r. West] Western Adl E1
- s. the mine] Colmar E1
- t. folded] crowned E1
- u. that] which E1
- v. evening atmosphere] air of evening E1
- w. delicate] delicately E1
- x. and] Om. E1
- y. verbenas] asters E1
- z. season] seasons Adl E1
- aa. whisperings of the wind] whispering cadences of the breezes E1
- bb. in the summer evenings] on a summer evening E1
- cc. these] of these Adl
- dd. entrance] admission E1
- ee. as] in E1
- ff. lovely°] beautiful E1
- gg. little] Om. E1
- hh. gum-trees°] wattle-trees E1
- ii. for an hour at a time] from day to day E1
- jj. Doris] She E1
- kk. build] building E1
- ll. swell] swelling E1
- mm. last days] end E1
- nn. in] of E1
- oo. her] Doris E1
- pp. very] Om. E1

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qq. two] few E1

rr. a week or ten days] ten days or so E1

ss. Doris] dear E1

tt. basket full] basketful E1

uu. girl's] Doris's E1

vv. she] Doris E1

ww. the days] day by day E1

Chapter VI.

During the night that preceded this day Mrs. Lindsay lay many hours awake. When she at last fell asleep, her slumber was fitful and broken. Towards morning she suddenly woke up in extreme agitation. She thought she had heard Doris calling out, 'Mother! mother! mother!' in piercing tones. When she opened her eyes, with this sound in her ears, her heart was throbbing so painfully that for a little time she could not move.

'It was a dream; it must have been a dream,' she said, holding her hand against her left side, as if to still the stormy beatings of her heart. Yet she had no recollection of any event, or any other word that led up to this wailing cry. As soon as she could move, she went tremblingly to the door that led from her own room into her daughter's, but all was perfectly still. Then she opened the window and looked out. The east was faintly touched with the pallor of the coming dawn. The first half-drowsy notes of awakening birds began to break the silence of the woods. It was the strangely beautiful hour in which nature, as if emerging from profound repose, seems to swim gradually back from the oblivion of night—all forms and colours spiritualized by the trembling approach of a new day. The dark masses of trees motionless as in a picture, the pale, unruffled lake, the deep clear vault of heaven, with a luminous reach of light slowly spreading in the orient—all were solemnly tranquil.

And when the mother once more turned to the dim, sweet chamber of her child, it was pervaded by an equal peacefulness. Near the window a bowlful of white roses glimmered in the uncertain light; on a little old-fashioned spindle table lay an open missal, beside a box of water-colours; on a chair, daintily folded, were the exquisitely-wrought under garments; in the depths of a half-opened wardrobe gleamed some of the crimson silk robes that Doris most habitually wore; and in the little bed, with its canopy of soft white Indian silk, the girl lay a fast asleep, her face, with its unruffled serenity, curiously resembling in expression the angel children she was so fond of painting. Over the foot of the bed a crimson scarf lay in careless folds.

This caught the mother's eyes, and she shivered slightly. In the yet dusky light this vivid streak of crimson somehow suggested to her morbidly-sensitive eyes the stain of a wounded creature's blood. She stole in softly and removed the scarf.

Doris moved, and lay with her face towards the window. Her lips parted in a soft smile. She murmured a few words in a low, glad voice, showing that some happy dream had come to her in sleep. At this the agitation which had taken so strong a hold on the mother was allayed. She went back into her own room, and though she did not sleep, she rested until after six.

Then Shung-Loo, with his invincible punctuality, with which no shadow of past or coming events was ever allowed to interfere, tapped at her door, and on a little table close to it in the hall left a tray, with two cups of d creamed chocolate and a little plateful of freshly-baked biscuits.

Mrs. Lindsay slipped on her dressing-gown and slippers, and took the tray into Doris's room. She had just awakened, and, on seeing her mother, started up to return her morning kiss.

'Is it really true, mother? Are we going away this very next day, into the strange countries where all the strange stories happened?'

'Yes, darling, going to-morrow. But, see, I have brought you your chocolate.'

'But, mother, how naughty of you! Promise me you will let me wait more on you after this. You know, I am a great thing—half a head taller than you.'

She sat up in bed, holding herself erect, so that even under a silken coverlet and in the weakly feminine folds of snowy lace that fell round her throat and slender white hands her heroic proportions should become evident.

'I promise you, Doris,' said the mother, smiling fondly. 'I dare say I shall soon grow stout and lazy, and let you come after me with my footstool and wrap; the voyage will be a fine opportunity. I wonder if the sea will make my little girl ill?'

'Oh no—not a bit. Mother, I remember being on the sea quite well, and I dreamt of it a little before I woke. Do you remember how blue it used to look from the Adelaide hills? And father sometimes took us sailing in a boat, you know, when we went to the seaside in the summer.'

As always in mentioning her father, Doris's voice sank tenderly; and, as was her habit on such occasions, the mother pressed her child's hand.

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'I remember, Dorrie; and you were quite a brave little sailor. Papa used to hold you up when the seagulls flew by, and you clapped your little hands with joy.'

'Mother, I hope there will be great white seagulls, and albatrosses with wide, wide wings, and enormous sea-serpents, with green and gold eyes, sailing along with our ship,' said Doris, her cheeks beginning to flush at the thought of all the evague wonders that might open out before her on leaving the calm monotony of Ouranie.

Her mother smiled, shaking her head.

'Now, mammy, don't tell me that there are no sea-serpents,' said Doris gaily. 'I shall tell the captain to go to Sinbad's island, and to Ispahan.³ Oh, you don't know half the places we are to see!'

Doris sipped a little chocolate, but she could not eat even one biscuit. Now that the hour of departure drew so near, the glad excitement of it all fairly carried her away.

'And the sea you saw in your sleep, Doris, was it blue and calm as we used to see it on summer days long ago?' asked her mother wistfully.

'No, I think it was stormy; and I was looking for you, mother, but I could not find you. Naughty little mother, where did you go? And why are you looking so pale again this morning, and dark under the eyes? Don't you hope the sea will be rough sometimes, mother, so that the waves will rise high with a white fringe to them, as they look in that picture in your bedroom?'

But the mother's heart, so sorely shaken by the tempests of life, was less adventurous. An old petition she had somewhere read long ago rose in her memory:

'Grant, O God, that this sea may be to us and to all who sail upon it tranquil and quiet. To this end we pray. Hear us, good Lord!'⁴

Doris could no longer linger over her chocolate.

'It is right down to my little toes, mother—the gladness of going!'⁵ she said, springing out of bed, and disappearing behind the pink chintz curtains that were drawn round her plunge bath.⁶

Her mother had been so much better these last few days that Doris, with the buoyant disbelief of youth in sorrow, had come to believe that the insidious weakness which for some days had prostrated her was quite passing away. Mrs. Murray was still very anxious, and Mrs. Challoner hopeful and uneasy by turns. Shung-Loo, the faithful Chinese servant, said nothing, but was in these days always hovering near his mistress. Shung was a marked personality in the Ouranie household. His connection with the family began in a curious way. At seventeen years of age he had been on the point of committing suicide at Canton, on account of failing to pass a literary examination.⁷ He had been rescued by Mr. Lindsay, the son of the British Consul in that city. Shung became the young man's personal servant, and devoted himself heart and soul to his interest. He was equally devoted to his late master's widow and daughter. He was now over forty years of age, and his savings amounted to a sum that would keep him in competence in his native land, to which he hoped ultimately to return.

Shung's wages were paid to him half-yearly—thirty pounds in six five-pound notes. He did not like cheques, and Mrs. Lindsay indulged his prejudice. On receiving this money, Shung would count it over carefully, fingering each note with respectful affection. He would put the amount into a well-worn pocket-book, carry it about with him, and put it under his pillow at night for a week; then he would bring it back to Mrs. Lindsay, and ask her to keep it for him with the rest at six per cent. The amount would be entered in his pass-book, and Shung would cover a sheet of rice-paper with strange characters, making elaborate calculations as to the increase which this new deposit made to his capital and income. Shung was, as a rule, up to his eyes in work, cheerful, capable, and immovably calm. But at times a great melancholy would steal over him. At such seasons, Mrs. Lindsay, always a little apprehensive of that side of his character which had so early led him to the thought of self-destruction, would urge him to return to his own country.

'You have enough money now, Shung, and some of your relations are still living. You will be able to keep a wife, and have a pretty garden and a rice-field of your own,' she would say to him, and Shung would listen with a half-pleased, half-wistful smile.

Who knows what visions of the Flowery Land,⁸ and of the almond-eyed little Mongolian babies who might be born to him, visited his imagination? Yet, though exile had for him something of that 'consumption of the soul'⁹ which takes the savour out of life, his attachment to his mistress and his old home, and doubtless, too, the fascination of rapidly accumulating capital, had always hitherto won the day.

'When you and Miss Dolis go, then me go too,' he would say.

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It was now arranged that he should accompany them to France and then take ship from there to Canton.

He was pasting on labels and cording up boxes in the hall, when, at four o'clock on that afternoon, Doris came to ask if there was not something she could do.

'Maman is sleeping now,' she said, 'and Mrs. Murray is near her, tacking a ruffle round the neck of my travelling-cloak. Everything I begin to do someone else comes and finishes it. Now, Shung, there must be something I can do?'

'Yes, Miss Dolis. You go out and take you walk lound Gauwali. Missee Challoner,' said Shung, turning to the latter as she came into the hall out of the room she occupied, 'you vely good, vely kind. Take oul young lady out to see big sky and bilds. She not out all day; too muchee visitols.'¹⁰

Mrs. Challoner promptly responded to this appeal. It was true that on this last day many callers had come from near and far. As Mrs. Lindsay could not be allowed to over-exert herself, Doris had been much to the fore, and had not been out of the house all day.

'I suppose that has hardly ever happened in your life before, except when you had the fever,' said Mrs. Challoner as the two walked slowly round the lake.

'And once, two years ago, when mother was a little ill,' answered Doris. She stood and drew in full breaths of the fresh air, which had in it poignant wafts of scent from the wattle-trees that were now in full blossom on the border of the lake, where they had been planted at intervals the year she was born. 'How strange it will be at first,' she said, 'to be so far from our own birds and trees and sky, and the great Silent Sea!' she added, looking towards the north-east, where, beyond the wooded rises that surrounded Ouranie on all sides, the great rolling plain was visible, which sixty miles beyond Buda turned into the arid Salt-bush country.

'Oh, my dear, the great sounding ocean will be much more entertaining than the Silent Sea,' returned Mrs. Challoner; 'when you are fairly in that country, the gray look of it, the thirst that never seems satisfied, and the awful quiet, seem to take the heart out of you.'

They were approaching a slight rise which was crowned with a group of shea-oak trees known as the Brotherhood.¹¹ Spot coaxed his mistress to take a run with him. When she reached the Brotherhood and looked eastward for a minute or two, she gave a little cry of joy and danced halfway back to Mrs. Challoner, crying:

'Guess who is coming—guess before you look!'

'What a picture the child makes!' thought Mrs. Challoner, looking at her with fond admiration. Hers was one of those rare faces never seen to such advantage as under the searching light of day. The fresh air brought a warmer tinge of colour into her cheeks, her great radiant eyes were sparkling; her eyelashes no longer cast a shadow under them, the amber tint of her hair was intensified by the sunlight. As she ran down from the Brotherhood on tip-toe, and stood on the margin of the lake with its reeds and tall grasses, bending and murmuring in the breeze with its wide, calm surface, absorbing the opulent afternoon sunshine, it would seem as though there were some subtle affinity between her and these wooing sights and sounds of nature.

'Who can it be?' said Mrs. Challoner with an answering smile, but regarding Doris so intently that she gave little thought to her question.

'It is Kenneth Campbell, and he has a gray horse this time with Jerry. What can have become of Rozinante?'¹²

It was the first question she put to the old man when they met.

'Rozinante kfell at the Mulga Ranges, Miss Dorrie, and I had to leave her. How do you find yourself to-day, ma'am?' he said, standing with uncovered head as Mrs. Challoner shook hands with him with the cordiality of an old friend.

Kenneth Campbell had been for fourteen years a shepherd on the Ouranie run,¹³ living most of the time entirely alone. Four years previously he had given up shepherding, and bought a snug little farm in partnership with a younger brother, but in a short time he wearied of farming. He bought a hawker's waggon, and stocked it with religious books and publications, and returned to the district with which he had been so long familiar, travelling in a very leisurely fashion from station to station, and from one small township to the other.

There was something in his appearance that contrasted oddly with his nominal avocation. He was tall and lean, with a narrow face and narrow, stooping shoulders, on which a long gray alpaca coat hung loosely. He had a high furrowed brow, a thin aquiline nose, long gray moustachios and whiskers, while his hair fell in silvery locks on his shoulders. His whole face and bearing conveyed an impression of refinement, even benevolence, though he had the indescribable air of one who holds little communion with his kind; sometimes for days he would be silent

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as a dumb man. At such times there would be a brooding, semi-prophetic look in his large brown eyes, and in his face an air of abstraction as complete as if the world and all that it contained were as remote from his thoughts as one of the fixed stars. At other times he would be possessed by an irresistible impulse to give expression to his thoughts, and he would do so with forcible nervous eloquence in a soft, flexible voice, with that half-plaintive cadence which sometimes marks the mutterances of Scottish Highlanders.

People said that his long solitude, and the mystical sort of books he read day and night, had unhinged his mind; and there may have been some truth in the supposition. It is certain that his most rooted and ardent ambition was to do good to his fellow-creatures, 'to save souls from perdition,' as he himself would say, though perdition and damnation with him meant moral evil rather than material torments. With his bookselling he combined voluntary and unpaid missionary work, holding impromptu services¹⁴ for station hands, splitters, miners and carters, or neven a solitary shepherd or hut-keeper who was willing to give him a hearing. He would on occasion take incredible trouble over some poor belated¹⁵ man who had fallen a victim to evil habits in the isolated life of the remote Bush.

Mrs. Lindsay had from the first recognised the rare qualities of mind and nature which distinguished Kenneth, and through her Mrs. Challoner had learned to esteem him. He had been shepherding at Ouranie when she lived there, and since her marriage she had seen him from time to time at her own home, and lately at othe mine—always with an increased longing that he would settle down comfortably on his little farm.

'You are just in time to see Mrs. Lindsay and her daughter before they leave, Kenneth,' said Mrs. Challoner, after the first greetings were over.

'Yes, yes, but it little matters in our span-length of time whether we say farewells. The great thing is that our spirits should meet at pa throne of grace,'¹⁶ he murmured absently.

Mrs. Challoner thought he looked thinner than ever, and as if more rapt in those musings in which mundane events were but as straws in the balance; when thus absorbed he would often lose all thought of creature comforts. It was many years since he had given up animal food, and he seldom ate more than twice in the twenty-four hours, his food consisting for the most part of a quart-pot full of tea and a slice or two of damper—'qunleaven bread,'¹⁷ as he used to call it.

'I don't believe you have been well, Kenneth. Oh, I wish you would live on the farm once more! We should all be more comfortable to think of you under shelter with your brother than living this lonely life,' said Mrs. Challoner, her anxiety for him increasing as she noticed the deep hollow circles round his eyes and the nervous, fleshless look of his hands.

He was watching Doris as she skimmed rback by the water's edge, looking at some water-birds that had newly arrived; but as Mrs. Challoner spoke he turned to her with a kindling¹⁸ look.

'But why should not all friends be comfortable about me, dear Mrs. Challoner? Death is the thing that the children of men dread most; and how many more die safe and sheltered in their beds than elsewhere! Wherever we may be on this piece of beguiling, well-lusted clay we call the earth, our lives must pass like snow-water; and often it is better passed in the wilds than elsewhere.'

The old man's eyes glowed; his face lit up with a pale spiritual light. Mrs. Challoner recognised that he was in one of those moods of exaltation in which the presence of a fellow-creature roused him to utter some of the thoughts that had else passed in smother.¹⁹

'A writer of the East²⁰ says,' he went on, after a little pause, 'that there are none happy in the world but beings who enjoy freely a vast horizon. And where in all the world shall you find it so wide and clear as on the great Salt-bush plains? There "like a man sbeloved of God"²¹ have I often stood at the dawn, and the earth lay view beyond view, with tnot a tree, not a mole-hill to break the sight, and the air as pure as if man was never created. Even in a region where there is no water, no grass, where the uvery Salt-bush itself has withered, where the very scorpion perishes, man, if so minded, can draw nearer to the Eternal²² than among throngs of his fellow-creatures, eager to barter their immortal souls for the loan of a piece of dead clay, for the painted image of a worm-eaten happiness—Esau's mess of pottage.²³ No, no; do not fear for me, dear friend. Lonely we come into the world, recognising no soul, able only to greet; alone vmust we pass through the Dark Valley.²⁴ It is but fitting that between two such strange journeys, so mysterious a coming, so solemn a departure, we should oftentimes be solitary.'

'Cowdie—Cowdie! come away and have a run with Spot, and tell him if you know these waterfowls!' cried

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Doris, her clear, glad tones ringing across the sombre utterances of the old shepherd like the wthrill of a bird heard in the darkness.

Cowdie was Kenneth's collie dog, whose grandparents he had brought with him from the rugged mountains of Argyllshire sixteen years previously. He was lying at his master's feet with his head flat on the ground, showing the whites of his eyes, as he glanced up now and then, waiting for his master's word of command.

'Go, Cowdie! go to Miss Doris,' said Kenneth; and the dog instantly responded to the girl's call with the fleetness of a greyhound.

'Where were you last night, Kenneth?' asked Mrs. Challoner, anxious to divert Kenneth's thoughts from what she felt to be a very melancholy, if not morbid, groove.

'At the boundary hut--the one five miles from here, between Ouranie and Mr. White's run--where I shepherded xmy line25 for nearly ten years. But all that time nothing happened so strange as what took place last night. It was after ten. I was reading in my waggon when all at once I heard a loud, sharp scream--the scream of a woman.'

Kenneth paused, looking into the distance as if awaiting some approaching sight or sound.

'And who was it, Kenneth?' asked Mrs. Challoner, with agitated interest.

'I am not quite sure, ma'am; but I will tell you all I know. As soon as I heard that cry I ran to the spot it seemed to come from. Perhaps you know ythe stringy-bark grows very thick round the boundary hut? I could see or hear nothing. Then I stood and gave a long, loud cooey. As the sound was dying away, I thought I heard a curious cry, as if one called and it was suddenly stopped. On that I began to search again. I went round and round for more than two hours. Then I thought of stories I had heard of strange creatures with strange cries in the Bush that white people have never seen, and I tried to believe zit was not a human being. Yet I felt I was trying to put a lie on myself. I went back to my waggon, but I could not sleep; so I lit my little lamp, and read for some time longer. Then I got sleepy, and aaI was just going to put out my lamp, when I heard bbthe sound of running--of someone passing quickly with naked feet. I jumped up and ran out; I saw something like shadows disappearing among the trees, one after the other. I did not know what I ought to do. My lamp was burning, and I thought if it was one in danger or lost he would surely make for the light. I turned up the cflight higher, and fastened back the flap of my tarpaulin, so that the light would shine out through the trees, and any creature lost or distressed could see it. I looked at my watch; it was one o'clock in the morning. About half an hour later I heard voices; I went out, and two men, spent with running, came up to me----'

'Two men?' said Mrs. Challoner, who was listening with painful intentness.

'Yes, two black fellows. One of them an old man, half naked, and bleeding from a wound in his side; the other a younger man, one that I knew by sight--he worked for some time on the Noomoolloo Station--Mr. White's, you'll remember. The old man yelled out something in the native language. I only understood "nape," which means wife. 26 Then the younger man asked me if I had seen any women. I told him I had not, and asked him if it was black women he was looking for. He said one was ddhalf-caste, the younger almost white, and both dressed like white women. Then they said they must look in my waggon; I held the lamp, and let them search all through it. The old man's wound kept on bleeding; now and then he wiped the blood away with his hand, and he got it over his face. He was awful enough without that. I have never seen anyone in the shape of a human creature so like what we might suppose the father of darkness to be.'

'Kenneth, these poor creatures--do you think they were from Noomoolloo?' said Mrs. Challoner hesitatingly.

'Ay, ma'am, they were the mother and daughter. Two miles from here I met a boundary rider of White's, and he told me the poor half-caste woman and White's daughter had run away two days ago for fear of being separated.'

Here Doris came tripping back, followed by the dogs, and the subject was dropped. She and Mrs. Challoner returned by the path bordering the lake.

When Kenneth visited Ouranie, he always stopped at the house of Mr. Murray, the manager. To get there he had to turn more to the west.

'Come in soon after you take the horses out, Kenneth,' said Mrs. Challoner in parting. 'Mrs. Lindsay will want to talk to you for a little time, and she keeps early hours just now. We want her to be strong and fresh for the journey.'

Kenneth promised to come early, and then slowly led his horses on their way. The evil that is in the world,

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active and implacable, laying waste so many lives, oftentimes weighed heavily on his mind, making his face sombrely earnest, with something of a fiery eagerness, like one crying in the wilderness,²⁷ and ready to denounce a world ripe for judgment.

- a. fast asleep] in a placid sleep E1
- b. agitation] agitation and disquiet E1
- c. events] event Adl
- d. creamed] cream Adl
- e. vague] great vague E1
- f. few] two E1
- g. now arranged that he should] his intention to E1
- h. France] France as their trusted and indefatigable servant, E1
- i. take] to take E1
- j. breeze] fitful breezes E1
- k. fell] fell lame Adl E1
- l. his thoughts] the thoughts which rose in his mind E1
- m. utterances] utterance Adl E1
- n. even] even for E1
- o. the mine] Colmar E1
- p. a] the E1
- q. unleaven] unleavened Adl E1
- r. back by] beside E1
- s. beloved] loved Adl
- t. not a tree, not] no a tree, no E1
- u. very] Om. Adl E1
- v. must we] we must Adl
- w. thrill] trill Adl E1
- x. my line] in my time E1
- y. the] that Adl
- z. it] that it Adl
- aa. I] Om. Adl
- bb. the] a Adl
- cc. light] lamp E1
- dd. half-caste] a half-caste Adl

Chapter VII.

A little time after the conversation between Mrs. Challoner and Kenneth Campbell had come to an end, another encounter took place at Ouranie that afternoon near the woolshed. Mr. Murray, the manager, was inspecting some repairs that had been made to the pens, behind this building, when he saw a man riding up who turned out to be Mr. White, of Noomoolloo. 'He has either lost a lot of money in town, or one of his best horses,' thought Murray as he greeted his neighbour. It turned out, however, that it was neither of these losses which gave so lowering an expression to White's face.

'Have you seen anyone belonging to me about here?' he asked in a gruff voice after dismounting.

'Do you mean man or cattle? I saw Crosbie-----'

'No, Koroona and her mother.'

'You—you don't mean-----'

'Yes, damn it, I do! They've cleared—run away—I believe they're somewhere about here. They haven't gone to Buda nor to the siding.'

'Koroona out in the woods?' repeated Murray, with a sort of stupid unbelief.

'Yes, perhaps among the wild niggers that were on their way to the corroborree near Wilkietown. Isn't that a proper sort of place for a girl with four silk dresses to her back, who cost me nearly £100 a year at school for three years. And now she's skedaddled with that half—caste old mother of hers! By the Lord-----'

White was a man celebrated for the large and varied stock of sulphurous language at his command. Murray waited with an uncommitted sort of expression till his neighbour had finished cursing, and then asked:

'But why did the mother run away?'

'Because I told her she must clear1 next day.'

'Next day?'

'Yes, next day, yesterday, before I began shearing. Not to clear into the woods, mind you—nothing of the sort. I was going to allow her thirty shillings a week as long as she lived—and that's not for very long, if I'm not mistaken. She had a cough, as I dare say you've noticed, that you could hear half a mile off. In fact, I made sure she would have turned up her toes months ago.'

'And why in God's name did you think of turning her off2 just now?' said Murray with a sombre light in his eyes. He was a big strong man with a weather—tanned face, his hair and long brown beard grizzled with gray. He was undemonstrative in manner, reticent, and rather taciturn as a rule. But he had strong sympathies and an active imagination, and was as easily moved to pity as a woman, with the difference that the feeling was intolerable to him if it could be translated into action. He was well acquainted with the poor half—caste who had faced the perils of the woods rather than submit to separation from her only child. As he recalled her, with her timid eyes and shy, kindly ways, cut off from her own people, avoided by others, her health ruined, meek and submissive always to this tyrant, who talked of her more heartlessly than he would of one of his sheep or cattle, he felt half choked with disgusted anger.

'Why? Just because I couldn't wait any longer—I've been on the loose too long. I'm going to turn a respectable, God—fearing, top—hat man on the a25th of September,3 at eleven o'clock in the morning, at St. Jude's in Wilkietown-----'

'You are going to be married?'

'I am.'

'And not to Koroona's mother?'

White broke into a furious volley of execration.

'What do you take me for? Do you think I'd disgrace myself by marrying a woman who is one—third a black lubra?'

'She's a jolly sight too good for you. She hasn't a vice more than any honest white woman, except humility.'

'That's neither here nor there. I've got an income of £5,000 a year.'

'Let me tell you, White, that to have £5,000 a year isn't the whole art of being a decent human being.'

'Now, gently, old man—gently; I'd put up with more from you than anyone else in the district, for you've done

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me many a good turn. But I'm going to marry a lady—you needn't screw up your nose like a colt in a halter for the first time—a devilish good-looking woman, too, and a sensible one at that. She's been married twice—the first time to a Church of England parson, the last time to a doctor.'

'Do you mean Mrs. Minkerton at Wilkietown?' said Murray in an amazed voice.

'I do; and though she's been married twice, I'm the only love of her life: think of that, old chappie!—the only love of her life,' repeated White with a gratified chuckle.

'Does she know——'

'Yes, I knew everyone in the district knows, and so I confessed to her. It was just like a bit out of the yellow-backs.⁴ "Lizzie," said I, "I ain't good enough for you. I haven't been quite as bad as most old bachelors; I've acted too much on the square." By Jove! she forgave me before I half finished. I tell you what, Murray, a good expression in the eyes, and £5,000 a year, go a good way with a woman of sense.'

Murray gave a disdainful grunt, and made a movement as if to turn away. White, as if not seeing this, went on:

'But of course she was jealous; she told me so plainly—ha, ha! We'd be ashamed to confess that, you and I, Murray; but it's a quality in a woman—by Jove it is! However, she consented that I should keep Koroona. Well, two nights ago I told Jeanie. She stared at me a bit, but she took it very quiet.'

'Yes, she's had a good training in the way of taking things bquiet,' observed Murray.

'Well, yes,' responded White, who seemed to take the remark as a compliment; 'whatever sort of woman I have in the house, whether black or half-caste or white, I mean always to be the master. I gave Jeanie £40 in an envelope and told her to be ready to start early in the morning, and that she cbetter say nothing to Koroona. She seemed dto be a bit dazed, you know. Still, I thought she understood. But enext morning they had both cleared.'

'And I suppose you think, if they had come here, I would give them both up to you?' said Murray slowly.

'And wouldn't you?'

'No, by the Lord I would not, as long as I had the use of my fists or a stock-whip!' cried Murray, with sudden savageness.

'You'd find yourself in the wrong box,⁵ though, if you tried to keep another man's property,' retorted White, in rising tones.

'Property? Allow me, as a justice of the peace, to tell you that you dare not take that girl from her mother.'⁶

Before White could make any reply to this, he caught sight of Kenneth Campbell coming round the woolshed.

'I can't stand that lunatic at any price,' he said hastily, and, mounting his horse, he rode off at a gallop. He was not the only man of irregular life in the district who was apt to give Kenneth a wide berth. Probably this is as near as most preachers of righteousness get to changing the lives of their erring fellow-creatures. But it was not a mode that met Campbell's aspirations to do good.

'Ah! I wish you had detained yon poor, poor creature, Mr. Murray, till I delivered the message laid upon me to speak to him,' he said, looking after the flying horseman.

'He isn't worth your powder and shot,⁷ Kenneth,' answered Murray.

The two men, who had become fast friends during the years that Campbell had been a shepherd on the run, talked together for some time. Then Kenneth went to see Mrs. Lindsay, as the sun was setting. He found her in the drawing-room on a couch near one of the French windows which opened into the garden. A massive jewel-case was fopen on a table near her, at which Doris was seated, turning over the contents with Mrs. Challoner.

'Maman, why didn't you tell me before this you had a valley of diamonds in the bottom drawer of your wardrobe?' said Doris, holding up a diamond bracelet to the light—one of a set of very costly jewels.

'I had almost forgotten, dearie, I had these things; most of them belonged to your grandmothers,' answered Mrs. Lindsay. Then she turned to speak to Kenneth, asking him about his journeys, and what he had been doing since she saw him last. There was a great sympathy between the two, and often when his voluntary labours seemed to him a vain and profitless thing,⁸ Kenneth found consolation and fresh encouragement in Mrs. Lindsay's words.

'Kenneth, you look very sad and worn,' she said, after talking to him for a little time.

'Oh, it is well with me, dear lady—it is well with me,' answered Kenneth. 'I do not expect my earthly pilgrimage to be a long one.' He avoided all mention of the special matter which was just then weighing on his mind.

'Oh, what a perfectly beautiful ruby! Look, when I hold it up, maman, how it seems to have a little crimson

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lamp in its heart!' said Doris, turning to her mother. Then seeing she was absorbed with her old friend, she did not again interrupt their talk. But Mrs. Challoner was ready with murmurs of admiration for every kind of gem and fashion of setting. And so for some time the two currents of talk went on near each other—the one full of artless enjoyment in the beauty and flawlessness of precious stones; the other grave and solemn, yet penetrated with serene hopefulness.

As the twilight deepened, Shung stole in noiselessly to light the candles. But the light that came in through the open doors and windows was so soft and peaceful that Mrs. Lindsay would not have it changed. A few minutes after Shung went out, Doris, whose sight and hearing were preternaturally quick, looked out into the garden with a startled air.

'No, it isn't Spot. I see he is lying on the veranda. But don't you hear a rustling sound? gThere, Spot has noticed hsomething too.'

Doris rose as she spoke to look out; but before she reached the open window, one came rushing in from the darkening garden—a young girl with torn clothes, with blood on her hands and face, bareheaded, with her dusky hair blown about her shoulders. On seeing Doris she gave a shrill cry.

'Oh, save me, save me! do not let them catch me!' she cried; and with that she rushed in through the window—rushed in and sank down, half kneeling, half crouching, at Mrs. Lindsay's feet. 'You will not let them come after me—oh, you will not, I know! I know—everyone says you are an angel of goodness! And my mother is dead out there where we were hiding in the woods.'

Mrs. Lindsay, white to the lips, and trembling violently, attempted to rise, holding out her hands protectingly, while her lips moved as if in speech, but no sound came from them. The next moment she had fallen back on the couch, blood pouring from her lips. Doris was the first to see this, and her sudden cry of anguish, 'Mother! mother! mother!' drew the eyes of the rest from the strange apparition of the girl—young and slender, with scarcely a trace of the mixture of races in her veins, who had thus suddenly flown out of the woods, crying for protection in her forlorn state. Mrs. Lindsay became unconscious, and was inanimate so long, that they almost gave up all hope she could ever revive. During this time of terrible suspense when all the remedies they tried proved unavailing, and they awaited the arrival of the doctor from Buda, expecting only that he should confirm their worst fears, Doris did not stir from her mother's side. Mrs. Murray took away the poor fugitive girl, whose frantic grief at sight of the mischief, which she thought was entirely due to her action, added to the distress of all. It was Mr. Murray who went for the doctor, driving a buggy and pair, so that no time should be lost if he were at home. As Dr. Haining depended chiefly on his practice among the squatters of the district, he was often absent from Buda, or, jas after a long journey, his horses were so jaded that to undertake another with them was frequently attended with undue delay. Nor, if the truth must be told, was Dr. Haining's skill of the kind which is of the first consequence in any intricate or subtle malady. But it was a relief kfor Mr. Murray9 to find him at home, and he almost laid violent hands on the worthy old man to hasten his journey to Ouranie.

They reached it at nine o'clock at night, to find that half an hour previously Mrs. Lindsay had shown symptoms of returning life. There was a faint sigh, a little flutter of the eyelids, and mshortly afterwards she looked at Doris with a smile so faint as to be almost imperceptible. But Doris saw it, and for the first time two or three hot little tears came to her relief. The girl's moral courage and presence of mind nwas a revelation to all. The doctor did everything that was in his power, but he knew at once that there was little hope of recovery. He stayed at Ouranie for three days. Late in the afternoon of the third oday an urgent summons came for him to Noomoolloo. White, who had come to see Koroona at Murray's house, vainly trying to induce her to return home, and assuring her that her mother had been buried as expensively as any white woman, had gone away in a state of considerable excitement. After getting home he was very badly bitten by a large mastiff he was beating in a savage manner, for some real or imaginary act of disobedience.

As Dr. Haining was going away, he stood for a little time talking to Mrs. Challoner in the hall. Mrs. Lindsay had not been removed from the drawing-room, and Doris was just then sitting by the bed, which had, under her directions, been placed opposite the window that commanded her mother's favourite outlook—across the shadowy flower-filled garden and the glancing expanse of Gauwari.

'Put it round at this side, so that mother can look out when she is getting better,' she had said, in a low pfirm whisper, when they were arranging the bed. Mrs. Challoner and the doctor exchanged glances, but they said nothing; and Shung, who was engaged in arranging the bed, carried out this direction, and clung to the reason

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with pathetic insistence. 'When Missie Lindsay bettel' was a phrase poor Shung was never tired of using in the days that followed. And, as a matter of fact, during these three days Mrs. Lindsay had recovered speech and full consciousness. It was true, she was extremely weak. qThough the blood-vessel she had broken was but a small one, the action of the heart, which had been seriously affected for many years, was so defective that from time to time she had great difficulty in breathing; but when these paroxysms were over, her face was stamped with an expression of rapt and absolute peace, and often, when she murmured a few words of meditative prayer, a smile that spoke of joyous expectation would flit over her face.

When Dr. Haining was leaving her, he said something about returning soon again.

'Do not fatigue yourself for me, doctor,' she answered softly. 'I have everything that I can want, and so many anxious to wait on me, especially this dear child of mine.' As she spoke she stroked Doris's hand lightly.

As the doctor was going out, Shung glided in with his young mistress's hat and gloves.

'Missy Dolis in all day,' he said, shaking his head gravely.

'Go, darling, out into the fresh air for a short time,' said Mrs. Lindsay. 'I feel a little stronger just now, and I want to speak to you when you return. Tell Kenneth I should like to see him for a few moments.'

Doris felt a strange oppression falling on her at these words. Her beautiful eyes, so full of love and softness, expanded with a startled expression; but there was also a look of intrepid courage on her face—the courage and devotion of a great love, capable of rising above all thoughts of self. Only during the time in which her mother had lain like one dead had Doris believed that her attack was fatal; and after the first overwhelming sensation of entire loneliness, of helpless, despairing isolation, as of a creature suddenly taken from under the measureless vault of heaven filled with warm blue air, and thrust in a dark corner, between cruel bars, an inexplicable composure came to her—a strong, unreasoning conviction that she would not long survive her mother. Was it some undeveloped malady that lurked in her system, or some strong obscure link between her own life and her mother's, which lent such force to the thought, devoid of all fear and without a touch of morbid self-pity?

But these thoughts and emotions vanished as quickly as they had come when her mother recovered consciousness. From that moment Doris's mind was centred on one object—to be well and strong, so as to be with her mother in the day time when she was most awake. Each night tthe girl had gone to sleep quite early, sleeping the profound sleep of a child unwearied with the long day, and rising early veach morning, radiant and refreshed, coming into her mother's room with the first sun-rays with a great bowl of freshly-gathered roses. Oh, how the gentle happiness of her mother's smile as their eyes met suffused the girl's whole nature with an ecstasy of gratitude, with an indefinable supreme sense of union, which nothing could rupture! wThe look of conscious deep serenity on her mother's face was to Doris a covenant and an assurance that all was well, and must continue so.

xOnly on the previous day, after recovering from a swooning feebleness which had lasted longer than usual, Doris10 had noticed her mother's eyes resting on her from time to time with something of solicitude—of anxiety. She had remained for a long time motionless, yhands clasped, her lips moving from time to time, till she fell asleep. After an hour she had awoke, a new radiance on her brow and in her eyes. Something of the same look was on her face now, and yet her words zroused a vague apprehension in Doris's mind. She lingered wistfully over her mother, with those tender and skilful little touches which impart to pillows a new quality of being at once softer and more supporting.

'Bring me a fresh story, Doris, about a new honey-bird or a fresh flower bursting into blossom,' she whispered, as Doris kissed her hands.

The girl's eyes were suddenly dimmed as she went out. She opened the door noiselessly that led into the hall. The doctor, with his back towards her, was talking to Mrs. Challoner.

'You see, it isn't one thing; it is a complication. She cannot recover. I don't expect that she can live more than a few days at the utmost-----'

Warned by a sudden pressure on his arm, and a low 'Sh! sh!' from Mrs. Challoner, Dr. Haining stopped abruptly. He would like to have retracted his words, or to have offered some modifying explanation, when he saw that Doris had overheard him; but her steadfast gaze disconcerted him.

'Were you talking of mother, doctor?' she said, in a very low voice.

'Oh, my poor dear child!' said Mrs. Challoner, putting her arms round her aaas to ward off this great sorrow.

Doris slipped away without further speech.

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'That child has wonderful pluck,' said the doctor, looking after her.
But Mrs. Challoner shook her head.

'I would sooner see her cry, and show more distress,' she said. 'She hasn't been a single day or night away from her mother in her life. I don't know how she is to live without her.'

a. 25th of September] 15th of this month E1

b. quiet] Om.* Adl

c. better] had better Adl E1

d. to be] Om. Adl

e. next] the next Adl

f. open] opened* Adl

g. There] See E1

h. something too] it now E1

i. should] would E1

j. as] if Adl E1

k. for Mr.] to Adl E1

l. little] Om. E1

m. shortly] a little E1

n. was] were Adl E1

o. day] Om. Adl E1

p. firm] Om. Adl E1

q. Though] Yet though E1

r. in] during E1

s. time] Om. Adl E1

t. the girl] she E1

u. wearied with the long day,) Om. E1

v. each] in the E1

w. The] That E1

x. Only] But E1

y. hands] her hands Adl E1

z. roused] woke E1

aa. as] as if Adl E1

Chapter VIII.

On going out, Doris saw Kenneth Campbell reading in the garden, and went to give him her mother's message. Then she went on to the rustic bench, near the violet-banks, and for some time the thought of that incredible separation which seemed to be drawing near bewildered and overwhelmed her. When she left the garden the sun had already set; but the air was so clear and transparent that for some time the light, instead of fading, mellowed and deepened, with reddish glows from the western horizon falling upon the trunks of the trees, and then gradually stealing upward to the topmost branches. Doris mechanically followed her mother's favourite walk round the margin of the lake.

'She cannot recover.' The words kept weaving themselves into every bird-note she heard, till gradually, as the twilight fell, the birds became silent. The honey-eaters were the first to go to sleep; after that the tremulous calls of the shell-parrots died away; later the chirping of the sparrows ceased, then the swallows' last twittering. As the reflections of the trees in the water were merged in a confused mass, the fairy carillons of the blue wrens were hushed; but the trills of the reed-warblers among the tall sedges still went on, while the slender brown reeds, and the dense clumps of ti-tree at the far end of Gauwari, began to be haunted by the long-drawn, plaintive calls of the curlews—one in the far distance answering the others with a measured cadence that seemed to embody the very spirit of the waning conflict of two lights. In that calm, brooding hour, when the dimness of night is still in suspense, while the light of day is neutralized by the tranquil twilight shadows—when even the steadfast trees that we know most intimately assume a half-mystic air as of beings from another sphere—in such an atmosphere the heart is often lightened of its most importunate fears. It is as though the mind became involuntarily conscious of the eternities to come, immutably sealed with a peace which the darts of fate we now so much dread are powerless to assail. Doris's companionship with nature had been too penetrating to leave her in this hour of deepest apprehension. She had been too long and too deeply moved by the sacred silent influences around her to stand in their presence coldly wrapped in her own sorrow. Her tears ceased as she looked around, suddenly pierced with the thought that earth and sky breathed the selfsame peace which was imprinted on her mother's face. . . . Was that beloved mother indeed to pass into the unknown realms which our Father keeps for His children infinitely beyond the reach of earth's light and darkness? Looking up into the far silent spaces of the sky, which was so immensely vaulted that it was as though the immeasurable heavens had broken asunder to the highest, a great strength of love nerved her afresh. She would not mar the beautiful serenity of her darling's home-going by futile tears and repinings. Sorrow she must have, but she would endure it bravely and alone.

She returned to the house to find her mother half sitting up and talking to Mrs. Challoner, without any distress of breathing.

'Mother, you are a little better,' she said, her heart almost ceasing to beat with the sudden shock of joy.

'Yes, dear; I am well enough to talk to you for a little. We won't have the lights in; let us sit in the twilight . . . like old times.'

Mrs. Challoner left the two alone.

There was silence for a little time, broken only by the notes of a fantail in the garden, who sang as if his small heart was too full of joy to go to sleep at his accustomed hour.

'I thought they had all gone to sleep except the little reed-warblers and the curlews, mother,' said Doris softly; and the sound of her voice speaking steadily gave the mother courage for her task.

'We have been very happy together, my child, . . . and now I fear you will grieve. . . .'

'Do not be afraid for me, mother,' said the girl steadily.

'My dear one . . . you are going to be brave for me and for yourself. It is strange how much we forget that it is only what we do not see which is eternal—that all around us is a passing dream from which our Father one day in His love awakes us.'

'You are going away from me, dmamma—away to the other home,' said Doris, with a little catch in her throat.

'Yes, dearest . . . after you went out I grew heavy with care at the thought of leaving you. . . . I feared for you in your grief and loneliness. . . . But as I looked after you I saw how our Father had put His own seal on the whole world around you, and I felt somehow sure that He would touch your heart also with the peace which passeth

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understanding. . . '2

'Oh, mother, was that why I could not cry any longer?' said Doris, in a low, awe-struck voice.

The mother's face was radiant. Her heart was full as she pondered over those mysteries of the soul and miracles of nature for which our most ardent words of explanation are clouds of enshrouding darkness.

'It will be well with the child.'³

She repeated the words over more than once with a rapt look in her face. Her strength kept up wonderfully for some time longer. For nearly an hour she went over many matters in detail with Doris regarding her future life—Mme. de Serziac and her guardian, and the disposal of certain sums of money, and her wish that, if Doris and Mr. Graham should at any time decide to sell Ouranie, Mr. Murray should have the first offer on as easy terms as possible.

'I think that is almost all the business we need talk, Doris,' she said at the close; 'but there is one thing I should like you to decide for yourself, whether, after we must part, you prefer to stay here till the Challoners are ready to take you to Mme. de Serziac, or go on with Mrs. Challoner to Colmar? You would have your own rooms, of course, with Shung to wait on you and your horses to drive and ride.'

Mrs. Lindsay spoke a little hurriedly, fearing that this ruthless necessity for realizing so closely the last strange farewell might press too heavily on Doris.

'I don't think I could bear to be here without you, mother,' answered Doris in a very low voice, as she stroked her mother's hand in the old loving fashion. Then she stooped down and kissed it repeatedly and passionately.

'Oh, mother, do you remember long ago, when I had the fever and used to dream so often you had gone away to the East—to the Silent Sea?' she said, her tears now falling in the dusk as fast as summer rain.

'Yes, Doris, I remember. And then you thought you had gone after me, and found me; and for days, till the fever left you, you thought that was where we were. I am going on a longer journey; but by—and—by, my child, when your work is done, you will come too.'

'Oh, mamma! mamma! if I could only come with you now!'

Then the mother spoke without tears or faltering of all she could do, of all the duties that awaited her.

'When your loneliness presses hard on you, Doris, remember that I wished you to work for others—that I wished you to have your share of all the duties and sweetness of life.'

'But, mother, if I am lonely all the time and want to come to you with all my heart, promise me you would not be vexed if I prayed to our Father to take me to you.'

'No, darling, I should not be vexed,' answered the mother softly. She had faith in the power of time to heal sorrow.

Then for a little space in the gathering darkness Doris did not try to check her tears. So much she yielded to the cravings of the love that filled her heart and had ever been the centre of her life. But after that evening she regained composure, and even cheerfulness. Henceforward to the last hour of her mother's life these did not desert her.

Early in the morning four days after this, as Doris stood drawing back the window—curtains, she caught her mother's eyes fixed on her in a loving, long, untroubled look. An unusual pallor in the dear face made her hasten to the bedside. Half an hour later Shung—Loo glided in, bearing a tray with some little delicacy to tempt an invalid's appetite. Mrs. Challoner was then in the room, her face bathed in tears. But Doris met him and put the tray down, looking at him strangely, saying:

'Oh, Shung, Shung, we cannot do anything for maman any more!'

She was dry-eyed, but the deep thrill of anguish in her voice made Shung's pale-hued almond eyes very dim. Hitherto no crisis had arisen in the girl's life in which Shung was unable to suggest some consolation, but he had too much of the philosophy of life to attempt any now.

Nothing in the room spoke of death or of sorrow. Through the wide-opened windows the clambering roses hung in dewy clusters, white and mauve butterflies hovering over them in the clear early sunlight. There were bowls of roses on the mantelpiece; even on the little table close to the bedside lay a great heap of blush-roses, a pot of heliotrope, of white lilac and a bunch of violets. 'Bring me some of our favourite flowers out of the garden, Doris,' the mother had whispered less than an hour ago. After bringing these in Doris had drawn the curtains back from the open windows. And here now were the dewy flowers giving out their penetrating fragrance, the hum of bees with their tireless industry in the garden, and over all the warm, liberal sunshine. And in the midst, after days

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of absorbed watching, of wakeful nights, of serene dawns, in which the loving spirit seemed endued with fresh vitality, had come the moment of bitter severance.

For the first strange days, loneliness and sorrow, all thoughts of herself, were partially lost for Doris in an overwhelming wonder, and a yearning stronger than the instinct of life, to penetrate the inexorable veil which, in one supreme moment, had been drawn between her mother's life and her own. That beloved mother, that gentle, self-forgetting, heroic soul, to the last full of thought and memory, and tender responsiveness to the lightest whisper of love! And then in one moment she had passed beyond all intercourse and all knowledge!

'Oh, maman! maman! can I never know anything more of you as long as I live?' Doris would say over and over again, regardless of everything around her in that one engrossing thought. The waves were breaking upon the rocks afar, where she could neither hear nor see them; ships were sailing across the seas to strange lands; pictures that had been painted hundreds of years before were hanging in closed chambers; choirs of singers separated by the whole length of the world sang the same hymns in churches and cathedrals. All these, and innumerable sights and sounds, though hidden and unheard, could be verified; but was there no possibility of reaching the lives that had passed beyond our ken? How far beyond the light of the moon and the wealth of the mid-day's sunshine and the orbit of the planets was that unknown universe of the spirit-world? Or was it near, though unseen and unknown?

The first sight of the sea, to a boy who has Viking blood in his veins, brings hitherto unknown emotions into play. There are vibrations in the waves which awaken memories that have no part in his personal recollections. And so all through our strange human dramas, dim reminiscent pictures transmitted by generations who have threaded their way through the short joys and tragedies of life, seem suddenly incorporated in individual experience, maturing the heart and mind when one of the great touchstones of experience is reached. Then the innumerable sources from which knowledge of life is consciously and unconsciously drawn seem in one short day to give up their messages. The events that were at the time hardly noticed, the news that was heard with wonder and straightway forgotten, the broken scraps of conversation that awoke a vague mistrust, the slow accumulations of perception and dawning instincts—all are suddenly illuminated with this vital event that lays its seal on the world and redeems it henceforth from the haziness of a dream and the misty disproportion of an uncomprehended mass of details.

In the first days of loneliness, of separation that seemed too strange to be real, Doris would take up one of her mother's beloved books, and in turning over the leaves with tender reverence, she would see a passage marked that seemed to hold the whole history of her own loss in lines that long years before had told the story of her mother's bereavement:

'Yet in these ears, till hearing dies, One set slow bell will seem to toll The passing of the sweetest soul That ever looked with human eyes.'⁶

The strange story of human life, beginning in the mists of childhood, passing beyond an inscrutable veil, repeated over and over from age to age, would at times hold her spell-bound; and in the face of the universal history of humanity, her own sorrow seemed to fall into a sober and ordered proportion. The restraint that thought and a widening range of vision puts upon all passion saved her from any morbid feeling of revolt.

'If I cry, it is for myself, not for you, darling maman,' she would say softly under her breath; and the mist of tears would be stayed by the recollection of her mother's face. The large serene eyes, the delicately-moulded features, the sweet quiet mouth, with its wistful little smile, would rise up so vividly before her, that grief would suddenly be checked by a feeling of incongruity.

'What is our life but a little span⁷—even the longest?' Kenneth would say, lingering, during these first days, to give such stay and consolation as were in his power. 'A little fever in the town, or thirst in the desert, or a storm in mid-ocean—what are they but the messengers that are sent to summon us from this vale of tears?'⁸

'Ah, but, Kenneth, it is a very beautiful world . . . and now, although maman is gone, all these long years we were together—oh, how beautiful they were!' answered Doris, shrinking instinctively from that austere contempt of the earth and all its belongings which so often marked the old shepherd's utterances. 'Listen to this that maman taught me to sing when I was quite little, Kenneth,' she said, opening the piano, and striking a few chords; and then she sang, in a sweet, low voice that gathered gladness as she sang:

'Plantons le mai, chantons le mai, Le mai du joli mois de mai; Et puis chantons quand on plante, Et puis plantons quand on chante. Le mai, le mai, Qui nous rend le coeur gai!'⁹

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'Ah yes, Miss Doris; yes, that is true. There is joy even in this life for the hearts that are possessed by perfect peace.' Then in a lower voice he said, as he looked at the girl's face: 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise.'¹⁰

'I know that for some the world must be a terrible place,' said Doris, turning from the open piano, and looking into her old friend's face with serious, wide-opened eyes. 'Often I think of poor Koroona, who had to run away with her dying mother, even out of her father's house.'¹¹

In the midst of her sorrow this story had fastened on Doris with a new power of interpretation. The thought of so much fear and misery, of familiarity with trouble bitterer than the pangs of death, made her look back on her own secure and happy childhood with a new power of observation. Her memory was stored with wide, spacious chambers full of light and grace and protecting love. What an endless store of days steeped in tangible beauty rose before her as she went from one familiar spot to the other, trying to say farewell, yet vaguely feeling that they would be with her when she went away as much as when she was in their midst! She could not have put the feeling into words, but it was in her heart, that the deepest reality of life had somehow gone from her, and that now the world and all it contained was a little uncertain and unfamiliar, as if seen through some softening medium like that of sleep, in which we see and hear and touch, and yet are all the time remote from the objects of sense.

Yet eeday by day she was attending with scrupulous care to details that devolved on her before leaving Ouranie with Mrs. Challoner. An old friend of her mother's in town, one with whom she had become acquainted on her first voyage to Australia, and to whom Mrs. Lindsay had left a small annuity for life, wrote to Doris pressing her to come and stay in town till her friends, the Challoners, were able to take her to Mme. de Serziac.

'Perhaps you would like it better, dear. I am afraid the Salt-bush country will seem terribly bare and dry to you,' said Mrs. Challoner wistfully, after this letter had come.

'No, dear Mrs. Lucy, don't send me away. I know you better than anyone else now. It does not matter so much about the country. . . . You know it is the Silent Sea that maman and I talked about so often,' answered Doris.

The next day the drawing-room was to be dismantled, but Doris begged to have it left just one day more as it used to be, and for one day more it was undisturbed, filled with a dreamy wealth of flowers as in the old days; the windows wide open, overlooking the garden filled with all September's overflowing abundance of bloom and perfume; the lake beyond, reflecting in its clear depths a few filmy clouds faintly white and vaporous, as foam tossed from the crest of waves, and everywhere there were the cries and calls of birds who had come back to their old nests or were building new ones.

The twilight deepened, warm and fragrant, like a beautiful reverie between day and night, and Doris stood for the last time in the old familiar room, going from one spot to the other, looking at the books and pictures in the fading light; at the cabinet, with its relics of the old aboriginal race—shell-spoons, a chisel of volcanic glass, necklaces made of small reeds and the stems of coarse grass cut into lengths and threaded, a netted bag made from the stems of cotton-bush and rushes, a message-stick, with close and involved carving—kone that had once passed from one tribe to the other as a signal of peace or war. From these memorials of a vanished race Doris went, and stood looking for some moments at a water-colour painting, in the foreground of which stood a dwelling, that had been for many generations in her mother's family. It was a calm English landscape, with wide, shadowy trees; a little white village in the distance, with a slender church-spire rising from the midst; a blue-gray sky overhead, with a few red clouds trooping into the west, while under foot the emerald-green meadows starred with buttercups and daisies completed a picture of Old-World repose and soft, cool tones. Often after days of intense heat, in which the very atmosphere at Ouranie seemed to be on fire and burn with viewless flame, Doris had watched her mother turn to this picture with a weary longing.

'Ah, darling mother,' she said in a wistful whisper, 'you were often very tired; but now all that is over, and, if I grow very tired, I will come to you.'

Three days later Doris was in the heart of the barren landscape of the Salt-bush country, where low desert ridges with rocky outcrops, and vast flat spaces of sad, gray, creeping bushes, were outlined against an immense sky of deep shadowless blue. It was a land so harsh and forbidding, so devoid of all charm, that it seemed as if no tradition of human interest could cling around its vague formless regions. But as the light of the first day faded, and stars began to glimmer in the clear topaz of the upper sky, Doris, looking westward, saw

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the long aerial line of the Eucalowie Ranges in the far, far distance, like a silvery silhouette in the midst of the faint vapour that at times creeps over these immense plains after sunset. The prospect restored to her the old picture of the Silent Sea, and, like a home melody heard far from home, it brought her nearer to the days whose memory now formed the core of her life.

- a. half-mystic^o] half-mysterious E1
- b. most] Om. Adl
- c. except] but E1
- d. mamma] maman Adl E1
- e. awe-struck^o] awe-/stricken E1
- f. wait] attend E1
- g. the] Om. E1
- h. mamma! mamma!] maman! maman! Adl E1
- i. would] will E1
- j. prayed] pray E1
- k. should] shall E1
- l. her] Om.* Adl
- m. loving, long] long, loving Adl long loving E1
- n. of] Om. E1
- o. wide-opened^o] wide-open E1
- p. blush-roses^o] bush-roses* Adl
- q. of] Om. E1
- r. of] Om. E1
- s. nor] or* Adl
- t. orbit] orbits Adl
- u. unknown?] unknown? These and kindred thoughts filled Doris's mind in place of the sunbright fancies of her untroubled girlhood. Her loss was one of those events which effect a sudden change in one's conception of things and events. E1
- v. human] pathetic E1
- w. tragedies] the long tragedies Adl E1
- x. best-loved^o] best-beloved Adl
- y. widening] wider E1
- z. puts] put E1
- aa. passion] passions E1
- bb. the recollection] a presentment E1
- cc. face] sweet face Adl rapt face E1
- dd. mouths] mouth Adl
- ee. day by day] hour by hour E1
- ff. town] Adelaide E1
- gg. Mrs.] Miss Adl
- hh. garden] gardens* Adl
- ii. and everywhere] Everywhere E1
- jj. old] Om. E1
- kk. one] a summons E1
- ll. the] Om. Adl E1
- mm. of] full of Adl E1
- nn. an immense] a boundless E1
- oo. stars] the stars Adl

Chapter IX.

As might be expected in an arrangement that had so many elements of inequality and uncertainty, Miss Paget gradually found that the understanding which existed between herself and Victor Fitz-Gibbon was beset with uneasiness. Her father had a sort of constitutional aversion to young men, due, doubtless, to the long years in which he considered his talents had been wasted in abortive efforts to sharpen wits that, in most cases, it had pleased Providence to make very dull.

'My dear, don't you think that young man is rather more frivolous even than the average of his species?' he said one evening after Victor had gone away, having 'dropped in' for an hour's chat by prearrangement with Helen.

Miss Paget flushed, and a hasty answer rose to her tongue, for even a dispassionate critic might consider the judgment unfair. Though it was true that Victor was not deeply learned in any sciences, yet he had a quick and active intelligence, was well-read for his years, and had an easy fluency of expression, which sometimes bordered on eloquence when his imagination was touched. On second thoughts Miss Paget smothered her resentment, and answered lightly:

'No, papa; I don't think so. I cannot even guess why you come to that conclusion.'

'He smiles far too readily. What was there in the latest method of disintegrating nebulae to amuse one?'

'I assure you, papa, he was not disrespectful to the nebulae,' answered Miss Paget, smiling as she recalled the little joke that had passed in an undertone between herself and Victor while her father read one of his 'notes' on those glowing masses of incandescent hydrogen which look like mere stains of light in the sky. They ought not, perhaps, to have exchanged any words; but it is hard to be kept among the stupendous mysteries of the solar system while so many little earthly trifles have an enchanting interest of their own.

The next time Victor paid an evening call he found Mrs. Tillotson in possession of Helen. The lady lived near enough to Lancaster House to indulge in those promiscuous and unceremonious calls which are the growth of a long-standing intimacy. If Mrs. Tillotson's favourite shares went up with a bound or had an alarming downward tendency, if she had an invitation to Government House and felt uncertain which would be the most appropriate dress, if a mutual friend was very ill, if her dressmaker had made an unconscionable overcharge—in a word, if there was any news or no news at all to talk over, Mrs. Tillotson, when disengaged for the evening and knew that Miss Paget was at home, would drop in with her favourite maid, who had a long-standing friendship with the Paget servants; and mistress and maid would have a cosy chat that often lengthened into an hour or two.

On this occasion Mrs. Tillotson had come to consult her friend on an important point. Her only sister, married to a delicate clergyman, had thoughts of accompanying her husband on a trip to Italy. The congregation were going to pay his expenses; but as to that of his wife and two daughters, if they went, it could only be with the help of some of their wealthier relations.

'Now, my dear, do you think that my means would justify me in presenting them with a cheque for £500?' said Mrs. Tillotson solemnly.

As a matter of fact, her means would enable her to do so twice over without any sensible diminution of her daily comforts. But though Mrs. Tillotson was a woman of innumerable verbal enthusiasms, life was destitute of motives to make her part with money readily.

'I should like to do it for the sake of Blanche, my eldest niece. She has a real talent for drawing. My dear, you would be surprised to see some of her later work, so full of soul, and very little touched up by Mr. Trim. He is a most capable young man, and has a wonderful eye for genius, and such a sense of humour. Every pupil taught by anyone else amuses him so much. He puts them back invariably, but then he brings them on most rapidly again. He is delighted with Blanche's last design for a pair of bellows; and, of course, the Old Masters and so on would be of immense advantage to her. And, do you know, my dear, there's another thing——'

Mrs. Tillotson dropped her voice mysteriously, and drew her chair a little nearer to Miss Paget, who was listening with a small portion of her mind, while the rest was occupied with conjectures as to whether Victor would come soon, and, if so, whether Mrs. Tillotson would express her delight at his having a friend like Miss Paget, who was like a second mother to him!

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'Of course, one doesn't like to be a matchmaker; but still, the other evening at Maria's,² when they were having a musical evening, I thought Victor Fitz-Gibbon was a good deal impressed by Blanche's singing. Of course, it is early yet to begin to think of his marrying.'

'Oh, not at all, Mrs. Tillotson,' answered Miss Paget, with a bright smile. The thought of the numerous young ladies with whom Victor would come into friendly contact did not invariably amuse her, but in this case she felt that she could afford to be generous. 'You see, it is simply a question of means. Nearly all the Crown Princes of Europe marry at twenty-one or twenty-two.'

'Well, my dear, he would be just twenty-two when they returned; for, if they all go, they won't leave till after Christmas. And, you know, a girl coming back after a year's absence-----'

Mrs. Tillotson's confidences were interrupted by Victor's entrance. She gave a flurried, conscious glance at Helen, and then, with ha tact that was her prerogative, she exclaimed:

'Talk of an angel, and you'll hear the rustling of his wings!³ Do you know, my dear Victor, Miss Paget was just saying that, as you have ample means, you would most likely marry, like the Crown Princes of Europe, at twenty-one or twenty-two.'

'Really? Then I hope Miss Paget will be at my wedding if I am to be ranked with such fortunate individuals,' said Victor lightly.

But Miss Paget, who was learning every nuance of his tones and expressions by heart, felt that there was an inflection of annoyance in his voice--felt sure, too, that Mrs. Tillotson's half-embarrassed, half-conscious manner would lead him to suppose that she had been taken into confidence as to their semi-engagement, though only on the previous day she had positively forbidden him to write to his mother on the matter. Some further speeches of Mrs. Tillotson's, marked by the same good sense, must have deepened this impression; for when Miss Paget next met Victor, his first words were:

'Well, Helen, after finding your "habitual Providence" knew all about our affairs, I thought I might tell the dear old mater, and I did.'

'Oh, the dreadful old woman! And she would stay till after you had gone, so that I had no opportunity of explaining to you,' said Miss Paget, choking a little as she spoke. She knew enough of Mrs. Fitz-Gibbon to feel very sure that her first and last impulse, on learning that her handsome boy, with his newly-acquired fortune, proposed to marry a woman so much older than himself, would be to throw cold water on the project as much as lay in her power. 'Well, never mind, what must be must be,' she added sombrely, finding some relief in that strain of fatalism which sooner or later invades the consciousness of all who try to plot and plan ifor any individuality beyond their own.

Victor had followed his first impulse in writing to his mother of the understanding between himself and jher. If Mrs. Tillotson had not, in a manner, driven him to this action, someone else no doubt would have done so.

In the meantime Mrs. Tillotson began to appear in so drearily objectionable a light to Miss Paget, that she began to ask herself on what grounds their friendship was really founded. 'An old friend of your dear mother's!' These were the words kwith which Mrs. Tillotson had embraced Miss Paget, but not until after she had come into lthe fortune of three thousand a year! An old friend of her mother? Yes; so was that Mrs. Selway, who had on Helen's eighteenth birthday volunteered to bring her out⁴ at a Government House ball in Sydney!

Oh, how well Miss Paget remembered every detail of that squalid 'coming out,' which was burnt into her memory as with branding-irons! They were in the mdepths of their poverty when the invitations came for this special ball to Professor and the Misses Paget. It was a more than ordinarily brilliant affair, because of the presence of some French royalties, and all Sydney was agog, as only a strictly democratic city seems to have the secret of being when such an affair is in the wind. Everyone was talking of it--those who had invitations and those who had none; the tradesmen who were busier because the great ball was coming off, and the tradesmen who had nothing to do with it.

'It is a pity we could not sell our invitations to nthose people who would give their eyes to go,' said one of the elder Miss Pagets; 'the price they would give would pay the oservant's wages and buy us new dresses all round.'

Then Mrs. Selway had dropped in--an old ancestral friend who somehow managed to live luxuriously on a narrow income. She also had an invitation, but no excuse for going, having just then no young relatives to chaperon.

'Couldn't Helen go?' she said. 'It is her eighteenth birthday too. It would be like her coming out. Oh, poor dear!'

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she ought to have a chance. I'll go with her myself rather than that she shouldn't have the pleasure.'

After a little discussion it was decided that Helen should go. There was a gown belonging to her eldest step-sister which, with a little alteration, was found fit and proper for the occasion. It was a white Liberty silk, which, after being carefully ironed, took to itself a lustre⁵ mendacious enough to deceive all but the eyes of other women. At the last moment the fit was found a little defective, and pins were used in a great hurry. One of them jagged Helen's shoulder cruelly, but she endured it without wincing. The other part of the performance was pinfinitely harder to bear. She had lain awake at nights sleepless with pleasurable excitement in anticipation of this joy. And it resolved itself into sitting out nearly the whole evening without a partner—a pin lacerating her flesh! She longed to rshrink away somewhere sin the darkness, but not until she had been twice in to supper would Mrs. Selway leave the brilliant scene. The new Governor spent more than his income in the discharge of his Viceregal duties, and the suppers at Government House were then very good.

'Just the sort of thing Mrs. Tillotson would do,' reflected Miss Paget, as hazy plans floated into her mind for relaxing the intimacy between them, and her heart hardened with the half-vindictive feelings which reminiscences of the days of her penury always brought to her. But it is difficult to devise a working scheme for cutting an old friend who lives within sight of your chimneys. And, after all, Miss Paget could not long keep a sense of grievance at an acute pitch. Only of late it seemed as if one cause of tuneasiness had hardly passed away before another arose.

It was in the nature of things that Victor's inheritance of a handsome competence should greatly enhance his social value, and that he should be much sought after for those amusements in which the distinctively youthful of both sexes play the most prominent part. Thus at balls and amateur theatricals, in which he so often took a leading rTMle, Miss Paget, when present, was for the most part a mere spectator. When ladies at a comparatively early age begin to speak slightingly of the commoner forms of amusement, they are apt to be credited with a more enduring contempt of such pleasures than they really feel. Hostesses are usually mothers, and readily resign themselves to the belief that a young woman who is by way of being an heiress, and is still pretty and attractive, habitually despises dancing. An eligible bachelor, on the other hand, can never hope to escape their invitations unless he marries, or begins to attend week-night meetings of the Salvation Army.⁶

Victor began by being very much disappointed when he went to balls and parties and found Miss Paget so often missing.

'You ought to come, if only for my sake, you know, Helen,' he said two weeks after they had landed from the Mogul. The words were sweet in her ears, and yet she tortured herself with the question, 'How much does he really mind?' Victor had been at a large party at the house of a mutual friend on the previous evening, and had given a lively account of the affair.

'And were your partners very pretty and amiable, and nicely dressed, Victor?' said Miss Paget, not making any direct reply to this assertion.

'Oh, they were very jolly, most of them,' he answered. 'But in the midst of it all I would think now and then, "If only Helen were here! She is most likely alone——" '

'Or asleep. Didn't you think that I might be asleep, and dreaming I was with you at Mrs. Purdie's ball?'

'Not at eleven o'clock.'

'Which was the only time you remembered me?' said Miss Paget, laughing.

'No; the time I thought of you most. What were you doing then, Helen?'

'Let me see. Papa stayed a little later than usual in the library, so I had the tray taken in there with his whisky and Apollinaris,⁷ and I heard how the great d b%ocles of the glacial epoch swept down the enormous d bris of the moraines into the valleys,⁸ whose banks had been already eroded. What could be more fascinating?'

'But, Helen, you must find it dull. I know it is awfully good of you to devote yourself to your father as you do, but, you see, you can't do it always; and couldn't one of the maids see to the tray if you were away?'

'But she wouldn't care to hear about the d b%ocles,' replied Miss Paget, smiling.

Then she asked Victor how he was getting on with his uncle in the warehouse. The young man's face clouded a little, but he answered lightly:

'Oh, like a house on fire—that is, I'm the house, and uncle puts me out at least twenty times a day. Perhaps it's mostly my fault, but if it is, I had no idea I was such a cross-grained brute. I was copying out an indent the other day—but there, I won't inflict such stuff on you.'

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'But I'm interested, Victor.'

'And, faith, I'll keep up your interest by not going too much into detail,' he answered. 'There is nothing more tiresome than relations who quarrel, except relations who admire each other. Uncle Stuart and I will never be tedious in the last way. Helen, I think I'll be off to the Bush for a few months, if any decent excuse offers itself. After all, we see very little of each other. What between your "habitual Providence" and—by Jove, that's her ring now!'

It was shortly after this conversation that Miss Paget, in the half-careless way in which a well-bred woman can put a request without making it, said to one and another of her party-giving friends:

'Do you know, I am suffering under a revival of folly. I got quite fond of dancing once more on the Mogul, but my friends keep on giving me credit for being quite beyond caring for the sound of dance-music.'

Very soon Miss Paget had as many invitations to balls, dances, and even informal hops, as the youngest debutante could desire, but in a uvery short time she felt convinced that it would be vdoubtful policy for her to resume such gaieties seriously. She was constantly comparing herself with the youngest and lightest-hearted of the girls around her—constantly thinking how the record of her twenty-nine years, of her buried embittered youth, was wall thrown into clearer xrelief when she stood near Victor, with his laughing eyes, and unlined face flushed with the bloom of early manhood.

'A dear old thing, isn't she? And fancy taking to balls and dances now, after despising them so long!' she overheard a girl say to Victor one evening, and she did not doubt that the words were meant for her ear, for Victor had been teasing her for more dances than she could give him; and the speaker was one of those young ladies who do not scruple at times to show a marked preference for the men they consider most eligible. 'A dear old thing!' The words stung her, while she despised herself for heeding them. She noticed that for the rest of the evening Victor carefully avoided the girl guilty of the impertinence, and her heart throbbed with gratitude for his unflinching loyalty to her. But she knew well the more he exhibited any feeling beyond the courtesy of casual acquaintances, the more tongues there would be to wag in a chorus of wonder and scorn and incredulity.

They met next day at a garden-party, and Victor taxed her with keeping too much out of his way. Her father stood near, speaking of some new astronomical discovery. Miss Paget and Victor moved a little away.

'For my part, I shall never believe in astronomers,' she said, 'till one of them demonstrates how the earth came to be the parody of a forgotten planet.'

'A parody?'

'Yes, where the connecting-link between people and their proper destiny is left out.'

'Helen, how dare you be inventing melancholy on such a day as this? Look at those roses, and the sea beyond the trees, and the chickens of the Madonna9 singing little hymns all the time, and me by the side of you. What do you want that you have not got?' said Victor, turning on her with laughing reproach.

'Youth—youth—youth!' were the words that rose to her lips with a passionate longing to utter them; but instead she said, with a careless smile: 'Oh, just a guarantee from fate that I shall always walk the stage bombarded with bouquets.'

'To the sound of melodious orchestral music?'

'Yes, kept out of sight so that I may not be offended by the scraping of the fiddle-bows. Joking aside though, I do often think that life is more like the skeleton of a pantomime than a play, though your poets are so fond of comparing the world to a stage.'

'My poets! aren't you falling in love with any of them on your own account, Helen?'

Miss Paget shook her head with a slight smile. Books had never been much to her. As for the poets, they seemed to her to be always attitudinizing—inventing words for imaginary yraptures, and emotions that entered little into real life. They wrote endlessly about constancy, and yet they generally ended by making love to other men's wives, though they seldom indulged in the practice to their own. Nature, too, was little to her beyond a setting which, apart from cultivation, had either too many trees or too few—always some quality in excess that a little repelled her.

a. of his species] Om. E1

b. an enchanting] so enchanting an Adl

c. when] when she was E1

d. have] both have E1

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- e. that of] Om. E1
- f. with] by E1
- g. enable] have enabled E1
- h. a] the Adl E1
- i. for any . . . their own] over-much, for themselves or others E1
- j. her] Miss Paget E1
- k. with which] that* Adl
- l. the] her E1
- m. depths] depth Adl
- n. those] some of the E1
- o. servant's] servants'* Adl
- p. infinitely] so infinitely E1
- q. a partner] partners E1
- r. shrink] go E1
- s. in] into Adl in to E1
- t. uneasiness] discontent Adl
- u. very] Om. E1
- v. doubtful] a doubtful Adl very doubtful E1
- w. all] Om. E1
- x. relief] relief in her face E1
- y. raptures, and] raptures and for E1

Chapter X.

A few days after the garden-party Miss Paget wrote a note to Victor telling him that she had finally decided not to go out in the evenings henceforth except when her father went also. 'I have just sent an excuse to the Masons,' she wrote, 'and it has occurred to me that you might wonder I did not turn up. I have, however, made an arrangement by which I think we can always be sure of seeing each other, at least, on Saturday evening. I have engaged Mrs. Tillotson to lunch and spend the whole of the afternoon of that day with me each week.'

For a short time Miss Paget felt sure she had done wisely in returning to her normal mode of life.

'It is very good of you to give up so much, Helen, without even a murmur,' Victor said admiringly.

'Poor papa, it is too bad to make a cat's-paw of him like this! He hardly knows whether I am in the house or out of it after dinner if we are alone, unless he has mislaid a dictionary,' thought Miss Paget. But though she did not enjoy the deceit, her eyes brightened with pleasure at Victor's quick appreciation of her supposed unselfishness.

'Fortunately, papa is fond of the theatre, and we are to have some good opera comique soon,' she said. 'Oh, the joy of looking at pink-silk bodices instead of watching old gentlemen dining; of seeing prettily-painted creatures giving joyful hops instead of retailing washed-out moralities!'

Victor came much oftener than the appointed Saturday evenings. Miss Paget's vivacious talk, her enthusiasm as to all he did or said, proved a centre for his thoughts. Events acquired an added interest for him from the charm of reviewing them with her. She was never difficult or exacting with him. She was much above the average run of girls he met, in intelligence, tact, and insight; there was a subtle flattery in the thought that she so highly prized his companionship. Her influence over him was so largely of the moral kind, that it was in reality increased by the thought of her renouncing the more seductive dissipations of society, so that her duties might be more loyally fulfilled in the quiet seclusion of home.

But gradually the underlying strain of falseness in their relationship weighed on Miss Paget's mind. She was conscious that she measured her words, modified her judgments, exaggerated her likes and dislikes—in a word, that she assiduously toned her mind to suit his. She knew that a part of her character was entirely shielded from his observation, that his estimate of her was in many respects falsely favourable, and that she could not trust his love to let him see her as she really was.

'You are always so cheerful, Helen,' he would say. 'I think it must be the people who are constantly going to parties who get so awfully stale and dull.'

'Ah, you think I don't depend on outside things for amusement; but I do.'

'As, for example?'

'The solemn old dinner-parties, two hours long; the musical assemblies, where the youngest performer is a cracked piano that came to South Australia with the first pioneers——'

'And don't forget the scientific conversaciones, where the aboriginal skulls are handed round,'³ said Victor, entering into the humour of the thing.

'Yes; and the skeletons of rare beetles, which take away one's breath with love and admiration.'

They both laughed, and then Victor said, half ruefully:

'Just the very things to which people never think of asking me.'

'No, my dear boy, you would be quite an anachronism there. People would begin to ask how you came to wander so far out of your own century.'

When Helen spoke like this, Victor felt how transparently sincere she was; how little she shrank from dwelling to him on their disparity of years, which other girls would have done their best to ignore.

But while outwardly, and always in Victor's society, Miss Paget had more rippling spirits, and seemed younger than was her wont of old, she secretly often fell into a nervous, morbid, anxious habit of mind, in which she seemed constantly to be waiting for news of disaster. If she was longer than usual in seeing Victor, if business or social engagements obliged him to hurry away after coming, if he appeared to be more thoughtful or in higher spirits than usual—all formed a subject for surmises, for doubts, for sickening apprehensions. How could she tell when the hour might come in which the invincible fascination of youth—the dewy April charm of a girl of

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sixteen or seventeen—might lead him to perceive that his Mogul proposal was a boyish freak cunningly encouraged? She knew that to see him, to be near him, to find his eye resting on her, to feel the pressure of his hand, the touch of his lips, made the blood in her veins course with strange, sharp tremors as if of imprisoned flame. It was like a revelation of what life really meant.

Yet all the time she knew also that his feeling for her was essentially different. She made no illusions for herself on this point. Her great and only hope was that, as time went on, his frank, affectionate nature would gradually root itself in his attachment to her till it became a bond strong enough to weather all the storms and chances of life. But to have time granted to one—is not that the supreme gift invariably denied, the supreme denial that turns a possible victory into the most disastrous of failures?

In the midst of Miss Paget's ceaseless turmoil of hopes and apprehensions, a day came on which she seemed to find all her fears verified.

'By the way, have you heard, Helen, that Florry⁴ Mason and Victor Fitz-Gibbon are evidently falling in love with each other?' said Mrs. Tillotson, looking up from a hideous Afghan blanket she was tricotting⁵ for some bazaar.

Miss Paget could never recollect what reply she made, but doubtless it was found satisfactory by her good old ancestral friend, who never went about without a packet of leaflet tracts⁶ and a large pouch of gossip, more or less inchoate.

She rambled on with divers other morsels of intelligence till her carriage—which had been resumed once more owing to a brilliant rise in silver shares⁷—called to take her to some charity meeting in the city.

Miss Paget sat for some time overcome with a confused agitation, hardly knowing what thoughts passed through her mind, the first coherent one of which she was conscious being: 'It is only what I have been expecting. . . and after a little I shall feel, perhaps, that gis a relief.'

In the meantime she was stricken with a sensation of ha dull, physical prostration. She went to the window and involuntarily pushed it open, feeling that the atmosphere had suddenly grown very heavy. There were swallows wheeling over the fountain opposite, darting down to the water's surface, and then taking short flights into the air, their clear twittering notes filling the whole atmosphere. An Ophir rosebush near at hand drooped under a cataract of burning buds⁸ and early opening petals. In the near distance the city lay fringed all round with the wide shadowy park-lands.⁹ To the east the hills, in softly curved folds, rose in the blue air, their slopes sprinkled with houses gleaming whitely in the midst of wide vineyards, orchards, and gardens, all bathed in the warm, still sunshine of a cloudless September day.

'It is all very peaceful and beautiful. How much there is in the world one might care for!' Miss Paget said to herself, as she looked at the scene. Then she sighed, a short, half-sobbing sigh. 'Am I going to cry?' she said half aloud, as if there were someone near whose presence would save her from such imbecility.

At that moment a messenger came from her father, and she hastened into the library.

'Helen, do you know anything of the second volume of my new Greek Anthology?¹⁰ Then where can it be? I want to look it up. I am not sure, but I strongly suspect that my old friend Codrington has treated an amphimacer as a dactyl.¹¹ It is hard not to be able to consult anyone on a point like this. Can anyone tell me why a man like Asterisk is called a professor of dead languages?'

'Unless it is, papa, that he sometimes wears a hood, and has, perhaps, cut open a toad,'¹² answered Miss Paget, a suggestion which pleased her father.

After sundry tomes and magazines had been turned over, the missing volume was discovered. While searching for it, Miss Paget suddenly thought that, of all the people she knew, no one retailed more baseless tales than Mrs. Tillotson. She would not believe this. And yet again, as she mused over the past two weeks, a hundred confirmatory proofs rose up. How very often of late had Victor been at the Masons' house—how often had he spoken of the family! Miss Paget, hardly knowing what she did, seized a pen, and for the first time in her life gave expression to the tremulous, all-absorbing emotion with which this love had flooded her life. Swift as the swiftest sea-swallows thoughts came to her. . . . Never, never before had the flower of vivid, adequate expression come so fully within her range. When she finished, she resolved to deny herself to Victor till he wrote to say this letter had reached him. She sealed and addressed it, then stared at it for a few moments and tore it into tiny fragments. No, never would she so humiliate herself for the sake of any human being, or any possible happiness!

At half-past eight there was a ring at the hall-door. Miss Paget felt as if her heart were beating in her ears

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when she saw Victor entering. Had he come to tell her?

'Helen, you are not well,' he said, holding her hand as he looked into her face. He was in evening dress, and looked so young and light-hearted, so strong and well, it seemed as though his mere presence should give the lie to fear and gnawing care. But it did not.

'Oh, it is only my throat that is a little queer,' answered Miss Paget.

At the moment it was true, for she felt a dry, convulsive motion in it, and her voice sounded a little hoarse. Victor was all concern.

'Very likely you have been reading aloud to your father half the day?' he said a little reproachfully.

It darted through her mind like a sting that the picture limned of her in the young man's mind was much more beautiful than the reality. For a moment she felt as if she must tell him all—her corroding fears, her miserable little subterfuges. But she managed to keep herself in hand.

'I have read very little to-day,' she answered; 'nothing, I believe, but an awfully stupid little story in a book I happened to pick up.'

'May I hear what it was?'

'A mere nothing about an old French duke who had been very much in love, and then got very much out of it, and told the lady so, giving her at the same time very good advice.'

'He must have been a magnanimous child of nature,' said Victor, laughing. 'What could he find to say?'

'Oh, he said, "We loved each other once, but now it is quite over. Believe me, constancy is a very tiresome and a very doubtful virtue. It is much better to forget things when they are once done with. This is a very pretty little dog of yours. Who gave it to you?"'

'Oh, he was jealous of her! Mind, you are never to take a little dog from anybody but me, Helen,' said Victor.

How buoyantly he laughed! After all, there could not be a shadow of truth in the Tillotson story. He would not meet her eyes with such frank good-will if there were. He was on his way to a musical evening at a house not far off. He meant to come earlier, so as to be able to stay longer; but he had been kept at the office, going over miles of figures with his uncle. When leaving, he expressed a hope that he should see her at a private dramatic entertainment at the house of the Masons. She had accepted tentatively for herself and her father. But she did not know till the curtain rose who the dramatic personae were.

It is well established that no drama can have the distinction of being performed by amateurs unless it has a rejected and successful lover. It seemed equally established just then with some of the people who went in for such entertainments in Adelaide that their success hung on securing Victor for the rôle of the triumphant lover.

'Nature moulded him for that part,' was the verdict of a young married lady, who seemed to cherish a conviction that nature had, with equal benevolence, designed herself for the part of the young woman who is agreeably harassed by rival suitors. But on the present occasion this rôle was sustained by Miss Florry Mason, whose name had been coupled with Victor's by Miss Paget's friend on the previous day. . . . Yes, she was very young, and often very pretty, with that sparkling, irregular kind of prettiness that is far more dangerous than beauty of a more refined and classic type.

The play began with an amusing scene of a misunderstanding and a gradual reconciliation between the young lady and Victor. They both acted with great verve and an absence of the stiffness that so often renders amateur actors so pathetic a failure.

'What a charming pair of lovers they make!' was whispered on all sides.

Mrs. Tillotson, nodding and smiling, made her way to Miss Paget between the acts.

'You see, my dear, it is as I told you,' she whispered.

In the enthusiasm of watching a love affair in its nascent stages, the good lady had quite forgotten her vague hopes regarding the niece whose designs for bellows were to be so much elevated by a study of the Old Masters.

Miss Paget gave an answering smile, and said they were just the right age to play at being lovers without being ridiculous. To others who hinted and speculated in the same vein she made replies equally nimble and indifferent.

She found it an interminable evening. Now and then she had a little sensation of giddiness, as if she were clambering over places with insufficient foothold. But she chatted and smiled, and looked grave and arch, amused and sympathetic, quite at the right moments till the close. . . . She recalled posters she had seen on an old carved gateway at Cairo, announcing the arrival of some jugglers in big scarlet words that were specially eloquent as to

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the 'excentricit s a riennes par la jolie et l'in narrable equilibriste Mlle. Cardinale.'¹⁴ She felt as if she were a second Mlle. Cardinale, but, fortunately, without any audience beyond herself.

She told her father he looked fatigued. He admitted feeling so, and their carriage was ordered early. Victor overtook them in the hall.

'You are going, Helen, and I have not even spoken to you,' he said in an undertone after he had shaken hands with her father.

'Oh yes,' she answered, smiling, but there was no mirth in her eyes. 'All mthese pretty speeches you made as the Romeo of the play—I took them all to myself. Was I very silly?'

Despite her smile and the studied carelessness of her words, there was a strained, hard ring in her voice, and Victor regarded her with a half-puzzled, nhalf-inquiring look.

'Will you be at home to-morrow evening?' he said, as he followed her to the carriage. 'Then may I come for an hour or so? Thank you so very much!'

When he came, the first thing he spoke of was a letter which had reached the office that morning—the unexpected resignation of the purser¹⁵ at the mine in which he was now largely interested. Mr. Stuart Drummond was chairman of directors, and one of his clerks acted as town secretary.

'So here's a chance for me to go into the Bush, Helen. Shall I go to the Colmar Mine?' he said, half jestingly.

Her heart leapt with a quick sense of deliverance at the thought. . . . Oh, if Victor were only safe in the social isolation of such a place for the next two or three months!

'The Colmar Mine! Where is that?' she asked, to gain time while she debated with herself what would be the best grounds on which to urge his departure.

They looked up a map of South Australia, and he showed her whereabouts in the midst of the Salt-bush country the Colmar reef stretched for miles from east to west. They both looked at it, neither of them speaking for a little.

The evening was warm, and the doors and windows were wide open. In the distance rose the shrill whistle of oa railway train; nearer at hand the rumble of tram-cars and the roll of carriages. And in between these common sounds of a city stole at intervals the long-drawn, plaintive calls of a curlew from the midst of a bosky dell of weeping-willows on the banks of the Torrens.

'Wouldn't it be dreadfully dull for you if you went there?' asked Miss Paget slowly.

'If I were it would be a new sensation; and you know you told me once on the Mogul that was one of the elements of happiness,' he answered, smiling.

'Did I? I knew nothing about it then,' replied Miss Paget half bitterly, as she realized how the new sensations of the past few weeks had robbed her of all peace of mind. 'And you would have to rough it a good deal,' she added, after a pause.

'Not very much. It would be a half-and-half sort of arrangement, without the joys of society or the bliss of lawlessness. That's one reason why I didn't take so very kindly to the thought of going—that and Uncle Stuart's anxiety that I should take the billet¹⁶ for a couple of months. Now you see, Helen, what a cantankerous Irishman I am.'

'And the parties and amateur theatricals, don't they count, too?'

'Ah, yes. By Jove, if I go, Miss Mason will have me drawn and quartered! We were to give three representations of the "Old Story"¹⁷ in the next two weeks in aid of some charities.'

Miss Paget would not trust herself to discuss Miss Mason's view of the case.

'You would sooner go ptravelling about in the woods?' she said slowly.

'Oh yes. The travelling and camping out and cooking are qall so jolly! Did you ever eat potatoes roasted in their jackets in hot ashes?'

'No, never.'

'Then, Helen, you don't know how really heavenly-minded a potato can be. And the teals cooked between red-hot stones in a hole in the ground, and the waking up at night with the stars shining through the gum-tree overhead, making their nightly procession across the sky, and all sorts of mysterious sounds in the woods! That curlew—do you hear her?—brings it all back to me—the vacations we used to spend hunting on the Murray.'

As Victor listened to the soft wailing notes a strange and sudden sense of disappointment fell on him. Fortune had smiled on him far beyond his expectations in those boyish school-days not long gone by, and he was an

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affianced lover, for so in honour he considered himself. But what was it that had escaped him? what inexplicable charm had eluded him? A lover!—and accepted! The bare thought used to agitate him with shudders of vague delicious expectations, and now it was all so calm, so matter-of-fact. Was it the sobering influence of property and of being nearly come of age?

Unconsciously he was overtaken by one of those brief, wistful reveries that come alike to age and early youth. Age, with its fatigue and ennui, its weariness of disillusion and wasted effort, its growing indigence of feeling and of the springs of action, takes refuge in memories of that vanished springtide when none of the daughters of music were laid low. Youth, with its keen, unworn senses, with its capacities of sensation deeper than the source of tears and laughter, vibrating to the verge of pain to all the mysterious calls of life, finds in such reveries a foretaste of the thrilling adventures, prophesied by the fulness of life that throbs in its veins and fancies.

Miss Paget saw the look of dreamy absorption in Victor's face, and the words 'evidently falling in love' came back to her like a ghostly warning.

'One sees that you have made sonnets of it all before now, Victor,' said Miss Paget, uneasy at this lapse of sequence in their talk.

He did not repel the insinuation. Indeed, it was over some of his boyish verses that their comradeship on the Mogul had first taken a tenderer and more confidential tinge.

'I think one gets rather sick of so much town,' he said, with a short, half-checked sigh.

'Well, if my wishes have weight with you, I say go to the Colmar Mine.'

Victor looked a little taken aback at the calm seriousness of Miss Paget's manner. She went on in the same earnest tone:

'I have been thinking for the last week or two that our months of waiting would be a more real probation if you went quite away.'

'You would really like me to go, Helen? Then that decides the matter.'

Victor closed the atlas, and stood up; strode to the open window, and then back to Miss Paget's side. The prospect of plunging into a new mode of existence had in it some undefined element of relief.

'I'll take a hammer or two and go prospecting till I discover a new gold-mine. I'll load you with barbaric crowns of unalloyed metal when I return, Helen,' he said, with boyish glee. 'The greatest drawback is that Uncle Stuart will be pleased at my going. I wonder what the mater will say?'

As for Miss Paget, she was so deeply moved that she could not at first trust herself to speak. She was overcome with a feeling of relief and thankfulness at this unlooked-for solution of the miserable and humiliating state of anxiety and unrest into which she had fallen. She despised herself for it, and fought against it all the time, but unavailingly. She had told herself that she should in reality covet every opportunity of putting Victor to the test of changing. But though she still retained the power of seeing things as they were, she had lost that of being dispassionate, or acting sincerely. She had gone on her way so placidly—with so cool and conscious a self-possession—all these years. The nearest approach to love-making in her life hitherto had been a few sober proposals of marriage from middle-aged men. They made her smile—the idea of people at their time of life risking their peaceful solitude by imitating the squires of troubadour songs. But no, they had no thought of emotion; it was rather the prudent union of two sufficient incomes that had fired the imagination of her elderly swains. . . . And now in the midst of her assured tranquillity she had been suddenly snared. It seemed as if her limits in the range of other emotions, and those biting memories of an unhappy, loveless girlhood, all combined to make her cling to this one passionate affection with a vehemence which held her will and judgment in subjection.

Her voice was a little shaken, but Miss Paget smiled as she said:

'But though your uncle may be pleased, some others will be sorry. Remember, Miss Mason——'

'Oh yes! Can you keep a secret, Helen? That young lady is to be my sister-in-law. Lance has proposed, and is accepted. They are waiting for her father's consent. Lance doesn't expect the paternal blessing till he gets a rise in his salary.'

'Oh, really!'

That was all Miss Paget's response to the news which scattered her worst fears to the wind. But she did not regret having helped Victor to decide on going to the mine. Still less so, when, two days before he left town, her father suddenly resolved to go to Colombo to meet an old friend there, who had been ordered by his doctor to leave England for a warmer climate.

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'Perhaps we may bring Professor Codrington back with us, Helen,' said her father.

And when Miss Paget made some rather irrelevant reply, he said, in a somewhat severe tone:

'My dear, I presume you are aware that he is the greatest living authority on classic metres?'

This information Miss Paget duly communicated to Victor when he came to say good-bye.

'Well, don't you let him present you with a little dog, else I'll be making speeches to you on the wisdom of forgetting things,' said Victor gaily.

Then he kissed her and went away. When she was alone Miss Paget crouched down as if strength had suddenly departed from her.

'But I will retain the command of myself,' she murmured brokenly.

And she registered a great vow that, come what might, she would not, till the period of probation was over, betray the strength of the passion that had mastered her nature.

a. evenings] evening Adl

b. evening] evenings E1

c. of the] Om. E1

d. if] when E1

e. much] so much E1

f. knew also] also knew E1

g. is] it is Adl E1

h. a] Om. Adl E1

i. strong] so strong Adl and radiantly strong E1

j. But it did not.] Om. E1

k. Miss Paget's friend] Mrs. Tillotson E1

l. being] seeming E1

m. these] those E1

n. half-inquiring^o] enquiring Adl

o. a] the Adl

p. travelling . . . woods] in the prospecting party, then E1

q. all] Om. E1

r. troubadour songs] troubadour's song Adl

s. Miss Paget] she E1

t. in his salary] Om. E1

u. That] This Adl E1

v. two] a few E1

Chapter XI.

The Colmar Mine is three hundred miles to the north-east of Adelaide, in the Hundred of Colmar, in the heart of the Salt-bush country—a far-reaching district, known variously according to local variations as the Salt-bush Wilderness, the Dwarf Desert, and the Waterless Country. But by whatever name it may be familiar before it is seen, the region transcends in uncompromising bareness any mental vision that may be evoked by its names.

A wilderness calls up a sombre uninhabited country; a desert, land that has never been tilled; while waterless country is in itself a description of parched-up barrenness. But a wilderness may have luxuriant herbage. A desert may consist of leafy scrub or shady forest.² And a land in which rain is seldom seen, and rivers never, yet sometimes has great rocks whose shadow, falling on the thirsty ground, may serve as a symbol of man's salvation.³ But in this eerie waste there is no grass, no trees, no water—hardly the semblance of a hill. In many parts the sole vegetation consists of the salt-bush, a sad-coloured, low-creeping bush, more gray than green, which breaks when trodden on, with a brittle snap like dry stubble.

In some places the salt-bush grows in sparse clumps, in others the shrub is dense, and spreads more continuously. And yet again there are wide stretches in which the earth lies almost naked, baked into reddish gaping fissures. When rain falls, it is with a tempestuous rush—in a fury that lashes the earth instead of nourishing it into fruitfulness. The stony water-courses are at such times filled with water; but high as it may rise, in a few days all traces of it disappear. The slender gray-green filaments of nameless plants die away. The earth, lying in flat monotonous uniformity; the cloudless sky, pallid with continual heat; the wide majestic sweep of the horizon, where the silent earth seems to pass into the quiet sky; the austere desolation and sterility—these are the things that remain.

The air is seldom cloven with the beating of a bird's wings. Still more rarely does the presence of man break the solitude. Sheep-runs are few and far between. Many that were once fairly prosperous are now forsaken. The squatter might struggle with the chronic drought, for the salt-bush is an ascetic that has learned the secret of living without water in the most barren soil, and sheep that are to the manner born can live on salt-bush. But a more implacable foe than drought came in the rabbit, who is fruitful, and multiplies in these arid regions, till every other creature that has the breath of life is exterminated. The rabbits swarm in the Hundred of Colmar, but they cannot affect its chief industry, which is mining. The country is here intersected with low, sullen-looking reefs, running chiefly from east to west, marked at varying intervals by ironstone outcrops. It is on the southern side, near the western end of one of these reefs, that the Colmar Mine is situated, within eighteen miles of Nilpeena, a small township on the Great Northern Railway line. Half a mile to the south-west of the mine there is a township, also called Colmar, that sprang into existence when the mine was started. An inn, two stores, a blacksmith's forge, a schoolroom, a post and telegraph-office, a boarding-house or two for the miners, comprise the bulk of the houses, all, with the exception of the front part of the inn, made of iron.

The country between Nilpeena and Colmar is partly wooded, partly dotted with reefs, and the reefs are dotted with the remains of many attempts at reaping an underground harvest out of the earth, whose surface looks as barren as that of the barren sea. It is apparent to the least instructed eye that the country is rich in minerals. Gold, silver and copper have been found there, but the land is mostly waterless, and operations for the most part have been fitful, erratic, and unskilful. Thus out of thirty so-called mines and diggings that have been started within a radius of forty miles in the Colmar district, all except half a dozen remain ineffectual beginnings.

Their sites are marked by shafts and trenches and esqualid debris of heaps of dirt and stones that look as if burrowed up by larger rabbits than those that have come to be the normal proprietors of the country. Around these heaps lie smaller ones—crude chimney-stacks of unmortared stones; rotting sacks, full of native grasses, that have served as mattresses; broken tent-poles, with fluttering strips of tattered calico or duck; smashed bottles; empty rusting tins; shreds of slop-store clothing; battered 'billy'-cans; old hats, whose slovenly greasy brims speak eloquently of the loafers that make up a large proportion of the nomads, ever on the move to these shifting El Dorados, where in a few days some 'lucky beggar'⁴ has picked up enough gold to keep him in grog and idleness for a couple of months or years, as the case may be. The Salt-bush country, as has been said, is, for the

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most part, a desert waste, with but few traces of man's presence. But those that are found in the form of deserted shafts and the sites of small alluvial diggings, degrade and vulgarize the landscape.

Even the Colmar Mine, which, since it first came into existence twenty years ago, has never been quite deserted, and is, as gold-mines go in South Australia, on a large and prosperous scale, forms an unsightly excrescence in the wide, austere and melancholy plain that stretches around it to unimaginable distances. The enormous stack vomiting out smoke night and day, the long irregular engine-house of galvanized iron, with its perpetual roar of machinery, the great heaps of bluish mullock, the equally massive mounds of red and chocolate-coloured tailings, the groups of squalid iron huts and motley patched tents in which the miners live, fall speak of a form of existence radically divorced from all that constitutes civilized life; an existence, for the most part, unlovely as that of a tribe of savages, but without the savage tribe's picturesque wanderings; also, it may be added, without its occasional famines. But though the daily routine and surroundings of Colmar are dull and prosaic to a degree,⁵ its history is not without some spice of adventure and variety. Gold was first found there by a solitary bushman, who had gone prospecting, and came upon a rich gutter of gold near the surface, from which he extracted over £500 worth of gold in a few weeks. He was robbed and murdered by two tramps, who surprised him as he was about to carry away his treasure. The murderers were convicted and hanged. The notoriety thus gained by the Colmar, as a place in which a man with a pick and shovel and a digger's dish⁶ might pick up a couple of hundred pounds a week, caused a great rush to the neighbourhood. But once the gravelly drifts of an old water-course had been exhausted, the place proved to have little alluvial gold. A long low reef close to the old creek was found, however, to have a very rich lode.⁷ In a short time a company was floated, chiefly with English capital.

Expensive machinery was bought; a large substantial house for the mining manager and numerous offices were erected. In short, everything was done on that handsome and lavish scale in which business is so often conducted when it consists in paying away other people's money. After a few years, during which the directors drew handsome fees, and the shareholders' experience largely consisted in paying unexpected calls, the English company was wound up, and the Colmar Mine was bought by a Melbourne syndicate. The new company had a shaft sunk a quarter of a mile away from the old one at what proved to be a junction of lodes in 'kindly country.'⁸ The results were for a time sensationally good. The sweet simplicity of high monthly dividends was maintained for nearly four years. During that time the Melbourne syndicate placed the shares on the Adelaide market and sold them all at an astonishingly profitable rate. It was then that Mr. Shaw Drummond became so large a shareholder. A year afterwards the dividends waned, and then finally stopped for more than two years. People said the lode had pinched out, and shares were very low indeed.

Then came a succession of sensational crashings. New shares were issued, and the capital thus called up was devoted to fresh development. Dividends were once more resumed in an intermittent way. So the Colmar Mine went on for years after it was owned by an Adelaide company—sometimes almost coming to a standstill, at others galvanized into feverish popularity by extraordinarily good crashings; sometimes paying phenomenal dividends, at other times none. One year it would be well managed; another well robbed. One month yielding forty per cent. on the capital invested; the next, perhaps not yielding enough to cover working expenses.

At last, after the history of the mine had been for two years more erratic than ever, an American manager⁹ of great skill and experience was secured. For more than a year Mr. Joseph S. Dunning worked the Colmar Mine at a wonderfully reduced cost and a rapidly increasing profit. But once more, what people began to call the bad luck of the Colmar re-asserted itself. One afternoon Dunning went down into the mine hale and well, and half an hour afterwards was taken out a corpse through the carelessness, or ignorance, of a new 'shift-boss,'¹⁰ who had at the wrong time set a fuse to a charge of dynamite. The directors despaired of finding anyone worthy of coming after the lamented American manager. But in the course of a week they succeeded in inducing an exceptionally good all-round man to take the position of manager at least tentatively—one whose mining experience was wide and thorough, and whose character stood high for probity. This was William Trevaskis, a justice of the peace and late M.P. for a town constituency. He had made a fortune chiefly by mining, but through two financial disasters, which occurred almost simultaneously—the skillful roguery of a man with whom he had been in partnership as a land-agent, and the failure of a local bank¹¹ in which he had been largely interested—Trevaskis had in a short time been rendered almost penniless.

He reached the mine one morning in September,¹² nine days before Victor Fitz-Gibbon came there as

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purser. One of the periodic droughts of the district was raging that season, and a high north wind was blowing, which blurred the light of the sun and made the air thick with grit and blinding dust. This was more especially the case in the vicinity of the mine, where the vast heaps of mullock and tailings dispersed themselves in the atmosphere on the slightest provocation.

'Thick enough to cut with a shovel, isn't it, captain?'¹³ said Searle, the then purser of the mine, who was showing the new manager over the offices.

'Is it often like this?' asked Trevaskis in a gruff voice, rubbing the dust out of his eyes.

'Oh, not more than three days a week, till November. But from November till-----'

'What in thunder is the use of that long iron passage?' said Trevaskis in a tone of amazement.

The two had come round out of the assay-room¹⁴ and the purser's office, which were at the southern end of the row of buildings generically termed 'the offices.' At the northern end was the manager's office, with a bedroom opening out of it at the back. There were six rooms in all, one opening into the other. The three between the manager's office and the purser's were used as store-rooms.

'I was waiting for you to exclaim about that passage, captain,' said Searle, with a wdelighted chuckle. He was a plump, red-faced little man, in a continual effusion of garrulity, without the power of discriminating between a contemptuous and a deeply interested listener. He had been four years in the mine off and on, and was never so happy as when he was showing a new-comer round the place for the first time, telling endless stories about it, dwelling with immense complacency on all that made it, 'taken all in all, the most remarkable mine in the whole of South Australia, perhaps, indeed, on this side of the Southern Cross.'¹⁵

As Trevaskis stood staring at the long narrow passage of corrugated iron, six feet high, with a flat roof of the same material, lit at intervals by small single panes of glass let into the sides, Searle felt that the moment had come for him to fire off this sentence on the 'captain.' But he had hardly made a beginning when Trevaskis turned away from him with an impatient and scornful grunt.

'Is this the key of my office?' he said shortly, fumbling among the bunch Searle had given him. The purser stood open-mouthed, hardly crediting his senses. He had impatiently awaited the proud and happy moment when this strange passage, which started from the manager's office and terminated at the other end in an irregular circular iron building on the side of the xreef,¹⁶ should strike the stranger with unbounded astonishment and curiosity. And now the new ymade manager gave an ill-mannered grunt, and turned his back on one of the most distinctive zand mysterious features of the Colmar Mine!

'Allow me, captain,' said Searle, recovering his scattered senses, and unlocking the door. When he turned round he caught Trevaskis' eyes fixed on the passage with a puzzled look. This was balm to Searle's wounded feelings, and he instantly attacked the subject once more. 'Did you ever see the like of that at a mine before, captain?' he asked briskly.

'I can't say that I have. What is it for?'

'You see the length of it—or at least you would if the wind was not so thick with dust. It is three hundred and twenty feet in length—three hundred and twenty feet—six feet high and six feet wideand-----'

'But what the devil is it for?'

But Searle, who never stopped talking as long as he could get a listener, was too often forced to tell a thrice-told tale.¹⁷ He was consequently not inclined to waste a subject so criminally as to come so soon to the point.

'You see this key, captain?' he said, holding up one of the door-keys on the manager's bunch that was smaller than the rest. 'Well, that key opens this door at the end of your office, and when you open that door you're in the passage. You go along that passage for three hundred and twenty feet, and then you come to a cave—aaa regular cave made into a bbgood-sized room—scooped out of the side of the reef, and ventilated with a ccstope,¹⁸ full of old machinery that belonged to the English company—a couple of furnaces, retorts, blanket tables, a bunk near the entrance, a table, a chair-----'

Searle paused to take breath. He fully expected that before he had reached so far in his description, Trevaskis would have set off down the passage to examine the place for himself. But instead of this his face wore a look of stony indifference.

'It's simply marvellous!' he gasped, making a despairing effort to infect his listener with a little becoming enthusiasm.

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'What is marvellous?'

'Why, that big underground place ddscooped out of the side of the reef, and connected with the manager's office by a passage three hundred and twenty-----'

'eeDamn the three hundred and twenty feet!' cried Trevaskis, in a tone of intense irritation. 'What is the thing used for?'

'First there was some sort of natural cave, they say, and this was much enlarged. ffThis enlargement was ggundertaken by hhDoolan,' returned Searle, in a grave, unmoved, historical kind of voice. 'That was before my time. They iisay he felt the heat dreadfully, and used to stay down there cool and quiet, without noise or dust, when the thermometer went above 115° in the shade. The next manager took it into his head that he got on the track of a good lode there, and set some men to work it. This made the place still larger, but I don't know about the gold. There were a lot of queer yarns floating round, I believe.'

'Did you ever know a mine that hadn't a bagful of lies told about it every week?' said Trevaskis, who was longing for an opportunity to have done with these reminiscences of his predecessors.

'Well, every manager that comes seems to think the one before him was a fool or a rogue.'

'I think some of the managers you've had here were both,' said Trevaskis. 'I'm sure the man who made this passage-----'

'Ah, I'm coming to that. This passage was made by Webster-----'

'What! the man who turned miser here, and then went mad?'

'The same, captain. I don't want to make anyone out blacker than he is, but I'd just like to tell you what I know myself personally-----'

'Thank you, I'm afraid I haven't got time to-day,' answered Trevaskis, pulling out his watch. 'We must confine ourselves for the rest of the time to business. It isn't a very cheerful subject. Webster became a raving lunatic; Dunning was killed in the twinkling of an eye. It only remains for me to cut my throat to finish up the record. Well, I only came for a month to try it. I don't fancy I shall stay longer than that.'

Never had Searle been more bitterly disappointed in his anticipations of acting as showman to the Colmar Mine. It was bad enough to treat the cave room and the passage three hundred and twenty feet long with surly contempt, but to have the history of Webster--of whom Searle could never think without a certain shiver in the marrow of his backbone--put by and passed over like an old woman's ghost story! The little man's heart swelled within him, and he went through the rest of his duties with Trevaskis observing the most dignified reserve.

When at half-past one he watched Trevaskis going to dinner at the Colmar Arms with a lowering brow and a set look on his face, the purser, though the least vindictive of men, felt assured that if the new captain took himself off at the end of a month he would be no loss to good-fellowship--an opinion he felt no scruple in expressing to the engineer, with whom he boarded at the three-roomed weather-board hut of one of the shift bosses close to the mine.

'I believe you're right there, Tom,' said the engineer. 'You see, he was at the top of the tree a short time ago in town. I think having to come here has put him off his chump so much he'll never have a civil word to throw at a dog.19 But as to chucking up jj£600 with times so bad--why, that's another matter.'

This was exactly the aspect of the case which was at that moment forcing itself on Trevaskis. When he reached the Colmar Arms, he was met at the front door by the landlady, a lean, untidy looking woman with a very tired and discouraged face, who showed him into the dining-room talking all the time.

'I thought you was the new captain. Long Ben the driver told us kkas you 'ad come, but I didn't think as you was coming to dinner, not bein' 'ere at one. Poor Cap'en Dunning always come at one to the minute. Did you 'ear, sir, as he 'adn't gone half an hour from the Colmar Arms, after a dinner of young duck and cauliflower, when he was called away into eternity, so to speak?'

'Ever since I came within a hundred miles of the Colmar, every soul I see tells me about Dunning's sudden death! And now, if you please, I want a little dinner,' said Trevaskis.

The landlady, with subdued volubility, said she would do the best she could, but she had expected him at one. Poor Cap'en Dunning always came so regular at one, and things was very mixed with them then at the Arms. They had just moved into the front part, which the cap'en no doubt noticed was of stone. The baby, who was a little over two year old, was cutting some back teeth; the cook had married at an hour's notice, just because there was a man handy to have her, and a Methody20 parson chanced to pass through; and the housemaid was down

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with a bad cold. These details were imparted in detachments, while the good woman placed on the table half a dozen fried chops, a loaf of bread, a two-pound tin of apricot jam, a pound of oily butter, and a large Britannia metal²¹ teapot half full of coarse lukewarm tea.

The new manager made a valiant effort to make some sort of a meal off these viands. But the attempt only sickened him and took away all appetite. The chops were tough, raw, cold, and greasy, the tea barky²² and bitter, the milk slightly sour. Trevaskis pushed away the meat, and drew the jam towards him. There were two large flies firmly embedded on the surface. . . . They were everywhere, these flies, large and small, buzzing in his ears and eyes—great flesh-flies beating heavily against the window-panes. The big bare room, with a long table covered with a spotted cloth and an array of dim glasses; the woman in the soiled print dress, with her dull, jaded face and wearied eyes, and the whining child dragging at her skirts; the smell of raw lcolza oil²³ in the new paint, of damp mortar in the newly built walls; the burst of loutish merriment that came wafted from time to time through the open mmdoors from the bar-room; the look of the country as seen through the window—all weighed on the man's mind like a hideous nightmare. He had been deeply miserable and irritated all day—indeed, for many days back. But at this moment it was no longer misery, it was nndespair, and fell on him.

'Good God! what a hole to come to after all these years!' muttered Trevaskis to himself. He was a stalwart, powerfully-built man, with a long and rather narrow face, the lower part completely covered with a thick grizzled beard and moustache. His nose was long, and slightly curved a little to one side at the end, through an accident in early life. His eyes were pale, with a greenish light in them, keen in expression, and very close together. In moments of excitement the pupils would seem to elongate in a way that gave oohim rather a sinister look. The head was well formed, the forehead square. Ordinarily he had the alert, determined air of one who does not let his thoughts travel beyond the matter in hand, ppno superfluous words or imagination to bestow on any subject beyond his own especial routine. But just now his face wore the strained and haggard look of one who qqhad been badly beaten in the race of life. The landlady, seeing that he had eaten nothing, brought in a plate of biscuits and some cheese. But Trevaskis gruffly declined rrthese delicacies, and ordered her to bring him some whisky and soda-water. Then he lit a strong Havana cigar, and as he smoked and sipped sshis whisky his courage revived. He would face the risk of being out of employment and out of pocket in civilized life rather than stay on at the Colmar. The directors, in their eagerness to secure him, had employed him on his own terms. It would be better to let them know at once he would not stay beyond the month.

He pulled a large flat pocket-book out of the breast-pocket of his coat, and turned over some papers, looking for a blank half-sheet on which to draw up a draft of the communication he would send on the morrow. The first letter that caught his eye was one from his brother, expressing rather clumsily the pleasure it gave him to hear Trevaskis had got a good job with high wages. Dick, he said, was getting on well in the bank, and they were both grateful to him for the billet.

It was a very illiterate, ill-spelt scrawl, and ttbrought back to Trevaskis the days of his early boyhood, when he and his brother worked together in a Cornish mine. It was a squalid, hard life—both of them unkempt and uncared for, their mother dead, their father rough and intemperate. From eight years of age till sixteen, uuTrevaskis thought, that was a long spell to work twelve hours out of the twenty-four—often hungry, most of the time barefooted.²⁴ Then he reviewed his long fight for wealth in Australia. Poverty and the squalor of his early life had so bitten into him that he had sworn a great oath he would make himself independent—yes, and rich, as many another had done in the Southern Hemisphere.

And gradually through long years of ascetic abstinence and the most rigid self-denial he achieved his purpose. He stuck to mining; it was the work he understood best—first on the tribute plan,²⁵ then on claims of his own; and all his money as he saved it he put into careful investments. He had gone almost hungry, certainly very dirty, and in very broken boots, once when he was working in a poor patch of country, which did not yield 'tucker' money.²⁶ And yet at that time the savings on which he would not encroach had swelled to £4,000. After that crisis his gains had increased by leaps and bounds. And at last, after seventeen years of toilsome lonely work and rigid saving, he found himself the master of over £60,000. He had determined he would have enough to live on like a gentleman before he left the Bush.

When he did so he lived in Adelaide, rented a handsome house, kept his carriage, went into Parliament, and married the daughter of a well-to-do doctor, 'a lady born,' as he often proudly said to himself. Even if he had known—and he did not—that his father-in-law was the son of a retired butcher,²⁷ the knowledge would not

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have modified this exultant feeling. His long apprenticeship to work in its grimeiest form, moiling in the dirt with soiled skin and filthy clothing, made him keenly sensible of all the graces and pleasantness of affluence. He never quite lost his first vivid impression of delight in the soft ease, the luxury, the perfect cleanliness of well-to-do households. The feel of soft carpets underfoot, the gleam of pictures on the walls, the glitter of silver on the table, the taste of dainty food well cooked, the rustle of ladies' silken gowns, the gleam of jewels on their arms and necks: these things would always have a higher worth for him than for those to whom they were familiar from childhood. To him they represented the highest good, the greatest enjoyment, of which vuman is capable. They were the symbol of that privileged exalted life of which his forefathers had caught passing glimpses behind barred gates and through the corridors leading from servants' halls.

'And, after all, I've come back to it again--this wwdamned mucky life among dirty labourers, and in a worse place than I've ever set foot in before. I might as well be a wombat in an earthed-up burrow,' he said to himself, closing up his pocket-book. He could not frame a draft of the letter he thought of writing; the fear of absolute want stared him in the face. He could do nothing but ponder in bitterness of heart on the record of his life: his twenty-five years of ignominious toil, his aspirations, his determination to succeed, his eight years of complete and assured success, and then his complete and bitter failure. He took up his hat, and, crushing it over his eyes, strode away to the lonely, cheerless rooms that now formed his only home.

- a. wings] wing Adl
- b. the most] very E1
- c. thirty°] the thirty Adl
- d. shafts and trenches and] Om. E1
- e. squalid] Om. Adl the squalid E1
- f. all speak] each feature speaks E1
- g. Colmar] the Colmar mine E1
- h. hung] hanged E1
- i. old] Om. Adl
- j. and lavish] Om. Adl
- k. in] of Adl
- l. a] about a Adl
- m. four] two E1
- n. A year] Three years E1
- o. yielding] Om. E1
- p. mine] Colmar E1
- q. Joseph] J. Adl
- r. Colmar] mine E1
- s. afterwards] later Adl E1
- t. skilful] Om. E1
- u. a local bank] the local Bank Adl
- v. in] late in Adl
- w. delighted] delightful* Adl
- x. reef] reef at the other end Adl
- y. made] Om. Adl E1
- z. and mysterious] Om. Adl
- aa. a] Om.* Adl
- bb. good-sized°] large-sized E1
- cc. stope, full] stope. The room is full E1
- dd. scooped out of the side of] tunnelled into E1
- ee. Damn] Curse* Adl
- ff. This] The Adl
- gg. undertaken] first undertaken E1
- hh. Doolan°] one Doolan E1
- ii. say] say that Adl

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jj. £600] £600 a year E1
kk. as] Om. Adl
ll. colza oil] linseed–oil E1
mm. doors] door Adl
nn. despair, and] despair that Adl E1
oo. him] them Adl E1
pp. no] with no E1
qq. had] has Adl E1
rr. these] the Adl
ss. his] the Adl E1
tt. brought] curiously broughtAdl E1
uu. Trevaskis thought] thought Trevaskis Adl E1
vv. man] a man Adl
ww. damned] infernal* Adl

Chapter XII.

'Are you busy, captain? may I come in?' said Searle, knocking at the half-open door of the manager's office three days later.

'Yes, come in,' said Trevaskis, without raising his eyes from the letter he was reading.

Searle waited a few moments, and then, with a rising choler that was new to him, he said:

'I had better see you when you're more at liberty; I have a very important-----'

'Oh, go ahead! Have you overpaid some fellow by a couple of bob?'

'I want to give notice; I must leave the mine as soon as possible,' said the purser, with a quiver in his voice.

And then he explained how a letter had come to him by that morning's post from his brother, who was a storekeeper at Wilcannia, and had broken his right arm rather badly.

'I have an interest in the business; in fact, all my savings are in it, and now my brother offers me a partnership, and wants me to start at once if I can. I would like to give a month's notice, but I'm afraid I can't.'

'All right; just put it in black and white, and I'll send it on; I don't suppose it matters about a long notice. There are scores of poor devils looking for a job in town just now who'll be glad of the billet.'

'They might be glad of it; it doesn't follow they would be fit for the position,' answered Searle.

'The position! Do you call it a position, then?' said Trevaskis, with a harsh laugh.

Further acquaintance had not improved the relations between the two. It seemed to Searle that the manager had from the first an unaccountable 'down' on him. As a matter of fact, a 'fellow with too much of a gab,'¹ as he would phrase it, was always antagonistic to Trevaskis; and in the bitter mortification that possessed him--the sense of intense irritation, which grew greater instead of diminishing, as hour by hour brought home to him more aclosely the complete social annihilation that had fallen on him--it afforded him a certain gratification to inflict annoyance on others. And to make matters worse, Searle found out that Trevaskis had spoken slightly of him. It was told to him with the kindest intentions, but the result was not an increase of harmony.

Robert Challoner had called on Trevaskis the day after he came, and invited him to Stonehouse, as the managerial dwelling-house had been called when erected nineteen years before, and it enjoyed the distinction of being the first stone house in the Colmar district. It was at the foot of the reef on the northern side, where the reef was at its steepest, completely closing in the view southward, so that from Stonehouse nothing could be seen of the mine bor its surroundings. There was also an avenue of blue gums and pepper-trees² call round the house, which dhelped to mitigate the stern aridity of its surroundings. It faced the west, where the flat, illimitable plain all round was faintly broken in the efar distance by fthe pale-blue lines, one beyond the other, known as the Euckalowie Ranges. The house was surrounded by a deep veranda, and there was a bay window on each side of the front door. One of these was open, and as Trevaskis went in with Challoner, who had met him at the gate, he saw a young girl looking out, whose face, with its rare dream-like beauty and deep, sweet seriousness, held him for a moment spell-bound.

The exquisite orderliness and tokens of refinement in the place, the welcome accorded to him by Mrs. Challoner, and the generous nature of the bottle of wine he drank with his host, all disposed Trevaskis to a more genial mood than he had experienced since setting foot on the mine.

'You see, if you feel inclined to gtake your family here after we leave at Christmas--indeed, we may leave a few weeks before our lease is up--you will have plenty of room,' said Challoner.

But Trevaskis shook his head.

'Mrs. Trevaskis is rather delicate--always accustomed to plenty of servants and society and all that; and we have five young children. She would never consent to come, and I wouldn't ask her. Searle has a bedroom here?' he added hwith a pause.

'Yes; he always slept in the house to take care of it before we came; now we take care of him,' said Challoner, smiling.

Then, noticing a hard, irresponsive look in Trevaskis' face, and knowing through Searle that the two didn't hit it very well, he tried to throw a little oil on the troubled waters by saying:

'He is really a very good fellow in his way, so trustworthy and good-natured.'

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'But what a tongue! I think it would be a very good thing for him to be put in solitary confinement for twelve months, so as to get him out of jabbering eternally. I never could stand a very talkative man,' said Trevaskis, with so much irritation that Challoner was rather taken aback.

He could not deny Searle's garrulity, but he felt that the new manager was unjust to him in laying so much stress on the defect. Both men smoked for a little time in silence.

During the pause, the strains of a very sweet, plaintive melody, played on a pianoforte in the adjoining room, became audible. Trevaskis listened with rapt attention.

'That is Miss Lindsay playing—the young lady you saw as we came in,' said Challoner.

'I should like to hear her nearer,' replied Trevaskis—'if it is convenient,' he added, as he noticed a certain hesitation in Challoner's manner.

'I will ask my wife. If——'

'No, no! I see it is later than I thought,' said Trevaskis, starting up, a deep hot flush rising in his face. He stared at his watch hard—not that the time was of any importance to him, but because in the sudden revulsion of feeling, the deep annoyance and confusion, he hardly knew what he did. He bade Challoner a hasty good-bye, and without waiting to see Mrs. Challoner, or leaving any message, he strode away, deeply, irretrievably offended.

'I ought to have put it more gracefully, I suppose,' said Challoner, staring after him.

Mrs. Challoner came into the room a few minutes later, and looked round in amazement at finding her husband alone.

'He is gone; I am afraid he is a little huffed,' Challoner said, in his slowly contemplative way, and then he told his wife what had happened. 'I would have explained to him that Miss Lindsay was not so much our guest, as a young lady in our care with her own rooms and servant, and that we could not ask anyone into her room without leave; but he went off in sparks,³ as James would say. And you know, wife, I can't take people by the throat to put them into good humour, and reel off a speech in half a minute to make them see how things stand.'

'I am afraid he will be a bad successor for poor Dunning if he has such a disagreeable nature. And I am sorry for him, too, poor man! I thought he looked very low-spirited.'

'It's conceit—my dear, it's conceit,' returned Challoner. 'You may speak of the pride of the people in the old country, whose genealogy didn't stop this side of Adam, but they're humble and companionable compared to men like Trevaskis,' said Challoner, who was a quietly observant man, with an innate perception of character, strengthened by that eye-to-eye intercourse with his kind which prevails in these lonely spaces of the earth, where human nature plays a larger part than convention. He returned to the subject again that evening.

'You can see Trevaskis is the sort of a man who can be uncommonly nasty if he chooses, and I'm afraid he has taken a dislike to poor old Searle.' Then he repeated to his wife what Trevaskis had said, and she suggested that he should give Searle a hint.

'Just tell him, Robert, that you can see the new manager is one of these people very reticent and disliking unnecessary talk. He won't take it amiss, you know, he's so good-natured.'

'Yes, he has no more gall in him than a pigeon;⁴ I wish——' Before the wish found expression there was a sound of footsteps on the veranda.

'Now, Robert, have a talk with him; just try and smooth matters,' said Mrs. Challoner as she left the room, for they both recognised Searle's footsteps. His bedroom was on the reef-end of the house, with a door opening on the veranda, so that he could get into his room without going through any other part of the house. But it was understood when there was a light in the general sitting-room Searle should come in and have a crack⁵ if he felt so disposed. He did so on this occasion, and soon gave Challoner the opening which he did not desire, but which, as a dutiful husband, he felt impelled to turn to advantage.

'The new manager is, no doubt, a very clever man,' said Searle, in a would-be dispassionate tone; 'but if he doesn't learn to keep a civiler tongue in his head, I'm mistaken if he won't have the miners by the ears before long.'

On this Challoner rushed in medias res.⁶ He found himself, at the end of what he had to say, with Searle aggrieved, disturbed, and questioning. Challoner had little of the diplomat in him. What he had to say must come out square and unabashed, with no gentle inferences, no half-tones. All these might exist in his intentions, but he had not the power of turning words to exquisite purposes and curious niceties of speech. He could not express the finer shades of sentiment, although he felt them. He was astonished at the look of deep resentment on Searle's

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face. Garrulous people are never without a deep substratum of self-complacency, and the purser was wounded to the quick. If there was one thing on which he prided himself it was non his ability to talk well and fluently, to be by turns grave and gay, instructive and amusing.⁷

During the days that followed he spoke to the manager only in monosyllables. But the joy of revenge was sobered by a suspicion that the less he talked the more pleased Trevaskis was. It is very likely Searle would not have so promptly responded to his brother's proposal to join him in storekeeping if it were not for the craving to startle Trevaskis with such a bomb-shell. And after all, the bomb-shell had fallen as flat as a damaged rocket.

But there was balm in Gilead⁸ for Searle's ruffled feeling when, less than a week after his resignation was sent in, the following note came from 'the Honourable Stuart Drummond, M.L.C., Chairman of the Directors of the Colmar Mine Company,' as Searle, swelling with importance, styled him in telling the event to Challoner that evening:

'Dear Mr. Trevaskis,

'My nephew, Mr. V. Fitz-Gibbon, has decided that he would like the post of purser and storekeeper at the Colmar Mine, at least till Christmas. The directors and myself are satisfied that Mr. Fitz-Gibbon—who, by the way, is a B.Sc. of the Adelaide University—is qualified for the position. You are probably aware that, on coming of age, he succeeds to my late brother's property, and, as his heir, Mr. Fitz-Gibbon will have a direct stake in the Colmar. We hope you will find it convenient to let him gain, under your skilful supervision, a practical insight into the working and prospects of the mine.

'I am, etc.'

'So it seems my successor isn't to be one of those poor devils who were walking the streets for a job, after all,' said Searle, with ill-concealed triumph.

Trevaskis made no reply.

'A Bachelor of Science. I expect he's well up in geology,' said Searle.

'Do you think so? Generally, a colonial degree means a young fellow's head has been muddled with books he never understood,' sneered Trevaskis as he walked away.

'I'll give him a good dig, though, before I leave; I'll let him have it hot⁹ somehow,' thought Searle, staring after him. 'A young gentleman, with a fortune behind his back, with a direct stake in the Colmar: he can't bully him as he does everyone else. I believe he dislikes the new purser more than the old one,' said Searle, with a chuckle.

But if the surmise was correct there was no sign of it in the manager's manner when Victor reached the mine by the mail-coach which ran daily between Colmar and Nilpeena.

'I'm afraid you won't find this a very entertaining place,' said Trevaskis, as the two were on their way to dinner at the Colmar Arms.

'Oh, I think I'll like it, for a few months, at any rate; the country is so unlike anything I've been in before,' answered Victor, glancing around.

'Oh yes, there's novelty in more than the landscape here,' said Trevaskis, with a short laugh.

He found a malicious satisfaction in anticipating the novelty of a hostelry like the Colmar Arms for the young gentleman who had come to such a hole from caprice.

Mrs. West, the landlady, was still waiting for a cook. Her baby was still getting his teeth, a process that seems to colour one's views of life as darkly as losing them.

'It's always like this; that wretched kid hardly ever shuts up,' said Trevaskis, as the mother and child disappeared, the latter keeping up an easy sing-song sort of wail, that swelled threateningly if he were too long neglected.

'Poor little beggar! He wants a little more nursing than he gets, I expect,' answered Victor; and when the two returned, he called out cheerily to the culprit, holding out his watch as a bait.

'I say, little one, would you like to see a tick-tick?'

The child looked hard at the watch and then into the young men's faces.¹⁰ After making this preliminary inquiry into their character, he seemed rather to approve of them. He gave a feeble smile, and then he slowly and gravely walked up to the new-comer, making a wide circuit round Trevaskis, looking at him in the meanwhile with a gloomy interrogative expression which greatly tickled Victor. He piled some sofa-cushions on a chair, and placed the child on them beside him, and gave him his watch to wind up. It was a robust, silver stem-winder, and after listening to its creaking sound for some minutes, as he turned the stem round, the child began to watch what

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went on at the table, and then stretched out his chubby hands for a share.

When the mother next entered the room, she found uDick munching a slice of bread-and-butter, and trying to keep up a conversation with his new friend.

'Your baby is a long way ahead of me in language, Mrs. West,' said Victor. 'What can be the meaning of a "bid dod in the bat wad"?''

'He is trying to tell you vabout the big dog in the back yard,' answered the mother. wOn hearing Victor's hearty laugh at this translation, she recalled a few more of Dicky's speeches equally xremote from the common tongues of humanity. Presently the landlady was deep in a detailed account of her trials with ydomestics.

'Why don't you get middle-aged women, who wouldn't zbe likely to marry?' said Victor sympathetically, after listening to a heart-breaking aaaccount of successive cooks and housemaids who had been obtained at high wages with passage-money paid, bbwhose career at the Colmar Arms came abruptly to an end with the catastrophe of a brief wooing and cca speedy wedding—even of clandestine departures without a wedding at all.

'Oh, blesh you, sir, if they was that old as they was likely to die of their years, they'd marry at the Colmar. You see a 'atter's life is a very lonesome one—I mean one as lives to hisself.11 When you go among the miners' huts and tents you see some closed up, with a padlock on the door—that's dda 'atter's place. West, my 'usband, he was comin' along with you from Nilpeena, and he heard as you was the new purser. "But what a young swell like that is comin' 'ere for," sez he——'

'But I'm not in the least a swell; I could rough it far more than I'll have to do here,' said Victor, a little chagrined that his rough suit of navy-blue serge, his blue-striped shirt, with an unstarched turn-down collar, and his soft gray hat did not save him from the imputation.

'Indeed, sir, swell and all, you're a kind-'earted young gentleman! To see the way as that crabby child took to you! An' though I'm 'is mother, I know he ain't sweet-tempered; but what can you expect, sir, with three double-teeth—one above, and the others in the lower jaw?'

'Lays himself out to be popular, that's evidently his eetack,'12 thought Trevaskis as he listened. As for being depressed by the crudeness of his social surroundings, they all seemed to strike Fitz-Gibbon as so many points of interest. He laughed more than once on the way back to the mine, recalling Mrs. West's despair at the craze her domestics took for matrimony as soon as they reached the Colmar.

'That's the place of one of the hatters who will be on the look-out for the new cook,' he said, as they passed a little one-roomed hut with a big padlock on the door. 'By the way, captain, shan't I be a hatter, too?' he added.

Trevaskis explained that there was a manager's residence on the north side of the reef, now let to some family, in which the purser had a bedroom. As they drew near the purser's office, Searle came to the door. Trevaskis had taken Victor down into the mine, etc., before dinner-time, so that he and the ex-purser had as yet hardly exchanged any words. The little man was eager to assert himself.

'I should like to stay a few days, if possible, to explain the books and that to you, Mr. Fitz-Gibbon, but I am afraid my time——'

'Oh! don't trouble yourself, Searle. After all, it is a very simple matter. Just to keep the time-book, pay the men on Saturday, ffind see that a proper account is kept of the consumption of stores,' said Trevaskis contemptuously.

Searle coloured deeply, and Victor hastened to say:

'It may be very simple when it's done by an expert like Mr. Searle, captain, but it's different for me. I know I shall be a bit of a duffer at keeping the books at first. If you could stay a few days, I should be awfully glad,' he said, addressing Searle, who expanded under this speech like a bud in the sunshine. He would try. He thought, perhaps, he could manage to stay two or three days longer, if Mr. Fitz-Gibbon thought it would be a help to him.

'The greatest in the world. I know how very well you have done your work; I heard of you in my uncle's office,' said Victor, who had, indeed, heard Searle's work highly commended, and was glad to proclaim the fact so as to atone for Trevaskis' brusquerie.

'Soft sawder.13 An Irishman all over!' thought the manager, as he strode away, leaving the two together.

Surely none of the duties of a mine purser were forgotten that afternoon by Mr. Searle. There was the day-book, in which things bought and sold were kept; the cash-book, showing receipts and expenditure; the invoice-book, the cost-book, the ledger and the time-book. It was over the latter that Searle took his most spread-eagle flights, impressing on Victor the profound importance of entering each man's time and avocation

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correctly from shift-bosses' records. Underground there were the able-bodied miners, the shovellers, the truckers, the rock-drill foremen, the rock-drill labourers, the air-winch boys; above ground, the engineer, the engine-drivers, the stokers, the battery-feeders, the pan men, the hands at the stone-crackers, etc., nearly all at different wages. Sometimes a man would be engaged as a shoveller half of his shift, and as a trucker the other half. Care must be taken that he was entered at the two rates of wages, etc., etc., etc.

At last Victor declared that his head was ringing, and that he began to suspect it was as difficult to be a good purser as it was to be a great poet. It made him low-spirited to look at the immaculate figures and copper-plate writing in that pile of books, of which he greatly feared he would make a howling mess. Searle was radiant, and administered fitting consolation. Then the two went to have a look round the mine, and Searle of course made straight for the iron passage, and detailed its marvellous history, sparing no detail as to its length or cost, or the number of sheets of galvanized iron in it. Then he made such mysterious allusions to Webster's history, that Victor begged him to relate the story, which Searle promised to do before he left. Finally, after the two had tea together at the Colmar Arms, and a bottle of Bass's ale,¹⁴ and a game or two at billiards, he insisted on making up a bed for himself on the bunk that was in the office, and then went across to Stonehouse, to introduce the new purser to Mr. and Mrs. Challoner. And there, in the room facing the reef, Victor wrote his first letter to Miss Paget—one which would reach her a few days after she landed in Colombo.

'You know,' he wrote, 'how I came prepared to "hump my bluey,"¹⁵ metaphorically speaking? Well, as far as that goes, my coming to the mine is up to this an A1 swindle—a sham as complete as the little Arabian birds you bought at Aden. Figure to yourself that you are peeping into my bedroom. Let me assure you that there is not the slightest impropriety in the suggestion, for it is a very pearl of bedrooms—in a stone house! with a Kurdistan rug before the bed!! another before the wash-hand stand!!! a third before the toilette-table, made up in pink and white, like a young lady going to a ball!!!! pillows with ruffles round them, on the outside of a knitted counterpane!!!! I ggbetter not use up all my store of exclamation points in this one letter, for I foresee I may need a few more later on. I had some thoughts of concealing some of these details from you, for it is rather galling to come away to the heart of the barren Salt-bush country to the "diggings,"¹⁶ and find honeself in a room overflowing with voluptuous splendour. I could put up with the rugs and the ruffles and the lady in pink and white—now don't be suspicious (vide top of iipage)—and even with the cake of almond soap I found in the soap-dish when I went to put my great square piece of plebeian yellow soap into it; but what do you say to long white muslin curtains to the window!!!!!! But this is upholstery. I must come to actual people. And first, one of my college chums, Maurice Cumming,¹⁷ is within fifteen miles of the mine. He and a brother have a little sheep-run—at least it used to jibe a sheep-run, but the rabbits are eating them out. As to the manager—it is etiquette to call him captain on the mine—if you were not preternaturally English, Helen, and me so fearfully Irish at times, I should tell you that when I first saw him I had a Presentiment—with a capital letter, as you may notice. When he is not on guard, there is a hard, angry look in his eyes. At all times his manners resemble the snakes in kIceland;¹⁸ but he has lost all his money, and lhas to come away from his wife and children. Wouldn't I be savage, too, if I had to leave my wife?' etc.

- a. closely] clearly Adl E1
- b. or] and Adl
- c. all] Om. E1
- d. helped] further helped Adl E1
- e. far] Om. Adl
- f. the] Om. Adl E1
- g. take] have E1
- h. with] after Adl E1
- i. the] an Adl
- j. for] to E1
- k. again] Om. E1
- l. a] Om. E1
- m. these] those Adl E1
- n. on] Om. Adl
- o. is] was Adl

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- p. in less than a week] a few days E1
- q. are] was Adl
- r. Science. I expect he's well up in geology,'] science,* Adl
- s. young men's faces] young man's face Adl two men's faces E1
- t. at] Om. Adl
- u. Dick] Dicky Adl E1
- v. about the] about a Adl that there is a E1
- w. On hearing . . . laugh at] Seeing that Fitz–Gibbon was much amused on hearing E1
- x. remote] estranged E1
- y. domestics] domestic servants E1
- z. be likely to] Om. Adl
- aa. account] narrative Adl
- bb. whose] but whose E1
- cc. a] Om. Adl
- dd. a] an Adl E1
- ee. tack^o] game Adl
- ff. and] send returns into the office, and Adl
- gg. better] had better E1
- hh. oneself] one's self E1
- ii. page] the page Adl E1
- jj. be] be called Adl
- kk. Iceland] Ireland* E1
- ll. has] has had Adl E1

Chapter XIII.

It was not till the evening before he left that Searle gave up the last insignia of his office.

'What! more keys, Searle,' cried Victor. 'Good heavens! how many am I to have in all? This makes seven, nine, thirteen--and two more fifteen. What is this long bright one for? it has no label.'

'That is the second key of the strong safe in which the gold is kept,' answered Searle slowly. 'On the last cleaning-up day, 1 just three days before you came, we put two bars of gold into it, each worth one thousand five hundred pounds and a few shillings.'

'Then there is three thousand pounds of gold in that safe now?' said Victor, regarding it with curious interest.

It was a massive fire-proof safe, standing in the north-east corner of the purser's office, opposite the door which opened into the assay-room, containing several furnaces and a large collection of chemicals in jars and bottles,

'Yes, and when there's about another three thousand pounds' worth in it, Wills, our mounted trooper,² will take the lot in an iron box into Nilpeena by the mail coach, and there he is met by a trooper from town. You keep this key, the manager has the other, so you can neither of you open the safe alone.'

'Have you ever had any attempt at robbery here?'

'Well, not by any outsider,' said Searle with a mysterious air.

'Oh, come! this begins to be like a chapter in a shilling shocker,'³ said Victor, smiling. But Searle maintained a very grave aspect.

'It is part of Webster's story, the strangest affair I ever was mixed up with. And do you know, Mr. Fitz-Gibbon, it's come across my mind once or twice that perhaps I'd better not tell you.'

'Why?'

'Because it seemed to me that after I told it to Dunning, the late manager--a splendid fellow, clever and well-educated, and such a pleasant-mannered man--a greater contrast to the present captain you could not see----'

'You're not in love with Trevaskis?'

'Nor he with me; but before I leave to-morrow I'll give him a little punch in the ribs.' Searle's cheeks grew red with anger and wounded vanity.

'But what were you going to say--that after you told Dunning?'

'He never seemed the same man, somehow.'

Though Victor had during the last three days been often amused at the solemn importance with which Searle would dwell on matters of small consequence, he began to perceive that there must be something tragical underlying this story.

'You can't expect me to let you off telling it after raising my curiosity to such a pitch,' he said. 'There's just an hour before we go to tea. You must come to the Colmar Arms with me, as it is your last evening. Can you tell it in an hour?'

As the story which Searle told is closely bound up with succeeding events at the Colmar Mine, it is necessary to give the substance of his narrative, leaving out the devious wanderings in which he indulged, especially in the earlier portion, when he gave an elaborate account of the way in which one of his eyes was affected with a cataract that at last obliged him to go under an operation in town, where he remained for nearly six months before he could return to his duties as purser. Webster had been manager at the mine for five months before Searle left. During his absence no regular purser was appointed.

'There was a man who went by the name of Oxford Jim at the winding engine⁴ for a few weeks before I left--I have heard that he's somewhere prospecting about here now,' said Searle; 'and Webster took him on to keep the books and so on while I was away. When I left, the mine was never more prosperous, and Webster was giving immense satisfaction all round. He was a great one for experiments. Before I left he had heaps of tools and machinery removed to the cave room. He got on well with the men, and everything was as cheerful as possible. When I got back and first saw Webster, I could hardly believe my eyes.'

'Had he altered much, then?'

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'That's hardly the word for it; he was like another man entirely. He used to be rather plump and fresh-coloured; now his face was gray, with deep lines round his eyes, and a sort of quick twitch about them sometimes, and fearfully restless—always on the move, especially at night. It was a very rainy season when I got back, and Webster used to wear a big black cloak, and a hat slouched over his face. In these he was seen by people at all hours of the night, hanging round the mine, and some said as if he were carrying things. He had loads of some old tailings carted into the cave-ground room. The yield from the mine had fallen almost to nothing while I was away, and we thought this was working on the manager's mind, and that he was trying to get gold in some way or another to make up the deficiency.'

'But a solitary man couldn't extract gold from tailings?'⁵

'Not very well without special machinery. Some said he did it only for a blind. At any rate, he used to be hours and hours in the cave room at night; and when I got back the iron passage was half done. He bought up second-hand iron from little mines and companies that had come to grief in the district; and though he said the passage would do to store things in, he had it gup entirely at his own cost. He said it was a little fad of his own, and he wouldn't put the company to any expense. Well, after I came back things began to look up again. Oxford Jim went away. The morning he left he said to me, "Be careful about what you drink with the captain on cleaning-up days." When I asked him what he meant, he just laughed and went away. He was a queer fellow, with a curious twist in his mind that gave him a very bad opinion of everything in this world, and I may say in the next. He used to take opium and things; people did say he was hardly ever quite straight⁶ hthe days he used to help the captain in cleaning up the gold.'

'Is cleaning up the gold a long job?'

'Here the whole process, down to smelting, takes about a day, sometimes a little longer. Your first experience will come off in nine or ten days. Webster and I always had something to drink together. Well, the second time we cleaned up, after I got back I felt rather stupefied. Next morning, when I saw the quantity of amalgam, I was simply thunderstruck; it was about half less than it ought to have been. Time after time the same thing happened, and Webster seemed to be getting queerer. He was brother-in-law to two of the directors, and had a good deal of influence, else I think he could not have carried on such a strange game so long.'

'I wonder you didn't draw up a report or clear or something. It must have been deucedly uncomfortable.'

'It was more than uncomfortable; but you know, Mr. Fitz-Gibbon, I'm not as young as I was, and I like things quiet; I'm afraid, too, Webster buttered me over⁷ a good deal. Still, in less than four months after I came back, the worry and fidget of it all brought on a weakness of my eyes, and I had to go away for two months. The mine had fallen off so much then that Webster took no one on as purser; and as it seemed that the Colmar would perhaps have to be given up altogether, the directors made no objection.'

'Well, when I came back the second time there were the most curious rumours about an iextraordinary rich lode, which had been opened up, and ja vugh of gold,⁸ and all the rest of it. But there was hardly a soul in the mine that I knew; the engineer and shift bosses, all except Roby,⁹ were new. As for the miners, of course they're always shifting about, except a few old hands who have their families here. The yield had improved, and Webster spoke of resigning. He had a claim at Hooper's Luck, nine miles from here, at which he had a couple of men working on tribute, and he said the prospects were splendid.'

'Surely it was rather irregular for a manager to have a private job on hand while he was working for the company?'

'Oh, as for that, nothing can be more irregular than mining companies from beginning to end,' answered Searle, who had been in some way or another interested in mining for many years, and could speak with more authority on this subject than on any other. 'A man who can't earn his tucker in any other line calls himself a mining expert. He goes into the heart of the Bush, and makes assays and reports; and a company gets floated with directors that know no more of mining than I do of Hebrew. And there's no doubt that in some ways Webster was a very good manager, and a captain who has knowledge, and is believed to be honest, can do anything with any company.'

Someone at this moment came into the assay-room, but neither Searle, who was absorbed in talking, nor Victor, who impatiently awaited the denouement of the narrative, took any notice. The assay-room was at the southern end of the offices, and the outer door often stood open until the offices were locked for the evening. It was Trevaskis who had come in and stood behind the half-open door leading into the purser's office, looking for

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some chemical among the rows of bottles that were ranged on shelves behind the door. While thus engaged his attention was riveted by what he overheard:

'At any rate, Webster had this claim at Hooper's Luck, and he was always riding across to it, and always got very much excited when he began talking of it. He had bought an American waggon¹⁰ and a pair of horses, and he was buying up a lot of the old machinery that was about the mine—old furnaces and crucibles and so on.

'I'll have a good many loads to cart to Hooper's Luck when I go there," he would say, chuckling and rubbing his hands, and then he would walk about and his eyes would begin to gleam. It used to come across me, that his mind was getting affected. One curious change that had come over him was that he had become most awfully miserly. An old friend of his that I met in town the second time I was there about my eyes, told me that Webster's father had become a perfect miser in his old age. A real miser, mind you, a monomaniac who lived alone and grudged himself proper food while he had great strong boxes full of gold and silver, and fifty-pound notes sewn into his old coat. One day when I was out shooting and had left my key into the safe with Webster——'

'Oh, it isn't imperative on the purser, then, never to give up his key?' said Victor, who had been gradually absorbing the thought that it was a mine-purser's duty to see that the manager did not commit theft.

'Oh no; we've often given each other charge of our keys when we were going away for a day or so. Once the gold is smelted and stamped and weighed, there's no chance of playing tricks with it. It's the white gold as the Chinese call amalgam that gets stolen by everyone in turn, from the manager to the pan-man.'¹¹

'Damn the fellow's impudence!' thought Trevaskis, and he felt inclined to give Searle a piece of his mind there and then for making so free with his superiors. But certain vague hints which had reached him regarding Webster of late, made him curious to hear the upshot. He stood at the shelves with his hand on the bottle he was in search of, so that if anyone appeared at either of the half-open doors, he might hurry away with the chemical without betraying that he had played the part of an eavesdropper.

'Well, I came back after dusk earlier than I expected. I found the safe unlocked and the gold gone. You might have knocked me down with a feather, as the saying is. I instantly went through to the manager's office. The doors were kept open then, from one room to another, so that you could go through without going outside; and there are duplicate keys for the manager and purser, but the doors were hardly ever locked. However, when I got to the room next the manager's office the door was locked, but when he heard my voice he opened at once. "Ah!" he said, "you missed the gold; it is here, it is quite safe; but aren't they beauties, aren't they real beauties, shining solid and yellow? The more there is of it in a heap the lovelier it looks! Sovereigns are pretty to look at, but what are they to ingots¹² weighing three hundred ounces?"

'The bars of gold were lying on the table, and he had scattered handfuls of sovereigns over them, and he kept bending over them and handling them, his eyes glittering as if he were in high fever. "Think of getting gold enough," he said, "to make fifteen of these bars—fifteen! think of it, piled one upon the other in a splendid glittering mass! Bah! when I make my pile at Hooper's Luck, I won't sell it—not till I have a little mountain, not till I have enough to make fifteen bars weighing each three hundred ounces. Good God! think of having a whole ton of gold, clean and pure, before you."

'He must have gone out of his mind; yes, he must have been mad. That evening I found it hard to calm him down. All of a sudden he cried out that the men at Hooper's Luck were robbing him. He was sure of it. But he would take them unawares, and search their tents and find a heap, a heap, a heap of nugget gold! He had put them on the claim, and paid them wages and given them tools, and now they were cheating him. He knew it. But he would steal a march on them, and I'm afraid he did it, too,' said Searle, dropping his voice.

Trevaskis was surprised to find himself breathing hard with rising excitement. His imagination was strangely fired by thoughts of those gleaming heaps of gold which had been conjured up by the distempered ravings of his predecessor.

'It was two nights after that,' said Searle, with a certain tremor in his voice, 'that I was coming very late, early I should say, from the Colmar Arms. I kept a little more to the left than I ought to have done, and struck the stable instead of passing between it and the offices on my way across the reef to Stonehouse. The stable-door was open, and there was Nick, the manager's black horse, in a lather of sweat, and quivering all over. Next day news reached the mine that Hooper's Luck had been robbed and one of the men killed. His mate had got a lift in Mr. Challoner's buggy from Hooper's Luck to Nilpeena, and it was good for him he had such a trustworthy witness to answer for him. For at the inquest he admitted that he and the murdered man were concealing the fact that they had got about

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two thousand pounds' worth of nuggets, and that they had planned to clear with the gold for Melbourne in a day or two.'

'And the murderer, was he discovered?' asked Victor in a low voice.

'No, but if my suspicions are right, the hand of God was heavy on him,'¹³ answered Searle. 'I kept on thinking of what the manager had said of stealing a march on the tributers, and of his horse in a lather of sweat between one and two in the morning, and the murdered man, and the stolen gold, and one thing or another, so that when I saw him I used to feel choked, and couldn't look him in the face. But there wasn't a breath of outside suspicion against him. I knew many a man has been hung on circumstantial evidence stronger than I possessed, and yet was proved innocent when it was too late. I would have resigned, but Webster was going as soon as they could get one in his place. And he was more than ever in the cave room—always, I think, part of the night.

'Everyone began to notice something very queer in his manner. At last one night, nine days after the murder, I was sitting here at this desk, making up the approximate cost, the door of the assay office was on the latch, as it generally was till I left for the night. It was thrown uopen as if by a whirlwind, and Webster rushed into the office here, his face as white as a sheet, his eyes starting out of his head, the sweat in big drops on his forehead. "I saw him," he said, "I saw him, I saw him with his head all battered in, as sure as God is in heaven!" and with that he fell into a fit, foaming at the mouth. When he came to, he was so completely off his head that Wills, the police trooper, had to handcuff him and watch him till he got him down into the asylum.'¹⁴

'And he is there now, isn't he? I heard something of his going insane, from the mine secretary in town,' said Victor, 'but not a whisper of anything else.'

Trevaskis, who had listened to the close with breathless interest, was in the act of turning away with the bottle of nitrate of mercury, for which he had come, when again Searle's speech arrested him.

'That is the first act, and the second was nearly as strange. No, you wouldn't be likely to hear any whisper of the Hooper's Luck affair—for Dunning and I were the only two who knew; I told him in the greatest confidence. I would have told it to the new captain, too, for in a way I thought he ought to know, but——'

Then came a few words which Trevaskis did not hear. Searle was lighting his pipe as he spoke. But he heard Victor laughing, and a dull dark red mounted into Trevaskis' face at the sound.

'I may teach you to laugh on the wrong side of your mouth before I've done with you, young man,' was the thought that rose in his mind, but more as an expression of quick anger than any serious resolution of revenge.

'And you,' continued Searle, 'will be none the worse for having your eyes and ears open. For more than seven months after Dunning came, I didn't say a word about the Hooper's Luck affair. I did go into the cave room with him one day, to have a search round. But there wasn't a thing in the place except old machinery and all sorts of odds and ends, down to an invalid-chair that one of the early managers had after breaking his leg. Then one night I told him, and the whole affair made the strongest impression on him. I fancy he began to prowl round in the cave room from that very night. He said to me one day, half joking, "What would you say if I discovered a great lode in that old cave room?" and I just told him, in the same way, not to begin to fossick in that place at any price.

'It was about six weeks later, I think, that Webster was discharged as being sane. We heard nothing of it till he came. He made straight for the mine. He got into Nilpeena by the train that reaches it at four o'clock in the morning, and tramped it here on foot, so that no one should know he was coming. There was a tremendous dust-storm on. You couldn't see from one end of the offices¹⁵ to the other. I was coming across after the three o'clock shift had gone to work. Near the assay office here I met a man bareheaded, his face as black as a pot, nothing white but the white of his eyes, and they were glaring like a wild cat that has a dog's teeth in its throat.

'"He has turned me out!" he said; "he won't let me into the passage or the old cave room."

'At that moment Dunning came out of his office and locked the door. Webster gave a howl like a dingo, and rushed on him. If I hadn't been there, I think it would have gone hard with Dunning. It was as much as we could do to hold him down till Wills got him handcuffed. He was worse than the first time, all the way down to Adelaide, so Wills told me. . . . It gave Dunning a nasty turn.'

Trevaskis heard footsteps approaching the outer door of the assay-room, and noiselessly slipped out, carrying vaway with him the nitrate of mercury. He had been in the room for about a quarter of an hour, and when he came out the wind had risen, and the dust was thick in the air. Looking eastward from the front of the offices, the great wide treeless plain, sweeping to the verge of the vague horizon, was enclosed in a lurid, reddish haze. The country in that direction was in places entirely destitute even of salt-bush, and the hard red earth lay gaping in wide

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cracks, which in a dry season, when the wind blew high, infected all the atmosphere with their own sombre stain.

'I don't wonder Webster went mad—living in a place like this for two years,' thought Trevaskis, with a dull sinking of the heart. The reddish sultry air, thick with dust, throbbing with the din of the battery and air-compressors,¹⁶ the smoke from the tall stack hanging in dense clouds overhead—all combined to make the atmosphere dark, heavy, and oppressive. To Trevaskis, who from time to time found himself stricken with attacks of acute depression that bordered on physical prostration, the place just then wore a menacing and almost infernal aspect.

He was still standing at his office door, looking blankly round with a sort of dazed impassiveness, when Victor and Searle approached him in eager conversation.

'I suppose, captain----' began Searle as he drew near. But before he could get any further, Trevaskis deliberately turned away, walked into his office, and slammed the door behind him.

Victor coloured to the roots of his hair.

'Never mind—I can have a look at it from the outside,' he said hurriedly. He had been so much interested by what he had heard regarding the cave room that he wished to see it there and then. It struck him that there might be some indications which would throw light on the strange fascination the place had possessed for successive managers.

Searle had at once proposed that they should ask the captain for the key that opened the door leading from his office into the passage; and this was the result. Searle was voluble as to the captain's unprecedented rudeness, but Victor, resenting it still more deeply, would not discuss it.

'After all, no man would indulge in such an extraordinary freak without some strong motive,' he said, as they walked down by the side of the passage till they reached the irregular, half-circular iron structure that enclosed the opening into the singular underground retreat.

'Or without being mad,' answered Searle. 'That was the conclusion Dunning came to after the most careful examination. But he, too, got quite fond of it for a work-shop; there's a heap of his things down there. As I was telling you, the shock of Webster's attack seemed to affect Dunning most strongly. The first thing that did him good was a visit from an old friend of his, an actor who was out of a billet, and came from Melbourne and stayed over a month with him. Then just before he was killed his health was out of sorts; he was afraid of some inward growth, and he had arranged with the directors that he should go once a month for a few days to Melbourne to be treated by some specialist. He was going to start the very day after he was killed—had everything ready. The directors thought themselves lucky to get hold of Trevaskis in his place, but----'

Victor discouraged reversion to this subject. Searle, however, had his innings when he bade the captain good-bye.

'Well, I suppose you're not sorry to go,' said Trevaskis in a nonchalant voice.

'In some ways I am,' answered Searle. 'The company have always treated me well; I'm not like the man who said:

"First I was a master, Then I was a grieve; At last I got the dogs to keep, And then I got my leave."¹⁷

But then, again, I'm glad that the company have sent a young gentleman of good position with an interest in the mine; there have been some curious tricks in connection with it before, and----'

Searle's heart failed him a little as he met the furious glare that came into the captain's eyes, so he cut his sentence short, and it was not till he was on the box-seat of the mail-coach bowling along to Nilpeena at the rate of ten miles an hour that he thoroughly enjoyed the 'dig' he had given the new captain.

- a. is . . . pounds°] are . . . pounds' worth Adl E1
- b. bottles, bottles, Adl bottles. E1
- c. any] an Adl
- d. better] had better Adl E1
- e. him] you* Adl
- f. well] very well Adl
- g. up] put up E1
- h. the] in the Adl
- i. extraordinary] extraordinarily E1
- j. a vugh . . . of it] went six or seven ounces to the ton E1

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- k. chemical] chemicals Adl
- l. at] to* Adl
- m. coat] coats E1
- n. to] of E1
- o. was] was part of Adl E1
- p. chemical] chemicals Adl
- q. to] compared to Adl E1
- r. kept] kept on Adl E1
- s. that] Om. Adl E1
- t. him] him that Adl the digger E1
- u. open] open to me Adl
- v. away] Om. Adl
- w. his] the Adl
- x. ways] way Adl

Chapter XIV.

Victor did not find that the manager developed more companionable qualities as the days went on. There is, doubtless, often a great satisfaction to the unregenerate man in taking change out of an offender by what Searle called giving a 'dig,' especially when the one who gives it is going beyond the reach of an inept pleasantry in return. The amazement which Fitz-Gibbon's voluntary sojourn at such a place as the Colmar caused Trevaskis was changed by Searle's parting words into a fast suspicion that the young man had, by reason of his large interest in the mine, come to play the spy on the new manager. Thus to the moroseness which his misfortunes and rankling sense of failure had induced was added the animus of a private grudge.

The result of this was not, however, at first bad for Victor; it had merely the result of making him work rather hard. During the first week he made several clerical slips which Trevaskis commented on with so much severity and rudeness that it was with much difficulty the young man kept his temper.

'Good heavens! how the animal sets my teeth on edge!' he said, and then he resolved that he would never give him the chance again.

For the next two weeks he worked late and early, mastering all the details of his work, making out lists of the stores on hand, so that he should not forget to order in time. As for the variations in the men's wages, he learned them off by heart, so that he should make no errors in writing out their weekly cheques. After this spurt of work was over, Trevaskis set him to take stock of all the mining materials in the various storerooms.

In this he had the assistance of Michael the cwater carrier. The mine was dependent for drinking water, as indeed were all the inhabitants of Colmar as well, on the Government tank,² half-way between the mine and the township.

'And very bad it do be getting, that same tahnk, Mr. Fitz-Gibbon. The dhry season is powerful bad for the tahnks; you gets down to ahl the mud and shlime and dead things.'

They were in the ironmongery store, Michael calling over shovels, sieves, coils of fuse, picks, leather belting, kegs of nails, etc., Victor checking them off in his stock-book. After an hour and a half of this, Victor cried out, 'Smoke oh!' and the two were talking as they spelled.³ Michael was a nervous-looking little man, with a brick-red face, keen little brown eyes, and very red hair. As he talked, quick spasmodic twitches would from time to time pass over his face, especially round the mouth and eyes and across the nose.

'But, surely to goodness, Michael, you have no dead things in the tank out of which our drinking-water comes!' cried Victor, with a touch of dismay in his voice.

'Indade, sor, and there is, an' mahny's the time I've had to hould me nose while I'm taking a draught of wather. It isn't so bad as that this saison yet, and the Government they do be puttin' off cleaning the tahnk. We'll have a spreadin' illness, the typhy faver or some such, and then we'll be forced to keep a docthor to our own cheek.'⁴

'By the way, Michael, what sort of a doctor is the man you subscribe so much a month for?'

'Well, sor, he's a big fat mahn, wid half the alphabet at his heels, living on the other side of Hooper's Luck. Iviry month there's a shilling stopped out of our wages, as you know, to dgive him, for living beyand the reach of ahny rale disthress, I may say. We did just as well when he wasn't there, and we died quietly, widout the help of medicine, if the hour had come. Mahny a time I do be wondering, sor, how mankind will come and shtay in a place like this, and from all parts of the worrld. There's Runaway Hans—a mahn that used to ego whan voyage from Chiny to the Pyreamaids, where I am tould the corps of holy cats⁶—the blissid saints forgive them!—and of moighty monarchs is kept as on the day they died, maybe shortly after the Flood; and yet that mahn left his kit and his Sunday breeches and three months' wage, to run away to the Colmar.'

'Runaway Hans!' repeated Victor, who was smiling broadly, and by this time decided that Michael was one to be cultivated; 'ah! that's the yellow-haired young man with a strong German accent?'

'Yes, the same; he do thry to spake English a little, but what he mostly talks is, as you say, sor, the German ahccent. Well, and he left all that behind him, and frun away for what? To scrape dirt underground till his guernsey pours over wid sweat gliked a rag soaked in the washtub, and live undher a sthrip o' calico wid an oneasy perished branch o' sandal-tree to keep the hate out—which it don't.'

Victor laughed; and at that moment Trevaskis looked in at the open door. His face darkened as he took in the

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frank, friendly relations which the young man had so quickly established between himself and Michael—the veriest drudge at the mine. Trevaskis' own manner to all who were under him was marked by a certain peremptory roughness, which is, as a rule, the note of the proletariat who has developed into the master.⁷ In his most genial moments he would never dream of entering into any talk with one like Michael beyond giving him orders, and perhaps occasionally blaspheming his eyes for not being more prompt.

'That's his lay⁸—to worm himself into the confidence of everyone, and that old fox Drummond hasking me to let him have an insight into the working of the mine. But I'll put a spoke in his wheel there!' thought Trevaskis, as he strode away after giving his orders.

'Barzilla⁹ Jenkins is going off by the afternoon mail. I want you to make out his cheque, Fitz-Gibbon.'

When Victor went into the office he found Jenkins, a big, brawny Cornishman, standing at the door as he had come up out of the mine—his face and hands black, his moleskin trousers stiff with clay and earth stains.

'You are at the rock drills, I think?' said Victor, turning up the time-book.

The man gave a muffled sort of assent. The men were paid each Saturday; this was Friday, but Jenkins was jonly entered for two shifts.

'Why, you are only down for two shifts, besides to-day's, since last pay-day, Jenkins!' said Victor, as he began to write out the cheque: 'three days, at nine shillings a day.'

As he looked up, to hand this to Jenkins, he was struck with the look of profound gloom in his face. There were suspicious light smears on his cheeks, too.

'It's just the inikity o' the oud Adam 'isself,' he burst out passionately. 'I missed two days' work, bein' on the drink, and now I've not enough to take me hum; and when I coom up this afternoon, I found this 'ere.'

As he spoke, he handed Victor a telegram, which ran: 'Your wife is much worse. Come at once.'

'I 'ad a letter last week, as she was onwell,' he went on, 'and I knowed some'ow last night she were weered. I oft a' gone before. I might be sartin kdoctors¹⁰ would do 'er no good.'

By this time Victor had produced his private cheque-book, and was rapidly writing out a cheque for five pounds.

'Take this, 'Zilla,' he said, putting it folded into his hand. 'You can pay me back when it is convenient,' he added, anxious to cut short the man's broken expressions of gratitude.

It was the personal relations into which he came with the miners that gave the strongest element of interest to the purser's work. Victor had strongly the sympathetic fibre, which is rarely absent from the Irish temperament when it has fair play. He had also that quick sense of humour which, under all circumstances, gives an enlivening strain to the serio-comedy of life. And at the Colmar, as in all other parts of the Australian Bush, there was a great deal of human nature about. It is true that most of it was quite in the rough; that there was little of those finely-spun hypocrisies, those keen but veiled rivalries, those subtle and contradictory nuances of character, which are developed among superior people, under the high pressure of civilization. Those politely ironical little stories that invigorate the languors of conversation, at the expense of mutual friends, were las unknown as the faculties sharpened only to invent means of killing time. But though there were no polished raconteurs ripely skilled in relating events which never happened, in a sparkling way, there was no lack of men who enjoyed hearing and telling such stories as came in their way in a somewhat Rabelaisian fashion.

At the Colmar, as in politer walks of life, those whose social instincts were most highly developed were not, as a rule, among the more admirable characters. They belonged rather to the habitual procession of the streets, with the chronic idlers left out, greedy for enjoyment in some form, and reckless as to the future. They alternated hard work with 'betting drinks to the crowd,'¹¹ and going twenty-four hours without sleep. They preferred to give a fillip to one day at the expense of another, rather than have all days alike monotonous. Speed with an equivocal result fascinated them more than the undeviating pace of safety. Some of the older miners were Cornish Wesleyans,¹² who combined to hold 'services' on Sunday, to get up teetotal entertainments, and generally influence the laxer brethren to adopt a more decorous mode of life. But early in his experience as a purser, it occurred to Victor that the miners would be a much duller lot than they were if the more serious among them had it all their own way. It is indeed a melancholy reflection that the good qualities of some people are aesthetically, oftentimes more unsatisfactory, at least to the mere looker-on, than the less virtuous qualities of others.

'Zilla Jenkins was one who hovered between the two camps—msometimes severely virtuous in his conduct, and rigid in his condemnation of all carnal indulgence. During such periods he was a total abstainer, and had even

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been known to give rousing addresses on the evils of intemperance. But these were adventures in the higher ethics, which time after time ended in disaster. 'Brother 'Zilla hev backslid again' was the testimony that had noften to be given regarding him at the chapel and blue-ribbon meetings.¹³

Two of these more serious miners interviewed Victor on Saturday after Jenkins had left by the mail-coach.

'About 'Zilla, sir; we does wish as you 'adn't a-be'd so kind to 'e,' the elder said in an expostulatory tone.

'You see it's like this, sir,' struck in the other man, before Victor, who was amused and a little taken aback, could make any response. 'Jenkins hev gone back agin an' agin to rowl like the swine in the Scripther¹⁴ in the slime o' evil-doin'. 'Zilla gets sorry, but the repentance don't stick to 'e. Now, we was a- watchin' for this 'ere oppertoonty. 'Zilla's been bad on the oburst.¹⁵ News comes as 'is missus is hill, she's gen'ally hill—that's 'ow she can't leave 'er mother to cleave onto 'er man, which is the rule o' Gord and o' nature,¹⁶ but she's got weerd and weerd, and 'Zilla he wants awful to git away; but he spent 'is money at the public-'ouse an' so did those as 'e goes wi' there. Why, sir, they're on the tick¹⁷ and on the borrowr from one month's end to the other. We was waitin' to the larst moment, an' then to come forrard and say: "'Ere, 'Zilla Jenkins, your missus is maybe i' the last gapse. 'Tis a gashly¹⁸ thing for a man to swaller 'is money an' make a beast o' 'isself onto the bargain, and then not 'ave enough to take 'im to his wife's berrin' maybe-----" '

'You were going to say all that to the poor fellow, when he was in such a fix!' said Victor, keeping a serious face with some difficulty. 'Well, I'm glad I gave him what phe needed-----'

'Ay, sir, but 'ow much better to slang 'e now than let 'e go straight to Berlzebub. We was goin' to lend 'im the money at 's awn 'count on a Hi Ho U, an' that 'ud 'ave 'elped to bring 'e back to the paths o' righteousness, so to speak, for 'e 'd a-been ashamed to spend 'is substance at th' Colmar Harms till 'e 'd a-paid us back, an' by that time we'd 'ave 'ad a sartin grip o' 'e-----'19

A teamster came into the office just then, to tell Victor that four teams were waiting at the weigh-bridge to have their loads checked, so that he had to leave before Rehoboam Hosking had quite finished.

Rehoboam, or Roby, as he was usually called, was one of the three shift bosses of the mine, and the one who most frequently conducted services in the little iron school-room which stood mid-way between the Colmar Arms and the post and telegraph office. He had what some of the miners called 'a great gift for spouting,' and was fervid in organizing meetings of all sorts, in which he took a leading part. On Sundays he often preached morning and evening. His sermons and exhortations were of a very rousing, not to say overbold, description.

Thus, on one occasion when he was carried away by his zeal for conversions, he cried out in stentorian tones: 'Descend upon us, O Holy Ghost, descend: if there's any damage done to the roof, there's not a shoveller on the Colmar that won't give a bob for repairs.'

One or two Episcopalians who were present afterwards accused Roby of blasphemy. He denied the charge with great vigour, and affirmed that they and the Church they belonged to were 'lukewarm Ladoshians, that the Amen of the beginning of Creation had long ago spued out of His mouth.'²⁰ This was a flight in metaphor which reduced one of Roby's opponents to silence, while it confirmed the other in his worst opinions of the shift boss's divinity, and even of his moral sincerity. Henceforth qthe Episcopalian believed all that was said against Roby, for there were unfortunately stories abroad about him that somewhat told against his influence as a social reformer. In preaching, he was fond of describing himself as a brand snatched from the burning,²¹ and with that complete deliverance from reserve and modesty, which so curiously marks the members of some religious sects, he would give graphic details of the rway in which aforetime he had distinguished himself in evil doings. At teetotal meetings, also, he would relate with gusto how at one period of his history he had been such a slave to drink that his first wife had died from the effects of destitution and misery.

'But at the same time 'e sdoesn't tell 'ow when he was a local preacher and class-leader at the Burrar, 'e prilled²² samples o' copper ore, and 'elped to start a little bogus company,' an old acquaintance of Roby's would say, and another would recall an equally discreditable story. Were they all true? Whether or no, the man was a very 'stirring' pulpiteer and blue-ribbonner. No new-comer was long at the Colmar without being importuned by Roby to give some assistance at the Saturday night temperance meetings, which were chiefly under his direction.

'The Lord did not make everybody smurt,' he would explain with great unction, 'but I blaiiv iveryone as tries can do summat for a blue mitting²³—sing a song or give a bit o' recitation, or music on any sort o' machine 'e plays.'

And thus Victor found himself pledged to Roby, to play a violin solo on the evening of each Saturday from

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the first week he came to the mine. Now it was four o'clock in the afternoon. The last of the men had been paid, and Victor had the office to himself. He took out his violin, tuned it, and began to play over the 'Last Rose of Summer'24 with variations. He had not played more than a minute or two, however, before he put the violin down with a little exclamation. The last time he had played this melody was at the concert on board the Mogul, accompanying Helen on the piano. The first few bars recalled the place and scene with the vividness which belongs to the associations of music, and with these Victor recalled that he had not finished reading her letter which had come by that morning's mail, posted the day after she and her father had reached Colombo. He had been interrupted in reading it; then he had gone to dinner; then he had paid the men; then he had gone to the weigh-bridge; and then—he had forgotten it. He admitted this to himself with a pang of self-reproach. It was new to him, this discovery that his thoughts and actions often fell below his own ideals of what a lover should be.

And it was such a bright, amusing letter, the people on board so capitally hit off, and the landing in Colombo; the drive among the swarming native quarters, where you see the craftsmen in their tiny shops without door or windows, the coarse screens of split bamboos rolled up; here a blacksmith sitting cross-legged beside his anvil, there an enamel-worker, then a brazier's shop full of glowing copper vessels, the richer shops with tinsel-covered skull-caps, with soft white silks and muslins, petticoats and trousers for women, with spangles and gold and embroidery; the soft-faced bronze babies, arrayed in tiny loin-cloths and heavy bangles, toddling after the Sahibs, to sell them a big scarlet flower; the traders, with a single basket of mangoes and a small branch of bananas, under a cocoanut palm by the roadside; the Hindoos with their caste-mark on forehead and chest sitting sideways on bullocks; the big funny vehicles with a pagoda roof; the little bamboo carts drawn by tiny humped oxen that run as fast as ponies; the yellow-robed Mollahs²⁵ under yellow umbrellas; the people who run after belated travellers with palm fans and screens of coarse bamboos, and great pineapples for threepence, and iced soda-water under the scorching sun. All was just as it had been on that day when they went through the place together.

'But what I like best to see are the natives of high caste in voluminous folds of pure white and majestic turbans,' wrote Miss Paget; 'their unmoved calm, their statuesque attitudes, their imperturbable mouths, make one feel that, as compared with Orientals, Europeans have, on the whole, degenerated into *commis voyageurs*.'²⁶

'What would Helen think of our miners?' thought Victor with a smile.

Then he turned to the letter again, and looked over it from beginning to end, while some feeling he could not have defined of loneliness fell over him. Was it because existence at the Colmar, like a Chinese picture without shading or perspective, had begun to pall on him, or was it that the discipline under which Miss Paget purposely kept her feelings left a void that, with the roofless sort of sensation which had begun to creep over him, struck him with a feeling akin to physical chill? Only just on the last half-sheet, after the close of the long letter, in a sort of unofficial postscript, came a few tender words:

'I think I have told you almost everything, except that I often felt sad at the thought of sailing, sailing, sailing farther away from you every day. I am at this moment in a charming room at the Mount Lavinia Hotel,²⁷ where father's friend is established. They are both on a balcony somewhere, talking about classic odes. When I look out ^{at}²⁸ the window, I see that lovely stretch of bright yellow sand, and the sea of an unfathomable blueness dying away on the beach. When I look through the doorway, with its khus-khus screen²⁹ half drawn up, there is a vista of polished floor and white-robed natives with bare feet gliding noiselessly about. Still I am rather sad, because you are not here. *Dites moi quelque chose de tendre qui me fasse oublier ces tristes pensées*.'³⁰

'Dear Helen! I must write her quite an epistle to-morrow,' said Victor to himself, after reading these lines many times over.

Then he went outside and stood looking westward across the mine, with its groups of low iron buildings, the long engine-room in the centre, with its reverberating throb of machinery, the heavy folds of smoke rising above it and hanging low over the adjacent groups of the miners' huts and tents, and beyond the little township, with its small iron buildings equally bare, without the sign of a tree, or even a fence, to break the dull dead level. For the first time the austere, inexpressible aridity of the country seemed to weigh on him. It was now many months since a shower of rain had fallen in the district. The gray-green salt-bush was frayed and thickly coated with dust, the bare earth showing between the low bushes in baked gaps. Was there any other spot of the earth more desolate than this?—flat, parched, and gray, without shade or water, lying in measureless vistas, with an atmosphere so

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pure and clear, and a sky so cloudless and widely vaulted, that frequently the mirage we call the horizon was entirely absent? For how many hundreds of years had the sun beaten remorselessly upon the thirsty waste? As he looked at it, an immense longing came over Victor to see once more the deep dull green of hills densely covered with stringy bark, or to see autumn leaves whirling yellow and red before a high wind, under a threatening sky.

'Well, Mr. Fitz-Gibbon, are you admiring the western view?' said someone close behind him.

'Yes; admiring it all so intensely that it has given me a fit of the blue devils,'³¹ said Victor, as he shook hands with Challoner, whom he had not seen for some days.

'You've been working too hard since you came here. My wife bbonly said last night you've never been at Stonehouse in the day-time, though you have been sleeping there for over ccfour weeks.³² You come away at daylight.'

'Not before six, my dear sir. Don't make me out stupider than I am. I ride for an hour or so, then breakfast at the Colmar Arms at ddhalf-past seven, and at eehalf-past eight I am in the office. Up to this, it has taken me eight or nine hours to do what Searle used to get through in five.'

'Well, you know, Rome was not built in a day. I came across to steal a little keg of blasting-powder, but as you are about I suppose I'd better borrow it; and then just lock your office and come back with me to Stonehouse.'

'Thank you; I'll come with pleasure,' returned Victor; and after he had got the keg of powder for Challoner, the two went across the reef to Stonehouse.

- a. the young man] he E1
- b. so] in order E1
- c. water carrier] water-carter Adl E1
- d. give] give to Adl
- e. go] go on Adl E1
- f. run] ran Adl E1
- g. liked] like E1
- h. asking] asked Adl
- i. his] Om. Adl
- j. only entered] entered only Adl E1
- k. doctors] doctor's troode Adl E1
- l. as] Om.* Adl
- m. sometimes] Om. Adl
- n. often] Om. Adl
- o. burst] bust* Adl
- p. he] was Adl
- q. the] this E1
- r. way] ways Adl E1
- s. doesn't] don't E1
- t. out] Om. Adl
- u. the] a Adl E1
- v. new] not new Adl E1
- w. ideals] ideal E1
- x. windows] window Adl
- y. he could . . . of loneliness] of loneliness he could not have defined E1
- z. fell over] overcame E1
- aa. of] on Adl E1
- bb. only said] said only Adl E1
- cc. four] three Adl
- dd. half-past seven°] eight E1
- ee. half-past eight°] half-past or nine E1

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Volume II.

Chapter I.

Victor had several times before this spent an hour or so with the Challoners, but always in the evening, between eight and ten o'clock. On these occasions he had become acquainted with all the occupants of the house but one: the host and hostess; Euphemia, the host's stout, rosy-cheeked daughter, placid and silent, and much given to blushing; Shung-Loo, who had learnt the secret of swift and noiseless action; and the cheerful noisy Irish general servant, whose good intentions were far in excess of her performances. He had heard Miss Lindsay named from time to time, and building a theory on some of those inferences, too vague to be called thoughts, concluded she was a middle-aged lady, probably something of an invalid. His intercourse with Mr. and Mrs. Challoner had been from the first on a pleasant and friendly footing. They had invited him to spend his Sundays at Stonehouse any time he felt inclined. But hitherto he had spent them with the aUniversity chum he mentioned in his first letter to Miss Paget, at Wynans, the rabbit-infested station.

On this afternoon he chatted with Mr. and Mrs. Challoner for some time, and then went into his own room to write. As he was going there, Mrs. Challoner told him that if he felt inclined to sit on the western veranda at any time, he would always find a comfortable chair there. After writing several pages to Miss Paget he availed himself of this invitation. Taking a book and a cigar with him, he went round to the western veranda. The curtains were all drawn. Before his eyes had grown used to the semi-gloom, he heard a sound that startled him strangely. It was the sound of one sobbing in bitter grief. A young girl, in an armchair, at the open French window, her face buried in her hands, was within a few paces of him. She had not heard his approach, and he tried to steal away without attracting her attention. But he could not for a moment withdraw his eyes from the slenderly rounded, graceful figure, from the exquisite head, with its wealth of deep amber hair, bent low in an abandonment of sorrow. And thus trying to do two things at a time—a performance against which we have all at one time or another been warned—he stumbled heavily over a chair.

Doris, hastily wiping away her tears, looked up. Their eyes met.

'I am awfully sorry,' began Victor, and then he stood, colouring deeply, unable to take his eyes off the face upturned to him, to look away from those wonderful eyes, radiant even in their sorrow.

Doris got up as if to go inside. There was a little wicker table by the chair on which she had been sitting, covered with crayons and water-colour sketches. She began to gather them up.

'Pray do not let me disturb you. I will go back to my room again. I did not know there was anyone here,' said Victor, coming nearer to her.

'Oh no, don't go away, please,' said Doris softly. She tried to look at him, but the great tears were again rising in spite of her, and she half averted her face.

'I am afraid you are hurt, or in pain. I am so sorry—so very sorry—to see you in distress.'

There was so much kindness and heartfelt sympathy in his voice that Doris felt constrained to make some response.

'You must think I am very foolish.'

'Oh no, no! I am only sorry I cannot do something for you. I am afraid you have had some bad news.'

'No—not news; there is nothing more that could happen to me,' she replied, speaking in a very low tone, so that her voice might not utterly break down.

'I—I did not know of your coming; I had not heard,' said Victor; and then he suddenly paused, asking himself why he made so sure that Shung-Loo's mistress was an invalid middle-aged lady? Had anyone ever said so? Had anyone, in fact, said anything beyond speaking of Miss Lindsay? But how was one to imagine that this represented a beautiful young girl with an air of distinction and refinement rare anywhere, but little less than astounding in a spot so isolated from the higher graces of civilization. These thoughts passed rapidly through his mind, ending with the reflection that he had made a most foolish and inept reply to the pathetic words the girl had uttered. He had in truth lost his head, and—he had better bclear.

'I am so vexed I disturbed you,' he said. 'Would you like me to raise the curtains before I go?'

'Oh, but you must not go; you came to read. You are Mr. Fitz-Gibbon, I think; I have heard Mrs. Challoner and Euphemia speak of you.' It seemed to Victor a distinction conferred on him to hear his name spoken by that

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softly modulated, musical voice. There was something too irresistible in her direct simplicity, her clear, candid gaze.

'I shall be only too glad to stay if I do not disturb you,' he said, and on that Doris resumed her seat and took up a chair—back on which she was outlining² figures in pale and dark blue.

Victor rolled up the curtains, and sat in the chair over which he had stumbled, and took up his book, but the words danced before him and the lines ran together. Then he perpetrated felony with his eyes. Still holding the book before him as if he were reading, he stole glances at the girl who was sitting barely six feet away from him. She was in a thin black dress, relieved only with narrow white lisse³ at the throat and wrists. She began to sew, her long thick lashes downcast, and as he looked he saw a great tear roll down her cheek, and then another. He felt choked with compassion, yet when she had spoken of her trouble he had made so imbecile a reply. There was something infinitely touching in the grief of one so young, and so much alone in the world. If he could only say something—something to distract her thoughts! He rustled the leaves of his book and cleared his throat. Doris furtively wiped her eyes and bent a little lower over her work, and the silence remained unbroken.

Then Shung—Loo came in his usual noiseless way with a white silk shawl. 'It neal sunset now, Miss Dolis.' She took the shawl from him with a little smile of thanks, and put it over her shoulders. 'Oh, Miss Dolis, you have clied, you must not,' he said in an impressive whisper.

'No, Shung; I am not going to again,' she said humbly. Then Shung—Loo disappeared as noiselessly as he had come. As soon as she was alone again—she felt satisfied that Mr. Fitz—Gibbon was buried in his book—Doris took up the corner of the shawl and held it to her lips, and her tears flowed afresh uncontrollably.

'Miss Lindsay, I ought not perhaps to speak to you when you are in such trouble; but you kindly asked me to stay—and—and I cannot bear to see you cry.'

Victor had put down his book and drawn his chair closer. His voice vibrated with emotion, and, in fact, his eyes were moist.

'Oh, I thought you were reading,' she said brokenly. 'Everyone tells me I ought not to cry, and I seldom do.'

'Would you find it very hard to tell me why you are so sorrowful? But don't if it hurts you; only——'

'It is because my mother has left me. She is gone; she can never come back to me.' She did not sob, but the tears were falling as fast as raindrops, her filmy laced handkerchief was soaked, her lips and hands were quivering.

'I would give the world if I could say something to comfort you,' said Victor, speaking little above a whisper.

'But you cannot—no one can,' she said through her tears, vainly struggling for composure.

Even in the midst of his distress, Victor felt a half—inclination to smile at the uncompromising sincerity of this little speech. It was evidently hopeless to trot out any of the serviceable platitudes that people use to bridge over those depths of grief in which they have no personal share. Still, even to make her talk a little helped to stem the tears which gave him so horribly uncomfortable a sensation in the throat. This constrained him to make another effort. 'You know, everyone feels badly hurt at some time,' he said lamely enough, keenly conscious, even as he uttered the words, that any small efficacy they may dhave ever possessed in binding up a broken spirit would be now ruthlessly weighed in the balance and found wanting.⁴

'Has your mother died, too?' asked Doris, looking up with tears trembling on her lashes.

'No—oh no! She was quite well when she last wrote to me.'

'Then you came away from her? You left her?' said Doris, a little shade of mistrust creeping into her manner.

'Oh, well, you know, young men nearly always do,' he explained.

'Don't they love their mothers as much as girls do, then?' asked Doris. She glanced up at Victor, her lips slightly parted, a look of dawning interest in her face, as if the incongruities of his sex were for the first time brought home to her.

'Oh yes; I think most of them do—only, you know, there is a difference,' he replied, anxious, he could not say why exactly, to make her believe as well of his kind as possible. 'Girls, of course, mostly stay with their mothers till they marry——'

'I would never have left my mother, never—never,' she answered with slow emphasis.

'What a pretty place this is!' he said, picking up one of the water—colour sketches which had fallen eto the ground. He felt all the absurdity of this abrupt change. But he wanted above all things to lead the talk away from dangerous topics.

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'That is Ouranie, our old home, where I was born, and where maman and I always lived together,' she answered softly.

Then she turned over the rest of her mother's sketches and showed him the shadowy corner in the garden where the violets used to carpet the ground, and the tangled banks of Gauwari, with the tall trees growing overhead. Doris had by a great effort recovered her composure, but her grief had been too suddenly arrested, and the pictures of her old home awoke too many tender memories; fearful that she might again break down she rose, saying:

'If you would like to see them, I will show you some more of mother's drawings another time;' and then, with a grave little bow, she went into her own room through the open French window.

She had been for some time that afternoon looking over these too well-remembered scenes, the last her mother had sketched and painted, till it seemed to her as if her mother were quite near. 'Oh, maman darling, it is sometimes so very strange without you!' she said. Then she had fallen asleep, and in her sleep she dreamt a dream dear and beautiful as the innermost circle of heaven could have been. Her mother came to her with the old tender smile and words, the old caressing touch. But in the moment that her heart was throbbing for exceeding joy,⁵ she awoke to find herself alone. In the cruel reaction, she was overcome with a grief keener than that of the first days of her bereavement. It was then that Victor had come. When he was left alone, he sat for some moments looking blankly at the sketch he had first taken up, and which Doris had left behind her.

'Well, I was a fearful jackass! I might have known that these were probably the very things that made her cry so. Poor little darling! . . . Well, she is little more than a child. . . . What wonderful eyes, what a perfect face altogether! . . . It is curious, but it seems as if I had often seen a face like hers in my dreams. . . . The expression is just that of the beautiful little Virgin in Titian's picture of the Presentation⁶—that serious dove-like innocence.'

These and divers other thoughts, more or less confused, passed in rapid succession through the young man's mind. He looked at the sketch a long time, taking in all the details of the tranquil home where this beautiful young girl had probably lived all her life, with the mother she would never have left.

'She seemed to be a little suspicious of me because I had left my mother,' he reflected, smiling. 'If I had only known what to say! . . . It must have been dreadful for the poor dear child to lose her mother. . . . To think I have been for so many nights under the same roof with her, without knowing it. . . .' Then he reflected with immense chagrin that he had declined to spend the evening at Stonehouse because of 'Zilla's⁷ blue-ribbon meeting. He felt half inclined to go to Mrs. Challoner and ask her to let him come, after all, as it did not matter so very much about playing a stupid little melody to a lot of rowdy miners.

But when he played his stupid little tune an hour later in the small school-room, crowded with the miners and their families, and a large proportion of the inhabitants of Colmar, 'Norah Creina'⁸ was so rapturously enraptured that he had to play again. It was a rough assembly with several larrikins in the back seats who joined in the choruses when there were any, invented parodies on certain recitations, and called out to the performers by name to cheer or depress them. This latter was especially the case if anyone gave a reading of a didactic cast.

'That's hawfully dry 'ash!'⁹ one would cry out.

'But, then, 'tis to do your immortal soul good, Jack,' another would respond.

'We didn't come 'ere because of our bloomin' souls; we come 'ere to 'ave a lark,' would be shouted out if the unfortunate reader still persisted in the reading with a purpose. But no musical performer, unless very obnoxious to the crowd, was ever interrupted.

'Angkore! angkore! go it, young un! you knows 'ow to handle the fiddle!' 'Give us another chune, Mr. Purser! they're worth twenty tractses.' On being thus adjured, Victor played from memory Beethoven's 'Adelaide' with variations.¹⁰ The melody, weighted with impassioned yearning, swept him into hitherto unsuspected depths of feeling: The winds of evening in the blossom-heavy bowers, May's silvery lilies of the valley, streams in their leafy channels, nightingales pouring out their souls in ecstasy, all whispering and breathing and murmuring and fluting the beloved name: A—de—la—i—de! A—de—la—i—de!

What had given such unaccustomed skill to the young man's fingers? what had suddenly kindled his instincts and imagination and heart with such swift intuition of the inner meaning of the great musician's masterpiece of a lover's incommunicable rapture and sorrow? The applause of the audience at the close was noisier than ever, the room more stifling. Victor was glad to get out under the starlit sky, cutting short Roby's profuse thanks and big words about 'valyable 'elp in a good work.'

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On leaving the township, he walked back to Stonehouse by a circuitous route. He approached the house by the western veranda. There was a light in one of the windows; he stood looking at it for some time. Then, with a profound sigh, he went round to his own room, and there was his unfinished letter to Miss Paget staring him in the face.

He ought to finish it to-night, so that it might be posted to-morrow, and reach town in time for the outgoing mail-boat. But what an age it took him to write a page and a half, and how stiff and fragmentary the close of the letter seemed on reading it over! He decided it would be better not to write at all when one felt so incomprehensibly stupid. As he reached this conclusion, he found himself staring hard into vacancy, recalling the sweep of heavy golden-brown lashes wet with tears. And this made him ask himself the question why he had made no mention of an event that had interested him so deeply. He went on with a sort of wrathful catechism, with eloquent blanks by way of answer. He lay long awake that night, and the upshot of his night vigil was that, instead of spending part of Sunday at Stonehouse as he had thought of doing, or going across to Wynans as he had half promised Maurice,¹¹ he went for a solitary ride towards the north-west.

After going four or five miles from the mine in this direction, the country became more diversified. There were numerous low reefs, ridged in places with dead-white, milky-looking quartz, and others with innumerable ironstone 'blows.'¹² Water-courses, too, were much more frequent than in any other part of the district—water-courses with wide shallow beds, filled with gravel and red dust, with broken pieces of hungry and crystalline quartz, mingled in places with fine specimens of glassy six-sided prismatic crystals. The region was full of experimental shafts and the remains of small alluvial diggings. Challoner's run verged on the western side of this auriferous tract,¹³ the boundary between being marked in one spot by a large broken-down whim,¹⁴ the massive posts bleached white with the fiery suns of many summers. Behind this whim was an abrupt blackish rock, that gave weird echoes of any sound that broke the silence. It was a desolate spot, speaking eloquently of the drought that had ravaged the district four years before. Striking off from this in a northerly direction, Victor rode towards Broombush Creek, which was four miles off. This creek took its name from being near its rise densely lined with that shrub.¹⁵ It was the largest water-course in the district, with wide gravelly reaches, closely neighboured by innumerable little reefs and rises, with a water-worn, denuded aspect.

'There ought to be alluvial gold here, if anywhere,' thought Victor as he struck the creek. He had heard it was seldom found without a lonely prospector here and there prowling in its vicinity. There was evidently one not far off now, for as he rode on, following the sinuous windings of the water-course, he saw a film of smoke ahead of him, rising in wavering fragments till they were lost in the blue air. The sight gave him a feeling of pleasurable excitement. Perhaps he was going to come on the early beginnings of a great gold-field. As he went on, he noticed innumerable trenches and small pits, now partly choked up, most of them evidently of old date. They were on each side of the wide shallow water-course, some on the face of the banks and in the bed of the creek. Two or three of the latter were quite recent. Near one of these he noticed a broken shovel. Half a mile beyond he came in sight of the spot from which the smoke ascended.

- a. University] Om. E1
- b. clear] go E1
- c. in in] in Adl E1
- d. have ever] ever have Adl E1
- e. to] on E1
- f. these] those Adl
- g. were] was Adl
- h. little] a little* Adl
- i. for] Om. Adl

Chapter II.

It was a curious little encampment, in the vicinity of an old well. Near it stood a horse in hobbles, looking around with a contemplative air, as if he were accustomed to a country in which it was easier to think than to feed. A little further on stood what at first glance looked like an irregular sort of tent. It was a cart, covered with a large discoloured tarpaulin, held down with stones at the back and sides. In front it was fastened back on each side of the shafts.

Close to the cart a wood fire was smouldering. Between the fire and the cart an elderly man was sitting on a low three-legged stool before an empty deal case turned upside down. He was smoking a pipe with a long many-jointed stem, and dealing out a pack of cards in two heaps. He was under the shade of a group of sandal-wood trees on the bank of the creek, yet his soft felt hat was pulled so low over his eyes, that as Victor approached he could see little of the man's face. Neither did he seem to notice the sound of the horse's hoofs.

Victor halted within a few feet of the fire, expecting that the solitary smoker would look up. But he went on dealing out the cards in unbroken silence, so engrossed in his occupation that he seemed oblivious of the rider's presence.

'Good-day, sir. May I come in?' said Victor at last, riding a little nearer.

The man did not start, nor show any appearance of surprise. Holding the cards he had in his left hand fan-wise, and pushing his hat back a little, he looked at his visitor.

'You may come under such shade as there is, certainly, young man; but to ask you to come in is beyond my power.'

'But is it agreeable to you that I should come under the shade?'

'Agreeable is a comparative term.'

'Ah, I see, you really don't want to be interrupted. Well, please excuse my intrusion.'

'Intrusion? Not a bit of it! Come under the shade and have a pannikin of coffee.¹ By the way, do you like coffee?'

'Oh yes, very much,' said Victor, who was really loath to go away without having some talk with this eccentric recluse.

At the first glance he did not look very much unlike an ordinary Bush labourer. But as soon as he spoke, it was evident that he belonged to a different class.

'I cannot offer you a chair,' he said, after Victor had dismounted and fastened his horse to one of the sandal-wood trees; 'and I fear there is a slight weakness in one of the legs of this stool. But I ought to have a box somewhere equal to your weight.'

He dived in under the cart and brought out an empty kerosene case,² on which Victor seated himself, with an apology for the trouble he gave.

'It's no trouble at all,' returned his host. 'In fact, I should probably not give you a seat if it involved any trouble. If you'll excuse me for a few moments, I'll finish this game with Jack.'

'Jack! where is he?' said Victor, looking round with surprise.

'He is not visible to the material eye,' answered the man gravely. 'He formed my acquaintance shortly after I dropped out of the ranks.³ I think he had some vague idea of setting up in the ghost business; but I didn't approve of that line, so I adopted him into the bosom of the family, so to speak. He plays a very good game in his own way—a very good game indeed.'

He went on smoking and dealing out the cards very slowly. It was apparent from the heaps already on the table, and the number still in his hand, that there must be two packs of cards required for the game that 'Jack' played. Victor watched its progress with great interest, pleased with the thought that he had, by chance, come in contact with one of those solitary men who are sometimes known in the Australian Bush as 'real characters.'

'By the Great Llama,⁴ Jack has won!' said the player, as he faced the last card.

'I hope that does not mean you lose a great deal?'

'Well, perhaps not. It just means that I may go on to Colmar to-morrow; that is, Sunday. I made a bet with Jack on the subject.'

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'Sunday? No—to-day is Sunday.'

'You must be mistaken.'

'Indeed I am not. Yesterday was Saturday—to-day is Sunday.'

The man with a perplexed look counted on his fingers.

'Monday I gave up fossicking; Tuesday I came here; Wednesday I went to the little shanty at Starvation Creek, where they sell grog on the sly; Thursday I returned with a furious headache and a few bricks for the pavement of hell;5 Friday I went across to see Van Diemen's Nick;6 and Saturday, that is to-day, I sank an experimental trench till three o'clock, and broke a shovel. In face of such an alibi, how can you explain your method of counting the days?'

'Perhaps you will be angry at my explanation,' said Victor, laughing.

'Anger is a moral luxury in which I have long ceased to indulge. Let us have your explanation.'

'"The next time I get drunk it shall be with those who have the fear of God in them."7 That carries my opinion of the alibi.'

The man's face slowly relaxed into a smile, and he looked at his visitor with some interest.

'You young rascal!' he said, in a tone of amusement; 'you think because you get tipsy yourself with boon companions, that a man of my standing indulges in the same weakness. . . . Perhaps you are right about the day. I suppose you've lived all your life in places crowded with the human species, where you knock every day into hours full of appointments, with men who cheat you and women who deceive you. I slung up8 that form of being happy many years ago.'

'And cin the meantime you lose a Sunday occasionally, and find Jack stealing a march on you. But do you think he won this game fairly, seeing that to-morrow is Monday?' said Victor, who longed to glean more information regarding the habits of the partner who was not visible to the material eye.

But the man did not at once reply. He went to the fire, and pushing the smouldering sticks together till they burst into a flame, he put a copper saucepan half full of coffee on the fire. Then he produced a second pannikin and handed it to Victor, nearly full of that beverage, very strong and of excellent flavour.

'Did you see anyone at work on your way here,' he asked, as he relit his pipe and resumed his seat. 'An old man, for instance, with a battered profile, as if people had been shying stones at him for half a century?'

'I saw no one since I left Colmar till I came here.'

'What! did you come from Colmar, from the mine?'

'Yes; I'm living there at present; I'm purser at the mine.'

'The purser? By Jove! you don't look much like it.'

'I give you my word that I can add two and two at the first shot,' said Victor with a smile.

'Oh, I don't doubt it! But why a young fellow like you should be at the Colmar bothers me. I should have thought you would at least be feeling pretty down on your luck, instead of which you go about with violet eyes, and a smile that embraces all creation.'9

'It must be your very good coffee that's getting into my head if I look so benevolent.'

'Ah, you find the coffee good? I'll give you the recipe for making it. Get the best Arabian beans; green, mind you. Roast them till they are quite brown, but not black. Then take two handfuls and bruise them between two stones. Put that amount to two pints of water in a copper saucepan, and let the water come to boiling—point slowly without the lid. That's the way the M'zabites of El-Aghouat10 made coffee when I lived in Sahara for some time, several years ago. But now tell me about the Colmar. Who is robbing that mine now for the shareholders?'

'No one, I hope,' answered Victor. 'Do you know much about the place?'

'I lived there six or seven months some time ago.'

'Oh! I wonder if you are the man Searle spoke about?'

'By the name of Oxford Jim?'

'Yes.'

'The same. Has Searle gone away?'

'Yes; I came in his place.'

'And who is the manager now?'

'Mr. William Trevaskis.'

'You don't mean that!' said the man with a start. 'William Trevaskis, eh? The last time I had the honour of

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seeing him he was rolling to Government House in a carriage lined with violet velvet, or something of that kind. Back to the old life, eh? Well, that is a piece of news!

'But how is it you didn't hear it before, living within ten miles of the mine?'

'Because I have for the last three months been not living, but hiding, like the modest peony;¹¹ burrowing little shafts, turning over gravel drift in dry tributaries of the sandy Broombush Creek, most of the time two miles from here, where no man comes. Excepting Van dDiemen's Nick—my friend with the battered phiz—I have not spoken to a soul for eleven weeks, till you came to-day.'

'For eleven weeks entirely alone! Why, it's like solitary confinement!' said Victor, looking round at the eerie desolation of the great neutral-tinted plain, which, in the declining light of the afternoon sun, assumed more and more the look of a limitless ocean without sound or colour or movement.

'Yes—solitary confinement with hard labour thrown in. And yet most likely six months from this, when I am spending my nuggets, eating the husks which the swine did eat,¹² I shall be sorry I left the Salt-bush country.'

'Your nuggets? Then you have found gold?'

'Oh, a little more than the colour,'¹³ answered Oxford Jim, with a satisfied laugh, and glancing behind him under the cart. Victor looked also, but all he could see were a few ordinary digger's tools, a roughly constructed cradle, a shovel or two, a pick, and two rusty edishes. But somehow the conviction grew on him that the solitary prospector had turned up trumps.

'Yes; a little more than the colour,' he went on, still smoking. His pipe had a very deep bowl, and the smoke, which ascended in blue spiral columns, seemed to Victor to have an acrid odour, foreign to ordinary tobacco.

'But what is gold to a man like me, an exile, an outcast, with a hateful past and no possible future; with every chance in life exhausted, every avenue closed? Someone says that each man bears his own tragedy about with him.¹⁴ I know what mine is, well.'

A vague look had come into the man's eyes, but there was a sort of mild exaltation in his face, and notwithstanding the melancholy despair of his utterances, he seemed to find a certain enjoyment in giving them expression.

'You are too much alone, you are morbid in consequence,' said Victor, who was touched by the thought of the man's dreary isolation.

'Morbid! Good Lord! what can make you as morbid as your fellow-creatures, when you begin to understand them? Snakes and dingoes and lizards are amiable sentimentalists in comparison with the bulk of mankind.'

Victor could not refrain from laughing.

'For my own part,' he said, 'I should like to be spared the amiable weakness of a carpet snake!'

'Oh, as for that, a carpet snake is a harmless worm, compared to your own kind of both sexes. He does not come to you with a smiling face till he gets a good opportunity to sting you. Ah, you may smile; you'll find it out for yourself one day. Now, take that man Trevaskis as an instance. I worked with him, for a year and a half, fifteen years ago. He was making money fast, and had thousands of pounds invested. I said to him one day, "I wonder why you keep on working like this when you have so much."

"Oh," he said, "I made up my mind when I was quite a boy that I would make enough money somehow or other to live like a gentleman; and I mean to do it. None of your poky, stingy little incomes, but something substantial and handsome."

'Poor old chap! it's rather rough on him to have lost all his money, after all.'

'Yes; but my feeling is that, on the whole, it served him right,' said Oxford Jim vindictively. 'When he said that to me, I said half jokingly: "Wouldn't it be a good thing to learn to speak like a gentleman, Bill, before you come on to the stage as a man of money and fashion?" He took up the idea quite seriously there and then. "Suppose you give me lessons," he said, "in pronouncing and writing? I'll pay you well for it." I didn't want to make a money affair of the matter. Indeed, I thought it would drop through in a month or so. But no, he was too determined. I never saw a man that stuck to any plan in all my life as he did, once his mind was made up. Every evening during a whole year he worked away for hours like a nigger; and then he would get up by candle-light and study again, writing out pages of dictation. Of course we grew very chummy in that time. I used to vary my lessons, in pronouncing and spelling, by telling him of the ways of living among the civilized races of the earth, developing his conceptions of society, as if I were a sort of unedited Manual of Etiquette.'¹⁵

Here, the speaker suddenly burst into laughter.

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'If you don't know much of the vagaries of Bush life,' he said, 'this may serve as a specimen for you. A man of fifty-five who grubs about in the wilds as a labouring drudge, and has lived the life of a wandering savage for over twenty years, can still give instruction in the social ethics of society.'

He had ceased smoking, and his utterance was now a little heavy.

'Then what was the upshot?' asked Victor.

'The upshot was that when I returned, after being in Africa and the East, some time ago, I drifted to Adelaide on my way to Blanchewater.¹⁶ Five years ago I saw Trevaskis face to face, in his rôle of gentleman—I, as usual, a poor devil in dusty clothes on the dusty highway—and—he cut me dead.'

'Surely he couldn't have known you?'

'Oh yes, he did; I caught his eye. Well, I believe I'll take the change out of him yet. I'm at a loose end just now. I want to wait for an old friend of mine who is coming down from the Far North.¹⁷ I might as well stay at Colmar—better than going to town, indeed. I'll most likely trundle across to-night or to-morrow. You won't be gone before then?'

'Oh no. You see, I have an interest in the Colmar Mine, and——'

'Oh, you have an interest in it, have you? Then just let me tell you a little secret,' said the man, with a sudden gleam of excitement, overcoming a drowsiness which began gradually to make itself apparent in his voice and manner. 'Search the cave room well.'

'Oh, it was well searched by the late manager——'

'Dunning, the man who was killed, you mean. Ah, I know a little about the sort of search he was making. Never mind, you take my advice. Tell Trevaskis you met an old man prospecting out at Broombush Creek, who advised you to turn over the floor of that cave room, with a passage between it and the manager's office. Don't tell him it was Oxford Jim who gave the advice, and don't let him search it alone!'

'Perhaps we had better have a couple of policemen to look after us both,' said Victor, in a jesting tone.

'Oh no, you haven't been long enough in the world, or in the gold business, to acquire the usual morals. . . . But there is a scientific classification of liars that I should advise you to keep in mind—the simple liar, the damned liar, and the mining manager,'¹⁸ answered the man sombrely.

'Well, good-bye! I expect I'll see you again, though I should do better to stay in the Salt-bush country than mix with the human race,' he added, when Victor rose to go.

The sun was low on the horizon as he rode back to the mine, his mind full of speculations regarding the lonely prospector. How had he come to have such a profound sentiment of the inutility of life, to be so penetrated with the conviction that henceforth nothing could change the course of his own existence, or make the world a fascinating place to live in? The thought that a human being could be so joyless and stranded, and perhaps, too, the solitary desolation of the country around him, gave the young man an unusual feeling of depression. But as he passed Stonehouse a curious glow of gladness stole over him, and his ride appeared to him in the light of an interesting event, one that might lead to the discovery of an unsuspected treasure.

Next day he and Trevaskis were engaged together in cleaning up the fortnight's yield of gold. Before the day was over, the gruff coldness of the manager's manner had thawed a little. He began to suspect that he might be doing the purser an injustice in supposing that he had any motive in coming to the mine beyond that of wishing to get a little experimental knowledge as to the working of a property in which he was interested. He worked so cheerfully, was so much interested in everything, sang snatches of 'Rory O'More' and 'Rich and rare were the gems she wore,'¹⁹ and countless other songs, in such a clear, blithe voice, and repeated some of Mick's stories with such an inimitable accent, that almost in spite of himself Trevaskis was drawn into a more genial frame of mind.

'I think you must have had an extra love-letter to-day, Fitz-Gibbon, you are in such good spirits,' he said jokingly as they were in the assay-room, after taking off the crucible in which the gold had been smelted. Victor coloured consciously. He had felt like a bird on the wing all day, because he was to spend the evening at Stonehouse. Yes, this was all that had come of the stoical resolution which on Sunday had led him to explore the wilds so as to keep out of the way of temptation. It is one thing, however, to do this on a given day, and quite another to remain inflexible during succeeding ones.

'Me get a love-letter! I'm surprised at you, captain, to be putting such notions into my head,' he answered gravely. Trevaskis laughed incredulously. Then it struck Victor that this would be a good opportunity to ask

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permission to search the cave room.

'Did you ever turn over that cave room at the end of the iron passage?' he asked somewhat suddenly.

Trevaskis, who well remembered the narrative told by Searle regarding this place, replied in a somewhat strained voice:

'No; I have not felt much tempted by the look of the place. A lot of Dunning's things are there; and old machinery with other odds and ends. Why do you ask?'

'Because, when I was out riding yesterday I came across an old fellow prospecting all alone, who-----'

'Told you there was some gold hidden away there?' interrupted Trevaskis, with a scornful smile.

'Perhaps you've heard the yarn before?'

'Oh, I've never been near a mine in my life without hearing four and twenty lying rumours about it.'

'Would you mind my fossicking over the place some day when it's convenient?'

Trevaskis' face darkened a little, and he hesitated before replying:

'Do you mean to dig in it? to look for a lode, or what?'

'Oh, just to make a thorough search, with Mick to help me when he isn't busy, or 'Zilla Jenkins when he returns. . . . I would be careful not to injure the place. Anything that's in it of value-----'

'Of value? I think the most precious article in it is an invalid chair. One of the managers broke his leg, and used to be trundled about in it; so Roby told me when I went down there with him the other day to look at some old machinery. . . . If there are many of Dunning's things, you might have them removed into one of the store-rooms.'

'Thank you; that could be easily managed,' said Victor, taking this as a grudging consent. 'I'll begin my search, say, on Monday next.'

'You better²⁰ have 'Zilla to help when he returns; he'll be a handy man in a job of that kind,' answered Trevaskis, in a more gracious voice.

But though in contact with Victor that day his suspicious mistrust of him had lessened, yet as soon as they parted he returned to his old standpoint.

'What should he want to go fossicking about in that place for? Perhaps to make sure that the late manager's belongings are not tampered with, or something of that kind,' he thought, with a sombre look in his face.

It was partly the inflexibility of his mind and partly the invincible suspicion of his nature which made it almost impossible for him to renounce a prejudice or an evil opinion once entertained. It was characteristic, too, that the lower motives of conduct always appeared to him more credible than any jothers.

a. left] right Adl

b. an] the Adl E1

c. in] Om.* Adl

d. Diemen's] Diemen* Adl

e. dishes] basins E1 see note 6 for p. 114

f. all] Om. Adl E1

g. to] Om. Adl E1

h. that] the Adl

i. had] Om. Adl

j. others] other Adl

Chapter III.

It was after dark that evening when Trevaskis went across to the Colmar Arms for his evening meal. When he came out at his office door, he saw Victor going across the reef towards Stonehouse. He did not turn up at the inn for tea, so it was evident that he was spending the evening with the Challoners. As the manager sat alone at the long dreary table of the dreary dining-room, he fell into one of those brooding fits of utter depression which from time to time overtook him since coming to Colmar.

At such times his past life would rise up before him, year by year and period by period, till he felt almost suffocated by despair, and a bitter sense of the injustice of his lot. He had earned his money so hardly—building up his wealth without help or bequest from anyone. And then, when he had achieved his purpose, how far removed he had been from plunging into reckless extravagance or speculation! The only faults he could charge himself with were trusting his partner too blindly, and putting so large an amount into bank shares, with the purpose of being quite safe. But now, after all his long years of toil, and those brilliant ones during which all his hopes were realized, he was beggared, and with no prospects in life that he could see beyond dragging out a death-in-life existence at some miserable mine, in the heart of some miserable desert. He had no knowledge nor training for commercial life; all his business aptitude lay in one direction. He had, after coming to the mine, some faint hopes that enough would be saved out of the wreck of his fortune to enable him to start as a sharebroker. But affairs had turned out even worse than he had anticipated. It was now certain that, in common with other shareholders of the bank that had failed, he would have to pay liquidation calls¹ on the shares he held.

As he sat plunged in the gloomiest reflections, feeling the weight of his misfortunes, and his loneliness pressing upon him like a heavy, physical load, he heard the sound of voices and loud laughter in the bar. Sometimes of late, when these fits of profound gloom overcame him, Trevaskis felt a nervous horror of returning to the solitude of his own rooms. He would have been ashamed to confess it openly, even to himself; but he would, in reality, have preferred to join the boisterous miners and stray swagmen drinking in the bar-room rather than remain alone with his despairing thoughts. He had sometimes compromised between the two plans, by sitting for an hour or two after tea in the bar-parlour, where the sound of voices of noisy merriment, and occasionally the strains of a banjo, an accordion, or a fiddle, gave him a certain sense of companionship. The bar-parlour faced the dining-room, being on the opposite side of the narrow passage which divided the newer portion of the Colmar Arms. Trevaskis went into the room on this evening, and found it as usual unoccupied, with a small petroleum² lamp on the mantelpiece, which diffused more odour than light.

There was a large horsehair sofa in the room, one end against the door that opened into the bar-room. Trevaskis threw himself down on this, with a newspaper in his hand. But he did not read it. His move into this room, with its staring wall-paper, its cheap vulgar oleographs, its strong fumes of negro-head tobacco³ and coarse spirits, seemed to bring home to him more forcibly than before the hopeless slough into which his life had been resolved. He recalled, with a vividness strange in his experience, all the external aspects and pleasures of the years during which he had enjoyed the delights and luxuries of wealth. His entrance into parliamentary life; the gratified sense of importance that came to him as his name began to figure in the daily papers—now introducing a deputation, then giving utterance to some pregnant comment regarding the mineral laws of the country, ever and anon as one of the guests at the more important social gatherings; at banquets to distinguished visitors; at official dinners given by the Governor—every detail had been precious to him.

He recalled the long evenings at the clubs; the pleasant excitement of hurrying from the theatre to go to an evening assembly; the malicious rumours and surmises regarding other people's affairs; the unexpected novelties and amusing gossip which his wife never wearied of retailing to him—all in his present cruel isolation had an exaggerated interest and value. But though, like the newly enriched of other spheres and countries, Trevaskis had developed a marvellous affinity for luxury and the more material aspects of refinement, he had no resources in himself. He read the newspapers, and there his reading began and ended. As soon as he had left the solitude of the Bush and the engrossing toil that had been sweetened by rapidly accumulating gain, he had taken with extraordinary avidity to all forms of amusement. Though he did not dance, he would pass hours watching people at a ball, enjoying the spectacle more thoroughly than most of those who took part in it. The

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music, the light, the flowers, the elegant dresses, the soft movement of costly fans, the fragrance of dainty perfumes,—all had an irresistible attraction for him. He was an habitual theatre-goer, and never missed an opera if he could help it. He had not the least technical knowledge of music, yet he would listen to a solo or a chorus with a sort of tranced rapture that had in it something almost hypnotic.

Now, he was exiled from all this, and worse still, he was separated from his wife and children. He recalled them as he had often watched them in the luxurious nursery of his big handsome house—his little fair-haired girls kneeling in their snowy-white nightdresses—and hot tears which refused to be shed dimmed his eyes. Then, crowding side by side with these reminiscences, came thoughts of his present surroundings—the mine, with its unceasing din and smoke, with the tents and hovels⁴ of the miners—those squalid abodes through which he passed and repassed thrice a day to his meals at the dreary inn. The earth floors, sometimes half covered with dust-strewn sacks; the dingy little deal tables, heaped-up with dirty dishes of tin and earthenware; the narrow bunks, with heaps of soiled clothing; the empty kerosene cases, that served for seats; the flapping partitions in some of the squalid interiors, covered with tattered newspapers; groups of children playing at digging mines, everything strewn with the grime of perpetual dust—all seemed stamped on his brain with the sharp precision of a photograph.

At times he would overhear the sound of women's voices in angry contention. In such settlements as the Colmar Mine woman is seldom anything more than the female of the man, with an emphatic tendency to shriek on insufficient grounds. Often he would meet groups of the miners on their way to the Colmar Arms laughing and talking merrily. They had washed and changed their clothes after coming up out of the mine, having put in their 'shift' of eight hours out of the twenty-four, at from eight to ten shillings a day. Many of them looked as if they had not a care in the world. Frequently he found himself envying them. He had left his own class—to do so had been the aim and the pride of his life. And yet, on this evening, after all that had come and gone, to sneak into a room where he could overhear men who belonged to his original rank in society, was the nearest approach to enjoyment which existence presented to him. He ground his teeth at the thought in a paroxysm of impotent rage, muttering half aloud, 'God in heaven! is there nothing I can do to get out of this dhole?'

He had of late been troubled with a dull aching in his head and eyes. To-night the latter were worse, with that acute sensation as of hot sand below the eyelids which foretold an attack of sandy blight.⁵ He rose and turned the light low, so as to relieve the tension of his eyesight. Then he lay down on the couch, with his face to the wall. Someone in the bar-room was playing a plaintive air on a zither; when it was ended there was a shout of applause, and several men spoke at once, asking the musician to have a drink in the various forms of invitation popular at the mine.

'Give it a name, old boy!'

'Have one with me, Hans.'

'Would you like a bath, or esuthin' stiff?'

'Nominate your pizen,⁶ mate!'

Trevaskis was astonished to find the voices penetrate the bar-parlour as distinctly as if the door were open. He went to see whether it was ajar, and found it was closed and bolted as usual. But the upper half, which was of glass, covered with a dingy cretonne curtain, had been broken in some recent scuffle. Hence all that passed in the bar-room was perfectly audible in the little parlour.

'Mein Gott! I cannot trink mid you all at once, my frents—von at a dime, if you please,' said the musician.

'You better have a good blow out while you can, Hans,' said one of the men; 'Roby will be making a blue-ribboner of you soon—now that he's got you to play at his Saturday concerts.'

'Ach Gott, even such a concerts is better than fnodings,' answered Hans. 'I haf few books, and I read small English. I do not get on fast mid your yellow packs.'⁷

'And little good they are when a bloke does read 'em,' said one, in a tone of conviction. 'It's allays the same sort o' onpossible chaps and females, with a lot o' rot about the sun ggoing down, as if 'e didn't every day follow out the same lines, since he first got 'is billet. . . . Now in my hopinion if you gives yourself over to be a liard, you ought to spin a good stiff yarn out o' your own 'ead. It's laziness and not the fear o' Gord as makes 'em steal old lies hisstid o' making up new ones.'

'You're not far wrong, sonny,' said an elderly man in an encouraging tone. 'For my own part, I'd more rather go to a gospel shop⁸ 'n read a inovel. One puts me to sleep sooner 'n t'other.'

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'Does Roby hold forth on Sundays as much as he used to?' said a man, whose voice Trevaskis thought he recognised, though he could not quite identify it.

'More so, from all I 'ears,' answered one of the miners. 'As for I, I gives un a wide berth. Go to 'ear a effigee of a man like 'e bawling out what 'e felt and what 'e thought and what 'e did? Not much. Ef 'e trampled on 'is conscience and 'is female, why can't the bloomin' idjit keep it to 'isself? Wash your dirty linen to 'ome,⁹ say the old proverb, and ef your soul is dirty, wash that to 'ome too, say I.'

'Brayvo, Circus Bill!' said one.

'Go it like a good un, old chap! Why, you could give us a stunning sermon off your own bat,' said another.

'As for jsermings, I'd like to know what was the good of ever takin' out a patent for 'em, from the beginning,' said another. 'I was one Sunday in town, wandering about, and I sees a place with ka door open and people goin' in. I followed 'em. There was Bibles, and hymn-books, and other utensils more or less religious, but not a soul said a word for 'arf an hour by my watch. At the end o' that, I got nervous like, and I came away. Someone told me lafterwards they was Quakers.¹⁰ If ever I jines a church it 'll be them, where people sits quiet and decent, keeping holy the Sabbath day, instead of setting a silly man to give a lot o' foolish jaw that no one minds.'

There was some laughter as the speaker ended, and then a man, in a thick crapulous voice, declared his conviction that all this chapel-going and preaching and creeds and Bibles was a made-up thing to keep mpeople from enjoying themselves over some liquor.

Someone remonstrated, saying in a reflective tone that in the old days 'the 'eathen rubbed ile into the karkiss of Christians, and put a lucifer match to them--and yet they went on spreadin'.'

'And then what sort of enjoyment is it?' said another, who spoke with a strong Scotch accent; 'pouring a lot of raw speerits down your throat till you're a beast, and then sleeping till you wake up a poor sick creature with a conscience like the undying worm.'¹¹

'Ach Himmel! dat is von way to trink,' said the German. 'Bud in mein gountry it nis not so. There two kameraden will sit for a whole day and night making joy and singing over their schoppen. In Ausdralia if von trink doo mooch id is othe teufel; bud if von trink doo mooch in pthe Vaterland,¹² id is yoost right.'

At this juncture the company in the bar was joined by a stranger.

'I'm blowed if it isn't Van Diemen's Nick!' said the landlord.

'Holloa, Nick, have you turned up too, old man?' said the voice which Trevaskis half recognised.

'You here, Oxford Jim?' cried the new-comer in a tone of surprise. 'Why, I thought you was far away, looking for the colour of gold among limestone ridges somewheres.'

'No, mate, I'm here instead. I'm going to take up a new line: write epitaphs, irrespective of the character of the deceased, for bereaved families, or something of that sort. I got kind of tired of regions red with black men's blood and stained with white men's crimes.'¹³

'That be damned for a yarn! You haven't been much beyond Broombush Creek all the time. Now, West, you look sharp, and give me a grown man's dose of your best Three-star brandy, dark,' said Van Diemen's Nick, in an authoritative voice.

The landlord, who was seldom sober after dark, broke into a string of lurid adjectives, winding up with the request:

'Pay me the three pound ten you owe me first!'

'I don't owe you a qsanguinary copper, not a farden,¹⁴ and you knows it, you cheatin' rvagabond!' shouted Nick.

There was a scuffle amid loud exclamations; Trevaskis blew out the lamp which was on the mantelpiece, and standing by the door that led into the bar, lifted a corner of the cretonne curtain to watch the proceedings. West had jumped over the bar and seized Nick by the shoulders. They were separated by those who stood nearest them; the landlady, half crying now, stood behind the bar imploring her husband not to make another row.

'Come, come, Nick! don't spoil good comradeship in this way,' said the man who was known as Oxford Jim, speaking in the half ironical tone habitual to him.

Trevaskis, on catching sight of him, at once recognised his old instructor in the arts of spelling and correct pronunciation.

'I don't want to spoil no good comradeship, but I sorder this tvarmin¹⁵ of a man to give me the refreshment I order. He's bound by his license to shelter man and beast and give nourishment when it's ast for.'¹⁶

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'I won't do neither till you pay me; and you've come without a copper to blesh yourself, as usual. I know you—you old penniless tramp!' shouted West.

'I'm an old penniless tramp, am I?' retorted Nick. 'Well, now, I'll just give you a lesson!'

He disengaged himself from Oxford Jim as he spoke, and thrust his right hand under the soiled blue woollen jumper he wore.

'Oh, hold 'im! hold 'im!' shrieked the landlady; 'he's got fire-arms; don't you see them a-bulging out all round of 'im?'

The landlord retreated behind the bar, and opening a small door which communicated with the back premises of the inn, called out, "Arry, 'Arry, 'Arry!" in thick stentorian tones.

A dragged¹⁷ and scared-looking maid-servant appeared at the door.

'I want the ostler!' roared the landlord. 'Tell him to go at once for Wills, the police-trooper. This very instant, mind! Tell him there's a harrest to be made.'

Trevaskis, standing in the darkness holding back a small portion of the curtain, watched Nick's uproceedings with growing interest. He saw him take a long thick looking package, wrapped up in a red cotton handkerchief, from underneath his blue jumper.

'Have you got the police-trooper handy, West?' he cried in a shrill voice that had in it a strange note of vt triumph.

The landlord, backing away a little while his wife wpassed in front of him, watched the man's proceedings with undisguised alarm.

'xYou had better play none of your revolver pranks 'ere, or, as sure as your name is old Nick-----'

'Call the trooper, I say! Let him bring his revolver. You yallus gives people in charge that has stuff like this.'

He was untying one end of the irregular-shaped parcel as he spoke. All eyes were fastened on him. Slowly he unfolded the soiled red cotton handkerchief.

'That's the sort of thing that gets a bloke into the "tin Maria"¹⁸ in this part of the world, ain't it, mates?' he cried, his voice almost rising into a yell of triumph, as he flung a large piece of heavy metal on the bar. It fell with a dull thud, and lay where it fell with a deep dull yellow glitter.

'By the Lord in heaven, it's all pure gold!' cried one of the men nearest the bar, in a tone of incredulous wonder, taking up the nugget. It passed from hand to hand, while the bar-room became full of confused and broken murmurs. The landlord stood looking on, eyes wide open, mouth agape, zwhen Nick turned to him with a violent imprecation, crying:

'Now, perhaps, you'll give me what I ast you for?'

West carried out the order as to the dose of Three-star brandy without a single comment.

Where had Nick been prospecting? Was there much gold? Was this all? How far away from the Colmar Mine? Did anyone else know of his find? To all of which Nick returned no answer, beyond smiling blandly and putting his forefinger significantly against his nose.

'This weighs over seventy ounces,' said the landlord, when he had at last got possession of the nugget, holding it as he spoke in the aapalm of his two hands.

'So this is what you were up to, Nick, when you were lying low and keeping dark all these weeks! It was rather hard to put me off the scent, though, and let me waste the sweetness of my old age among these billabong courses¹⁹ behind the-----'

'Don't let the cat out of the bag, Jim!' cried Nick. 'I'll give you a nugget or two, bbold bloke, and some horiginal promoters' shares in my new company.'

'Thank you, Nick, thank you kindly,' answered Oxford Jim. 'Why, man, this nugget alone will enable you to sit on a post and swill beer among the aristocracy of Colmar for a year to come!'

'Do you think I've got no better idea than that of enjoying myself?' said Nick indignantly. 'Ah, you're allays makin' game of a chap, and I think you're a little jealous, after all! You said you was getting the colour of gold where you stayed so many weeks behind Broombush Creek.'

'Broombush Creek—Broombush Creek!' The name passed from one to the other; one or two made a motion towards the door, as if they would set out for the place there and then.

But Nick took no notice. He kept his eyes fixed on Jim as he said, in a dogged tone:

'Come, man, let's see the colour you got. Show it to us! This is not my only nugget; I've plenty more where

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this came from!

As Nick spoke he put down three more nuggets on the bar. The men around began to look at him with a new expression on their faces. He was a small, lean man, with a flat, battered sort of face, who had led a flat, battered sort of life from his first entrance into the world. He had been for years prowling about in auriferous districts, chiefly because he had a rooted dislike to steady work. He ran up scores in the inns and stores that would give him credit, and then disputed the validity of the claims. His face and hands were perennially stained with earth; no one had ever seen him in clean clothes. The one solace of his existence had hitherto been to obtain a bottle of strong drink, and lose all thought and capacity of action in those strange bouts of absence from consciousness which we term drunkenness. And now, in the midst of the base and sordid accidents ccthat made up the record of his years, this strange thing happened to him. Alone in the arid desert, grubbing in the dirt, he had accidentally come upon a certain heavy glittering metal, more precious to the majority of his kind than the loftiest achievements of human genius, the progress of science, or the perfection of holiness. Nick enjoyed the unusual importance of being looked at without pity or contempt. Added to this, the old brown brandy, of which he had imbibed what he called 'a grown man's dose,' ddadded something to his feeling of importance. As he watched the crowd of men in the bar-room pressing round his nuggets, he turned once more to Oxford Jim.

'Show us the colour you got, Jim, do!'

'Well, I don't mind if I do, since you are so pressing,' answered the man thus addressed, as he rose to leave the bar.

He came towards the door leading into the bar-parlour, in which Trevaskis stood absorbed in listening to and observing all that passed. But before Jim reached the door the landlord interposed eagerly:

'Come this way, mate—it's the nearest way to your room.'

As Jim disappeared through the door behind the bar, West said in an exultant voice:

'I bet you a drink all round this chap's got somethin' worth lookin' at. He come here early this mornin' with a tumble-down little one—'orse cart, and an 'orse as you could count ee'is ribs arf a mile away; and he carries two or three swags into ff'is room, and locks it most careful behind 'im when he goes out.'

No one made any reply to this; all eyes were fixed on the door through which Jim had disappeared. A curious silence had fallen on the noisy crowd. Each one believed, without knowing exactly why, that the man who had accepted Nick's challenge with an air so self-contained and unboastful had something to show worth looking at.

In a few minutes he reappeared, carrying a bundle folded up in a blue blanket in his arms. A low murmur broke from the lookers-on.

Jim stood by the counter and unstrapped his bundle. The men pressed round him like a swarm of bees. Trevaskis, secure in the darkness of his retreat and the absorbed excitement of all the men, stood close to the door looking on with rising emotion.

'There, that's one bit of colour, Nick!' said Oxford Jim, holding up a great nugget of gold that weighed nearly a hundred ounces.

There was a hushed, breathless silence for a brief space, and then a wild shout went up, and there was soon a babel of distracting cries.

'Hip, hip, hooray! our fortune's made!'

'You wasn't working far apart, you two!'

'Mein Gott, ggis vas drue all de hhdimes. I iibas begin to tink Ausdralie was like other goundries, where von vork hard for liddle pay and no bleasures. But now I see it mid mein own eyes. . . . A man can get a gread lump of gold down in the dirt widout no governments!' said the German.

'There's plenty more gold where these nuggets were found. They're the biggest ever seen in the Colony. Here's news for you, Ben, here's news for you!' cried one to a newcomer who entered at that moment.

He was a correspondent for one of the daily newspapers in town, and no sooner had he seen the jnuggets and heard the tale of their discovery, and kkheard that the lucky diggers had been working in the vicinity of Broombush Creek, than he rushed off to the telegraph-office to endeavour to send a late message to town.

'There will be a great rush in no time; and we'll all be off to the diggings. Hurrah, hurrah for the new diggings!'

The cry was taken up on every side. When the tumult had a little subsided, Oxford Jim said, in a tone of quiet conviction:

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'Well, now, you fellows who are miners at the Colmar Mine, llyou better buy up the old cave room and search it well. You'll find it a better spec than going off to the new diggings, I can tell you!'

There was a roar of laughter at this; but Trevaskis, whose blood seemed to be on fire at sight of the gold, and who knew Oxford Jim well enough of old to feel sure he did not speak in jest, stole out of the bar–parlour unseen and unobserved, resolved that he would on this very night see for himself whether there was any truth in his words.

- a. petroleum] kerosine Adl E1
- b. which] that Adl
- c. newspapers; groups] newspapersthe groups Adl
- d. hole] infernal hole E1
- e. suthin'] sunthin' Adl
- f. nodings] nothings Adl
- g. going] goin' Adl
- h. isstid] instead Adl
- i. novel] novil E1
- j. sermings] sarmings Adl E1
- k. a] the Adl E1
- l. afterwards] arterwards Adl E1
- m. people] the people Adl
- n. is] vas E1
- o. the] de E1
- p. the] de E1
- q. sanguinary] Om.* Adl
- r. vagabond] ole vagabond E1
- s. order] command E1
- t. varmin] varmint E1
- u. proceedings] proceeding Adl
- v. triumph] victory Adl
- w. passed] passed away* Adl
- x. You had] You'd Adl E1
- y. allus] allays Adl E1
- z. when] until Adl
- aa. palm] palms E1
- bb. old] Om.* Adl
- cc. that] which E
- dd. added something to] increased E1
- ee. 'is] 's Adl
- ff. 'is] 's Adl
- gg. is] id Adl
- hh. dimes] times E1
- ii. was] vos Adl E1
- jj. nuggets and heard] nuggets, heard Adl
- kk. heard] found Adl
- ll. you] you had Adl you'd E1

Chapter IV.

When Trevaskis left the Colmar Arms, his intention was to go at once into the cave room and make a vigorous search without a moment's loss of time. On reaching the mine he found it was nearly eleven o'clock. According to his usual habit, he went across to the mouth of the shaft, and saw the night shift go below.

This was composed of thirty miners in all. To a man they were greatly excited by the news, which had already spread, of the pure nuggets exhibited in the bar-room by two diggers who had been prospecting not far from the mine.

'I got gold gravel there myself two year ago, out of which I made a ten-pun note,'¹ said one man not given to boasting or idle speech.

Ten of the men there and then gave notice of their intention to leave at the end of two days--the shortest notice which they could give without forfeiting wages.

'If I were wise, I'd throw up my billet here, and make for Broombush Creek before the rush sets in,' thought Trevaskis, as he recalled some of his past experiences at newly-found alluvial diggings. Various schemes flitted before his mind. One was to ride across at daylight to Broombush Creek, and make an examination of the vicinity for himself.

With his long experience and practical knowledge of gold diggings, there might be a certain fortune for him in that place, if he pegged out a good claim² and telegraphed to the directors of the Colmar aMine to accept his resignation from the earliest possible moment. He was so engrossed with these plans that, when he went into the cave room and looked around at its huddled confusion, his first impulse was to leave it without wasting any time on such a wild-goose chase.

The excavation was at its highest from nine to ten feet in height. The roof sloped away irregularly, extending on the north or reef side in a sort of low wide passage a little over three feet in height. The floor in the main body of the place was littered with old mine tools and disused machinery. Only the middle part was kept clear. Here there was a space of ten feet by twelve, covered with a square of linoleum. In the centre stood a small deal table, a canvas-back lounging chair, a stool, etc. Close to the table there was a large shoe-trunk, on which were placed two or three old cases with empty and half-empty bottles, containing various chemicals, such as nitric and sulphuric acid, mercury, borax, and carbonate of soda. There were, besides, strips of buckskin, canvas, and chamois leather.³ At a little distance from this space, and near the entrance, stood a bunk with a narrow paillasse and one or two rugs over it. Close to it stood the invalid-chair, covered with dust.

Trevaskis placed the lantern he had brought on the small deal table, and turned over the contents of these cases. The last he examined contained the usual solvents for gold, and all that was necessary for assaying it by cupellation.⁴ He was familiar with the way in which some men became infatuated in the matter of experimenting with gold and with the minerals that bcontained it. He perceived that some of the previous managers of the mine had been bitten with this mania. Webster, probably, in particular, the man who was now in the lunatic asylum, constantly raving about the three hundredweight of gold which had at one time been in his possession. All this would be more than sufficient to account for the stories in circulation as to the treasures of the cave room.

As this thought passed through Trevaskis' mind, he glanced round at the piles of discarded or worn-out machinery, elliptical sheet-iron buckets, broken hand-pumps, a little champion rock-drill with the cylinder smashed, a double-ended boring hammer, a few roll-picks, long-handled shovels, claying bars,⁵ etc. Then he looked with some attention at the two furnaces close to the western side. He found they were fixed in a strong and workmanlike manner. As he was examining these, he noticed a water-tap in the wall hard by. This tap was very stiff, but after some pressure he succeeded in turning it, and water poured out. So, then, it was connected by a line of underground pipes with the tank at the end of the offices, which was supplied with water from the main tank of Colmar.

It suddenly struck Trevaskis that a tremendous amount of ingenuity and labour had been expended on this place in one way or another. Could it all have been the freak of a man dgoing mad? 'I don't believe it,' he said to himself half aloud.

Then, for the first time, Trevaskis became convinced that some person or persons had carried on experiments

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to a singular extent in this place. This conviction made him begin to search in a methodical and careful manner.

He began with the large shoe-trunk. Having removed the cases that were on top, he tried to open it, but found that it was locked. A nearer examination showed that the lock was of the frail description usually found on such trunks. He further noticed that a small label was gummed on the top of the trunk. On wiping away the dust which covered it, he found that this label bore Dunning's name. He could not open the trunk without forcing the lock. After a brief pause he resolved to do this. Looking round the room, he soon found a hammer and a chisel. With a few blows he broke the hasp and opened the lid.

The trunk was almost empty. There were some papers, some half-worn clothes, a large bottle of laudanum,⁶ almost full, and a bunch of keys—five in all, two very small. Trevaskis took these out and looked around with increasing interest. It seemed unlikely that these keys should be kept here unless they were used to open boxes stored in the same place. There was a pile of wood and some bags heaped up near the furnaces. He turned the bags over, and found that they contained coke. There were six bags in all, and as he displaced the last he noticed that the ground close to it, in a southerly direction, was slightly raised. He instantly got a double-pointed pick to turn the earth over. At the first stroke he felt the concussion of the pick against a hard unyielding surface. Upon this, he got a shovel and worked more cautiously. In less than two minutes he had uncovered the lid of a large strong wooden box. It was fixed in a recess in the ground, and in front there was a slight cavity facing the lock. The largest of the keys fitted it, and Trevaskis turned it with a somewhat unsteady hand.

This box, unlike the other, was quite full. On top there was a suit of clothes which seemed very much out of place in a receptacle so jealously guarded. To wit: an old well-worn gray overcoat, very large, and not free from stains; a pair of dark moleskin trousers, with some earth-stains; a soft brown felt hat with a large brim, and a corduroy waistcoat. Trevaskis regarded these articles with some wonder. They were exactly of the kind that old Bushmen have by them as a best suit. After putting these aside, the next object that attracted his attention was a large carpet-bag. He took it by the handle to lift it out with one hand, but he could not move it without a strong effort.

'There's gold in it! there's gold in it!' he cried in a voice hoarse with excitement. His hands trembled as he fitted one of the small keys into the lock. But though he uttered the words over and over again, and in a manner believed them, the sight that met his eyes when the bag was fairly opened, and the upper layers of cloth removed, fairly took away his breath.

There were in all seventy-eight nuggets of gold, each folded in a piece of buckskin. Some of them weighed from seven to ten ounces, others a few pennyweights. He unwrapped them one by one, till they were all uncovered, lying in a great heap of almost pure gold. As Trevaskis looked at this, his breath came fast and thick, his lips were dry and parched, his head dizzy.

'It isn't Colmar gold—it's nugget-gold.⁷ It's the gold that Webster took from the tributaries near Hooper's Luck!' he said in a low, horrified whisper. And close on this came the thought that this gold was stained with blood, and that he would not touch it, that he dared not take it for his own. But the thought carried no conviction with it, and died away almost as soon as it arose.

Some of the kindly old divines who write with ardour of the beneficence with which the world is governed, would have us believe that temptations are sent in proportion to the degree of man's strength to resist them.⁸ When we leave the optimism of the cloister, we are unfortunately met by the fact that many temptations come with cruel psychological exactness at the moment when the one who is tempted is least able to bear the strain. Never before had gold, and all that it can buy, been so passionately coveted by Trevaskis as on this night.

'There must be two thousand pounds' worth of nuggets here,' he thought, taking them up one after the other slowly. Then a hazy recollection shot across his mind, of having seen an old pair of scales somewhere among the debris around. In a few moments he had discovered them, with the weights, hard by, wrapped in a piece of brown paper. To weigh the nuggets of gold, from the largest to the smallest, was the work of a quarter of an hour. There were five hundred and forty ounces in all, and so little of quartz or foreign mineral matter that barely twenty ounces need be deducted on this score. Yes, there were over two thousand pounds' worth, all ready packed in this carpet-bag!

There could be no doubt that it was the gold that Webster had committed murder for; and after Searle told his tale to Dunning, the late manager had discovered the gold here. Was there any more? What of those ten months during Webster's management when the weekly yield of the Colmar Mine had fallen from a thousand ounces a

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week to less than six hundred? What about Searle's statement as to the strange diminution in the amalgam? In face of the possibilities that these thoughts suggested, the gold he had discovered began to appear but as a paltry stop-gap in Trevaskis' eyes. For the first time in his life, a feeling of voracious, overpowering avarice seized him. Gold, gold, in masses, in heaps, in quantities to represent twenty or thirty thousand pounds! This was what would really mean restored wealth and prosperity for him. Was it, perhaps, hidden in heaps somewhere within this cave room? Was it for nothing that these furnaces had been so firmly fixed, and all the requisites for smelting gold provided?

Trevaskis, feeling as if his brain were on fire, renewed his search in the box with feverish haste. But very soon he was arrested by a strange and ghastly object. After removing a large flat portfolio, which lay under the carpet-bag, there was a square wooden box without a lid, the top covered over with several layers of tissue paper. In the act of removing these, Trevaskis became conscious of a faint, sickly odour. The next moment, as he lifted a sheet of paper, he caught a glimpse of human hair. He stared at the sight for a moment, in incredulous dismay. Then he removed the last sheet. Now there could be no mistake about it. The back of a human head, with long, thick gray hair straggling at the ends, lay fully revealed, and the nauseous smell had increased.

Trevaskis retreated some steps. The sweat stood in great cold drops on his forehead; his whole body was like a branch of shaking leaves. Should he replace the articles he had taken out of the box, close it, and flee? The thought of murder had been present with him from the moment he had sighted the nuggets. Involuntarily he had been, from time to time, on the track of the man who had ridden so hard to Hooper's Luck, and then back with these gold nuggets, leaving behind him a man stark and stiff, with his head horribly battered. Was this the evidence of another crime?

Trevaskis could not have told how long he stood overcome with horror and a feeling of miserable irresolution, when a sudden sullen reverberating sound seemed to shake the earthen walls and roof that environed him. He started violently, overcome with guilty fear. The next moment he knew that it was the sound of a blast in the mine, and with this the thought of his surroundings arose before him as vividly as they had pressed on his mind when he lay in the semi-obscurity of the bar-parlour in the Colmar Arms.

He closed the lid of the strong box hurriedly, and carried the portfolio and the carpet-bag containing the gold to the little deal table. On opening the portfolio he soon saw that it contained some of Dunning's private papers and letters. Among the latter he took one up at hazard, and began to read it without any thought of making a discovery that should affect his present position. It began with expressions of gratitude for the hospitality and kindness which the writer had received at the Colmar Mine, during a visit of four or five weeks.

'And now let me tell you,' said the writer on the second page, 'that so far from having forgotten our talk the night before I left, as you seem to fancy, I have been more successful in carrying out my commission than I could have hoped. My dear boy, you may consider that your bet of £200 with your old Sandhurst⁹ mate is in your pocket! I tell you what, old man—I'll stake my professional reputation as a man of thirty, whose fate it is to take the part of an aged father and a doting grandfather more frequently than any other rTMles, that the wig and beard I send you, coupled with a few other precautions, will render you absolutely unrecognisable.'

'The wig!' repeated Trevaskis half aloud, with a dawning light in his eyes. In a moment he was back again at the strong box. He opened it and pulled out what looked like a human head. It was a wig, and under it was a long gray beard and moustache. At the bottom of the box lay a dead rat. Trevaskis hauled it out by the tail and flung it with all his might to the further end of the cave room. Then, with a feeling of growing triumph, the elation of a man who is gradually assured of victory, he returned to the table and began to turn over the other contents of the portfolio.

Presently he came upon a plan of the cave room—an exact drawing that showed the conformation of the hanging wall and the floor, with well-defined circles in sixteen spots, five of them in the narrow passage¹⁰ running northward. Trevaskis took one of the picks and dug cautiously, but with extraordinary rapidity. In a very short time he unearthed a large strong blue glass bottle, of the kind known as the Winchester pint.¹¹ It was closed with a glass stopper, and over this was tied several folds of newspaper. The bottle contained a solid grayish mass of matter, being about three-quarters full. It was amalgam. The quantity in the bottle Trevaskis briefly reckoned was worth one thousand three hundred pounds. If there were sixteen of these hidden in the cave room, the total value would be something over twenty thousand pounds!

His brain reeled at the thought. For a few moments a sort of paralysis of mind and body overtook him. He felt

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like one who in a dream stands upon a precipice where one false step may be fatal. The treasure was within his grasp: only, in the first moment of success, his joy and elation were quenched by the thought that in a few days Fitz-Gibbon would, as he had said, make a thorough search! But with the thought rose a fierce determination to prevent this in some way or another—in some way or another to secure the wealth around him. But the first thing was to make sure that it was here. With this thought, Trevaskis set to work once more. The five spots marked on the plan as being in the northern passage each yielded up its precious deposit of a large bottle containing, on the average, half a hundredweight of amalgam, which would, when retorted and smelted, yield about forty-two per cent. of gold.

After that, Trevaskis turned over one by one the other spots marked on the plan. Not one failed; each held its own share of the treasure. As he looked around, making calculations, and adding up the amount of this strange and suddenly discovered wealth, Trevaskis' attention was attracted by the look of the bottles which had been hidden in the northern passage. They looked much fresher than the rest. The newspapers which were tied round the stoppers, though earth-stained, were not worn. He unwrapped one of these. It contained a date, and the date went back no further than three months. At sight of this, Trevaskis gave a low ironical laugh.

'So it wasn't only Webster, and the other fellow before him . . . for I'm certain the one who first began to creep into this place was stealing the amalgam . . . it was the extremely able and clever and trustworthy Dunning as well,' he thought. And then for the first time some misgivings, questions, scruples and remorseful qualms overtook him. One by one he replaced the bottles, and lightly covered them over. Then he went back to the strong wooden box. He turned over the wig and examined it attentively. He slipped it on his head, and found that it fitted him as if he had been measured for it, coming well down on his forehead and the back of his neck. There were fastenings in the wig a little above each ear, on which the patriarchal-looking whiskers and moustache should be fastened. Trevaskis replaced both carefully in the wooden box without a lid. Close beside this he noticed a smaller one; it was locked, but the second of the two small keys fitted the lock. On opening the box he found it contained a fluid for darkening the skin, an adhesive gray powder for the eyebrows, and a crayon for deepening wrinkles. There was half a sheet of paper, with instructions on these points written in the same handwriting as the letter regarding the wig.

It was apparent, then, that, on the pretext of winning some bet, Dunning, the able, honest, and trustworthy manager, had through his actor friend secured the means of completely disguising himself. At the bottom of the sheet of instructions, Trevaskis read the words, 'The wig and whiskers are those of a hairy old man who had been for some time remote from a barber. I think it would be well, in making your eyebrows gray, to brush them backward with a weak solution of gum. This will not only give them a hairy aspect, but aid materially in giving a different aspect to the eyes.'

'He intended to go away the very day after that on which he was killed,' reflected Trevaskis. 'He was going to Melbourne, and going to take this nugget gold with him; that would be less suspicious than the amalgam. In fact, to sell amalgam would mean to be marked at once as a thief----'

Trevaskis paused at the word, and then uttered it half aloud: 'A thief.' It had an ugly sound. Yes, Dunning's plans had all been carefully laid; so were the plans of the men who had got the gold on tribute at Hooper's Luck; so were Webster's plans. As the ugly sequence of murder, insanity, and sudden death rose before him, Trevaskis felt an impulse to take a solemn oath not to touch this gold, to let it come to the company to whom it belonged of right, to let Fitz-Gibbon discover the lot, all but the nuggets, which would in the natural course of events revert to Dunning's heirs, when they came to claim the property he had left at the mine. It was so much mixed up with the company's property that it would be difficult in some cases to decide which was which. Another fact that had come to Trevaskis' knowledge, since he had been at the Colmar Mine, was that the directors had made an advance of salary to Dunning, to the extent of £150, a few weeks before his sudden death. Hence all his books, papers, and belongings were kept as security by the company, till a brother of Dunning's in one of the other colonies, with whom they had communicated, should repay the amount and claim the late manager's belongings.

Trevaskis pictured to himself this man's surprise and delight on finding that a box in an underground lumber-room contained over two thousand pounds' worth of gold; he pictured to himself Fitz-Gibbon's excitement and wonder on finding this great store of stolen amalgam. What a commotion there would be among the shareholders! Yes, it would be a nine days' wonder, and then it would be forgotten, and things would go on as usual, and he would remain in miserable exile in the heart of the Salt-bush country. Such a chance as this did not

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come in a man's way twice in a lifetime.

'Ah, what shall I do, what shall I do?' he cried, suddenly flinging himself down on the bunk that was close to the entrance into the room. His temples and pulses were throbbing stormily. His mind was in a whirl. He started up after a few minutes, and took up a double-pointed pick, with the purpose of beginning there and then to dig a great hole in which to hide all the amalgam. But the next moment he threw down the pick with a bitter smile at the senility of the plan. No possible hiding-place could be devised with any certainty of being secure, in a place that would be subjected to a 'thorough search' by one looking for a treasure. His thoughts wandered to other modes of secreting this fortune. All around lay hundreds of miles of waste and uninhabited country. And yet there was no safety, no security, for such a treasure as this, except in the bowels of the earth, in a place locked against accident and design.

'If I could retort the amalgam in here. . . if I had even a month to turn round in. . . I could take up a claim somewhere near, and carry the gold away—according to Webster's plan. Once I had the gold in my possession, safe away from here———Oh, I'll do it, I'll do it, somehow or another, somehow or another———'

Trevaskis was pacing up and down rapidly, restlessly, with something of the fierceness of a caged animal, when suddenly a shrill whistle¹² broke the silence. He drew out his watch and stared at it incredulously. It seemed impossible that this should be the summons at six o'clock in the morning for the miners who were to take the place of the night-shift an hour later. His watch had stopped, he had forgotten to wind it up; but he now noticed that the candle, which he had put into the lantern whole, was burning low. He stood for a moment irresolute. Then he took the carpet bag, containing the nugget gold, out of the box, and after shutting it he sprinkled some shovelfuls of earth over the lid. Taking the lantern, he went out of the cave room and into the passage, the long, narrow iron passage, whose length had won Searle's fond admiration. Now its purpose was apparent. It had been built by Webster so that he could pass to and fro, when he was robbing the mine and contemplating his ill-gained possessions, screened from observation.

When he reached the first little square window, Trevaskis found that the sun was rising. As his eyes encountered the clear morning light, he became conscious of a sharp, smarting pain in them. The excited vigils of the night had made them worse. Yet so engrossed was he with the thought of his strange discovery, that as soon as he reached his office, and had locked the door leading into the passage, and put the gold into the strong safe in his office, his first act was to walk slowly down beside the passage, to examine its construction more closely, and to see whether any of the sheets of iron were loose. As he looked in at one of the little windows, he noticed for the first time that they were furnished with blinds of dark-green American leather.¹³ These were now closely wound up, so that he had not previously noticed them.

'Ah, he forgot nothing!' thought Trevaskis, still gazing in at the little window.¹⁴ At that moment he heard approaching footsteps, and a cheery voice calling him by name, which he recognised as Fitz-Gibbon's.

- a. Mine] Mines* Adl
- b. contained] contain E1
- c. etc. °.] Adl etc., etc. E1
- d. going] who was going Adl E1
- e. on] in Adl E1
- f. opened] he opened Adl
- g. was] were Adl
- h. them] Om. Adl E1
- i. somewhere] Om. Adl
- j. were] was E1
- k. that] Om. Adl E1
- l. like a branch of shaking leaves] shaking with terror E1
- m. the] a Adl E1
- n. newspapers] newspaper E1
- o. were] was E1
- p. were] was E1
- q. on] to E1
- r. should be fastened] could be secured E1

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Chapter V.

'Good-morning, captain! Have you been having a look at the new claim? I dreamt last night there was a tremendous heap of gold there. If that's true, you'll be forced to take it seriously, you know,' said Victor.

Trevaskis could not afterwards recall what his answer was to Fitz-Gibbon's remarks, as they walked together across to the offices. He retained his wits sufficiently, however, to avoid the common intriguer's folly of over-reaching himself by elaborate explanations of what might be taken for granted. The iron passage and the underground room were in his charge—under his sole key; and the conversation that had taken place might naturally have led him to view them with more interest. 'Whatever I do in this affair, I must always try to seem unconcerned and on the square,' he thought.

'You are up very early to-day,' he said, as they drew near the offices.

'Yes, I'm going for a good long ride. I couldn't sleep, somehow, once the daylight dawned this morning.'

Anyone observing Victor would have noticed a look of curious preoccupation in his face. Now and then he seemed to be on the point of smiling, and then he would knit his brows and walk a little faster, as if pursuing a troublesome thought, which he was determined to bring down. He went into the office for his riding-whip, and when he stood within the threshold he looked around inquiringly. Was it only a few hours since he had gone out of this room and walked down to Stonehouse in the gathering twilight? As he rode through the fresh morning air, he went over all that had then happened for the hundredth time. He did not see the ashy plains lying in monotonous uniformity under the fresh blueness of the morning, nor the majestic sweep of the horizon all round where the gray earth seemed to be folded within the edges of the jewel-clear sky. He was going over the few simple events of the past evening minute by minute, word by word—nay, step by step—when, after leaving the office, he crossed the reef, not following either of the paths, but taking a longer route and approaching the house by the western entrance, instead of coming, as his wont was, by the southern end, where his own room stood with its separate door opening into the avenue that encompassed the house on every side.

The hope that led him to do this was fulfilled. Doris was on the veranda, looking towards the west, her face touched with that wistful inquiry which, since her mother's death, had come to be her more habitual expression when alone. It was the opportunity he wanted, because, as he told himself, it would be so intolerable to meet her before others, after that sad little first meeting and abrupt parting, without giving voice to something of the sympathy that had been pulsing in his heart ever since. There was no awkwardness in their meeting, for the moment Doris saw him drawing towards her, she turned to meet him with grave simplicity, without hesitation or embarrassment.

'I was so sorry, after you had gone on Saturday evening,' she said, returning his bow and meeting his glance with the confiding wide-eyed gaze of a child who has never known fear. There was no trace of tears now on the thick sweeping lashes; the sweet low timbre of the voice was not strained; and the pure soft oval cheeks were lightly touched with a faint peachy bloom.

'Not sorry on my account, I hope, unless because of my fearful stupidity,' he answered. He tried to speak lightly; but he was so deeply moved that he was conscious of a treacherous unsteadiness in his voice. In the instant that her eyes met his, and that he heard the sound of her voice, he admitted to himself that, from the moment he had set eyes on her, he had been constantly thinking about her in one way or another, especially another,—that is, in roundabout, indirect, fugitive, unpremeditated ways.

'Your fearful stupidity? But when, then?' she said a little wonderingly.

'Why, when I wanted to say something to you so very much, that would make you feel a little better, and instead——'

'Ah, but, don't you know, sometimes nothing can make you feel better until you have cried all you want to,' she said in a lower voice.

'But it is bad for one to grieve too much; and I am sure good and wise people can often say things that help one in trouble.'

'What do they say?'

'Ah, you see, I am not one of them. I am not able to do more than feel I would do anything in the world to

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keep you from being sad.'

'But what do you think they would say to you if you had lived all your life with your mother? You two together, and then—Ah, but you haven't—you came away from her, didn't you?'

'By George! she is not going to forget that against me,' thought Victor, twirling the point of his moustache a little nervously.

'You see, it is because you are not a girl,' Doris said half apologetically, feeling that she had perhaps reflected rather severely on her new acquaintance.

'But suppose good and wise people knew a girl,' she went on, moved at the picture rising before her, and deeply in earnest in her inquiry—'one who had been with her mother day and night all her life, never away from her, and her mother was the noblest and the best and the dearest, always sweet and gentle, and doing everything that was good; and the mother was taken away, and the girl was left alone, and could never see her mother again as long as she was in this world; only sometimes when she slept her mother would come, and the girl would fold her arms tight so as not to be left alone again, but when she woke up they were empty? Oh, tell me what anyone could say to make the trouble less?'

Her lips were quivering, and there was an intensity of pathos in her voice which went direct to her listener's heart. Indeed, it is probable that this voice would have done that without the deep thrill that pervaded it. For a passing moment he feared that the keen edge of her grief would again overcome her. But he soon perceived that her sorrow was of that calm and pervasive kind which trains even the young and inexperienced into dignified self-restraint, which is swept away only by those flood-tides that arise when in solitude.

What could anyone say to make the trouble less? Her great radiant eyes were raised to his face awaiting his reply. And he, instead of being able to make answer with some serene and lofty maxims culled from the sayings of saints or sages, was insanely asking how it was he had never before seen eyes anything at all like these, and then, where could these violets have grown, whose breath was around her with such delicate haunting fragrance? With an effort, he pulled himself together.

'I think they would say different things, you know, in different ages,' he said, feeling acutely the abject lameness of his words. And then, a little inspired by the expectant look on Doris's face, he went on to say that in the old heathen world wise men bade people remember various things that should moderate human grief, but that Christians dwelt on other thoughts, such as the happiness of those who were taken from us. 'Not because they have left us, you know,' said Victor, feeling acutely that he ought not to have ventured on a theme so little familiar to him.

Doris listened in grave silence, saying, as Victor finished talking:

'Ah! yes; that is what Mrs. Challoner and Kenneth say.'

'Kenneth? Does he live anywhere near?'

Doris explained who her old friend was, and how they expected to see him on one of his rounds in the Colmar district in a few weeks. Then, after a little pause, inspired by a growing confidence in her new friend, whose voice and eyes were so full of gentle kindness, she said, a little hesitatingly:

'There is one thing, though, that often keeps me from being too sad: though mother cannot come back to me except in my dreams, I shall one day go to her—perhaps even soon.'

She stopped, struck by the look of startled pain that came into Victor's face.

'Oh no; don't say that!' he cried imploringly.

'But, you know, we all must go away one day, just like the wood-swallows who used to come to Ouranie. To-day they would be in the trees singing and flying across the lake, with their pretty silvery breasts and wide dark wings, and to-morrow they would be all gone. One could never tell the reason why. The almond-trees would be loaded with blossom perhaps, the violets out thick, and the Indian doob grass would have lost the last bit of brown, down by the shores of Gauwari, where it grew so thick; and yet they went, because the day had come. . . . I do not believe you like what I am saying,' she said, suddenly noticing that a wistfully pained look was still in his eyes.

'Yes; I would like anything you said. But I don't like you to think of such sad things; you are too young.'

'But I am more than sixteen; and even little children often die—like that boy last week of poor Mrs. Doolan's.'

'She was burnt out to-day. Did you know,' said Victor, who, having escaped the snares of explaining how the good and wise administered consolation, was now anxious to divert Doris's thoughts from so grave a theme as that

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of departing from this world like a wood-swallow who forgets the secret of returning.

'Oh yes; Mrs. Challoner has had her brought here with her baby. She had only time to snatch it up and run outside. Would you like to see the baby?'

'No, thank you, not at all,' answered Victor, with unnecessary fervour. It was not that he disliked babies more than the average of his sex, but there are moments when no kinfantile charms can soothe the pain of an interruption.

'It is a very nice little thing; we are going to make clothes for it, and for the mother. It is not you who send men away from the mine, is it?'

'No. I just have to put down how many hours they work, and pay them, and help to clean up the gold, and so on.'

'And which do you like doing best?'

'I like it best when the offices are locked and I come across to Stonehouse,' said Victor, with a little smile.

'Yes, isn't it a nice house to be in this place?' said Doris, looking around, 'and with trees round it! but they cannot get flowers to grow here. I sometimes feel as if I would be ill for flowers.'

Victor's heart gave a sudden leap.

'What kind of flowers do you like best?' he asked, making a rapid calculation of how long it would take one of the best florists in town to make up a box of his rarest and choicest flowers to send on to the Colmar Mine.

'I can hardly tell you; I think I like them all best in turn. If I said I liked roses best, I would at once think of violets, and then I would think of water-lilies—like those, with lovely waxen cups and saffron hearts, that grew in thousands on the edge of Gauwari. I like even orchids.'

'Ah, then, you don't like orchids quite so much?'

'No, except, perhaps, white ones. All white flowers are so lovely. But I do not like any hot-house flowers as much as those that grow out in the sunshine, and in the light of the moon and the stars—where the birds sing, and the dawn comes red into the sky over the tops of the trees.'

Doris paused suddenly, as if she had been betrayed into saying too much.

'Well, I never thought of it before,' said Victor; 'but now that you speak of it, how sickening it must be to be shut up with a thermometer and warm pipes, instead of being out where the dawn and twilight come! All the outlines become so visionary, and there is a faint, dreamy light. It is like a gentle swooning away, like things you half remember in a pleasant dream. I think these are the loveliest hours of all, especially in the woods.'

'I am glad you think that,' she answered quickly. 'And have you noticed how there is always one bird that keeps on singing after the rest—very often a honey-bird, when the gum-trees are in blossom. Oh, do you know, I am really very idle,' she said suddenly. 'That poor woman who was burnt out,' she went on in explanation, 'has nothing left for herself and the baby. Her husband was sent away from the mine, and he is somewhere looking for work. She had two one-pound notes, and they were burnt too—everything gone. We are all doing some needlework for herself and the child.'

A little later, when they were in the drawing-room that had been more especially set aside for Doris, the industry that prevailed was remarkable. Mrs. Challoner was changing one of her own serviceable dresses to fit the homeless woman; Euphemia was busied with another garment; and Doris worked with skilful, rapid fingers at a little pink dress. Challoner and Victor tried their skill one against the other at a game of chess. And always in the pauses during which his opponent studied the moves that might gain him the victory, the young man's eyes wandered round the room, noting some of the things that had before given its air of delicate culture and refinement to the Ouranie home. The rows of morocco-bound books in the dwarf bookcases of ebony, touched with gold moulding, ranged against the wall; the graceful antique vases; the rare china; the pictures; the delicately-carved fans; the brackets with their photographs of gently nurtured men and women; the soft, silken curtains that draped the windows; the branched candelabra of old massive silver, with their many-shaded candles diffusing a rosy light over the room, and above all, the exquisite young face with the heavy, upward curving eyelashes, casting a pathetic shadow under the radiant eyes—all these enchained Victor's eyes. It seemed like a dream, that a scene in such curious contrast with its outward surroundings should be found in the heart of the Salt-bush country, and closely neighboured by the Colmar Mine. Perhaps it was little wonder that once and again Victor came off second-best at chess on this evening.

'But still you have more skill than I have. I look for a beating the next time,' said Challoner, as he gathered up

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the chessmen. Then, before going out to smoke on the veranda, he begged Doris to play a little. 'You are just quite a Dorcas meeting² to-night,' he added, with his slow, benevolent smile. 'So I'll only ask for that piece with the birds calling to one another.'

On this, Doris put down the little pink dress and went to the piano. After a few preluding bars, she played one of those improvisations which her mother used to find so full of woodland charm. The flute-like warblings of the magpies as they sing, when the faint vapours that hover over the woods begin to swim out of sight in the clear dawn; the fan-tails' chorals of exceeding gladness; the sweet tinkling calls of the superb warblers,³ first a solitary bird mtrilling its magical notes, then another and another, till all the air is rifted with ecstatic sounds—all were cunningly interwoven on a rippling accompaniment which Doris had transposed from an old cradle-song. Her mother had found delight in listening to her nreproduce these snatches of bird-songs, and this was the first thing the girl could bear to play after leaving Ouranie. She had played it over and over again, trying to fancy that it might somehow reach her mother's ears, and that it pleased her as in the old, happy days, till she had caught the keen, fluctuating nuances of bird-notes with marvellous precision.

Victor stood at the end of the piano, looking and listening as if spellbound.

'That was a little troop of singing honey-birds, I think, at the end,' he said in a low voice, with a lambent glow in his eyes that was new to them.

'Yes; I was trying to remember how they called to each other when they first found our Murray wattles⁴ in bloom down by the oleander bushes,' answered Doris, in her gravely simple way.

'Do you know this bird?' she added, striking a few chords which made deep, re-echoing cries of hubuh huh! hubuh huh! with faint, hollow-sounding reverberations, very weird and solemn.

'Oh yes, I do,' answered Victor eagerly. 'Where did I hear them one Michaelmas vacation when I went to Mount Gambier? I remember now it was in the reedy marshes of the odismal swamp.⁵ That is the booming of the bittern. But I have never seen one.'⁶

Doris, it turned out, had long watched for psight of one by the shores of Gauwari, and after she had resumed her work, Victor sat on a chair near her to glean information as to the plumage and habits of the bittern. Rather a large bird, the neck very long, mottled chestnut-brown and black, with what avidity he learned these details! And then when the bittern was exhausted, his eyes fell on a chair-back bordered with the most grotesque little figures, outlined in light and dark crimson silks, others in pale and dark blue.

'What very strange-looking creatures these are!' he said, examining them closer.

A faint smile rose on Doris's face, and he guessed that the needle which flew so nimbly in her slender rose-tipped fingers was responsible for these funny little effigies in Chinese clothing.

'What can they be?' he asked, watching to see her look up.

'They are Gooloos,⁷ answered Doris, smiling more broadly, 'and they used to live on the far side of the Wall of China.'

'Most of them seem to be in great trouble. Are they friends of yours?'

'Oh, I do not like them very much; but I am sorry for them.'

'Why are you sorry for them?'

'Because the poor little mites are always trying to do things they qbetter not.'

'What sort of things?'

'To make shadows stay in the same place, to turn sunshine into fogs, to make the moon and the stars keep quite still, to teach the birds to count one, two, three, instead of singing.'

'The poor Gooloos! And that is why so many of them are crying?'

'Yes, and because it is easier to hide their faces in their hands than to make them look properly sorry.'

On this Victor laughed, softly⁸ saying:

'And yet, in all their grief, they have such lovely coloured robes.'

'They must all keep their own colours,⁹ you see; they belong to the crimson faith and the blue faith.'

'What is their faith besides wearing pretty colours?'

'Oh, I think it is what they want other people to believe,' answered Doris thoughtfully.

Victor smiled as he recalled it all. And yet, in thinking of Doris, even in solitude, the expression uppermost on his face was a deeply serious, appealing look. The austere silence of these vast plains began to insensibly colour his thoughts. Not even the cry of a bird or a breath of wind broke the stillness, which the golden sunshine,

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growing stronger and fuller, seemed to intensify—a stillness deep and breathless as that which broods over the landscape in the background of Raphael's 'Vision of Ezekiel.'¹⁰ In such a scene, with an air so light and pure that one becomes unconscious of inhaling it, the mind which has not yet lost the freshness of youth is readily touched to finer issues than those that prevail in a grosser atmosphere.

What stores of buoyant fancies, what sunlight—enfolded thoughts, what radiant communion with Nature, the child must have possessed before the shadow of grief fell on her young life! But she would gradually roverlive this sorrow; she would laugh and be gay once more in the light of the sun. Happy the hours that would win her back to the unspoiled gladness of her childhood! So ran the thoughts of the young man; and then, in thinking of the maiden, a curious mood of exalted impersonal rapture grew on him—less keen than joy that is solely individual, but warmer and closer than the glow which comes at times with the onrush of thoughts as to the glad vague possibilities of life. The hunger which had at times gnawed at his heart, as if for wider and deeper emotion than he had yet known, was satisfied. And yet with this new—born felicity, the consciousness of disloyalty towards Helen, which had dismayed him in the tumult of his thoughts on first seeing Doris, was now absent. It was as though, in addition to all that he knew of good in life, he had suddenly come on a revelation of its ideal glamour and preciousness. The face and form, so exquisite in their beauty and innocence, seemed to him a type of that spiritual loveliness which man worships rather than dreams of possessing. He would see her from day to day; he would find out ways of serving her, of bringing the rare smile oftener into her face. He pictured her looking at the beautiful flowers for which she pined—white fragrant flowers. In two days from this he would bring them to her. His heart beat tumultuously at the thought.

Then, as he rode into Colmar and passed by the post and telegraph office, the thought struck him that he would save more than a day by telegraphing to the florist. The office would be open in half an hour. He left his horse in the stable of the Colmar Arms and went into the dining—room. He passed one or two groups of men in eager, excited talk about gold finds and diggings and large nuggets. But he was too much absorbed in his own thoughts to hear what was being said.

- a. good] Om. Adl
- b. so] Om. Adl
- c. wide—eyed^o] wide—eye* Adl
- d. the] Om. Adl
- e. the] Om. Adl
- f. that] Om. Adl
- g. dwelt] dwell E1
- h. were] are E1
- i. snares] snare E1
- j. unnecessary] an unnecessary Adl E1
- k. infantile] infantine E1
- l. are all] all are Adl E1
- m. trilling] thrilling Adl
- n. reproduce] reproducing E1
- o. dismal swamp] Dismal Swamp Adl
- p. sight] a sight Adl E1
- q. better] had better E1
- r. overlive] outlive E1

Chapter VI.

'I've had a glorious ride, captain,' he said, taking his accustomed place at the table, where breakfast awaited him. One sat reading a newspaper with his back to the window, whom Victor on entering took for Trevaskis. But on being thus addressed, he made his face visible above the paper, and Victor recognised the man he had seen at Broombush Creek on the previous Sunday.

'This is a pleasant surprise!' said Victor, and the two shook hands like old friends.

'You know my given name, with its Bush prefix, is Oxford Jim. Allow me to introduce myself in proper form—James Vansittart. Oh, so you're a Fitz—Gibbon? Are you any relation of the Captain Fitz—Gibbon who came out as aide—de—camp with Governor Somebody early in the sixties? His youngest son? Well, in appearance you're a proper chip, etc.,² but otherwise the pendulum seems to have swung back. . . . You know what I mean. The father can't exist without clubs and high play, and all the other little effete sophistications of society. But the son returns to the primal sanities of life, grilled chops and steel forks at eight o'clock in the morning, and a pursership at the Colmar. . . . I'm waiting with some impatience for the captain. I'm going to keep on the lay³ that he doesn't know me, you see. It's a little bit of comedy, and nothing is rarer in life. You pay for it at the theatre, but they give you instead a slavey with a smudge on her face.⁴ I shall stay here for two or three weeks, probably. I've sent about a thousand pounds' worth of gold on with the trooper to a bank in town. . . . Of course you've heard all about the gold. I had a good mind to tell you on Sunday, but I was going to keep it a dead secret till I got to town and started a company. I'm not sure I hadn't some floating ideas of playing the big man, and riding in my carriage, and losing my memory when I saw some poor devil trudging it on foot who worked with me for a year and a half. Lord, Lord! what funny little guinea—pigs we all are!'

Vansittart laughed softly, and sipped a little coffee, but made no pretence of eating. He had discarded his digger's costume, and was attired in fresh white linen, and a tolerably fitting dark suit of clothes. He had also paid a visit to the barber, who combined his professional duties with a little temperance bar of what he called American drinks;⁵ and the change that these little concessions to the usages of civilized society had effected were much to his advantage. But that curious expression of vagueness in his eyes had deepened rather than decreased. He had been smoking his long—stemmed pipe, and Victor was again sensible of that faint poppy—like odour which he had noticed the first time he was in Vansittart's company. He evinced also the same proneness to speech, falling into complacent monologues, in which his own observations seemed to afford him that glow of enjoyment book—lovers find in reading a favourite author.

When he found that Victor had not heard even a rumour of the exciting gold scene in the bar—room on the previous evening, Vansittart gave a graphic description of the event. Nothing had escaped him, except, of course, the man who had heard all in the next room, and whose part in the drama was to affect Victor in so unforeseen a manner. It was like those plans we form of life in which we leave nothing out except the master weaver, whose cunning threads are to form the most fateful pattern of our lives.

'I shouldn't wonder if you found a few of your miners non est⁶ to—day,' said Vansittart, looking out at the window towards the mine at the close of his narrative.

'Oh, if we have a dead—lock,⁷ I'll turn digger myself,' answered Victor gleefully.

'Here he comes; now for a little fun!' said Vansittart, taking his place at the table. 'Another cup of coffee, if you please,' he said to a maid who had come in with a fresh supply of chops.

Trevaskis came in hurriedly, and sat down with a slight nod to Victor. His eyes were bloodshot, his face flushed, and there was a tremulous motion in his hands which he could not wholly control. He stared at Vansittart for a moment, and then said with a forced smile:

'Haven't we met before, old man?'

Vansittart returned his look with a blank expression. Then, with a slow smile, he said:

'You must have a good memory. I remember seeing you five years ago in a carriage going into Government House. There was a block,⁸ and your coachman had to rein in his fiery steeds for three or four minutes. I was one of the vagabonds looking on, you know, feasting my eyes on the colonial aristocracy.'

'I didn't see you then,' answered Trevaskis, a deeper flush rising in his face.

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'Oh, I met your eyes; I looked at you particularly, for I thought to myself, "Now, there's a man who was probably not born in the purple. But by thrift and industry, and fair-dealing and perseverance, he has made his way to the front ranks. He is one of the men the newspaper fellows call the backbone of this great, young, democratic country."'

'Stow your jaw!9 what are you giving me such impudence for?' broke out Trevaskis savagely.

He had caught a passing smile on Victor's face, when, having finished breakfast, he took out his pocket-book to ephrase the telegram he was going to send when the office should open ten minutes later. . . . 'It's a put-up thing between the two of them. He's taking notes to make a good story out of it, for his friends in town,' was the thought that rose in Trevaskis' mind, and goaded him into a sudden explosion of wrath.

'Impudence, my dear sir! I assure you I know my place better,' answered Vansittart with unmoved suavity.

' "Bless the squire and his relations; Give us, Lord, our daily rations; Make us know our proper stations,"10 were the first lines I lisped. Probably they will be the last I shall breathe when I "shuffle off this mortal coil"11 in some benevolent institution of your great democratic, etc., etc.'

'I suppose the big nuggets have got into your head, Jim. No doubt you're one of the fellows who came here with the swags of gold last night, that everyone is talking about,' said Trevaskis, trying to carry off the matter with the bluff, hearty manner of a man who can give and take a joke.

'Jim—and pray who is Jim?' said Vansittart in a tone of amazement, and drawing himself up with a haughty air.

'You say you do not remember the occasion on which I had the honour of seeing you, and yet you address me by my front name. I beg your pardon, sir, you have the advantage of me.'

Trevaskis looked at Vansittart with baffled rage, and then glanced at Victor. But he was now oblivious of what was going on around him. They were a curious trio: Vansittart happy in the little farce he was acting, and revelling in the consciousness of his newly-found fortune, soothed into forgetfulness of the past by the treacherous nepenthe12 with which he had learned to drug his mind against memories of his wasted life. Trevaskis with his brain inflamed by that cruellest of all lusts, the lust for gold; his imagination alternately on fire with inchoate schemes for getting possession of the treasure he had discovered, and dazzling visions of returning to his family, to his lost place in society as a man of money and influence; then dashed with cold fears by thoughts of the doom that had overtaken his predecessors. And with these two, the young man, immersed in one of those charmed episodes in which all the world is full of opening roses, and dreams that have more ideal bliss than any vision of happiness that is translated into the implacable prose of existence.

'I suppose the telegraph-office is open by this time,' he said, glancing at his watch before he went out. The words brought a dew of cold perspiration out on Trevaskis' forehead. For a moment the certainty seized him that Vansittart had given such information regarding the underground room to Victor as had induced him to telegraph the news direct to his uncle. The next moment he made a mock of himself for his fears. 'Remember the man's head and the dead rat,' he said to himself; and this became a sort of rallying-point when moved by any sudden fear. Yet the hope that he might glean some inkling of what had passed between the two, induced him to make one more effort at a better understanding with Jim. But Vansittart, with a gleam of enjoyment in his eyes, rebuffed him as before, and left the dining-room a few minutes after Victor had gone.

'Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday.' He counted over the days that might intervene till 'Zilla returned. Fitz-Gibbon would then expect to carry out his proposed search. The excitement about the new diggings, and the rush that would be certain to take place, might prevent his securing 'Zilla's help for a thorough examination for some little time, but would offer no bar to Fitz-Gibbon's making investigations on his own account. And how could this be prevented without raising suspicions—suspicions, too, which the slightest examination of the cave room would more than verify? If he could only have a clear month, in which to retort the amalgam!13 Nothing could be more fortunate than this discovery of gold in large quantities in the Colmar district, for it would enable him, if once he secured the treasure, to dispose of it without much difficulty. He could, for instance, remove the gold in a waggonette, and take up a solitary claim after resigning his post as mine-manager, and gradually invent his luck. Or if the diggings that started had any importance, he could, as he had often done before, act as a sort of middleman and buy up gold on the spot. He was well acquainted with the average digger, and could count without fear of disappointment on buying up gold very readily for pound-notes paid on the spot. . . . And, besides, if there was a rush he would only need to buy just as little or as much as suited him. The wildest rumours were always

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afloat as to the quantity of gold raised, and it was well known that a large proportion of the diggers habitually concealed their findings.¹⁴ He had once before smelted nuggets, so as to prevent the banks from over-reaching him,¹⁵ and there would be no difficulty in the way of his selling the gold in pure bars, assigning the same reason for his action. . . . Only let him safely secure the treasure, and other difficulties would disappear.

On his way back to the mine, Trevaskis' brain was in a whirl as to what plan he should pursue. Near the engine-house he was met by some of the miners who wished to leave there and then, forfeiting two days' wages.

'Go on and get your cheques,' he answered laconically. He went into the smithy and watched one of the men at work as he sharpened some rock-drills. Then he passed on to the carpenter's shed, where the carpenter was preparing some joists for repairing the roof of the powder-magazine, which was at the foot of the reef half a mile off. Roby consulted him as to the necessity of ordering an additional stock of shoes for the amalgam-pan, also of dies and battery gratings.¹⁶

'We shan't want 'em for some time, but if there's a big isturt¹⁷ at these new diggings we may be left in the lurch. The teamsters-----'

'All right; send in a memo. to the purser of any articles you think should be sent for. I'll look over the list before it's sent.'

'I'm afeerd, cap'en, you're not very well; you're lookin' jsomewhat white to-day,' said Roby.

The flush on Trevaskis' face had subsided, and his eyes, besides being much bloodshot, had a curiously contracted look, with dark-red semicircles under them.

'No, I'm not at all well,' he answered. 'The fact is, I don't believe I can stand the heat here at all. Just see how the sun is blazing down at half-past ten in the morning, and we're only at the end of October.'

'I tell 'ee what it is, cap'en, you'll 'ave to take to the under-room, as poor Cap'en Dunning did klast summer.'

'Well, I'll go down and try it, after I finish my morning round,' answered Trevaskis in an indifferent voice.

He did not go, however, until he saw Victor on his way to the Colmar Arms at one o'clock. When he descended, he went direct to the hidden trunk and took out the box containing the wig and beard. He also took the portfolio containing Dunning's letters, and carried them into his room. So much of his many plots, at least, should take active form. He would make sure of the gold locked in his safe, and he would invent some means of selling it, secured against detection. He had a kind of groping intuition that some plan would suggest itself, by which he could make use of Dunning's preparations for disguise.

He knew it would be useless for him to attempt to sleep. He locked the doors of his office and room, drew down the blinds, and fitted on the wig and false beard and moustache, and put on a pair of smoke-coloured sun-glasses. The transformation was sufficiently striking. But it became still more so when that night, after darkness closed in, and he was secure from any interruption, he went through the process of deepening the lines in his face, of giving it that sun-bronzed hue which the mixture in the phial produced, and finally ruffling and powdering his eyebrows in the way that Dunning's actor friend had suggested. Then he once more put on the wig and beard. They were so well made, so natural-looking, so closely fitting, that it was difficult to believe they would have disguised anyone else as they disguised him.

This completeness of disguise gave him a curious feeling of confidence. Dangers and difficulties lay in the way, no doubt, but the greatest difficulty of all was surmounted in having the means of hiding his identity so completely when he disposed of the gold. How to do that without running the risks which seemed inseparable from long delay, kept him awake till long after midnight, though this was the second night through which his vigils extended. He was up next morning, notwithstanding, in time to see the men of the first shift go to work. There were no fresh departures for the diggings; but the daily newspapers reported the sensational find of gold which had been revealed by two men who had been working within a few miles of each other in the locality of Broombush Creek, and prophecies were made as to the rush that was inevitable. It was further surmised that other solitary diggers had been for some time in the neighbourhood with more or less success. Trevaskis glanced hurriedly over the newspapers. Then he looked over his letters. There was one from the secretary of the company, informing him that a letter had been received from a brother of the late manager, intimating his intention of coming to the colony in the course of six weeks after the date of writing, to look into his brother's affairs, and take possession of the effects which were at the Colmar Mine.

'The letter was dated from Sydney,' wrote the secretary. 'So that Mr. Raphael Dunning may come by way of Broken Hill.¹⁸ In order to prevent mistake, the directors request me to say that the late manager's personal

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belongings at the mine are to be handed over only on the production of their authorization to that effect.'

Trevaskis' first action after reading this letter was to turn to the portfolio and ransack the rest of the papers, at which he had not yet looked. Two or three were concerned with unimportant matters, one concerning a little cottage which Dunning was apparently renting on behalf of someone not named. The next letter he took up contained a house-key. The letter enclosing it ran:

'Sir,

'oHenclos pleas find recet for p£19 10s. for Six mounth rent¹⁹ of Cotage noomber 4 in bendigo-row hindmarsh²⁰ from 1 July to 31 decembur, hit bein' cloas to the railway Station he won't find no deferculty in findin' hit, and whatever Date he come within the six mounth he can take posission but I must have a mounth Notis if he want to leeve at the end of the leese there is shutters to the Winders of the two front qrooms so if any pains is smarshed I dosnt hold myself Rispoansable witch the naybors is desent and not likely to brake in.

'Your rispeckful,

'Noah Allert-----'

Trevaskis stared at this production for some moments.

'What the devil was the fellow up to with this?' he said half aloud, and then in a moment it flashed across him—all the more readily because it offered a solution of one of those lame gaps which stared him in the face, the moment he tried to think out a working scheme for disposing of over two thousand pounds' worth of gold, in the guise of an old digger. He steadied his mind now by a strong effort in the tumult of excitement which arose with the feeling that he saw his way clear before him. Step by step he went over his scheme: he foresaw every difficulty; he provided against every contingency; he made sure of his safety from every point of view; and he swore a great oath that what one man had failed to do because of insanity, and another because of sudden death, he would accomplish within a week.

'No, nothing will happen to me, nothing will cross me. I'm the third—no, the fourth man; for there was the digger who was murdered. I'm the fourth man that set his heart on enjoying this gold, and it's against the law of averages that I too should fail—completely against the law of averages.'

- a. I've] I have Adl
- b. had] Om. Adl E1
- c. were] was E1
- d. those] these* Adl
- e. phrase] word E1
- f. a] this E1
- g. made a mock of] mocked at E1
- h. the] Om. Adl E1
- i. sturt] spurt* Adl
- j. somewhat] some Adl E1
- k. last] larst Adl E1
- l. having the means of] Om. Adl
- m. newspapers] newspaper Adl E1
- n. concerning] relating to E1
- o. Henclos] Henclose* Adl
- p. £19 10s.] £9 10s. Adl E1
- q. rooms] rums Adl E1

Chapter VII.

When the mail-coach came in on Thursday morning, it was crammed with passengers, all bound for the new diggings.¹ Half an hour later a large American waggon drawn by four horses, also crowded with people bound for the same place, passed by the Colmar Mine. Then, all during the day vehicles of various descriptions were seen rumbling slowly on their way to this new Golden Jerusalem² of the Salt-bush country. It turned out that over four hundred men had reached Nilpeena that morning by the early train, all bent on being afirst in the field. Most of those who had money clubbed together and hired all the vehicles available in the township to convey themselves and their impedimenta to the gold-fields. Many of these were well equipped with tents, tools, and a couple of weeks' rations. But the larger proportion were men who, on getting out at the railway station, tramped it on foot, with neither purse nor scrip,³ with a shovel rolled up in the blue blankets slung on their backs, carrying in one hand a 'billy,' black with use and a rigid absence of outer scouring. bBesides the pick or shovel there was perhaps a loaf in the swag, certainly a modicum of tea, sugar, and tobacco.

They tramped on in a long straggling line, their route marked here and there by columns of smoke, where some alone, some in groups of from three to five, halted to boil a billy of tea and smoke a pipeful of the strong fig tobacco which Bushmen habitually use. Many were found among them who were without even these elementary necessities for tramping it to an unknown gold-field. But when they were in company with others who were better off, the more destitute ones were not left in need. Nor was any surprise felt at the faith, or recklessness, of men who had neither tea nor tobacco, nor food nor tools nor money to buy cthem—thus swelling a rush in which to the uninitiated a store of some at least of these would seem to be the only safeguard against starvation. But a rush in quest of gold is a species of gambling that has many queer features. The man who has a little knowledge and experience, and the one who even without these has brawny arms, and is not afraid of work, has without money or tools a better chance than the men who lacking these come with stores of danything else. Many of the men who have most experience in alluvial gold-diggings are chronically hard up. Whether they make hundreds of pence or of pounds in any given rush, they are equally likely to be penniless a month or two after it is over. They are invariably ready to start at an hour's notice when the rumour of a fresh hunting-ground within a practicable distance reaches them. There is sure to be many a 'tender-foot' and greenhorn⁴ who will be glad to give food, and find tools, in return for work, or a 'wrinkle' or two in pegging out a claim.

The amateur element was stronger than usual in the Broombush Creek rush by reason of being less than two days' journey from the capital, and within thirty miles from a railway station. All day the long irregular procession straggled on. After the mail-coach and the four-in-hand, as the American waggon was styled, came horsemen, bullock-drays, trollies, spring carts;⁵ even the one vegetable-cart of which Nilpeena boasted, drawn by a sturdy donkey, was there, piled up with the swags and shovels of half a dozen men, who walked before and after the rickety little machine, which in ascending the gentlest eminence, creaked as if its last moment ewere near at hand. And in advance of the vehicles, side by side, and after them, came the men, who fhad walked with light or heavy burdens, some with none at all. Even at this early stage, those who had adventured the rush without money or baggage began to ascend the social scale. They were paid in money or kind by the more heavily laden to help them with their burdens. Already, too, some of those who had put their hand to the plough looked back.⁶ Though there were no scrubby heights to scale, or unknown deserts to cross, the arid, waterless nature of the country, and the unexpectedly large number who were making for the untried diggings discomfited the less hardy spirits.

Before noon, twenty men came asking for work at the Colmar Mine.

'Not much danger, 'pears to me, of our 'aving to shut up shop on haccount of the new diggings,' said Roby with a chuckle.

'Well, when you come to figure it out, eight or ten bob a day⁷ sure, is better than the 'ope o' turnin' gentleman by Hact go' Parlyment, with the chance o' perishing by starvation thrown in,' observed an old miner.

All the men who had worked on the night-shift were standing at the doors of their huts and tents, or down at the Colmar Arms, where the bar-room overflowed with dusty hswagsmen⁸ quenching their thirst, and listening with greedy eyes to the landlord's frequently repeated narrative of the fabulous swags of gold, that had dazzled the eyes of all beholders in his bar-room three nights ago. No tale of enchantment or adventure was ever listened to

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with such devouring interest. In the bar and elsewhere nothing was to be heard but talk of claims and pegging out, of pockets and gutters and nuggets of gold; of half-forgotten reminiscences of old diggings, and tragic stories of lucky diggers. There was an electrical thrill of excitement in the very atmosphere. Even Trevaskis, who had so many grim problems of his own to solve regarding gold, was in a measure carried out of himself, by the wave of eager expectancy which stirred the place, as to the experiences that awaited the mixed multitude, hurrying in search of fortune to Broombush Creek.

But one at least among all this gold-fever hubbub was occupied with far other thoughts. The mail-coach that had brought the first instalment of diggers had also brought Victor the flowers for which he had telegraphed on the Monday morning.⁹ There had been a delay of two days in sending them, because of an error made in transmitting the message from the Colmar office. But here they were at last. As soon as Victor had the office to himself, he cut the cords and opened the boxes to sprinkle the flowers with water. His eyes sparkled at sight of their loveliness, and thoughts of the pleasure they would give Doris. He counted the moments till he could bring them to her. Yet he purposely delayed going with them till it was close on seven.

He had observed that after sunset she almost invariably sat for some time on the western veranda, watching the dying light in the sky above the immense landscape, into which the feverish seekers for gold had been hurrying all day. This evening the after-glow was unusually vivid, spreading far up to the horizon in waves of pure fire-colour,¹⁰ embracing the most delicate nuances of tint, from a broad line of deep carnation low down on the vast horizon, to a faint silvery pink far overhead. As soon as he crossed the reef and began to descend towards Stonehouse, Victor saw the slender, dark-robed figure clearly outlined in the warm evening light. Spot and Rex, a young kangaroo dog,¹¹ bounded to meet him with the animation of dawning friendship. Their mistress also greeted him with a smile.

'You are quite loaded, and yet Rex ran to meet you! That shows he quite approves of you,' she said, as she patted Rex on the head.

'Doesn't he like people who carry things, then?' asked Victor, putting his boxes on the little wicker table that stood near.

'No; because, you see, most of the people he used to see with any kind of load were sundowners.'¹²

'Perhaps he knew somehow that these boxes hold something for you,' said Victor, colouring a little as he bent over the boxes, undoing the strings.

'For me?' said Doris, with a little note of incredulous surprise in her voice.

'Yes, if you will kindly accept them.'

And now the lids were off both the boxes, and the light layer of white cotton-wool removed. And lo! in the first box at which Doris looked there was the most enchanting array of white fragrant flowers: feathery sprays of white lilac, clusters of white Indian musk kroses, of the white fairy and exquisite Niphetos roses; white heliotrope and picotees,¹³ tuberose with their perfumed waxen buds, clustered sprays of stephanotis with their delicate yet penetrating fragrance. In the centre there was a group of magnificent orchids, pure white petalled, with yellow and mauve labellum. The flowers had been skilfully packed, their stems wrapped round in wet moss, so that they bore little trace of their journey. But a drooping petal here and there made Victor apologize for not having brought them to Stonehouse as soon as the mail came in.

'I will bring up the next lot the moment they come, and then they will last longer,' he said, eager to say something that would carry off the keen emotion visible in Doris's face. She had seen no flowers since she had left Ouranie, and the sight and perfume of these, awakening so many chords of memory, moved her almost too much for speech.

'You got these lovely, lovely flowers for me! They must have come hundreds of miles,' she said in a tremulous voice when she could trust herself to speak.

'Oh yes, it is really nothing, you know. You just mention to someone in town you want a few flowers,' said Victor with a tincture of mendacity of which he was not often guilty. And then he took the folds of cotton-wool off the flowers in the second box, talking so as to give Doris time to recover herself.

'These are not so fatigued-looking; you see they have more colour. I really know hardly anything about flowers, except roses. These are the Catherine Mermets. I know them by the sweet scent; my mother likes them very much. This, I suppose, is an orchid.'

It was a *Cattleya* with deep rosy crimson labellum and pink petals. This second boxful was little less lovely

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than the other. The La France, Malmaison and Gloire de Dijon roses were superb. There was a wealth of daphne pouring its poignantly sweet fragrance on the air, and a great crowd of pansies, carnations, and yellow Austrian briars.¹⁴

'Shall I go and ask Shung-Loo to get some basins and water for you to put them in?' said Victor, who, after seeing Doris stealthily kissing a plume of white lilac with quivering lips, cast about for some excuse to leave her alone with the flowers.

'Oh, please do not trouble! I can ring for him after I have looked at them a little longer,' she answered, taking up one flower after the other, with a caress in every touch and look. Then, after a little pause: 'I cannot say how grateful I am for your kindness! I have been longing for flowers more than I can tell; it sounds foolish to say thank you-----'

'Yes; because the pleasure they give is more than thanks enough!' said Victor eagerly.

'But I hope they are not all for me,' she said a little hesitatingly.

'Yes, certainly; to do what you like with them.'

'But I would sooner you gave half to Mrs. Challoner and Euphemia. We can divide them;' and with that Doris began to mix the white and coloured flowers.

'You are too unselfish; you know you like white flowers the best,' said Victor, who stood watching her.

'Well, you see, I am keeping a larger share of the white lilac,' said Doris, who fixed a spray of these flowers at her throat, and then made an equal division of the rest. 'When I wrote letters at Ouranie I used to date them by the flowers that were coming out. If I were going to write a letter to-night, I should date it "the day of all the flowers." Now, I am going to tell Mrs. Challoner and Euphemia that there is something too wonderful--as if a fairy had come--only you are rather too big for a fairy.'

'Yes, I'm afraid my weight is against me in that line. You had better say a sundowner--one of the kind that a dog of good sense, like Rex, can tolerate.'

Well, whatever name might be applied to the giver, there could be no difference of opinion as to the extreme pleasure the flowers gave. Mrs. Challoner, who was easily moved to enthusiasm for her kind, found a depth of friendly thoughtfulness in the offering which increased the goodwill she already bore towards Victor. Even the placid Challoner was moved to unusual enthusiasm, when, on being invited to spend the evening in the drawing-room, he saw the lovely multitude of flowers, set out in the old china and fine cut-glass bowls, to the number of a score or so. They were ranged on the bookcases, the little tables, the piano, and mantelpiece, giving the room that air of grand tranquillity which it is the privilege of beautiful flowers to impart.

'I must sit where I can look at these roses, my dear, while I am waiting for you to let me checkmate you,' he said to his wife as they sat down for their usual games of chess, while the young people played, Victor accompanying Doris on his violin in some of Moore's melodies, with which they were both familiar. Then, when Euphemia went away to finish one of those endless letters to her brother and 'a friend,' which she seemed always to have on stock,¹⁵ Victor, noticing a reversi-board,¹⁶ ventured to ask Doris if he might play a game with her. But though the game was entered upon with much seriousness by Doris, the contest very soon lagged. In fact, no two-handed game has yet been invented whose rules prevent this, when the one who humbly asks another to play does so for the express and perfidious purpose of an uninterrupted talk.

'I have been wondering,' said Victor, after a few moves, 'whether you know anything more about the Gooloos than you told me the other day.'

A wistful little smile passed over Doris's face.

'I used to fable a great deal about Gooloos and other queer little people, when I was a child. But, of course, it is foolish when one is grown up.'

'I wish you would fancy that I am not grown up.'

'I can hardly do that, seeing I have to look up when I speak to you. I might, perhaps, fancy that you are not too wise to care for such things.'

Victor laughed involuntarily, then checked his mirth, and said:

'Who are the other queer little people?'

'Oh, Shapes and Yangs. Shapes are always flying and changing; but Yangs would sooner die than change, and they never wish to fly. They just want grass, and the sun on their backs. If they went into society, perhaps you would call them pigs. No, I don't think I shall tell you any more, I can see you think my little people very silly.'

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said Doris, noticing that Victor was trying in vain to repress the amusement afforded by the characteristics of the Yangs.

'I don't think them silly at all; they are very amusing. I wonder how you came to think of such things.'

'Didn't you make up stories to yourself when you were little?'

'No, not much. I used to read other people's stories, and play a great deal.'

'Ah, you had other children to play with; I had no playmates but myself. I used often to play at having a brother. He was so grand and brave. He was a great soldier, and used to go to the Holy Land¹⁷ and make the infidels give up the prisoners. When we went out driving I used to ask my mother to let the ponies go very fast, and then I used to fancy that I was Richard, on his Arab horse, chasing dragons and going after savage people.'

'Then, was he always away at the wars?'

'No, he sometimes came home and told me where he had been, and what strange things he had seen. I used to live under a nectarine-tree in the garden, and watch for him to come across the sea—that was Gauwari, our big lake; it bordered the garden on one side. But I used to like best to ride and drive in the direction of the great plain. I could fancy always such wonderful things about that, for it was like a great strange sea—so gray and wide and quiet. Mother and I always called it the Silent Sea; but now that I am in the midst of it——'

She ended with a little sigh.

'It is very bare and desolate, and nothing very wonderful in it, except that it is such a huge plain and reaches so far,' said Victor, who was listening to these revelations of a solitary childhood with the keenest interest.

'I am afraid things are often like that,' she responded thoughtfully. 'When we used to visit Mrs. Seaton, the girls had a brother, and he was not in the least noble or chivalrous. He was greedy about tarts, and sometimes pulled his sisters' hair.'

'But, on the other hand, there are many things quite as beautiful as we can imagine them.'

'Ah, yes! The "Arabian Nights" are quite poor compared to what is going on all the time. Even among the grass, where a tiny brown seed swells and pushes up a thin little green lance; and by-and-by it is a feathery tassel, shivering if you even whisper near it. . . . Often when Kenneth used to speak so much about heaven, and say it was a great deal more beautiful than this world, I used to wonder whether there are corners there where the violets come out early, and where one might put down an old fairy-book with its face against the canary lavender, to watch the white-eye-browed swallows¹⁸ when they come the first day.'

There was a wistful thrill in the girl's voice, but she spoke more rapidly than was her wont, and with the animation a deeper tinge of colour stole into her cheeks.

'I do not believe you were lonely at all, though you had no playmates,' said Victor, after a little pause.

'I did not want anyone else when I had mother,' she answered in a very low voice.

And then there was silence between them for a little. The flowers poured their sweetness on the air, and through the open windows, with the curtains half drawn back, the moonshine was visible lying over the great Silent Sea, that hemmed them round with that mystic light which gives a magic of its own to the barest landscape.

'We are not getting on very well with our game, are we?' she said after a little, and on this Victor tried his best to lose his pawns.¹⁹ But it was little he could think of just then, except the sweep of those heavy lashes and the wonderful eyes they revealed when they were uplifted; the sweet cadence of her tones, and that enchanting mixture in her talk of bright, aerial fancies and direct childlike simplicity. Altogether, that evening was formed of those supreme, fugitive hours which, once flown, seldom have a to-morrow.

- a. first] the first Adl E1
- b. Besides] Beside E1
- c. themthus] them, in thus Adl
- d. anything] everything E1
- e. were] was Adl
- f. had] Om. Adl E1
- g. o°] of Adl
- h. swagsmen] swagmen Adl E1
- i. sight] the sight Adl
- j. far up to the horizon] gradually E1
- k. roses] rose* Adl

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- l. likes] liked Adl
- m. than thanks] thanks than Adl E1
- n. grand] glad Adl E1
- o. games] game Adl
- p. that, seeing] that, seeing that Adl thatseeing E1
- q. dragons] dragoons* Adl
- r. pawns] counters Adl E1
- s. of] of anything Adl E1
- t. aerial] Ariel Adl E1
- u. seldom] can never Adl

Chapter VIII.

On the following Saturday morning the mail-man brought Victor two more boxes of flowers. These he sent across at once to Stonehouse by Mick, and then went to the post-office for the mine letters, as was his custom each morning, half an hour after the mail had been delivered. As he walked leisurely along smoking a cigarette, he gave himself up to the pleasure of imagining Doris's delight on finding one of these boxes entirely filled with white and Parma violets.¹ He pictured her to himself bending over these, holding them to her face, talking to them, kissing them. . . . His cigarette went out and he threw it away, hastening his steps with that rapt expression on his face, and that unseeing look in his eyes, which tell of entire abstraction from the objects visible to material sight.

He still in some fashion kept up the fiction to himself, that his feelings were of the most benevolent and disinterested friendship. But in the midst of his happy, engrossing thoughts this morning he became conscious of an inner voice struggling to ask him questions. None are so deaf, however, as those who won't hear.² But it may be taken for granted that a week is the utmost limit of time during which one can be happy under false pretences. Among the letters that Victor received was a bulky one from Miss Paget. At sight of it he drew a long breath, and capitulated to the inward monitor, without even attempting to make terms. It was on last Sunday he sent away his reply to Helen's previous letter. Not a line had he written to her since; how often had he thought of her? What dreams and visions and reveries, on the other hand, had been with him day and night of a certain face and form! How constantly the thrilling tones of a low sweet voice had been in his ears!

'But what else could happen, after once seeing Doris?' he asked himself helplessly. The bare thought of her prevented him from being as unhappy as he felt he ought to be; for the longer he looked at Miss Paget's letter the more clear it became that he had made a frightful mistake in supposing that he loved her. Perhaps she knew, perhaps that was why she put off the engagement—after all, they were not engaged. The relief he found in this thought made him feel ashamed of himself. He took refuge in trying to think of something else. There was that cave room he was to search on Monday; whether it contained treasure or not, it would make the subject of a long letter to Helen. He could tell her about his first meeting Vansittart, and the comical interview between him and Trevaskis. . . . 'Even if at the end of the probation appointed by Helen'—here Victor paused, and then, with the felicity of his father's race, he put the point—'we neither of us wish to make our friendship into an engagement, we shall still remain friends—I am sure of it. I must not send a miserable scrappy letter in answer to one like this.'

He went into the manager's office with his letters and papers.

'I suppose I can begin my search of the underground room on Monday, as we arranged,' he said.

Trevaskis had opened one of his letters. He read it rapidly, and said in a hurried voice: 'I half expected this: I am called away on urgent private business. I must telegraph to the secretary at once. Will you kindly take this message across to the telegraph-office for me?'

He got a form and wrote: 'Called away on urgent private business; forced to apply for a week's leave of absence, dating from Monday. Please reply at once.'

In less than two hours a reply came, granting the leave asked for. Trevaskis was in the purser's office talking to Roby and Victor when the telegram was handed to him.

'There is a man near Malowie I have to see,' he was saying to Roby. 'Do you know whether the train stays half an hour or so at that station?'

'Iss, it's the change o' gauge,³ cap'en.'

Trevaskis glanced over his telegram, and then a sudden thought seemed to strike him.

'I could be sure of finding him at home on Saturday night. . . . I ought to have applied for my leave from to-day, really.'

'Oh, as for the matter o' that, what be the differ, shouldst 'ee leave to-day or Sunday a'ternoon?'

'Then if I went by the second train, the one that only goes to Malowie, I could catch it this afternoon?'

'Oh, sure 'nough, the mail coach gets in half an hour before she parts.'

'That's what I'll do, then,' said Trevaskis in a tone of sudden determination. 'Just send word to the mail-driver to call round, will you, Roby? I don't think there's anything else to arrange about during my absence besides what

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we've gone over.'

'Oh, everything will be all right, cap'en. You see, I'm used to bein' left in charge at a hour's notice. I've had dmany a year practice at it,' said Roby, with his large smile as he went out.

Trevaskis discussed one or two business matters with Victor. Then, as he was going away, he said in the careless tone in which one speaks of an indifferent matter: 'Oh, and, by the way, the search business had better stand over till I come back.'

'Just as you wish, captain,' answered Victor, who was in reality not very much engrossed by the affair.

Trevaskis had studied every move beforehand, taking precautions against each contingency, by giving himself a wider margin of time. He had chosen Malowie as the station at which he would get out, because there, the crush of people and the hurry and bustle of changing carriages made any chance encounter less dangerous. On reaching this station, he took the carpet-bag containing the gold and the disguise out of his portmanteau. The latter he booked to go on by the early Monday train. It was some time before he could get even this simple detail attended to. The rush to Broombush Creek, which had subsided for a day or two, had now assumed phenomenal proportions. Gold had been discovered in large quantities over a wide area, several nuggets weighing over sixty and seventy ounces. And there were the usual sensational rumours of even larger nuggets, whose lucky finders were not anxious to spread the news of their good fortune. More than seven hundred men were on their way to Nilpeena by the train that would reach it on Sunday morning. The railway people were unprepared for so unprecedented a crush of passengers, in addition to the ordinary numbers, and the platform and offices presented a solid mass of excited, struggling, noisy men, each one fighting for himself. A rumour had spread that the carriage accommodation was insufficient, and the confusion that ensued was indescribable.

Trevaskis saw several faces he knew in the thick of the crowd, but they did not notice him, and he did not speak to anyone. He breathed more freely when he got away from the railway-station. He took a short cut through the township, and walked on rapidly till he reached a creek thickly lined with ti-tree, two miles and a half away from Malowie, in an easterly direction. Here he assumed his disguise, beginning with his clothes. He put on a dark loose, earth-stained pair of trousers over those he wore; he took off the coat he had on, put it into the carpet-bag, and in place of it wore a long shabby dust-coat. Then he lay down, making a pillow of his carpet-bag. He dozed fitfully for a couple of hours. As soon as daylight reddened the east, he fixed a pocket looking-glass in the fork of a tree, and performed the more delicate shades of his toilet. He put his soft silk beaver in the carpet-bag, and wore instead an old gray hat, with a slouching brim, which he pulled well over his eyes, and knotted a large red silk handkerchief round his throat. When he looked at himself, with his brick-red complexion, his straggling gray hair falling over his neck, his thick grizzled moustache and long silvery beard, he could not repress a triumphant exclamation of pleasure. All that remained for him to do now was to transform the carpet-bag into a swag. He took out a little black billy, one which he had found in one of the storerooms and blackened over an impromptu fire of deal boards in his room on the previous night, and a thin, brownish-red rug which he had rolled round the gold. He got a slender piece of wood the length of the carpet-bag, which he folded within it, so as to stiffen the outline. He tied up the whole in the rug, turning in the edges well over the bag, and strapped the swag with an old saddle-strap at each end. Then he fastened a loose cord between the two, and slipped the swag over his shoulders, carrying the billy in one hand in orthodox tramp fashion.

He struck across country till he gained the highroad, and followed it on to the second railway-station beyond Malowie, and twelve miles distant therefrom. He chose this rather than the nearer station, partly to pass the time, and partly because he wanted to have a good long tramp, so as to get the dust well into his boots and face and clothes. As there was a high easterly breeze with a strong touch of hot wind, this purpose was well effected by the time he reached Kilmeny. It was a straggling little township, its chief features being a big flour-mill and two public-houses. He went to the one nearest the railway-station, a shabby, one-story building in which no one seemed to be astir, though it was now close on eight o'clock. The only inmate visible was the landlord, a big, fat man, who was shambling about the house in an aimless and discouraged manner. He was keeping house, he said, and didn't know where the things were kept very well. He offered Trevaskis brandy and water and cold beef and bread for breakfast, adding, 'Every soul 'bout the place has gone off to the diggings except my wife, who was confined of two twinses a couple of days ago, and a female cook likewise down with the mumps.'

But Trevaskis would touch no stimulant.

'I want no speerits; if ye can't give me a dish o' decent tay I med as well be goin' to th' next house,' he said in a

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gruff voice, with an unmistakable Cornish accent.⁴

On this the landlord bustled into the kitchen, and in twenty minutes brought him a teapot full of tea.

'One o' they cross-grained old Cousin Jackses⁵ as go mouching alone for gold,' said the landlord, speaking of Trevaskis to a customer who had dropped in for an early 'phlegm-cutter.'⁶ 'You can see by the look of him he's been living alone somewheres like a wombat, till ehe has got out fo' the way of havin' even a proper Christian drink. I remember-----'

His reminiscences were cut short by the sound of a bell forcibly rung. Trevaskis had finished his breakfast, and now ordered a bedroom. As soon as he was shown into one, he locked the door, took off his wig and beard, put his swag under the bed, and, throwing himself on it in his clothes, he was fast asleep in a few minutes. He slept till sunset, and then rose and had another nondescript sort of meal, in the course of which the landlord entertained him with anecdotes of the 'twinses' and the sudden exodus of more than half the male population of Kilmeny for the new diggings.

'It's close to that there Colmar Mine, as is so gcelybrated for 'anky-panky tricks,' he said, and then, without receiving any encouragement from his listener, he launched into a description of some of the more notorious episodes in connection with the Colmar. 'They get managers there up to all the tricks going for to line their own pocketsets. They say they've got hold of a very straight man this time, but that wicious in his temper—he gives the chaps the rumbles⁷ for a day and a 'arf with slanging of 'em.'

Trevaskis cut short this pleasing picture of himself by asking for his account, including bed and breakfast; he paid it, and then, having secured the window and locked the door of his bedroom, he went out for a stroll. He passed a little wooden chapel, through whose open door and windows the sound of a powerful voice was plainly audible. The wind had fallen, and the twilight hush was unbroken, except for that deep resonant voice. As Trevaskis leant against a post and rail fence smoking, close to the side of the chapel, the preaching man's message reached him word for word:

'When the devil wants to get hold of you,' he said, 'he don't come all hoof and claws, a-butting his horns into you, and driving you head foremost into crime. No; at first he takes slim liberties, so to speak, and they are so like something you've been doing before, you don't find it out all at once. Then, after a bit, you do something shadier than before—still, not so very black; and you feel sorry about it when you lie awake at nights. But by-and-by you get over that, and you go on and on, till-----' Here the preacher dropped his voice impressively, and Trevaskis went on his way with a hot, deep flush surging up into his face, under the swarthy dye that was part of his disguise.

He had in early life been intimately associated with an ardent section of the Cornish Primitive Methodists, who dwell on every incident of individual life as a special act of over-ruling Providence. At this moment, old associations returned to him, with all the vividness that hcharacterize the early impressions of a strong and tenacious nature, whose forces have for the most part been concentrated in a narrow groove. Ideas had played so small a part in his adult life, that those which had been early implanted in his mind slumbered there as hard and clear and unmodified as in the days in which he had first assimilated them.

'It is a warning—as sure as God is in heaven—it is a warning sent to me,' he said over and over to himself, striding on he knew not whither. Year by year his past life unrolled itself before him, and he saw as by a lightning flash of quickened observation the steps by which he had been gradually familiarized with dishonest practices. As a boy of fourteen, he had in working on tribute with his father come to learn by experience that cheating, when practicable without detection, was reckoned no disgrace,⁸ among a large proportion of miners. Even some of those who held forth as class-leaders and local-preachers would, when the opportunity arose, act without scruple on the maxim, 'Fear God and cheat the company.' He himself, since he had come to man's estate, had little qualms in over-reaching his fellow-men, in grasping at a larger share of profits in mining work, or mining speculation, than rightly belonged to him. But never before had he been concerned in any act that would, if unveiled to other men, have placed him on the list of criminals. Now he seemed vaguely to perceive that his previous life had been an insidious preparation for crime; that at the critical moment the avarice of a lifetime, intensified by poverty, made the opportunity of being rich by secret theft an irresistible temptation.

'Then after a bit you do something shadier than before . . . by-and-by you get over that, and you go on and on till-----' That blank, which his mind involuntarily invested with a sombre fascination, daunted him more than the most voluble catalogue of crimes. His disguise, which at dawn of day had given him a sensation of gratified

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triumph, seemed to him in the gathering twilight as ignominious as convict chains. 'I'll sling up the whole affair,—yes, I'll sling up the whole affair,' he repeated to himself at intervals, with the iteration usual with him when deeply moved.

Night fell, and a luminous space of silvery light in the sky heralded the moon's rising. He found himself on the outskirts of the township, near a cottage with a little garden in front full of flowers. The windows were wide open, and he saw by the lamplight in the room within a quiet family group. The mother with an infant in her arms, the father with a large book and two or three children grouped round him, an older girl seated at a harmonium playing a hymn tune. Presently she began to sing, in a sweet though untrained voice, 'Shall we gather at the river?'⁹ and the younger children clustered round her and joined in. Then the father stood up, and his deep bass gave body to the clear high treble of the children's voices. It was all as commonplace as the light of heaven. But to Trevaskis, in the awakened forecasting state of his imagination, it all seemed part of a plan by which he was led to review his deeds before it was too late. The man in there sang peacefully with his children, while he skulked about, disguised like one who had shed blood—no, he would go no further on this path, whose beginning was a theft, whose end no man could foresee.

What should he do with the gold while he went on to town? But now, the moment he began to consider how he should relinquish it, the love of this thing stirred his heart with a deep masterful yearning. The thought of resigning it to other hands filled him with vindictive jealousy. It was not as if it could be handed over to the rightful owner. Probably it would be claimed by the Government, and what would Government do with it? Squander it, as it had squandered millions before, on foolish railways to nowhere through desert country, on crooked jetties from which to load wheat that would not be grown, on marble staircases and Persian carpets for fancy viceregal country houses.¹⁰ Could not he make a better use than that of it—he who had lost his hard-earned thousands through the knavish duplicity of other men? He had wronged no one by taking this gold . . . and he had gone too far to retreat. As for the remaining stores of gold, that clearly belonged to the company.

'But if I take this, I'll be sure to struggle somehow for the rest. Twenty thousand pounds is a fortune; but as for two or three thousand . . . I've had a warning—I've had a warning. What made me come away and leave the gold there under the bed, and stop by that little chapel and listen to the way the devil tempts and tempts a man to the very brink of hell?' He stood on the brow of a little hill beyond the confines of the township, whose lights gleamed here and there through open doors and windows. The tinkle of a bullock-bell¹¹ or two in the distance was the only sound that broke the profound calm, while in the heart of this solitary man raged a tempest of conflicting thoughts and desires.

All around, as far as the eye could travel, lay small habitations of wood and iron, in the midst of wide wheat-fields, where the crops were stunted and meagre with the long-continued drought. Three or four weeks back, prayer for rain had been offered in all the churches throughout the colony; but as yet no rain of any consequence had fallen, and in this northern region much of the wheat must perish in the ear.¹² Thinking over this, Trevaskis asked himself what reason there was for believing that Heaven was really much concerned with the conduct of human affairs.

As the impulse towards right-doing had been awakened by material fears, so the reascendancy of the strongest motives that swayed his nature was strengthened by like tawdry misconceptions of spiritual influences. And yet he did not revert to his former purpose without a further effort at resistance.

'It is close on nine o'clock now,' he said, looking at his watch in the bright soft moonlight. 'I won't go back to the public-house till near twelve; the publican will before then make sure I'm not returning, and he has of course a master-key to open the locked door. Well, if he or anyone else has found that gold he can keep it. I'll ask no question, or hold up my finger, but take it as a proof that what I heard to-night was not a chance, but a warning and a sign from above.'

He passed part of the time resting against the trunk of a gum-tree, part in striding about and watching light after light disappear in the houses as the inmates retired to rest. Sometimes he was overpowered with dread lest the gold might be discovered and tampered with, and again he found himself hoping that it might be all stolen. . . . 'They say they've got hold of a very straight man this time.' The words came back to him mockingly again and again. He had always prided himself on his reputation for integrity. To hear the estimate in which he was popularly held thus spoken of by an entire stranger, in a remote little township, curiously quickened his determination, once this trip was accomplished, to run all risks rather than that of detection.

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Within the last day or two he had sometimes thought out the plan of removing all the great jars of amalgam into his bedroom, while Fitz-Gibbon searched the cave room—of making some excuse to Roby's wife, who came daily to tidy up his rooms, and dispense with her services while the treasure was in them. But from the first the risks daunted him. Now, during the hours of his self-imposed vow, he reviewed all the mishaps that might lead to detection if he took the stolen amalgam into his actual possession on the mine. He reflected that both Webster and Dunning had, under the most disastrous circumstances, been saved from being found out, by keeping their booty hidden in the cave room. As he slowly pondered over these things, he bound himself by a solemn resolution, in the name of his wife and children, that he would not allow any consideration to tempt him to remove the gold from its hiding-place till he could take it entirely away from the mine.

'After all that has happened in connection with the Colmar, in the way of murder, insanity, and sudden death, I'd rather let the young jackanapes go down and discover the lot than fill my room with stolen stuff,' he thought. 'But, no, no! as sure as my name is William Trevaskis, I'll find some means or another of keeping his nose outside that iron wall until I've turned the gray stuff¹³ into bars of yellow gold, and carried them safe away.'

So, after all his impulses of repentance, remorse, and fear, these were the thoughts that filled the mine manager's mind as he returned to the inn. When he examined his nuggets by the light of a scrap of tallow candle, flaring in a dirty tin candlestick, and found them untouched, the thought floated dimly through his brain that the best result of his hearing part of a sermon in that little wooden chapel had been, that in those solitary hours in the tranquil moonlight he had perceived how foolish and dangerous one of the plans was which had occurred to him regarding the stolen treasure in the cave room.

- a. these] those Adl
- b. the] their Adl E1
- c. meeting] meeting with Adl
- d. many a] a many Adl E1
- e. he has] he's Adl
- f. o'] of Adl
- g. celybrated] celebrated Adl
- h. characterize] characterizes E1
- i. a] an Adl
- j. it] they Adl E1
- k. hardly earned] hard-earned E1
- l. stores] store E1
- m. round] around Adl E1
- n. bright soft] soft bright Adl E1

Chapter IX.

The train passed through Kilmeny at half-past eight in the morning. Ten minutes before it came in, Trevaskis bought a third-class ticket to Adelaide. There were several men in the compartment he entered, two of them miners, who had come down from Broken Hill. One of these Trevaskis recognised as a man he had discharged from the Colmar Mine three weeks previously for insubordination. He was an inveterate talker, whether at work or play, and kept up his reputation on this occasion with unstinted energy. His companion was much more reticent, and responded for the most part by an occasional grunt. On one topic, however, the silent miner was moved to express himself with confident vigour. This subject was the mine in which he had been working, one that had of late risen high in popular favour.

'Pay dividends, indeed!' he exclaimed scornfully. 'Not for a couple of years to come. There's too much lead and too little silver, and that will soon be well known. Mark my words, the shares will be down with a bang before you're two weeks older.'

Trevaskis, leaning back in a corner of the compartment next one of the windows, with his aslouch hat¹ pulled well over his face, seemed to have fallen fast asleep soon after he got into the carriage. But these observations regarding Block Twenty were not thrown away on him. He did not utter a word, and hardly changed his position during the course of the journey.

It wanted a few minutes to one when the train stopped at Bowden-on-the-Hill. This is within a quarter of an hour's walk of Hindmarsh. Trevaskis made for the railway-station there, and asked one of the guards the nearest way to Bendigo Row.² The man asked in what street. This Trevaskis did not know, only that it was near the railway-station.

'Hi, young shaver, come here!' cried the guard to a lad of nine or ten, who was dawdling about the platform. 'Do you know where Bendigo Row is?'

Yes, the boy knew. Gussy Heinemann's mother lived there. Then Trevaskis told him if he showed him the way he would give him sixpence, and, thanking the guard, he followed his guide. They crossed a street, and went up another for a few minutes in a westerly direction till they came to a narrow lane. The first row of little stone cottages was Bendigo Row.

'There isn't nobody living there,' said the boy, when Trevaskis stood at the door of No. 4.

'I know that,' said Trevaskis, fumbling in his pocket for the key. 'This is my house just now, though I didn't quite know where it was. And if you want to earn another sixpence, you can wait here a little and show me the way to the branch of the National Bank that's in Hindmarsh.'

The boy assented with a joyful grin. As a matter of fact, the bank was almost within sight.³ Five minutes later Trevaskis was inside it, waiting to see the manager, having left all that the carpet-bag contained in No. 4, except the gold. He found only a youth in charge, who looked wonderingly at the hairy-faced old Bushman when he asked to see the manager in a gruff Cornish voice, and replying laconically, 'Won't be in for a quarter of an hour,' resumed his work at a tall desk. It was evidently the slack time of the day, for no other customer came in while Trevaskis waited. He sat at a little ink-stained table on a stiff leathern chair, trying to read the daily newspaper that lay before him. But now that his journey was over, and his purpose so nearly accomplished, an indescribable feeling of uneasiness took possession of him. For the first time the thought flashed across him that Dunning, for aught he knew, might have used the disguise he now wore in disposing of gold at this very bank. He felt tempted to go away without waiting for the manager, and walk across to one of the North Adelaide branch banks.

But as he was on the point of acting on this the manager returned.

'You buy gold, I suppose?' he said shortly, putting his bag on the counter.

'Yes, anything up to a ton,' answered the manager jocosely. 'Have you come down from the Broombush Creek diggings?' he added, as Trevaskis opened the carpet-bag.

But to this the silvery-bearded Bushman made no reply. He took out the nuggets one after the other, without pausing or taking any notice of the wondering admiration of the manager and his clerk.

'I make it five hundred and forty hounces,' he said briefly, when the whole lay in a yellow, glistening heap on the counter.

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On being weighed and tested, the gold was found to be a few pennyweights over this.

'I expect you were in the field some time before this rush took place?' said the manager, looking at Trevaskis narrowly.

'Don't 'ee fret about me, sir, but do 'ee just figure out 'ow much this coom to at £3 18s. 6d. a hounce,' answered Trevaskis, on which the manager laughed, and put him down as a regular old Cornish digger, of the bluff, outspoken type.

'Do you consider it so pure as to be worth that much?'⁴ he said, turning over a large nugget fspecked here and there with quartz.

'I knows it; but ef you're in any doubt-----'

'I'll give you £3 18s. an ounce.'

'Well, I'm pushed for time. I make you a gift o' the sixpennies,' answered Trevaskis curtly.

'How will you take the money?'

'One hundred twenty-pound notes--the rest in fivers and silver.'

Trevaskis counted over the notes with slow deliberation, and then crushed them into an inner pocket in the carpet-bag, nodded brusquely to the manager, and walked away. When he got into the sunlight and the fresh air, he was astonished to feel a momentary sensation of numbness creeping over him. It was the lassitude of excessive fatigue, of which he had until then been unconscious. There was a ragged-looking little square near, with seats here and there under the trees. He sat on one of these, and for a little time he revelled in a drowsy, luxurious feeling, in which weariness and a sense of triumphant success were curiously mingled. All his limbs ached with fatigue, and his eyes felt so heavy that he could scarcely keep them open. Yet all the time the blood was coursing swiftly in his veins, and his heart was beating vehemently. There was plenty of time for him to rest and indulge in the myriad plans that floated hazily through his mind. The evening train, by which he would be supposed to have come, did not reach town till nine, or after.

But the day did not seem long to him. On the way back to No. 4 he passed a little general store, at which he bought some tea and sugar, a loaf of bread, a mug, and half a pound of butter. He gathered up some chips and sticks in the little back-yard, got a billy full of water from the tap, and made himself some tea.

As he sat eating and drinking in his curious solitude, in the dim light he admitted by half opening one of the shutters, his eye suddenly fell on some gilt lettering on the mug he had bought. He read the words, 'For a good boy,' and suddenly burst into loud laughter. Yet the next moment the grotesque irony of the thing made him reflect with quickened perception on the contrast between his secret actions and the place he held in the world's regard. A justice of the peace, an ex-member of Parliament, the son-in-law of a leading doctor--what could this man have to do with a vagabond skulking about in disguise, disposing of stolen gold?

The thought came home to him still more acutely when he sat at breakfast next morning with his wife and children. He had managed everything without a slip. Strolling across from Hindmarsh on the previous night, he reached the Adelaide railway-station, just as the northern train came in, and mingling with the throng of passengers, he in a few minutes obtained his portmanteau, and placed the carpet-bag in one of its compartments as he drove to his own house in a cab.

'Zoo won't do away no moe, pappy, will gnoo?' said a blonde-headed little boy of three, who was mounted beside him on a high chair.

After all, would not that be best?--leave his weary, hateful exile at the mine, and put hthis money, of which he thought now in its hiding-place with a sort of abhorrence, into a decent-sized farm near town, and work the land for a living, like an honest man who had no cause to be ashamed in the presence of his prattling little ones. As he looked over the morning paper he noticed a place which he knew well advertised to be let on easy terms. A farm of two hundred acres, with a large orchard and orangery, and a comfortable eight-roomed house, a few miles beyond Norwood. He determined to go and have a look at the property in the course of a day or two.

After breakfast he went to the Exchange⁵ with his bundle of notes subdivided in a roomy pocket-book. He had explained to his wife on arriving, that it was business connected with the share market which had suddenly brought him to town.

'I hope you will make a lot of money out of it, whatever it is,' she now said, as he went out, with that vague belief in the money-making power of shares, universal in communities largely bitten with gambling in mines.⁶

'People are making such a lot of money on 'Change lately,' added Mrs. Trevaskis, in the regretful tone of one

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who has been on the losing side. 'There is Winny Berger's husband, who helped to float a silver company at Beltana.⁷ He made over £3,000, and now the shares are worth absolutely nothing. Winny was so awfully delighted about his selling out just at the right moment. She ordered a dress from Worth, and has gone to the Melbourne Cup.'⁸

'I expect, my dear, the people who bought her husband's worthless shares are not quite so pleased,' said Trevaskis, smiling rather sardonically.

'Oh, well, that is their look-out,' answered his wife indifferently; and then, with renewed vivacity: 'The Bergers are putting a new wing to their house—a ball-room and conservatory—I was over it the other day with Winny. The whole of this wretched little house would go inside the ball-room.'

'Well, I'll consult Moses & Co. Perhaps they'll put me in the way of jewing the public,' said Trevaskis, as he went out.

Whether he jewed the public much or little, the fact remained that before his week's leave of absence expired, Trevaskis had, by buying Block Twenties on Tuesday and selling them on Thursday, added £700 to his money. By this time he had abandoned all thought of the farm with the orchard and orangery. The bare mention of the project had filled his wife with disdainful horror. 'A farm! a place with pigs and cows, and sunbonnets and bad seasons!' she ejaculated a little incoherently, as if the latter was a commodity laid on like gas or water, wherever agriculture was concerned. 'It's bad enough for you to be managing a mine away from home,' she went on, 'and our furniture getting spoiled in this poky little house, with one general servant⁹ and an incompetent nurse; but to go on a wretched bit of land, and sell apples and oranges-----'

'You speak as though I had asked you to go round with a donkey cart, full of fruit and a pair of scales!' retorted Trevaskis, whose nerves had been so much strained by his recent experiences, that he was unable to listen to his wife's unreasoning querulousness with his accustomed forbearance. On this she burst into tears. She had been trying to bear up as well as she could, she said, in a voice broken with emotion. What with five young children and a small poky house of six rooms, where part of the furniture was being spoiled, and the rest ruined in a warehouse; with a general servant who invariably spoiled the gravy, and a young nurse who was always on the point of tipping the perambulator over; and now on top of it all to be taunted in this way—and so forth, and so forth.

'She will never know a contented day again till we have a big house and servants and a carriage once more,' thought Trevaskis, and these biting ambitions accorded but too well with his own. The addition made by his lucky investment in Block Twenties to the proceeds of the stolen gold merely served to strengthen his fixed determination to secure the rest of the hidden treasure. His thoughts were constantly reverting to this subject, and to the obstacles that had to be surmounted. . . He would have to work entirely by night in retorting the gold. As for disposing of it afterwards, he could not bear the thought of repeated journeys in the disguise he had first assumed. But he was now certain that the fortunes of the new diggings at Broombush Creek would offer an easy solution. The low reefs in the vicinity of the creek had been tested by experts, and found to contain gold in sufficient quantities to pay for crushing.¹⁰ Already four or five companies had been started, and the necessary plant was on the way to the diggings. Trevaskis was too familiar with the histories of goldfields, not to know that in a short time one or two of these companies would come to grief, and that the plant, etc., could be bought for less than half the cost. He could start working on his own account, and all the rest would be easy. A more serious obstacle now than the disposal of the gold was the arrangement he had made to let Fitz-Gibbon investigate the hiding-place. How could this be prevented without raising suspicion? If he postponed the investigation from time to time, the young man might, in sheer weariness, drop the project. Perhaps after all it occupied very little of his thoughts.

But on the day before he left town, he made a very unpleasant discovery, which still further complicated the situation. He was in the company's office discussing various mining matters with the secretary, who said to him as he was leaving:

'Ah, by the way, isn't Mr. Fitz-Gibbon going to search some underground place for a pot of gold that some old fellow told him was to be found there?'

'Yes, yes, we're going to get a great fortune there,' answered Trevaskis, without a change of countenance, though his heart gave a great thump when he heard the words.

'Mr. Drummond, his uncle, had a letter from him the other day, in which he mentioned it. We've heard some rumours about that place before. Yes, of course, there's always yarns about mines one can't believe. But Mr.

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Fitz–Gibbon will have plenty of time; it seems he'll remain till Christmas after all. I didn't believe he would stay there more than a month at the most.'

'He may or he may not stay till Christmas,' thought Trevaskis, as he left the office; 'but at any rate he don't fossick about in that part of the old mine till I've secured the gold.'

This, then, was the fixed purpose with which he returned to the mine. The prize at stake was too precious to be forgotten. To occupy a good position, to be above the necessity of work, to eat and drink well, to drive in a carriage, and have 'everything handsome,'¹¹ is an ideal of life so ardently prized, so universally scrambled for, that, in its achievement, lying, cheating, hypocrisy of all kinds, robberies of every grade, are constantly enacted. It is by no means a new play. The cast has been on the world's stage from time immemorial, the actors are perpetually renewed, and the drama is now as popular at the Antipodes as it could ever have been in the Old World.

- a. slouch] slouched Adl E1
- b. There isn't] There's isn't E1
- c. one of] Om. Adl
- d. banks] Bank Adl
- e. and] an' Adl E1
- f. specked] speckled Adl
- g. noo] zoo E1
- h. this] his Adl
- i. at Beltana] Om.* Adl
- j. who] that Adl E1
- k. top] the top Adl
- l. forgotten] foregone Adl E1

Chapter X.

Victor, after bidding Trevaskis good-bye, as he climbed into the mail-coach that took him on the first stage of his journey to town, returned to the office and read over that thick letter from Miss Paget which had suddenly thrown a kind of gray light athwart certain rose-tinted illusions. It was a long, bright, pleasant letter, but perhaps, if it were received under the best auspices, there was too little in it that spoke to the heart. . . . Her father and Professor Codrington were just then ecstatically happy over the rubbings of antique stones from some antediluvian quarry in a remote part of Asia.¹ Among these rubbings they had discovered a new sort of metre!² Had she told Victor in her previous letter that among the residents of Colombo they had unexpectedly met a relative—a young clergyman newly wedded? A gentle little cherub of a man, with big blue eyes and a dimple or two, who apologized for the decrees of Providence in two short sermons each Sunday, and for the usages of Anglo-Colomban society³ during the rest of the week. His bride had an inexhaustible trousseau—a new dress for every emergency of life; and when there was no emergency at all she looked all the more like a lyric out of a Parisian fashion-book—a pretty lyric, too, only a little too much colour, especially in the matter of yellowish-green—a little too suggestive of a 'resolute angel that delights in flame.'⁴ There was a long, vivid description of a journey to Kandy and back—of a reception and dinner at Government House, and various other social functions, at which the vanity of cliques and the pretensions of little-great⁵ officialdom and its wives and daughters were noted with an unsparing pen. But there were no tender fancies, nor foolish little fondnesses, nor any lingering on those feelings that are the food of love. All these Miss Paget, of set purpose, denied to herself. Only near the close, as in her previous letter, were a few words which might be interpreted as a sign that she was not all the time in brilliant spirits. 'It is all very lively and amusing; nevertheless, at times je m'ennuie horriblement; pensez donc un peu ^ moi.'⁶

Victor felt as he had done on receiving Miss Paget's previous letters, that there was something lacking in them. But now he felt strongly that there was something lacking in his own heart yet more unmistakably. He contrasted the strong emotion with which he anticipated seeing Doris from time to time with the feeling that had suddenly surprised him on seeing Helen's letter, and the flimsy disguises with which he had, during the last few days, beguiled himself, were torn aside. He lingered over his evening meal at the Colmar Arms, though there was little in the way of food or company to attract him. Vansittart had for a day or two past kept entirely to his own room. 'He wasn't ill, but queer like, and didn't care to eat, or see anyone,' the landlady explained. There were several strangers at the table, men coming or going to the new diggings. Their only talk was of the finds there, or the companies to be started—of the diggers and various adventurers, whose numbers were swelling daily. Victor listened to them with a dull amazement at the avidity with which they harped on these details, long after every fibre of novelty had been threshed out of them. His little friend Dick, now happy in a toy stem-winder⁷ of his own which Victor had bought for him from a travelling jeweller, came and sat by his side, and made conversation to the best of his ability.

It was all very dull, and there was nothing to tempt him to linger as he did, except to pass the time till it was half-past eight, when he was due at the little school-room of corrugated iron, where he played a solo on the violin, and stayed to play a second later on, at Roby Hoskings' pressing entreaty.

It was close on ten when he got to Stonehouse. The moment he opened the door of his room the sweet, penetrating breath of flowers saluted him. And lo! there on the toilet-table was a bunch of white and Parma violets in a little Sevres bowl. He was still bending over them, all the torpor and dullness of the day replaced by an incredible thrill of happiness, when there was a tap at the door. It was Shung-Loo with a small tray, on which stood a cup of chocolate and some biscuits, and an invitation from Mrs. Challoner to breakfast on Sunday mornings⁸ at nine o'clock, which he accepted with thanks.

'I could not do anything else,' he reasoned. As if he wished to do anything else! As if he did not lie awake for hours half intoxicated with joy at the prospect of feasting his eyes on a certain face that now haunted him day and night with radiant, serious eyes! As if he did not rise with the first sunrays and wander round the house like an unquiet spirit, waiting to catch the first glimpse of Doris!

And at last he saw her coming out in a loose white morning robe, her hair in tumbled masses on her shoulders,

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damp from the shower-bath, as if they had caught dew-drops in their folds of tawny amber. She came to meet him as he approached her with a luminous sparkle in her face.

'You did not come last night, and we wanted so much to thank you,' she said; and with that she gave him her hand.

And as he held it for a moment in his, timidly touching the firm, slender fingers for the first time, it seemed to him as if this quiet Sunday morning in the heart of the arid Salt-bush country would henceforth become the great date of his life. He could not have told what he said in reply, but it was doubtless something appropriate, for Doris went on with an enchanting look of gladness that seemed of right to belong to her, though it had of late been absent from her face:

'Such a great boxful of violets! You would hardly believe how many little dishes we filled with them. And it is late in the season for them. We had very few at Ouranie in November. Did you see the little bowlful we put in your room? . . . Oh, it is we who have to thank you more and more! I wonder if you know how much I love violets, and white ones especially?'

'I felt sure you did. Although I could not see any, it seemed as if you always had some.'

The old look of deep, pathetic gravity came back to her eyes.

'Ah, that is because at Ouranie we made scent from them. They did not last long there, and we gathered them—mother and I—in great basinfuls, and got all the scent out of them by an old recipe. cDo you like it? There is some on this handkerchief?'

She held it out to him, and he took the soft, daintily-laced bit of gossamer in his hand and held dit for some time, feeling dreadfully loath to give it up.

'It is sweeter than the violets themselves,' he averred; and he turned the little handkerchief over with a lingering tenderness.

Did she guess that he coveted it? It would seem so, for after he restored it she went into her room—they were by this time on the veranda—and presently came back with a white Indian silk handkerchief, embroidered round the edge with those fanciful little Gooloo figures in palest dog-rose pink.

'I worked them a long etime ago, and I have put some of our extract of violets on it for you. Will you please keep it, and this little bottleful?'

'I shall keep them as long as I live,' he said, taking these little gifts from her with a stormy beating of the heart.

'But no; the handkerchief will wear out in a year or two, and you will use the scent in a few months,' she said, looking at him with surprise at the extravagance of the metaphor he used.

'At any rate, you will allow that I may keep this pretty little cut-glass bottle for a long time,' he said, half laughing, ready to treat his unguarded speech as a meaningless trope, though he felt in every fibre of his being it was but a cold statement of a bare fact.

Could it ever dawn on her how much they were to him, those simple little tokens of goodwill? What would she have thought if she could have seen him that evening in his own room, pressing her silk handkerchief to his lips over and over again? As he pictured to himself the wondering surprise in her sweet grave eyes, he coloured and smiled, and thrust the precious embroidered morsel of silk into an inner breast-pocket of his coat.

Mrs. Challoner's invitation to breakfast had been warmly extended to the rest of the day, and the hours had passed by with something of the unreality of a happy dream—with something, too, of that cold awakening to the complications of everyday life, that too often comes after moments of visionary bliss.

Near sunset they all walked a couple of miles across the western plain. Its most marked feature was the track that led through the frayed Salt-bush to Broombush Creek—a track now wide and trodden into a well-defined road by the ceaseless traffic of the crowds on foot, on horseback, and in vehicles, ceaselessly pushing on to seek their fortunes at the new diggings. A few stray passengers were in sight, and here and there in the distance were to be seen films of smoke floating up from brushwood fires, kindled by the travellers to boil their billies of tea. Challoner and his wife walked in advance, the three young people a little behind them.

'We must drive across to see the diggings,' said Challoner, turning round, 'one day before the rush is over. It will be something for you to remember, Miss Doris, when you get to the Old World.'

It was then, from some further talk that passed, Victor learned for the first time how near this departure was. Directly after Christmas! Something seemed to obscure his sight for an instant. It seemed as though the vast melancholy plain, that made an interminable landscape wherever one looked, had suddenly engulfed his joy, his

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dawning expectations, his vague hopes. All his life he would recall with strange vividness the sensation that overcame him that moment, as if the vital forces of being were suddenly lowered, and the world had resolved itself into an illimitable ash-coloured wilderness, over which human lives passed like flying shadows, like the phantoms of a dream lost in infinite abysses of unremembering sleep. For a brief space an inexplicable melancholy fastened itself on him with a virulence which had hitherto been totally unknown to him. It was as if for one implacable moment he saw, as in a vision, the struggling, restless, tragic futility of human hopes, begotten in ignorance, snatched away in a passion of anguish, eternally lost in a little mound of dust. But such sombre reflections were foreign to his temperament, and the next moment he was almost ready to smile at them.

'You are going to relations, I suppose?' he said, after a little.

'Yes; distant relations on my father's side. But beside the relationship, Mme. de Serziac was my mother's dearest friend. Her children are my cousins.'

After they returned to the house she showed him their photographs—the mother, the two daughters, and the son, taken at various ages. The last one of the latter represented a young man with a pointed moustache, and the immaculately-fitting uniform of a sous-lieutenant⁹ in the French Guards. It was on this photograph that Victor looked the longest.

'He looks very different there, doesn't he?' said Doris reflectively, turning to this photo from the previous one, in which he had been taken with his sisters, looking rather an awkward youth with over-long limbs.

'Yes; you see, he is quite grown-up here, and a soldier. Of course you like the soldier one best?' replied Victor, looking at the young officer with a sombre brow. He hated himself for making the suggestion as soon as he had spoken the words. But Doris answered without the slightest hesitation.

'No, I don't think I do; for, you see, he seems more like a stranger, and I don't like to write to him as I used to do.'

'Oh, do you, then, correspond with each other?'

'You see, it was like this,' answered Doris, leaning her cheek on one hand and looking up at him. 'We always wrote to each other two or three times a year when we were children—on birthdays and at Easter and Christmas time—sending cards and little gifts. Then for four or five years Raoul did not write at all. I suppose he was too busy, for he left St. Cyr¹⁰ and went into the army when he was only eighteen, and only sent messages and birthday remembrances in his sister's letters when he was at home. But after we sent them our photographs—these,' turning the leaves of the album to the picture in which she was taken with her mother on her sixteenth birthday, 'Raoul wrote a nice long letter to me, asking for a picture for himself, and begging that I would write just as I used to long ago. But I think it would be silly to write like that now.'

'Yes, and Doris said the other day she would ask you about it, Mr. Fitz-Gibbon,' said Euphemia, who was sitting near Doris with her accustomed gift of silence, but listening to all that passed with deep interest.

'Ask me?' repeated Victor. The gloom that had gathered on his face sensibly lightened.

'Yes; I thought you should know what sort of a letter a boy quite grown-up would really like to get,' answered Doris, a little shyly.

'Oh, as for me, I would like to get any sort of letter that you wrote.'

But this assurance, though spoken with that perfect veracity which seldom animates human intercourse, did not seem quite to satisfy Doris.

'Isn't that the sort of thing one says for the sake of politeness?' she said hesitatingly; and then, after a little pause, as if to soften the inquiry: 'Of course you cannot tell how very stupid I am at writing letters. You see I know, because my cousins write such very clever letters—quite different from mine.'

'I have been wondering what sort of letters you used to write,' said Victor slowly, having with difficulty resisted the temptation of making various assertions during the pause that ensued.

'Well, mostly about the flowers—there were always flowers at Ouranie; and the birds, and the look of the sky—the——'

'If you were writing to-night, what would you say about it?'

'About the sky, do you mean?'

'Yes.'

She looked out through the open window and into the tranquil heavens, where the moon, almost at the full, was slowly mounting into sight. Her eyes grew large and humid as she slowly replied:

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'I would say that the dark half of the moon was over, and that it was like a great silver basin heaped up with soft white lilies. And all the time, you see,' she said, turning round and looking at him earnestly with her great candid eyes, 'the moon is like ka cinder, as dry as ashes, full of dreadful scars and lextinct volcanoes. I was so disappointed when mother told me about it when I learned a little about astronomy.'

Victor looked into the pure sweet face upturned to his with a growing thrill of emotion. It was with difficulty he averted his eyes, and said with an affectation of carelessness:

'Well, if a good fairy came to me and gave me my choice of gifts, I know what I should choose.'

'I should like to know.'

'Letters like those you wrote from Ouranie.'

'Really, do you mean mit?'

'Really and truly.'

'I wonder at that very much.'

'Why do you?'

'Because there are so many things more important than getting any letters. If you had your choice, would you not sooner be back with your mother?'

Victor turned quickly, and looked out at the window. He was forced to smile, and he feared that if Doris saw him, his levity would seem as strange to her as his choice of fortune.

'Well, there isn't much chance of fairies giving us the embarrassment of choosing,' he said, evading a direct answer. 'But some kinds of letters would rank very high with me. . . . I suppose you like getting your cousins?'

'Oh yes, especially Eugenie's. She is just a few months older than I am, and she is going into society this season.¹¹ There has been so much for her to tell about, and she makes you feel as if you knew the people.'

'Like that letter in which she told you about the Duchess, Doris,' remarked Euphemia.

'For my part, I would much sooner hear about the silver basin heaped up with soft white lilies,' said Victor.

'Then do you think I might write to Raoul as I used to?' asked Doris, a little anxiously.

Victor knitted his brows, and stroked his moustache with slow thoughtfulness.

'It is difficult to advise about another person, especially one you know nothing about. Of course I can answer for myself. I'll tell you what I think we might do—that is to make my opinion of any value——'

The young Machiavelli paused and looked as grave and reflective as if he were trying to decide a knotty question of statecraft.

'Yes, tell me,' urged Doris with interest.

'You might fancy I was a long way off, and that you wanted to write to me and let me know what this place was like, and so on, like an exercise, you know, and then I might help you——'

'Oh yes, that would be nice; but what a shame to practise on you! Don't you mind?'

'Not in the least. I was going to say that I could help you nto make it into an ordinary letter, like the prosy sensible things people generally write, and then you could send it to your cousin.'

'It is no use, I must write and tell the whole truth to Helen,' Victor was saying to himself half an hour later in his own room. 'It will be horrid, I know. . . . What in the name of heaven made me fancy I was in love! . . . Oh, what a beautiful darling she is! . . . And going away in six or seven weeks. . . . I shall take my passage by the same ship. I shall find it necessary. Will she ever care for me a little? But what a fearful donkey I was! . . . Fortunately Helen does not love me. . . . I am quite sure of that now.'

a. the] of the Adl

b. mornings] morning Adl

c. Do] Did Adl

d. it] it up* Adl

e. time] while Adl

f. beside] besides E1

g. should] would Adl E1

h. a] Om. Adl E1

i. would] should Adl E1

j. the] Om. Adl E1

k. a] an extinct Adl

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l. extinct] Om. Adl
m. it] Om. Adl E1
n. to] Om. Adl

Chapter XI.

Some days later Victor received two letters that served to tranquillize the contending emotions and purposes that so often assailed him during the interval. The first was one from Miss Paget, telling him that her father had persuaded Professor Codrington to accompany him back to Adelaide on a long visit, that they might probably be leaving in less than a month from the date of writing, so that any future letters of his to Colombo would be peradventure ones.¹ If the Professor received certain tidings from England when they were due, they might be leaving a little earlier than four weeks. They were perhaps going to get out at Albany and take the train across to Perth² for a short visit. There were friends of the Professor's there, and he had little difficulty in persuading her father to break the journey back. As for herself, she was at present a sort of classic chorus, whose remarks might be from time to time audible regarding events without in the least affecting their course.³ Personally, she would much sooner have stayed longer at Colombo, with its Bengalis, Moslems, Punjabis, Ghoorkas,⁴ etc., hustling each other in the streets; its swarms of bronze children in dingy sarees, of women clothed in slim cotton robes and a baby on the hip, to say nothing of the funny little boards of smeared sweetmeats under coarse mats, supported on four slender bamboo canes. . . . The bride, too, was far from having exhausted the resources of her trousseau. Only the other day the barometer fell a little, and she instantly went into feathers—plumes on her jacket and skirt, plumes on her head, and a long white feather boa. It was just as if an enchanter had been turning her into a bird, and the process was arrested half-way. She was full of those fols enfantillages⁵ some brides were fond of indulging in. . . . Well, if no more letters reached her from Victor in Colombo, she would at least expect a few lines at Perth or Albany, addressed care of the P. and O. agent.

The other letter was from his mother, written after she had got his, telling of the attachment between himself and Helen, and the engagement imminent after the period of probation. Mrs. Fitz-Gibbon wrote with some emotion. She entirely refused to look on this affair in a serious light.

'Dear boy,' she wrote, 'what put it into your head that you were in love with a lady almost old enough to be your mother, and to propose before you attained your majority? When I read the cool, matter-of-fact announcement, and then thought of the lava-torrent of eloquence, into which you would have plunged as to the eyes, lips, etc., of the adored one, if your heart had been really touched—pardon me, dear, if I tell you that I could not help laughing. You rash, impulsive boy! Not that perhaps it is surprising you should have mutually whiled away some of the tedious days by a little love-making. . . . Apart from the question of age, Miss Paget has many attractions. She is intelligent and very nice-looking. But the discrepancy is too preposterous, and my own belief is that it was only to let you down gently that she suggested the compromise. She has too biting a sense of humour, not to appreciate the ludicrousness of the matter; for you are not only very young in years, but young for your age, as your father was before you. Please allow a little to my knowledge of two generations of Fitz-Gibbons.'

It may be doubted whether this was altogether a judicious letter, or would have gone far to effect the object of the writer, had not a more potent cause been at work. Even though Victor would now be glad to believe, that Miss Paget had not seriously looked forward to their engagement, his mother's letter vexed and irritated him—till he came to the last page.

'But at any rate, my dear boy, you will come to bring me home, before you take any further steps in the matter. Now that we have not to study economy so painfully, there is no reason why we should not have our long-projected little tours together. I shall meet you on the Continent according to the line you prefer to come by.'

When his office-work was over that day, Victor saddled his horse and rode out towards Broombush Creek. As he galloped across the plain, his hopes became boundless as the high, wide horizon round him. He would write a short letter to Helen at Colombo, and then a note to Perth, telling her he would meet her as soon as she landed. He would run down to town for the purpose. . . . After all, she had been wise enough to see from the first that there was an impossible element in his wooing. He went further, and began to feel sure that his mother's view of Miss Paget's action was the true one. . . . Well, she would always be his friend—she had often said so—irrespective of any closer bond; and she would love Doris. Who would not that once saw her?

Then, in fear and trembling, he suddenly asked himself whether it was possible that he could ever win so dazzling, so overwhelming, a gift as Doris's love. But as he recalled her growing gaiety and confiding air, the

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sweet little smile with which she now gave him her hand on meeting and parting, his hopes rose high. He was near her; he would see her day by day; he would go by the same ship that the Challoners chose for their voyage after Christmas. Yes, he was sure now all would be well. A great unreasoning wave of joy swept over him as he rode on, and he gave vent to his feelings by singing at the pitch of his voice:

'Hurrah, hurrah, let's sound the jubilee! Hurrah, hurrah, the flag that sets us free! Hurrah, hurrah——'6

He was arrested by the sound of a clear, mocking echo, as distinct as his own voice. It was from the low rock near the broken-down whim, to which he was quite close, though he had not noticed it, in his joyous self-absorption. Two men were half reclining on their swags at the foot of this rock, resting while they boiled a billy of water for tea. Victor slackened his pace. As he approached them, a dog rose up and began to bark joyously, struggling to get away; but one of the men held him back by a stout cord. It was Doris's Spot—the friendly young collie who had accepted everyone as a possible friend. The tramp made a feeble statement about being followed by the dog from somewhere near the Colmar, and refusing to turn back.

'That's a way dogs have when held by a ship's hawser,' said Victor, laughing.

He went no further, but rode back at once, with Spot running ahead. When they came in sight of Stonehouse, he bombarded the place with his short, excited barks. Before Victor reached the front avenue there was Doris rejoicing over her vagrant, with Rex looking on, saying as eloquently as eyes and a tail can speak, 'I told him he would get into a mess, going to speak to strange swagmen.'

As Victor anticipated, Doris had been in great trouble at Spot's disappearance. They missed him shortly after mid-day, and waited for his return in vain. Then Doris and Euphemia had gone across to the mine to see if he had followed Mr. Fitz-Gibbon; but no trace of him was to be seen.

'Now here he is, all safe and sound, the naughty old darling!' and both girls embraced him and patted him, a proceeding which Spot enjoyed immensely.

'Do you know, after all, there is something of the good fairy about you,' said Doris. 'You get boxes of flowers for us, as if by making a sign over the Salt-bush, and now you rescued Spot when he was being stolen.'

'Well, and do you know what this good fairy advises, so as to make Mr. Spot give up following chance swagmen?' said Victor. 'Tie him up for a whole day, and give him a beating.'

The bare suggestion won more caresses for Spot. Then Doris told Victor how, during their search, they had seen a dog that in the distance looked like hers disappearing into a tent. They went to the door to inquire.

'Only there was no real door,' she said, 'but just a sack hanging in the opening; and inside there was a poor woman looking dreadfully ill, with two children in bed, sick of a fever. Oh, such a miserable place!—the floor, bare earth, dirty and uneven—no chairs—not even a table; and the woman thinks it is the water out of the tank that makes them ill.'

'Yes, I know they are rather bad, the sort of places some of the miners live in,' assented Victor, but without much interest.

Doris, however, was not content with being merely sorry. She wanted to have something done. Hesitating a little, and looking down, while a deeper tinge of colour stole into her cheeks, she said she had some money to spend as she liked, and she wanted to do something for this family. Could Victor suggest some way of getting them a better place to live in? At Ouranie they had got a little wooden house from town, all ready to be put up at Peppermint Ranges for a school.

'Couldn't we do something like that for the Connells?'7 asked Doris, looking at the mine-purser with her direct, serious gaze.

But was this a matter to be decided in half a minute of time, while one is holding one's horse by the bridle? No; it was a question to be talked over for an hour and a half, by the light of many candles, softened by pink shades, with an elderly couple playing their habitual elderly games of chess, with the breath of late violets and sheaves of white lilac pervading the room, and the cool evening wind stealing in through the open windows.

Victor found the advertisement of a firm of builders, in one of the weekly newspapers, illustrated by a seductive wood-cut, of a little three-roomed wooden building, with doors and windows all complete. Doris and Euphemia looked at this picture with rapt enthusiasm.

'I think it is better for the price than the building we got for the school-room,' said Doris, with quite a business-like air. Then she took up a pencil and wrote some figures on a piece of paper. 'I think I should like to order three of these houses. There are some others with children who are ill,' she said, after a pause.

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'But you mustn't begin to present people with houses as if they were Christmas cards,' said Victor, smiling.

Euphemia was summoned into the kitchen in consultation over a cake that was being made. When she was gone, Doris, in reply to Victor's remonstrance, said very gravely:

'But I know mother would like me to help these poor people. I like to do things that seem to bring us nearer.'

Victor felt something like a pang of jealousy at the thought that Doris's love for her mother was so deep that it might exclude the growth of a new affection. This was succeeded by the reflection that he might help his own cause with her, by co-operation in this matter. 'Zilla had a few days ago returned part of the loan he had made to him, at the same time expressing a wish that there were some place to which he could bring his wife at the mine. She was too delicate to live in a tent.

'You have put a plan in my mind,' he said; 'that is, if you order one of these wooden places, I'll order another for 'Zilla Jenkins. But, you know, I think we ought to charge a little rent. The miners here get good wages,⁸ and can afford to pay a little for a place to live in.'

'But not when the children are ill,' objected Doris.

The next day she went further, and told Victor the people who were getting money out of the mine, ought to provide houses for the miners. Altogether, he found this business of ordering two prosaic little wooden buildings, a wonderfully enchanting affair. Indeed, at this period he lived in a world of enchantment. There was a light in his eyes, and a glow on his face oftentimes, that might draw the eyes of the least-interested observer.

'Smiling at angels⁹ again, Fitz-Gibbon?' said Vansittart, a few evenings after the weather-board cottages had been ordered. It was the fifth day after Trevaskis' return from town, and the three were sitting at tea in the dining-room of the Colmar Arms, when Vansittart abruptly broke the silence with this inquiry.

'What do you mean?' said Victor, turning to him, his unconscious look of beatitude replaced by one of wonder.

'Ten minutes ago I was talking to you most profoundly about the destinies of the human race. I said they were unable to achieve any real lasting good, and that the divinities who tried to help them had all ended with failure. There was the Indian god who tried to carry the world to salvation, and lost his hands and arms; another who developed a liver with a fowl snapping it out of him through ages; another who was put to death on a cross.¹⁰ "Yes," said you softly, staring into your teacup with a little smile. After that your mine-manager spoke of the great dray-loads of machinery that are on the way from Nilpeena to Broombush Creek. On that, you looked out through the window, again smiling ineffably. Are you in love?'

Much, no doubt, may be forgiven to a very young man who is for the first time passionately in love; but when his state of exalted preoccupation was so crudely brought home to him, Victor felt that his behaviour had been very boyish and undignified, and in momentary confusion he seized the first explanation that offered itself to him.

'Don't you know,' he said, 'that when people smile into their teacups and at windows, it is money they are thinking about—gold heaped up in an old cave room? By the way, captain, I suppose I can go on now with that search?'

Trevaskis shot a quick look at Vansittart, and then at Victor, the blood surging violently into his face. He had been several hours for four nights running at work in the cave room, retorting and smelting the amalgam, and his first thought, when thus addressed, was that he had somehow been spied upon.

'It's better to settle mine-matters at the mine,' he answered brusquely.

'Don't mind my presence in this matter, sir,' said Vansittart, with icy politeness. 'You see,' he went on, fixing his eyes steadily on the manager's face, 'it was I who first told Mr. Fitz-Gibbon that the cave room was well worth looking into. I wonder he has taken so long about the matter. For a young man who is so much wrapped up in money, he is singularly dilatory.'

Trevaskis emitted an ejaculation that was between a snort and a grunt—one of those sounds of defiant indignation which has perhaps descended to us from the days preceding the evolution of speech, still retaining a primitive eloquence that defies translation into language. He felt certain for one brief moment that all was known, that these speeches were prearranged, and the prelude to openly denouncing him as a thief. But he recalled his terror on that first night, when he made sure that he was uncovering a mutilated corpse. 'It may be another dead rat, after all,' he said to himself. He drained a cup of tea, and then went to the sideboard to pour himself out another. His hand shook like a leaf, but with a strong effort of will he controlled himself.

'Did I tell you that Dr. Magann is coming to settle at the mine?' he said to Victor, resuming his place at the

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table. . . . 'Oh yes—next week. There's not a soul left at The Ridges and Hooper's Luck except a few women and children and an old man or two. The rush to Broombush has thinned a lot of the townships between this and Adelaide; but as for The Ridges, it's simply cleaned out. It's lucky the old doctor is coming here; there's illness in three or four of the tents and huts.'

In his determination to ignore the terror that had for a moment overtaken him, he talked much more than was his wont. He even retailed some old mining stories, over which he and Victor laughed heartily. Altogether he was a much more genial being through the rest of the meal than he had ever been at that table before.

Vansittart sat listening and looking on in gloomy silence. A curious change had come over him since his illness. That pervasive ecstasy of the nerves, evoked by what he called his Australian 'keef,'¹¹ had entirely forsaken him. It had no longer power to charm him into pleasing visions, or complacent monologues, alternated with drowsy, voluptuous reveries. When he spoke, it was in bitter discontent with the world and all that it contained. But for the most part he sat silent, with an expression of unmoved sombreness on his face. He fixed his attention on Trevaskis from the moment that the cave room was mentioned till he left the dining-room. Then, turning to Victor, who was lighting a cigarette preparatory to leaving, he said:

'What is that man up to? You noticed nothing unusual in his manner? Why, the moment you mentioned gold, the blood rushed to his face in a torrent. His eyes, too, are much worse again, and when he lifted his teacup, his hand trembled as if he were in a fit of D.T.'¹² . . . Hasn't he made some excuse so as to prevent your going into the cave room?'

'It has not yet been convenient. I haven't been thinking much about it, to tell the truth.'

'Well, I tell you he is up to his eyes thieving in that place.'

It always gave Victor an uncomfortable feeling to hear a man impute a baseness to another. Perhaps he was as much in danger of being misled by his belief in people generally till they proved themselves unworthy of confidence, as Trevaskis was by his unfailing suspicions of all with whom he came in contact. This trait of his character had from the first forced itself on Victor, and he thought he now recognised the same tendency in Vansittart. It was this that induced him to reply:

'I have often heard of the melancholy of the Bush, and, do you know, Vansittart, I begin to think that it makes people take rather gloomy views of human nature.'

'Yes, because you have plenty of time for reflection and concentrated observation—that is, if you have come to years of discretion. As for you, young man, if I am not mistaken, you live and move in an artificial paradise just at present. You have inhaled more keef than I have swallowed in all my life. Take care that your heaven does not come down with a run, like a broken drop-scene.'¹³

He stared hard into the bright, handsome young face opposite to him. Its indomitable gladness seemed to wound him almost like an insult.

'Well, as long as you suspect me only of being happy-----'

'Yes; but don't forget that happiness in a world like this is the last refuge of an idiot!'¹⁴ said Vansittart savagely.

On this Victor laughed outright, and rose to go. But something in the sombre eyes, the forlorn, stooping attitude, the uncared-for, lonely look of the man, suddenly touched him.

'I say, old man, I don't believe it's a good thing for you to be staying on here with nothing to do. Wouldn't you find it more amusing to wait for your friend in town?' he said, putting his hand on Vansittart's shoulder as he spoke.

'It wouldn't make any real difference to me,' answered Vansittart, after a little pause. . . . 'I came across an old black-fellow dying from a wound and from thirst once in the Bush. "Wirin-ap yarnt-il, wirin-ap yarnt-il!" he kept on saying a score of times to the minute, which means, "I am sick from a spear-wound."¹⁵ That's about the size of it with me. My life has been a claim that didn't pan out well. I'm better waiting here than in town.'

'Poor old chap! I wonder what came over him?' thought Victor, as he walked across to his office. 'I might have offered to play a game or two of euchre with him. . . . But, then, there is this letter about the weather-board cottages which I want Doris to see.'

a. feelings] feeling Adl

b. had] Om. Adl E1

c. he] Spot Adl

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- d. them] them into Adl
- e. has] have E1
- f. that] the Adl
- g. much] Om. E1

Chapter XII.

Trevaskis, though outwardly calm, was in a state of indescribable excitement as he walked across from the Colmar Arms to the mine. His throat felt parched; his pulses seemed to be thundering in his ears. So it was Vansittart who had first told Fitz-Gibbon about the probable treasure that was secreted at the mine. Vansittart had been for some months acting as purser while the amalgam was being stolen. Now he was staying on at the Colmar Arms, on the pretext of waiting for an old mate, who was coming down from the Far North. Was this a plant? Had he any certain knowledge? Was he, perhaps with Fitz-Gibbon's aid, gathering up evidence that would be incontestable? Would the two, with the assistance of a policeman summoned from town, one day break open the iron wall that secured the entrance to the cave room?

But when his fears had reached this climax, Trevaskis reflected that even in such an extremity it would be impossible to convict him of actual guilt. No search—no discovery that might possibly be made—could connect him with stealing the amalgam. It was characteristic of the dogged tenacity with which he kept to a purpose once formed, that even the gold which he had retorted and smelted during the past four nights he had secreted underground, though he had been much tempted to put the bars in the strong safe that stood in his office.

But he had already taken action towards securing a place to which he would convey the treasure. The day before this he had ridden out towards Broombush Creek. In a secluded spot at some distance from it he had pegged out a prospector's quartz claim, and sent in an application to the Government. As soon as this was granted he intended to set a man working there,² providing him with a small hut to live in.

These would be the preliminary steps. Afterwards, when his three hundredweight of gold was ready for the market, he would take it all away and elaborate his plans. He would buy up the disused machinery at the Colmar Mine, and in common sacks, among old tools, he would take away this fortune without a breath of suspicion—if only this double-faced young Irishman and this crazy opium-eater³ did not make mischief. Christmas was not now far off, and at that date Fitz-Gibbon would be leaving.

'If I can only tide that time over somehow or another!' he said, clenching his right hand rigidly.

So engrossed was he in his thoughts that he was close to his office-door before he saw that someone stood there awaiting him—a powerful-looking, thick-set man, half a head shorter than Trevaskis.

'Be that b'ee,⁴ Bill?' said the man, holding out his hand.

'Why, Dan, where did you spring from? I am so very glad to see you—very glad indeed!' said Trevaskis heartily, as they shook hands.

Perhaps he felt there was call for this assurance, for it was his brother, older than he was by five years, but still a working miner, as he had been in early youth. It was now some years since they last met. On that occasion Dan had come one evening unexpectedly to his brother's house; he happened to be entertaining a number of guests at dinner. He would not ask Dan in among them, and he could not send him to the kitchen. He tried to compromise the matter by pressing a ten-pound note into his hand, and asking him to call on the morrow. But Dan had thrust the bank-note back with some violence.

'Studdy there, Bill, studdy! I come to see c'ee, not for money. I can't clunk⁵ that, man,' he said, and then hurried away.

'Come in, Dan, come in,' said Trevaskis, unlocking his door. 'I expect you've come a good distance, and want something to eat,' he added, as he lit the lamp.

'No, I've had tay wi' my old mate, 'Zilla Jenkins. I met 'im close by as I got off Circus Bill's trap.⁶ I dcom' from Broombush Creek.'

'Circus Bill's trap' was a passenger coach, which had within the last week begun to run daily between Broombush Creek and Nilpeena.

It turned out that Dan had been at the diggings, not on his own account, but summoned there by a brother-in-law, who had been among the first in the rush to Broombush Creek.

'E had pretty good luck, but 'e was took bad, and 'e sent for me. 'E seemed to know from th' first as 'e wouldn't git over it, and ehe just wanted to give me safe what 'e 'ad got. Poor old chap! he died yistiday a' four o' the marning. I feel quite whizzy like. They'll die there like flies before long; such a shaape⁷ 'ole I never seed. I

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wouldn't stay there for no money. 'E give me this, poor fellow! 'twas 'ard to die for the sake o' getting 't for another man.'

Dan produced a soiled cotton handkerchief with a round lump knotted in the middle. It was a number of small nuggets of gold, about twenty ounces in all.

'I reckon 'tis about fifty pun worth o' gold?' he said interrogatively. There was a good deal of quartz mixed with it.

'I'll give you seventy pounds for them, Dan,' said Trevaskis, turning the nuggets over.

All the sombreness had left his face. There was a ring of gladness in his voice, and a light in his eyes. Here was the one man in all the world who could best help him to carry out his plans. He wondered now he had not thought of Dan before. He was a man who would be bound to him by the strongest ties—one of a faithful, trusting nature—who, if the facts of the case must eventually be revealed to him, would not be greatly shocked or surprised. But only under urgent necessity would he make a confidant even of Dan. He would at first tell him as much or as little as the emergency called for. These thoughts passed with lightning rapidity through Trevaskis' mind.

'Seventy pun, Bill! Why, you're making me a present o' some o' that, sure 'nough,' said Dan, smiling.

'Oh, I'm going into the gold-buying trade before long,' answered Trevaskis. . . . 'Now, isn't it a funny thing when you come to think of it?' he went on reflectively. 'Here have I been for the last week thinking every day of writing to you, not only to answer the letter I got when I was coming here, but because I wanted to make you a certain offer.'

'What sort o' offer, Bill?'

'I am going to take up a prospector's claim a few miles away from Broombush diggings, and I want you to take charge of it at, say, six pounds a week.'

'That's a handsome wage,8 Bill! Then you make sure there's gold there?'

'I know it,' said Trevaskis; and then he went on to explain that, in some way which he could not then divulge, he had found out that a quantity of gold had been hidden in the locality years before; that the two men who were chiefly concerned in it were dead, and that no one else had now a better right to it than he had himself. 'In fact,' he said, lowering his voice, 'it's for the sake of that I'm staying on here. I don't want to throw up my billet till I can make a proper search, and to make a proper search, a man must fossick about, perhaps for months. You've turned up just in the nick of time. I'll provide you a comfortable crib to live in, and a horse and some sort of ha machine.9 There's a lot of old second-hand tools here that I can buy cheap from the company.'

Trevaskis, in his excitement, walked up and down the room, hardly giving his brother time to put in a word. The longer he thought over the plan of having Dan at the claim, the more certain he felt of ultimate success. Dan had never risen a step above the class he was born in; but he was a safe man and a true, noted from childhood for being well able to keep his own counsel under all circumstances. He had, it is true, a weakness for drink; well, that would be no detriment in this case, at certain times.

'But what tools should we want, Bill, if it's only just to fossick round? A biddix or two for diggin', and a buss and a crock for cookin',10 as poor father used to say, is all a miner wants.'

'My dear man, we don't want to advertise to all the world and his wife11 what our schemes are. The plan will be for you to begin working at the rock, as if we were going in for crushing and all the rest of it. When all is done, Dan, I'll give you a couple of hundred pounds over and above your wages.'

'Well, Bill, you're no bufflehead at making money, and I'm no snail-dew12 at work, and I'm sure it 'ull be all'ays fair sailin' 'twixt thee and I; we'll chait neer another nor each other, but it fills me o' wonder you should make so cocksure o' finding the gold. Now, in a body o' troode,13 thee mayst take the word o' a man that j'ull lie like old Nick hissel' on gold.'

'I know that, Dan, I know that,' answered Trevaskis, laughing. 'But you may be pretty sure I'm not going to engage and send you to my claim on a fool's errand. Now we'll drink success to our venture.'

He produced a bottle of brandy, some tumblers, and a jug of water.

'Softly, softly, Bill! Yes, if you have a few biskies,14 I don't mind if I taste one or two,' said Dan. Then they clinked their glasses to drink success to the gold-searching. As they were in the act of doing this, a loud, hard single knock was heard at the window. Trevaskis instantly went out, but there was no one in sight.

'I heard no footsteps, did you, Dan?'

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'No, not a sound, but that one hard knock. . . . I don't like it, Bill.'

'Oh, nonsense, man! it was la dumbledory¹⁵ with wings—one of those creatures that come out on warm nights——'

"Twas a mtremenjous row for a hinsek to make, Bill,' said the elder brother incredulously.

'But, then, a man couldn't get out of sight for three minutes, at the very least, Dan. You see, there's the rest of the offices in a row to the south, and the galvanized iron passage that reaches to an old sort of underground place on the north side. You haven't got the old Cornish superstitions¹⁶ in you still, have you?'

Trevaskis laughed and drained his glass. Dan also drained his, but he did not laugh. He did not like a loud, solitary knock, with no one visible when it was answered. How often had it been proved to be a sign, that of those who heard it one would be beyond the reach of all sounds of earth before a year had run? Trevaskis guessed the thoughts that darkened Dan's brow, and, lighting a candle, he went out and searched about round the window. Presently he came in with a great winged beetle, dead, on the palm of his hand.

'There, Dan, there's your prophet—dashed himself dead with one blow, trying to get in to the light. Help yourself to another nip. This is proper old Martell.¹⁷ None of your fiery new rubbish!'

They spent the next hour in arranging the details of Dan's search at the claim. He was to work alone, but would ride across every second evening or so. All would be ready for him by the time he came back. He had to return to Bendigo to let his cottage, perhaps sell it, and set his little affairs in order. But he would be back in nine or ten days at the longest, including half a day's stay at Mount Lofty to see his son Dick, the bank clerk.

'That's one thing I'm allays thankful to you for, Bill—gettin' that boy a dacent, easy berth,' said Dan; 'for he's took arter his poor dead mother, not fit for a full shift o' hard work. He's growed fust-rate though, hoyer by a head nor me.'

Trevaskis knew that this youth was the pride of his father's heart, and he let him talk on, throwing in a eulogistic phrase now and then, while his thoughts were busy elsewhere. At ten o'clock he made a bed for Dan in the office on the sofa, which could be broadened at will for that purpose.

'I'll clear out the next room to this for you, Dan, and you can take a bed here when you come over from the claim,' he said, as he bade Dan good-night. 'It will be a fine thing for us both, for we've seen too little of each other all these years, and yet I'll be bound we'd do as much for one another as most brothers.'

Trevaskis seldom spoke with much effusion, but when he did he usually had an object to gain. At present this consisted, in the first instance, in inspiring his brother with complete confidence in his goodwill.

At dawn the next morning Circus Bill made a very early start nfor Nilpeena, so as to return on the same day to Broombush Creek. The brothers parted on the heartiest terms. On that day, and during the greater part of the succeeding week, Trevaskis omanaged to have his dinner at the Colmar Arms alone, by going there an hour later than the usual time. His breakfast and phis evening meal he managed to get in his own rooms, by having a spirit-lamp¹⁸ to boil water for tea, and getting the baker to leave a pound of butter and a loaf of bread now and then. He was, when hard at work, a spare eater, and had hitherto rarely passed the bounds of temperance in drinking. But now, with the constant strain of working half the night, and often sleeping badly the other half, he got into the way of depending more and more on stimulant, to meet the heavy demands he made upon his endurance. During these days he kept out of Victor's way as much as possible. He expected him daily to renew his proposition about the search, and the only plan which he could at present devise was simply to decline doing anything in the matter till the brother of the late manager came to take delivery of his effects. It was a pitifully lame excuse—he knew that—one which would give colour to the strongest suspicions as to his motives; but every day's delay was worth hundreds of pounds to him. Night by night, as he retorted and smelted the gold, and added to his heap of shining bars, he became more indifferent to the thought of mere suspicion—to anything short of losing the fortune that each night brought more and more surely within his grasp.

Apart from this robbery, he was most devoted to the interests of the Colmar Mine, seeing to all the details of the work above and below ground with a feverish restlessness that knew no pause. Then, about nine in the evening, he would go down to the cave room, put five hundred ounces of amalgam in the retort, plaster its top edge with carefully-worked clay, before putting on the lid, which he made air-tight by driving in the holding-down wedges. Then he kindled the fire in the furnace, slowly bringing it up to red heat. At eleven o'clock he would go to see the night-shift go below, scrutinizing each of the men with an eagle eye. If one of them showed the least symptom of intoxication he instantly ordered him away. One of the shift-bosses would

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sometimes intercede for an old or tried miner.

'No, I won't have it—I won't have it! There's been too much of that sort of thing at this mine,' Trevaskis would say in iron tones. 'Rock-drills are destroyed and slovenly work is done, if the men are not perfectly sober. I'm here to protect the company and the shareholders, not to coddle drunken rascals.'

Then he would return to his gold. About midnight, when the retorting was completed, he turned out the spongy cake of gold, broke it up with a qhammer into small lumps, placed them in a crucible with the necessary fluxes, and put the crucible in the assay furnace, which he had ready heated with gartshore coke,¹⁹ out of the bags he had found near the furnaces. The smelting took from fifteen to twenty minutes. Then he poured the molten gold into a long, narrow iron mould, and, when solid, turned it out into a dish of muriatic acid to eat away all impurities. The acid boiled and bubbled when the red-hot gold was put in it, filling the air with yellow suffocating fumes,²⁰ from which Trevaskis escaped by retreating for some minutes into the iron passage. Last of all he put the gold into an enamelled basin full of water, and washed the acid, etc., off with a strong scrubbing brush. Then the pure, massy bar, two hundred and fifteen ounces in weight, was ready to be made into golden vessels for royal tables, into jewellery for fair women, into wash-hand basins for barbarians, into sovereigns for the joy or misery of mankind. There it was, without a stain of the earth from which it came, ready to feed the hungry and tempt the weak, to clothe the naked and pay the wages of sin.²¹

For ten nights Trevaskis worked with the same brilliant result. Each night he watched by his retort and crucible, the flaming fire casting strange shadows in the gloomy recesses of the cave room. His eyes, which were nearly well when he returned from town, had again become much inflamed. When he went about he wore a dark-green shade over them, and the protection this afforded was valuable to him, mentally as well as physically. He had never before quailed at the sight of any man, but now he found it a comfort not to be obliged to speak eye to eye with the most insignificant employ at the mine. In the anticipation of the purser's renewed request to search the cave room, Trevaskis had a conviction that the excuse he meant to make for delaying the event would gather much force, from the indifference with which he could speak when his eyes were veiled from observation. But day after day passed by, and Victor made no sign. He was too deeply preoccupied with more delightful thoughts to waste any on a matter so trivial as a problematical treasure. But Vansittart, without any strong personal interests, and absolutely idle while he waited for his friend, watched and thought intently over the little drama which he felt convinced was now going on at the Colmar Mine. When he found that day after day Trevaskis came for his dinner an hour later than the usual time, and did not come there at all for breakfast and tea, he knew that the arrangement was solely to avoid contact with him, for fear he should make any further allusions to the cave room.

He occupied a small bedroom opening into the dining-room, with a window that overlooked the front veranda. Daily he would station himself at this window, and watch Trevaskis as he came and went away, noting every movement and gesture—his eager haste, his anxious abstraction, his eyes jealously guarded by the broad green shade. He even went, one still, dark night, and watched by the enclosure round the entrance to the cave room, with sleepless vigilance, from ten o'clock till the dawn reddened the east; but not a sound, not a sign, not a gleam of light rewarded his long vigil. As a matter of fact, Trevaskis, on this particular night, suffered so much from his eyes that he could not face his secret night-work. But he exercised such stringent precautions against detection, that it may be doubted whether the most vigilant swatchers would have been able to find a clue to his proceedings. Vansittart, who knew something of the capacities of the cave room for concealment, felt baffled, but not convinced. He tried his best to rouse Victor to some enthusiasm on the subject, but the young man, half in impatience and half in fun, at last forbade him ever to mention the cave room any more.

'You cast reflections upon stage comedy once,' said Victor; 'but at any rate it has this advantage, it comes to an end in a couple of hours, whereas yours goes on for weeks at a stretch.'

'You think it's a comedy? What I told you about----'

'Now, don't—don't mention it any more, or I shall change my dinner-hour,' said Victor, laughing. 'Your pretending you didn't know Trevaskis was a little amusing the first day; but, then, you kept it up too long—and now this hidden treasure!'

'Well, never mind; I'm waiting developments.'

Next morning Vansittart got a letter from his friend, telling him he would be at Nilpeena in two days. He determined to have a say once more regarding the cave room in Trevaskis' presence before leaving the Colmar

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Arms. With this object he told the landlady that they all wanted dinner at the later hour on this day. Then he walked across to see Victor at his office, as he had done several times before, and chatted with him on indifferent topics.

'By the way,' he said, as he was leaving, 'Mrs. West wants to know if you can make it convenient to come later to dinner to-day. Some domestic rupture, I suppose, about having two dinner-times.'

Victor for the first time doubted the explanation when, after he and Trevaskis were seated at the table, Vansittart came into the dining-room. There was a look of devilry in his dark eyes that betrayed some latent excitement. A moment or two later the three were joined by two men who were on their way to Broombush Creek—one of them the manager of a company that had started crushing with tolerable results. Trevaskis entered into animated talk with this man on mining. Victor talked a little to the other stranger. Vansittart sat on in silence till dinner was half over. He looked annoyed, as if his plans had been upset. But at last his opportunity came.

'Ay, it will maybe turn out a great place yet—this Broombush Creek,' said the new manager.

'And repeat the history of all other places in which gold is found,' said Vansittart, in a low-pitched, deliberate voice.

'I expect so. Do you know much about gold-mining and diggings, sir?' said the unsuspecting stranger affably.

'Yes, a good deal. In fact, I've just made my fortune at a gold-mine.'

This statement produced what the law reporters call a sensation. That is, one of the strangers said 'Oh!' another 'Indeed!' and both looked at Vansittart with the utmost interest.

A deep flush mounted into Trevaskis' face. He longed for the shade over his eyes. If he had known he would not be alone, he would not have removed it when he sat down to dinner. But he went on with his meal without once looking at Vansittart. Victor felt sure that a disagreeable 'development'²² was to take place, and, according to the fashion of his age and sex, he awaited the development with a certain amount of enjoyment.

'Yes, gentlemen,' said Vansittart, in emphatic tones, 'quite a fortune! The story is a short one, and can be briefly told. I was at a mine in a colony not far from here. It seems that one or two previous managers had been making a pile for themselves in a slightly irregular way. Don't let this surprise you overmuch. I assure you that nature and human society abound with bravos who are ready to rob and devour each other for the sake of a few mouthfuls and a little gold. Well, there was another man employed on this mine, and he went out one day looking for daisies. He was young and simple, and loved daisies to distraction; in fact, he had as many illusions as a young girl, and this was one of them. He did not find any daisies that day, but he found another man. Now, I am sure it is very inartistic to keep on finding another man in this way; but, being neither a poet nor va comedian, I have to take things as they happened. Well, the man who didn't find a daisy came back to the mine that day, and he said to me:

' "There's gold hidden in an old cave room here—so wI am told. Shall I go and have a look?"

' "Yes," said I, "as many looks as you like—next week."

'However, I thought I'd have a glance myself beforehand, and alone; and what do you suppose I found?'

'Broken bottles,' said the new manager, laughing.

'Old tailings,' said the other man, also laughing.

'A diamond as big as an emu-egg,'²³ said Victor, joining in the mirth.

'Won't you give a guess too, sir?' said Vansittart, looking fixedly at Trevaskis.

Trevaskis was by this time livid in the face, but xstill he made a feint of eating. On being thus directly addressed by his tormentor, he gave a hoarse little laugh and said:

'Perhaps you found as big a fool as yourself.'

'No, sir; I'm afraid that, in some respects, would be impossible,' returned Vansittart, with unmoved urbanity. 'But I'll tell you what I did find. I found white gold²⁴ in heaps and heaps—in hundredweights, I may say—and I went night after night and made it into yellow gold—into gold yellower than sovereigns and purer than wedding-rings. And I said to ythis young man:

' "You go and find some daisies for yourself. As for going into that enclosed room—a horrid cave and very inconvenient—don't think of it!"

'Mind you, gentlemen, I had that receptacle under lock and key. . . . So now I'm like the lilies who neither toil nor spin.'²⁵

'I'm afraid you're taking a rise out of us,' said the man who sat znext Victor.

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Trevaskis, who had finished eating, sat with his hands tightly clasped underneath the table. But though he could not entirely command their tremor, he kept his voice well under control.

'If I wanted to stuff a greenhorn with a tall mining yarn, I wouldn't have far to go to better that,' he said sneeringly.

'Very likely; but, you see, I'm limited to facts, sir,' returned Vansittart, with grave politeness.

Then they all arose from the table, Trevaskis and the manager who was going to Broombush Creek exchanging hopes, as they parted, of seeing each other on future occasions.

As Victor left the room Vansittart followed him to the door.

'I'm going away to-morrow, Fitz-Gibbon, to meet my friend at Nilpeena; so that's the last scene of the "comedy" as far as I am concerned. What do you think of the development?'

'I fear your audience wasn't educated up to enjoying it. That young simpleton, for instance, who doted on daisies. Confound you! I owe you one for that, old fellow.'

They both laughed.

'I wonder,' said Vansittart, 'whether the curtain conceals a tableau of this little drama that will interest you more! Mind, you must tell me—if ever we meet again after to-morrow.'

- a. the] all the Adl
- b. 'ee] 'e E1
- c. 'ee] 'e E1
- d. com'] coom E1
- e. he] 'e E1
- f. plans] plan Adl
- g. the] that Adl E1
- h. a] Om. Adl E1
- i. is] was Adl E1
- j. 'ull] 'll Adl
- k. some] Om. E1
- l. a] Om.* Adl
- m. tremenjous] tremendous Adl
- n. for] to E1
- o. managed] arranged Adl E1
- p. his] Om. Adl E1
- q. hammer] hammer and chisel Adl E1
- r. not a sign] Om.* Adl
- s. watchers] watcher E1
- t. later] Om. Adl E1
- u. to-day] later to-day Adl E1
- v. a] Om. Adl
- w. I am] I'm Adl E1
- x. still he] he still Adl E1
- y. this] that Adl E1
- z. next] next to Adl
- aa. arose] rose Adl E1
- bb. did] do Adl

Chapter XIII.

On his way back to the office, Victor saw 'Zilla Jenkins standing at the door of his new weather-board cottage, which had been put together during the past few days.

'Come and 'ave a look at the residence, sir. I'm that pleased I want to dance the letterpooch¹ all over it!' he cried.

It was a snug little place, with well-fitting doors and windows. 'Zilla's broad, massive face shone with the pride of proprietorship, as he showed Victor over the three rooms.

'This 'ull be the kitchen. I'm putting up a dresser with a few boards. The missus would come next week, but I want her to wait till this illness is over at the mine. Some says as it's catchin'.'

'But isn't this your time for being asleep, 'Zilla?' asked Victor, after he had admired the neatly-planned shelves and the superiorities of a dwelling that kept out dust and wind.

'Iss, sir; but a man don't want so much sleep when he 'ave a place like this to put in order. Snell's 'ouse 'ull soon be ready, too—and badly they need it. They say the youngest child is very ahill, and there's more bbeing took bad at the mine.'

The Snells were the invalids for whom Doris had the cottage ordered. It was now being put together not far from 'Zilla's abode. It occurred to Victor that he would ask Doris and Euphemia to come and see how this new addition to the mine was progressing, as soon as his work was over for the afternoon. He had not been at his desk more than five minutes, when Mick came with a message that Trevaskis wished to see him in his office. The moment Victor entered, the manager turned on him, his face distorted with rage.

'I want to know,' he said in a loud, insolent tone, 'why you are conspiring to treat me with contempt?'

Victor, on hearing the tone in which he spoke, looked at Trevaskis in amazement.

'Pardon me, but I don't understand your speech nor your manner,' he answered.

'No; but perhaps you'll understand both before we part,' said Trevaskis. He was not only in a great rage, but he was using purposely offensive language, with the hope that Fitz-Gibbon would, in a moment of anger, throw up his pursorship, or commit some grave breach of discipline which would furnish a pretext for asking him to resign.

On hearing the last remark Victor's nostrils quivered, and a gleaming light came into his eyes.

'I decline to bandy personalities.² Will you kindly explain what you mean by saying I conspire to treat you with contempt?'

'I mean your conduct with that blackguard Vansittart; telling him tales about the mine—setting him on at me about that damned cave room, and then sitting grinning——'

'You are talking utter nonsense, and I think you must know it. I never told Vansittart anything about the mine; I never set him on to you. Why should I? Do you suppose, if I wanted to say anything to you, I wouldn't say it to your face?'

'It's conduct I won't put up with, turning me into ridicule. I've never suffered anyone to do so before, and, by God! I won't now,' said Trevaskis, rising as he spoke.

'I think we had better finish this talk when you have recovered your memory,' said Victor, beginning to be very angry in his turn.

'What do you mean by that—what about my memory?' cried Trevaskis, drawing his breath hard.

'You made a certain accusation—I denied it entirely; yet you still repeat your ungrounded cassertion. You forget that you are talking to a gentleman. That is what I mean by saying your memory has failed you,' answered Victor, looking steadily in Trevaskis' face.

'And you forget that you are talking to your superior officer,' retorted Trevaskis, still using the tones of an angry man. But it was becoming clear to him that his shots had missed their mark, and that, in making charges based only on suspicion, he had placed himself in a false position.

'I think not,' answered Victor. 'I do not see that it is part of my official duty to listen to unwarranted accusations without denying them.'

'Then do you say that nothing at all has passed between you and Vansittart about me and the mine?'

'Pardon me, but that isn't the question. You began by accusing me of conspiring to treat you with contempt. I

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do not hold myself responsible for what Vansittart may or may not say.'

'Then I'll ask you one thing. Did you know nothing of the attack he was going to make on me to-day, by insinuating that I was getting gold in the underground room?'

'Certainly not.'

'And yet you purposely changed your dinner-hour—and that scoundrel was with you in the office for some time this morning—as if you hadn't time enough to concoct your schemes——'

'You are using exceedingly offensive language, and you are again returning to the charge I have denied. I went to dinner later because Mr. Vansittart told me that this was the landlady's wish.'

'He is a liar! If he attempts to insult me again as he did to-day, I'll break every bone in his body. I think, as you are so fond of his society, it might be as well to tell him that from me.'

'Excuse me, but I shall do nothing of the sort. I suppose you are not afraid to deliver your own messages,' returned Victor, laying a malicious emphasis on the word 'afraid.'

'Afraid—damn your eyes! I'll show you whether I'm afraid.'

'Damn your eyes! show it as soon as you like.'

The two were by this time equally infuriated, and stood glaring at each other with venomous eyes.

'I shall report you to the office. You think because your uncle is a director that you can play the master here.'

'You must do as you think fit about reporting me,' answered Victor; 'but remember that this disagreement has nothing to do with my work as purser. It is altogether owing to insinuations thrown out by Vansittart regarding that cave room. As we are on the subject, I may tell you straight that, all things considered, I should think it more satisfactory for me to search that place, as you agreed I should some time ago.'

'And I may tell you in return that, until the late manager's things are removed, I shall not have that place touched. I never thought much of the rumour from the first; but now that I know who's at the bottom of it, I wouldn't give a continental oath³ for the snivelling yarn.'

'I don't quite agree with you there; for my own part, I should feel inclined to advise the company to have a thorough search made,' said Victor. For the first time, the thought took hold of his mind that Vansittart's suspicions might not be unfounded, as he considered how very inadequate was the reason given for delay, more especially as Trevaskis had at first suggested that Dunning's effects should be removed into one of the store-rooms, and now assigned no reason why the plan should not be adopted.

'Well, if I believed as much in your friend Vansittart as you do, perhaps I should feel the same,' returned Trevaskis, with a forced laugh. 'But, you see, I don't—perhaps I know a little too much about him—and at any rate I'm not going to meddle with Dunning's things till his brother comes.'

The mine engineer knocked at the door just then, and came in to consult the manager about part of the machinery which was not working well.

'I suppose I had better return to my office, then,' said Victor, as he withdrew.

The manager followed him out.

'I was in a bad scot when you first came in, Fitz-Gibbon,' he said, in a conciliatory tone. 'But I see that I was too hasty. We'll just go on as we were, and think no more about the matter.'

Victor did not respond very cordially. Once his wrath was aroused he was apt to be vindictive. 'The impertinent under-bred cad' were the words with which he described Trevaskis, as he returned to his office. Then he sat down and wrote a note, in which he called on him for a written apology for the insinuations he had made—first as to his conduct, then as to his veracity. After he had relieved his feelings in this way he tore up the letter. He would not risk making a final breach between himself and Trevaskis.

'I should most likely have to go if I made this into a big row,' he reflected, 'and I don't want to do that till Doris leaves with the Challoners. It won't be so very long now. Still, I should like to take a rise out of this fellow for his insolence.' As he thought over the matter, he hit on a diplomatic way of doing this.

There was a letter from his uncle, chiefly on business details, which had been unanswered for more than a week. Victor wrote an exhaustive and concise reply to this, and towards the close said: 'Things are going on prosperously at the mine. Now I have got well into the work, I find I have a good deal of spare time on my hands. I should like to spend some of it in that old underground place of which I told you. If the search turns out to be unremunerative, I should be willing to pay any extra labour I employ out of my own pocket. The only obstacle now is that some of the late manager's effects are stowed there, and Trevaskis has some scruples about

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interfering with them till Dunning's brother takes possession. But there is ample room in one of the unused offices, in which the articles in question could be kept under lock and key. An order from the office to shift them would relieve Mr. Trevaskis of any responsibility in the matter, and give me the chance I wish for, before my time at the mine is up. I shall be glad, therefore, if you give instructions to the secretary to this effect, without delay. I did not at first attach much importance to the matter, but a man who was employed here during Webster's tenure of office is certain that gold was concealed in the place in question, and some events which I would rather not commit to writing have of late made me incline to the same belief.'

As Victor read this over before closing the letter, he felt satisfied that it would effect his object. If after the order came for removing Dunning's effects Trevaskis still invented objections, it would be pretty evident that he had some sinister motive, and that the sooner action was taken on behalf of the company the better. It was only when Victor was crossing the reef, on his way to Stonehouse, that all thoughts of the disagreeable scene between himself and Trevaskis were replaced by pleasanter musings. It was close on sunset, and he lingered on the crest of the reef as if lost in contemplation of the scene before him. It was now well on in November, and week by week the days were getting warmer, the sky paler and more cloudless, the Salt-bush more deeply coated with dust, the space between the bushes barer, and baked in places into a more vivid tinge of red. As the summer came on, the prospect of later rains lessened. During the previous twelve months only eight inches had fallen in the district. The hot winds were frequent, fraying and mangling the gray-green salt-bush, till it looked in some places like neutral-tinted fodder trampled under foot. Tall clumps of overblown mallows were beaten to the ground in pallid masses of sere leaves; and in all the wide desolation of the vast plains no sign of life was to be seen, except the trailing clouds of dust that hung perpetually in these days above the road that led to the new diggings. It was a strange, weird scene, but it is questionable whether any of its features caught the young man's eyes.

He was looking through the avenue of trees that surrounded Stonehouse, when suddenly his face was lit with a warm glow.

'There she is! Oh, my beautiful darling!' he murmured, looking at her with all his soul in his eyes. Then he went a few paces to the left, so that he might see Doris better as she stood looking westward, across the gray, limitless plain, above which the sun, in going down, seemed to set the sky on flame. Doris had a letter in her hands and her dogs were close beside her, Spot evidently doing his best to decoy her into walking with him. But his mistress was more irresponsive than usual. Even at the distance which separated them, it seemed to Victor there was something pensive and fixed in her attitude. Would she look up with a happy smile when she saw him? Of late he had got into the habit of expecting this, and he was seldom disappointed. But was it the gladness of mere friendliness or——Victor did not finish the conjecture, for Spot had run to meet him at the gate, and now Doris saw him, and their eyes met.

'You were reading a letter. Don't let me disturb you,' he said, making a movement to pass on, and then lingering to pat the dogs and ask Spot if he had been stolen again.

'Oh, it is only the one that I was going to send you.'

'Then post it to me at once, please, or be the postmaster. I am come to see if there are any letters for me.'

She gave him the open sheet, looking at him with a half-shy, half-amused smile.

'You know, when people are anxious about their letters, they always read them at the post-office,' Victor said, as he began to read. There were a few preliminary formal phrases, and then the writer said:

'You must not expect a very interesting letter, for I feel too old now to make up fairy fables, and nothing happens here but people passing in crowds to search for gold, or crushing stone for it at the Colmar Mine, with machinery that goes on day and night. Nothing but this, and the rising and setting of the sun, moon and stars, the sky growing red and pale by turns. It is all so dreadfully bare——there are not even long shadows; and always the immense naked plains——the strange, silent sea, without waves or ships, with no sounds but the voices of the wind, when the hot wind blows all day, and cries all night. Does it take all the leaves, the buds, the waters, all the water-fowl and the honey-birds, and the beautiful blossoms, to make gold down deep in the earth, or lying in nuggets near the surface? For that is nearly all that is to be found here, and it cannot be worth so much as that. . .'

'May I keep this letter for my own?' asked Victor, after reading it to the end.

'Oh yes; but do you care for it? Do you think if I wrote one like that to Raoul——'

'No; don't write it to anyone else. Let it be only for me,' said Victor, with so vehement a note of entreaty in

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his voice that Doris looked up at him quickly, with a little expression of wonder in her eyes.

'I suppose you think I am very selfish,' he said; 'but sometimes—when I think of your going away——'

'Do you think of that, too? I do often—I am sometimes sorry. But as for letters, I used to think that I would never keep any.'

'What made you think so?'

'Because they seem to make people sad afterwards. . . . Perhaps if one lives long enough, everything makes one sad.'

'That is a dreadful little heretic of a thought.'

'A heretic? That means one of the wrong faith?'

'Yes. The right faith for your thoughts is that everything is to love you and serve you and make you happy.'

She smiled a little, and then said reflectively:

'I think my thoughts are seldom very sad now.'

She was little given to analyzing her own thoughts, but it was undoubtedly the case that of late something of her old spontaneous gaiety had returned.

During the week that followed, Victor obtained Mrs. Challoner's consent to take Doris and Euphemia out riding early in the morning. Challoner was much occupied in disposing of what was left to him of his sheep and cattle. He was engaged each day on some part of the run with men who came to buy or look at the stock. He might as well give them away as to take the prices offered, he said. He seemed depressed and out of sorts, and his wife longed for the day when he would finally leave the scene of so much financial disaster. In the meantime he was unable to take the girls out riding.

'Let me, Mrs. Challoner. I know every inch of the ground about here now. You can trust them to my care, can't you?' pleaded Victor. And when, to the unconcealed satisfaction of all three, the request was granted, Victor felt assured that the arrangement had come bodily out of the heart of the 'Arabian Nights,' or some equally enchanted region, in which the sun rose chiefly to compass adventures, untouched by the prose of the ordinary world.

Morning by morning he would awake with the dawn, get into a knock—about suit of clothes, and go into the stable to groom the horses with Shung—Loo's help. Then, by the time he had his bath and was dressed, the girls would be ready in their riding—habits, and Shung—Loo in his linen suit, impeccable as though no duties had ever been performed by him beyond treading on carpets, with a dainty Japanese tray⁴ in his hands, would bring in cups of chocolate, and a plate of delicious little flaky cakes, of which the secret seemed destined to die with him. 'Many a man has immortalized himself for less than making such cakes,' Victor said more than once, and, finding that they had no distinctive names, he christened them 'Shung—Loos.'

'When I have a house of my own,' he declared one morning, 'there will always be a plate of Shung—Loos on the breakfast table.'

'But Shung—Loo won't be there to make them,' observed Euphemia practically.

'Now, how are you so sure about that?' asked Victor, a dancing light in his eyes.

'Oh, because he'll always be with Doris, and she'll be away on the other side of the world.'

'And do you suppose I'll be tied by one leg to the mine all my life, like one of those chuckies⁵ of yours who refuse to lay two eggs a day?'

It must be observed en parenth se that Euphemia, though not yet a 'notable housewife,'⁶ kept a keen look—out on the fowls, and when she suspected one of them mmaking a felonious nest for herself in a casual unknown salt—bush, she promptly tied the defaulter by the leg near a domestic nest, till her evil habits were abandoned and she had sorrowfully taken the truth to heart that the way of transgressors is hard.⁷

'No, of course you'll not always be at the mine; but won't your house be in Adelaide?' said Euphemia, generously ignoring the jibe regarding her chuckies.

'Oh, not necessarily. A little event will sometimes change the course of one's lifea book, or a sermon, or a couple of verses. With me it's the Shung—Loo cakes. I must fix my house near enough to borrow Shung. "V. Fitz—Gibbon presents his compliments to Miss Lindsay, and will she be kind enough to lend him her Celestial man—servant for an hour and a half?" That will be the sort of note I'll be nafter writing day by day.'

They all laughed over this, and the joke was often taken up afterwards.

a. hill] ill E1

b. being] Om. Adl

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- c. assertion] assertions Adl
- d. Now] Now that Adl E1
- e. good] great Adl
- f. space] spaces Adl E1
- g. in] Om. Adl
- h. prospect] prospects Adl E1
- i. of trees] trees Adl Om. E1
- j. that is] Om. Adl
- k. it] Om. Adl
- l. to] Om. Adl E1
- m. making] of making Adl E1
- n. after] Om. Adl

Chapter XIV.

One morning they went as far as the broken-down whim, and spoke to each other at a little distance, so as to hear the strange distinct echoes, that had a curiously mocking, ironical undertone.

'It is what we say, but not our voices,' said Doris. 'This rock has a voice that has no kindness in it.'

'You will remember it when we go away,' said Euphemia, a little way off.

'Away! away!' The words died slowly, with a suspicion of laughter in the dying syllables, but laughter without mirth. Victor, who had reined his horse in close beside Doris, thought he saw her face falling a little at the word.

'If the voice has no kindness, it has sorrow,' he said. 'If you were going away and I had to stay at the mine-----'

'Aren't you going to stay after we go away?' she said, looking up quickly.

He had been on the eve of telling her a hundred times before, and a hundred times he had checked himself; but the temptation was then too strong.

'What I should like to do would be to leave on the same day, and go down by the same train from Nilpeena, and then take passage in the same ship by which you go.'

'And come all the way--to France? Oh, that would be charming! It would be no longer the Silent Sea then, as this is.'

She looked round beyond the echoing rock, northward and southward, where the great expanse of gray naked land was in the distance half concealed by a light mist, which veiled the inequalities of the low reefs.

Then she looked back at Victor, who was watching her face intently.

'Why should you not come? Your mother is across the sea, and-----'

'I am coming,' he said, his heart beating hard.

'Oh, I am so glad!' Her voice, with its spontaneous gaiety, thrilled the young man with a sudden keenness of emotion that almost bordered on pain.

They were both silent for a little, a vague half-consciousness invading the girl's serenity.

And then Euphemia's robust, cheerful voice came from a little distance, awakening sudden startling reverberations in the echoing rock.

'What can that be over there?' she cried, pointing with her riding-whip in a southerly direction.

'Over there,' echoed the rock, with its sinister after-notes.

Here beside it, their horses for a moment held in check, were two young creatures, with radiant eyes and quickly throbbing pulses, a vague mist of happiness on their faces, all the glad possibilities of life seeming to lie around them like sheathed buds. But what was there 'over there'?

'I do not much like your echoing rock,' said Doris, as they rode up to Euphemia, to see what had attracted her attention.

'It is a little hut--one of the weather-board kind, I suppose,' said Victor, 'for it was not there six days ago. Someone must have taken up a claim, but diggers don't generally put up a hut of any sort. Why, this is going to be one great gold-field,' he added, as he looked around, and noticed that a mile or two away from the broken-down whim, towards the north, on the road to Broombush Creek, a large irregular edifice was in course of erection.

'That must be the place Mrs. West's brother is putting up,' he said. 'She told me it is to be called the Half-way House, because it is about half-way between Colmar and the diggings.'

'Couldn't we go as far as the diggings this morning?' said Euphemia. 'Mother said the other day we might go within sight of it.'

Doris, however, objected on the ground that she wanted to get back a little earlier than usual, because of something she wanted to do for the Connell children. This was a second family in which two children had lately fallen ill. Sickness had of late been spreading at the mine, and Dr. Magann, who had removed from the partially-deserted Ridges, bringing with him his movable wooden dwelling, announced that the malady, which had attacked several adults as well as children, was in some cases as low fever, in others typhoid.

'I wish you wouldn't visit these poor people so often,' said Victor, as they turned homewards.

'Why do you wish that?'

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'Because I didn't like to see you out in the dust and heat, going into places where they have fever.'

'But you ought not to wish that I were selfish,' she answered, looking at him with grave seriousness. 'When I see these poor people's hot, bare, untidy little huts and tents, and then come back to Stonehouse, and think how I have had everything soft and pleasant all my life, I feel as if I could not bear to have so much and they so little.'

'But you have sent all your own easy-chairs to the sick people, Doris, so there's one thing you have not got more than they have,' said Euphemia bluntly.

Victor, on hearing this, stole a look at Doris that had in it much of the respectful adoration with which devout people regard a patron saint. Indeed, to him those radiant eyes, full of sweet tenderness for all suffering, were holier than those of any saint in the calendar.²

'I think, though, mother is getting frightened that you might take the illness, for you had fever when you were a little girl, and might get it again, so perhaps it will be only Shung and me who go with flowers and things,' Euphemia went on, after a pause. She was very loath to turn her back on the 'diggings' for the sake of the invalids.

On hearing this Victor's uneasiness increased.

'But really, you know, the people of our mine are not so badly off. They all have plenty of food and fresh air, though perhaps a little too much dust and mullock. And now that Zilla has lent his cottage to the Connell—she won't bring his wife while there is so much illness—none of the larger families are in tents or one-roomed huts. And if they would only boil the water before they drank it, it wouldn't hurt them. Besides, you know, they are very kind in helping one another,' he added, trying to imbue Doris with a stronger motive for being reconciled to Mrs. Challoner's wishes than the fear of personal danger would be likely to afford.

'I cannot do very much,' she answered, 'but I like to sit by the sick children and do little things for them—put a few flowers into a pretty vase where they can look at them. You should see their eyes when they see those Provence roses³ that come from your friends in Adelaide! If I gave them to the mother, she would most likely put them down somewhere and let them fade. Mrs. Snell would not do that—she knows how the children love flowers; but Mrs. Connell does not seem to understand.'

'She keeps on gossiping with the other women; she doesn't mind the children properly, nor keep the house clean, nor anything,' broke in Euphemia, with a note of indignation in her voice. But Doris seemed to shrink from direct faultfinding. In small things, as in great, she had that gentle charity which leads the rare natures endowed with it to regard the defects of their fellow-creatures with invincible forbearance. 'Pity, and sympathy, and long-suffering, and fair interpretation, and excusing our brother, and taking things in the best sense, and passing the gentlest sentence,'⁴ was the girl's inalienable inheritance from her mother.

In the end Victor felt rebuked, as he realized that there was a taint of selfishness in his anxiety that Doris might be spared even the thought of squalor, or suffering, or hardship. Her impulse to give not merely money, or the things that money could buy, but a part of her own life, her own gentle ministering, made him reflect penitently on his partial indifference to such matters, while largely absorbed in happy thoughts and happy plans for the future. Gradually, contact with her enlarged his moral consciousness. He felt that the things to desire most for Doris' sake were not luxury and ease, but that one's own heart and nature should be touched to finer issues, so as to be more worthy of her companionship.

But these early morning rides were by no means always tinged with grave thoughts and reflections. They would often break into songs, and laughter when one of them failed to catch up the tune, as they rode through the exhilarating morning air, their horses' hoofs seeming to keep time in a perpetual refrain; and on other occasions Doris would recount one of the stories Shung-Loo told her when she was a little girl, beginning after this fashion:

'There was once a Lah-to prince who bribed the world with elephant-tusks, and oxen with humps, and buffaloes that live in the water. When he went out he was surrounded with flags, and the sky was full of feather fans, and the big kingfisher birds came and made umbrellas of their wings. And two-and-twenty elephants came in a train after him, loaded with big cowries to give the poor people, and sixteen cowries was the price for a bowl of rice. At night men with gold on their teeth played flutes, and women in gold chains sang songs to make him go to sleep. Then when he slept the black barbarians,⁵ who wear only their skins, a handkerchief, and no sandals, each with a peach-blossom fan——'

'Oh, Doris, a peach-blossom fan, when they had no clothes!' remonstrated Euphemia.

'That's the way it is in the Shih Ch'ing ya ch'Y,'⁶ answered Doris; 'and as you don't believe every word without asking questions, you cannot hear any more.'

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This was a hard saying,⁷ but Doris was forced to adhere to the rule, for the reason that Shung–Loo had been inexorable in its observance.

'Well, you ought to finish it for Mr. Fitz–Gibbon, for he believes every word and never asks any questions,' urged Euphemia, which was true to the letter. For always when Doris spoke, her soft musical voice, with its varying intonations giving emphasis to all the grotesque little nuances of Shung–Loo's stories, fascinated Victor—if that were possible—more than ever. He would listen in rapt silence, stealing a glance from time to time at the darkling little shadows cast by those heavy lashes, at the delicately–moulded cheeks, to which exercise had brought a delicate damask glow. And as he listened and looked, it seemed as if he had in absolute fact penetrated one of these charmed regions of Oriental supernaturalism whose lore so curiously hung about the girl's solitary childhood.

How completely, how dangerously happy he was! The poet upon whom the Muses keeping ward over Mount Helicon, and dancing with delicate feet round the violet–hued fount, bestowed laurel–leaves, hand a staff of luxuriant olives, and the breath of an inspired voice, saw a vision of the beginning of all things,⁸ in which the earth gave birth to the starry heavens, that they might shelter it upon all sides, and so make it for ever a secure seat for the blessed gods. But this was the revelation of a singer born into the world in its nonage, before the story of man's darkly–stained, incomprehensible existence had filled so many sombre tomes, and before so many wise men had risen up to prove to us that there are no gods. Yet from generation to generation there come brief spaces into most lives in which the old poetic tradition is verified, and the earth is once more a secure seat for the blessed gods. Yes, even in regions where nature is as arid and destitute of charm as is the Salt–bush country, where, though the air, the sky and the sunshine are early in the day perfect in their loveliness, yet the earth in its level, neutral–tinted barrenness is more like a vague outline than a finished picture. . . . Now, after two weeks of these long early rides, they were coming to an end, though the riders did not know it.

On the last occasion they rode close to Broombush Creek, very early in the morning, and saw the diggings, with now close on five thousand men at work. They passed the Half–way House, a low rambling structure of wood and galvanized iron, the bar already open for travellers; its signboard—a piece of calico stretched on a board nailed over the door—bore the inscription, 'Half–way House. T. Smith:⁹ Licensed to sell wines, bears, sperits,' in letters of extraordinary variety as to size. In half an hour after passing this, the outskirts of the diggings came in sight, and a medley of confused sounds broke the calm of early morning.

The continual rumble of diggers' cradles, the ring of shrill voices, of axes cleaving wood, of sawing and hammering, of creaking water–carts, carting tanks of water from the one permanent well, which was over a mile from the centre of the diggings, all made up a great volume of sound. The scene altogether conveyed an indescribable impression of confusion. The diggers' tents were of the motliest—dingy canvas, duck, calico, ksacking and hessian, roughly cobbled together; old tarpaulins also were fastened over vehicles of every size and description. Among these there was a sprinkling of iron edifices, chiefly stores, boarding–houses, and Government offices. The telegraph line had been extended from Colmar, and the post and telegraph office, with the quarters of the Warden of Goldfields¹⁰ and the police troopers, a branch bank, etc., were near the centre of the wide, irregular encampment. A public hospital had been built, with a medical man in charge. But typhoid fever had broken out, and the accommodation was inadequate for the increasing patients. A private hospital was now in course of erection, on a slight rise near the road by which one approached the new diggings from Colmar. Everywhere all round, the earth was turned over in mounds, and everywhere men were sinking and tunnelling in the ground, with shovels, gads, pickaxes and crowbars. Machinery had been erected in two places, and already the sound of the batteries was heard. For the sun was now rising, and all hands were hard at work.

The sky, so clear and immensely vaulted, full of warm, pale–blue air, with that look of youth inseparable from pure and joyous colouring, formed the strangest contrast to the world which it overarched here—where the ash–gray salt–bush was replaced by tumbled heaps of soil, and by the squalid abodes of thousands of dirt–stained men. The immense flat, featureless landscape all round held nothing to break the sharpness of the contrast between the heaven above, majestic in its noble sweep of outline, and the earth below, gray and formless and naked, as if it had been worn into sallow desolation by the march of countless aeons of centuries, till in this spot it was torn and mangled by an irruption of strange reptiles that had learned the use of tools.

As the riders stood at some little distance looking on, a great shout was heard in the vicinity of the hospital, where some diggers were at work. The shout was taken up by others near.

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'A boomer nugget! a boomer nugget!'

The cry flew like wildfire, and strange excitement ensued. From every quarter men came running and crying out: those who were at work throwing down their tools; those who had been preparing breakfast, some with flour on their arms up to their elbows, with steaks or chops in their hands, as they were about to put them on the coals, gridirons, or frypans, with dish-cloths on their arms, with soiled tin plates in their hands—some even with handfuls of tea which they were about to put in teapots, or billies, or quart pots. When that shrill, sudden cry reached them, there were scores who did not wait to put these things down, but rushed as they stood, as if fearful that this lump of yellow metal, speckled over with quartz, might vanish like a celestial visitant before the sight of it gladdened their eyes. There were some who even ran half naked as they tumbled out of their beds, with dishevelled hair, strained eyes and naked feet.

When they had all satisfied themselves that this thing was true, and not a dream or a false rumour, then the great hubbub increased, and the clamour of voices swelled on the air mightily. But after a little this died away, and gave place to a feverish industry that nerved thousands as one man. There were many who did not taste food that morning for hours. They gulped down pannikins full of hot tea, and then worked on with frenzied haste. Might they not at any moment come upon a boomer nugget—turn it over in the dirt, or hear the dull thud of their tools as they struck against a solid lump of the precious metal? Many who had been on the point of leaving, sickened and wearied out with toiling for weeks and finding not even the colour of gold, while they lived on credit or the generosity of their fellow-workers, now took heart of grace,¹² and stayed to labour on with renewed energy. Others, who had been lying ill of fever for days or weeks, crawled out of their bunks, and sat watching their mates at work with hungry, wistful eyes; for who could tell whose luck it would be next to come on a big nugget? It is the gambling element that lends so strong a fascination to digging for gold, not the naked lust for its possession, as one is apt at first to suppose, on witnessing the sort of humiliating frenzy that oftentimes takes possession of men, when searching for it in its primitive and most enchanting form.

When the sudden tumult had subsided, the riders turned their horses' heads homewards.

'Wherever men come to this country they make it ugly,' said Doris. 'Instead of planting gardens or trees, or digging for water, they make dreadful holes and spoil the salt-bush.'

'I was just thinking I should like to go and make dreadful holes myself,' said Victor, smiling. 'At any rate, they don't spoil much in spoiling the salt-bush.'

'The salt-bush is a very good creature,' said Euphemia quickly. 'Cows that eat it give good milk, the hens lay good eggs, salt-bush sheep make the best mutton, and the sky is nowhere more beautiful.'

Euphemia was born in the Salt-bush country, and it would seem that in the hearts of most human beings Heaven has implanted a love for the spot in which they first see light—a token, perhaps, that life is a gift, notwithstanding our many and bitter feuds therewith.

As the sun ascended the heavens they returned on their 'happy morning track,'¹³ all unconscious that it was the last of those excursions.

'You will remember Broombush Creek in the old world,' said Victor, as he helped Doris to dismount.

'Yes. I am so glad that you are coming, too. I think of that so often!' she answered, in a low voice.

The words sent the blood tingling through his veins and surging in his ears. He was intoxicated with joy as he walked away.

- a. slow] low Adl
- b. didn't] don't Adl E1
- c. to] Om. Adl
- d. who] who'll E1
- e. of] at Adl E1
- f. give] give to Adl E1
- g. these] those E1
- h. and] Om. Adl E1
- i. charm] charms Adl
- j. Licensed] licensed* Adl Lisensed E1
- k. sacking] even sacking Adl E1
- l. hands] hand* Adl

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Chapter XV.

Doris and Euphemia hastened to get out of their riding-habits and dress for breakfast. They were a little later than usual on account of their long ride, and they were consequently much surprised, when they went into the dining-room, to find that though breakfast was ready, and Shung-Loo in his accustomed place behind his young mistress's chair, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Challoner had yet made their appearance. Presently Mrs. Challoner came in, looking very fagged and anxious. Her husband had hardly slept all night. Towards morning he had fallen into a troubled sleep, and now he had wakened up with a burning headache and slightly delirious. She had been anxious regarding him for several days, noticing that an unusual languor hung about him, and that he neither ate nor slept well. But he had made light of all this, saying it was only a little overwork, and that working too much between meals did not now agree with him. He had refused to consult the doctor, partly because he was very busy disposing of his stock just then, and partly because something to be shaken up every two hours had never done him any good when he was out of sorts.

The doctor was now sent for, and promptly confirmed Mrs. Challoner's fears. It was fever—most likely typhoid—and the patient was worse because he had not 'caved in' as soon as he ought. He had, judging from symptoms, been working for a week with the fever hanging about him.

'Oh, my dear, I think I ought to send you to Adelaide, or perhaps back to Ouranie, till the worst is over,' said Mrs. Challoner to Doris in the afternoon, when, her husband having fallen into a sleep, she came into the drawing-room, where the two girls were arranging how they could best help in the trouble that had fallen on the household.

'Go away!—when you want all the help we can give you! Oh, Mrs. Lucy, how can you even think of it?' said Doris imploringly.

Then Mrs. Challoner, who was very tired and very anxious, cried a little, and confessed it would be a great comfort, she knew, to have Doris in the house. On this Doris made her lie on the couch, and bathed her temples softly with eau-de-Cologne, and after a little Mrs. Challoner fell into a deep sleep, and Euphemia took her place in the sick-room. It was nearly sunset when Mrs. Challoner awoke, much refreshed.

'You always had wonderful little hands for soothing headaches away,' she said to Doris, who now went on to tell her that she and Euphemia had been making certain plans. Doris was to take all household cares off Mrs. Challoner's hands, and Shung-Loo would help to nurse part of each night, and Euphemia part of each day. Then Shung would have nothing else to do, but have his whole time for Mrs. Challoner, and she was never to go too long without sleep and rest.

'Then, my dear, as I understand it, you are going to do all my work, and allow Shung to do nothing for you,' said Mrs. Challoner, looking at the girl with dimmed eyes.

'Yes, I am going to be the housekeeper,' answered Doris undauntedly; 'go to sleep quite early, and get up early in the morning and waken Bridget, and see that she does things nicely, and always has hot water in the fountain. Shung will cook all the things that you want in the sick-room, or go on messages. Oh, we have thought of everything.'

Mrs. Challoner might exclaim against Doris taking her place so valiantly in the performance of unaccustomed responsibilities, yet it was an immense comfort in the face of a perhaps dangerous and tedious illness to have one at her right hand so able, willing, and resolute. Euphemia was willing and docile, but she lacked initiative. This Doris would supply, and the two, working harmoniously together, with Shung as ally and coadjutor, would form a strong stay. Only, as so often happens in drawing up domestic as well as political programmes, there was one element left out of the reckoning, which, on this first night, made itself strongly felt—the unforeseen. So far from going to sleep 'quite early,' it was nearly twelve o'clock before Doris closed her eyes that night.

It was a little after eight when Shung-Loo, who had gone to the doctor for medicine, returned with it in some excitement. The Colmar Arms was on fire, and nothing could be done to stop it. It was in one great blaze; they could see it from the top of the reef. Shung had heard that someone was burnt in one of the rooms, but there was so much hurry and confusion he did not know who it was, or whether it was true.

'Oh, I hope Mr. Fitz-Gibbon was not hurt there!' cried Euphemia. Doris turned very pale.

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'I think he was going to play at the miners' concert this evening. But of course they would all turn out to try and stop the fire,' she said, after a little pause.

They went with Shung to the top of the reef. It was a sultry, still night. The flames, which had now completely enveloped the house, cast a brilliant illumination around, and figures could be seen hurrying about, evidently concentrating all their attention on saving the places near the inn. Fortunately, it stood a little apart from the other dwellings, and there was no sign that any of them had so far caught fire. As the maid was out this evening, at a sister's on the mine, who was married to one of the miners, Doris and Euphemia did not stay long looking at the sight. Mrs. Challoner met them as they came in, and was alarmed at the pallor of Doris's face.

'The shock has been too much for you, Doris,' she said, when Euphemia had breathlessly related the catastrophe at which they had been looking. 'I must order my little housekeeper to bed in good time,' added Mrs. Challoner, as she kissed both girls before returning to the sick-room for the night. Shortly afterwards Euphemia went to her own room, saying it seemed as if it were two days ago since they got up at daylight to go to Broombush Creek. She could hardly keep her eyes open. Doris stood looking after her with a feeling of blank amazement. It was Euphemia who had suggested that perhaps Mr. Fitz-Gibbon had been hurt, yet now she seemed to think no more about the matter, while she herself felt almost stunned with terror. The thought had fastened on her mind that Victor might have tried to save someone from the fire—that when it broke out he might have been in the house. A hundred conjectures kept passing through her mind, each more disquieting than the other, till her agitation grew so that she could hardly stand. She went to the southern veranda, from which she could see the red angry glare in the sky. Looking at this, her fears became insupportable. She went round to the back, to the little lean-to room that Shung-Loo occupied, to send him down to the township. He would find out if anyone had been hurt—if Mr. Fitz-Gibbon was safe. But as she reached the door the light that shone through the window was put out, which meant that Shung-Loo had gone to bed. As she stood debating with herself whether she should call him, she heard someone hurrying to the house. It was Bridget.

'Oh, Miss Doris, did ye hear about the fire, and Mr. Fitz-Gibbon and the landlord being burnt to death?' she cried, flourishing the rumours she had heard in their most gruesomely dramatic form.

She went on with great excitement, retailing all that she had heard, and various surmises on her own account, bewailing the mishap with facile sympathy, and that glow of half-gratified importance with which some people recount a tale of horror.

But Doris heard nothing beyond the first awful intelligence. She stood in the wan starlight as if turned to stone.

'It was just a mercy av the Lard that me brother-in-law wasn't there when the fire bruk out, for he's just the very wahn to get into throuble on the first opportunity. Well, it's after noine, Miss Doris; I musht be turning in, so as to be up broight and early, for there's always shlops⁴ to be made ahl the toime whin there's illness in the house—and I'd like to see the funerals if I can be shpared. We seem to be getting a dale av throuble all gat once. Good-night, Miss Doris; ye're enjoying the coolth av the air. If ye cast you're oi round as you go in, ye'll see the sign av the shmoking ruin in the sky.'

And so, in entire unconsciousness of the crushing blow she had dealt the girl, who stood in speechless horror leaning heavily against a lounge beside her, the good Bridget bustled into the kitchen. In imagination, she was already putting a bit of crape on her Sunday hat, as a sign of her sympathy and sorrow for the father of a family, and perhaps that handsome young gentleman, so pleasant spoken, and generous in the matter of frequent tips. She was not quite sure he was a corpse yet, but, at any rate, he was badly burnt, and would most likely not get over the accident.

Groping her way into the house, Doris somehow reached the sitting-room. The door and windows were open, and the shaded candles were throwing a flood of soft light into the dusky stillness of the night. She tottered towards the couch under one of the windows, but before she reached it, it seemed to swim out of sight—a great blank and silence fell upon her.

After what seemed long hours, but was in reality only a few minutes, hshe⁵ found herself on the ground, her hands outspread on the couch, and her head resting on them. She tried to remember how she had come there, and looked round the room with startled eyes. Nothing was changed. There was the little flannel nightgown she had been sewing for one of the Connell children on the wicker gipsy table;⁶ above her hung the picture of the beautiful old English home in which her mother was born; her mother's water-colours of Ouranie iwhere she had

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arrayed them on the opposite wall; near her, on the low bookcases, were the radiant flowers, but at the sight of these a terrible sorrow seized her. Moaning like a creature stabbed to the heart, she covered her face with her hands and began to tremble like an aspen leaf in the wind. 'Burnt to death! burnt to death!' The words turned into scarlet letters around her. But as the horror and tearless anguish were again half lost in a creeping stupor, the sound of approaching footsteps reached her. There was a gentle knock at the open door.

'Is there anyone here?' said a well-known voice; and then there was a quick exclamation—a low cry of alarm.

For a moment Doris hardly dared to believe her ears, hardly dared to look, fearing she was betrayed by one of those happy dreams that jfled when one kwas fully awake. But this vision was too eager, too much alive, and too robust, to be lightly spirited away.

It was Victor—not indeed scathless, for one arm was in a sling, and one side of his face was darkly flushed, where it had been winnowed by the fiery breath of flame.

He stood for a moment transfixed with that low cry on his lips, and the look of sudden alarm that had come into his eyes on first catching sight of Doris, lying with her head against the couch, her face rigid and white as if in a swoon. The next moment he was by her side, helping her to rise.

'You have hurt yourself? you are ill, Doris?' he cried, looking at her, as she leant back on the couch, her face still deadly pale, and a strange, strained look in her eyes. 'Perhaps it is you who are ill, not Mr. Challoner, as I heard in the office to-day. But where are the rest? Why are you all alone, looking so dreadfully pale?' he said, looking around, for it was not yet ten. And as his first affright passed away the wonder of it all grew upon him.

'No, I am not ill; I am better,' answered Doris in a low, feeble voice.

It was all too sudden; the revulsion from the horror and anguish which had overwhelmed her was too great at first to permit her to feel or think. For a few moments she was only conscious that the terrible misery was unreal. Here was Victor, but with no vital hurt. The violence of the reaction shook her almost as much as the brutal tidings. But gradually a great and solemn gladness put new life into her failing pulses.

'You have come!' she said, looking up at him with the dawn of a smile as he stood before her, his face full of wondering anxiety.

The fact was so obvious that one might deem the words little to the purpose. But they were spoken with a thrill of gladness that woke a strange happiness in Victor's heart.

'You were not very badly hurt, after all?' she said, looking from his flushed cheek to his bandaged arm.

'Oh, very little—it is nothing! But, Doris, does Mrs. Challoner know that you have been lill? You are trembling even now, and your hands are quite cold,' he added, touching them as they lay folded over the end of the couch.

'No, no one knows . . . and I am nearly quite well.'

'Had you fainted? Did anything alarm you?'

He was looking at her intently, and saw that at the question a faint wave of colour slowly overspread her face. Her eyes deepened with unshed tears, which gave a blurred, misty outline to all around her. She felt as if a great gulf of unknown emotion threatened to overpower her. She mshrank,⁷ she knew not why, from recalling the words that had overpowered her with such horror.

'I will tell Mrs. Challoner you are here. I know she would like to see you,' she said, rising.

But her gait was a little unsteady. She leant on Victor's offered arm till she reached the door of the sick-room.

'Please don't frighten her about me. You see, I am well now,' she said in an almost inaudible whisper as he turned back.

Two minutes later she re-entered the sitting-room with Mrs. Challoner.

'Oh, you were at the fire!—you have been hurt!' cried the latter, as soon as she caught sight of him.

And then the story of the fire was gone over as far as Victor knew it. He had gone with 'Zilla Jenkins to the Saturday concert.

'I got Roby to let me play my tune the first thing, as I wanted to come up at once to see if there was anything I could do for you here. I heard through the doctor that Mr. Challoner was down with the fever. Before I finished there was a great cry of fire, and we all rushed out pell-mell. It must have been going on for some time before it was noticed. West, it seems, had been drinking rather heavily; he was in bed most of the day, and his wife was in the bar——'

'Oh, poor thing! Was she hurt at all? Was anyone injured besides you?' asked Mrs. Challoner anxiously.

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'Yes, the landlord. It must have been in his room the fire began. He was behind the bar in the wooden part of the house, which was as dry as chips. They noticed a strong smell of burning, but they thought it came from some rubbish—heaps the ostler set on fire towards sunset in the back-yard. When the flames broke out beyond the room where the fire began they could do nothing but run out for their lives-----'

'Then didn't West give the alarm?'

'He never came out at all,' answered Victor, in lowered tones, glancing anxiously towards Doris.

'He was burnt to death?' said Mrs. Challoner, in horror-stricken tones.

'Yes; and the people who were in the bar had only just time to clear out. Some door or partition gave way, and the flames swept over it like an avalanche. The bar and all the back part of the house was one mass of flames when we reached the place from the school-room. Mrs. West was struggling to get away from some people to rush into the house for her little boy. They thought he was in the same room with his father. But, fortunately, I happened to know that he was in an end room of the stone part of the house. Dick and I were rather chummy, poor little chap! The house was all at sixes and sevens for a day or two back—the cook gone, a dazed housemaid in the kitchen, and Mrs. West having to see to the bar. This evening, while I was having tea about seven, Dick came in in his nightdress from a little room that opened out of the dining-room. He had been put to bed early, so as to be out of the way, but he said he wasn't "s'leepy," and so he had some tea with me, and then went back to bed. I got in through the dining-room window all right, but by the time I got back with Dick a spark through the open window had set the curtains on fire. I had to tear them down before I could get out with him-----'

'Oh, Mr. Fitz-Gibbon, you saved the poor nchild's life at the risk of your own life!' said Mrs. Challoner, looking at the young man with beaming eyes.

'There was not much risk, really,' answered Victor. 'The great thing was that I knew where the poor little beggar slept. The smoke was getting rather bad in his room, but the dining-room was very little on fire when I went in.'

'But your cheek is a little hurt, and your arm perhaps very much,' said Doris, speaking for the first time, with an adorable little quiver in her voice and a dove-like, melting softness in her eyes.

'Well, and that was through stupidity,' said Victor, who could hardly help laughing aloud for sheer light-heartedness. He would in truth have endured twenty times as much pain for the sake of hearing that faltering intonation. 'As I pulled the curtains down, I let the burning edge of one brush my face and coat-sleeve. It must have been on fire for some little time before anyone noticed it, and then when I pulled it off my shirt-sleeve flared up. But Dr. Magann dressed the burn for me after I had taken Dick to the Olsens' place. That is where he and his mother have found shelter. Mrs. Olsen is Mrs. West's sister. . . . And I have had the offer of being boarded by the amiable oScroogs,' said Victor, with a smile.

Scroogs⁸ was a man who kept a large, rough boarding-house at Colmar. He had been twice fined within the last two months for sly grog-selling and for riotous goings on at his establishment.

'But you must not go there; the place is not fit for you. We can very well manage to board you here,' said Mrs. Challoner.

It goes without saying that this arrangement had great charms for Victor, only he was loath to add to the cares of the household at this juncture. Finally, they compromised the matter by arranging that he should breakfast and dine in the evening at Stonehouse. He could easily manage about lunch in his office on week-days.

'But you must be careful—you should not irritate your arm. I must have a look at the burn to-morrow,' said Mrs. Challoner, with motherly solicitude.

'Oh, it is nothing; it will be all right in a day or two. Fortunately, it's my left arm,' answered Victor.

But though he made light of the part he had played in the catastrophe, no one else at Colmar—with perhaps one exception—was disposed to follow suit. The risk he had run and the hurt he had received were both much exaggerated. Bridget was not the only one who consigned him to an untimely grave. It was found to be a kind of artistic emotion to say that he had been burnt alive. The next day being Sunday, there was leisure to dwell on all the harrowing details, and there was a constant stream of pinquiries at Stonehouse as to Victor's condition. The first to arrive was Mick, who would not be satisfied with Bridget's assurance that the 'young gentleman was qlike a May daisy, and 'ating a hearty breakfast—glory be to God!' She had offered Victor her own congratulations on his safety with the eloquence of her race, maintaining a discreet silence as to her too ready belief in his mortality.

'If I might make so bould, I would like to shake hahnds wid you, Mr. Fitz-Gibbon,' said Mick, when Victor

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came out to see him at the back-door.

'Why, Mick, one would think I had been singed all over like a plucked hen,⁹ to hear you speak so solemnly!' said Victor, laughing, as he shook the little man's hand.

'Indade, sor, some av thim made me belave that a singed fowl was a fool to¹⁰ the shtate ye wor in. I was sound ashlape through it all in my little tint, and rwhen I got up and wint out, the first mahn I met was Ben Combrie, and the flare sof the Colmar Arms in the sky like the day av judgmint. And two min roasted in the flames, says he—the landlord and the purser.'

'But surely you know Ben Combrie's gift for saying the thing that is not,¹¹ Mick?'

'I do, sor—none betther—but ye cahnt thrust him even at the loying, for he sometimes tells the trut and shlips you up whin you laste tixpicts it—and the half was thru. Poor Wisht, his wife will mourn, though maybe widout reason, and we all sorrow for the good grog—'twas a sinful washte! And here's a tiligraph for ye, sor; I met the boy coming up, and I thought I might as well save him. It came ulast night in the middle of the combushtion. He mintoned vlikewise, sor, that the choild ye saved out av the flames was running about as hearty as a young wallaby this wmorning, though the poor mother is lying xspeechless crying on the poor omadhan that yshpilte¹² zhimsilf and the good grog intoirely. 'Tis loikely the funeral will be early to-morrow.'

- a. nor] or Adl
- b. made their appearance] appeared E1
- c. for] Om.* Adl
- d. tired] tried* Adl
- e. Then] Om. Adl E1
- f. to] up to Adl E1
- g. at] to E1
- h. she] Doris* Adl
- i. where] were where Adl E1
- j. fled] flee E1
- k. was] is E1
- l. ill] so ill Adl E1
- m. shrank] shrunk Adl E1
- n. child's life] child Adl E1
- o. Scroogses] Scroogs Adl E1
- p. inquiries] enquirers Adl inquirers E1
- q. like] just like Adl E1
- r. when] whin Adl E1
- s. of] av Adl E1
- t. ixpicts] ixpict Adl E1
- u. last] lasht Adl E1
- v. likewise] loikewise Adl E1
- w. morning] marning Adl E1
- x. speechless] spacheless Adl E1
- y. shpilte] shpilt* Adl
- z. himsilf] himself Adl

Chapter XVI.

'I wonder if this is something further about the cave room,' thought Victor, turning the telegram over, as he went into his own room with it. By Saturday's mail a letter had reached him from his uncle, telling him that instructions had been sent to Trevaskis to have the late manager's effects removed and afford the purser full scope to investigate the cavity, on behalf of the company. The delay in answering Victor's letter had been caused by Mr. Drummond's absence in Tasmania. Within half an hour of the receipt of this, Trevaskis had come into the office with an open letter in his hand.

'I suppose you have had instructions about this?' he said, in a tone pitched at a deliberate calmness, yet with a curious vibration underlying it of strong emotion. Victor, in reply, read the portion of his uncle's letter which dealt with the matter.

'I can't possibly have the things removed for a day or two,' said Trevaskis in accents which suddenly jumped by a note above the diapason of his usual voice. There was an odd smothered fierceness in his manner that made Victor suddenly look at him with inquiring wonder. It seemed as if the man had aged by years in the past few weeks. Perhaps, considering all the circumstances, the change was not surprising. For nine consecutive nights he had worked in the cave room, his eyes gradually getting worse. At the end of that time he was unable to stoop, or read, or walk in the sunshine, without torturing throbs of pain in his eyeballs. The doctor, whom he at last unwillingly consulted, strongly urged him to go away from the mine for a change. 'Why, man, you'll blind yourself,' he said two days later, exasperated into brutal frankness by the patient's obvious disregard of his instructions. At the words, a sudden cold dread shot through the manager's mind. For the next eight days and nights he rested almost absolutely. Once in the twenty-four hours he went below, and took a turn all round the mine. For the rest of the day he sat in his room with the blinds down. When solitude and enforced idleness became unbearable, he would go into the cave room and gloat over his bars of shining gold—each one worth close on nine hundred pounds.

Then he would pace about in the obscurity of the place, pausing at the spots where the great bottles of amalgam that were still untouched lay hidden.

'Oh, if Dan would only come! if Dan would only come!' he would sometimes say at such times half aloud.

He was not one who indulged much in the habit of addressing remarks to himself audibly; but the constant strain of anxiety, of harassing uncertainty as to whether he could after all secure this treasure, culminated at times in fits of such intense restlessness, that to walk about speaking to himself, in the solitude and obscurity of the cave room, afforded him a certain relief.

But Dan's coming was indefinitely delayed. He wrote to say that he had been stupid enough 'to get upon the spree,'² and that when he was getting over this he had a feverish attack. He was now in the hospital and the doctors wouldn't tell him when he could get out, but he hoped he would soon be well enough to travel.

This might mean the delay of a few days or weeks. It might mean that Dan would not come till it was too late; for in a couple of weeks at the most Raphael Dunning would arrive to take possession of his brother's belongings, and once that was done, the last vestige of excuse for delaying the search of the cave room would be gone.

Trevaskis did not fail to grasp the weak points of his situation; but these, somehow, only inspired him with a sort of desperate, despairing resolution to use every possible and impossible means to secure the gold. If the worst came to the worst, he would secrete the bars, at least, in his own room. Could there be anything among Dunning's many papers that could give a clue to the treasure?

At the thought, Trevaskis instituted a rigorous search of all the letters, documents, and boxes which would be handed over to the late manager's brother. In one of the latter he discovered two duplicate keys of the strong safe for the gold. He regarded them curiously for some moments, wondering to which of his predecessors belonged the credit of having them manufactured. Webster most likely, so as to enable him to steal some of the amalgam, when kept for a night in the safe before it was retorted.

This discovery curiously enough lessened the accidental scruples which still visited Trevaskis from time to time, especially when his conscience was illuminated by the fear of detection. He thought, with something akin to indignation, of innumerable 'dodges' by which the majority of mining managers contrived to rob the people by

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whom they were employed.

'I wouldn't, and I couldn't, so help me, God! steal an ounce of gold or amalgam from the mine on my own account,' he thought; 'but to keep a treasure that you have discovered—ah! that is quite another matter. No one else has a better right to the gold than the one who finds it.'

After all, the fact that a man's forefathers have fastened a lantern to a cow's head on a dark night by the seashore, so as to lead a casual trading smack to founder on the rocks for the sake of its cargo,³ must impart certain distinguishing nuances to his conscience.

At any rate, after discovering these keys Trevaskis was more than ever upheld by the consciousness that his moral rectitude would never allow him to stoop to the base pilfering which had been so largely practised by other managers of the Colmar Mine. Yet, side by side with this, his determination grew stronger not to let any untoward circumstances cheat him out of the enjoyment of the fortune he had discovered in the cave room.

When his eyes became strong enough to bear the sunlight, his first care was to ride across to the weatherboard hut erected on the quartz claim which he had secured in the vicinity of the broken-down whim. It reassured him to prowl about this hut and reflect on the treasure that might soon be hidden there.

As he was riding back he finally determined that, as soon as ever Dan came, the best thing would be to take him fully into his confidence and secure his help in hiding the gold and amalgam in the hut, away from the mine altogether.

'I'll send a message to Dan on Monday or Tuesday, begging him to come on, even if he's half dead. If he became much worse at the little hut it would be a fine opportunity for me to resign suddenly. I'd just say that the company ehad better send another manager as soon as possible. "My only brother has been taken very ill all by himself; I must give him my whole time. In any case I fintended to resign soon, as I find my health will not stand the climate here." '

He wrote these lines and several more, finding a certain relief in picturing this conclusion of his suspense.

'It is now some time,' he reflected, 'since Fitz-Gibbon and I had that Barney. He has never said a word about the search since; I don't believe he even thinks of it. Ah, there's nothing like a good bluff sometimes!'

Such were the half-complacent reflections that passed through Trevaskis' mind on Thursday evening, after he returned from visiting his quartz claim. On Friday night he felt well enough to resume operations in the cave room. But by Saturday morning's mail came an official letter, written by the mine secretary at the dictation of the chairman of directors, instructing the manager to permit the purser to remove the late Mr. Dunning's effects from the cave room and institute a careful search of the place. For a short time after reading this letter Trevaskis sat perfectly motionless, staring hard before him. The meshes were closing round him; he was snared, and not only so, but he had been perfectly hoodwinked by this double-faced young Irishman.

The thought galled him almost as much as the prospect of losing the gold.

'But I won't lose it! I won't! I won't!' he muttered to himself, clenching his hands and teeth.

He had need of all his decision and energy to quell the rising passion that threatened to overmaster him.

When Victor, struck by the curious intonation of his voice, looked at Trevaskis, he saw that his face looked gray and lined. His eyes were uncovered. The space between them, as has been said, was unusually narrow; but now the pupils had lengthened in a curious way, so that they almost seemed to meet in a sinister glittering line, like the eyes of a cat in the dark.

The expression of his whole face gave Victor a certain shock. He concluded that Trevaskis was furious at having his objections set aside. Or was there, after all, some truth in Vansittart's conviction? The last surmise led Victor to answer with a certain reserve that, as soon as Dunning's things were cleared out, he was ready to begin his search.

On that, Trevaskis strode away without making any reply. For the rest of the day he purposely kept out of Victor's way.

'If this telegram is to hasten operations,' he thought, as he opened the envelope, 'the old fellow will certainly have a fit.'

But the first glance showed him that the message touched him much more nearly than any event connected with the Colmar Mine. It was from Miss Paget, dated Saturday morning, from Albany, and ran:

'Left Colombo sooner than anticipated. Not going to Perth. Caught in a tornado three days ago; vessel almost foundered. Stay here till Tuesday to recoup. Expect to reach Adelaide on Friday next.'

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When the doctor, after paying his morning visit to Challoner, interviewed his second patient at Stonehouse and dressed his arm, he declared the young man had developed febrile symptoms.

'Why, both your cheeks look as if they were scorched, and your pulse is going nineteen to the dozen. You'll have to be careful, young man; that's a nastier burn than you think for. You'd better lay up for a day or two,' he said solemnly.

But Victor, who was in his own confidence more than the man of healing, did not propose to take this advice seriously. He knew it was the prospect of his interview with Helen, which was now so near—the thought of the moment when he should be free to put his fortune to the touch and win or lose it all—that made his pulses bound and his temples throb. What would Doris say when he first uttered the words that had been the refrain of his thoughts and the burden of his dreams so long? Not so very long, perhaps, counting by the mere duration of time. But in periods of vivid emotion, when the hours he doles out are counted by heart-beats, and not by the clock, Time is found to be an old bankrupt, who has not the wherewithal to pay his debts.

'Doris, I love you! I love you!'

He was dramatizing the scene to himself, as in the manner of young lovers, sitting in the western veranda late in the afternoon, staring hard at an open book which he held right side up, just as if he were reading it page by page. Would the words startle her too much? Would the moist, radiant eyes look at him in troubled wonder? He had sometimes feared that she would hardly understand—that the guarded seclusion of her life and the dewy simplicity of her youth would make his words of love a strange tale which as yet could find no response in her heart. And now he began to recall all that had fed his timid hopes, and the unreasoning happiness that of late had taken possession of him, and then began to fear lest he had built too much on her candid friendliness, her unembarrassed pleasure at the prospect of his travelling with them. And yet was there not a great thrill of gladness in her voice as she said, 'You have come'?

He was in the very heart of these reflections, when she came out with the hushed footfalls that so soon become habitual when there is illness in a household.

'I want you, please, to let down the curtains. I have made Mrs. Challoner lie down in my room, and I want to make it quiet and shady, so that she may have a good sleep while Euphemia takes care of her father,' she said, with the gravity befitting one who has to look after many people.

Victor obeyed, and then drew forward a rocking-chair for her, saying:

'You have been going about working all day, I believe. Now don't you think it is time you rested?'

'I have not done nearly as much as I thought I should-----'

'Oh, you ambitious child! Didn't you give Shung directions three hundred and twenty times, and beat up eggs, and put fresh water in all the flower-vases, and scold Bridget?'

'But you and Phemy helped me with the flowers. As for scolding Bridget, I only just remonstrated with her for carrying such dreadful tales as-----'

She suddenly stopped short, and Victor, who had merely invented the accusation at random, said gravely:

'I suppose you gave it to her well till she cried, and promised she would do so no more?'

But Doris had assumed a little air of reserve, which piqued Victor into saying:

'Was the tale too dreadful for me to hear?'

'It was last night, you see,' answered Doris, after a little pause.

'Last night when you were alone?'

'Yes.'

'She came and frightened you with some ghost story?'

'Oh, it was much worse than any ghost story!'

'May I try and guess what it was?'

She gave a shy little nod by way of answer, and then said, with a half-mysterious smile:

'But I don't believe you can guess in the least.'

'Well, I think it will be only fair for you to help me, as we used to do when we played at hiding things indoors on a rainy day.'

'How was that? I don't know any gregarious games at all.'

The whimsically old and sedate words that Doris sometimes used amused Victor intensely, but he kept his countenance as he explained:

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'The other youngsters jgo out, and you hide a penknife, or a big glass marble, or anything, in some secret place; then, when he tries to find the article, if he goes near it you say "Hot," if he goes away from it, you say "Cold." '

'Oh, very well.'

'Bridget came and told you that she put salt-bush in the custard?'

'Cold.'

'kThat she broke a S vres bowl and buried the remains without an inquest?'

'Cold.'

'That she wrote a spelling-book and dedicated it to the universe?'

Doris laughed outright.

'You are in the Polar regions,' she said, gently swaying the rocking-chair backward and forward, in comfortable security that Bridget's b tise6 and her own foolish credulity were too much beyond the ken of a third person's unassisted speculations.

Victor looked profoundly dejected for a moment, but so far he had not an inkling that an lincredibly happy revelation awaited him.

'She went to the township and said she met a dragon?'

'Hot and cold.'

'Ah! I won't come away from the township. It was last night when the fire broke out?'

'Hot,' said Doris, in a tone of losing confidence.

'She came and told you some dreadful tale about the fire?'

Doris, who had so little practised the art of concealment that even the evasion of a question half offended her instinct of absolute sincerity, began to see that no alternative remained but to confess the whole story.

'I will tell you how it was,' she said slowly. 'When Shung told us about the fire last night he said some people had been hurt—he did not know who. Euphemia said she hoped you were not, and that made me feel so dreadfully afraid-----'

'That I was hurt?' said Victor, a quick flush rising on his face as he leant over towards Doris, drinking in every word she said.

'Yes. I went round to send Shung down to see if you were safe, but he had just put out his light. Then Bridget came, and—you mustn't think I was very foolish for quite believing it—even now it seems terrible to say it-----'

She gave a long, low sigh.

'Was it about me?' asked Victor, in a breathless sort of voice.

'Yes; she said you were burnt to death.'

He could not for a moment utter a word in reply. Doris, glancing up at him, thought he looked strangely glad, and some undefined feeling made her heart begin to beat more rapidly.

'And was that what made you feel so ill, Doris?' asked the young man, in a low, shaken voice.

'Yes. I quite believed it till I heard you speaking, and—oh, I felt as if I would die!'

'Oh, Doris, my darling! you do care for me, then? I love you—I love you with all my heart and soul! but I have been afraid-----'

She shrank back a little as he bent closer to her, and the look in her face was partly what he had conjured up half an hour before. Only with the wonder and timidity there was something of dawning comprehension, even of gladness; but she did not speak, and after a little time he spoke again.

'You are not angry with me, are you, Doris?'

'No—oh no!' she answered softly.

'And do you think you love me a little?'

There was a long pause, and then, whether she knew all that it conveyed or not, she answered in a perfectly audible voice:

'Yes, I am sure of it.'

'And do you know how much I love you?' he asked after a little, trying hard to keep down the rising torrent of his joy.

A vivid colour had risen in her cheeks, but Victor was quite pale, and his hand, as he placed it on the arm of the chair on which she sat, shook a little. Seeing him so pallid and agitated, a troubled look came into her face.

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'You are not unhappy, are you?' she asked very gently.

'No; there is only one thing that could make me unhappy just now, Doris.'

'What is that?'

'The thought that you could not love me as long as we both live.'

'Yes, and when we both die,' she answered very gravely.

And then he was more than content. Only one more petition would he make just then.

'Doris, let me hold your hand a little moment.'

A smile parted her lips as she gave him her hand. It trembled like a little reed-warbler whose wings are suddenly pinioned as his lithe brown fingers closed over hers. Very gently, fearing to frighten her, yet unable to resist the impulse, he bent his head and imprinted one tremulous kiss on the palm of the imprisoned hand; and then he released it, hardly daring to glance at her, for fear he might see a look of trouble or displeasure in her face. But it was happy and serene, and he took heart of grace.

'One day this little hand will be given to me, Doris, and I shall place a plain gold ring on the third finger.'

'Do you mean that we will be married?' she said hesitatingly.

'Yes, that is just what I do mean,' answered Victor, with a low, glad laugh.

'But mustn't we be a good deal older and wiser first?'

'Oh no! We're wise enough at this moment, Doris, and we'll be quite old enough⁷ in another year—perhaps in six months—as soon as I can see your guardian in London.'

'Why will you have to see him?'

'Oh, to assure him that I have some money and come of decent people—that I am the very one to make you happy as long as you live.'

'He'll know that as soon as he sees you,' said Doris, with a slow, thoughtful utterance.

'Oh, you darling!' murmured the young lover passionately.

And then he rose and paced up and down the veranda. The temptation to kneel down and enfold her in his arms rose too distractingly.

'Come into the avenue for a little walk, Doris,' he said, after a moment or two.

They walked side by side, for the most part in silence. When Victor spoke, it was of indifferent subjects, for he saw that gradually Doris had become a little more agitated. When she turned to re-enter the house he said:

'Doris, before we part, tell me once more—do you love me?'

She looked up at him, her lips slightly parted, her eyes full of a soft, deep light, some luminous touch of emotion in every line of her face—all her young, pure beauty made more beautiful by the great enchanter.

'I am quite sure of it,' she said slowly.

A kind of hushed awe had fallen upon her. What was this new divine influence that wrapped her round, making the thought of sorrow faint and far away, enclosing her as if in a new world? She had no word or phrase for it all. She could only feel it thrilling every fibre of her being—feel it keenly, physically, as one feels the touch of a hand, or hears the melody of a bird's song, or inhales the mpenetrating breath of the early violets; but more mysterious than any of these ecstasies of feeling, seeing that this new faculty of her nature embraced them all, and yet was centred in another. The consciousness of being so happy apart from all the influences of her past life, apart even from thoughts of her mother, struck her with a kind of amazement. She was glad to be in the silence and solitude of her own room that night to ponder over the strange wonder and beauty of it all.

a. cavity] cave room E1

b. diapason] level E1

c. his] the Adl

d. innumerable] the innumerable Adl E1

e. had] Om. Adl

f. intended] intend Adl

g. is] in Adl

h. what] who* Adl

i. youngsters] youngster Adl E1

j. go] goes Adl E1

k. That] Then Adl

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l. incredibly] incredible Adl
m. penetrating] Om. E1
END OF VOL.II.

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Volume III.

Chapter I.

As for Victor, he was lost in that tide of unreasoning, tumultuous bliss which comes to a man but once in his life—time, and in his youth or not at all. He reflected when it was too late that his purpose had been to speak no word of love to Doris till after he had seen Miss Paget; but it was all too inevitable, and now he was too restlessly happy to sleep. The night was very still, but cool, and full of starlight. He went outside, and walked to the top of the reef. The throbbing of the air—compressors and the din of the engine travelled far into the night. By that sound he knew it must be after twelve, for on Sunday work was not resumed till midnight.¹ As he stood looking into the vast spaces of the plains all round, vague and gray and level, without form or motion, he was thrilled with wonder as he thought of the sequence of events which had brought Doris into the heart of so desolate and melancholy a region—thrilled with the thought that here, where nature was at its sternest and man's existence in its barest form, they two should find each other and the great happiness of their lives. While lost in these reflections, a man came hurrying up the reef from the mine, and paused within a few paces of Victor, saying:

'Is that you, cap'en?'

'No, 'Zilla, it isn't the captain,' answered Victor, who recognised the voice.

Something had gone wrong, and the engineer wanted to consult the manager.

'I bait and bait at a'is door, but 'e ain't in, and I thoft 'e must a—come to ask for Mr. Challoner.'

On hearing the captain was not at Stonehouse, 'Zilla stood for a moment in deep thought.

'Perhaps he's in by this time. He may have gone for a stroll somewhere,' suggested Victor.

But 'Zilla didn't fall in with this view. It was now nearly half an hour since he had first gone to the captain's rooms, just ten minutes after he had been at the shaft's mouth seeing the men go below. 'Zilla had waited and gone again, but the rooms were in darkness, and still no sign of Trevaskis. Victor suggested that he might be asleep.

'E may be took in a fit, but 'e couldn't be asleep and not 'ear the knocks I give. I wish you'd come down, sir, and go to 'is rooms by the inside way, and make sure. The cap'en looks very bad to me lately, and very bad—tempered; like a hedgaboer² at the least word, and when a man don't mean nothin' in the world.'

They were descending the reef by this time. Victor went into his office as suggested, and through the four rooms intervening, followed by 'Zilla. He knocked at the door and called out 'Captain!' repeatedly in a lusty voice. But there was no response. As they were leaving the purser's office the engineer came up. The driving—wheel of the pan—shaft had got out of gear, and he was anxious to hang up the battery³ and stop the machinery.

'But if I do it off my own hook he'll most likely make a devil of a row,' he said; 'more especially as the fortnightly cleaning—up is so near.'

'He can't be in,' said Victor; 'it's impossible.'

They walked back to the pan—room and waited another half—hour. The driving—wheel had worked loose and could not be righted without a stoppage.

'But if I stop without his orders he'll bdamn my eyes till he's black in the face, and want to know who's master here,' said the engineer, a quiet, steady—going Scotchman, who found the Trevaskis r gime rather an exasperating one. 'cI'll tell you what, Mr. Purser,' he said, when the half—hour was up, 'you come with me to the manager's office, and if I can't make him hear I'll break a pane, open the window, and go in to make dsure; and if he isn't on the premises I'll stop the machinery on my own responsibility. If he goes gallivanting about at night, God knows where, it's his look out.'

Victor agreed to this arrangement, and the three once more walked up to the manager's office.

They knocked and shouted with the same result as before. Then the engineer got a stone, and, making a clean break in one of the lower panes, ehe opened the window of the manager's office and got in. He struck a light and passed into the bedroom. It was empty, and the bed had not been slept in. As he was getting out, the door of the office that led into the iron passage was unlocked, and Trevaskis entered, a bull's—eye lantern⁴ in one hand, a parcel in the other. He gave a savage yell when he caught sight of a man disappearing through the window. Either by accident or design, the lantern fell from him with a crash and the candle was extinguished.

He rushed to the window, and, seeing three men dimly in the darkness, broke into an excited volley of abuse, in a thick, strange voice. The engineer attempted to speak, but could not at first make himself heard. They were

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thieves—they were consigned to eternal and active perdition; but first they would be hauled to gaol.

'If you've quite finished, sir, perhaps you'll allow me to tell you that I'm the engineer.' He drew nearer to the open window as he spoke, and Trevaskis gave a muffled exclamation. 'Please take notice,' the engineer went on, in tones quivering with anger, 'that it was on the business of the company I forced my way into the manager's rooms, as Mr. Fitz-Gibbon, the purser, will bear witness.'

The mention of this name had a singular effect on Trevaskis. He remained quite silent for a moment, neither attempting to light candle or lamp nor to make any reply. The engineer had again to ask for instructions before Trevaskis spoke. Then, seeing Victor turning to leave, he called out to him to wait a moment.

'I'll be down after you in five minutes,' he said, and on this Bruce and Zilla returned to the engine-room. Trevaskis went into his bedroom and came out in a few minutes, locking the doors after him.

'Of course you're making all sorts of conclusions about my being in the cave room, Mr. Fitz-Gibbon? And your being about here at this time of night proves that you are full of suspicions.'

He had begun in a calm tone, but again that curious sudden change ensued: a loud, uncontrollable fierceness crept into his voice. Victor could see in the starlight that the manager's eyes were glaring wildly, that his hands were twitching, and that his face was working convulsively.

'He must be drunk,' was the thought that passed through his mind. And there was some truth in the supposition, though there was much more than ordinary intoxication to account for Trevaskis' uncontrollable excitement. He had been working on Friday night till near daylight. On Saturday night, after receiving official instructions to clear out the late manager's effects, he had not gone to bed at all. He had worked all night and part of Sunday; now it was two o'clock on Monday morning, and after all he had been almost caught with his pots and bars of gold. All his sleepless nights and brilliant visions of success, all his schemes and contrivances, had been in vain. This boy, who had from the first come to spy on him, had over-reached him in the end. His brain whirled and everything swam round him as he spoke. A sudden murderous instinct rose within him to take Victor by the throat and crush the life out of him. The paroxysm passed away, leaving him miserably shaken, and with an almost insane longing to tell Fitz-Gibbon the whole truth—to take him into the cave room there and then, and show him the great glittering heap of gold in massive bars, the bottles full of amalgam, and cry: 'This all belongs to the company!'

Victor, perceiving that the man was labouring under some cruel emotion, and believing that his brain and imagination were demoralized just then by strong drink, answered him in the tones that turn away wrath.⁵ Great personal happiness makes even hardened natures magnanimous, much more one that is innately generous and has not as yet been indurated leather by time or calamity. The imputations thrown out against him by Trevaskis would, under ordinary circumstances, have prevented Victor from offering any explanation as to his presence at the office with the engineer. But it had been forced on him that the manager's morbid suspicions were like a disease which he was unable to get rid of. He therefore fully explained his meeting with Jenkins, and Trevaskis listened and believed. But when, after mid-day on the morrow, he met Victor coming out of the telegraph-office, all his old suspicions returned. He himself had gone there to send a message to his brother, imploring him to come at all hazards, without a day's longer delay.

Trevaskis had resolved, as a last resource, to shift all the gold and amalgam to the hut he had erected on the claim near the broken-down whim as soon as his brother could arrive. He had this morning bought a strong spring-cart and a stout horse from a man who had left the diggings at the Creek very much down on his luck. He was negotiating with the company for the purchase of certain old machinery, which they were only too glad to sell. There would be two or three loads in all. In the dead of night he would load the cart with the gold and amalgam, tied up in old sacks. In the morning he would have some of the machinery fixed in the cart, with Dan to help, and after Dan started he would overtake him on horseback, and explain that his load was worth, not an old song for old iron,⁶ but twenty thousand pounds!

Even in the thick of all his terrors and anxieties, and the profound physical nervousness that assailed him from time to time, he would dwell with a sense of intoxicating elation on the sense of getting the gold all safe away. He would see Dan driving slowly on the big dusty track towards Broombush Creek, looking from time to time around him as he got half-way for the great white posts of the broken-down whim, beyond which he was to slue⁷ off to the left for a mile and a half to the lonely hut, which could be clearly seen from the vicinity of the old well.

Then he would go galloping after him, and that night they would make a recess in the floor of the hut in which

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to hide the gold.

'That quartz claim will turn out the richest in the history of Australian mining, only this won't get into history,' he thought. And then he chuckled to himself as he pictured Fitz-Gibbon going solemnly into the cave room and making his ineffectual search. But all this hung on Dan's speedy arrival. He despatched his telegram, wording it as strongly as possible. As he came out of the telegraph-office, he met Victor face to face. Was he going to send a message as to the further delay in his search of the cave room? He resolved to keep a brave front to the last, and fight to the uttermost for delay, hoping for Dan's speedy return. A few minutes after he had seen Victor go back to his office, Trevaskis followed him, to make a certain statement regarding the search of the cave room. As soon as he entered Victor rose, saying:

'I was just coming to see you, captain. I want to get away to town for a few days.'

'To town for a few days?' repeated Trevaskis mechanically.

'Yes; will you be well enough to clean up the gold this week?'

'I intend to do so on Thursday.'

'Oh, that will suit me famously. I can then start by the afternoon coach on Friday, and pay the men when I return.'

'How long shall you be away?'

'Not more than four or five days at the longest.'

'Not more than four or five days?' repeated the manager, in the same mechanical voice in which he had first responded to the purser's announcement.

It would be impossible to disentangle the chaos of thoughts that darted through his mind. But clear above all else rose the conviction: 'He is now sure about the treasure; he is going to secure police assistance.' Trevaskis struggled to act on the belief. It seemed as if he spent several moments in trying to utter the words: 'oYou better come down into the cave room this morning and have a look round. The half-search I made last night makes me believe there's some gold hidden there.'

But every instinct of his nature rose up in revolt against this surrender. Each faculty of his mind became centred in one supreme effort to gain time. To have so much wealth in his possession—the end and aim of his dearest ambitions, the object of his most jealous passions—and pto give it all up! No, no! not so long as the ghost of a chance of success remained.

'I suppose I could put off paying the men till I returned on Tuesday or Wednesday?' said Victor, looking a little wonderingly at the manager's haggard face.

'Certainly, that will be all right; I came in to say that, owing to the arrears of work caused by my sore eyes, I cannot go qinto the cave room with you for a few days.'

'Oh, we'll let it slide till I return,' said Victor carelessly.

The manager looked at him narrowly. Then, sinking his voice and speaking in a semi-confidential tone, he said:

'The fact is that, judging from a cursory examination, I am under the impression that Dunning's effects were tampered with after his death. It will be therefore better that we should act conjointly in this matter.'

'But the keys were in Searle's possession till he delivered them to you,' said Victor quickly.

'Exactly, and therefore I am going to write a note to him asking a few leading questions,' answered Trevaskis coldly as he walked away. When he reached the door he turned as if struck by an after-thought.

'It will be about the eighth of December when you get away. You have spoken about leaving the mine at Christmas-time. Do you think of making any arrangement about resigning when you are in town?'

Victor hesitated before replying. He could not explain that his movements depended on the course of events at Stonehouse, nor did he think it advisable to say that he knew of a suitable candidate ready to apply for the pursership as soon as it was vacant. His friend Maurice Cumming had recently bespoken Victor's interest in the matter, finding that a little extra ready money for a year to come would materially aid himself and his brother in their strenuous fight at Wynans against the rabbits. Victor by this time knew enough of the manager's jealous and suspicious temperament to feel sure that to speak of his friend's appointment as a foregone conclusion would be an impolitic measure. He therefore compromised the matter by saying:

'I don't think I shall decide about the date of my leaving till later on. I believe we shall find no difficulty in getting a purser at a short notice.'

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Of course, the half-embarrassed pause and the cautious reply could bear but one interpretation to Trevaskis.

'I knew it—I knew it! He is going to try and snare me like a rat in a hole!' he muttered to himself as he strode away.

He hurried into his office, fearful of betraying the passion of impotent rage which he felt threatened to carry him beyond all bounds. As soon as he had gained his own room he broke into a volley of the most horrible imprecations; his eyes started in their sockets, and he foamed at the mouth.

His first coherent thought was one of terror. 'I am going mad—I am going mad!' he said to himself repeatedly, staring at his face in a small square looking-glass that hung above the washstand in his bedroom. His wild, distorted eyes; his livid skin; the great cold drops of perspiration that stood on his forehead; the tremor which at short intervals shook him from head to foot, were all repetitions of the paroxysm that had overtaken him for the first time in his life in the small hours of the morning.

He tried to reason, but thought failed him. He lost all grasp of the subject or the plan that struggled through his mind. One after the other, terrible pictures rose before him, irrespective of mental volition. He followed one man who crept with treacherous footsteps to commit murder; he saw another suddenly stricken down dead; and still another writhing in madness. . . .

When he grew calmer, he reasoned with himself that it was not incipient madness that had attacked him, but the result of constantly dwelling on exciting thoughts; of utter sleeplessness for three days and two nights; the want of proper food; a dangerous use of stimulants; and, to crown the whole, this sudden overwhelming terror that all would be in vain—that Fitz-Gibbon had acquired a certain knowledge of the stolen gold, and was dogging all his actions. Probably he had last night bribed the engineer to tamper with the pan-shaft, so as to have witnesses as to the manager's absence in the cave room.

Now he was going to the directors with his tale; of what use would it be to try and hide so great a quantity? A black tracker, or even an ordinary detective, would trace it like a beaten highway. He must think of some plan—something that would give him time, that would save him. But the moment that he tried to think or frame a plan, a throbbing came in the back of his head, like the rapid echoes of a hammer beating persistently, maddeningly. He must sleep for seven or eight hours at a stretch.

He took one of his accustomed rounds, seeing to all that was being done; he gave some directions to the shift-bosses who would be in charge of the night-gangs underground. Then he summoned Mick, and told him to let no one knock at his office-door, or disturb him in any way; he was feeling ill, and was going to have a good sleep. He undressed and went to bed at four o'clock in the afternoon. But the room seemed full of sounds; sudden cries, strange voices and violent shouts rent the air. He drank glass after glass of almost undiluted brandy; but instead of serving as a soporific, this for a time made him more acutely conscious of the ruin that stared him in the face, while his power of connected thought had absolutely deserted him. At last he fell into a deep dreamless stupor, from which he did not awaken till near sunrise the next morning.

His head was aching, but the long rest and unconsciousness had in a measure restored his mental balance. He brewed himself a pot of tea, and drank cup after cup, hot and strong, till his headache was almost gone. But the moment his anxieties and fears and surmises returned upon him, he felt that dull, persistent, all-absorbing beat in his brain—that vague wandering of mind; his train of thought lost suddenly, as if in an unsounded deep—which had before terrified him. He went about the business of the mine all that morning, resolutely turning his mind away from the torturing and distracting thoughts of the cave room. He reflected that the cleaning-up on Thursday would yield the largest average to the ton of quartz which had ever been reported at the Colmar. There had been a steady and continuous increase of gold since he came, while at the same time the working expenses of the mine had been, by his unrelaxing vigilance in every department, considerably diminished.

Nor had any of these points escaped recognition by the directors. Within the last month they had given him a considerable rise in his salary, at the same time complimenting him highly on the unprecedented success which had marked his tenure of management, and expressing a hope that he would see his way to enter on a fixed term of office. This Trevaskis had so far refrained from doing, on the ground that circumstances might in any month compel him to resign.

Thinking over these things as he went through the routine of his mine work on Tuesday forenoon, Trevaskis reflected that though Drummond might lend a willing ear to his nephew's tales, the directors as a body would be very loath to take any action that would reflect on a manager who had in less than three months made his value

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felt in so marked a manner. . . . If he could only by some means fasten a quarrel upon Fitz-Gibbon apart from the matter of the cave room—some stigma of carelessness, of neglect of duty!

It would be so readily believed that a young man of independent means, who came to the mine for a mere freak, and who could leave it at any moment without the least detriment to his prospects, should fail in some respects to work like a man whose daily bread depended on his daily work. . . . But as Trevaskis reviewed the manner in which Victor discharged his duties, he failed to recall any instance of negligence more serious than forgetting to lock the office-door on one or two occasions when he left sit for the night.

Arrived at this point in his cogitations, Trevaskis suddenly stood motionless. He was in the pan-room, where the loosened wheel was giving some trouble. But he had decided not to have it touched till Thursday, so that the yield of gold should not be impaired by any stoppage. The din around him seemed all at once to sharpen his faculties, so that he saw, as in a completed picture, the scheme after which he had been vainly groping. He had found it held the clue.

Towards sunset he saddled his horse and rode across to his claim near the broken-down whim, so as to get his scheme all clear and straight before him. This was the plan he formed; on Thursday, after he and Fitz-Gibbon had cleaned up the gold and locked it in the safe as usual, he would hand his key to the purser and ask him to keep it till Friday morning, as he was going across to Broombush Creek and would most likely stay there that night. He had done this three weeks ago, so there would be nothing unusual in either action; the unusual part would come later on. He would return shortly after midnight, get the duplicate keys which he had found in Dunning's private box, go into the purser's office through the inside entrance, and take away the seven hundred ounces of gold.

In the morning, when Victor gave him back the key, he would, as was customary under such circumstances, have the safe unlocked, so as to make sure that all was right. The safe would be empty! A hue and cry would be raised. His first duty as manager would be to send an official telegram to the directors. The police trooper would at once begin to search round; so would he—Trevaskis; and that night he would discover the gold where the thief had secreted it. Then Fitz-Gibbon would no doubt go on to town as he proposed. He might, perhaps, be confident that the keys had not been out of his possession; but there the facts would be public and patent to all. The same train that conveyed Fitz-Gibbon to town would carry a letter to the directors from the mine-manager, declining to act any longer with a purser whose negligence had so nearly cast an irretrievable slur on them both. He would point out that if the thief had succeeded in carrying off the gold as easily as he had obtained possession of the keys and rifled the safe, the consequences to him as a poor man, with a wife and family dependent on his sole exertions for a livelihood, would have been serious in the extreme. Any insinuations made against him by Fitz-Gibbon would then bear a very suspicious aspect. If he went to the trouble of stirring up an inquiry as to the cave room, he would take up the position that he had special reasons for not caring to interfere with Dunning's effects till his legal representative was on the spot. By the time that a week or two was consumed, the treasure would be secured in a way that would leave no possibility of recovery. Then they could search till they were black in the face.

Trevaskis laughed aloud in his glee as he saw himself at last triumphant over all dangers and obstacles. He went over the whole scheme time after time, strengthening lame places and elaborating little details, during his ride to and from his quartz claim. He worked that night in the cave room again for several hours, after finding that he could not close his eyes in sleep.

During the next two days his demeanour to Victor was more friendly than usual. He was most of the time slightly under the influence of drink. He tried to refrain, feeling that in his excited state a stimulant was dangerous. But the tension of his nerves, the fits of miserable uncertainty which assailed him, the almost total lack of appetite, and the loss of sleep, made it impossible for him to bear up without a liberal recourse to the old Bordeaux brandy of which he had a case in his office. Nor had he any dread that the habit to which he yielded at this pinch would take a mischievous hold of him. He regarded his drams as a sort of medicine that would help him over a steep pull, like doses of quinine for ague fever.

The gold cleaning-up was over by half-past six o'clock on Thursday.

'I am going over to Broombush Creek, to see one of the managers there. I'll most likely stay the night, and perhaps have a little turkey-shooting on the way back. I'd better leave my key in your charge,' said Trevaskis, as he was leaving the office, after the two bars of gold were locked up.

'All right. Of course you'll be back before I leave?'

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'Oh yes. I'll be here by eleven in the morning at latest.'

And with that the two parted.

- a. 'is] 's Adl
- b. damn my eyes] swear at me Adl
- c. I'll] I Adl
- d. sure; and if] sure. If E1
- e. he] Om. E1
- f. neither attempting] attempting neither E1
- g. doors] door Adl
- h. Sunday; now^o] Sunday, and now Adl
- i. glittering] gleaming Adl E1
- j. massive] massy Adl E1
- k. has] has either Adl
- l. either] Om. Adl neither E1
- m. from] Om. E1
- n. on] after* Adl
- o. You] You'd E1
- p. to] then to Adl E1
- q. into] in Adl
- r. all] Om. Adl
- s. it] Om. E1
- t. in] of Adl
- u. family] a family Adl
- v. triumphant] triumphing Adl E1
- w. stimulant] the use of stimulants E1

Chapter II.

A celebrated Greek philosopher was of opinion that women were only created when Nature found that the imperfection of matter did not permit her to carry on the world without them.¹ It is possible that some might demur to this; but most of us would be ready to admit that letters are written chiefly because of the imperfect development of our senses. And yet there are certain communications which one might prefer to make in a little note, even if telepathy were an assured and exact science.

Of this kind was the announcement that Victor had to make to Miss Paget. He had put away the thought of their actual meeting as often as it had arisen; but now that he was to set out on the morrow, and the hour was drawing so near in which his story must be told, its awkwardness came home to him more and more.

He reflected how very frequently he had found Mrs. Tillotson installed with Helen for the afternoon or evening, how often she was summoned by her father into the library, and, still more embarrassing, he thought how very foolish he would feel when it gradually dawned on Miss Paget that he had come, not to woo,² but to make a confession and ride away. Yes, on the whole, it would be better to write a little note—one which, without going into tedious details, would put Helen en rapport with his position. This he would leave at Lancaster House personally as soon as he reached town, leaving a message that he should call an hour later. He had almost succeeded in persuading himself that his mother's suggestion was true—that Miss Paget had fixed a term of probation not so much to test his fidelity as to let him down gently without too abrupt a refusal. But as he sat at his desk to write his little preparatory letter after Trevaskis had left the office, certain recollections arose which made his task a difficult one.

He wanted to find words that would put the matter adroitly and delicately, but all the finer nuances of expression seemed to escape from his pen. After writing half a sheet he stared at it discontentedly, and then sat resting his head on his hand. The day had been sultry and airless. He had been at work from five in the morning, and it was now nearly seven. The pen slipped from his hand. He did not fall asleep, but he went off into a waking dream. Some lines he had read in an old poet came back to him:

'Open the temple gates unto my love; Open them wide, that she may enter in.'³

A look of beatitude overspread his face. Suddenly he was startled by the sound of a dull loud report, speedily followed by a second and a third. He thrust his unfinished letter into the drawer of his desk and went to the outer door of the assay-room. Roby stood talking to the mine blacksmith a few paces away.

'What are these reports, Roby? Are they making another grave?' asked Victor.

'Ah, Mr. Purser, in the midst o' life we are in death!'⁴ answered Roby, with the strong nasal accent habitual to him when giving expression to any serious sentiment. Then he explained that one of the Connell children had died of fever that morning. The father and another miner were now employed in blasting out a grave in the little cemetery, which was within half a mile of the mine, where the ground was so adamantine that it could not be dug out in the ordinary way. Victor had recognised the sounds, having heard them on a few occasions previously. This process of forcing a last resting-place from the blue clay slate rock had always seemed to him a rather horrible preface to being buried. Just then, when he was lost in blissful waking dreams, the thought of death struck a sudden chill to his heart. He was turning impatiently away from Roby, who seemed inclined to improve the occasion, when Michael reached the door of the assay-room with a message for the purser. It was to the effect that Circus Bill's trap with passengers from Broombush Creek was going to start at daybreak, so as to reach Nilpeena in time for the early train to town.

'I thoht, as ye were going, sor, to-morrow, ye moight loike to start early, so as to save the waiting at Nilpeena. 'Tis a sthränge droiver, Circus himself being laid up at Broombush wid a touch av sunstroke. It's glad oi am he washn't tuk wid the same on the way from Nilpeena, for the sake av the lady that come to Shtonehouse.'

'Has a lady come to Stonehouse?' asked Victor. 'At what time? Have you heard who she is?'

Michael, who spoke of the new arrival solely because he divined that anything which related to Stonehouse was of passing importance to the young purser, was not surprised to find the eager interest with which he received the news. He, however, knew nothing beyond the fact that a lady had arrived by Circus Bill's trap half an hour before the mail-coach came in. As soon as Victor had despatched the little man to ask the driver to secure a seat

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in the early trap, he went across to Stonehouse. When he reached the house he found an air of unusual bustle pervading it. Shung-Loo was flitting about the place with as near an approach to a smile as his face ever wore. Bridget was hurrying in and out between the kitchen and dining-room; Euphemia had a large basket of flowers in the veranda, which she was arranging in vases on the little wicker table. When Victor joined her she had a great deal to tell him. Her aunt, Mrs. Murray, had come from Ouranie, Doris's old home. She had all at once made up her mind when she found that Mr. Challoner's illness was likely to be a lingering one.

'She has come to stay and help to nurse father, and see that mother gets plenty of sleep, and that Doris does not do too much. Aunt thinks that she is looking rather too pale.'

'But there is nothing wrong with her. She was well this morning,' interrupted Victor anxiously.

'Oh yes; she isn't ill, you know,' answered Euphemia placidly. 'But she went to see Mamie Connell—that little girl who has been so ill—and found she had died. Then aunt came and brought a lot of things from Ouranie. . . . Doris is in her own room now, reading over and over a little doll book that belonged to her mother. You can always tell when she thinks of her mother . . . she sits so still and her eyes get so large and dark.'

A summons to dinner put an end to Euphemia's confidences. As the patient had fallen into a sound sleep, all the household assembled at this meal. Victor was duly introduced to the new-comer—a bright, active little woman, who treated her journey of over two hundred miles to the Salt-bush Country as if it were an afternoon drive.

'You all look as if you needed twelve hours' sleep on end,' she said, glancing at her sister and the two girls. 'I think I had better send you all to bed in an hour after dinner.'

But there was a general outcry against this. One who had come off a long fatiguing journey could not be allowed to sit up on any pretence.

'It is you who must go to bed soon after dinner, auntie, and in my little room,' said Euphemia.

But Doris objected to this proposition. Her room was much larger; besides, there was a couch in it on which she herself could sleep very well. On this Victor joined in.

'I know it is not in human nature to sleep in three rooms at once; but as my room will be empty, I think it ought to have the honour of Mrs. Murray's presence.'

He went on to explain that as he intended to start by Circus Bill's trap, which was going to Nilpeena in the small hours of the morning, it would be more convenient for him to sleep on the bunk in his office, where he would be nearer Scroog's place, from which the trap started. As Victor made this announcement he met Doris's eyes with a half inquiring, wistful little look in them, which made him thrill with pleasure.

'Tell me, Doris, are you sorry I am going away for a few days?' he asked a little later, with all the egotism of a young lover.

They had adjourned to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Murray, instead of taking it easy, as behoved a wearied traveller, began to write a long letter to her husband. Mrs. Challoner had returned to the sick room, and Euphemia was engaged in rifling the numerous vases she had recently filled of some of the white flowers they contained.

'Yes. I am a little sad even when you go away to the mine in the morning. I always look after you, though you do not see me.'

'Oh, you perfect little darling!' murmured the young man in a voice made tremulous with joy.

'How strange it would be,' continued Doris, 'if one of us two died like that little----'

'Oh, don't, Doris—don't speak or think of anything so dreadful!' said Victor, in an imploring voice.

She was silent for a little time, and then said softly:

'But, Victor, you must think of it one day. Even if we lived here a hundred years, what a tiny speck of time it is compared to the thousands and thousands that have come and gone! Everything and everyone goes away after a little time. That is why I try so often to think what the other world can be like.'

'But, my own Doris, is not this world enough for you just now? Why think of any other?'

'I must think of another, because my mother is no longer here,' she answered, fixing her eyes, wide opened, on his face. Then, after a little pause: 'Did you ever lose anyone that you loved very much?'

'No. I can hardly remember my father.'

'Ah, that is the reason that you like to think only of this life. If you had lost anyone that you loved as I loved mother, you could not help trying to imagine day by day where she is, what she is doing or saying. You could not help feeling oftentimes that she still thinks about you. Oh, how much I would like to know whether the

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flowers that she loved so much grow there, and whether "the river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God,"⁶ looks to her like the waters of Gauwari! Perhaps you do not like me to talk like this to you?

'Oh yes, Doris. Only—I know I am a selfish wretch—I would rather that thoughts of me pushed nearly all others out of your mind.'

'So they often do—all but mother. And to-day, more than ever, I keep thinking of her all the time. First, when I went down to see little Mamie Connell, and found that she had gone away in the night——'

'Gone away?' repeated Victor wonderingly.

'Yes; that is what really happens, you know, when people die. The mother was crying in a loud way. I don't know why, but it made me feel almost unkind to her, when she made such a noise. She kept on sobbing because there was no priest. As if that could matter, when the poor dear child went home to God!'

'Oh, you little Protestant! You must know that I am of Mrs. Connell's way of thinking. If I were dying I should be very uncomfortable if there were no priest to look after me. Not that there need be the same fear for poor little Mamie.'

'But why should you want a priest?'

'Because he would, I hope, help to make things a little straight for me.'

'Wouldn't you feel sure that you were going to heaven?'

'No—not at all.'

'Then what do you think might become of you?'

'Dearie, I would rather not say. I am awfully weak in theology. Besides, I want to hear you talk. I want to hear about the rest of your day.'

'When I saw Mamie she made me think so much of darling mother. I felt as if I wanted to go to her that moment.'

'Oh, Doris! didn't you think of me?'

'Not just then; I could only think of mother. As I stood at the door of Mrs. Connell's house, telling her I would bring some of the flowers that Mamie used to like so much, a trap passed by quickly, with a lady on the front seat. I thought she looked very much like Mrs. Murray, only I couldn't be sure. Then when I reached home here she was. She brought a boxful of things from Ouranie: some of the early fruits; flowers from the garden, and grasses from the banks of the lake; pictures and books. One of them is full of little old French rhymes that mother used to sing to me when I was a small child.'

'Tell me some of them, if you please—that is, if you remember any.'

'Oh yes; I shall never forget them. They are old berceuses with words strung together that have a sleepy sound, like this:

' "Som, som, som, b ni, b ni, b ni, b ni, B ni md'endacon, Som, som, b ni nd'endacon." '7

Doris crooned the words in a low, monotonous voice.

'That sounds very dreamy and wise,' said Victor. 'Perhaps I should not ask what "Som, som, som," means.'

'It is like asking sleep to come. They are not all nonsense—words; they are chants to make you happy and good. "Come, Sleep," say some of them, "and keep the child safe and quiet. Mother has to work, and father has to go into the woods." Often these little chansons⁸ come to me when I am asleep, just as mother used to sing them. Sometimes the little "Som, som" promise to give a good child towns and villages—even Constantinople.'

'That ought to make any right-thinking baby fall fast asleep, I should think.'

Doris smiled, and then said:

'The one I like best begins, "Dors, dors, doux oiseau de la prairie." '

'Say it in English, like a good child.'

' "Sleep, sleep, gentle bird of the plain; take thy repose, red-breast, take thy repose; God will awake thee in His good time. Sleep is at the door, and says: 'Is there not here a little infant—a little infant sleeping in its cradle—a little infant swaddled—a little infant reposing on a blanket of wool?' Here——" '

'Doris, do you think there will be enough to make this cross for Mrs. Connell?' said Euphemia, approaching the two with a basketful of white flowers, chiefly moss roses, marguerites, and jasmine.

'Yes—more than enough, I think,' answered Doris; 'only I hardly know how to make it. Mrs. Connell said she would like the flowers made into a cross,' she said, turning to Victor, who sat looking at Euphemia, wondering

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whether any providential circumstance would arise to call her away.

On hearing Doris's explanation he, of course, volunteered his help. He went out into Mr. Challoner's workshop, and soon returned with a cross formed by nailing together two small flat boards, fashioned according to the proportions of a small gold cross which he had on his watch-chain. He watched Doris covering this artless wooden cross with flowers, fastening them by the stems with a narrow white ribbon, while he handed her the flowers and Euphemia looked on.

'Sing me another little "Som, som," ' said Victor, after some moments, half resenting Doris's absorption in this pathetic little task.

Then in a low, half-mysterious voice Doris crooned the words:

' "Dedans le bois, dedans le bois, Savez-vous ce qu'il y a? Il y a un arbre Le plus beau des arbres; L'arbre est dans le bois. Oh, oh, oh, le bois Le plus joli de tous les bois!" '9

* * * * *

At last Victor was forced to go and pack his portmanteau. When he returned to say good-bye Mrs. Murray's letter was finished and she sat talking with the two girls. Doris had completed her last offering to the little one who had 'gone away' so early that morning. It lay on the table, the great symbol of renunciation, wreathed with soft snow-white blooms. Doris held it up for Victor to see; but he hardly looked at it—his eyes were fixed on her face.

There was no further opportunity for speaking to her alone; but as he bade her good-bye, she held out both hands to him, her face irradiated with an expression of confiding love, which made him feel that it was worth while to go away for the sake of such a look.

It was after ten when he reached his office. He had to write up some entries in the cash-book. He began to nod over this, and it was with difficulty he kept himself awake till the work was finished. At last the books were put away, and merely removing his coat, waistcoat, and boots, Victor threw himself on the bunk with a travelling-rug over his feet.

But just as he was falling asleep, he recollected that he had the manager's key, and that he would be gone hours before Trevaskis returned. With an effort he roused himself to consider how he should leave it in a place of safety. He relit the lamp, put the safe-key in an official envelope addressed to Trevaskis, locking it in the right-hand drawer of the table at which he habitually sat. Then he wrote a memo. to say that he was taking advantage of Circus Bill's trap going so early, so as to save waiting at Nilpeena; that he had locked the safe-key in the drawer, and that the key thereof was enclosed in this memo. He took both to the manager's office, going to it through the intermediate store-rooms. He took his bunch of office-keys with him, expecting that he should have to unlock at least two of the three doors which intervened between his own and the manager's office; but they were all unlocked, and feeling sure that Trevaskis must have left them thus for some reason of his own, Victor left them as he found them.

This excursion wakened him up so thoroughly that it was close upon twelve when he dozed off again. Before he could be said to have fallen asleep he was roused by some movement; but he was so loath to get up the second time that he did not move till he distinctly heard the sound of a key being thrust into the lock of the safe.

- a. the] an Adl
- b. to] Om. Adl
- c. that] Om. Adl E1
- d. old] Om. Adl
- e. it on which] it, and on that E1
- f. in] Om. Adl
- g. compared] when compared Adl
- h. mamma] maman Adl E1
- i. eyes, wide opened,] wide-opened eyes Adl E1
- j. loved] love Adl E1
- k. what] and what E1
- l. would] should Adl E1
- m. d'endacon] d'endacoui E1
- n. d'endacon] d'endacou E1

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Chapter III.

Trevaskis returned to the mine at a quarter to twelve, after drinking heavily at the leading hotel at Broombush Creek. He had abstained from all stimulant during the day, and meant to keep absolutely cool and sober till this crucial affair of temporary theft was done with; but the fatigue and aheat of the day, combined with his inability to eat, and the tense excitement under which he laboured, combined to break down his resolution. So far, however, from feeling incapacitated for carrying out his plans, it seemed to him that the fillip which brandy gave his spirits and imagination formed an additional element of success.

He put his horse in the stable, and then went into his rooms by the outer door of his office. He had, in the course of the afternoon, come through the intermediate rooms from Victor's, leaving the doors unlocked, so that he might pass through in the dark without a light. After much consideration, he had decided to hide the gold in the safe in his own room. It would be the safest plan. Then, as soon as darkness fell, on the succeeding night, he would go out with the gold, and come down the face of the reef with it, nearly opposite the engine-room, triumphantly displaying the two bars, as he had recovered them, wrapped round with a piece of stained cloth, where they had, no doubt, been hidden by the thief, under some stones, till he should be able to carry them off at his leisure.

It was these after-details that occupied his mind as he reached the safe with the pair of duplicate keys. He was so sure of his ground that he could manage all without lighting even a match. He knew that there were always some of the miners who lingered at the inn till after midnight, and who, on returning, would sometimes stroll to the engine-house. If they saw a light at so unusual an hour in the purser's office, they would as likely come as not, in their idle irresponsible way, to see what 'was up.' He shot back both bolts, and was in the act of taking up the first bar of gold, when he thought he heard footsteps at the door. He had not time to withdraw his bhead from the safe, when a strong grip on his arm for a moment paralyzed him, and a voice cried at his ear:

'Who are you? What are you doing here?'

In a moment he had recovered from his stupefaction. With the fury of a beast of prey suddenly attacked, he closed in the darkness with the man, whose grasp warned him that he was not one who could be lightly shaken off. Backing out from the safe, and without uttering a word, he threw both arms round his antagonist like a vice, and flung him fiercely round. As he did this, the man's head came against the edge of the iron safe with a horrible dull thud. At once his hold relaxed. He gave one low shuddering moan, and Trevaskis felt him in his arms a limp, inanimate burden. He slowly released him, letting him slide to the ground without allowing him to fall heavily. He lay there without a movement, or even the sound of breathing. And then an awful silence fell on the room.

Trevaskis was incapable of coherent thought. His first instinct was to recover the keys and make off; but he had dropped a bar of gold. It was under the man's motionless form. As he groped about, he came on a fine cambric handkerchief—one that had a suspicion of the breath of violets on it. Then, with a cold, trembling hand, he touched the man's face. The cheeks were smooth; on the upper lip there was a slight silken moustache. A suspicion of the truth flashed on him. He remembered that a lamp usually stood on the window-sill; he groped for it, and lit it after he had ineffectually struck two or three matches. He could never recollect the first instant in which the prostrate man's face became visible to him. After what seemed long moments, he found himself with a heart that throbbed to bursting, his eyes riveted on Fitz-Gibbon, who lay as he fell, without sound or motion. And, as he looked, the words came to him like the hiss of a serpent: 'By—and—by you get over that, and you go on and on till——' Now the blank was filled. Trembling in every limb, he knelt down beside Victor.

'My God! I have killed him! I have killed him! I have killed him!' He murmured the words over and over automatically, while the perspiration rolled in great cold beads down his face.

For some moments the power of thought was suspended. He tried in a stupefied mechanical way to recollect what he had proposed to do. But here, even if his memory had been clear and active, it would have afforded him little assistance. It was all the work of less than three minutes; but in that infinitesimal space of time he found himself in the grim clutches of a deed wholly at variance with the purpose which had called it into being.

It is this tragic, unlooked-for evolution of events that, all through man's history, makes him so largely the puppet of forces with which he may gamble, but which he can never wholly control. Nearly all the criminals who

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become such through accident, rather than temperament, owe their first plunge into lawlessness to the unforeseen development of circumstances rather than determined purpose.

'No, no; he doesn't move nor breathe; he is dead—he is dead—he is dead!' moaned Trevaskis under his breath, his eyes fixed on the livid bruise above Victor's right temple. He felt for a pulse in vain; he held the glass of his watch against the parted lips; he placed his hands above the heart; but he found no symptom of life. Trevaskis rose up, looking wildly around. His brain, which had been demoralized for so many days by fiery stimulant, by ceaseless excitement, without proper rest or nourishment, had at this crisis lost all power of initiative.

Twice he essayed to blow out the lamp, with a vague purpose of going away, of saddling his horse and riding back to Broombush; but no, even already he felt himself in the toils. He had kept away from the main track on his return, so as to avoid anyone he knew, and yet, within two miles of Colmar, he had been accosted in the starlight by three horsemen, one of them the manager who had dined at the Colmar Arms on the day that Vansittart made up his story about the fortune he had discovered at a gold mine. The thought of this chance encounter made him feel as if all effort at concealing his guilt would be abortive. Whichever way he turned he seemed to see himself beset by unknown risks, from which he could find no ultimate escape.

'I have murdered him! I have murdered him!' he gasped hoarsely, staring at the prostrate body, his face gray with terror. Presently, with a wild rebellion against the horror of it all, he flung himself down once more by Victor's motionless form, chafing his hands, uncovering his chest, and raising his head. Then he got some water, with which he wetted the young man's lips, face, and hands. But there was no tremor of returning life—all its pulses seemed to have ceased. Oh God! he was already growing cold and stiff!

As this conviction fastened upon him, Trevaskis stood once more rooted to the spot. He was overtaken by a nightmare sort of horror, in which all his consciousness was centred on one awful thought. He saw, as if in a series of pictures, the ghastly consequences of this night's work. His arrest, his trial, the witnesses that would arise on every side, the damning evidence that would be supplied by the contents of the cave room.

'They won't believe I didn't mean to kill him,' he said, uttering the words in a horrified whisper, his parched lips cleaving to his teeth. 'And yet I didn't—I didn't—so help me God! I had no thought of harming him.' One or two hot tears trickled down his cheeks. Gradually the very poignancy of his sufferings seemed to restore his stricken faculties. Part of one of the projects that had floated hastily through his brain, when rendered desperate by the thought of seeing the cave room searched, now came back to him. He hurried through the store-rooms to his office, and opened the door leading into the iron passage. Then he put a lighted candle in the cave room, preparatory to carrying Victor there.

At first it seemed as if he were wholly unequal to the task. But as he thought of all that lay at stake, the blood leapt in his veins with those throbs that chronicle moments during which physical impossibilities disappear. He lifted Victor in his arms, and, without once pausing on the way, carried him through the offices and the iron passage into the cave room. On reaching it he placed the inanimate form on the bunk near the entrance. As soon as he had done this, he hurried back into one of the stores in which a small quantity of dynamite was kept. He took five plugs and a cartridge, with the necessary wire to explode the charge, from a magneto-electric battery in his own office. Then he took the lamp back to the purser's office, intending to extinguish it and leave it there. But he dared not. A sudden unreasoning, overwhelming horror came over him, that, if he went back in the dark, the face of the dead would stare at him from every side. Even at that moment, with the light full in his eyes, a conviction seized him that close behind, just over his shoulder if he looked, he would see a sight that would freeze his blood with terror. He leant across the desk at which Victor used to work, and moaned piteously:

'O God! O God! is this to be my life after this? Wherever I go, wherever I am, whatever I do, is this thing to be with me—never to leave me? And I was warned, I was warned, but I would go on my way! But, oh, God in heaven! though no one else would believe it, you know I did not mean to kill him, nor to lay a finger on him.' Tears coursed down his cheeks as he spoke, half in prayer, half in exculpation. No, he had not meant it; surely that would take away the guilt of the deed. This little outburst seemed to lessen the pressure on his brain.

Yet, as he went back, he peered with wild eyes from side to side. When he reached the cave room he put the lamp on the little deal table, taking care not to let his eyes wander towards the bunk on which Victor was lying.

Trevaskis' plan was to let this charge off, so that it might appear Victor's death was due to the discharge while engaged in searching the place prior to his going to town. There would be the letter which he, the manager, had

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received on the subject less than a week ago, to bear witness to Fitz–Gibbon's wish to overhaul the cave room. Everyone that knew anything of it knew that the place was littered with all sorts of odds and ends. A few plugs of damaged dynamite accidentally ignited would be the supposed cause of explosion, and of the young man's death. But before firing the charge he would remove the smelted gold. He had hidden the bars underground close to the bunk.

As he was about to uncover them his gaze involuntarily rested on Victor. The next instant he was kneeling beside him with a low cry. If his eyes had not deluded him there was a slight tremor of the eyelids. Now, as he felt the pulses afresh, he thought he could detect a faint, uncertain beat. When he put his hand over the region of the heart he was sure of it.

Like most men who have lived much in the bush with workmen under them, Trevaskis had picked up some rough knowledge of surgery. Now that the first overmastering terror and excitement had passed away, leaving him comparatively sober, he noted symptoms in Victor's condition that pointed to concussion of the brain. The inflexibility of the limbs, the coldness of the body, the all but imperceptible pulse and breath,² he had noted these before in such cases. But as he recollected this, he also recalled how, in the two worst instances of concussion of the brain that had come under his notice, the patients had, after lingering some days, died unconscious. . . . Would Fitz–Gibbon recover or die?

With this thought arose the question as to what should be done with him under these altered circumstances. Should he take him back to the office and leave him till he was found lying there? No one would have any clue as to the way the accident happened. Only, if he died, would not a chain of evidence be somehow forged that would incriminate the real culprit? At this thought Trevaskis stood for a moment irresolute. At last he determined to take Victor back and leave him on the floor in the office, with his head slightly raised.

But when he attempted to carry him, as he had done before, he found himself quite unequal to the task. The stimulus of extreme terror was gone. The reaction had set in. The varying emotions he had passed through had dissipated his strength. He went to his room to fortify himself with a dose of brandy. All the time he was torn in two directions, whether to hide Victor in the cave room and tend him till he found whether he died or recovered, or take him back and allow him to be discovered in his unconscious state on the morrow in the ordinary course of events.

He lit a candle in his room and helped himself to some brandy and water. As he was in the act of drinking this, he noticed Victor's note on the table, with the key of his drawer. He had barely taken in the fact that the young man's presence in the office was due to his intention to start by Circus Bill's trap at four in the morning, when he heard a continuous knocking at his office door. He instantly blew out the light and waited in silence, to find whether he was the victim of the insane fears that in so short a time had taken fast hold of him. But no, the knocking after a short intermission was renewed. He went to the office window and drew up the blind.

'Be 'ee there, Bill?' said a voice which he recognised as his brother's. He went out to him at once, finding a strange relief in the prospect of friendly companionship. At first he heard his brother's voice as if from a great distance. Dan Trevaskis was in dire trouble, and, all unconscious of the wild dismay in which he found his brother, he began to relate his tale. On the journey from Melbourne he had met his boy Dick on the way thereto—ran against him accidentally at one of the stations at which both trains called. He was looking miserably ill, and on being questioned he confessed to his father that he had embezzled some money, that he had left the Bank on ten days' leave of absence, and meant to run away somewhere. His father had brought him back with him; had walked with him from Yarranalla, twelve miles further off than Nilpeena. They had come by an indirect route, so as to meet no one on the way.

'I want to hide 'e, Bill. The lad can stay by me at that claim where I'm to work alone. Why, what 'ud be the good of 'e trying to run away? I'll make the money good to the Bank; but I can't abear to let 'em 'ave the boy to put in prison. I'd sooner die, by God I would!'

'Where is he now?' said Trevaskis, in a dull heavy voice.

'E's prestin' a bit away from here. . . . I didn't like to bring 'e up, in case anyone might be about with q'ee.'

Gradually, as Trevaskis listened to his brother, a scheme unfolded itself, vague at first, but gathering coherence as he thought it over.

In this youth fleeing from justice, and in his father eager above all things to screen him from the reach of the law, he might find the very instruments needed to free him from the horrible dilemma in which he found himself.

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To send this youth away under the name of Victor Fitz-Gibbon would afford him all the means necessary to secure the treasure and to see whether Victor recovered. If he did, he could be drugged, and left in the wastes around somewhere till he was discovered. Others might be suspected, and others might suffer, but at any rate this great crisis could be tided over. Only, till the boy was safely despatched, secrecy would be necessary as to that stricken life now hidden underground. If the worst came to the worst—if he died, he could get rid of the remains in a way that would absolutely defy detection. There was the limestone kiln³ all this week and the next, and at any time that the manager would choose to set it going, ready to calcine any matter that was cast into its depths.

A short time before Trevaskis left town, he had seen a play in which a murderer—a man who had designedly killed another for the sake of gain—had disposed of his victim in that manner.⁴

'This is what people mean when they say the stage has such good moral effects,' he thought; 'it helps them to scheme how to get away from a coil of suspicions. No one would believe that I hadn't killed Fitz-Gibbon because he was on the track of the hidden gold. But I didn't; it was all accidental. Now here's the way to get out of it all.' He felt his courage rising every moment.

'What do you think, Bill? Can't I keep him with myself all unbeknownst to anyone else?' said Dan, in an imploring voice.

'No, Dan, you can't; the thing has been tried over and over again, and always comes to grief,' answered Trevaskis coldly. And then, in the pause that ensued, he keenly noted the despair of the unhappy man, who was ready to embrace any scheme to save his boy from the shame and open disgrace that threatened him.

'There's only one plan that I can see to save him,' said Trevaskis in a moody, yet half indifferent tone.

'What is that, Bill? tell me for God's sake!' cried Dan.

There was silence for a moment or two, and then Trevaskis answered, in the tones of one who is not supremely interested:

'There is a young swell here who wants for some reason of his own to be quit of his friends for a time without leaving the country. There is a wool-ship⁵ leaving Port Pellew the day after to-morrow. If anyone left by that vessel in his name I believe he would pay handsomely-----'

'Oh, Bill! Bill! would 'e let my boy go?—but tell me, has this young swell done nothing 'isself?' cried Dan with breathless eagerness.

'Nothing in the world, in the way you mean,' answered Trevaskis, still maintaining the cold aspect of a man not committed to one side or the other.

'Would 'e let my lad Dick go in place of 'e?'

'I believe he would, and pay his way,' answered Trevaskis, turning to fumble for his pipe and tobacco-pouch. He smoked as a rule only at night, and kept these on the mantelpiece of his office. He had lit only a candle, and he felt somehow safer to be away from his brother's observation while he threw out these baits as if they were half-random suggestions, unconnected with any vital interests of his own.

'Then, Bill, for God's sake let my boy go for him!' cried Dan, standing up and placing his hand on Trevaskis' arm.

'Go and call him in,' said Trevaskis curtly. Dan at once hurried outside. Then Trevaskis unlocked the iron safe in his office and took out a little leathern bag which held a hundred sovereigns. He had thought it safer to keep some gold coin by him, and now his forecasts were strangely confirmed. He was fast approaching the old self-complacent standpoint, in which his 'luck' appeared to him as a definite valuable possession, to be calculated and acted upon. With this bag of sovereigns in his pocket he went with a lighted candle into the purser's office. There was Victor's Gladstone bag all ready packed, with his ulster and travelling cap on a chair by the sofa on which he had thrown himself down under his travelling rug. He unlocked the drawer of the desk at which Victor habitually worked, and found the large envelope enclosing the safe key addressed in his bold running hand:

Captain Trevaskis,
Colmar Mine.

The envelope had been so hurriedly closed that by slipping in the point of his penknife the paper yielded under a little pressure without the least tear.

Trevaskis reflected that someone might call by arrangement to waken the purser before four. He therefore threw the window wide open, poured water into the wash-hand basin, which stood in an iron frame near it, washed his hands, and threw the wetted towel carelessly on the edge of the stand, and then flung various articles

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about on the bunk, giving the place that air of disorder which a room wears when one leaves it hurriedly. Then he gathered up Victor's effects and took them to his own room. There the father and son awaited him.

Trevaskis wasted no time in preambles of any kind.

'I'm going to help you out of this mess you've got into, Dick, but mind, you have to keep your wits about you. You'll get out of the train at Oswald township, and change into the one for Port Pellew at mid-day. You'll get into the Port at seven in the evening, and put up at the Kangaroo Inn. It's about the middle of the township, facing the jetty, and the nearest inn to the station. Here's a note—book and pencil; just enter these directions. . . . Yes—well—there are two wool-ships advertised to sail on Saturday, early in the day. Go by the first one that sails. Now, mark me, your line is to leave evidence which will lead people to believe you are one Victor Fitz-Gibbon, but you are not to go in his name. Dan, what name had this unfortunate boy better go under? W. T. had better be the initials, because he'll have to take a stock of my things. William Thompson—that will do—that will do.'

'And 'ow's 'e to give out that 'e's Fitz-Gibbon, Bill? Is 'e to make any statement?' said Dan, who was quivering with excitement as he listened.

'Nothing of the sort,' answered Trevaskis. 'In the first place, he's to post me this letter the first thing.' He produced the envelope Victor had addressed, and into it he put two or three folded official documents that he took off his own table—papers of the kind that might have been casually in the purser's possession.

'See, I'll put a stamp on it, and it will be all ready for posting, and mind you post it the very first thing before you go to the inn. Then, in your bedroom, be careful to forget this little packet—look, there are three letters, all addressed "Victor Fitz-Gibbon, Colmar Mine, Colmar," as well as a couple of his visiting-cards. Go into your room the last thing before starting, and put these into a drawer in the toilet-table or some such place. Your name won't appear at all; they don't treat these ships like passenger vessels. You'll pay the captain for your passage. You'll go first class, and directly you land in London go to the post-office; there will be letters awaiting you there, and I'll make arrangements with a friend in the City to give you some work in an office till we can see our way to your coming back. Here's a hundred sovereigns for you.'

Trevaskis, as he spoke, emptied the little leathern bag on the table, and the money fell in a glittering shower.

'Oh, uncle, that is too much! You are too good to me,' said Dick, penetrated with the thought of his kinsman's disinterested generosity.

He was a tall, loose-jointed youth, with pale eyes and rather a foolish mouth, but there were as yet no vicious lines in his face, and the sight of his father's silent misery pierced him to the heart.

Trevaskis filled one of his largest portmanteaus with clothes and linen. As the preparations drew to a close, poor Dan began to feel certain misgivings.

'Oh, Bill! don't 'ee think if 'ee spoke for my lad to the directors and managers they'd look over this? I'd be more nor willin' to make up the money. 'Twas only fifty pound, all told,' he said, speaking to Trevaskis in a low voice.

'Just enough to get him four years in the stockade,⁶ and put the stain of a convict on him for life,' answered Trevaskis, closing the portmanteau with a sharp click. 'As for my speaking to anyone on his behalf, if I was a wealthy member of Parliament, and all the rest of it, I might do some good; as it is, I vwould only give them the clue where to send the police for him.'

Dan shrank back as if he were struck, and offered no further resistance. At three all was ready.

'You had better walk down with your portmanteau, and wait a little beyond Scroog's inn till the coach starts,' said Trevaskis, turning to his nephew. But the father in Dan rose tyrannously.

'Just 'alf a minute for myself and the lad, Bill!' he said in a tremulous voice, and then he stepped outside with his son. The night was very sultry, the sky heavily overcast with clouds.

There was a high, hot wind, dense with dust.

'Dick, my boy, wyou're going far from me. I want to say a few words to you, but I'm whizzy like.'

Dan stopped abruptly. He made an effort to go on, but the words ended in short stifled sobs. There was so much he would like to have said, now that the moment of parting had come, and he thought bitterly that to send his son away to the far ends of the earth, with a lie in his mouth as it were, was not a hopeful antidote for the evil courses into which he had fallen. But probably no form of set words or remonstrances could have reached the heart and conscience of the lad as did the sound of his father's broken voice.

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'I oft to have set you a better ensample, I know,' he went on, when he could make his voice audible.

'Oh, father, don't say that; you've always been too good to me!' cried Dick, his own voice shattered and full of tears. 'You kept me long at school, and got me a good easy billet, and now xI have given you nothing but trouble.'

'If you was only a little youngster once more, Dick, and I could keep you! but to be going from me like this, it takes the 'eart out o' me.'

Dan looked round, as if with some wild and sudden thought of escape. The silent and desolate salt-bush plains did not seem to him as forbidding as the wide, cruel world beyond, to which his boy was fleeing in disgrace.

'But if I kep' you they would tear you from me, and make a gaol-bird of you. Oh, Dick! will you come to that after all? Oh, I'm afeerd, I'm afeerd-----'

'No, father, no! I promise you on my knees!' cried the lad in an agony of remorse and grief, kneeling down where he stood.

'Say your prayers to me, Dick, as you used to when you was a little chap,' whispered the father.

When they re-entered Trevaskis' office it was half-past three. He had some tea and bread-and-butter ready, and Dick did his best to eat and drink; but it was rather a melancholy failure. The first gleams of daylight were struggling through the warm dust-laden air as he went on his way. Half an hour later the coach started from Scroog's inn, amid a lusty chorus. Several of the passengers were lucky diggers, who had spent the night in drinking and gambling. The refrain

'We won't go home till morning, Till daylight does appear,'⁷

fell on Dan's ears with a mocking hilarity, as he watched the trap whirling away, with Dick wedged in between two other passengers on the back-seat.

- a. heat] the heat Adl
- b. head] hand Adl
- c. than] than to E1
- d. hands] hand Adl E1
- e. looking] looked* Adl
- f. upon] on Adl E1
- g. on] in Adl
- h. arise] arise up Adl
- i. hastily] hazily Adl E1
- j. explosion] the explosion Adl E1
- k. of] Om. Adl
- l. of concussion . . . his notice] that had come under his notice of concussion of the brain Adl E1
- m. continuous] low continuous Adl E1
- n. distance] distant* E1
- o. him; had walked with] Om.* Adl
- p. restin'] resting Adl
- q. 'ee] 'e E1
- r. means] time Adl E1
- s. reason] reasons Adl E1
- t. pocket] possession E1
- u. iron] open Adl
- v. would] should E1
- w. you're] you are Adl
- x. I have] I've Adl E1

Chapter IV.

It would be hard to say which of the two men who watched Circus Bill's trap disappear in a great cloud of red dust felt most perplexed and miserable.

'I wish to Gord I 'ad a—took 'e back to the boss o' the bank, sooner than let 'e slide alike this,' said Dan slowly, his massive face quivering, his eyes dim and bloodshot.

Trevaskis made no reply. In the calm dawn of bthe day the conviction grew on him that his action in hiding Victor in the cave room was a plan so dangerous that it could have originated only in an intoxicated brain; but now the die was cast, and so far chance had favoured him. All the passengers, except Dick, were people from the diggings, and the driver who had taken Bill's place was a stranger to the mine.

He pondered how and when he should reveal the real situation to Dan. Suppose Fitz–Gibbon should die? Trevaskis felt the possibility had to be faced, and he decided that in such an event he must have no confidant. He decided, too, that in any case it would be best to let his brother remain in ignorance till Dick was beyond recall.

'You're low and miserable, Dan, and I don't wonder at it,' he said kindly, putting his hand on his brother's shoulder. 'Come in, old man, and have a good stiff nobbler or two of brandy, and go to bed. I'll make one up for you in the room off my office; I've had it cleared out on purpose. But perhaps you'd better not go to bed for an hour or two. Hang about and show yourself when the night corel comes up, and the morning one goes down; we don't want to give anyone the chance of saying you're hiding here.'

'You're right there, Bill,' answered Dan; 'I'll go across to the ingin–room and 'ave a pitch wi' 'Zilla. . . . And, Bill, do'ee not leave the grog about. . . . Thee know'st 'tis not pors'ble for me to 'ave just one nip, and be ended . . . and I want to keep feer2 sober and daicent, and say a word or two to the Lord for my boy, night and day. 'E may turn a deaf ear, but I'll just give 'E a chance to 'ear me.'

But Trevaskis had no thought of furthering those good intentions. He prepared a bed for Dan in the empty room between his own office and the ironmongery store, locking the door that led into the latter. On a box beside the bed he put a tin of biscuits, a jug of water, a tumbler, and a freshly–opened bottle of brandy. On the evening of the next day this was empty, and Trevaskis filled it once more with the same liquor. It was late on Monday before Dan recovered his senses, sick and sorry, and ashamed and miserable, to the last degree.

In these four days Trevaskis felt as if he had lived as many years. During the first day every succeeding hour seemed to deepen his despairing hopelessness, his impotent rage at his own imbecility. If he had only left Victor lying senseless with the keys in the safe! But his brain had been paralyzed. At first the plan of making it appear that Victor had taken ship from Port Pellew had seemed a godsend; now he perceived quicksands on every side, and felt that each step he took to avoid suspicion and inquiry might eventually become a strong link in a chain of damning evidence.

At the end of forty–eight hours Victor showed signs of returning consciousness. After that, when Trevaskis attended him, he wore the wig and long gray beard which transformed him into an old man. To ensure himself still more against recognition, he also wore the smoke–coloured sun–glasses. On Monday morning, after giving Victor an egg beaten up with water and sugar, Trevaskis noticed him looking round, and trying to raise one of his hands. If he were well attended to, he might be himself again in a few days. As this accident had taken place without any design on his part, might it not be better to leave the young man alone for a day or two? This would at least retard his crecovery.

As Trevaskis pondered the question, he went out through his office door and walked round the mine. 'Stone dead hath no fellow.'³ The words seemed to resound in his ears, to be hissed at him by everything he passed. Could he—would he do it? In imagination, he followed himself, on a dark night, with a strange burden to the edge of the lime–kiln pit, with its lurid flames leaping high. . . . Was this what he was coming to hour by hour, and step by step?

'No, no, no! never! never!' he cried, starting back as if from an obstructing barrier. He returned to his office. On the table lay the mail, as it had been delivered to him untouched. Now, on turning over the papers and letters, he found two from Port Pellew. One was for Dan. He opened it, and read the following lines:

'Dear Father,

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'Don't be uneasy about me. I'll never, never forget what you and uncle have done for me. I'm sailing by the Arcadia⁴ in an hour. I've done everything uncle arranged. Father, I'll never forget my promise to you.

'Dick.'

The look of the other envelope, addressed in Victor's bold, careless handwriting, with the Port Pellew post-mark and date, sharp and clear, revived Trevaskis' courage in a wonderful way. He instantly wrote a few lines to Mr. Drummond, expressing a little surprise that Mr. Fitz-Gibbon had gone to Port Pellew, without mentioning his change of plan. At least he (Trevaskis) inferred he had gone there, from the receipt of the enclosed envelope, which merely contained a few official documents. He had entrusted some commissions to Mr. Fitz-Gibbon, which needed prompt attention, and he would be glad therefore to know whether he had yet reached town. In order to save time, he was making inquiries at Port Pellew by the same post.

Then he wrote to the landlord of the Kangaroo Inn, asking whether a Mr. Victor Fitz-Gibbon had put up at his hotel on Friday last, and if so whether he was still there.

After that he felt reassured, till on going to see Victor again near sunset.

He found him murmuring some words over and over. He listened intently, and heard him say:

'Have you my letter, Helen? Helen, have you my letter?'

Helen? Was it, then, possible that the young man's abrupt change of plan was due to some woman, and had nothing to do with the question of searching for gold? Here Trevaskis saw himself threatened with a hitherto unsuspected danger. He knew that Victor's mother was on the other side of the world, and that he had no sister. An uncle's anxiety might be easily satisfied; a brother would in all probability calmly accept the first version furnished by circumstantial evidence; other friends would smile and suspect the young man had some good reason for secretly setting off on a long voyage. . . . But a woman—one who perhaps loved him? Each circumstance that served to satisfy others might in her estimation be a ground for added suspicion.

'Helen, have you my letter?'

Trevaskis listened again with laboured breath, and a dull, heavy beating in his temples.

After a short time Victor fell fast asleep. Trevaskis, devoured with fresh terrors, went to the purser's office, with the purpose of searching for some clue to this new complication. In the table drawer he found the letter which Victor had begun to write to Miss Paget:

'Dear Helen,

'When, at the close of our voyage in the Mogul, I asked that our friendship might have a firmer basis, and you laughingly suggested that the sea breezes had got into my head, I thought you were laying too much stress on the difference in our ages; and when, a few days after landing, I asked you to become my wife, I thought you were a little hard-hearted in stipulating for a period of probation, so that the strength of my affection might be tested. But now I find that you were wise. For though my esteem for you is and always will remain unaltered——'

That was all. The letter broke off abruptly. But after reading this fragment, Trevaskis opened Victor's desk, and read one by one the letters which he had received from Miss Paget since coming to the mine. Then the telegram from King George's Sound⁵ completed the record. Trevaskis locked the unfinished letter where he had found it with a lightened mind. If this young lady were harder to satisfy than Victor's other friends, as to his hurried departure, this half-sheet of writing would probably prove very useful.

It was after sunset when Dan, haggard and miserable, with throbbing temples and confused faculties, staggered out of the room in which he had been lying most of the time unconscious since Friday afternoon.

Trevaskis met him with a hot, strong cup of what he called 'coffee royal,'⁶ which Dan took and gulped down in silence.

'Here's a letter from Dick,' said the younger brother after a pause.

Dan read the few lines, and his shaking hands grew more tremulous.

'Thank God 'e's got safe away!' he murmured. 'But what's the use o' me taking God's name in vain? . . . I'm worse than the brute beasts that perish!'⁷ he added with bitter emphasis.

'You'll be better after this, Dan,' said Trevaskis, who, now that the moment for making his revelation had come, felt as if all capacity of emotion had been left far behind. He was conscious only of a cold curiosity as to how this hiding of an injured man underground would strike his brother.

'Yes, I'll be better,' repeated Dan slowly. Then after a pause, 'If I could only resist the devil. You meant it for the best, Bill; but I'd give anything I 'adn't 'ad this burst of drink. It's more 'n a year that I didn't give way till I

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went back to Bendigo, and now there's all that time to make up. For a few months at a time I don't feel no satersfaction for keeping from the drink, for I allays says to myself, "You've gone this length before, old boy, but you was overcome at the end." There's some people as says there ain't no devil but what's in our own insides. But when a man finds 'isself doin' something as drags him down and down, and makes ghim bad in body and soul, 'ow are you to give a haccount of it but through the devil?'

Dan was not skilful in dialectics, but probably the most subtle metaphysician could not better define that tragic contest which is constantly going on in human life, between conscience and appetite, with such varying and infinitely disastrous results.

'I don't know! Sometimes to forget everything that's ever happened or can come to you is the best you can do,' returned Trevaskis sombrely.

'Well, I'm thankful, Bill, that though you've your hups and downs in money, you don't know nothing of that sort of misfortune,' said Dan.

Trevaskis looked hard into his brother's face without speaking.

'Leastaways, I 'opes not, Bill. But you look very bad—is anything the matter?'

'Just come with me for a bit,' said Trevaskis, and in silence the two men walked down through the narrow iron passage till they came to the entrance of the cave room. Here Trevaskis lit a shaded kerosene lamp, and went to the recess on the right-hand side of the room, in which Victor was lying.

When Dan caught sight of the still, stretched form and white face, he gave one of those sudden violent starts which may often be seen on the stage, and occasionally in real life. As for Trevaskis, he stood holding the lamp in his right hand, and staring straight before him, till his brother's hoarse, terror-stricken whisper broke the silence.

'O Lord in heaven, Bill, what is this? You didn't do it, you didn't! Tell me you didn't strike 'e down, and that 'e ain't a-dying!'

The horror of Dan's voice and face and action gave a curious stimulus to Trevaskis' imagination.

'No, Dan, I didn't do it, not wilfully. I'm as innocent in the matter as the babe unborn: only who would believe that? I'll tell you how it was in a few words. I found the buried gold I told you about, partly smelted, partly amalgam. I put it here for safety till you should come and cart it to the broken-down whim. This young man, who was purser at the mine, must have htaken into his head to come prowling about the night before he was to go on a journey. It was after midnight on Friday night.⁸ I was here, stooping over the gold, with only a candle stuck in a bottle—the one you see broken there. All at once some one rushes at me, catching me round the throat. I closed with him and flung him down in the dark, for the bottle with the candle was thrown down before I could turn round. When I lit it again I found it was Fitz-Gibbon, badly hurt.'

'Was it in place of 'e my boy went away?' asked Dan in a choking voice.

'Yes, I found out isomehow Fitz-Gibbon had reasons of his own for clearing out of the colony for a bit,' answered Trevaskis, plunging deeper into falsifications than he had any intention of doing when he began his garbled story. 'Then, as I was in the thick of it all, wondering what I was to do, you and Dick came along. . . . I was stupid to go so far for the sake of your boy; but it was in my head, like the beat of a hammer, how our name would be all over the country as criminals—your boy for theft; me for a murderous assault. But it will be all right yet, Dan; only let us stick by each other like men. I've written to the manager of the bank, enclosing a cheque for the full amount of Dick's stealings.'

'Don't, Bill, don't call it by that name; it go to my heart, it do,' said Dan, in a smothered voice.

Ultimately he fell in with all his brother's proposals. He consented to nurse Victor until he was sufficiently recovered to be conveyed by night, and left where he would be speedily found, either near Broombush Creek or Hooper's Luck. He fed and tended him day and night, sleeping on a shake-down near him. At the end of five days the drowsy stupor in which Victor lay the greater part of the time began to pass away; he was still delirious, but now and then he looked around and asked lucid questions.

When this improvement took place, Trevaskis thought it advisable to keep his faculties clouded till he should be strong enough to be moved; he therefore measured doses of laudanum from time to time out of the bottle he had found among Dunning's effects, and these doses Dan administered, knowing nothing of the nature of the drug. Its effects were varied. At times Victor became feverish and wildly delirious; at others he lay completely stupefied. At last Dan's suspicions were aroused. On the tenth night following the Monday on which he had taken charge, he slept very soundly. It was after six on Friday morning when he awoke; he found Victor lying awake,

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and talking at intervals, more calmly than he had done for days back.

'Have you any letters for me?' he asked, as Dan was busy warming some preserved chicken-broth over the spirit-lamp which he had for such purposes.

It should be here noted that Trevaskis had telegraphed to one of the grocers in town for a complete store of invalid requisites, and these had speedily arrived by the mail-coach from Nilpeena.

'I don't think there's any letters to-day; perhaps we may get some to-morrow. . . . But just now take this mug of broth, with a crumb of bread in it,' said Dan soothingly.

He helped Victor into a sitting position, propped him up with some pillows, and fed him.

'You are very good to me. . . . Have I seen you much before this?' asked Victor, in a puzzled tone; and jhe then began to look around him, into the dim slopes and irregularities of the place, in the midst of which the solitary kerosene lamp made but a faint island of light.

In half an hour after he had taken food, Dan gave his patient the dose of medicine that had been, as usual, mixed by Trevaskis on the previous night. In a quarter of an hour Victor sank into a state of stupor. When he woke up his talk was wildly incoherent.

After dark the manager came in with a brisk, cheerful air. From the hour that he was relieved from attendance on his victim, he had gained in health of mind and body. On the Monday night, when Dan took charge, Trevaskis had gone to bed at nine o'clock, and slept without a break till seven next morning. By Wednesday's mail he received two letters--one was from Victor's uncle, the other from the landlord of the Kangaroo Inn at Port Pellew.

Mr. Drummond was surprised at his nephew's sudden change of plan, but felt no alarm. He knew nothing of his proposed journey to town, and could only suppose that some circumstance, of which he was as yet ignorant, had caused Mr. Fitz-Gibbon to go to Port Pellew instead. He asked the manager to lose no time in communicating any further particulars that might come to his knowledge regarding the matter.

This Trevaskis was able to do to good effect. By that day's return mail he forwarded the note received from the landlord at Port Pellew, enclosing the visiting-cards and the envelopes addressed to Mr. V. Fitz-Gibbon which had been found in a drawer of the room occupied by that gentleman at the Kangaroo Inn on the previous Friday night. On the next morning, Saturday, he had taken passage by one of kthe sailing vessels which had left Port Pellew that day. In reply to this letter, one came from Mr. Drummond on Saturday, thanking Trevaskis for the trouble he had taken in the matter, saying that no letters had been received from Mr. Fitz-Gibbon prior to his departure, and that his brother had suggested Victor must have written some letters which had gone astray, and inquiries were accordingly being made at the Pellew post-office. Then, with this an official letter had come from the secretary of the company, relative to the appointment of a new purser at the Colmar. No word was written as to working or searching the cave room for gold, so it was evident that no importance had been attached to the matter, apart from Fitz-Gibbon's whim.

And now Trevaskis saw himself successful all along the line. Day by day the gold which he had first stolen and invested in mining shares was increasing. He was constantly studying the share-list, and telegraphing some fresh instructions to his lbroker. Almost every fresh sale, and each new investment, added to his wealth. What could he not do with the command of £20,000 in ready money? The longer he dwelt on the dazzling prospects before him, the more blind he became to the miserable fears which beset Dan in his strange and uncongenial task.

'Why, Dan, you are a first-rate nurse,' he said in high good-humour, as he came into the cave room on this Friday evening. 'I think you'd better take a turn in the open air, and I'll sit by your patient till you come back,' he added, either not seeing or ignoring the fixed, questioning look with which his brother regarded him.

'I don't much care to go out, Bill,' answered Dan slowly. 'Hanyone as meets me looks at me in a curious way, as much as to say, "This is the bloke as is down with fever." The larst time I went out I met 'Zilla----'

'What the devil does it matter who you meet?' answered Trevaskis roughly. 'You'd better have a mouthful of fresh air, for on Saturday I shall be busy all day, and in the evening I may have to ride across to Nilpeena, and not be back till late Sunday. He sleeps well, don't he?' he added, glancing carelessly at Victor.

'I think he sleeps too well, Bill. This mornin' he was nearly 'imself, lookin' at me and speakin' quite clear-like----'

'And then after his medicine he wasn't quite so clear in the head,' put in Trevaskis, who thought it, on the whole, more prudent at this juncture to let his brother know the real state of affairs.

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Dan nodded, looking at his brother with gloomy suspicion.

'Don't you see,' said Trevaskis, 'that if he's to be kept here another two weeks or so-----'

'Two weeks!' cried Dan, starting to his feet. 'Ah, you're druggin' 'e--you're druggin' 'e! You want to make 'e whizzy and gone in the mind. . . . I won't do it . . . I won't . . . I'll nurse 'e right or not at all.'

A tempestuous scene followed between the two. It ended in Trevaskis consenting to have Victor removed from the mine in five days from that time. After receiving this assurance, Dan went out into the fresh air. He walked towards Broombush Creek, and was away for two hours. During his absence Victor woke up and called Trevaskis by name several times. In his terror, Trevaskis gave him a larger dose of laudanum than he meant to administer. All that night, and till late in the afternoon of the next day, Victor lay in a torpid state, Dan sleeping and watching beside him, waking up now and then from miserable dreams, in which he was constantly occupied in carrying a corpse, and vainly seeking some spot in which it might be hidden. He became at last wild with the horror of it all. The rigid form and white, set face of the young man, the loneliness, the silence, the underground gloom, broken only by the feeble light of a lamp, drove him to desperation.

At last, within an hour of sunset, he made a sudden resolve to take Victor into Trevaskis' room, where he could have light and fresh air. He cleaned the invalid chair that was lying among the lumber of the cave room. One of the wheels was off, but he replaced it, and speedily improvised a lynch-pin out of an old wire-nail. Then he placed Victor in the chair, with a pillow under his head and a rug folded round him, and wheeled him slowly through the passage up to the offices.

'I don't care what Bill says to this,' he thought. 'The boy is dwinin'9 away for fresh air and light, and I won't sit by and see 'e die. Oh, A'mighty Gord, if everything is in your hands, give me a lift just now,' he said, pausing when close to the offices, near one of the little square windows that lit the iron passage, and gazing with affrighted eyes at Victor's livid face. To Dan's distempered brain it seemed as if the young man's breathing had entirely ceased. He knelt by him, feeling his pulses with rough, tremulous fingers. Presently his growing terror was relieved by hearing Victor give a long low sigh. At the same instant a dog sprang up outside against the four small panes of glass, with short, joyous barks of recognition. A clear sweet voice called out 'Spot, Spot!' but the dog did not move. And then, as Dan was in the act of beginning to wheel the chair once more, he suddenly caught sight of a beautiful young girl looking in at the window. He reached it with one leap, and tore down the dark-green blind which was fastened above the panes of glass. In less than sixty seconds he had gained Trevaskis' bedroom and lifted Victor on to the bed.

- a. like] Om.* Adl
- b. the] Om. Adl E1
- c. recovery] discovery Adl
- d. felt] had felt Adl
- e. one] one of* Adl
- f. the] a* Adl
- g. him] 'im Adl E1
- h. taken] taken it Adl E1
- i. somehow Fitz-Gibbon] Fitz-Gibbon somehow E1
- j. he then] then he Adl E1
- k. the] the two Adl
- l. broker. Almost] broker, and almost Adl

Chapter V.

Solomon Olsen's general store was a great resort for the miners' wives on Saturday afternoons. On these occasions the weekly bills were paid, and supplies for the coming week were bought. Those who had young babies nourished them with frank unreserve, sitting by the counters on each side of the store, and giving their orders after a very leisurely fashion. They filled up the pauses between their purchases with such gossip as the Colmar Mine afforded them, after they had exhausted the more engrossing events of a domestic nature.

'And did you hear that Jack Teague was sent to the right—about because 'e missed two shifts through illness?' one would say. 'Yes, when 'e went back at 'leven at night, the cap'en said to 'e, "'Ump your bluey and clear." But 'tis not so easy clearin', I think, wi' a wife and mother—in—law and three youngsters.'

'The manager be getten' more and more onreasonable,' another would respond. 'There's my boy Jan, as hard—workin' a chap as ye'll find. And the cap'en 'e come along t'other day. "Jan," sez 'e, "thee beest a pretty man for an 'ammer. Thee beat'st just like a thing.² Can't a'e thump better 'n that?" ' and so forth.

On this special Saturday afternoon, however, the great theme was the conduct of Dr. Magann, the mine—doctor, as he was generally called, being in point of fact almost entirely supported by the miners, who, since he settled at Colmar, were pledged to pay him so much weekly out of their wages. A few days previously a woman had been taken suddenly ill, but the doctor, when sent for, was found to be too unwell to leave his bed. So the patient had died 'without the help of no doctor,' as the people phrased it.

'Mind you, I don't say as he'd do she a mossel o' good,' one voluble woman explained. 'But it don't seem right to 'ave a post—mortor affair on a decent female in bher own 'ouse, as if she was can unbeknown tramp, as died through the visitation o' Gord A'mighty through bein' drunk four week on end.'

'And what is this deep larned complaint the doctor said at th' inkwest she died of?' said another, who had opened the weekly paper she had called for at the post on her way to the store.

'dHannererism,'³ said a neighbour, peeping over her shoulder. 'Who'd a—thought that 'ad anything to do with the 'eart. It's just wonderful 'ow them doctors efind things out, and calls 'em by names as nobody would think of.'

'Indeed, as for that, Mrs. Penlevin,' said the woman who held the newspaper, 'I fthink they inwents diseases, the same as they does pills. It don't seem reasonable as they can tell so many things from another as goes on quite inside o' folkses.'

'Well, but that's why they cut open frogs and corpses, Mrs. Piersen, so as to find out the proper nateral name o' hillnesses,' returned Mrs. Penlevin slowly.

'Indeed, then I can't believe as 'ow the karkiss o' a toad, be it iver so wise as some people says, can learn them so much about the inside o' a Christian,' said another sceptic. 'An' if we're to be cut hopen, and put in the papers for dyin' peaceable to 'ome, I don't see much good in paying for a doctor. Why, Miss Lindsay, as comes about to us, does three times more good, wi' 'er flowers, an' jellies, an' sweet looks.'

'Oh, she's a hanjull, she is, and no mistake!' said a dark—faced little woman, who was nursing a two—months—old baby near the open door. 'And there she is a—comin' at this moment,' she added, looking out.

Doris had alighted from the pony—chaise and given the reins to Shung—Loo. When she came into the store she stood speaking to one and all of the women assembled there. Mr. Olsen was at one counter, his wife at the other. Solomon Olsen was a large, thick—set man, with a swarthy complexion, a big hooked nose, black hair and whiskers, a retreating forehead, and restless black eyes swimming in fat. He had a loud, voluble utterance and an invincible self—assurance. He looked as if his whole heart and soul were perpetually engrossed in small, mean plots for making more money than he ought out of his fellow—creatures. Yet on entering the little sitting—room behind the store, the first object that caught the eye was a faded picture on a parchment, hanging on the eastern wall. Above this was inscribed, in half—erased Hebrew characters, the words 'From this side blows the breath of life.'⁴ It was a picture of Jerusalem, that wonderful old ruined city, which has so long lain desolate in the sight of 'all that passed by,'⁵ and yet towards which, through the long ages, so many wistful eyes are turned from far—separated and alien lands in prayer, and at the hour of death, looking for the fulfilment of the words that were traced under this picture, also in Hebrew: 'Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate; I the Lord have spoken it, and gI will do it.'⁶

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It was opposite this curious old-world picture, with its mystical inscriptions, that Doris waited for Mrs. West, who was making a very slow recovery from the nervous illness which had followed the shock of her husband's terrible death and the total destruction of her home and all that it contained.

Doris had been to see her several times previously. The last occasion was five days before this, and Mrs. West had then expressed a great wish to accept her brother's invitation to stay with him for some time at the Halfway House, the inn which he had opened midway between Colmar and Broombush Creek. But the passenger van was always so crowded with rowdy men, and she and Dick were so weak and easily shaken, that she could not yet undertake the journey. Poor little Dick had an attack of low fever hanging about him, which did not lay him up quite, but grew worse and better from day to day with lingering tediousness.

'He's laying down just now, and don't seem quite hisself, poor little man!' his mother said, as she came into the sitting-room. 'He keeps on talkin' o' the fire, and the smoke being in h'is heyes. I'm most sure if I could get him away the change 'ud do 'im good.'

'That is partly why I came to-day,' said Doris. 'I know of a good way to get you over to your brother's. An old friend of ours, Mr. Kenneth Campbell-----'

'The old man as sells awful religious books, and carries on so about people's souls and the Sabbarth day, is it, Miss Lindsay?' said Mrs. West, with a slight accent of alarm.

'Yes, he sells books, and often gives them away,' answered Doris, who hardly recognised Kenneth under this description. 'The day before yesterday he took poor Mick Doolan, and another man who had been very ill of fever, across to the hospital at Broombush Creek. He has a nice roomy waggon, covered in, and when I told him about you and little Dick, he said at once he would take you to your brother's.'

'I know 'e's very good and kind like, and always ready to do things for everybody as is in trouble; but it just seems to me as if I couldn't bear the thought of being spoke to about my soul, and what's to become o' me in the other world, Miss Lindsay,' said the woman tearfully. 'You see, I'm so hard put to just now in this one, and it's so dismal about ipoor West, for if it's all true ole Campbell says, my pore man 'ud 'ave a bad time of it altogether, for I know he wasn't very sober. But I do think as the Lord 'ud take into account 'is jbein' burnt to death, and not go on at 'im with the same like-----'

'Oh, don't think about such dreadful things, please don't,' said Doris in a pained voice. As she had never been taught anything regarding eternal torment, and had read very little on the subject, she had but a vague comprehension of Mrs. West's meaning.⁷ 'Poor dear Kenneth would never think of talking in a way that would worry you. He is ready to take you to-morrow afternoon.'

'An' bein' Sunday, too. Oh, Miss Lindsay, 'e could never keep 'is tongue off o' me.'

'Well, I will come with you; you'll see that poor old Kenneth is just the soul of kindness,' said Doris, half laughing and half vexed.

Mrs. West's face brightened at once.

'Oh, if you come, Miss Lindsay---but isn't it a deal too much, a young lady like you to come in that waggon, and all for me? Poor little Dick 'ull be that pleased; but it's just too much trouble.'

'It's no trouble at all. I thought of taking you over in my pony-trap before, but Mrs. Challoner did not like me to go with only Shung to take care of me---the working men are so rude to the Chinese⁸---and I want you and Dick to be safe away before we leave. Yes, we are to go a day or two after Christmas. Mr. Challoner is well enough to travel. The change to a cooler climate will do him good, and he wants to see his brother before he sails.'

Mrs. West was incoherently voluble as to the sorrow that would be felt at Doris's departure, and, indeed, of all the Stonehouse household. Then, as Doris rose to go, she said with sudden animation:

'There, now, I was as near as could be to forgettin' agin to ast you about Mr. Fitz-Gibbon. I've lheered so many rummers. Is it true, Miss Lindsay, as he went right off in a wool or wheat ship to England or the Cape?'

At the mention of Victor's name a quick tinge of colour mounted in Doris's face; but there was no perceptible change in her voice as she answered:

'Yes, it seems he sailed from Port Pellew two weeks ago to-day.'

'And never said nothin' to nobody about it?'

'He spoke about the ships at Port Pellew to the manager the day before he left; but we think he could not have known then, and that it may have been some sudden message he got on the way.'

'Well, it may seem conceited, but I can't believe some'ow as he meant to go like that, when he started without

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saying a word to me. I don't know as you knew him much, Miss Lindsay. He was boardin' at the Arms with us till we was burnt out; and, of course, you know as he saved poor little Dick from the flames. A nicer, m kinderhearted young gentleman never lived. Not a day after the accident but he come in to see me and Dick. Last Wednesday was a fortnight the last time he come. "I'm going to town for a few days," sez he. "Can I do anything for you, Mrs. West?" he says; and then he turns to Dick, and Dick climbs up on 'is knees. Blesh you, ma'am, that little chap was friendlier with him the first day he come to the Arms than ever he got to be with 'is own poor par, who 'adn't what you might call a sweet temper at no time. And we was out of a cook, and the way he would put up with everything, and smile and be nso pleased! . . . "Well, Dick," he says that Wednesday, "what shall I bring you from town?" "A little cock to crow in the morning," says Dick; and then Mr. Fitz-Gibbon says: "Is there jam on your fingers, Dick? No, there isn't; nor butter, nor treacle. You're a wonderful young man this afternoon. Now, here's a oletter for you; hold it tight in your hand so, and don't open it till I'm gone, and give it to your ma to take care on." I just thought it was his pleasant way to amuse the child, but what do you think it was, Miss Lindsay?'

Miss Lindsay admitted her inability to guess, but she was listening with a look of vivid pleasure.

'Well, it was a five-pound note inside o' a little henvelope. No, I'm sure he never knowed he was going that there journey, and why should he? I don't know whether it's on account o' hillness and bein' pnervous through qmisfortunes, Miss Lindsay, but several nights since I hear this tale I've lay awake hours and hours, wonderin' if nothin' hasn't gone amiss, or if it isn't one o' them strange things as 'appens sometimes.' Mrs. West's voice sank mysteriously as she said this.

'I think it is perhaps because you are feeling ill,' said Doris, after a little pause. 'What we think is, that he got a message from someone at Nilpeena; that he was wanted at the Cape of Good Hope, and that, as he knew a wheat-ship was going there direct, he went by it. He posted a letter to the manager from Port Pellew, and very likely he sent some others that went astray. I know several of our letters were lost at Buda.'

Doris was going over in detail the laboured explanation that had been arrived at by several people in succession, in face of an inexplicable event. A loss her mother had sustained of some important documents, through the carelessness of the local postmaster, whose children were found to have amused themselves with opening and tearing up letters, was fresh in Doris's recollection. Some similar catastrophe appeared to her to be the clue to Victor's strange silence, when, instead of going to Adelaide as he had arranged, he went and took ship to England or the Cape of Good Hope, no one was quite sure which.

A few days after Victor's supposed departure, before anything had taken place to make it apparent that his plans were not carried out, Trevaskis had gone to Stonehouse to ask after Challoner. In the course of conversation with Mrs. Challoner, he had casually mentioned that it appeared Mr. Fitz-Gibbon, instead of going to Adelaide, had taken a trip to Port Pellew; that he had received a letter from him, posted from there.

'Perhaps he'll take a trip to the Cape or to England from there,' he added, half laughingly.

Mrs. Challoner asked him what made him think so.

'Oh, it just struck me, when I got his letter posted from there, enclosing some papers without saying a word as to his altered arrangements. The day before he went away he said something about these sailing-ships. . . . But, at any rate, I'll know in a day or two, for there was something I wanted to find out, and I sent him a letter, in rcare of the principal hotel-keeper of the place.'

Trevaskis all through maintained an easy, unperturbed tone, as if there would be nothing after all to surprise or alarm one if Victor had taken this extraordinary course.

Three days later the manager again called at Stonehouse.

'It is as I thought about Mr. Fitz-Gibbon,' he said, after a little talk on indifferent subjects. 'I got a letter from the landlord of the principal inn to-day. The young gentleman who had stopped a night at his place sailed on Saturday last by one of the ships, and in his room he had found a little packet, which he enclosed to me. That little packet held three of Mr. Fitz-Gibbon's letters and two of his visiting-cards. So there's snow no doubt of it. I hope he'll have a pleasant voyage.'

'But why should he go like that, without telling any of us? Did Mr. Fitz-Gibbon say anything to you girls about going to England shortly?' said Mrs. Challoner, turning to Doris and Euphemia, who were sitting near her and listening to all that passed.

'He spoke of going about the same time that we did to meet his mother,' said Doris, after a little pause.

A sudden light came into the manager's face.

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'Ah, that's it, you may depend. Perhaps she came as far as the Cape, and, who knows? he may have written letters that have gone astray. I expect his uncle may know more. I've written to him all I know, and sent him the landlord's letter, and the only one that came to my hands from him.'

So the evidence had been gradually built up. In the midst of the perplexity that often overcame Doris when she thought over this strange, sudden voyage, this firm conviction was her stay—Victor must have written to her, to explain all, and the letter must have been lost. She had not at any time been actively unhappy, but within the last two days a moral and physical languor had fallen upon her. She ate very little, her head often felt heavy, her sleep was uncertain and full of disturbed dreams. On the previous night she had been in a curiously clairvoyant state. The night was warm and the wind high, swaying the avenue trees around Stonehouse ceaselessly with weird melancholy sounds that awakened vague misgivings of she knew not what indefinable ills. She fell asleep and woke up, again and again, repeatedly dreaming evil dreams. She saw things as they actually were in life, without any of the haze or uncertainty of visions. Faces and tones floated round her of all the people she had ever known—a strange zone of foreboding sounds, of countenances averted, and fixed on someone who was lying motionless on a low couch underground. She could not get near this couch, and she did not see the face of the one who was lying on it; but gradually the conviction grew upon her it was Victor. And when she awoke, feelings of dread and uneasiness for the first time took possession of her. They were now revived by Mrs. West's apprehensions.

'I can't think as 'ow everythink should 'appen together like that,' she said in answer to Doris's supposition about letters having gone astray. 'Do you know, Miss Lindsay, whether he was taking any gold with him to town?'

Doris had heard nothing of his doing so. Why should such an event, if it had occurred, have any significance?

'I dunno,' said Mrs. West slowly. 'There's so many wicked things done for the sake o' gold.⁹ When my brother-in-law Olsen told me as Mr. Fitz-Gibbon 'ad gone off secret like and sudden, I up and said at once, "There's suthin' at the bottom of this as isn't right. Perhaps someone is makin' believe in the matter because of some wickedness or another." '

The words kept ringing in Doris's ears as she drove slowly back. They so completely engrossed her thoughts that it was not until she had been in the house for some little time she remembered that she was to have called to see Mrs. Connell's elder little girl, who was now convalescent, and who looked forward to her visits from day to day with eager expectation. Doris could not bear the thought of Norah's disappointment. As it was now close on sunset, she could not stay any time, but she hastened down with a little coloured picture-book, which made the child very happy.

As Doris was returning, Spot behaved in a strange way. He ran up and down alongside the iron passage sniffing and barking, and absolutely refusing to leave it. Doris went out of her way and followed Spot along the passage for a little time, trying to coax him to follow her. She came opposite to one of the little square windows. At this Spot jumped up and began to bark with noisy joy. Doris looked in. At the same moment someone rushed to the window violently and drew down a blind. But not before a sight met her eyes so strange and incredible¹⁰ that her brain grew dizzy and her eyesight failed her.

- a. 'e] 'ee Adl E1
- b. her] 'er Adl E1
- c. an] a Adl E1
- d. Hannererism] Hanererism Adl E1
- e. find] finds Adl E1
- f. think] thenk Adl E1
- g. I] Om. Adl
- h. 'is] his Adl
- i. poor] pore Adl E1
- j. bein'] being Adl
- k. of] at that of E1
- l. heered] heard Adl E1
- m. kinderhearted] kinder-'earted Adl kinder/'earted E1
- n. so] as Adl E1
- o. letter] little letter Adl E1

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- p. nervous] nervis Adl E1
- q. misfortunes] misfortune Adl
- r. care] the care Adl E1
- s. now] Om. Adl
- t. it] that it Adl E1

Chapter VI.

Doris stood motionless for a few moments, supporting herself against the iron wall. Before any coherent purpose had formed itself in her mind she saw Trevaskis leading a saddled horse towards the office.

In a few seconds she had reached him. Before she could speak he had turned to her, his face full of concern, saying:

'What is it, Miss Lindsay? Is there anything wrong?'

'Do you know that Mr. Fitz-Gibbon is in there?' she said, pointing to the iron passage, her hand trembling, her voice low and quivering.

Aided by the information he had gleaned through reading Victor's half-written letter to Miss Paget, Trevaskis with instinctive quickness guessed all that underlay the girl's agitation.

'You are ill and nervous, Miss Lindsay,' he said in a studiously quiet and impressive voice. 'Would you like to come down through the iron passage and see for yourself?'

'Thank you, I should like to come at once,' she answered.

Trevaskis fastened his horse to a bridle-post in front of the offices. Then he opened the outer door of his own, saying, 'I will just get the key.' He passed into his bedroom. Dan was sitting by the bed: on it Victor was lying in a state of somnolent unconsciousness, muttering from time to time in a thick inarticulate voice. Dan Trevaskis, with a face aful of dull misery, fanned the sick man feebly from time to time.

'I've took 'e up, Bill. But, Gord 'elp us, 'e don't seem to me like as 'e'd live. 'Twas dreadful close down there; but 'tain't so much better 'ere. Bill, I must get a doctor to 'e some'ow or other. It breaks my b'art to see and c'ere 'e, it do—it do. If you was-----'

'Shut up, you miserable blatherskiter, will you!' cried Trevaskis, in an access of sudden fury. 'You went on mumbling and jabbering like this last night, and I told you we would get him away shortly; now you dared to take him up here without my leave—and what's the consequence? A girl comes to me with a white face, saying Fitz-Gibbon is in the iron passage.'

Without waiting for a reply to this speech, muttered in a low menacing tone, Trevaskis closed the door after him, and rejoined Doris with a bunch of keys in his hand. To open the door leading into the passage, to traverse it to the end, to light a bull's-eye lantern and let the partial gleam of it fall on the outer portion of the cave room, was the work of a few moments.

'I suppose you have been hearing rumours of Mr. Fitz-Gibbon's disappearance, and have become anxious on his account, Miss Lindsay?' said Trevaskis in a suavely sympathetic tone, as he walked beside Doris on her way towards Stonehouse.

'I do not know what to think,' she answered in a shaken voice.

Spot, whom Trevaskis had been careful to keep outside, made a dash at the door when it was opened, and now that it was shut he stood close against it with his nose to the ground, his eyes full of fiery animation. But Doris heeded him no longer. She did not even notice that he lingered behind.

'At any rate, you see that your strange fancy was a delusion. I took you in without a moment's delay, so that you could be under no mistake. You see, Miss Lindsay, the key of this passage never goes out of my possession; so that whatever motive Mr. Fitz-Gibbon might have for hiding, he couldn't do it without my knowledge.'

'Hiding!' repeated Doris, raising her head with a sudden haughty gesture. 'He would never hide—why should he?'

'How, then, could you think that he would be there?'

'There were some words running in my head,' returned Doris in a faint colourless voice. ' "Perhaps someone is making believe in the matter, because of some wickedness or another." And then I looked in at the little window where Spot was bounding up, and there—half lying down, his eyes closed, and his face white—oh, I am glad I was deceived! It was terrible-----'

'I am glad that I was on the spot,' said Trevaskis, speaking in a tone of kindly solicitude. His face had blanched visibly while Doris was speaking; now a dull red mounted in his cheeks, and settled in a deep rim under his eyes. 'I know what it is to be bothered with strange ideas—to fancy you see faces and things.'

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'Have you sometimes seen things like that, then?' asked Doris, with a feeling of relief.

'I had a touch of fever on me once, and I couldn't close my eyes but I saw crowds of faces and animals, and heard people talking and shouting,' answered Trevaskis slowly. 'And not only so, but at last, when I went about—I was so placed that I could not keep in bed, as I should have done—I began to fancy I saw people in all sorts of ways—some dancing, others lying down as if they were dead.'

Doris drew a long sigh. They had now reached the top of the reef, and looked down on Stonehouse with its surrounding trees, and the illimitable western plain, gray and silent, and lightly flushed with the crimson afterglow which lit up the sky.

'You are sure that no one but yourself can get into that iron passage?' she said. And then, without waiting for an answer, 'I think it would be better to search that underground room well.'

'I was down there for some hours this afternoon,' said Trevaskis, repressing with an effort the strong irritation roused by the persistence of her impression. 'It is very good of you to be so much interested in one who is almost a stranger to you. I had a letter from his uncle this morning. He does not seem so very much surprised. I have been wondering whether the young lady he was engaged to marry knows-----'

'The young lady?' repeated Doris, looking up with a puzzled look, as if she had not heard aright.

'Yes; Miss Helen Paget. Mr. Fitz-Gibbon is engaged to be married to her, I believe,' answered Trevaskis with slow emphasis, watching the girl's face as he spoke with malicious keenness. But he was not rewarded by any signs of distress or confusion. Her calm gravity was undisturbed, outwardly at least. A look of perplexity, perhaps of unbelief, rose in Doris's eyes. Trevaskis, disconcerted by her clear, unconfused gaze, took refuge in pulling out his watch, awaiting with nervous eagerness her reply. But she made none. Seeing Kenneth Campbell approach on his way towards the mine, she bowed to Trevaskis with simple dignity, saying:

'I am obliged to you for taking me into the passage, but I must not keep you any longer. I think I must talk to my old friend Mr. Campbell about poor Mrs. West. We are going to take her across to her brother's place to-morrow.'

Trevaskis retraced his steps with a feeling of baffled uncertainty which added fuel to the rage that smouldered in his mind against his brother. He had long ere this found the futility of endeavouring to act as though he were 'quite on the square.'¹ He was terrified lest he should make some move that might ultimately wreck all in the end. For in the involved, dangerous game he was playing, circumstances were constantly forcing him to go on the hand to mouth plan.² A much greater man than he was fwill be prone to commit blunders in such circumstances, because the want of proportion between his means and his ends progressively increases, and his mind is exhausted in fruitless efforts. He had to go on to see two of the directors of the Colmar, who had been examining an old mine further north and had telegraphed to him to be at Nilpeena to meet them on their way back to town. He had not much time to spare, but he could not go on without a word of warning to Dan. The word of warning turned into a violent altercation. Dan sat as if he had not moved during the last half hour, staring at Victor, who still lay for the most part motionless. Now and then he tossed feebly, and now and then he murmured half audible words. But he did not open his eyes, and there was no gleam of consciousness on his face.

When Dan saw his brother coming to the room a second time, he started up, his heavy eyes aflame. He said nothing till Trevaskis had entered the room, then he planted his back against the door with a look of dogged despair and determination, which checked the furious reproaches that rose to the lips of the younger brother.

'Look 'ere, Bill, if this job is to go on it must be at the awner's 'count,'³ he said in a low husky voice.

'I don't understand you,' returned Trevaskis.

'Then I'll put it feer, so as there cussn't be a mistake. Yistidday was a fortnight that I parted from my awnly cheeld to go as it were in the place of one as was anxious to make b'law 'e 'ad left the country. Friday and Saturday, Sunday and Monday, I was lyin' most of the time-----'

'Dead drunk; yes, go on.'

'Why did g'ee keep the drink to my 'and, knowin' well that in the low, haaf-sared⁴ state I were in I would keep on drinkin'? Why did h'ee draw the coortins and keep the place quiet, so 'ut I might lie there without countin' day ior night? Why did j'ee-----'

'Suppose I don't choose to be cross-examined by you like this, as if I were a country bumpkin in the hands of a kerb-stone lawyer,'⁵ said Trevaskis, his eyes flashing ominously.

'And then, when I coom a little to myself, you took me down to a hawl of a place, where this young man was

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lying, and you patched up some sort of a yarn, and I sucked in every word like Gospel truth. You didn't wait till I was clever and feelin' like a man,' said Dan, with a catch in his throat. But he overcame the weakness, and went on, with that tense indignation which sweeps all artifice before it: 'No, you made me b'law as 'twas for the sake of my lad partly, and that you wanted to take care o' the young man—to nuss 'e, to be good to 'e.'

'So I did----'

'So you did not. All the time you've been pizenin' k'e with drugs. Shame on you to do such a cowardly thing, and me takin' every care on 'e.'

'You fool! what is the good of exciting yourself like this?' cried Trevaskis, beyond himself with rage, his eyes glowing like coals, his face ashen to the lips.

'I may be a fool and an idjit, but I won't be a murderer.'

'A murderer!' cried Trevaskis, starting up with a threatening movement of his hand.

'Yes, a murderer, a murderer, a murderer!' cried Dan, raising his voice and drawing nearer to his brother, who gazed at him with a feeling akin to fear.

'For the good Lord's sake, hold your tongue!' said Trevaskis in a low voice. 'Do you want to draw a crowd of miners round the place? Do you want to have me accused of what I never meant to do? Do you want to have your own boy exposed to all the world as a thief? What good will all this do you? Come, Dan, be reasonable. We've both lost our heads a little. Give me your hand, like a good fellow. You needn't be afraid that anything will happen to this young man. A little laudanum won't kill anyone; and you must see that if he got his senses clean back, while he's here, lit would be all up with me.'

Dan, who was rarely moved to great excitement, listened to his brother in stolid silence. In silence he took his proffered hand, and seemed to assent to what he said.

'I don't mind your keeping him in this room to-night, only be careful, Dan, be careful. After I come back to-morrow, you must go away for a day and a night for a little change.'

Dan sat for nearly an hour after his brother went away, close to the bed on which Victor was lying. A terrible thought had fastened on his mind. It was a close, sultry night, with a hot wind blowing from the north-east. The sky was deeply overcast, the daylight was fading, and a darkness heavier than that of night had fallen on this man, bereaved, lonely, and despairing.

'I want to get up—I want to get away—why do you tie me like this?' Victor muttered, over and over again, throwing his hands about with a convulsive, helpless gesture. After a time he turned over, and gradually fell into a deep sleep, breathing heavily.

'Bill means to kill 'e—to give 'e a big dose when 'e gets me away, and then when I come back 'e'll make me bury 'e somewheres. 'E'll make me do everything. But I won't, I won't! I'll take 'e away somehow before he comes back; I'll take 'e away this very night.'

Dan's brain seemed to be on fire. Even as he gasped out his determination to take prompt action, he was conscious of a creeping lassitude, of a total inability to plan or act. He felt dizzy, and the walls seemed to close around him. He went out, locking the outer door behind him, feeling that if he did not get away for a little time he would choke, or fall down in a fit. There was no fresh air to revive him; yet even the dismal wailing wind, full of sulphurous smoke, warm as if it had escaped from a seething caldron, thick with dust and mullock grit, was better than the close room in which Victor's motionless form and pale face struck an indefinable fear into Dan's soul. The long-continued tension, the morbid nervousness that had seized him on the day he had met his boy under such unhappy circumstances, had now come to a climax. He walked bareheaded along the foot of the reef above the mine, with its dull roar of machinery and its flaring lights. A sort of blurred confusion fell on him; he gave up trying to think what he should do. He saw someone coming towards him—someone who came close up against him. Dan stood aside to let him pass. But the man did not pass; he came up to him, and gripped both his hands.

'Dan, Dan, what's come to ye? mTo-morrow I leave this mine for good, and I've been nlooking for you to say good-bye. I ast for you of the cap'en, and he shut me hup as if I was a cut-throat. My missis is bad again, and I won't come back 'ere no more.' Dan made a hoarse murmur by way of reply. 'P'raps 'tain't my business, but 'pears to me, Dan, there's summat wrong with you besides hillness.'

'Iss, 'Zilla, iss,' burst out Dan, not waiting to think or parley with himself, 'summat is wrong with me in body and soul, and if I don't get some 'elp I don't know what's to come to I.'

'Tell me what it be, Dan. You as good as saved my life once, and I don't forget that.'

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'You are goin' away to—morrer?'

'But I can wait.'

'No, don't wait; you can help me to—night. But swear on your knees, in the hearin' o' the living God—if so be as 'E cares to listen to we—that you'll never, never speak to anyone of what I tell ye, that you'll ax no question over what I say. Swear to me on your soul, as you hope to be saved from eternal damnation; swear to me, 'Zilla, for the sake o' old times.'

Dan's voice was hoarse with anguish. He was trembling, and his hands were cold and clammy. At that moment he clung to his old friend as to one providentially sent to save him from the terrible fate that, to his excited fancy, seemed momentarily drawing nearer.

'I swear, Dan, I swear to do what I can for you, short o' foul sin, and that you wouldn't ax o' me,' answered 'Zilla. 'What trouble be you in?'

'A man's been badly 'urt by accident——'

'A man on the mine—a young man?' cried 'Zilla, with a strange suspicion rising in his mind.

'I didn't mean to do 'e 'arm, and it's no fault o' mine, and you must keep to your promise, 'Zilla, and ax no questions,' answered Dan doggedly.

'I won't, Dan, I won't! A man's been 'urt, you say?'

'And I've been trying to nuss 'e. I've been on the job for some time. Lord in heaven, I've lost count o' days!'

'On the mine here, Dan, without no doctor? There, I don't want a hanswer; only when you're swellin' with sore amazement you must let it off some'ow. You've been on the job for some time, Dan?'

'Yes, and I dussent tell a livin' soul, for fear o' being took by the throat and clapped into prison.'

'And you innercent, Dan?'

'Do you misbelieve me, 'Zilla?'

'No, my old mate—no, I don't; but—There—no, I won't—go on, Dan.'

'And now this night a hawful fear 'as come upon me, 'Zilla; a fear o' crime and blood—guiltiness that 'ud hang round my neck like the nether millstone,⁶ and drag me low down below the very foundations o' hell.'

'Oh, Dan, Dan! 'e ain't a—dyin'? I won't ax another question; but tell me 'e ain't a—dyin?'

'No, 'Zilla—no, no; but I want 'e to get better quicker nor I can make 'e ow' drugses out o' a bought box, made up by people as never saw the sick ones as swallers 'em. I want 'e to be took care of above ground, not down in a dark, lonesome cave place.'

'Down in a cave place, Dan? Slinkin' there alone and in secret with a man badly hurt? 'Ow in the name o' the Amoighty did you get into such a hawful fix, and you an innercent man?'

'Zilla's voice was full of consternation and wonder. He spoke without any afterthought as to his friend's veracity. Dan understood this, feeling that the whole affair was so full of perplexing mystery, that it was taking an unfair advantage of his old mate to appeal to him for help, while giving him so little confidence. It was a sudden fear, lest he should be tempted to betray his brother, that led him to reply in a gruff tone.

'Zilla, the world is full o' liards. Don't you go a—haddin' to the number. You promised not to ax questions?'

'I did, Dan, I did, and I won't go back on my word. You want to have this man took to a place where 'e'll be well took care of— say, to an 'orsepital?'

'Iss, 'Zilla, and with money to pay for the best nussin'.'

'There's a private 'orsepital been lately opened at Broombush, for those as can pay well.'

'Yes, that's been running in my 'ead, 'Zilla. But——'

'In course, you want to get him took there without pyour appearin' in the matter?'

'Nor you, 'Zilla, for that 'ud come to the same thing.'

'I know that. Did you ever see a hold Scoty as goes about with an 'awker's waggon, sellin' religious books, and preachin' on Sundays and week—days, when 'e can get chaps to listen as 'ow's there's few to be saved, and it's very onlike it's them?'

'No, I never did!'

'And 'ave you some sort of a machine and a beast as you can make a start with this very night?'

'I could qborrow the light 'Merican waggon as belongs to the place, and there's a beast in the stable. But what do you mean, 'Zilla?'

'Zilla briefly explained that Kenneth Campbell was going on the morrow to take Mrs. West to her brother's at

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the Halfway House. That he was a man who was always on the look-out to do things for people in need, and had already taken several men, who were suffering from fever at the mine, to the hospital in Broombush Creek in his waggon.

'My idear is, if you was to make a start to-night, and meet him somewhere on the way----' said 'Zilla, pausing a little dubiously, as he saw that there were some grave obstacles. If Dan had a horse and trap, even one as fanatical for serving his fellow-creatures as Kenneth was, might wonder why the man who, with such conveniences, had come upon a helpless invalid in the bush, did not at once convey him to a place of refuge, instead of appealing to a casual passer-by. But here the thoughts which had been slowly revolving in Dan's mind during the last endless days and nights, in connection with this matter, came to his aid.

'I won't meet the ould chap o' the road at all, 'Zilla,' he said eagerly. 'I 'aven't told you--we 'adn't much talk together sin' I coom this time--but I was goin' to work a claim theer, about a mile to the south o' what they call the broken-down whim.'

'That's feer within two miles and a arf o' the Arf-way 'Ouse, Dan! That 'ull be most on the track.'

'Iss, and there's a bit of a shanty there. I'll go this very night. I'll rsturt in two hours, with sthe sick man on a mattress tand quite comfortable like, 'Zilla. Oh, 'Zilla! the weight as is took off my 'eart. I'll be like camped there, and this ould chap as is so given up to doin' things for people, he can coom along from the Arf-way 'Ouse.'

'Iss, Dan, you scratch me a few lines, and I'll go acrost and show them.'

'And 'e'll be sartin sure to coom?'

'As sure as there's breath in 'is body, and anyone needin' 'is help,' answered 'Zilla solemnly.

An hour later, 'Zilla went across to Stonehouse to see Kenneth. He was not in his waggon, and 'Zilla went to the kitchen to ask where he would be likely to find him.

'Tis about this journey o' his uto-morrer,' he explained to Bridget, who stood at the door, fanning herself vigorously with a Chinese paper fan.

'Shure, thin, and if it's to take vahny more sick people it cahn't be done; for the mistress hersilf is going as far as the Half-way House, besides the sick woman and Miss Doris. Ye see, it's loike this,' said Bridget, who was always ready to offer elaborate explanations of every domestic project. 'Mrs. Challoner, she haven't been shlaping at ahl at ahl for days and noights; and it just tuk Mrs. Murray in the head, if she went for a dhroive in the waggon, it might lull her loike, and be a little change; so----'

Before Bridget's flowing narrative had come to an end, Kenneth came round the back veranda, and 'Zilla gave him the note, which he had received from an old mate of his, who was at work somewhere not far from the Half-way House.

- a. full] Om. Adl
- b. 'art] 'eart Adl E1
- c. 'ere] 'ear Adl E1
- d. his] this Adl E1
- e. ultimately] Om. E1
- f. will] might E1
- g, h, j. 'ee] 'e E1
- g, h, j. 'ee] 'e E1
- g, h, j. 'ee] 'e E1
- i. or] nor Adl E1
- k. 'e] 'ee Adl
- l. it] that it Adl
- m. To-morrow] To-morrer Adl To-/morrer E1
- n. looking] lookin' Adl E1
- o. w'] wi' Adl E1
- p. your] you Adl E1
- q. borrow] borrar Adl E1
- r. sturt] start Adl
- s. the] this Adl
- t. and] Om. E1

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u. to-morrer] to-morrow Adl

v. ahny] ohny Adl

Chapter VII.

It was close on four o'clock in the afternoon of the following day before Kenneth's roomy waggon reached the Half-way House. During the latter part of the journey Mrs. Challoner began to doze. As soon as they entered the little inn, which was empty of customers and very quiet, they induced her to lie down, and in a few minutes she was sound asleep. This was the result for which Mrs. Murray had so fervently hoped, when she induced her sister to take a long, slow drive. 'If she falls asleep, my dear, don't wake her up on any account,' were her last whispered words to Doris. And now Doris closed the door of the little bedroom softly, and went out to tell Kenneth that they must put off their return till Mrs. Challoner awoke.

Kenneth, with a somewhat blotted sheet of paper in his hand, was talking to the landlord, who was pointing out a slight rise some distance south aoff the highway, which led to the diggings. Doris waited till the two men had finished their talk, and then delivered her message to Kenneth. She was surprised to learn that he was going to a place beyond the broken-down whim, to take a sick man to the hospital at the diggings.

'It was nearly nine last night when I got this,' he said, folding up the sheet of paper. 'Mrs. Murray thought I better say nothing about it to Mrs. Challoner; she might want to come on, or it might distract her mind. Thanks be to the Most High that He has sent her sleep,'¹ said Kenneth, uncovering his head in his slow reverent way. 'I did not like this restless wakefulness night after night.'

'Someone ill—away in a place like that—quite alone, Kenneth? Has there been anyone looking after him?' asked Doris, with a startled air.

As so often happens when the mind is much engrossed with any subject, her thoughts instantly reverted to the apparition of the preceding afternoon on hearing of this invalid.

'This is all I know of the matter, Miss Doris,' answered Kenneth, handing her the sheet of paper with a few roughly-written lines.

One band a half mile of Broke-down-wim.

"Zilla Jenkins,

'i hev come acrost a young man as badly wants looken arter in a orsepetal or some such, wich cbeen onable to do so myself, ef you nows of enyone kumin' along shortly to the dDiggings would you ax him to kindly call at the broke' down w'im.

'A nold Maite.'

It was a little difficult for Doris to make out the meaning conveyed by the unfamiliar orthography, but as soon as she had caught the gist of the lines a curious change came over her face. The pallid languor which had been settling on it within the last few days was replaced by a vivid flush; her eyes glowed, her lips parted in eager expectancy.

'Kenneth, I know where the broken-down whim is; I want to come with you,' she said, in a voice but little above a whisper.

And Kenneth, who had from her childhood obeyed the girl's slightest wish, found the few gentle objections he raised finally overruled.

'But you won't come to the diggings, dear Miss Doris,' he said, as he turned his horses' heads towards the rock that rose near the broken-down whim, and looked across the complete flatness of the intervening country as if it were within half a mile of the Half-way House. 'Mr. Keltie tells me that I'll have to come back to this road almost in a straight line, so as to get eon the high-road to the diggings. So I'll leave you here on the way back; the journey would be too fatiguing for you, and forbye,² it's very like this poor man is suffering from fever.'

This 'poor man.' The words woke a strange deep pain in the girl's heart. Could there be any grounds for the thought that had lodged itself so obstinately in her mind? All through the past night she had lain in a sort of waking dream, seeing over and over again the prostrate form, and the blanched, motionless face, which for one brief instant had been as absolutely visible to her as the earth under her feet or the sky above. She was forced to believe that the sight was in some way a repetition of the feverish dreams that she had perpetually dreamt on the previous night. Some of her earliest childish recollections were of faces and voices seen and heard in sleep, that were as real to her as the voices and faces of waking hours. But might not these repeated dreams, and that vision

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seen in the daylight, be forecasts of what she was now about to see?

She recalled an old book of dreams, and what was called second sight,³ she had once been reading, and which, at her mother's wish, she put away, on being told she was not yet old enough to read such things. 'There was so much that darling maman used to tell me I would understand better when I was older,' she thought, 'but I think things seem stranger and harder to understand the older I grow.' She put her head down wearily with a stifled sigh. The languor of the past few days weighed on Doris more than any of the household knew.

'Oh, Kenneth, can we not go a little faster?' she said, after a few moments, finding that Kenneth's horses seemed to have almost fallen asleep.

Kenneth was in truth deep in one of his beloved mystics, and the brooding reveries habitual to him when travelling. When Doris spoke he remonstrated with his horses, and soon afterwards they passed the broken-down whim, and the dark abrupt rock near it with its startling echoes.

Doris recalled every word and incident of the day she first saw this place, and Victor had spoken of going with them when they went across that other mysterious sea, full of colour and sound and motion; not gray and uniform and silent as this was. And yet not quite silent. A few sounds broke the torpor of the monotonous plain, and were thrown back in lengthened echoes by this solitary rock beside a waterless well.

The rumbling of the waggon, the solitary call of a white eagle⁴ poised in mid-air, the strokes of an axe in the distance, were repeated with clear lengthened reverberations that magnified the original notes into a cadenced volume of sounds with weird mocking undertones. The weather-board hut, standing over a mile beyond the broken-down whim, was on the border of a water-course, lined with small sandal-wood trees. As Kenneth drove up to the front of the hut, Dan came out to meet him. For a little time after Kenneth got out, Doris remained in the waggon. Now that they had reached the place the thought of finding her waking vision realized here, made the few moments that followed a time of sickening suspense.

'Oh no, no; it is impossible,' she said to herself, looking at the little hut, and overcome by a sudden conviction of the unreality of her imaginings. It must be true that her senses had been tricked by some touch of fever. Was it not fever which at this moment made her head so hot and heavy, her sight so uncertain, and her hands so unsteady? Yet, as she doubted and reasoned with herself, she leant forward, eagerly watching for the next event.

As her eyes fell on Dan, a troubled recollection shot across her brain. Had she not caught a swift glimpse of his face yesterday, when that torturing vision of Victor had flashed on her for one incredible moment? For an instant her memory seemed sane and trustworthy, but then doubt and confusion fell upon her. She could but dumbly wait and watch. As for Dan, the moment he saw Doris, he recognised with a terrible misgiving the beautiful young face that for a few seconds had looked in through the little window of the iron passage. This was the young lady who had gone to his brother to declare that she had seen Mr. Fitz-Gibbon. Had she come now so as to be able to convict the two of them?

Dan, though in many respects quick to perceive, was slow to act, more especially when placed in circumstances where prompt and masterful deception was necessary to ensure his safety. He had little of his brother's power of instantaneously producing a plausible tradition, according to the requirements of an unlooked-for emergency. Neither the bent of his mind nor the course of his life had fostered this gift. He stood listening to Kenneth without hearing a word he said, expecting that every second this girl with her deep wonderful eyes would step to his side, saying, 'Why did you hide this ailing man underground at the mine, and then carry him off to the wilds?' Had she done so, Dan in the first moments could no more have attempted to lie to her than to an angel from heaven. But nothing of this kind happened. After the first quick, wondering look at him, the girl sat back in the waggon, neither moving nor speaking. As for Kenneth, his talk was not of a kind to call either for a ready answer nor for great vigilance on the part of anyone wishing to deceive him.

When Dan recalled his scattered wits sufficiently to catch the drift of the old man's words, he found he was deep in a discourse on the blessings of solitude.

'In the wilderness I have ever found the posterns of the dwelling of peace,' he was saying. 'It is in the midst of the world that the flesh gets its most signal victories, till it grows insolent and domineering, and drugs its poor fettered companion the spirit with carnal opiates till it loses all sight and hearing. . . . It was into the wilds of Arabia that St. Paul departed after his conversion, and saw visions and dreamed dreams it was not lawful to utter to uncircumcised ears.⁵ But why do I speak of mere man? Did not the King of Heaven, who was born for our sakes among the beasts of the field, who was fed on a little breast milk, and gave up His life between two

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criminals, also often go away into the unpeopled wastes?6 My friend, I hope that the solemn influences of these solitary plains are not unknown to you.'

'No, sir--oh no,' stammered Dan, quite at sea as to Kenneth's meaning. 'Gosh! 'Zilla didn't say as he was crazed,' was his inward reflection. But as the conviction grew on him that he had to do with a man of unsound mind, he recovered his courage and presence of mind.

'I am glad of that, sincerely glad,' said Kenneth fervently. 'It is in such scenes as these that we recollect our vagrant thoughts, and renounce the exterior extravagancies of our conduct.'

'Was you goin' to take this poor young man as 'as come acrost me suffering from fever or some such to the diggins orsepital, sir?' asked Dan, who began to fear that, if he did not cut short the spates of the old man's eloquence, he might become entirely oblivious of the object of his visit.

'Ah, yes, yes. You have sheltered him and nursed him. But tell me, have you spoken to him of more important matters? Does he seem alive to the interests of his immortal soul?'

'He don't look much alive in any way just at present, I'm sorry to say,' answered Dan, leading the way to Victor's side, where he was lying with a rug over him on a mattress, on which Dan had conveyed him in the American waggon. Before leaving the mine, he had deemed it prudent to give him a dose out of the bottleful of medicine which Trevaskis had left. Dan would much sooner have given his patient no more of this, knowing it was a narcotic. But things being as they were, he recognised the necessity of keeping Victor unconscious while removing him. But either the jamount Dan had administered was too small, or repeated doses of the sedative for more than a week had rendered it partially ineffective. At any rate, this first dose, instead of making Victor sleep, had acted as a stimulant, so that, on the way to the hut, he made repeated efforts to get out of the waggon. Miss Paget, he said, wanted to see him; she was waiting for him; he had something very important to tell Helen, and he had been tied and kept in the dark for so long. Dan was reassured to find how much strength he retained. It was hard work to make him keep in the waggon, and when, after a little time, he complained of thirst, Dan had mixed a dose of laudanum with the beef-tea he gave him. Since then he had been lying for the most part unconscious.

Now, as the two men stood by him, he turned over and muttered a few inarticulate words. Kenneth felt his pulse.

'I suppose it's fever he has, he seems greatly reduced. How long has he been with you?' he said, fixing his large melancholy eyes on Dan's face.

'A good few days. 'E speaks a lot sometimes, and a deal more wandering of late. From what kI've picked up, I should say as 'e's been wanting to 'ide from his people for some reason,' said Dan, plunging with many qualms and pricks of conscience into the fictitious statements he had ready in case of being questioned.

'Ah, poor young man! poor young man! He cannot hide from the eyes of lthe Most High,' said Kenneth.

It was curious how the old man's readiness to speak of things not of this earth lessened Dan's fear of being caught tripping when making statements that had no foundation in fact.

'Ere's some gold as 'e 'ad on him,' he said in a calm, confident voice, handing Kenneth the purse of sovereigns he had filled from his own store. 'I b'law there's a private orsepital now at the diggins. It'll be best to take him there, bein' by all happearances a gentleman, and used to softer 'andling than 'e'd get among common folks. Now, sir, if you mdrawer the nmattress from under o'im, I'll take it and fix it in your machine.'

Dan, as he spoke, lifted Victor in the rug and placed the pillows under his head. As he took up the mattress to carry it to the waggon, he asked Kenneth whether there was not someone in the vehicle. Kenneth replied that there was a young lady, the daughter of an old master of his, who had come with her friend, Mrs. Challoner, on an errand of mercy as far as the Half-way House. Dan was relieved of all apprehension by this reply. Yet, when on reaching the waggon he found Doris, after alighting and waiting on the further side, with an expression of strained expectancy on her face, he divined that all danger was not over. He touched his hat respectfully.

'I am going to laid the waggon a little nearer, so as to lift the sick man in,' he said, speaking without any sign of emotion, though his pulses were beating hard and fast as he anticipated the moment in which this lovely, grave-eyed young lady should catch the first sight of the patient.

'Is he so very ill?' she asked softly. She did not hear what Dan said in reply. He was leading the horses, and the rumbling of the wheels as the waggon was drawn as close as possible to the front of the hut overpowered his speech. Doris followed, and stood at a little distance. And then, as Kenneth and Dan carried the sick man out between them, she caught sight of his face. For an instant her heart seemed to stop, and then it fluttered like a bird

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suddenly snared, and all around grew dim.

'Oh, Kenneth!—Kenneth!—it is Victor!' She thought she was crying the words out aloud; but though her lips moved, her voice did not even reach whispering-point. She stood as if riveted to the ground, not even drawing nearer as they placed Victor on the mattress in the bottom of the waggon. They were very gentle and careful in handling him—placing a pillow under his head and folding the soft striped rug round him. He moaned and murmured some words in an indistinct voice. Doris noted it all, standing speechless and motionless, but her lips slightly parted, her face blanched and colourless as a lily.

As soon as Victor was safe in the waggon, Kenneth began to look in the big miscellaneous-filled locker for a book of devotions he wished to give Dan, who took advantage of this interval to approach Doris. He knew that she was overpowered with emotion, but he pretended to notice nothing of this, and spoke in his ordinary tones.

'It ain't a putty place this for a man to be ill in. I've done my best for the gentleman sin' he coom to me; but-----'

'Ah, I know him—he is a friend of ours—Mr. Victor Fitz-Gibbon, who used to be at the mine,' broke out Doris, who, like one in a nightmare, suddenly recovered the power of speech on being spoken to.

Dan threw as much astonishment as possible into his face and voice on hearing this. Then Doris falteringly reached the end of the waggon, and looked, with all her soul in her eyes, at Victor lying in such strange unconsciousness of her presence.

'E's not so bad as 'e looks—'e's 'ad some medicine to make 'e sleep'—'e'll wake up fo'mby7 quite fresh-like, and be 'isself in a few days,' said Dan soothingly, forced in spite of himself to say something to relieve the anguish of anxiety so touchingly visible on Doris's face.

'Yes—yes. I have to start—at once,' said Victor, moving restlessly.

The sound of his voice, and Dan's consoling assurance, lightened Doris's worst fears. Looking from Victor into Dan's face, she told him of the strange sight she had seen, or thought she had seen, in the iron passage at the mine.

'And you thoft you saw me as well as the young man?' said Dan in a wondering tone. 'Ah, 'tis just 'nough to 'maze one the way dreams come true at times.'

'But I was wide awake; and I looked in because Spot would stay and bark, as if there was someone he knew. If he were here now you would see how he would recognise Mr. Fitz-Gibbon; we left him at home for fear he would waken Mrs. Challoner if she fell asleep,' explained Doris.

The longer Dan spoke to her, the more completely he fell under the spell of those wonderful eyes, with their clear sincerity of gaze. He felt in a vague way that it was more disgraceful to lie to this girl than it was to deceive the common ruck of mankind. But he had to protect his boy fleeing from justice, and his brother from detection: his brother, the ex-Member of Parliament, the trusted manager, and upright Justice of the Peace, whose crafty dangerous game was now nearly at an end, leaving him scatheless, untouched by a breath of suspicion as to violence or fraud or falsehood. And the thought that this strange episode of imposition and concealment and sickening apprehensions was now really at an end stimulated Dan's imagination. He told Doris, in his homely, unpolished phrases, how he was fossicking about for gold, and how, more than a week ago, this young man came along, not feeling very well, and how he had gradually got worse; how he seemed to have some reason for concealing from his friends where he was; and how since he had been delirious he kept on often calling on a young lady—'Helen' he sometimes called her—'Miss Paget' at other times.

In saying this, Dan studiously looked away. He had not the slightest doubt that the young lady before him was the subject of Victor's troubled snatches of talk; that it was her name which had so often lingered on his lips as he made restless efforts to get to her. He divined, too, that his knowledge would not displease the girl, whose agonized anxiety on the young man's behalf had so clearly revealed her feelings. On hearing the names Dan repeated, Doris started, drawing in her breath like one who had received a sudden blow.

'And to think as ye who was wide awake had a sort o' vision of me, too, so many miles off,' said Dan in a tone of wonder, still looking towards the wavering course of the Broombush Creek, which in the vicinity of the broken-down whim was more thickly-lined with slender sandal-wood trees than the shrub from which the water-course took its name. Rough and untutored as he was in the conventions of polite conduct, his instinctive delicacy led him to keep his eyes turned from the young lady's face for some little time after the revelation he had made to her. 'It 'minds me,' he went on reflectively, 'of what appeared to myself many years ago. I was after an

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'ard stem, qstopping a bock8 in a Cornish mine-----'

'Here is the book I have been searching for,' said Kenneth, approaching the two with a small thick volume in his hands, turning over the leaves and glancing from passage to passage with the familiarity begotten by a long friendship. He gave it to Dan, saying, 'Take it, my friend, in remembrance of the Samaritan-like kindness⁹ you have shown to this young man. Read it day by day, and prize the privilege you enjoy of living here, in total abstraction from the carnal pleasures and excesses of the world.'

Dan made an uneasy motion, and gave a deprecatory little grunt. He understood enough of Kenneth's speech to make him recall with dismay the two bottles of brandy he had 'put away' a short time before, in the course of four days. But the glamour of solitary reverie and absorption in the inner life was at this epoch strong on Kenneth, and he went on with rising enthusiasm:

'Here where you do not go abroad at all, where you labour much and seldom talk, where you eat sparingly, without any of those dainty cates¹⁰ which tempt the senses, where you are clothed in homely attire, you have precious opportunities of living the higher life. You may rise at dawn to pray and meditate, you may read long and often, be vigilant against the snares of the enemy of souls, and persevere in the practice of holy exercises.¹¹ In the lonely watches of the night-----'

'The yowling of the dingoes is sometimes hawful, sir,' said Dan, anxious to bring the old man back to plain matters of fact. 'Do you know,' he added, lowering his voice, 'that this sick man is a friend of the young lady as is with you?'

Dan glanced at Doris as he spoke, his eyes full of puzzled apprehension. She was standing by the waggon, looking eastward into the vast gray plain with a tense fixed gaze. The pallor of her face was startling. Her silk dust-cloak¹² and gauze veil were blown backward, and as her face and slight girlish form were fully revealed there was something in her look and attitude that brought a climbing sorrow into Dan's throat. It seemed as though she ought to be sheltered even from the dust-laden breath of the hot wind in her mother's arms. Yet here she stood in this arid solitude, with a strange seal of sorrow and loneliness on her face. Dan expected that Kenneth would receive the news he told him with interested surprise, and that he would instantly question the young lady as to the name, etc., of the sick man; but Kenneth merely replied:

'Ay, ay, he must have been at the mine then. The sun is lower than I thought; we must be going on our way.'

With a few parting injunctions as to the true welfare of the soul, Kenneth returned by the track he had followed in coming. As the vehicle started, Dan gave a parting look at Victor lying in motionless slumber; at Doris, who, sitting sideways, kept her eyes almost constantly fixed on him; at Kenneth, whose lean grave face had already assumed the dreamy absent look which usually settled on it when slowly driving through the Bush.

'If I 'adn't told so many whoppers,' thought Dan, 'I'd fall on my knees and thank God for a hour on end.'

As soon as night set in he was on his way back to the Colmar mine, which he reached an hour after Trevaskis had returned from Nilpeena.

- a. off] of Adl
- b. and] Om.* Adl
- c. been] beein' Adl E1
- d. Diggins] Diggings Adl
- e. on] in Adl
- f. of] on Adl E1
- g. tradition] story E1
- h. the] these Adl E1
- i. moments] few moments Adl E1
- j. amount] quantity E1
- k. I've] I have Adl
- l. the] Om.* Adl
- m. drawer] drawr E1
- n. mattress] mattrass E1
- o. 'im] 'e E1
- p. but] Om. Adl E1
- q. stopping] stoppin' Adl E1

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Chapter VIII.

Kenneth's horses, which he had driven together for nearly five years, had gradually acquired the art of seeming to walk briskly, while in truth their pace was very slow. But on the way from the hut beyond the broken-down whim Doris took no note of this. For the first mile she sat as she had done in coming, on the front seat beside Kenneth, but watching Victor intently. She saw that when the waggon went over uneven ground the motion jolted him roughly. His head rolled from side to side, and he muttered uneasily. She could not bear that he should endure this discomfort.

'Kenneth, don't you think I had better sit so that I can support Mr. Fitz-Gibbon's head?' she said timidly, after the first mile had been got over.

'Yes, Miss Doris dear, it is very thoughtful of you. Then you know his name? To be sure, that good man—maybe I ought to have asked who he was—told me you had seen the sick man before. Perhaps you would wish to come all the way to the diggings, so that he should be better cared for?'

'Oh, yes, yes! Please don't go to the Half-way House at all, Kenneth, till we return,' pleaded Doris.

'Just as you wish, Miss Doris. If Mrs. Challoner wakes before we get back, she'll know you're safe with me. I'm thinking, by the look of the sky, that there's a dust-storm coming on. But we're safe in the keeping of the Shepherd of Israel, who slumbers not nor sleeps.'

Kenneth took one of the movable seats of the avan, and fixed it for Doris close beside the invalid. Then they went on their way once more. At sundown Kenneth halted to make some tea. Victor half woke up and drank a cupful. He looked at Kenneth as he supported his head and held the cup to his lips, and murmured some broken words. The next instant he was once more in a state of drowsy unconsciousness. A quarter of an hour later, when within a mile of the diggings, a dust-storm broke over them with terrific violence. The horses refused to face it. Kenneth stopped on the sheltered side of a clump of sandal-wood trees, and made the tilt of the waggon as fast as possible against the dust. But it came in driving showers through every chink and cranny. Doris, stooping over Victor, shielded his face with her dust-cloak. Now that the motion of the waggon had ceased, his sleep was less broken, his breathing more regular.

As Doris sat holding her cloak over him, his head resting against her knees, all the conflicting emotions which had taken possession of her, when the incredible assertion made by Trevaskis on the preceding day had been so strangely confirmed by Dan's words, died away. He was safe, and he would live, and reach 'Helen' after he had been nursed back to health. As for herself, she was confused and very weary. Oh, if she could only go to her mother! The vital forces, which had been subtly undermined for some days back, flagged lower. She did not cling to the world or any of its bewildering, cruel stories. She could not understand them. She longed only for the profound love that had wrapped her round all her life, and never deceived or wounded her. She did not fear death. In her mind it was associated solely with the great peace that had reigned in that quiet room in her old home, full of roses and sunlight, in which but a few months ago her mother had awakened from the dream of life² with a look of rapturous serenity on her face.

The very memory of that dear countenance, stamped with a profound and unutterable peace, seemed to soothe every lingering regret. She could see the sky growing darker, even the sunset flush trembling into wanness, as the dust-storm raged with the fitful wails of a wind that rushes at its own wild caprice over boundless plains, without a solitary wall or hill, or even a line of trees, to impede its course. The grayness of the earth, in this region perpetually clad in dead colours, became even dimmer. The light waned in the sky, and the wind blew more furiously. To Doris it seemed as though all around were mounting billows, ready to float her to the verge of the unknown shore which at some unknown distance must bound this unmeasured sea, before so silent, but now full of commotion, of shrill, tumultuous voices. But gradually they died away; they swooned into the silence that sooner or later falls upon all the sounds and tumults of the world.

The sickle of a young moon hung low on the horizon, and stars trembled into sight;³ the cries of a long line of water-fowl, flying from some drought-stricken district, sounded far and thin overhead; the rumble of the wheels, the beat of the horses' hoofs, the cries of the birds, the light of the moon and stars in the sky, the sudden arrest of the emotion that formed the dominant pulse of her young life, happy, tender memories of her mother—all were

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woven by the mysterious shuttle of sleep into a delicate tissue that bore the mask of reality.

The wind had changed. It was soft and low, breathing from the west, with long lines of dreams in its wake—dreams that were at first like vaguely luminous pictures. They seemed to fall from successive heights in slender streams of transparent foam, and then slowly invade the gray plains with silvery waves of light, lapping against the shore in numberless battalions that were perpetually renewed. . . . She was gliding over the yellow sands, and the light of the moon mingled with the glow of the dying sunlight; she could hear the beat of the waves, and the calls of the white seagulls wheeling above them. A boat drew near the shore, with milk-white sails, crowded with tall, strong angels, whose wings were folded on each side of them. She watched them idly sailing by, but as they passed she saw that at the further end her mother sat with outstretched arms. On that she called out; but the waves rose, and her voice was lost in their hissing . . .

Now it was night, and darkness was around her, the wind was rising into a storm; deep calling unto deep,⁴ and she was alone. The darkness thickened round her, and she was alone in a strange, desolate country; but in a moment one came calling her by name and holding her by the hand. It was Victor, and as she clung to him the light came back once more; . . . but someone came between them and led him away, and she was alone. Then a strange terror fell on her—an inexpressible, unreasoning, creeping fear; a fear, not of death, nor of the ghastly legends that men tell each other with blanched faces of how the soul, ardent, conscious, full of love and hope and infinite tenderness, is plunged in a moment of time into eternal oblivion like the carcass of a stall-fed ox.⁵ The horror that had fallen on her was a horror of life—a shrinking cterror from the days full of gay sunshine, carrying away with them, like the petals of faded roses, all that the heart clings to, all that makes the world a place in which it is pleasant to dwell.

She was in the midst of the Silent Sea—gray, voiceless, sinister, for ever the same—and she was alone. In the sleep that had overtaken her, Doris knew for the first and last time what is symbolized by the word 'despair.' She looked with conscious eyes into those remorseless depths of being in which the bereavements of death are seen to be gentle and loving and merciful, as compared with the robberies of life. She could not cry; but it was as though tears of flame were slowly falling one by one on her heart, and consuming it within her. The whole world seemed full of mounds, overgrown with grass, beneath which human souls were dropping piecemeal into clods of dust; and all around her the dead sombre colours of the Silent Sea—the gray, vague formlessness, the darkness on which no shadows could be cast.⁶ . . . How many, many hundred years had stealthily crept between her and the happy serenity of the days in which she had lived with her mother!

Her mother! The word was like a spell. As she breathed it, moving uneasily in her sleep, the terrors that had overpowered her fell away one by one. They were not true, they were part of a mocking nightmare; now she was dawning to the truth, and the truth was peace and blessedness, and light and healing. She heard a faint rustling, as of one drawing near her in flowing robes. Oh, joy unspeakable,⁷ and consolation never more to be wrested from her! her mother had come to her! Her arms were round her, her lips pressed on her cheek.

'Oh, maman, maman! did you hear me—have you come for me?' she murmured in a happy whisper, and with that she looked up into her mother's face. It was as gentle, as beautiful, as full of love, as real to her, as it had ever been. She waited in breathless eagerness for her mother's answer. And her mother's answer was to take her in her arms once more, and kiss her on her brow; and then she awoke, her eyes wet with happy tears, her brow warm with her mother's kiss. 'That was her answer—I am going to her,' she said to herself half aloud.

Then she knew that she had been asleep, that their journey had come to an end, that Kenneth stood talking to someone in the doorway of the hospital in which Victor was to be nursed. The waggon stood quite close to the front of it; the tilt had been drawn aside, and the light was shining in, so that she could see Victor's face distinctly. As she looked at him he moved and murmured some words. She bent over him. 'Helen, you understand, don't you?' he was saying, in a troubled tone. But the sound of another woman's name on his lips had now nothing of sorrow or fear for her. The bliss of her mother's summoning kiss wrapped around her like a garment which could be penetrated no more by the darts of any self-regardful sorrow.

'Dear Victor, good-bye! God make you well and happy!' she murmured softly, stooping over him, and fslightly touching his brow with her lips. He moved at the touch; he seemed struggling to awake.

'Darling, darling!' he said, half raising one of his hands.

'He is dreaming of Helen,' she thought.

In that instant Kenneth came with two men, one holding a light, the other to help him to take the patient

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inside. It was all the work of a few moments, and then they were on their way back to the Half-way House. When they reached it Mrs. Challoner was still asleep; only the landlord and one or two late travellers were astir. The landlord pressed them to stay for the night, as it was now ten o'clock.

'The young lady looks so very pale; I am afraid she is ill,' he said.

But Kenneth, looking steadfastly at Doris, saw that her eyes were shining, as if her heart were full of happy thoughts.

'Miss Doris is often pale,' he replied; and then he explained that he was pledged to set out on a long journey on the morrow, and that it would be better for Mrs. Challoner to travel in the cool of the night.

So Mrs. Challoner was awakened from her long sound sleep, and said she felt like a new creature.

Early next day Kenneth departed. Doris, who had slept very fitfully, was up to say good-bye to him. As he held her hands in his, they seemed to him very hot and dry.

'My dear Miss Doris, I hope the fever is not on you,' he said, looking into her face anxiously. Surely it was very pallid, and the shadows under her eyes very deep. Yet when she looked up at him there was that calm, exalted gladness in those wonderfully radiant eyes which struck him on the previous night.

'I am well, thank you, Kenneth,' she answered, smiling at her old friend. 'Here is something I want you to keep always,' she added, giving him a small sandal-wood box. It held a large gold locket, with a photograph of her mother on one side and of herself on the other.

Kenneth looked from one to the other. As he looked at Mrs. Lindsay, he said with the soft, pensive intonations which had always in them something of the solemnity of solitary musings:

'Dear heart, sweet gentle lady, of thee it might always be said, "God hath given His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."⁸ Now thou art among the companies of the blessed, enjoying the sweetness of the contemplation of the Father for ever.'

'Kenneth, if you heard that I had gone to her, you would not think it was anything to grieve for, would you?' asked Doris softly.

'No, dear child; you have ever had one of those sweet and well-disposed natures which need little chastening to make them fit for the companionship of the sinless ones. . . . But though your life may be long in the land,⁹ something tells me we shall not meet again. To me the hour of my deliverance can never come amiss. Though we are drenched with matter, yet the better part of us faints oftentimes for converse with the spiritual world. If you return from over the sea and find that I am gone, you may know, dear Miss Doris, that what my soul longed for has come to pass.'

During that and the following day the Challoner household were occupied with the manifold duties of their departure from the mine. Shung was, as usual, equal to two or three ordinary servants. But he kept a keen eye on his young mistress, and was more insistent than usual that she should spare herself all fatigue. One and another noticed her increasing silence, her lack of appetite, and an air of curious abstraction. It was a touch of the fever, they thought, and the doctor ratified the conclusion. It was a good thing they were going away, he said, for the change would most likely arrest the disease. At times she heard and saw nothing of what went on around her. A whole world lay between her and the accustomed familiar details of life. The wondering speculations, the absorbing thoughts, which had taken possession of her when her mother died, returned to her with overwhelming vividness. Only the sting of separation was wonderfully removed. The earth and all that it contained had come to wear to her the aspect of a scene in which she had no stake.

The world was enclosed in a pearly light, shot through with golden sunbeams, the morning they left Nilpeena by the early train. Near mid-day they passed the confines of the Salt-bush country. The wide shadowy woods and softly swelling rises that succeeded the boundless horizons and arid monotony of that region exhilarated the spirits like an escape from captivity. Later they passed through districts full of great fields of wheat ripe for harvest. Flocks of sheep stood under the shade of old spreading gum-trees, by permanent water-holes in the creeks; herds of cattle were feeding leisurely in well-grassed paddocks; enclosed hillsides were dotted with vineyards; the townships had their meanest habitations surrounded by fruit-trees, bending under loads of fruit.

Almost every surrounding scene on the way was intimately associated in Doris's mind with memories of her mother. They had made the journey so often together, that each little station at which they stopped, each township they passed, was perfectly familiar. To several dwellings, of which they caught merely brief glimpses in passing, Doris had given names, had even fitted them with stories to which her mother listened with smiling interest.

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'The boy that went away from Pear-blossom Farm to get rubies as big as eggs has come back, maman, and they have built a new room for him—see it there, at the end of the house!' Doris would say eagerly, pointing out the new addition as they passed a house a little way off the railway line, surrounded by pear-trees, that in their season were clothed with a delicate splendour of blossom seldom equalled elsewhere. She had fallen asleep after looking out through the window all the morning, but as they passed this well-known spot she awoke from a quiet, happy dream, in which she heard her mother saying:

'We are too late for the blossoms this time, Doris; but see how the trees are bending under their young pears!'

She looked out at the window, and lo! there was Pear-blossom Farm with another new room to it—a large one with a bow-window.

'What has happened now, maman?' she said, smiling softly. And then she remembered that her mother was no longer beside her. But the thought had no sting in it, till she overheard some whispered words in the carriage.

A guard, who on this route had often seen Mrs. Lindsay and her daughter travelling together, came in to check the tickets. He looked at the young lady, now in black, and without her mother, and said something in a low voice to jChalloner. 'Dead?' Doris heard him repeating the word in a low, startled voice, and divining who was meant, her heart rose in rebellion against the thought. The things that had been for a short time so close and dear to her—these were dead: they had fallen from her like the fruit-blossoms whose time is overpast. But her mother, whose welcoming, reassuring kiss had released her from all pangs of sorrow, when her hour of desolation had come in the very heart of the Silent Sea, ah, she had never died! she had but 'awakened from the dream of life.'

From the moment that Nature was once more around her in the dear familiar aspects of beauty and fertility, the old close bond between Doris and her mother was more strongly renewed: not so much through memory, as a constant pervasive sense of communion which made all other interests dim, even a little unreal, in comparison. Not that she was indifferent, least of all to memories of that brief space during which an emotion more absorbing than she had felt before had overcome her. It was impossible to forget that, but she looked on it as something irreparably past, while this quickening of the old life embraced almost the whole of her past, and would be linked with those coming experiences of which her chief forecasts came in dreams and long silent reveries.

'Does your head ache, dear? Are you very tired?' Mrs. Challoner asked repeatedly during the latter part of the journey, and to all inquiries Doris answered that she was very well.

They were met at the railway-station by those old friends of Mrs. Lindsay who had written to ask Doris to stay with them in the early days of her bereavement. She now gladly consented to visit them for a week or ten days, according to the date at which Mr. Challoner's health enabled them to leave the colony. Her first care the next day was to send Shung to post a short letter she had written to Victor the day before she left Stonehouse, intending to send it that same evening; but it had been somehow overlooked. As Kenneth had said nothing of the invalid he had taken to the private hospital, Doris also maintained silence on the point. She felt sure that Victor's presence in the district under such strange circumstances, after his supposed departure by ship from Port Pellew, would lead to much wonder, very likely to much blame; and blame for him she could not bear. She was little given to analyzing her thoughts, but even in their unprobed recesses there was no shade of anger against Victor. Though she felt there was something strange, something she could not comprehend, in what had happened, yet she did not pass any judgment. 'And what is life that we should moan? Why make we such ado?'¹⁰ These words, marked by her mother's hand years before, now seemed to sum up all.

- a. van] waggon E1
- b. the] Om. Adl E1
- c. terror] in terror E1
- d. awakening] awaking Adl E1
- e. round her] her round Adl E1
- f. slightly] lightly Adl E1
- g. struck] had struck Adl E1
- h. surrounding] succeeding Adl E1
- i. in] Om. Adl
- j. Challoner] Mrs. Challoner Adl
- k. repeating] repeat E1
- l. felt] ever felt Adl E1

m. little] not Adl E1

Chapter IX.

It was on the sixth day after her return from Colombo that Miss Paget heard the first rumour of Victor's abrupt departure for England or the Cape of Good Hope. There seemed to be a difference of opinion as to his destination even among those who knew the most, and in the end she found that no one knew very much except by implication. It was at a garden-party she heard the tidings—at the same house and near the self-same spot on which Victor three months before had charged her with inventing melancholy.

The entertainment was given in honour of a German nobleman who had travelled all over the Old World and the New, chiefly with the result of proving that cosmopolitan dining did not impair his digestion. The house was moderately old, as awe reckon age in Australia, and the surroundings picturesque. The sea was quite near, and the grounds laid out in lawns, and numerous walks lined with Old-world trees mingled with those of native growth. There were winding lanes almost buried in shrubs and creepers, and the daintily-trimmed lawns were sprinkled with dwarf yellow honeysuckles, scented verbena, daphne bushes, and many others of the perfume-breathing kind. It was a warm day about the middle of December, and the sunshine seemed to extract their inmost essences from flowers and leaves, so that the air was loaded with perfume which, in places, might be too heavy, were it not for the fresh, keen savour of the sea-breezes.

Miss Paget, with her father and Professor Codrington, were among the last to arrive.

'It is all the fault of the Delphin Ordon,' she said, excusing herself to the hostess smilingly. 'Oh, don't ask me what it is! I only know it is shelves of old books, over which bold learned gentlemen cannot keep the peace.'

'But Professor Codrington is not as old as your father, Helen,' returned the hostess, with a meaning smile, which made Miss Paget feel sure that already the pundit's mild infatuation for herself was the subject of gossip; for it was a fact that his intimacy with Miss Paget opened the Professor's mind for the first time to the thought that to form the subject of equivocal odes in the dead languages was not woman's sole function.

There were over three hundred people present, not counting the large blonde Count who was the centre of attraction. Miss Paget, after chatting with a group of ladies near the hostess, passed on with her father and his friend, talking to scores of people, many of whom they saw for the first time since their return. There was a band playing, and on every side much talk and laughter. Miss Paget, in one of her most becoming gowns, and with a constant succession of smiles, did honour to the occasion. But anyone observing her closely would have noticed an expression of anxious scrutiny, of inquiring observation, in her face, as she looked round her from time to time.

Would Victor make his appearance perhaps to-day? If not, she would, at any rate, surely fall in with someone who could perhaps throw light on what was beginning to look like a mystery, and which, whether it was a mystery or not, filled her with insupportable apprehensions. Victor's telegram, saying that he would be in town on the evening of the day she landed, had awaited her on reaching home. It had been sent after his telegram to her at King George's Sound. She looked for him to come on Saturday evening, after the arrival of the late north train. But he neither came nor sent. On Sunday she made an excuse of not feeling well, and stayed at home from church, thinking he might turn up at any moment. Had something detained him at the mine? Or was he ill? Oryes, she had said to herself repeatedly during the past few weeks that a certain change had come over Victor's letters; and the thought was confirmed when she found that there was nothing beyond a telegram for her at the Sound. But then it was delightful that he should hurry down the very day she returned. And she resolved that she would show all the joy she felt. She would voluntarily shorten the time of probation, and their engagement would be announced forthwith—that is, if there was nothing wrong; and if there was—— She did not try to face the alternative. 'I suppose I shall pull through somehow,' she thought, and the words fairly express the history of the succeeding days of strained suspense.

She had shoals of visitors, and a rush of all sorts of social engagements. On the Tuesday succeeding their return, her father spent hours with her arranging a list of the friends he wished to be asked to a succession of small dinner-parties, to meet Professor Codrington, before they went away to Port Callunga for their annual stay at the seaside. Though Mr. Paget thought that he was easily bored, his partiality for this form of entertainment in his own house, cunder his daughter's careful supervision had, up to this, resisted the combined inroads of age, dulness and monotony.

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There were the momentous questions as to the relations between certain people—as to the advisability of asking two men at once, otherwise suitable, but whose wives conspired in being so immovably stupid that no party of ten could survive such absolute dead-weights, etc., ad infinitum. Then there was the even more important task of deciding on soups and entrées and wines to suit the company. It seemed as if the discussion would never, never come to an end. Yet Miss Paget did not flinch, though each time the door-bell rang, or the sound of footsteps passed the half-open door of the morning-room, in which this domestic conclave was held, her heart was in her throat with the question, 'Is it Victor?'

'My dear Helen, why do you persist in having the door open?' her father cried at last in a tone of irritation, seeing her eyes fastened on it when there was a subdued murmur of voices in the hall. 'It is almost the sole point in which you seem to betray your Australian origin,' pursued Mr. Paget, who felt that the subject was serious enough to call for a digression from the point on hand. 'Professor Codrington said only the other day that in your society he quite lost sight of your not being English-born.'

At another time Miss Paget would doubtless have indulged in some mental or audible remark as to the comic inability under which Professor Codrington, like the majority of the deeply respectable British middle classes, laboured, of being absolutely unable to imagine people are civilized in a country not even mentioned in their parents' geographies. But just then she merely said, with the greatest meekness:

'Did he, papa? I am glad; for I am sure it would worry him to have one different from the people he is used to. . . . But about the door. I would sooner have it a little ajar, if you do not mind much. I find it so close; I seem to need more air these last few days—as if I had a little touch of fever.'

Mr. Paget involuntarily drew back.

'I hope to goodness, Helen, you are not going to fall ill with all these arrangements on hand. I wish you would let that maid who has been taken ill go to the hospital!'

'I assure you, papa, that has nothing to do with it. It is chiefly my throat; it sometimes ails a little like this in the early summer.'

Her father resumed his suggestions and instructions, and Miss Paget did not allow her eyes to wander again towards the door. But when the conference was over she went out and took a cab off the nearest stand, and went into the General Post Office in the city, and sent a message to Victor at the Colmar: "Have you been unable to leave? Please send an immediate answer." That was all, beside her name and address. The reply came as they were leaving to go to the theatre. It was from the post and telegraph master at Colmar, with whom Victor had been on very friendly terms, and the answer was: "Mr. Fitz-Gibbon left here early on Friday morning."

'Is that from anyone unable to come to dinner to-morrow, Helen?' said her father, after they got into the carriage.

'Oh no, papa; it's a mere bagatelle—nothing so important as that,' she managed to say with a smile, and all the time her heart was throbbing like the throat of a singing bird. Oh, how sick she was getting of this double life, and of everything around her: the great situations in dramas, which produce an immense effect, and the small situations in life, that make no outward change at all, and yet paralyze the very springs of action.

On the next day, Wednesday, they had their first dinner-party—seven of their most intimate neighbours. Mrs. Tillotson was not among the number. Her daughter Jane had influenza, and the good lady was waging an internecine strife with the nurse and doctor on the subject of antipyrine,² reading extracts to the patient out of the wrong magazines, and goading her son-in-law to desperation, by imploring him each morning at breakfast, and every evening at dinner, to have new and more enlightened advice as to the state of his lungs.

'Yes, my dear, Jane, I am glad to say, is a little better. What it has cost me to save her from being the victim of antipyrine I would not like to tell you! However, I have the consolation of having done my duty, and I am coming home to-morrow,' she said to Helen, when they met at the garden-party on Thursday, where here and there, through the vistas of shadowy foliage, shimmering expanses of the Southern Ocean caught the eye.

It was on a slight rise at the end of an elm avenue, commanding one of these views, that Miss Paget first caught sight of Mrs. Tillotson, sitting with another gold friend on a rustic bench under a big gum-tree.

'You must tell me all the news—you know how hungry one is for news after being away so long,' said Miss Paget, who had been feverishly anxious to see Mrs. Tillotson, feeling sure she would be one of the first to hear if anything strange or unusual had happened to 'Mrs. Fitz-Gibbon's boy.' But she did not mention his name. She made Helen sit down beside her, and drenched her with showers of vapid twaddle, or what seemed so to her

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listener, who was indeed tired to death of perplexity and doubt and wonder. Once or twice she essayed to say in a careless tone, 'I wonder whether Victor Fitz-Gibbon is still at the mine'; but after saying 'I wonder' she gave the sentence a new turn, and the longer she delayed, the more impossible it became to utter the words without a violent effort or betraying too much emotion.

All through the previous evening she had felt that she might at any moment step out of the room from her smiling guests, into one adjacent, to meet the tragedy of her life. . . . 'A tragedy only to myself, no matter what happens,' she thought. To these people, to everyone else, it would be a story to smile and wink over. A woman of her years breaking her heart over a boy just out of his teens! She cherished no illusions—she did not spare herself—but this did not lessen the pangs she endured. She had come out to-day determined in some way to end the suspense—to ask anyone or everyone who would be likely to know.

'But at least he has not been killed or had a bad accident—there would be a paragraph in the papers,' she said to herself, as the two old friends between whom she sat gossiped on, and she sat staring at some white-sailed boats on the blue waves at the end of the avenue, motionless, as if asleep, with the shadow looking exactly like the substance, even to the tear at the tip of one of the sails. She knew the scene was one over which some people would rave as being very beautiful, but there was not a fibre of her nature that vibrated to its charm. It gave her rather a feeling akin to repulsion, almost one of helpless terror, like the presence of a great, serene implacable force profoundly indifferent to the sorrows and destinies of human beings.

She saw her father and Professor Codrington walking towards a marquee, near which the band was playing. She thought of asking her two old friends to hcome in a devious direction towards the same centre, on the chance of meeting someone who would know something of Victor, of meeting himself, perhaps. At that moment some words spoken between two ladies, who had met just behind the rustic bench on which she sat, caught her ear.

'Gone away in a sailing-ship? Didn't he write to tell anyone?'

'No, not a word. In fact, none of us in town knew he had left the mine till father heard from the captain—you know they call the men who manage the mines captains.—Ah, how do you do, dear? Isn't it too lovely? The band, and the views, and the Count—such a droll creature! . . . I hear he speaks every known tongue.'

'Ah, the version I heard is that he eats every known tongue, down to that of a jew-lizard,³ and you know what used to be his waist is on my side of the story.'

Miss Paget had risen on catching the first words about one who 'had gone away in a sailing-ship.' The speaker, as she had divined by the voice, was Miss Stuart Drummond,⁴ talking to two or three other young ladies. The new-comer was Miss Mason, fianc e of Victor's elder brother.

She caught sight of Miss Paget, and came forward to speak to her.

'Doesn't the sea look exquisite just from this point of view?' said Miss Paget, leading her a little away from the rest. She had not seen them, but a troop of sea-gulls opposite the avenue vista, circling widely over some booty of the waves, with outspread snowy pinions and faint, complaining calls, gave a special point to the scene. Miss Mason, feeling she was expected to admire it all, made some polite remarks and then spoke of Colombo. Miss Paget must have enjoyed it very much, and then the getting home was always so nice. Wasn't it iwhilst she was away that poor dear old Mrs. Ridley died so suddenly?

'Yes, and do you know since I came here I heard a curious little rumour——'

'Oh, about Victor Fitz-Gibbon? Isn't it the most curious affair? but it can only be some whim, you know. There is nothing whatever amiss to account for it, as is so often the case when people go off like that, without saying a word to anyone.'

Miss Paget had rightly judged that Miss Mason would know all there was to tell. She went over in detail all that had been learned, and what Lance said and thought. Victor had written indefinitely of coming to town before Christmas.

'We thought when he came down that he would be sure not to go back again, for, after all, it was a little absurd, his going there at all. And now he won't be at our wedding.'

'It is to be soon?'

'In three or four weeks,' answered the girl with a jdimpling smile; 'and Victor was to be kbest man.⁵ Oh, I shall scold him! You know Lance is almost sure he must have written, and that the letters were somehow lost—perhaps entrusted to some "sundowner," like poor old Bertie Grayson's letters, when he wasn't heard of from that station beyond anywhere for months and months. As it is, no one had a letter from him but the manager

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of the mine.'

The theory of lost letters was confirmed by Miss Paget's own experience, though she could not make use of the confirmation. But it did not seem to be much needed. None of his people were greatly disquieted, only amazed, and a little inclined to be vexed at him.

'If his mother were here, you know, she would be distracted; but we others take it calmly enough,' Lance Fitz-Gibbon explained to Miss Paget a few minutes later. 'But I don't suppose it would have happened if the mater were at home,' he added; 'indeed, I sometimes think perhaps it was on account of some letter from her he went. I found out that the English mail had been delivered the day before he left. Only why go by a tub of a sailing-vessel, and from Port Pellew? It seems as if the boy had determined on something, and wanted to avoid all the bother and fuss of talking it over with people.'

'He wrote nothing to you in a letter, then, or anything of that sort?'

'Not a syllable. We didn't write to each other very often, you know. I had some idea of having an inquiry made, but uncle pooh-poohed the thought, as everything was so clear—his letter posted to the mine-manager, and his letters and cards left at the inn.' It was more the anxious, questioning look in Miss Paget's face that made Fitz-Gibbon go over these details than any real anxiety in his own mind. She was at first too startled to adopt the explanation supported by everything except direct proof. Afterwards it amazed her that she should in so short a time adopt the suggestion that, strange as Victor's abrupt departure was, yet it afforded no reasonable ground for anxiety. Of her own special reasons for lying awake at night, and getting up restlessly before dawn kindled the sky, of growing pale and losing her appetite, she was, of course, mute as the dead.

On the second day after hearing the news Miss Paget horrified herself by going into a fit of violent hysterics for the first time in her life. The servants' wonder, her father's shocked amazement, and his insistence in sending for his doctor and explaining that his daughter had sobbed and cried at the pitch of her voice as she had never done in childhood—all were details full of such keen annoyance that for a short time she could think of nothing else. She took herself to task severely for succumbing too easily to those fears that had been in the background from the first. Henceforth, amid the conflict of her thoughts, she clung to the belief that Victor could not have gone as he did without some good reason altogether unconnected with her, and that no reason would have induced him to go without writing to her. His letter was lost, and until further tidings came she would not allow her fears and doubts to gain the upper hand.

She bent herself resolutely to a disposal of her days that would leave no idle moments. She gave more of her time to household duties, trying to win back some of the old girlish sense of elation in the perfect order and completeness of the household of which she was mistress; going oftener into the great bright airy kitchen, with its tiled walls and floors of spotless purity, its gleaming utensils of plated ware and copper and agate, and its wide range, so perfectly adjusted that it would almost cook of itself. She supervised some repairs to the servants' rooms, with their pretty outlooks, and flowers growing at the windows. She went now and then, as in olden times, for a chat with them in their sitting-room, into which she had conveyed so many artistic knick-knacks, till some of her older friends solemnly warned her against making her servants' lives so luxurious that they would be unfitted for their own sphere in life. Had she ever undertaken anything in which some danger was not found to lurk? But all other dangers, real or imaginary, sank into insignificance compared to this, of finding her whole life made waste and void, by centring all its vital interests on an unrequited attachment. It was with a sort of vague terror of this that she took up her old pursuits with increased zeal and method.

She went more frequently to charity meetings, visited the destitute asylum and the hospitals and the suffering poor with steadfast regularity. And then all during the first week after she learned the inexplicable tidings of Victor's departure there was the succession of dinner-parties, which claimed so much attention.

The stir in the household created by such parties, the sound of beating and pounding, the fragrant essences and condiments that impregnated the atmosphere, the savour of roasts and joints, of sauces and dainty soups, often affected her with a feeling that amounted to nausea. But she went through all the duties of a careful hostess with relentless exactitude. She tripped down the broad stairs, shimmering in delicate summery fabrics, to await her guests, and said the right things at the right moment as seriously as if the dearest aim of her being was compassed, when, on bidding her father goodnight, he said: 'Well, Helen, I think our little party went off very well.' And, as a matter of fact, she tried very hard to make herself realize that in the midst of so much that was maimed and spoiled in the world through sheer poverty, the rich, flexible, delicately adorned aspects of life had a distinct value

of their own.

And thus somehow time wore on till nineteen days had passed from the one on which Miss Paget heard the news of Victor's departure. And now it was the second of January. She had for the first time evaded the annual sojourn with her father at Port Callunga—at least, for the first four weeks. It was possible for her to do this without incommoding him, because Professor Codrington bore him company, and the older and more experienced servants could be relied on to do everything for their material comfort. Their mental harmony must largely depend on their conclusions regarding the Cretic and tetrameter–iambic metres.⁷

Miss Paget felt that the seclusion of Port Callunga, with its beautiful monotony and the unbroken loneliness of seashore, would be more than she could bear, while she watched and waited for tidings, and counted the days till it would be possible to get a cablegram from Victor. The serious illness of one of the maids gave her sufficient excuse for staying at Lancaster House, and her father agreed to the arrangement with that docility which always characterized him when neither his pursuits nor dinners were threatened by the vagaries of man or woman kind.

'But about Mrs. Tillotson, Helen?' he said, a few days before his departure. 'I would not like to say anything unkind; but without you to listen to her fears about her investments and her sons–in–law——'

'Of course Mrs. Tillotson stays with me, papa. Why'—with a rising smile—'I am not quite sure that it would be proper for her to go with you and Professor Codrington and all those reckless metres.'

Since she was left a widow six years previously, Mrs. Tillotson had spent part of most summers with the Pagets at the sea–side. But she, too, found reasons for being better contented to stay just then at Lancaster House, instead of going to Callunga. She had let her house furnished at an exorbitantly high rent to a newly–enriched Silver King,⁸ and she wanted to keep an eye on the premises. Then Jane was really very delicate, though George would not or could not see it, nor take any steps to go away for part of the summer. But she, at least, had her eyes open, and would try to do her duty, and her duty was not to be beyond reach if Jane should want her. . . . As for Matilda, she was so taken up with embroidering altar–cloths, and so devoured with grief at the spread of 'heresy,' that a mere mother hardly counted in her life at all. . . . But George was more like a ghost than ever, and if he really became one, no doubt Jane would remember that her mother was still living. And then there were those Banjoewangie⁹ shares. She had implored Richard to put the last money that fell in from mortgages into something that would be quite, quite safe, and now, after paying such high dividends, these shares were steadily going down. That was so often the way with mines after they had been worked for a little time.

Mrs. Tillotson's first care each morning was to glance over the share–lists in the daily papers, and her spirits would rise and fall with the Banjoewangies in a way that Miss Paget would no doubt have found trying if she had not been partly oblivious of the matter. As long as her companion put in a sympathetic monosyllable now and then, Mrs. Tillotson gently potted on in the manner of an insensitive, self–involved, garrulous woman, who takes no impression from any personality foreign to her own. Each day furnished her with events, visits, and conversations that kept her in a gentle simmer of indolent activity.

On the date mentioned, the two sat on a veranda overlooking a shadowy part of the lawn, at two o'clock in the afternoon, when Lance Fitz–Gibbon came in through the side gate. On seeing him Miss Paget turned very pale.

'You will be surprised at my errand,' he said, by way of preparing her, when she had stepped in with him to a morning room that opened on the veranda.

She murmured something by way of reply, and then he handed her a little note. The lines were wavering and uncertain, but not more so than her sight. When the letters ceased to dance before her eyes, she read these words:

'Dear Helen,

'Can you come nto me at once? The journey has knocked me up so much that Lance insists on my resting.

'Yours,

'Victor.'

'He is at the house in which I lodge, less than half a mile away,' Fitz–Gibbon said, meeting her eyes as she looked up in hopeless bewilderment, after slowly reading this note the second time through.

To get a hat and oa pair of gloves and a sunshade, to excuse her absence to Mrs. Tillotson for an hour or so, and to find herself walking rapidly beside Fitz–Gibbon to his lodgings in Jeffrey Street, was the work of a few minutes. On the way he told her all he knew. Four days ago a telegram came to him from the Broombush Creek private hospital from Victor, saying he was well enough to travel. He had started for the diggings at once, and returned by the first north train that day. Victor insisted on travelling straight through, and wished to drive to

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Lancaster House direct from the railway-station, which Fitz-Gibbon had prevented his doing by promising that he would at once bring Miss Paget to him.

They had reached the house before Miss Paget comprehended that the report of Victor's departure from Port Pellew was absolutely untrue—that he had been hurt, and lying in some place unknown to him for two weeks, according to the date of his admission to the hospital, whither he was taken by some person in a hawker's waggon. He had been unconscious for days in the hospital, and for days, when he tried to explain where he had been and how he had been hurt, his talk was taken to be the delirium of fever. Indeed, he was not free from fever now. It would be better to postpone talking of the mysterious events, as far as possible, till he was stronger. They had telegraphed to the mine-manager, and were going to put the matter in the hands of the police.

Miss Paget listened as if she were walking in a dream. But amidst all the confusion and inexplicable mystery, one thought rose up clear and beautiful as a star. His first anxiety was to see her. The weary, endless days of strained perplexity and harassing uncertainty had tried her more than she herself knew. Now it was as though a great load were suddenly taken off, but as if she were too weak and weary from the burden to feel greatly relieved. But soon she would be rested, and able to rejoice that her dismal apprehensions and mistrusts were over and past.

But even as she waited in the drawing-room, while Fitz-Gibbon went to tell Victor that she had come, a feeling of exquisite happiness stole over her.

'O, God, I thank Thee!—it is more happiness than I have dared to hope for!' were the words that rose in her heart. . . . The next moment she was following Fitz-Gibbon into the room in which Victor was resting.

- a. we reckon age] age is reckoned E1
- b. old learned] learned old E1
- c. under] and under Adl
- d. beside] besides Adl
- e. getting] Om. Adl
- f. and] and the E1
- g. old] Om. Adl
- h. come] go E1
- i. whilst] while Adl E1
- j. dimpling] dimpled Adl
- k. best] groom's E1
- l. floors] floor Adl E1
- m. dinners] his dinners E1
- n. to me] Om. Adl
- o. a] Om. Adl E1
- p. were] was Adl

Chapter X.

He was in a dressing-gown in a half-sitting position on a couch, awaiting her with a look of such eager expectancy on his face that Miss Paget's first feeling was one of quick joy.

'Helen, where is she?' were his first words.

'Who, dear Victor?'

'Doris.'

'Doris?'

'Yes.'

'I—I----'

'Oh, Helen, adon't say you do not know!'

'But what can I say?'

'You know nothing of her; you have not seen her?'

'I never knew anyone of that name.'

'And I made so sure—oh, so sure----'

He pressed his hands against his temples, and lay back with half-closed eyes, with an expression of intense chagrin.

'What did you make sure of, Victor?'

'That you had seen her, and then that Doris had written—that you knew where she was.'

'You have been very ill, dear.'

'Ill? I have been in hell—down low in the innermost circle!'

'And you are far from well yet, Victor.'

'Just five days ago, after what seemed long years of darkness and ceaseless struggle, I woke up. Everything was unreal. Then I got her letter. Oh, Helen, think of it! My poor darling believes that I do not love her as she thought.'

Miss Paget's hands were so tightly clenched that her nails made livid dents in the delicate flesh.

'But who, then, could have told Doris? Who else knew but our two selves?'

'bKnew what, Victor? I am afraid your head is----'

'Yes, it is whirling in chaos. But I have one thing to steady me—one thing to hold by. It is not all black confusion. Only the thought that she may be sailing away. . . . Oh, it is too intolerable!'

Victor turned away with a movement of extreme impatience, and lay back looking weak and spent. His face was white and thin, his eyes looking unnaturally large and hollow. Miss Paget noticed that they glittered with excitement when he spoke, and that, until overcome with exhaustion, there was a vehemence of emotion in his face and voice she had never seen in them before. This, coupled with his strange conduct and inexplicable speech, gave her a quick thrill of fear. Was it the delirium of fever or of a more fixed and dangerous aberration?

'Dear Victor, what is it that distresses you? Is it any news of your mother, or----'

'No, no, no! It is Doris—my Doris! She has gone away. I must find her. She must know the truth . . . and perhaps she is sailing away to the other side of the world!'

No; never before had Miss Paget seen him touched with this absorbing intensity. But here a sudden chill fell on her—a doubt that his cwords did not spring from imaginary events or a disordered brain.

'Doris! My Doris!' What could these words signify? The first dread that Victor's mind was temporarily unhinged gave place to the dread that it was not. Yet she tried to hope against hope—to lead him from the feverish thoughts that had taken hold of him. She spoke in the soothing tones in which one seeks to dsoothe an irritable child:

'All these days we have been thinking of you as on your way to England; but now you are safe here.'

'Good Heavens! what fantastical notions you have all got hold of!' he cried, epassing his hands once more against his temples. 'I made so sure you would know something about Doris. Not that you would have made her believe I did not love her. You would have understood it all. The last time I saw her was a few hours before I was made insensible. . . . I was coming to you, Helen, to tell you all.'

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Miss Paget drew her breath in suddenly. For a little time it seemed as if she were spending her last breath in holding herself above the billows breaking stormily over her head.

Yet only a very short pause elapsed before she said in a calm, even voice:

'What were you coming to tell me, Victor?'

Again there was silence in the room for a short time. Victor had turned his head aside, and Miss Paget saw that his eye-lashes were wet.

In that moment, had it been in her power, she would have restored to him without a moment's hesitation the lost love who had so entirely effaced her own claim that he seemed to have forgotten its existence. But as the first tumult of bitter disappointment subsided, the past returned to him in clearer proportions.

'You were wiser than I was, Helen, when I thought I loved you well enough to ask you to be my wife.'

'Tell me about it now, Victor . . . all you were coming to tell me when these strange things happened,' she said, stroking his thin, hot fingers with her cool, firm hand.

And by degrees she heard the story—the old simple, ever new and imperishable idyll of two young human hearts who found in each other the happiness and completion of their being.

'No one knew but our two selves. . . . I did not mean to speak till I had told you. . . . I would have come at once to you . . . only you were away. . . . But I was glad to remember that from the first you thought my affection was a boyish folly. . . .'

'Yes, I thought it was not likely to last,' she said with her invincible little smile—a smile which mentally she considered equalled Mdlle. Cardinale's most signal feat of balancing in the air.

'I am glad now that you did not really love me in that way.'

'Now, how clever it was of you to find that out,' she said, shifting one of the cushions to make his head more comfortable.

'I don't think I did quite find it out, Helen, till I was really in love myself,' he answered slowly. He raised one of her hands to his lips, and added: 'I knew you would understand how it all happened.'

The words hurt her horribly. But beyond speaking in a very low voice, she betrayed no emotion as she replied:

'Yes, I think I quite understand, Victor.'

The longer she was with him, the more she realized that his hurt, and the bitter disappointment which had come to him with the recovery of full consciousness, had for the time entirely changed him, making him self-engrossed, impatient, and profoundly melancholy. It was an effort of memory to recall his face as she had last seen it, beaming with health and boyish gaiety, with every thought tuned by that love of the bright side of life which seemed doubly his by temperament as well as youth.

But there was no effort of memory required to make her realize that nothing—nothing made any difference to the place he held in her heart. 'Oh, thank Heaven, no one knows—no one ever will know!' she said to herself, bending her head as it all rose before her, bringing a hot sudden flame into her face. The steadfast, unalterable vehemence of her feelings, notwithstanding that the fears which had from the first beset her were now certainties, was the last drop in her cup of bitterness. . . . She recalled stories that had come to her knowledge, of women who had clung to men even when they had outraged every instinct of humanity. Love, which, according to the poets, should exalt and transfigure human beings, did it not in reality as often humiliate and disgrace them, and render them recklessly egoistic? But she had always known the poets were dealers in pretty fables and baseless lies.

'At least there are some depths of humiliation I shall be spared,' she thought bitterly, as she glanced at Victor's face. Sombre and changed it might be, but it would never bear traces of cruelty and deceit and shameless self-indulgence.

During the short silence in which these reflections passed through Miss Paget's mind, Victor had drawn a little letter from an inner pocket in his dressing-gown.

'It is all so awfully mixed up, Helen,' he said, his voice weak from mental and physical weariness. 'You may be wondering why I made so sure you would know something about Doris. . . . Well, I will give you her precious little letter to read. I got it the last thing as I was leaving the hospital. The doctor had it for a day or two, I think. He said I had been drugged after being hurt, and must be kept perfectly calm. At first he would do nothing I told him, only try to keep me quiet. It was only when a telegram came from Lance, in answer to one I bribed the wardman to send, that the doctor believed a word of what I said . . . "Delirium—all delirium," he kept on muttering, till one day I flung my boot at him; and after that he said it was a case of acute madness.'

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'Poor dear Victor! Then kI may look at this letter?'

'Yes; please read it to me slowly aloud, Helen.'

Miss Paget took the note and read:

' "My dear Victor,

' "To-morrow we are leaving-----" '

'You see, Helen, lthere is nothing to show whether it was the mine or Adelaide. I sent a telegram to Trevaskis on the journey down, and instead of giving me a date, he merely telegraphed that the Challoners had left some days ago to take ship for England.'

'Then we can look up the shipping intelligence,² and find out from that—or some of the agents,' said Miss Paget.

'Oh yes, yes! this very day. I knew you would help me. I seem to have lost all power of thought.'

Miss Paget resumed.

' "And I want to say good-bye, and to thank you for all your kindness: I will never forget it." '

Victor gave a great sigh that was almost a groan, and made an effort to get up.

'What now, Victor?'' said Miss Paget, who was holding the letter on her lap, so that the tremulousness of her hand should not be noticed—an unnecessary precaution.

'What now?' he repeated. 'I want to go away. I want to find out where Doris is, and, if she has sailed, to take the next ship. Why, there may be one starting now! My kindness to her. . . . Good God! as if I would not lay down my life to save her a pang! . . . And all this time she thinks. . . . Helen, why don't you go on? But I know I interrupted you. I won't say another word till you finish.'

To lessen the temptations of breaking this promise, Miss Paget read to the end rapidly, not pausing if any word or sentence drew an impatient sigh or a low exclamation from her listener:

' "I think, dear Victor, I must have made a mistake as to some things you said—I mean, in the way you love me. I do not blame you, for I am sure there is some explanation I cannot guess, and I am afraid you were unhappy when you went away so that we shouldn't know where you were. Perhaps that is why you fell ill, and had to be nursed near the broken-down whim.

' "Mother and I lived so much alone, and were so very, very dear to each other. But even with maman there were a great many things she did not explain to me. . . . Once when we were returning from town we travelled with Koroona—the girl I told you mabout—mother was so angel-kind to everyone, yet she would never take me to see Koroona at Noomooloo, and Koroona was never at our place till she came flying out of the woods that terrible evening. . . . Often, too, when mother was talking to Mrs. Murray or Mrs. Challoner, or even some of the poor splitters' wives, she would speak in a low voice and look at me; or other times I would come in from the garden, and they would speak of something else. One day, not very long before we parted, I asked mother why there were so many things she did not explain to me, and she said I was not old enough yet to understand. . . . And this is another of these many things. . . . But you must soon get well, and ncome to Helen and be happy." '

Miss Paget drew a deep breath at the mention of her own name. Victor's face was very pale and set, but he offered no interruption.

' "I think I shall write one letter to you from France, to know how you are. This is a real letter—not like the little make-believe one when you let me practise so that I might write to Raoul. . . . But that would be quite different, for I know you and love you so much better. I hope you will not think I am vexed or unhappy. I will tell you a secret: darling maman now seems quite near me all the time, as if she had in some way come in place of what made me so happy without her. . . . I am glad you got so many beautiful flowers for me, for flowers will always speak to me of you, and remind me of the great pleasure they gave to the sick children. Poor little dears! they were starved for beautiful things, and there is nothing in all the world more beautiful than flowers, except the swallows flying. . . . I am glad you are now in a place where you will be nursed well from the fever. I pray for you every day.

' "I am, dear Victor,

' "Your faithful friend,

' "Doris." '

' "oCome to Helen and be happy!" When I read that I made sure that in some way you had met Doris here,' said Victor, speaking in a dull tone. 'No one else, except, perhaps, Mrs. Tillotson, knows.'

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'She does not know--no one knows from me,' replied Miss Paget, who, in the midst of a whirl of confused thoughts, discerned one thing clearly: this letter, in its girlish simplicity and uncomplaining renunciation, in some way inspired her with new hopes and confidence. Only, if she had really gone, would Victor at once follow, or would he wait till the delirium of fever left him sane and collected? She insisted upon his taking a little wine before he tried to give her some idea of all that remained with him of the past strange days.

He drank almost a wineglassful, and as soon as he was strengthened by its reviving influence he became more excitable and unreasonable. Why was he being kept like this, inactive? Why was not Lance doing something? The first thing that should be done was to arrest Trevaskis.

'On what grounds?' asked Miss Paget.

'Not on grounds--on suspicion. Oh no, nothing could or would be done unless he were allowed to act, and he was tied--fastened down as of old. . . .' This was the light in which his feebleness appeared to him. He had in the journey spent more than his reserve of strength, and his brain was cruelly clouded by the long days in which, after his violent hurt, he had been kept insensible by doses of laudanum.

Miss Paget made him lie down again on the sofa. She bathed his head, and rubbed his temples softly with the palms of her hands. She allowed him to talk, for she felt it would be worse than useless to try to impose silence while he was in such strange perplexity. He told her that his brother as yet knew nothing of Doris; he could not bear beginning to explain. Everything he said aroused only wonder and doubt. And then he told her how he had been falling asleep on the bunk in his office, when he heard someone unlocking the iron safe, and he sprang up to catch the thief. The keys had been left with him, and it was only Trevaskis who knew of them. . . . He was seized and struck on the head. After that, all he could remember was a cavernous place with dim lights coming and going, borne by men--one with his face almost covered with long gray hair, the other shorter in stature--and when he was alone a feeble light burning in a distant corner. They were gentle in attending to him, but one seldom spoke, and his own eyes seemed always heavy and dull with sleep. . . . Such memories could hardly hold a clue. They bore too much the impress of those fragmentary visions of fever which, once finding lodgment in the brain, perpetually recur.

And then the journey to the hospital! That, too, was like a dream fitfully remembered. He was borne out of the darkness; the lights of the stars and the fresh wind were round him, and he thought Helen came to him. He even remembered calling on her by name to tell her. The horrible shadowy figures were gone, and later he felt sure that Doris was there. He could remember her bending over him, or near him. He seemed to have wakened up from time to time. He thought at first it was heaven, and then he knew it was much better, for they were both alive and on the earth.

Then he woke up in the hospital, and no one even knew who had brought him there. At least, they did not know his name. An old hawker, the wardsman said, who had brought people to the other hospital from Colmar. But he had not been brought from the mine. He had been brought from someone working a claim. She had seen in Doris's letter that he had been near a place they both knew.

'But, after all, everything is well, Victor,' said Miss Paget gently, gratefully noticing that the look of anguished perplexity was gradually leaving his face. 'Even if Doris has gone away, she is with her friends. She will be taken care of, and you will in a short time be strong and well again.'

She soothed him and talked to him till he dropped into a sound sleep. She heard footsteps coming to the door, and softly opened it in time to prevent anyone from knocking. It was Victor's brother, followed by the landlady with a tray, on which stood a little basin full of beef-tea. 'Half a pound of gravy beef, quickly boiled in a common saucepan,'³ thought Miss Paget, giving the preparation a brief glance. She whispered that the patient had fallen asleep, and had better not be disturbed. Then she went into another sitting-room to speak to Victor's brother.

'You have succeeded in quieting him, Miss Paget,' he said, looking at her with a little smile. Then he showed her a telegram which he had a few moments before received from Trevaskis, announcing that he would be in town by the late train to-morrow.

'Poor old Victor has some dark thoughts about this man,' said Lance. 'But of course it is part of the fever. The doctor at the Broombush hospital said he was no more fit to travel than he was to fly. However, short of tying him, he could not be kept. But now, Miss Paget, do you think you could prevail on him to have a doctor and a nurse?'

'A doctor and nurse here? I am afraid the bare idea would irritate him. He is so anxious to go about.'

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'But now that he has seen you? Don't think I am trying to force your confidence. But I thought, before Victor went to the wilds, that he had lost his heart to you. And certainly his intense anxiety only to come to you at once confirmed the impression. . . . I know that you would be likely to hesitate. No, don't tell me a word more than you wish.'

'You are right in supposing that there has been a little more than mere friendship between me and your brother. But—now——'

'Then I will just say only one thing, Helen. Excuse the liberty, but I have known your name a long time, and like the sound of it much.'

Miss Paget, who was extremely pale, responded by a friendly little nod and smile. Despite her agitation, her eyes were shining with some emotion akin to happiness.

'There would not, I am certain, be the same risk in Victor's case that there would be with some young men. He is the soul of fidelity. I won't say any more—perhaps I should not say so much.'

'Thank you. We will put that aspect of the question quite aside just now. Victor needs nursing and society. We have so much room, and quiet, and everything that is necessary, at tLancaster. And I have just been considering that at my time of life, with Mrs. Tillotson in the background——'

Her voice failed her a little, but she kept up her smile bravely.

'Oh, that would indeed be good for the poor fellow! He is in such a state of intense irritation. I think strangers about him would make him wild, and, then, people would come who should not see him—like Uncle Stuart.'

'Oh, is he to be contraband?'

'Well, yes, as long as he comes looking so black, and saying he must have an explanation from Victor of all this sham mystery. Trevaskis, the manager, he said, is furious.'

'Furious! I think I should like to see him when he comes,' said Miss Paget thoughtfully.

'Well, I told uncle he could not possibly see Victor to-day. He'll very likely call the day after to-morrow with the manager, and you must just use your own discretion. I thankfully accept your offer—at any rate, for some days.'

After talking over various details as to Victor's removal, his brother went back to Lancaster House, to order the carriage to come for Miss Paget and her charge at five o'clock.

- a. don't] do not Adl
- b. Knew] Know*Adl
- c. words] mysterious words E1
- d. soothe] pacify E1
- e. passing] pressing E1
- f. time] Om. Adl E1
- g. the] Om. Adl E1
- h. over] round E1
- i. his head] Om. Adl
- j. all] also* Adl
- k. I may] may I Adl E1
- l. there is] there's Adl
- m. aboutmother] aboutand mother Adl
- n. come] go E1
- o. Come] Go E1
- p. upon] on Adl E1
- q. it] that it Adl
- r. lights] light Adl E1
- s. I] that I Adl
- t. Lancaster] Lancaster House E1

Chapter XI.

Victor awoke calmer and more collected, but with a more settled purpose of losing no time in finding out whether the Challoners had already sailed, and, if not, whether they were in Adelaide.

'The first thing to do is to get a file of the daily papers--here is to-day's,' said Miss Paget. 'I'll see if the landlady can help us.'

Lance had gone to telephone to his bank, and the landlady went vaguely searching in various rooms till she had newspapers for six consecutive days. But when Miss Paget returned with these, there was no longer any need to consult them. Victor sat with that day's paper in his hand, with a stunned look on his face.

'They are gone--they are gone,' he said, speaking like one hypnotized, and then in silence he pointed to the passenger-list of a French mail-boat that had sailed on the previous day: 'Mr. and Mrs. R. Challoner and two Misses Challoner.' 'Doris is put down as their daughter, and they are gone,' he repeated in the same tones. 'Oh, to think that I am only a day too late--one miserable little day--and all the days that I was lying tied and in darkness!'

The very cruelty of the blow seemed to take away all power of further emotion. Doris was gone--across the great salt dividing ocean--believing that he did not love her with all his heart and soul, and yet speaking no word of blame, acquitting him from all faults. There was nothing now to be done but suffer and wait till he was a little stronger.

'She is with her friends, you know, Victor. She is safe. It is not as if any harm would come to her,' said Miss Paget, more dismayed by his calm and settled misery than she had been by his irritable impatience.

'Yes, she is with her friends,' he answered slowly; 'but I am not with her. And we were to have made this voyage together--with the great sea around us, full of motion and lustre. So unlike that other gray inland one she called always the Silent Sea!'

'The one thing that you must now set your heart on is to get well. You can then make plans and carry them out. I am going to take care of you.'

'To take care of me?' he repeated, as if the thought were too novel to be grasped all at once.

'Yes, to see that you have proper nourishment at proper times, that you rest when you ought, that you do not attempt things beyond your strength.'

'But then you'll have some doctor hanging round, who will try to give me remedies for everything except what ails me,' said Victor moodily.

But Miss Paget undertook to obviate all and every disagreeable contingency. Lance returned and put up some of Victor's clothes which he had not taken with him to the mine. Then he supported Victor to the carriage, which was waiting at the door.

'You are walking more firmly and looking better already,' he said, taking the silence which had fallen on his young brother as a sign of the contentment of a heart more at rest.

'I am going to take him for a drive,' said Miss Paget, after giving her directions to the coachman, and arranging some cushions round Victor in the deep soft-seated carriage.

The day had been very warm, but a slight rapid shower had lightened the atmosphere. They drove in a westerly direction through quiet wide streets, where each house was fronted with flower-gardens still full of roses, great masses of petunias, and beds of heliotrope, bleached ashy pale by long days of summer. The slopes of the Adelaide hills, shadowy with vines and olives, and tall pomegranate-trees and groves of oranges and lemons, were lying in the warm sunshine, with white houses gleaming through the foliage like quiet, soft scenes in pictures, each with some individual feature of its own as the point of view was changed.

They passed through Walkerville, where so many of the houses are enclosed in roomy gardens, and crossing by the Company's Bridge, they drove into the Botanic Park, skirting the Torrens bank, with its sloping terraces planted with fast-growing trees and drooping willows along the water's edge. Then they passed through the length of the exquisite avenue of plane-trees, one long unbroken arch of pure emerald flame. Victor, whose eyes had grown accustomed to the naked monotony of the great Salt-bush plains, found his spirits gradually reviving under the influence of these benign and tranquil aspects of Nature, breathing only of well-being and man's

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enjoyment of her gifts. The calls and laughter of children at play, the rumble of trams and vehicles in the distance, the roll of carriages near at hand, the clear, melodious whistle of the blackbirds who are here acclimatized,³ the rapid cries of shell parrots rifling the honey blossoms of the gum-trees, were all blended into a harmonious symphony of friendly, familiar life, carrying an assurance to the young man's heart that all must yet be well, though fate had of late dealt him so heavy a blow. The constant feeling of heavy apprehension that had been created by the narcotics with which his system had been poisoned grew lighter in the serene sunshine among these reassuring sights and sounds.

The two were silent for the most part, and Miss Paget, glancing at Victor's face from time to time, saw something of their light coming back to his eyes. The thought arose, what happiness to be once more beside him, if only this girl had not crossed his path! And then she reflected how every joy that came in her way was marred by some gray spectre of what had been or might come to pass, and with that came the resolution that she would postpone her life no longer—that she would be glad in the light of the sun,⁴ and take with a grateful heart the gifts that came in her way. Yesterday her life was bitter with forebodings and uncertainty; she did not know whether Victor were dead or alive, or in what latitude he might be of the great, treacherous sea. To-day he was safe beside her; she would rest in that, be glad in it, let to-morrow bring what it might. She leant back with half-closed eyes, and when Victor, stooping a little forward, leant against her arm, the touch mounted to her head like wine.

He, looking at her for the first time without being engrossed with his own emotions, noticed that she was unusually pale. She had, perhaps, been suffering since they parted. It was not her way to say much of herself. She looked up and found his eyes fixed on her, full of their old kindness; her heart began to beat wildly.

'Are you well, Helen? I have been so full of my own troubles, you have hardly told me anything about yourself,' he said.

'Oh, you see, father and I belong to the happy people who have no history,'⁵ she answered lightly.

And then she went over in detail the record of their days since her last letter had reached him; that is, she told him everything, except those moments of poignant feeling which sum up more of actual life than months of outward events—except those wakeful nights in which the years that might await her, empty and shorn of all the happiness she coveted, swept by in a ghostly procession. But who, to hear her laugh and talk, dwelling on every ludicrous little episode, would have guessed aught of this? Not Victor, certainly, who felt something of his accustomed buoyancy of spirits returning as he listened, and even laughed from time to time.

As they ascended the rise on which Lancaster House is situated, they caught glimpses of the sea, its silver radiance softened by a pale-blue haze penetrated with sunshine. Did it look like this to Doris at that moment? Was she perhaps talking to Mrs. Lucy, and recalling some mysterious legend of China, or of the time when beasts spoke and Queen Bertha span?⁶

'Oh, God bless her! God bless my little darling, and take care of her for ever and ever!' Victor's heart swelled and his eyes grew dim. What a wonderful thing was this new emotion that had taken such tyrannous possession of him—a companion before whose magic that of genii or fairy was a mere creature of weight or pence!⁷ A glimpse of the sea, the folded slope of a hill, the chance trill of a bird's song—all had now a thrill and a meaning that far transcended their mere external beauty.

This came home to him still more forcibly next morning. During the night he slept well; before waking he dreamt of Doris most vividly. She seemed to be quite near him—so near that if he had stretched out his hand he could have touched her. But he was so enraptured by the smile with which she looked at him that he stood motionless, feasting his eyes on her face; so that when he woke his whole frame was suffused with that vague, delicious sense of well-being which comes with happiness—that supreme contentment in the present moment, without remembering the past or questioning the future.

The impression remained with him so strongly that he escaped soon after breakfast to muse over his thoughts alone. He walked very slowly at first, going up the little rise that to the west of the house commanded a view of the sea. He seemed to draw nearer to Doris as he looked. How she would love this sight of the great waters, as they lay limpid and shimmering in the distance, enveloped in magical light, with faint shadows flitting now and then across the quivering blueness, pale and visionary as a world apart, which might somehow vanish from sight at any moment! It was like waking to life anew to look on the familiar sights of earth, while his nature was so profoundly stirred that it seemed as if he were endowed with new senses of perception. There was more colour in

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the sky, more melody in the songs of birds, more oxygen in the air, deeper and more tender associations bound him to the world, this beautiful morning, while every breath he drew gave him an added sense of vigour. And the stronger he felt, the clearer grew the light, as of a perfected memory, in which he recalled Doris sitting near him, in that strange night journey across the Silent Sea. He was buried in these recollections, when he saw Miss Paget approaching him.

'You are looking dreadfully independent this morning,' she said, taking his arm.

'Yes, Helen; I think to be near you makes me better,' he answered, suddenly touched with the thought of her unvarying goodness to him.

She thrilled all over at this speech. What if, after all, Doris were separated from him beyond recall? Thoughts arose which she dared not dwell on; hopes leapt to life she would not consciously entertain.

She had come to tell him that his cousin, Miss Drummond, and his brother's fiancée, Miss Mason, had called. Was he well enough to see them? If not, she would make excuses; they would understand. But he almost laughed at the thought of not being strong enough to stand a little talk. Why, he was almost well enough to start for Jupiter—on foot, if need be.

He might pride himself on feeling so strong and well, but one at least of the young ladies had as much as she could do to keep her tears back at sight of him. This was his future sister-in-law, Florry Mason. She was at all times an affectionate, tender-hearted girl, and just then she was in that slightly exalted, easily-touched mood which many girls experience on the eve of marriage, and Victor had been always a great favourite with her. To see him so changed, with all the bloom gone out of his face, and his hands so white and bony! She tried hard to keep her voice steady and her eyes bright, but Victor noticed a huskiness in her utterance. Was she well, and wasn't it about time she took fright and put off the wedding?

This was fine allusion to an old joke. Florry had confided to him, when they were acting together, that she liked getting engaged immensely; but she was sure when the time came she would take fright, and put off the wedding.

His gaiety helped to restore her. She had so much to tell him. The wedding was to be in nine days, and to-morrow there was to be a wedding-dress bee at their house. Did he know what that was? All her dearest friends assembled to help to make her dress. Well, she had nine very intimate friends altogether, and besides these there would be one who was a great friend of her mother's—Miss North—who was quite a clever doctor. And wouldn't Victor come out with Miss Paget to-morrow? Lance would turn up to keep him in countenance.

'To sew a bit of your wedding-dress? I haven't got a thimble,' answered Victor. But this was too shabby an excuse, and before she went away Miss Mason had Victor's promise that he would come out to Broadmead,⁹ her mother was so very anxious to see him. 'And oh, you poor dear, dear Victor, to think you have been so dreadfully hurt and ill, and we none of us knew it!'

She cried a little, after all, but gafter she felt so much better, and Victor, declaring that she had taken fright after all, shifted his chair so that no one saw her but himself. And then she went to Mrs. Tillotson, to include her in the invitation to the wedding-bee, and Miss Drummond had a little talk with Victor.

Her father wished to know whether he would be well enough to see him to-morrow morning, and the man from the mine—captain, didn't they call him?

'Yes, certainly, I want to see that man—Trevaskis, I mean,' he answered in an altered voice, while a curious change came over him. A shiver passed through his frame, as if touched by a slight current of electricity. Suspicion, repulsion, and a longing for revenge, sentiments hitherto so foreign to his nature, brought a sombre shadow on his face. Miss Paget noticed the alteration, but she was not prepared for the hard, cold, steady look of hatred that settled in Victor's eyes as soon as he saw Trevaskis on the following forenoon. Mr. Drummond had first entered the morning-room in which his nephew sat writing. The elder man murmured something about an extraordinary affair, and an investigation, and wishing for light on the matter. Victor, without making any reply to these feebly-jointed statements, asked where Trevaskis was.

At this moment Miss Paget entered, followed by the manager. He was very well tailored, and had improved immensely in appearance since Victor last saw him.

'Well, Mr. Fitz-Gibbon, this is a strange meeting!' he began, with a little more effusion than was usual with him.

Victor ignored the manager's extended hand, and looked at him fixedly with a malignant expression that gave Miss Paget an unpleasant little shock of surprise.

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'A strange meeting! I wonder whether it is the strangest we have had?' he said, not speaking till she had left the room.

A curious scene followed. Trevaskis let himself go, partly because his fear and confusion were so great that he felt his safety lay in an assumption of violent anger. He called on Mr. Drummond, as chairman of the directors of the Colmar Mine, to witness the studied insult conveyed by the young man's manner and words. . . . He suspected that there was something fishy behind this suspicious sort of disappearance; but to begin to make insinuations against him—against him of all men—as if he could have a single reason under God's sky to wish Mr. Fitz-Gibbon any harm! At this point he choked a little, and his voice broke with emotion.

'Have you taken leave of your senses altogether, Victor?' said his uncle, turning on him with austere indignation.

Victor, from the first moment that consciousness returned, had felt a strong suspicion that the attack on him in his office, and his subsequent disappearance, were in some way due to Trevaskis. The moment they met this suspicion turned into a conviction, and yet seemed more incredible than before. In spite of himself, he found Trevaskis' resolute and intrepid attitude throwing ridicule on his belief.

'You can surely bring forward some grounds for such a serious charge against a man,' said Trevaskis in a calmer voice. 'Only mind you,' he added after a little pause, 'I can see well enough that you are not yet yourself. I know what it is to have the mind full of cranky ideas left by a sharp stroke of fever, and there's no doubt that there has been some foul play somewhere, which will soon very likely be traced up by the police. At any rate, they shall have all the help that I can afford them. But I should like to know what you can recollect of the place you were in.'

'I woke up from time to time in some dark underground place,' returned Victor slowly, his eyes fixed on Trevaskis' face.

'Underground? Have you any proof, or is your recollection quite clear on the point?'

'I cannot say that anything is clear,' answered Victor sombrely. At this admission the manager looked at the chairman of directors with a significant little nod.

'Do you recollect seeing anyone attending you or speaking to you?' said Mr. Drummond.

'Yes, very well. There were two men, one of them I should imagine about Mr. Trevaskis' height and build, but with gray hair, a long gray beard, and sun-glasses. As far as I can remember, he never spoke. The other was a shorter man, and, if my memory does not deceive me, he resembled the other. Latterly I seldom saw the taller man.'

Victor looked hard at Trevaskis as he spoke, but the manager's expression of eager interest was perfectly exempt from any touch of consciousness.

'Two men, and in an underground place,' he repeated thoughtfully. As he spoke he took a note-book out of his breast-pocket, and wrote one or two short entries. Victor watched him with a baffled, lowering expression.

'You telegraphed to me about Challoner,' said Trevaskis, as he closed his note-book.

'I know! I know! They sailed the day before yesterday,' said Victor, turning away with a motion of passionate impatience. Could this really be the scoundrel who had spoilt some of the most glorious days of a lifetime? he asked himself, with an excess of impotent rage, as he thought of Doris sailing leagues and leagues further away from this, hour on hour, believing that he did not love her—that he had deceived her. The belief could hardly be laid to Trevaskis' account. This mystery within mystery made his brain reel with the old chaotic bewilderment which used to overtake him when he was drugged in his unknown hiding-place.

He felt so weak and shaken that he pushed open the window and leant out for a little fresh air. On hearing this statement as to Challoner's departure, a look of pleased surprise came into Trevaskis' face.

'Oh, you knew about the Challoners?' he said, and then, finding that Victor made no further remark, he turned to Mr. Drummond, saying: 'It seems Mr. Fitz-Gibbon has nothing more to say to us.'

On this Mr. Drummond cleared his throat.

'I need hardly tell you, Victor, that this affair has caused me great annoyance, and I must ask you for your own sake never to breathe to anyone a word of the most unjust, and I may say extraordinary, suspicions you first seemed to harbour. I cannot help thinking that your mind is still very unsettled.'

Victor looked at his uncle without replying. 'I wonder if he was very much discomposed by my disappearance?' was the thought that passed through his mind. As a matter of fact, the old gentleman had saved himself from insolvency by appropriating to his own use most of the ready money that was to come to Victor on

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his twenty-first birthday.¹⁰ But the young man was still oblivious of this, and his first feeling after his uncle parted from him was one of self-reproach. 'It is horrible to get a blow on the head and be drugged for a hundred years; it fills one with suspicions,' he said to himself wearily. But it was not only the physical blow. It was one of those wounds of destiny that distil a subtle clairvoyance of evil into the moral nature. It was not only that the early swell of quick emotion unspoiled by any after-thoughts had deserted him, but already his confiding disposition was touched by invincible mistrust. This is a common element in the story of human lives. Youth under the action of time is like a palimpsest exposed to a biting acid, that brings strange legends to light.¹¹

'I have persuaded your uncle and Mr. Trevaskis to stay to luncheon, Victor. Will you join us?' said Miss Paget, coming in so softly that Victor did not hear her till she stood behind him.

'No, Helen, unless you promise to poison them both,' he answered, half laughing. But in reality he looked so pale and exhausted after his interview, that Miss Paget, in her capacity of nurse, decided he must have no more fatigue just then. He was too evidently overwrought in mind and body.

After luncheon was over Miss Paget sat talking to Trevaskis at an open French window.

'You don't know what it is to see all these beautiful trees and flowers after being in a place like Colmar,' he said, his eyes riveted on a tall hibiscus shrub, all aflame with wide-cupped flowers, of a delicate, bright pink hue, drooping one over the other in innumerable shoals.

'Would you like to look at our roses? We have still a great many left,' she said; and, taking a sunshade from a table in the veranda in passing, she walked beside him, pointing out those of the rosebushes whose buds and blooms were still untouched by the heat of summer. Standing near some tea-roses in the shadow of a tall, slender gum-tree, whose pale-pink myrtle blossoms were in possession of some pugnacious pairs of black and yellow honey-eaters, Miss Paget said suddenly: 'There is something I want to ask you, Mr. Trevaskis. Do you know why Mr. Fitz-Gibbon is so anxious about the movements of the Challoners?'

At this unexpected and direct question Trevaskis' face flushed deeply. From the moment he entered the house his mind had been actively occupied with what he knew of the relations between Miss Paget and Victor. His observation, sharpened by what he had learned through having overlooked the contents of his desk, as well as the half-written letter, was keen to detect signs and glances which would otherwise have held no meaning for him. He had seen Miss Paget's eyes full of tell-tale tenderness as they rested on Victor's pale and agitated face. She loved him. Did she know that there was someone who had supplanted her? He judged that she did from the nature of her inquiry. And he knew that the tale which would best serve his purpose would be the one she would most joyfully, most readily believe. These considerations passed through his mind in a flash. There was a scarcely perceptible pause between the question and his answer.

'Yes, Miss Paget, I do; and I wish, for Mr. Fitz-Gibbon's own sake, that he would get rid of the ideas this fever seems to have put into his head.'

'The fever?' stammered Miss Paget.

'Yes, the fever,' returned Trevaskis, in a slow, emphatic voice. 'I'm not going to say what I think of this mystery of his being thrown down and hurt. I know he was far from well at the time. People have done strange things before now, that they knew nothing about afterwards.'

'You—you don't think that—that Mr. Fitz-Gibbon had an accident out alone when he was in a feverish state?'

'It is what I do think, Miss Paget; and I think, too, he must have wandered and fallen in with some prospectors who thought they would make a good thing of keeping him till they would somehow make money out of him. People who, perhaps, got some chum of theirs on his way to England to drop Mr. Fitz-Gibbon's card at the inn at Port Pellew, and an envelope addressed to me that was in his pocket, so that a hue-and-cry wouldn't be raised after him. . . They must have got funky¹² over keeping him, and then one night took him to the hospital. . . . However, it will be the business of the police to find out all about that if they can. . . . But what I wanted to say about this young lady—child she was, more than anything else—is, that it would be a thousand pities if Mr. Fitz-Gibbon were to risk his health, or even to lose his time. . . . It is no use my telling him this. . . . The first question he would put to me would be: "How do you know this young lady does not care for me?" And in honour'—Trevaskis italicized the words with magnificent effect—'I could not tell him. It would be a breach of confidence, and I may say it was something of the nature of an accident that I came to know it. . . . But I think those who have any influence over him should prevent his going on any journeys till he is quite well . . . and when he is quite well it's very likely he won't want to go.'

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'You think, then, that it was the fever-----'

'Yes, and I think the fever is still on him. . . . I think there was very little--very little indeed--between himself and the young lady at all. . . . They just met now and then at Mrs. Challoner's, and--well, I can't go into all the reasons that make me think it, but it's my belief that it was mostly the fever put this into his head. . . . Why, I've known men to take an idea into their heads like that, and not get rid of it for months--for months, I say--and yet 'twas nothing but the fever.'

'Nothing but the fever!' Oh, what a melody the words were in her ears, and how many little incidents took to themselves breath, and wings,¹³ and bore living testimony to the truth of this! If only Victor could be wooed back to perfect health, to wholeness of mind and body, before he took any rash step! 'Nothing but the fever.' The words penetrated her soul with a rapture that had in it something of exquisite pain. Happiness! She had hardly known it till this moment. But she refrained from thanking God, as she had fervently done when she first went to see Victor. The practice seemed to have in it something dangerous for her.

She wandered round in the shady avenues for half an hour after the visitors had gone, too agitated, and too much engrossed in othought that left no room for others, to be able to meet Mrs. Tillotson's endless prattling. When she went in she found that Victor had fallen asleep, looking so pale and spent that she half relinquished the thought of going to the Masons'.

But this brought Mrs. Tillotson's sky down with a run.¹⁴

'Oh, my dear, not go to the pwedding--dress bee? I haven't heard of such an arrangement before, but I am sure it must be quite exquisite. And an afternoon tea of that number--not more than fifteen or twenty altogether--is always so very, very enjoyable. It will do Victor good--the drive there, and the young people. My dear, you and I are very quiet, you know--and his sister--in--law to be, and all; it's like going to his own family.'

Victor, having qawakened, joined the two, and Mrs. Tillotson instantly appealed to him.

Did he really think it would be too much for him? He begged leave to be left at home. Then Miss Paget suggested a compromise. They would go early. Victor would see his friends before the other guests had come, and then she would drive him back, leaving Mrs. Tillotson at Broadmead if she wished. The carriage would return for her later. Mrs. Tillotson was not quite happy. It was so entirely an affair of the young people. If Helen and Victor came away--well, they would see.

What happened was that, when they got to Broadmead, Victor was so pale and dejected, and, in short, looked so much the invalid, that Mrs. Mason insisted upon his lying down in a cool, quiet room, where no sounds reached him but the faint tinkling of a fountain close to the window, and the cries of honey--birds rifling the pale honey--coloured blossoms of a tall young white gum hard by. She further insisted upon his taking some nourishment and drinking some dry champagne, and promising to go to sleep. In a little time she came tip--toe into the room, and found that he had kept his promise. And then nothing remained to be done but to see that the horses were taken out of Miss Paget's carriage, and that she resigned all thought of going away till the cool of the evening.

- a. and] with Adl E1
- b. and] and then Adl
- c. birds] the birds Adl
- d. on] upon Adl
- e. excuses] his excuses Adl E1
- f. in] an Adl
- g. after] afterwards Adl E1
- h. out] Om.* Adl
- i. this] his Adl E1
- j. further] Om. Adl
- k. behind] beside Adl E1
- l. his] this Adl E1
- m. observation] observations Adl E1
- n. I'm] I am Adl E1
- o. thought] thoughts Adl E1
- p. wedding--dress bee] wedding--/bee Adl E1

q. awakened] awoke Adl E1

Chapter XII.

Miss Florry¹ Mason's wedding-dress bee formed a pretty and animated gathering. The nine or ten dearest friends were chiefly in white or delicately tinted dresses, and each was adorned with a profusion of blooms worn in bouquets, clusters, wandering sprays, or plastrons,² according to the nature of the wearer's favourite flowers. There was a swelling ripple of talk and laughter as they settled down, and a little consternation on finding that the dressmaker had not prepared 'seams' enough. Some had swelling lengths of ivory satin, but all could not be employed on the skirt and aunder-jupon.

'A bit of piping³ will do for me,' said one.

'And the pocket for me,' said another.

'What is the use of putting a pocket in a wedding-dress?' asked one of the elder girls. 'It is only in your sanest and calmest moment you can remember where it is to be found.'

At last all were provided with some portion of the satin, into which more or less stitches could be put, by amateur needles, without encroaching on the delicate question of fit or style.

'Now that we are all at work, I think the "sanest and calmest" of us should tell a story,' said the bride-elect.

'I wish I had been married for a few days, and then I would tell you girls a story that would make your flesh creep,' said a young sister of Florry's, who had but recently escaped from the school-room.

There was some laughter and expostulation, and the elder sister said a little severely, 'Now, Mab, don't begin to carry on!'

'I wonder you allow yourself such a common phrase, looking as you do so much like an exalted cherub,' retorted Mab. 'And as for "carrying on," nothing will make me believe that it is not rather dreadful to go away from every friend you have in the world with a strange man.'

'Do you call Lance a strange man?' asked Florry indignantly.

'Certainly; you just see him for a little time in the evening after he has spent the day in trying to look good—not always successfully. Besides, if it weren't rather gruesome, why should one's mother give the institution away so?'

'Oh, don't laugh, girls! it will only make her worse,' said Florry, in a vexed tone. But the girls were too much amused not to laugh, and one of them pursued the subject by asking how one's mother 'gave the institution away.'

'Why, for weeks before a girl marries,' replied Mab very seriously, 'her mother never calls her anything but "poor dear!" and "poor darling!" and the last day of all it is "poor dear darling!" and tears.'

'You have been through it all, Mab.'

'Yes. Florry is the fourth girl married out of this house, and two brothers have followed the same broad path, and even they, I believe, breakfasted on coloured soda-water⁴ the morning they were led to the altar, blushing, the poor dears! like tomatoes.'

'Really, Mab, I'll get mother to ask you to go into the schoolroom if you run on at such a rate,' said Florry.

'I can call spirits from the vasty deep, and so can you, and so can any man, but will they come?'⁵ said Mab, in a declamatory, semi-mocking tone, very provocative of a breach of the peace.

Fortunately a diversion was caused just then by the entrance of Mdlle. Clemente, a young French lady whose father was a viticulturist near the Masons.⁶

'Come here, dear, till I admire "le dernier chic"⁷ in millinery,' cried Mab, between whom and this young lady a warm friendship existed, unimpaired by the fact that neither was very fluent in the other's mother tongue.

'Ma bch rie, rien de plus simple et de moins compliqu . Ce qui manque en g n ral un chapeau moderne c'est l'id alit ,'⁸ said mademoiselle, taking her chapeau to bits like a Chinese puzzle, by pulling out a few pearl-headed pins.

Mab insisted on mademoiselle sitting by her, 'de causer chiffons,'⁹ and gradually the 'bee' fell into amicable pairs and groups, till a burning discussion arose regarding a recent tennis tournament,¹⁰ in which sides were vehemently taken regarding two champion players—A, an Englishman, and B, an Australian.

'A is so much more graceful; look at his splendid underhand strokes: he puts the pace on a ball entirely with his wrist.'

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'But his volley is nothing to B when smashing, and the brilliant way B plays his strokes overhand, and takes his balls forehand.'

'Ah, but look at the splendid length A kept on his cball, hardly any falling inside the service line.'

'But then B's double play! Did you notice him in the semi-final? A cannot come near him in some things; for example, the underhand lift.'

'Do you compare the two? "For as sunlight unto moonlight, and as water unto wine-----" '11

'I think, Miss Paget, I must make you mistress of the ceremonies,' said Mrs. Mason, advancing with a smile from the bay-window, in which she had been engrossed in talk with Mrs. Tillotson till the rising tide of too eager controversy attracted her attention.

Miss Paget was laying a fold¹² on a long slip of bridal satin, smiling from time to time at the girlish chatter going on around her, but don the whole too much engrossed with her own thoughts to have a very clear idea of what was being said.

'Oh, very well,' she answered; 'what does a mistress of the ceremonies do?'

'I think she sorts those who are enot of the ffaith in tennis into packages not wanted on the voyage,' said a demurely grave voice.

'That is too burning a question. As I am in authority, I think I'll second Florry's original proposal, and call on the oldest and wisest of you for a story. I am the oldest, but I wouldn't like to say I am the wisest.'

'For my own part, I believe a girl is as wise as ever she will be at sixteen,' said Mab, holding up her chin defiantly.

'Oh, Mab, Mab, you don't really think so!' said a girl with velvet-soft voice and eyes who sat near the enfant terrible.

'Then, if you think you are aeons wiser than I am, you tell a story, Jessie,' responded Mab with a determined air.

Jessie laughed, and then held up a trailing breadth of the thick shining satin she was overcasting with minute stitches, looked at it admiringly, and said:

'Really, Florry, this is the loveliest satin-----'

'Oh, you awfully mean thing!' said Mab impetuously. 'I would sooner be a stewed rabbit than try to get out of a contract like that!'

'Like what, Mab?'

'Why, smothering the point in dispute by holding up ivory satin to a lot of girls-----'

'But why is that such an infamous proceeding?'

'Because no question of truth or justice has the slightest show, compared to the tail of a wedding-dress, especially if it is twenty-five and a demi bob¹³ a yard.'

'Oh, really, Mab!' began Florry in a pained voice. And then Jessie--being one of the fierily sympathetic kind who go through life responding to every call, and seeking above all things to save others from the pain which her own too sensitive nature exposed her to--interposed.

'Yes, I suppose it is true. I did try to get out of the challenge. The thing is to show that at sixteen or thereabouts you had as much sense as at--well, say twenty-five.'

'Yes; if the theory functions, you can easily spot an incident,' said Mab with the calm certainty which belongs to her years, and a mixture of metaphors peculiarly her own province.

Thus goaded on, Jessie looked pensively thoughtful, diving into her past life for a 'case in point.'

'Well, it is hardly a story; it is about myself, and it makes me rather ridiculous,' she said, laughing a little.

'Of course--because you were not so wise then,' said Mab in an encouraging tone.

'It was when we were returning from England some years ago. Among the passengers there was a Lord Guy Pearsall, fourth son of the Duke of Saltson.'

'And you were cringing enough to fall in love with him?' said someone, laughing mischievously in the shadow of the grand piano, near ga folding-door that opened into a conservatory radiant with exotic flowers. 'A scion of the effete British aristocracy, and your father a fiery republican!'¹⁴

'No, I did not,' answered Jessie, blushing a little. 'I admit I admired his filbert nails very much, for I know they often come into the world, but seldom last-----'¹⁵

There was general laughter at this.

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'Well, we forgive you enthusing about filbert nails, which probably require generations of people living on others. But, confess now, he had other attractions?'

'Not in the way of being good-looking. He was quite a little man, not at all young, with rather a red face, and hardly any hair: none on his face, and hardly any on his head. He told father he had about three sous¹⁶ a day to live on. I suppose it was true, for we heard he often lost forty or fifty pounds a night at cards. However, we got very friendly, as people do on ship-board. And really he had not a thread of affectation in him. He was going to a cattle-station in North Queensland, to live there, you know, not just on a visit. I said to him one day, how different he would find it from his previous life, for he had lived nearly always in big cities.'

'Oh, Jessie, you were making it easy for him to ask you to share his solitude!' said the irrepressible Mab. But she was laughingly reprimanded by Miss Paget, and Jessie went on:

'Well, he said he thought he would rather like "roughing it," and then I don't quite know how it came in-----'

'Oh, conversation is often very inconsequent in real life, especially on board a mail-boat,' said someone in a tone of judicial gravity.

'Well, I fancy it was to prove that he had roughed it a little, even in England, for he told me how, a short time before he left, he had been staying at a rectory in the country, and how he thought a bourgeoisie dinner at six o'clock was so nice and interesting. How there was a whole leg of mutton—a whole leg on the table at once—and potatoes and things standing in dishes, and not removed till they were nearly all eaten; and how, when these were taken away, the maid brought in a pie—quite a large dish—and after that came the most curious part of the performance: the maid went round the table with a funny little brush, with a crooked ivory back to it, and swept the table—actually swept it, by Jove! with this odd-looking brush, before putting down the apples and walnuts, etc.'

'Oh, Jessie, what fun to hear him describing a crumb-brush! Didn't you laugh?'

'Yes—at the crumb-brush,' said Jessie, her cheeks reddening.

'I would have laughed outright, and told Lord Guy that it was only on Sundays we used a crooked brush with an ivory back,' said another.

'Well, I know I was a dreadful little snob, but it gave me a sort of humiliated feeling to hear our every-day dinners described as if they were the customs of some newly-discovered savages. But I was only seventeen at the time, and if you think, Mab, I would be guilty of such silliness now. . . . And what followed was worse, for father asked him to dinner. Lord Guy stayed a fortnight at Government House, and I just felt I would die if our maid went round sweeping the table before him. So I implored mother to have ha dinner ^ la russe. You know that was not common here seven years ago-----'17

'My dear Florry,' said the mother of the bride-elect, entering the room at this juncture, 'Miss North has come; but she has a young lady with her, something of an invalid, and thinks she had better not stay, perhaps.'

'Ah, she must, if only for half an hour,' returned Florry eagerly.

She excused her absence for a few moments, warning the narrator of the crumb-brush story not to proceed till she returned. In a short time she came iback and placed a large easy-chair opposite the open bay-window, explaining, as she did so, that Miss North and her young charge would come in for a short time just to see them at work.

'She is the loveliest girl you ever saw,' she was saying when the stranger entered, leaning on Miss North's arm. She bowed with grave simplicity as she was led to the arm-chair, and as they looked at her with kindly, interested faces, each felt that her rare loveliness could not have been exaggerated. The deep radiant eyes, with their heavy sweeping lashes, the flower-soft oval face, the white wide brow framed with masses of deep amber hair, but, above all, the curiously spiritual expression of face—all made a picture which, once seen, could not but linger long in the memory. But why was the face of one so young and beautiful stamped with that strange look of remoteness alike from the turmoil, excitement, and careless gaiety of youth? It seemed as if the careless chatter around her could have as little part in her thoughts as if she already belonged to another world.

She looked out through the open window, and into the valley below the lawn, which was filled with the delicate downy foliage of olive-trees, whose gray-green leaves, in clustered masses, have something of the dimness of pale clouds rather than the verdure of living trees.

'I do not know those trees, I think,' she said, turning to Miss Mason, who had drawn a chair to her side.

'Those down in the valley? They are olive-trees.'

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'Yes, I remember reading about them a short time ago,' she said, mentally recalling the words: 'And He came out, and went as His custom was unto the Mount of Olives.'¹⁸

It was on the day before her mother died she had read this passage. But the interval between that time and the present seemed now to be separated from her, not by months, but by a few hours.

There was some demand on Miss Mason which called her to another part of the room. Seeing Miss Paget near at hand, looking at Doris with fixed interest, she introduced the two, and asked Miss Paget to take her place beside the new-comer.

'Miss Paget, there is something I should like to ask you,' said Doris, when they were left alone.

'Yes, dear; let me hear what it is.'

'Is your name Helen?'

'Yes.'

Doris was silent for a little, and then said softly:

'I am glad we have met.'

'Had you heard my name before?'

'Yes; you could hardly imagine where I heard it the first time.'

'I should like to know.'

'It was in the midst of the Silent Sea—the gray lonely plains where the gray salt-bush, bending before the wind, looks like noiseless waves.'

'And who spoke my name there?'

'Victor.'

'Ah! you heard him speak it? Was he—did he know you were there?'

'No. He was ill with fever.'

'Near the house in which you lived?'

'No; he had gone away. I do not quite understand. But the man who took care of him in a little hut said Victor did not wish people to know where he was for some reason.'

'Was that the one who took him to the hospital?'

'No; it was Kenneth—Kenneth Campbell, our old shepherd—who took him. I was with Kenneth, and sat near to Victor to make his head easier. And then I heard him call on you, as the man who took care of him did before.'

'The man in the little hut?'

'Yes. Can you tell me how Victor is? I have been wishing to know so much before we go away.'

Miss Paget drew a long quivering breath. For a moment she thought her answer would be: 'He is here—you will see him;' but almost as if without volition her answer came:

'He is much better. He came from the hospital two days ago.'

'Oh, I am glad! And you have seen him?'

'Yes; he is staying at our house. I am taking care of him.'

'Dear Miss Paget, I know you will be so good and kind!' There was a scarcely perceptible tremor in the girl's voice.

By way of answer, Miss Paget pressed Doris's hand. There was a mist before her eyes, and a faint, far-off tumult in her ears. It seemed as if her heart were torn by two contending impulses, and as if she waited helplessly to see which prevailed.

'I am happy you are taking care of him, for I know he loves you,' said Doris, after a little pause.

A servant brought them some tea. Miss Paget looked round to see if perhaps Victor had come into the drawing-room. She saw Mrs. Mason leaving it with a small tray, and she divined that this was some tea for Victor in his own room. Should she hasten after Mrs. Mason, and tell her that Miss North's young charge was a friend whom Victor would be glad to see? Should she tell Doris that he was here? She did neither, and the moments passed.

'My dear, I think we must be going now,' said Miss North, coming to the bay-window in which the two sat.

When going away, Doris asked Miss Paget to come to see her on the morrow, and Miss Paget gladly consented. The hour was fixed for five o'clock in the afternoon by Miss North. She was a lady of considerable talent, extremely hospitable to new ideas, and perhaps more willing still to impart them. She lingered to speak to Miss Paget while Florry Mason talked to Doris.

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'I am glad you are coming to see the dear child. I want her to get as well as possible before she leaves. She has a touch of intermittent fever, and you know the average doctor's old-fashioned way of putting people to bed! Now, I am certain that the sources of life are profoundly influenced by our will; and this girl, young and beautiful as she is, and in a way happy, would be perfectly content to die. She has lost her mother, in whom she was pentirely wrapped up. She was brought up too much alone. It was partly, I believe, a fad of her father's. Now, my theory is, that girls should not be subjected to experiments. They may do no harm, and produce interesting variations, in the case of men and pigeons.'

Miss Paget watched Miss North's neat little brougham drive away, and then heard a chorus of voices discuss the singular beauty and charm of her young patient.

'But I like eyes with more "go" in them,' said Mab. 'Hers are just holy. One would not dare to speak to her of a "mash" '19 or-----'

'A what, Mab?' said her mother, in a wondering tone.

'A "mash," mothera new kind of encyclopedia.'

- a. under-jupon] jupon E1
- b. ch rie°] chere Adl
- c. ball] balls Adl E1
- d. on] in Adl
- e. not] Om. E1
- f. faith] wrong faith E1
- g. a] the Adl
- h. a] Om. Adl E1
- i. back] Om. Adl
- j. the] for the Adl
- k. who] that Adl
- l. to] Om. Adl E1
- m. if] Om. Adl
- n. you have] have you Adl
- o. a scarcely] scarcely a Adl
- p. entirely] certainly Adl

Chapter XIII.

'I cannot tell Victor on the way home, because Mrs. Tillotson would overhear,' thought Miss Paget. But underlying the thought was the question, 'Shall I tell him at all?'

Broadmead was situated at the foot of the Adelaide hills, and, as is also often the case there in the summer time, a strong easterly gully breeze sprang up after sundown. The wind was full of unquiet voices in Miss Paget's ears as they drove homeward. The first stars were beginning to swim into sight; the daylight still lingered in the west in a wan, diffused light. Away in the distance beyond the town the sea lay dark and motionless, touched here and there with long lines of silvery blight that distinguished the sea waters from the darkening shore.

Victor lay back in the carriage lost in thought. He had slept for many hours. Now that he was calm and collected, he was trying afresh to find some clue to the network of problems by which he was surrounded. For the first time it occurred to him that his desk, containing all his private letters, would be at the manager's mercy. Then he recollected something about a letter to Helen. Had he addressed it?

'Helen, did you have any letter sent to you from the mine later than my telegram?' he said suddenly in an undertone, bending towards her.

'No, none,' she answered.

'I wonder if that is the clue?' he said half aloud. Was it Trevaskis who had told Mrs. Challoner of the relationship between himself and Miss Paget, and had Doris been thus misled? In the midst of the fury this conjecture aroused, Victor was overcome by a feeling of disgusted weariness. What was the use of spending himself in angry thoughts when all the time Doris was sailing away beyond recall? He would start by the very next boat. It did not matter whether he were well or not. To follow in the wake of the vessel that bore Doris away would do him more good than anything else in the world.

Miss Paget, on her part, was equally absorbed in her own reflections, while Mrs. Tillotson prattled gently on from one subject to another. Now she was describing the last grand ball-dress that Helen's eldest sister had worn a few days before the Pagets returned.

'Bleut, I believe they called it, my dear—a sort of white damask spangled with gold—d collet en coeur and down the back, on the shoulders white satin bows fringed with gold. I don't know what there is in shoulder-bows, though, that don't seem to accord well with years—well, of maturity.'

'Perhaps it is the associations of the nursery,'² suggested Miss Paget.

Mrs. Tillotson, without pursuing the subject, went on to other dresses, in which sky-blue velvet, opening over a sky-blue crpe de chine, and old-rose brocade, with old-rose satin panels, etc., figured luxuriously.

'It is such a comfort, don't you think, that our papers have taken to describing dresses at the more fashionable parties. It really gives quite a tone to society. And yet sometimes one can't help thinking beauty when unadorned—how does it go?³ There was that young girl who came in with Miss North. I thought I ought to know her, somehow.'

Miss Paget's heart seemed to leap into her throat, but she kept silent, and Mrs. Tillotson went on:

'There she was just in black and white, you know. I didn't catch her name. I think you spoke to her. I believe Victor has fallen asleep, poor boy!'

'No, I am wide awake,' answered the young man, sitting up, and, shaking himself free for a little from his engrossing thoughts, he talked at intervals all the rest of the way. His first care on reaching Lancaster House was to consult one of the daily papers, to see when the next mail-steamer sailed. There was a P. and O. going in six days. He could land at Brindisi,⁴ and get across to Mentone within twenty-four hours. Why, he might be there within a day or two of the time the Challoners reached the place! In six days he would be sailing in the wake of the vessel that bore them away—very likely gaining on her—for it was the Bendigo that was going, and the Bendigo was well known to be the swiftest of the mail-boats. Suppose the Marly,⁵ the boat by which the Challoners and Doris had gone, lost a few days on the way, why, at Aden, or Port Said, or Ismailia⁶ the Bendigo might actually catch her up!

He conjured the scene of meeting Doris on shore at one of these ports. He saw her eyes lifted to his with all their sweet radiance; he heard the thrill of gladness in her voice—the thrill with which it vibrated that night at

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Stonehouse when she said: 'You have come?'

'Yes, Doris, I have come. Oh, my darling! how could you for one moment believe that I had deceived you? . . . And she would not even blame me,' he reflected, coming back from Ismailia to the veranda at Lancaster House, where he was pacing up and down.

Here the hot east wind was not so high as at the foot of the hills, and was, besides, modified by surrounding acres densely planted with trees, by many fountains falling in continuous cascades of water in soft cooling showers.

Yes, he would start in six days from this evening. A note to his tailor, an order on his banker, and all was ready. To others he would say nothing till the day before his departure. His uncle would want to detain him on business, Lance because of his wedding, the police because of the search that had been instituted to bring to light those who had assaulted and confined him; Helen would be anxious to keep him till he was stronger. But all these things were as packthreads exposed to flame in face of his getting away. . . . Oh, to be on the face of the great deep, speeding hour after hour nearer to the moment in which he should see Doris once again!

The heavy weight that seemed at times to press upon his brain—the drooping languor, the ennui, the vindictive, revengeful thoughts against Trevaskis—all these had fallen from him as he gave himself up to thoughts of Doris and of his speedy journey. After all, how much better it was to think of those we love, than of those who call up feelings of revenge, and hatred, and all uncharitableness!

As this thought crossed Victor's mind, he stood opposite one of the open French windows of the drawing-room in which Helen and Mrs. Tillotson were sitting. The latter was drinking tea, and talking as usual without cessation.

'Poor dear Helen, how that old woman must bore her at times!' he thought, glancing at her. His gaze was arrested by the harassed expression and the extreme pallor of her face. He recollected how this had struck him the first day she drove out with him after his return to town. He reflected, too, how she was always ready to sacrifice herself for others. With this reflection he seemed suddenly to regain the point of view from which he had tried to write on the evening before he was to leave the mine. She had no warning of the news this letter was to have conveyed; she had waited in ignorance and uncertainty till she had come to him the instant she had received his message—and then, he remembered it well, without even a word of greeting, he had asked her only concerning Doris. . . . Yes, he was ill and desperate, stupid with drugs and wild with disappointment, and he was misled into believing she must have known something of the origin of Doris's letter. All that had formed part of his point of view. But now he was trying to realize hers.

In the effort a great wave of compunction, and a feeling akin to shame, swept over him. How good and generous she had been to him! He was glad that she had never really loved him; but how grateful he ought to be for her loyalty and friendship! He sat on a cane lounge by the open window waiting for her to look up. But she did not look up, she looked down; she drew a book towards her, not to read, but to hide her tears. She was crying. He looked away instinctively, knowing she was unconscious of his observation.

Miss Paget murmured some excuse to Mrs. Tillotson, and escaped to her own room. She was in a state of miserable indecision as to her action. At times the thought was strong with her that Trevaskis' assertions were true—that Doris did not love Victor, and that his own thoughts respecting her were partly the result of fever. 'I am happy you are taking care of him, for I know he loves you!' The words still sounded in her ears. But also with the words rose before her the girl's sweet, candid look—her childlike trust and direct simplicity.

'Oh, what am I going to do—what am I going to do?' she murmured to herself on reaching her room. If Doris were going to sail in a few days, should she allow her to go without making a sign to Victor, on the mere chance that, as he grew better and stronger, his love for Doris should prove to be partly the phantasm of fever? But what of the girl herself? Was there no lurking wistfulness in her voice and look—no tones or subtle inflections that told their own story?

'It is wrong—it is wrong not to tell him, come what may!' she said, covering her face with her hands in an agony of uncertainty. Each beat of the pendulum seemed to be offering her the choice of free action. Yet every moment seemed also to bring her the consciousness that not her will nor her better aspirations would prevail, but this preponderant, irresistible passion, which had given a treacherously egoistic warp to all the impulses of her nature—this passion which said to her: 'Risk all, risk everything, but do not give him up. Hold on by the least chance; you cannot afford to think of others.'

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'But I shall—I shall consider others—I must!' came the contending impulse. She threw open her window to get more air. She heard the sound of Victor's footsteps. He was near her. She would go to him at once, and tell him before she could change her mind. She went out, and the moment she drew near he turned to her, holding out his hands.

'Helen, I was just thinking of you! How dear and good you have been to me!'

He took her hand in his, and held it in the firm affectionate clasp of a younger brother.

Then at the touch of his hand and the sound of his voice a sort of moral dislocation took place. Her purpose was reversed as completely as if a brief and inexplicable delirium of the brain had destroyed all sequence of thought. The hot air, heavily scented with orange-blossoms, blew in her face, making her feel faint and drowsy.

She made an effort to speak, but, instead of uttering any words, she gave a long, low sigh.

'You are not well,' said Victor, in a troubled voice.

'No, my head feels rather heavy and confused. I think perhaps the sea air might do me good.'

'Oh yes, Helen, you ought to go. You are always thinking of others. You do not care enough for yourself.'

The words had a mocking ring to her. Nevertheless, she went on after a pause:

'I begin to think it would be nice to go to Port Callunga. It is so cool and quiet. But, Victor, I would not go unless you came—unless you let us take care of you till you are quite recovered.'

She sat on a lounge where her face was in shadow, but where she could see his face in the soft glow of the tall lamp in the drawing-room,⁷ whose wide square shade was draped with rose-tinted silk and lace.

Victor reflected rapidly that it would be better not to tell Helen at that moment of his unalterable determination to sail by the Bendigo. After all, he could spend two or three days at Port Callunga, and she would see how quickly he got strong and well.

'We have plenty of room at Port Callunga for a small regiment, and we shall only be five in all,' pursued Miss Paget: 'my father and the Professor, you and Mrs. Tillotson, and myself.'

'I shall be glad to come, if you go soon—say the day after to-morrow.'

'Yes, why not? We can drive there by starlight. I could not well leave before.'

'Oh, that will be grand! Part of the road winds by the sea-shore, between tall rocks,' said Victor, with something of his old vivacity. 'The stars overhead, and a moon either waning or coming—I have lost all count of the moon; the immensity of the hollow-sounding sea on one side, you taking care of me, and me seeing that you don't die in looking after me and Mrs. Tillotson.'

'Yes, Victor, what is it?' said Mrs. Tillotson, who had been listening to the sound of voices for some time, with a great longing to join the speakers.

'Oh, did you really overhear me?' said Victor, in a tone of contrition; 'and me abusing you like—your dearest friend. Well, it isn't my fault—it's history: "Listeners never hear any good of themselves." '8

'Hark to the boy!' said Mrs. Tillotson, laughing, as she settled herself comfortably in the cane rocking-chair that Victor drew forward for her. 'You really are getting quite yourself again, Victor.'

'I am getting more than myself,' replied Victor, half in play and half in earnest, as the memory of the contradictory emotions which had in turn governed him in the course of the past day flitted across his mind. 'Besides my proper self that I have hitherto known, there's an oold creature coming along, who takes me by the ear from time to time, and tells me I have been an irreparable young "dolt." '

'Is it about your disappearing like that, and as suddenly coming back?' asked Mrs. Tillotson eagerly.

She virtually felt an ache in every joint of her system for fuller information on these points. On that first day when Miss Paget, at a moment's notice, had been summoned away, and had returned late in the afternoon, with Victor looking incredibly changed, pale and anxious, without a trace of his old merry self, Mrs. Tillotson, instead of having any sort of a satisfactory explanation given to her, had been taken aside by Helen, and told in the most explicit terms that under no circumstances was the patient to be worried with questions or surmises. He had been dreadfully ill, and some people had been telling lies—that was pall the sum of the information contributed by Helen.

But perhaps the patient himself, now that he seemed to be getting into his old proper spirits, might be more liberal in giving those details after which a kindly heart naturally hankers. With this hope Mrs. Tillotson ventured for the first time on a direct question. But on being thus squarely summoned before an assize which he knew was bent chiefly on gathering news for vague and widely disseminated gossip, Victor speedily retreated into the safety

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of a general statement.

'Oh, as to my disappearance, we all have to wait to see what the police tell us,' he answered; and then, swayed by the one dominant purpose which had come to him within the last few hours—that of getting well as soon as possible, and in any case sailing for the Old World in the course of six days—he shortly afterwards availed himself of the privilege of an invalid by going to bed quite early.

Miss Paget was in the meantime trying to believe that for once in her life she had acted in a rational manner. Lance Fitz-Gibbon's conjecture as to having noticed that Victor seemed to have lost his heart to her—then Trevaskis' words, and Doris's—and now Victor's own: she thought over all these, trying to reassure herself.

The fever, and some chance meetings with this lovely child, in which he had perhaps said a little more than he meant seriously or permanently, had put these confused thoughts into his head. But how quickly he had fallen in with her suggestion of going to the seaside! how his spirits had risen at the prospect! how quickly he had disappeared as soon as Mrs. Tillotson came upon the scene! She could not dog them in this way once they had gained the shores of Port Callunga! When there, she and Victor could take long walks on the sea-shore—far beyond the chance of interruption.

'I know, my dear, it is very good of the Archdeacon—these "brotherhood of man" assemblies,' Mrs. Tillotson was saying. 'But, oh! how much more comfortable they would be if he could tell the poor people to take a bath—a good brown soap and flesh-brush bath, you know! We could supply them from the Blind Asylum⁹ at sixpence each, Helen dear. . . . But although I could easily suggest this to the dear, good Archdeacon, I suppose it would be rather difficult to speak to the people he invites, beforehand.'

'It would be rather a delicate social nuance,' said Miss Paget, smiling as she roused herself to some perception of what was being said.

'This is the sort of thing into which I used to throw all the ardour of my life,' she thought, as she sat in the solitude of her room, and contrasted the intense vibrant emotion which now flooded her thoughts with the wintry pallor of the half-hearted work in which she had been endeavouring to forget her own immediate interests. . . . 'And yet,' she reflected, 'I may in the end find myself like one of those couriers¹⁰ of medical science who poison themselves in a clinical experiment.' Then she fell into a long reverie, recalling how from the first dawn of consciousness one of her most abiding thoughts had been that she was one of the failures of life—one born to endure the sensation of defeat perpetually renewed. She argued that this was one reason why she was so sceptical of happiness for herself; why she had expected from the first that Victor's affection would not last; why, now that proof upon proof came to her that this fear was misplaced, she was still beset with hesitation and mistrust.

- a. so] Om. Adl
- b. light that] light, distinguished Adl
- c. sailing] Om. Adl E1
- d. called] call Adl E1
- e. satin] Om. Adl
- f. the] Om. E1
- g. getting] motive for getting Adl E1
- h. after] by Adl E1
- i. up] Om. Adl E1
- j. feeling] a feeling Adl E1
- k. had never] never had Adl
- l. strong] too strong Adl
- m. every] each E1
- n. egoistic] egotistic Adl
- o. old] older Adl E1
- p. all] Om. Adl
- q. these] those Adl E1
- r. to] to try to Adl E1
- s. room] own room Adl E1

Chapter XIV.

Yet, notwithstanding the arguments and considerations with which she fortified herself, Miss Paget did not sleep much that night. Every now and then Doris's face would rise up before her, irradiated with a strange, spiritual light, the radiant eyes fixed lovingly on her face. She rose before it was dawn; then after sunrise she fell into a short, troubled sleep. From this she awoke with an insupportable sense of wrong-doing. She seemed to herself to have, by some strange impulse, contradicted all the traditions of her past life. And why? Why, indeed! No human being could be really worth that fatal moment in which passion, like a volcanic eruption, sweeps before it all the tenderer growth of which the soul is capable.

She bathed and dressed hastily, putting on a clinging robe of pale violet Cashmere, giving no thought to the make or hue of the robe she wore. In reality, she could have chosen no tint more calculated to throw her pale cheeks and anxious, unquiet eyes into strong relief. The day was unbearably close, with that dull, suffocating kind of sultriness which comes in an Australian summer as the climax of a stretch of burning days and hot nights. She wandered out on the lawn. A quarter of an hour before the breakfast-gong sounded she was joined by Victor.

'Oh, Helen, you must be ill!' he said, in a tone of alarm. 'Why not come to the seaside this afternoon?' he went on. 'The heat is intolerable; at least, for those who are ill. You see, I am all but off the sick list. Let me take care of you now, Helen, and be obedient as I have been to you.'

'What is your prescription?' she said, with a faint smile.

'First, that you are not to be worried in the slightest degree for anything or anybody. I'll take Mrs. Tillotson off your hands, and we'll set off for Port Callunga after breakfast.'

She longed infinitely to adopt this plan, but she could not. As she noted the marked improvement in Victor's appearance, her hopes revived.

'I cannot very well go this afternoon. I met a very charming young girl at the Masons' yesterday—one who is staying at Lindaraxa, and I promised I would call and see her. Wouldn't you like to see the house once more you so often dreamt about?'

'Oh, don't speak about dreams! Last night, for the first time since I was knocked on the head, I slept without seeing demons and monsters. But, if you'll allow me, I'll drive with you to town. I have some matters of business to attend to before we go to the seaside. I have your gracious permission, have I not?' he added smilingly, as Helen received his communication with doubtful looks.

'Yes, if you don't attempt to walk much. Drop me at Lindaraxa and then go on in the carriage, and call for me when you are ready.'

Miss Paget reached the house a little after four. Miss North was out, and Doris was just then asleep. Mrs. North, a kindly, mouse-like little woman, who was in a chronic state of half-panic as to the results of her daughter's brilliancy, confided her fears to Miss Paget in a rather mixed fashion. She felt sure Miss Lindsay was slightly worse, though she did not say so, and Rachel was always so hopeful as long as people kept out of bed. If only she would send for a doctor.

'But your daughter is a doctor herself,' interposed Miss Paget.

'Oh yes, my dear. But she has so many ideas, and that is always rather risky. Now, the first day I saw Miss Lindsay, when the dear child reached town—I can't think of her as anything but a child; I was staying with her mother at Ouranie when she was born. We came out on the same ship from England, and my husband died on the voyage. Everyone said Australia would be so good for his lungs, and no doubt it would, only he never reached the country. And as for the Lindsays, they were like a providence to us, only more so in a way, for Providence doesn't seem to mind much at times about us. Well, as I was saying, the dear child is asleep just now. Rachel has a great idea—you had better keep moving about and be chatty if you are ill, because, as I think she says, of the force of the will, and all that; but if you are getting thinner all the time-----'

'Then, do you think Miss Lindsay is worse?'

'I hardly know what to think, dear. If only Rachel would come back. . . . She seems to be praying so much to-day, and that is always sad, as it were, for a young person.'

'Does your daughter go to church to pray then?'

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'Oh, my dear, Rachel never prays; she has got far beyond that. . . . She is quite up to the cleverest doctors in many things,' answered Mrs. North, evidently quite scandalized at the inference which her own words had naturally conveyed. 'I mean Miss Lindsay. I have sent a messenger for Mrs. Challoner. . . . I hope Rachel won't think it foolish of me . . . but I feel very nervous.'

'But when I saw her yesterday-----'

'Yes, just so, my dear. It was when they came in yesterday I thought Doris dlooking more unusual than ebefore, so to speak. But Rachel would have it her plan was answering beautifully—I mean, keeping her about and seeing people, and all that, instead of laying up and having things made for her. "Mother, the greatest happiness of your life is having slops made for people," Rachel says to me sometimes, laughing, and perhaps it is true in a way.'

At the end of half an hour Mrs. North went to see whether Doris was awake and prepared to see her visitor. Ten minutes later Miss Paget was ushered into her room.

'I am so glad you have come,' she said, rising and holding Miss Paget's hands in her own.

Almost at the same moment they both noticed one pacing up and down in the garden opposite the window. It was Victor, who, having transacted his business in town, had called in returning for Miss Paget as had been arranged. Instead of waiting in the carriage, he had, after a few minutes, wandered into the garden. He had that afternoon secured his passage by the Bendigo. The near prospect of setting sail made him restless, and the mere act of walking with the tide of returning vigour in his veins was a luxury. He was engrossed with thoughts of his journey, and did not once notice that the path which he was pacing traversed that portion of Lindaraxa which he had so often seen in his dreams.

But Miss Paget recollected this well, and she turned to Doris with a question on her lips. The girl, with her face transfigured, her hands clasped, had sunk on a low chair near the half-open window. She was partly hidden by the curtains. At last she met Miss Paget's fixed look with a little smile.

'He is waiting for you, is he not?' she asked, her lips trembling a little.

'Yes,' answered Miss Paget, in a very low voice.

There was silence for a few moments, during which the trilling of a canary in the little conservatory adjacent to the room seemed to rise and swell into strange volumes of sound. The extreme pallor of the young girl's face, the look of deep, wistful pain in her eyes, the tightening clasp of her hands, all were apparent to Miss Paget.

'Dear, dear Victor! God bless you, and take care of you for ever,' murmured Doris in a low voice. Her lashes were wet as she looked up, but her smile had something of its old radiance. 'I think I understand why he does not wish to see me again,' she said slowly.

'But he does—he does!' It seemed to Miss Paget as if she had surely uttered the words aloud. But her lips had hardly moved. She no longer asked herself what she should do. She stood like a spectator watching a drama whose issue is still quite uncertain.

'But would you like to see him?' she forced herself to say after a long pause.

Victor was slowly passing the window, going towards the gate. Doris looked at him fixedly till he was out of sight. Then, turning to Miss Paget, she said slowly:

'Do you know if he got a letter I wrote to him after-----'

'Yes, yes. It reached him shortly before he left the hospital. I think he was glad to get it,' added Miss Paget.

'Then I think I would sooner do as he thinks best,' answered Doris.

'Ah, then you do not wish to see him? I am afraid I may be fatiguing you.'

'Oh no, you are not, indeed. You are very good to come—and will you come again, perhaps?'

'Yes, to-morrow morning. In the afternoon we are going to the sea-side.'

'And do you think it would be wrong-----'

She did not finish the question. Victor was strolling back. He was repeating some lines half aloud, a glad smile on his face.

Miss Paget, white to the lips, stood regarding Doris as she sat bending forward, her hands rigidly clasped, her whole soul in her eyes. Victor repassed the window, and after that Doris turned to Miss Paget.

'I am glad to see him . . . but I think it would fbe perhaps . . . not quite right. I think he knows best.'

The moral torpor which had fallen on Miss Paget seemed to affect her also physically. It was with difficulty she spoke or moved. Suddenly this inertness left her. She was roused by an insane fear lest Miss North should

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return and ask Victor to come into the house. She now hastily bade Doris good-bye, and exchanged a few words with Mrs. North as she left the house. She had of set purpose spoken that morning of her visit to Lindaraxa, and suggested that Victor should accompany her. The impulse was similar to that which leads some people to decide upon a certain course of action by tossing a coin. . . . Victor had come to the house, and Doris had seen him, but had refrained from making any effort to speak to him. It seemed as if fate had willed that they should not meet. Doris would soon sail away, and live among new scenes and companions. She would forget with all the happy elasticity of youth. Even now she could not be said to be unhappy. And as for Victor, was it not after all quite apparent that fever and not an absorbing passion had been at work with him? The stronger he grew the less he seemed to be haunted by melancholy regrets.

During the drive home, which Miss Paget lengthened by going round by way of the Botanic Park, both were apparently in high spirits. Victor was anxious to impress Miss Paget with the belief that he was nearly if not quite recovered, so that when, on getting to Callunga, he showed her his ticket as a passenger by the Bendigo, she should not be anxious on his account. She on her part was striving with all her might to drive away all thoughts and recollections of Doris; and at first her mind was obedient to her wishes.

All through dinner she laughed and talked incessantly, although the atmosphere was heavier than ever, and even ice seemed to acquire something of a sultry taste. But dinner was barely over when she found herself struggling with a horrible, an all but irresistible, inclination to sob aloud. She made her escape on some pretext from the drawing-room, where Mrs. Tillotson and Victor were engaged in some languid game with lettered bits of pasteboard. The twilight was closing in, and the hot north-east wind was higher than ever. Some change was approaching; the sky was covered with heavy clouds; in the west a long lurid line of sweltering crimson hung low in the horizon. Miss Paget wandered out among the trees for a few minutes. Then, going into her own room, she threw herself down on the bed and broke into hard, dry sobs, that convulsed her frame without bringing her any sense of relief.

'Oh, how could I--how could I?' she moaned to herself, in a hoarse, broken voice. The look on Doris's face, the pleading wistfulness of her eyes, were before her vividly, sweeping away the laboured impositions with which she strove to appease her wounded conscience.

There was a flash of lightning, followed by a long roll of thunder. A thunderstorm of great violence raged for more than a quarter of an hour. She stood looking out all the time, a feverish colour mounting into her cheeks, her temples throbbing vehemently. During that interval her resolution was taken. She would not go to the seaside to-morrow, and after she had seen Doris once more she would tell Victor, and then let things take their course. After all, if life became unbearable, there were a hundred paths that led out of it.¹ With the thought a strange calm fell on her. She did not again return to the drawing-room; she sent an excuse by a servant to Mrs. Tillotson and Victor. The thunderstorm had given her a nervous headache, and she thought she would be better if she slept; but she did not sleep. She sat down and wrote a short note, and sent one of the servants across to the family chemist for a bottle of chloral.² A good deal of this medicine had been used in the case of the maid who had been ill, but always under the doctor's prescription. The chemist, however, sent the required amount on reading Miss Paget's note, merely taking the precaution of writing a memorandum to ask that the phial should not be entrusted to the charge of the servants.

'It is evident,' thought Miss Paget on reading this, 'that one of the chief advantages of belonging to the classes³ is that one may get a dose of poison at will.' 'Poison!' She repeated the word, and turned the bottle over curiously. Often during the days in which she had waited in suspense as to Victor's movements, the thought had come to her how little necessary she was to anyone's happiness. To-night she sat going over the thought of her own death step by step.

She saw the scene of her funeral: the hideous black-plumed carriages going slowly to the graveyard, then returning at a cheerful trot; the mourners talking to each other complacently, with the relief of a disagreeable duty over. Her father would be so much put out by the interruption to the usual routine of his days, that he would dine that evening with one of his married daughters, without being sure beforehand that he should not be offended by the sight and smell of mock-turtle soup. They would all put black on, and utter her name with a becoming sigh for a few weeks, and then they would begin to reckon what extra luxuries they could indulge in, with the addition her money would make to their incomes. Ah, how odious, malicious, and brutal, human life was at bottom!⁴ Even the greatest catastrophe that overtook human beings was but the counterpart of the ruin that sometimes comes to

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an ant-heap. . . . When a dray-wheel passes over it, the ants who have not been crushed rush about distractedly; but in a short time they are thieving the grubs of other insects, and carrying the booty down into their holes as usual.

And Victor—how would her death affect him? Oh, he would be happy, as long as Doris was spared to him! Miss Paget had been too willing to blind herself to the truth, but now she swept aside the meshes of imposition which her own hopes, and the words spoken by Trevaskis and Doris, had woven. It was only a misunderstanding—a deception practised perhaps by Trevaskis himself on Doris, that had led her to the conclusion as to Victor's love for 'Helen.' Yes, Doris had heard him repeat that name during his unconsciousness. But this was only owing to the anxiety which possessed him to come and tell her that he no longer loved her, or rather, that he perceived he had never done so. . . . She knew so well. . . . Had she not every right to know?

What happiness had all the years of her life hitherto brought to her, that she should expect bliss in any form now—now that she was no longer young, and had never been beautiful? Why did she expect more success? Love and devotion, like every other good, were purchased. Yes, purchased by some definite charm.

Miss Paget slept till long after sunrise. A cold, raw wind had succeeded the excessive heat of the past few days. Mrs. Tillotson was loud in her exclamations as to Miss Paget's ailing looks.

'My dear, you are certainly getting the influenza!' she cried.

Helen caught at the idea. The complaint was just then spreading in the province. She lay on a couch most of the day. She tried to make herself believe that the impulse which had carried her away on the previous evening was spent; but all the time she was conscious of a deep under-current, whose swell would bear her she knew not whither.

'There is no question of our going to the seaside by starlight this evening, Helen,' said Victor, coming into the drawing-room within an hour of sunset. Up to that time Miss Paget had remained in her own room.

'No. I fear I am going to be ill,' she answered slowly; 'but before I am laid up——'

The housemaid brought in two notes on a little silver tray. Neither was of much importance, but as she glanced over one of them Miss Paget decided on her line of action. Half an hour later she was at Lindaraxa, and in Doris's room. Mrs. Challoner was with her, and Shung-Loo came noiselessly into the room to draw the curtains and light the candles. Mrs. Challoner looked extremely anxious. On coming into Doris's room early that morning she had found her very lightly clad, sleeping by the open window, with the cold west wind blowing over her. The change from the late sultry weather had been more than usually severe, and though Doris complained of no pain, her voice was seriously affected. Miss North was apprehensive that she had caught cold, and had, before going out on her professional round, regulated the temperature of the room, and left Mrs. Challoner in charge.

But Doris, though conscious now and then of a heavy sensation in her head and chest, had been wrapped round with such happy dreams that her thoughts were constantly wandering from things around her. All day, at intervals, she had spoken to Mrs. Lucy and Shung-Loo as if they were back at Ouranie again and her mother quite near her. Now Mrs. Challoner awaited Miss North's return with some anxiety.

'I will leave you two alone for a short time,' she said, divining by Miss Paget's manner that she wished for this.

'I am afraid, dear, you are not well,' said Miss Paget, holding the girl's hands in her own. The feverish brilliancy of Doris's eyes and the flush in her cheeks filled her with strangely conflicting emotions. She had come fully determined to tell how she had deceived both Doris and Victor. But she hesitated. 'Your name is Doris, is it not?' she said. And then in rapid confused phrases she told how she had been under some strange mistake. . . . And now she was quite sure Victor wished to see her—did not know that Doris was really here.

'Didn't he know yesterday?' asked Doris, her lips trembling a little.

'No; and I want you to do me a favour, a great favour.'

'Oh yes, only tell me. You are so good and kind. I shall be happy to do something for you.'

At these words Miss Paget lost all self-control. Deadly pale, with the tears streaming down her face, her hands tightly clenched, she knelt at Doris's feet.

'Oh, Doris, Doris, let me tell you,' she cried in a choking voice. 'I deceived you yesterday, and hid the truth from Victor, and now I cannot bear that he should know. But I must tell you.'

She told her tale, with bent head, not sparing herself, but she said something of that hunger for love, that void in the life of the affections which from her earliest recollections had been with her like a chronic heartache.

'If only my mother had lived even for a few years, so that I might remember her arms around me, her lips

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pressed upon mine, I think all might have been different,' she said at the close.

And then she found Doris's arms around her neck, and the girl's flower-soft face wet with tears pressed against her cheek.

'Dear, dear Helen, how terrible never to know your mother! No one else can ever make up for that. But, dearie, do not be miserable any longer. In the end all will be well. Tell Victor I should like to see him once. He need not know any more than you wish to tell him.'

The tender sensibilities and delicate imaginative perceptions which formed so strong a feature of Doris's nature seemed at this juncture to enable her to divine what she could not clearly understand.

- a. come] go E1
- b. for] to Adl
- c. I would] to Adl E1
- d. looking] looked Adl
- e. before] ever before Adl
- f. be] Om.* Adl
- g. into] to Adl
- h. bid] bade Adl E1
- i. horrible, an] horrible and Adl
- j. The housemaid°] A servant E1

Chapter XV.

As Miss Paget drove back, she found herself from time to time blinded by tears, but when she reached the house the thought of her interview with Victor steadied her nerves.

She bathed her face and put on a warmer dress, and then went into the library. She stood as the housemaid turned up the gas, looking round the room with the half-belated air of one who is trying to realize the aspect of a partly forgotten scene. As the maid was leaving the room, Miss Paget asked her to see whether Mr. Fitz-Gibbon was in the drawing-room. She returned to say that only Mrs. Tillotson was there. She had been dozing, and woke up to ask if Miss Paget had returned.

'Tell her, Jane, that I will come into the drawing-room in ten minutes; and if Mr. Fitz-Gibbon is in his room, tell him I wish to see him in the library.'

A few minutes later he came in. Miss Paget rose as he entered.

'I have some news for you, Victor.'

'Some news? Letters? Anything about Doris? But no-----'

'Yes, about Doris.'

'Oh, Helen, is it from King George's Sound? But letters could not come yet.'

'No, it isn't letters. When you saw the names of the passengers that day-----'

'Good God! Helen, how pale you are! Has anything happened to the ship? Tell me in one word.'

'No, no. Doris was not on that ship at all.'

'Not on that ship at all! Why then--she has not gone?'

'No, she is at Miss North's.'

'At Lindaraxa? She is there this moment? Oh, I must go! I must go at once. Did you know before? Don't try to keep me back, Helen.'

All inquiry and emotion were lost in the one overflowing desire to see Doris.

'She has not been well. It is too late. She expects you in the morning,' said Miss Paget, almost in a whisper. The fiery impatience, the rapture that transfigured the young man's face, were not so unbearable for her as the thought: 'And it was for this I rent the child's heart--only yesterday!'

'Not well! But then I can see the light in her window. Helen, don't try to persuade me. I couldn't rest all night. I promise you I won't make myself ill. Ill! How could I be ill, and Doris still on this side of the world?'

'But let me tell you--there is something I want to explain,' said Miss Paget. 'You will perhaps think it strange, that it was only to-day I went to her to ask if she were Doris. She was introduced to me as Miss Lindsay.'

'Introduced to you where?'

'At Mrs. Mason's . . . when we went there.'

'And I was under the same roof! Oh, good heavens!'

'Yes, and yesterday-----'

'It was Doris you went to see? And I waited outside, and she was in there all the time, and you did not know? Oh, Helen, I must go, if only to hang round the place for a few minutes. . . . I shall take a cab there and back.'

It was impossible to detain him. It was eleven o'clock before he returned. He was pale and agitated, but he had seen the light in Doris's window, and he had talked for an hour with Mrs. Challoner. It had been a strange meeting, both thinking the other was in distant latitudes on the sea. Doris had told her nothing, so after all he must have dreamt that Doris had been beside him on the way to the hospital. It was strange, too, how the impression strengthened as he grew stronger. But all was now well. He repeated the words with a short impatient sigh. Then he told Helen how he had fallen into the error about the Challoners' departure. It was Challoner's brother Richard who had sailed with his two daughters. Mr. Robert Challoner was still too ill to travel. He was recruiting at the seaside, and Mrs. Challoner had left him only yesterday. Doris had not been well, but he would see her to-morrow--to-morrow morning at nine.

'At nine to-morrow morning,' he repeated, walking up and down the room, too excited and preoccupied to rest. 'Just think, Helen, if we had gone to the sea-side still in ignorance; and then four days later I should be on the water. It would be like that terrible little tragedy of "Evangeline." I never could bear to read that poem.'

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'You were going—so soon?'

'Yes. I knew you would think it was dangerous, but you see how well I am. I did not wish you to be uneasy, but here is my ticket, which I bought yesterday.' She looked at it with a strange expression in her eyes. 'What do I not owe you, dear Helen? Think of it—to get to Mentone, and find Doris was in Adelaide when I left! . . . It would be too unbearable. . . . I often wonder how Longfellow could bear to write that poem. It was too cruel. To find each other at last when one was dying and both were getting old.'

'But there are some cruel things in life, you know,' said Miss Paget in a low, colourless voice.

'Ah, but, Helen, think of the beautiful, happy things, the idylls lovely and tender, as if they were let down to earth straight from the inner courts of heaven. . . . How strange you shouldn't have known at once it was Doris. There is no one else in the least like her. And you made friends with each other as soon as you met? Tell me, Helen, did you really think she was fit to-day?'

'A little feverish, perhaps.'

'Feverish! After I parted from Mrs. Challoner I had the strongest impulse to go back again, and implore her to tell me exactly what she thought. But----'

'If you don't take care, Victor, you will be ill yourself to-morrow-----'

'And not be able to go in the morning? Oh, how absurd!' He broke into a low, glad laugh at the thought, and began to hum the words:

'"My dust would hear her and beat,
Had I lain for a century dead,
Would start and tremble under her feet
And blossom in purple and red." 3

'You repeat the lines as if you believed them; to me there is something absolutely revolting in such hyperbole. "Had I lain for a century dead"—as if we did not all know what happened to us long before we were a century dead!'

Something cold and strained in her voice struck him. But he answered in a light tone:

'Well, but is this a time to talk of being dead gafter a century or a thousand years? . . . Helen, I have so often thought I should like you and Doris to be friends. And now you are, without any help from me.'

He would have talked to her of Doris all night. But as the clock chimed twelve he obeyed her injunctions to try and get to sleep. It was some time before his glad restlessness would allow him to close his eyes, but at last he fell into the deep dreamless slumber of happy exhaustion.

It was a strangely beautiful world into which he woke next morning. All the sudden harshness of the atmosphere had died away. The mellow warmth of summer, tempered by a cooling wind, lay over all the land. The delicate primrose of the dawn still lingered in the east. The softly-folded hills below this divine glow, their valleys and curves touched with the tremulous vapour of early morning, had something of a dream-like indistinctness. But the sleeping town in the foreground was sharply distinct in the clear air.

'She is there, and I shall see her in less than four hours,' Victor said, looking across towards North Terrace from the brow of the little wooded knoll that rose to the south of the house.

The first sunrays were catching the wide expanse of the sea westward. Above it, as if in a faint reflection of the east, a wide band of pale rose-lilac encircled the horizon. As the sun rose higher, this space of exquisite colour was beaten into transparent flakes of gold, till they were lost in the blue air, like a legend of visionary beauty. All was surpassingly lovely. It seemed as if the magic of earth and air and sea was for the first time fully revealed to him. He looked on the most familiar scenes with the keen enjoyment with which one catches the first aspects of a new country before any of the old links of habit have dulled the incisiveness of outline. The tall snowy groups of Christmas lilies, the deeply accented forms of the Nipa palms round a fountain, the wide leaves and lotus buds of eastern lilies⁴ on the water's surface, the rose bushes loaded with cataracts of roses, the deep bruckmansia bells, the great beds of heliotrope, all poured their poignant exhalations on the air, till the colour, the fragrance, and the almost incredible thought of soon seeing Doris, overcame him with an intoxication of happiness that bordered upon pain.

But would the time never pass? At breakfast he heard Mrs. Tillotson as if from a great distance urging him to eat. He heard her bewailing the abandonment of the seaside plan. 'For I am sure, Helen dear, you are not well. But if hit is influenza you are getting, let me advise you beforehand not to take antipyrine.'

Victor looked at Miss Paget, but he could hardly discern whether she was pale or flushed.

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'You ought to walk among the trees and flowers, Helen, and hear the birds sing,' he said to her, as they rose from the table.

'Their songs are for you, not me,' she said, with her unconquerable little smile.

But the next moment she was in her own room, lying prone on her bed, beyond the relief of words or tears. It was not one emotion—it was all the long—hoarded bitterness of a lifetime that seemed to be distilled into a cup which she must drain to the very dregs. Her loveless childhood, her spoilt youth, the sordid shifts of poverty which had burnt themselves into her memory at the most susceptible period of life: day by day and hour by hour she lived them all over again in one of those swift moments of recollection, in which the past is seen and felt rather than recalled. Why had she been always the puppet of a destiny, relentless in denying her one complete and unmutated joy—one day, nay, one whole hour of vivid happiness?

And now—now to crown all, what had come to her? Through the long years in which she had been starved of affection and the tender graces of life she had never lost sight of the wish to help others—to be to few or many a stay in the hour of need. She seemed to see a long defile⁵ of the old, the maimed, the morally paralyzed, to whom she had given alms.

But how poor and meagre and profitless it had all been! A few score of poor people were a little better housed, a little better fed, in cleaner apparel for a few days or weeks, than they would have been without her aid. But always she had asked herself in the end, what did it signify? Now, for the first time, she seemed to see clearly what had been at the root of her dissatisfaction. She had longed to give moral help—longed to stand between poor driven human creatures and the malice of their destiny—to shelter them from the storms that were driving them to shipwreck. And now? It was not only the cruel deception she had practised on the previous day. But at this moment, revolt and despair, and some dark tinge of hatred for those whose lives were crowned with a happiness denied to her, were surging up in her heart. What subtle thrill of hope had come to her when she observed yesterday the igreater hold that the fever seemed to have taken on Doris?

'Oh, no, no! not that—not that!' she said to herself, half aloud, in a choked voice. Then she opened the drawer of her mirror, and took out the bottle of chloral, and held it in her hand as if weighing it.

A fever, a lingering tumour, the mistake of a railway pointsman, the bite of a dog, the most trivial accident, the most malignant disease, these might at any moment end existence. Then why not an overdose of chloral? It would be a far more kindly and judicious accident than those that nature so often and so ruthlessly employed. And there would be no scandal to lacerate the feelings of those who had never loved her.

'The deceased lady, who was widely known for her social gifts and jher unfailing benevolence, had been suffering for some time from insomnia,' etc., etc. She knew so well the decorous sort of newspaper paragraph in which the event would be recorded. 'I am not sure, but I am afraid that she took a great deal of antipyrine after all,' she imagined Mrs. Tillotson saying, with a lugubrious shake of the head. And as this crossed her mind she began to laugh. There was a tap at her door, and she put away the bottle of chloral before calling out 'Come in.' Mrs. Tillotson opened the door, saying:

'Victor is going to town, and do you know, dear, I'm not quite sure he should go alone. He seems to me a little light-headed— smiling and singing so much—quite different.'

'Yes, but it is the sort of light-headedness that seldom lasts,' returned Miss Paget, hardly defining to herself the special significance she attached to the words.

But when she met Victor in the hall, hat in hand, ready to set out to see his Doris, with all the radiance of youth and happiness unclouded by a single fear in his face, she was conscious for a moment of a strange pang of apprehension as to what might await him.

He proposed walking across the Park Lands. But now that the last moments of waiting had come, he could not bear the delay. It could not matter if he got to Lindaraxa a little earlier. He hailed the first cab he saw, and was at the gate in twelve minutes, having repeatedly urged the cabman to faster speed. A carriage was waiting near the gate, and half way between it and the house Victor met a rosy—visaged old gentleman, whom he would have passed with a bow, had he not been held fast by the arm.

'This is a nice thing, young gentleman, to try and pass me with a lift of the hat—the venerable doctor who ushered you into the world, how many years ago?'

'Not more than half a century, doctor,' said Victor, half distracted by the delay. He speedily got away, after giving more or less incoherent answers as to his reported journey to England. The hall—door stood open, and

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before he could ring, Mrs. Challoner, who had seen him coming, came out to him.

'I know I am a little early; but perhaps Doris is ready to see me?' he said, his voice shaken by the passionate throbbing of his heart.

'Oh yes, she has been talking of you, Victor; come in here for a moment.'

She showed him into the drawing-room, and hastily left the room. His overpowering happiness made him deaf and blind, or he would have seen that Mrs. Challoner's eyes were red and dim, and her voice unsteady. She had on the previous evening heard Victor's little story with the strongest interest and sympathy. She could not then bear to dash his joy by expressing any of the fears that oppressed her as to the unfavourable development of Doris's illness. But now concealment would be impossible. Doris was threatened with congestion of the lungs.⁶ She had been delirious through the night, and the old medical friend whom Miss North had called in for consultation took a very gloomy view of the case. On going into the symptoms he declared that she had been taken about when she should be in bed, and that the insidious inroads the fever had made on her constitution were all against her rallying-power.

But Miss North still kept up her courage. She knew her old friend was of the rigidly old-fashioned order, who go in for the heroic remedies of bed and blisters on the shallowest pretext—one of the people, in short, to whom new ideas and theories figure hazily as a kind of moral lymph, to be used under quarantine regulations⁷ for the gradual vaccination of respectable society; unfit for a family practitioner at first hand. Even at this moment, as Miss North came out of Doris's room, she was smiling half abstractedly at the neatness of this comparison. She resolved to note it down for future use. When she saw Mrs. Challoner with overflowing eyes, she lost her patience a little.

'Really, Mrs. Challoner, you and mother and Doctor Mellersh get upon one's nerves a little, with your long faces. . . . The child is looking quite radiant just now; who is this Victor she keeps on talking to now and then?'

'Oh, Miss North, I come to ask you to break the news to him. He is waiting to see Doris—looking so happy and confident—it breaks my heart.'

'My dear lady, the human heart is in reality a tremendously strong muscle, though people speak so glibly of breaking it, like egg-shell china,' said Miss North with kindly gravity. And then, always on the alert as she was to seize any new possibility, she explained that she should say nothing to Victor beyond telling him that Doris was rather feverish, and must not talk much. But he might sit in her room at intervals. . . . His happiness and confidence, and Doris's pleasure in seeing him, would all help to swell those odic forces⁸ that are the real fund of life.

Surely no other ten minutes in the course of all the ages were so long as those that elapsed between mVictor entering the house and his being taken by Miss North into Doris's room. He followed his guide closely, a blinding mist around him, the surging as of great billows in his ears.

'Oh, Victor dear, I am so glad you have come. . . .'

The words came to him low and broken, and Doris held out both hands to him with a strangely beautiful smile. He knelt down by her side and covered them with kisses. Then the mist slowly cleared away. They were alone. Doris was beside him, softly calling him by name. But for a little time he could make no reply. And then, as he grew calmer, and held her hands and looked into her face, his joy, which was almost unbearable in its intensity, received the first little check. Doris was supported by pillows in a deep armchair, in one of the white cashmere robes in which he had so often seen her in the early mornings at Stonehouse. Her eyes were strangely brilliant, but her face was no longer flushed; and, oh, what was it—what was it that smote him, as if a hand fumbling awkwardly had suddenly touched his heart? A look of evanescence . . . a smile remote from all earthly interests. . . .

'Darling—you—have been ill. . . . You are—ill now,' he said in a broken voice, with an odd pause between the words.

'But, Victor, don't be sorry. I cannot tell you how beautiful it is. Always at night, and sometimes in the day, I hear nmaman's voice as in the dear old times. And now you have come there is nothing more to wish for.'

'Except that you should be well and strong, my own dear one. . . . Oh, Doris, how did you come to think that there should ever be room in my heart for anyone but you? Your letter—your dear little cruel letter . . . see, I have carried it next my heart . . . but now I want you to take it back—to tell me that you understand.'

Poor child, she whose ways and thoughts and associations had been so far removed from those of ordinary

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life—how could she grasp those complex and conflicting interests? But as she looked oin Victor's face, as she listened to the sound of his voice, telling her with eager rapidity his reasons for wishing to start for town, and the mystery which still hung over those days during which he lay in helpless darkness, she knew that she had been in error in some of her thoughts.

'Did you not like my letter, then, Victor?' she said, taking it from him and turning it over.

'Yes, dearest, because, though you were under a strange delusion, you still somehow trusted me. . . . After all, I will not give up this letter till I have many more in its place. To-morrow, when you are better, you shall write at the end, "I know you love only me." '

'Would you like it better if I wrote that? Then let me write it now.'

She took a pencil and traced the words at the bottom of the letter. Her small, quaintly-formal writing was a little uneven, but it sufficed. Before the time expired when Victor should leave, Doris had told him of the strange way in which she thought she saw him in the iron passage, and of her journey with him to Broombush Creek.

'It was so strange and lonely part of the way—oh, so dark and strange over that gray, gray Silent Sea! And then it was silent no longer . . . it was full of loud, shrill calls . . . the voices of the wind . . . calling, calling, as if they, too, were lonely and sorry, and they could find no home, and no answer.'

'Oh, my Doris, and I was there, and could do nothing for you!'

'But don't be too sorry, Victor dear. . . . I hear it in your voice. . . . And you know after a little time it was all beautiful again. Mother came to me . . . mother, with her face as glad and beautiful as the day she went away.'

Her breathing became a little hurried, and her cheeks flushed. She lay back silent for some little time. The high, clear, musical whistle of a blackbird came in through the half-open window. And then she spoke again, her voice a little huskier and more hurried.

'I am glad you are at Ouranie, Victor. . . . You see, it is full of flowers . . . if you open the window a little more. . . .'

The sunshine was now beyond the prescribed temperature of the room. He rose and opened the window wide, drawing back the curtains; and lo! there were the shrubs and blossoms he had so often seen in his fragmentary dream. The air was embalmed with orange-blossoms. Great rose-bushes were still heavy with blooms; the sprays of an Ophir rose-bush lay half across the path in torrents of flaming, wide-opened roses. The gladioli, white, scarlet, and crimson, stood in clustering masses waist-high; Banksia roses in pink and honey-pale masses were lying in swathes close to the window. One touch that now came back to him as ppart of his dream he missed—a magnolia tree with a few wide-opened chalices; but looking a little to the left of the orange-grove, he saw it—a few late blooms with their great petals still folded, like the wings of a dove that has come with a message from afar. Then, seeing that his dream was so literally reproduced, something of vague cold dread seized him.

It was not until qnext day, however, that he felt any real apprehension of the great calamity that was to fall on him. In the morning he was told that Doris was worse. During the afternoon he was allowed to see her for a short time. She was then half-unconscious, but on seeing him she smiled, and held out her hands. A little afterwards she seemed to be talking to her mother.

'Say it again, maman darling,' she murmured; and then she repeated the words slowly, as if saying them after some one: ' "Dors, dors, doux oiseau de la prairie. . . Dieu t' veillera dans son bon temps!" '9

Victor endeavoured to control his grief, in order to save her pain. It was in the deepening twilight she last spoke to him. Consciousness had then partly returned, and she knew by the sound of his voice that the billows of grief were around him.

'Do not be so sorry, dear Victor,' she said softly.

'Oh, Doris, Doris!' was all that he could say in reply.

'When maman was going away, she put her hands on my head, and said, "God bless and keep my darling." Let me say the same to you, Victor.'

He knelt beside her, and she placed her hands on his head, and said in a tremulous voice:

'God bless and keep my darling!'

Before the sun had set on the next day she had awakened from the brief dream which comprised the span of her serene and guileless life.

a. overflowing] overwhelming Adl E1

b. only have] have only Adl E1

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- c. be] have been E1
- d. be] have been E1
- e. really] Om. Adl E1
- f. ill] really ill Adl E1
- g. after] Om. E1
- h. it is] it's Adl E1
- i. greater] great Adl
- j. her] Om. Adl
- k. to] to meet Adl
- l. to] of Adl
- m. Victor] Victor's E1
- n. maman's] mamma's Adl E1
- o. in] into Adl E1
- p. part] a part Adl
- q. next] the next Adl E1

Chapter XVI.

After the first strange days were over, Victor found his thoughts constantly turning on schemes of unmasking Trevaskis. The inquiry which had been undertaken by the police, aided by the manager's eager suggestions, had, of course, come to nothing. It now seemed that there was no certainty at all as to the departure by any of the sailing ships of the young man who had presumably personated Victor.

At last he resolved to prosecute a search on his own account. Day and night he was pursued by the thought that Doris's untimely death and his own irretrievable bereavement were largely due to the chain of circumstances woven by the action of the man who, for his own purposes, had first rendered him insensible and then kept him so long drugged.

'I could not get him hanged for it. Perhaps the worst villains always die in their beds with troops of admiring friends round them; but I could get him disgraced—branded—branded for life as a thief and a cheat and an impostor,' he would think over and over again in a dull, mechanical round, till at times he was almost beside himself with the thirst for vengeance. He often reasoned with himself that Doris's memory—her last loving words, and the pressure of her beloved hands as she uttered them, should serve as a benediction to keep this passion at bay.

But nevertheless it returned on him again and again. About the end of January he went to look for Kenneth Campbell. He had been reported dead by the special policeman who had undertaken the investigation, but he resolved to search for himself. His mother would be soon on her way out to Australia. He resolved to occupy the time till she arrived in hunting up every possible clue. After that he had no plans. His uncle had from time to time put off carrying out the instructions of the will under which Victor was heir to the late Mr. Shaw Drummond—but his income on coming of age, irrespective of the property in Mr. Stuart Drummond's hands, was more than enough for his wants, so that he granted the delay without a second thought.

He got on Kenneth Campbell's track at Nilpeena, where he had stayed two days after leaving Colmar. Seventy miles further on towards town he was met by the news of his death. But after fully testing the evidence he became convinced that it was a case of mistaken identity—that it was a man of the same name who had died in the Burra hospital, not the old ex-shepherd. At last he found someone who knew where the brother lived with whom Kenneth had farmed for a short time. This was in the Wimmera District in Victoria.

It was a long, uninteresting journey, and the results very uncertain. But he was now possessed of that dogged obstinacy which in one who has the two strains of Scottish and Celtic origin is sometimes driven to the verge of a mania. He had not yet picked up a single clue that did not end in a 'possum track up a gum-tree.'¹ He had sometimes thought of setting off himself to meet the wool-ship that was bound for Plymouth, and engaging a detective to meet the other at Cape Town. But he was now convinced that no one had really taken the journey, and that the whole ruse had been managed by Trevaskis with the same adroitness with which he had compassed the rest.

When he reached Thomas Campbell's little farm he found Kenneth—now a confirmed invalid—so wrapped in the study of Persian theosophy,² that he could hardly make him carry his thoughts back to the journey he had taken with a sick man from near the broken-down whim. He received the news of Doris's death without any surprise. But though he said it was ground for rejoicing when those who were beloved of Heaven were called to their real home, some tears slowly coursed down his cheeks. When he heard that Shung-Loo had departed for China he lifted his eyes, and clasped his hands in fervent supplication that the seed of knowledge which he had tried to sow in his heart might blossom and bear fruit abundantly.

'But I believe there is not a nation under the sun without true worshippers. To-day I read the life of a Persian saint who sat seven years long in a hermitage with stopped ears,³ day and night calling upon Allah, till wall and door at last to him were one. Ay, the cup of spiritual knowledge is not put into the hand of man in the midst of vanities.'

Victor was very patient with Kenneth, because of those tears he had shed; but in the end all he could extract from him was that the man who had cared for him in the little weather-board hut was strong-looking and thick-set, and that he spoke as the Cornish miners do who have grown to manhood before they leave England.

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'Did he remind you of anyone?' asked Victor.

Kenneth deliberated. 'Yes, he did. As soon as I saw him he reminded me of the captain at the Colmar Mine—Trevaskis.'

Victor gave a low exclamation. He had, in the course of the inquiries he had made, learned that Trevaskis had a brother, who stayed for some days at the mine on two occasions. Three days after his interview with Kenneth he had engaged the services of a private detective, who had the reputation of being the cleverest in South Australia, to ascertain where Daniel Trevaskis had been employed during the two weeks from the 9th December to the 23rd December last year.

It is now pretty well established that the cleverest detectives in Australia are the most easily recognised members of the communities in which they reside. In this case the detective returned to town in a few days, reporting that he had been blocked in his inquiries by being everywhere publicly denounced as a spy by the miners, and threatened with the most unpleasant consequences if he did not at once clear out. Dan Trevaskis had been off and on at a claim near the broken-down whim, but he had left it, and made frequent journeys to places at a distance from the mine. Now he was staying with his brother, preparatory to going to England in a short time.

On hearing this, Victor at once started for the mine. He would at least see this man for himself. He stayed at the inn till he saw Trevaskis coming to dinner. Seeing that he was alone, he did not meet him, but went out through the bar-door as Trevaskis entered by the main entrance. Victor walked up towards the mine, keeping a sharp look-out on the men he saw about. Presently he noticed a little in advance of him one who had been a fellow-passenger by the mail-coach from Nilpeena. He had not then taken much notice of him. As a matter of fact, he was often so sunk in thoughts of Doris during these solitary wanderings as to be quite oblivious of his surroundings.

Now he was struck by something secretive, furtive, and sinister in the man's appearance. He was extremely thin, closely-shaven, and wore a loose alpaca overcoat, with a rather bulgy look about the breast. He carried a small bag, and kept glancing rapidly from side to side, and walking faster and faster as he drew nearer the Colmar Mine. He did not go to the mine or the offices, however, but struck off in an easterly direction towards the enclosure round the cave room.

But before the stranger reached this, Victor's attention was drawn by the figure of a man who disappeared into the engine-room as he drew near it. He instantly followed him. Roby met him with an out-stretched hand; but Victor, merely grasping it in passing, said:

'Isn't this Mr. Daniel Trevaskis?'

'Sure 'nough 'tis,' answered Roby, looking after him with amazement.

Dan heard the answer and the question, and quickened his footsteps, going out by a side-door of the engine-room, and into the purser's office, the door of which was open.

Victor, too excited to remember the nearest way, lost a little time. As soon as Dan got inside he rushed from one store-room to the other. When he gained the manager's office he tried to lock the door, but the key was missing. The door leading into the iron passage was half ajar, however, and rushing through this, he closed and bolted it behind him.

Without a moment's pause, Victor rushed back and got a large mallet out of one of the store-rooms. With a few strokes he splintered the door, and then he laughed aloud—a laugh not pleasant to hear.

'Now you are in the snare!' he cried out.

He hurried through the passage. As soon as he entered the cave room he knew that this was the place in which he had been lying for thirteen days. This was the accursed place, and this man who had fled into it had been his gaoler.

He peered around in the darkness. The light from the panes of glass in the enclosure of the entrance to the cave room did not penetrate beyond a third part of the cavity; the rest was in impenetrable gloom.

'You are in there, Daniel Trevaskis . . . and you may as well come out!' cried Victor.

There was no answer.

'You hound! This is where you and that infamous blackguard, your brother, drugged me and kept me.' He was beside himself with rage as he thought of all that had followed upon this. 'If you wait here till the Day of Judgment you won't escape me again!'

After waiting for twenty minutes, Victor began to consider that it would be better to get a light, and call on

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some of the men for assistance, or, at any rate, to bear witness to what should happen. The one thing he was determined on was not to let this man escape him till he should get him under police surveillance, and take out a warrant against him.

'He cannot get out; he must come back along the passage,' he reflected. At that moment he thought he heard a curious sound of tapping on one side of the iron wall round the entrance to the cave room. He went back as far as the first little window, and then he saw Trevaskis coming, his face drawn and gray.

'Who has been smashing in doors here?' he said in a choked voice.

'I have. . . . I am on your trail now, you lying scoundrel! You coward, to come and attack a sleeping man.'

'I never did git, as sure as God is in heaven!'

'How do you dare to mention His name with such a falsehood? You stole into the office, you flung me down when I was half asleep, and then you drugged me—you and your brother. But I have him—I have him now like a rat in a hole.'

Twice Trevaskis attempted to speak, but his throat seemed to be full of ashes.

'You have no proof—not one!' he gasped at last. 'You go on the paltry fact that my brother came in here when he saw you. Let me tell you he has been drinking hard, and has had a touch of the "horrors." '

'Gord ha'mighty! what it is to be born a liar. You don't get into no scrape without bein' able for to crawl out somehow,' said poor Dan with a groan, in his hiding-place.

It was not bodily fear that had made him flee, but the conviction which he had all along that he would never, face to face with Victor, be able to deny that he had been with him during his imprisonment in the cave room—that and the terror of exposure for his boy. He had been well paid by Trevaskis for his assistance, and now that the gold had all been safely disposed of, Dan was to start next week by the mail-boat, so as to meet Dick when he landed in England.

The sound which Victor had heard ten minutes earlier had been going on all this time. It was the sound made by a chisel being inserted under a sheet of iron, to force the nails back that held it in its place. Now the sheet was bodily removed, a man came quickly through the opening, and went hurrying through the entrance of the cave room. Victor at once advanced from the passage, fearing his quarry should escape him. The first glance showed him that the man, who was on his knees lighting a small lamp, was his fellow-passenger from Nilpeena. As soon as the lamp was lit, leaving it on the ground, he began groping on all fours, feeling the ground, and turning the loose earth over with long lean fingers. Then he cried, with a voice that had the vibrations of the cry of a wounded animal:

'Ah, my God, my God! it is all gone! All stolen—all stolen; gone for ever!'

Victor then knew that this was Webster, and he stood watching him in the semi-darkness with a sort of fascinated horror. Trevaskis also crept nearer to look and listen, half fearful that this strange apparition—the gaunt-looking man who had effected an entrance through the wall, who had come provided with a lamp, who crouched on the ground burrowing in the earth, whose voice had a shrill, savage ring—was somehow in collusion with Fitz-Gibbon.

The man rose and carried the lamp further into the cave room. His hand shook so that the light flickered like an aspen leaf. When he reached the narrow portion running northward, he knelt down and burrowed in the loose earth, groping on his knees, his breath coming in laboured gasps.

'No, no, no! not an ounce—not an ounce!' he shrieked, in an insane voice that had lost all balance of modulation. Then he moaned and sobbed in a horrible way.

Presently, from a dim recess beyond him, Dan crept out shaken and unnerved. Could this be Fitz-Gibbon, who had suddenly gone mad, or was it an emissary of the Evil One come to destroy him with terror because of the part he had played in this hateful underground place? In any case Dan could no longer remain where he was, for this man, with his awful cries and carrying a light, was steadily drawing nearer to him. He glided stealthily from his hiding-place, keeping in the shadow, and hoping to avoid notice. But in the obscurity he stumbled over some of the litter with which the floor was encumbered.

Webster instantly started up with a maniacal cry, drawing some weapon from under his coat.

'Leave this man to me,' said Victor, making a quick motion forward.

He was too late; it was a five-chambered revolver, loaded and cocked, that Webster had drawn. Dan was shot through the heart, and fell without a sound. The next moment Victor felt a sharp, stinging pain in his head. He

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knew no more till he became conscious weeks later, to find that he had been nursed back from the brink of the grave by Miss Paget. As soon as the news of the catastrophe at the Colmar Mine—Dan murdered, Victor dangerously wounded, and Webster killed by his own hand—reached town, Miss Paget came without a moment's delay, accompanied by one of the best surgeons in Adelaide. For many days the young man hovered between life and death; but, with a devotion and endurance extraordinary even in a woman, Helen stood sentinel between him and the roar of greedy Acheron.⁵ For days and nights in succession she scarcely quitted his bedside. Later, she had the assistance of a trained nurse.

In the kearlier stages of Victor's convalescence his mother reached Adelaide, and at once came to him at the new Colmar Inn—the one for which Scroogs had obtained a license while it was still a curious medley of tents and weather-board cribs. Now it had a frontage of stone-rooms, and in the best of one of these the patient was lying on a couch under a window looking leastwards, towards that great flat space, interspersed with naked patches of reddish earth, broken up here and there into gaping fissures.

Victor lay looking out on the scene with the languid, unseeing gaze of one who has, without much heart in the affair, battled his way back to a fresh hold on life. Presently his notice was attracted by a half-stifled sigh, and looking round, he saw that his mother, who had been reading, had let the book close on her lap, and was looking at him with dimmed eyes. Mrs. Fitz-Gibbon was a very handsome, well-preserved woman, who at forty-eight might pass for being ten years younger.

'Well, mother, you look very solemn,' he said, with a feeble smile.

'Oh—dear Victor—I am so thankful!'

There was a suspicious break in her voice.

'Is it usual to weep, mater, when one is thankful?'

'You naughty boy, you begin to be saucy already.'

'Already? How many hundred fowls⁶ have I devoured within the last two weeks?'

There was a little pause, and then the mother spoke again.

'Of course there were other thoughts as well as gratitude. When I look at you . . . and compare you with the boy from whom I parted less than a year ago——'

'Handsome as an Apollo' were the words that rose to the mother's lips; but though she had been exceedingly vain of her son's good looks from his childhood upwards, she was of Puritan descent, and she checked herself.

'Isn't it strange,' she went on, after a little pause and in a different tone of voice, 'that you should ever mhave come to a place like this at all, and that, having come once, you should have been nearly assassinated, and having come again, you should have been nearly murdered?'

'And yet, mother,' said Victor after a little silence, 'I would not for all the world have missed coming here.'

He meant this to be the prelude to telling his mother about Doris; but even the memory of strong emotion invaded his brain with an irresistible languor. He sighed heavily, and turned away from the window so that he should not see that great level, naked plain—the Silent Sea—in which the supreme joy of life had come to him—and eluded him.

'I believe Helen would scold me if she heard me broaching such topics at all,' said Mrs. Fitz-Gibbon presently. She had never possessed that finer tact which leads people to perceive without making perception a matter of comment, and to understand those half shades which so often convey more than stronger colours. She reflected a little as to the cause of her son's continued silence, and then said, 'I must ask your forgiveness for one thing, Victor—that letter I wrote when I knew less than nothing of dear Helen.'

'What was it you said, mother?'

Mrs. Fitz-Gibbon laughed softly before she replied:

'How like you are to your dear father in some things! That was exactly his way of making it pleasant for one who had been disagreeable. He would pretend to forget all about the affair!'

At this moment Miss Paget came in with a great boxful of flowers that had come from Lancaster House. At sight of them the vision of those other flowers, that used to come to this arid wilderness in all their delicate beauty for Doris, rose before Victor with strange distinctness. She brought him a plume of white lilac—one of those late blossoms that bud and come into bloom after the almanack says they are over. Its faint yet poignant fragrance seemed to sum up for him all the unspeakable longing and regret of which a lifetime is capable.

'Was it worth all the pains you have taken to keep me in life, Helen?' he asked as she stooped to arrange his

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pillow. 'That means you ought to have a bowl of chicken-broth,' she answered, laughing. Then, in a lower tone, 'There is nothing else in life worth so much for me.'

Four months later they were married. The paper which announced the marriage contained an enthusiastic description of a testimonial presented to William Trevaskis, J.P., on the occasion of his retirement from managing the Colmar Mine. The Chairman of Directors, in making the presentation, said that Mr. Trevaskis was a man who had long ago made his mark in mining. The indefatigable industry, the downright John Bull⁷ honesty which had characterized his management of the Colmar Mine, were beyond all praise. While deeply regretting his loss as a manager, they all—directors and shareholders alike—were gratified to know that the trained sagacity with which Mr. Trevaskis had dealt in Broken Hill mining shares now enabled him to resume the position in society of which his unmerited misfortunes had previously deprived him. Mr. Trevaskis was about to enter Parliament once more, and his friends were confident that he would make his mark in politics as he had in mining. The tea and coffee service (of sterling Broken Hill silver, artistically relieved with Colmar gold) was a slight mark of the esteem in which he would always be held by those who knew him best (cheers).

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 - h. a'mighty] Almighty Adl
 - i. liar] liard Adl
 - j. the] a Adl E1
 - k. earlier] early Adl
 - l. eastwards] eastward Adl
 - m. have] Om. Adl E1
 - n. always be] be always Adl E1
- THE END.