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UNDER TWO SKIES

A Collection of Stories

BY

ERNEST WILLIAM HORNUNG

AUTHOR OF "A BRIDE FROM THE BUSH"

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JIM-OF-THE-WHIM

I

HIS real name had gone no further than the station store. There it appeared in the ledger, and sometimes (though very rarely) on a letter in the baize-covered rack, under post-marks which excited the storekeeper's curiosity; but beyond the store verandah he was known only as Jim-of-the-Whim.

He lived by himself at the Seven-mile whim. Most of his time was spent under a great wooden drum, round which coiled a rope with its two ends down two deep shafts, raising a bucketful of water from the one while lowering an empty bucket down the other. The buckets filled a tank; the tank fed the sheep-troughs; and what Jim did was to drive a horse round

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and round to turn the drum. It was not an arduous employment. Jim could lean for hours against a post, smoking incessantly and but occasionally cracking his whip, yet serenely conscious that he was doing his duty. In times of plenty, when there was water in the paddocks and green life in the salt-bush, the whim was not wanted, and other work was found for the whim-driver. Unhappily, however, such intervals were in his time rare, and Jim was busy, though his work was light.

Jim never neglected his work. Sometimes he took a few days' holiday, and exchanged his half-year's cheque for poisonous bush alcohol; this was only customary; and Jim was highly considerate in his choice of the time, and would go after a rainfall, when the sheep could not suffer by his absence. He never allowed his excesses to degenerate into irregularities. He knew his work thoroughly, and applied his knowledge without sparing his bones; when not actually driving the whim, he was scouring the plains for thirsty stragglers. As a permanency at the Seven-mile he was worth higher wages than he was ever likely to get from

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Duncan Macdonald, though this squatter would have conceded much (for him) rather than lose so reliable a hand. But Jim never asked for a rise; and Macdonald was perhaps not eccentric in declining to take the initiative in this matter.

Jim's hut was two hundred yards from the whim. As bush-huts go, it was a superior habitation. It was divided by a partition into two rooms; it had a floor. In the larger room stood a table and a bench, which were both movable; and this merit was shared in an eminent manner by a legless armchair mounted on an old soap-box. Prints from illustrated papers were pasted neatly on strips of sacking nailed to the walls. Sacks filled with the current rations hung from the beams. The roof was galvanised iron; the walls, horizontal logs of pine between pine uprights.

Civilisation was met with on the threshold in the shape of a half-moon of looking-glass, nailed to the doorpost on the inside. This glass was only put to practical use on the infrequent occasions when Jim amused himself by removing his beard. At such times, when the

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operation was over, and Jim counted the cuts, the reflection showed a sun-browned face of much manly beauty, invested with a fine moustache in a state of picturesque neglect. His eyes were slightly sunken, but extremely blue; and he had an odd way of looking at you with his head on one side, owing to a breakage of the collar-bone from a fall far up country, when the bones had overlapped before growing together again.

The station storekeeper, a young Englishman named Parker, who gave his services to the economic Macdonald in return for 'Colonial experience,' and, among other duties, drove out with Jim's rations, was the only regular visitor at the Seven-mile hut. Yet Jim had one constant companion and sympathetic friend. This was Stumpy, the black kitten. The genesis of Stumpy was unknown to Jim, who had found him in a hollow log, while chopping up a load of wood sent from the homestead. Jim had chopped off two inches of what he took to be a new variety of the black snake before discovering that he had mutilated an unlucky kitten. The victim became 'Stumpy' on the spot; and

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from that moment the kitten shared every meal and sentiment of the man, and grew in wisdom with increasing inches.

One cloudless winter's day (it was in July) Mr. Parker, arriving at the Seven-mile hut at high noon, found Jim idly caressing the kitten, and singing. He always did sing when he played with Stumpy, except when he broke off into affectionate imprecations upon some new impertinence on the part of that quaint little creature. In fact, Jim sang a good deal at any time. At general musters of all hands, such as at the lamb-marking, his voice made him popular in spite of his reserve, though he sometimes sang over the heads of his mates. To-day his singing was over the head of Mr. Parker, for it was in Italian, and Jim looked up with a quick change of colour at detection. He had, however, nothing to fear. Young Parker, so far from knowing Italian when he heard it, had been sent away from his public school because the rudiments of Latin were still beyond him at seventeen. Jim was pronouncing his words funnily—that was all that struck young Parker.

'You've heard the news, Jim?' were Parker's

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first words. 'We've a visitor—a lady, ye gods! —Mrs. Macdonald's sister.'

Jim had heard nothing about it. He appealed to Stumpy, and inquired if *he* had any information. Altogether he treated the intelligence with indifference, and went on playing with the kitten. Parker was piqued. He was full of the guest at the homestead, Mrs. Macdonald's enchanting sister, and must tell some one about her, even though the only accessible ear was a whim-driver's. He launched into a rhapsody which occupied some minutes, and blended the old public school slang with the stronger-flavoured bush idiom, newly acquired. Jim heard him stoically; then he held up Stumpy by the fore-quarters, and addressed this animal gravely.

'D'ye hear all that, Stumpy? Then just you forget it again, my little feller. Wimmin is nothink to us, as I've told you before; so never think on 'em, Stumps, or you an' me'll fall out! That's it—he says he hears, Mr. Parker.'

Parker changed the subject.

'Here's a letter for you,' he said, and tossed

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a square blue envelope across to the whim-driver. It was not one of the well-directed letters he occasionally received, with English postmarks which invited speculation. It came only from Sydney, and the superscription was amusingly illiterate. Jim opened the letter—and turned whiter than the soiled sheet which now began to tremble violently in his hand. There were merely a few written words on this sheet of paper, but a short newspaper extract was pasted below them. The written words danced before Jim's eyes; the printed words became illegible; and if young Parker had not been deep in the contemplation of his own face in the looking-glass on the doorpost (gloating over the promising beginnings of a russet bushman's beard, and wishing he could have his photograph taken as he was, to send home to the old country), he might have seen Jim shiver from head to foot, and push the kitten from his trembling knees. As it was, by the time the youth did turn round, Jim-of-the-Whim looked and spoke like a calm and rational man.

'Mr. Parker, sir—I want a cheque.'

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'You aren't going on the booze again, Jim—already?'

'No, sir. I want you to make out a cheque for—as much as I'm worth, payable to this name and at this address.' He tore off the portion of the sheet of letter-paper above the newspaper-cutting, scored out a few words with a stump of pencil, added three words of his own, and handed this upper portion to young Parker. 'And please to put in this slip with the cheque, sir.'

These were the three words that Jim had written—

'To cover expenses.'

II

The young lady whom Mr. Parker had raved about to Jim-of-the-Whim was Miss Genevieve Howard, of Melbourne; and, to do that young fellow justice, he had but praised one who gained golden opinions on almost every hand.

Miss Jenny had a pretty face, a perfect

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figure, a sweet soprano voice; and she was run after at the Government House assemblies. She was hardly, however, one of the Melbourne beauties. Her hair was free from special merit; she had no complexion at all. Even her eyes were of a neutral tint, though as a rule they were subject to such clever control that the colour was of no consequence; the rule was broken when emotion softened them; then they required no management to render them quite bewitching. Genuine feeling was no stranger to Miss Jenny, but depth of feeling was. She was emotional. And greater even than her talent for singing was her natural turn for coquetry, which amounted to genius.

But when Miss Jenny came to stay in the back-blocks with her sister (whose invitations she had persistently refused for years) her little fling was over: she was engaged. It was a startling engagement. Her world could scarcely believe its ears when it was announced that the popular Genevieve—with her beauty, her money, her fairly smart tongue—had engaged herself to Clinton Browne, a country curate no better than a pauper. It seemed pre-

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posterous. It vexed many; it wounded one or two; but at least it scored off those hanging judges of Miss Jenny's own sex who had averred that Miss Jenny was holding back until the Australian squadron should anchor once more in the bay, or another cricketing team come over from the old country. But these were not the people to be silenced for long. They presently heard of Mr. Browne's translation from the country to a town curacy, and about the same time that Miss Jenny was going up country. They promptly declared that she was frightened of seeing too much of him. She was tired of an amphibious position in society (for Government House had been renounced); her enthusiasm for aboriginal missions and the rest had gone out as suddenly as it had caught fire; the originality, pathos, and romance attaching to the voluntary immolation of the brilliant Miss Howard on true love's altar were losing their fragrance in her own delicate nostrils. All these points, and worse, her judges insisted on—not knowing that their most ingenious malice could not have condemned the accused to a worse servitude than station-life in the

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remote lonely regions of Riverina, where Miss Jenny now was.

The well-built homestead among the tall pines on the sandhills had absolutely no attraction for the town-bred girl. The surrounding miles of salt-bush plains and low monotonous scrub oppressed her when she wandered abroad. There was not one picturesque patch on the whole dreary 'run.' Then she was prejudiced against squatters in general, and unjustly accepted her taciturn, close-fisted brother-in-law as a type of the class. Him she could not endure. She pitied her elder sister, the gentle Julia, who, having thrown herself away to begin with, made the worst of the bargain by becoming her children's meek, submissive slave. Their name was legion, and they were young savages one and all; the only one of them that Aunt Jenny would have anything at all to do with, while she could help it, was the reigning baby in arms.

At first, it is true, the young lady thought it rather nice to have a horse to ride at her own sweet pleasure. But this treat was minimised after the first ride, when Duncan gravely

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cautioned her against galloping his horses while 'feed' was so scarce in the paddocks and chaff so expensive; and after Miss Jenny had frightened herself horribly by losing her way in the scrub, and not finding it again for several hours, she removed the ride from her daily programme, and reserved it for those times when her nephews and nieces succeeded in making a perfect pandemonium of the homestead. Her days were spent chiefly among the pines, with a book or some fancy-work, or in the verandah when the children were out of the way. It was here that she made Clinton a gorgeous sermon-case of purple velvet, with C. B. in a crest of gold on one cover and I. H. S. on the other. This touching and suggestive present brought down upon her head a very beautiful letter from the ardent curate, who rashly stated that henceforth his sermons would be inspired. But the letter was far too beautiful to be answered immediately, or even to be read over twice. Not that Browne had rivals in Messrs. Bird and Parker, overseer and storekeeper respectively. Miss Howard took not the faint-

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est interest in either of them, though she had subjugated poor Parker (quite unintentionally) on the evening of her arrival, and been compelled to snub the forward and facetious young overseer a few days later.

'I declare,' Jenny wrote to a friend, 'except dear old Julia, there's not a soul fit to speak to on the premises! And the children prevent one speaking to Julia—little wretches! My dear, I mayn't even sing in the evenings for fear of waking them, and even if I might it would be no pleasure with a *pannikin of a piano*, besides which, none of them know a *note* of music! I wish I had never carted all my songs up here—the sight of them tantalises me. As for the men, they are insufferable—not that I want to go back to Melbourne just yet. After all, I knew what to expect, for, as *you* know *too*, all bushmen are the same!'

Fate, coming down from heaven in the form of a heavy and welcome rainfall, proved Miss Genevieve Howard at fault in respect of this sweeping judgment.

On a gray and lowering day that young lady might have been seen cantering by the Seven-

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mile whim; she *was* seen, in fact, by the whim-driver, who ran to open a gate for her. The act of politeness did not strike Miss Jenny—as it ought to have done—as abnormal on the part of a station hand; nor did a hint about coming foul weather, spoken with unusual deference, receive the slightest attention. She threw a bone of thanks to the dog her gate-opener, and rode through without once looking under the brim of the gray felt wideawake on a level with her dogskin gloves.

But a few minutes later, as Jim stood at his hut door watching the rain come down in real earnest, there was a muffled tattoo of hoofs upon the soft sandy soil, and a horse pulled up in front of the hut.

The diffident tone and manner in which the young lady now addressed him offered such a pretty contrast to her monosyllable at the gate that Jim very nearly burst out laughing; instead, however, he bared, and ever so slightly inclined, his head, just as a gentleman would have done in his place.

'I think this is called the Seven-mile hut?'

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'Yes, miss.'

'Is Mr. Macdonald here?'

'No, miss.'

'But you expect him?'

'No. I've heard nothing about it.'

'Oh, but I heard him say he was coming here.'

'Then he'll come, you may be sure, miss.'

The drops were falling thick and heavy.

'And I thought,' said Miss Jenny doubtfully, 'I might drive back with him in the buggy, which has a hood. I know Mr. Macdonald is coming here, for I heard him say so. I am only surprised he hasn't come yet.'

'He'll come any minute,' said Jim with decision. 'Help you to dismount, miss? That's it. Now, if you'll step in there out o' the rain, I'll take the saddle orf of the 'orse.'

The whim-driver followed Miss Jenny into the hut, carrying the saddle. Then he kicked the log into a blaze, drew near it the legless armchair on the soap-box, observed that Mr. Macdonald was certain not to be long, and, without another word, went out.

Miss Jenny listened to his retreating steps (and those of her horse, which he was evidently

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leading to some shelter) until they were lost to the ear in the rattle of rain on the iron roof; then she stood irresolute, her mouth pursed into the tiniest crimson circle, and doubt in her eyes. She made a pretty picture in her dark blue habit, the firelight sweeping over the flushed face underneath the white straw hat, and dancing in her hair—a pretty picture in a frame of unbarked pine, with a beading of galvanised iron.

She glanced round the wooden walls. How clean and tidy everything was! She had never imagined that common bushmen looked after their huts like this. Was this a common bushman, by the way? He certainly said 'orf of' for 'off,' and dropped the *h* from 'horse'; but otherwise he spoke almost as well as she did herself; his manners were better than those, say, of Mr. Bird; and he was really handsome —she had discovered this at last. What a pity he was only an ignorant bushman! He was nothing more, after all; or else, for one thing, he would not fight so shy of a riding-habit.

The girl sat down on the quaint seat in front

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of the fire, and the spurting flames made her thoughtful. . . . Presently she realised that there were no more flames, but only embers: her meditations had taken time. Yet the whim-driver did not return. Where had he gone? Did the absurd creature mean to leave her sitting there all day? She would demand her horse and brave the rain—only, now that she had waited so long for Duncan, it would be weak not to wait a little longer and be driven home dry. She raised her eyes from the red embers of the fire; they had rested on the glowing logs too long; they burned and ached, so that the rest of the hut was dark and indistinct to them.

Had this sensation lasted, Miss Jenny would at least have been spared a more startling one; for her clearing eyesight was greeted by a pair of emerald eyes transfixing her from the blurred gloom of the chimney corner. The eyes had no body, and Miss Jenny jumped up in high alarm, tumbling the legless chair from its pedestal the soap-box. A horrible sound issued from the region of the staring eyes. Miss Jenny leapt upon the soap-box, and

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thence, with immense agility, on to the table. Her sight lost all its dimness: the owner of the unearthly eyes, the author of the unearthly sound, stood revealed—a small black demon, with a back bent like a bow before the arrow leaves it.

Now, cats were this young lady's pet abhorrence; so she instinctively took the measure that had served her through life on like occasions, and screamed out lustily. Nor did she stop until the whim-driver appeared at the door with a scared face. Then, in an instant, she was sufficiently collected, and more than sufficiently indignant.

'Take that nasty, horrid little wretch away!' gasped Miss Jenny.

Jim simultaneously grasped the situation and poor Stumpy—the latter by that loose skin at the back of the neck which is to your hand what the loop of your overcoat is to the peg.

'Stumpy!' he began, in a terrible voice, 'you're a little——'

His teeth came together with a snap. Terror filled his face, for he felt as a man who

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has driven within an inch of a precipice, and pulled the right rein at the right second. And the words that Jim checked in his throat it would be grossly unfair to conjecture. He relieved himself by tossing Stumpy into the inner room, and banging the door.

'Danger's past,' he then said, smiling at the goddess aloft, with his head cocked at the rakish angle which he could not help. 'You may venture on deck, miss.'

He held up his hands to her assistance. What else could he do? But he may have done it awkwardly, for Miss Jenny stood immovable, vowing she was all right where she was. Jim thereupon threw himself with vigour into mending the fire. A modest idea occurred to him that advantage might perhaps be taken of his back being turned; and he was quite right, for there followed a flutter in the air and a light bounce on the floor; and when Jim looked round, after a decent interval, Miss Howard was standing gazing out of doors. He was glad she had not fallen and bothered him to pick her up.

Out of doors it was raining hopelessly; nor

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was there any sign of the good Duncan. The heavy framework of the whim loomed dispiritingly through the rain. There was nothing else to look at.

'How do you work a whim?' all at once asked the visitor.

'By driving a horse round and round,' Jim answered; and he came and looked out at a respectful distance from her.

'How very lively! I should rather like to see one working.'

'We don't do it in wet weather; there's plenty of water without. But if you cared to come some hot-wind day, miss, I'd show you the whole thing, and welcome.'

There was no eagerness in his tone; the invitation was inspired by a civil instinct, nothing more; and at that moment Jim-of-the-Whim was as good a misogynist as he had ever been. But Miss Jenny was rude enough not to answer; and Jim became exasperated: and that was the beginning of it all.

'*Will* you look round again to see the whim at work?' Jim asked, out of pure pique.

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'I don't mind.'

'Make it a bargain, miss!'

'A bargain, then. If Mr. Macdonald doesn't come at once, I must ride back, rain or no rain.'

Jim thought that he should not grieve if she did. 'I hope you'll do no such thing, miss,' was, however, what he said; and certainly, for a common man, he was wonderfully ready with a polite falsehood. 'I'll make you a billy of tea and a johnny-cake in true bush style, miss, if you'll do me the honour to try 'em when made.'

Miss Howard consented with light hauteur, and went on gazing out into the rain, wondering by what stages such a good-looking, decent-spoken man had gravitated to the bush; and whether he had ever been anything very much better than a whim-driver.

As for Jim, he made himself very busy indeed, sitting on his heels over the fire in an attitude peculiar to back-blockers; and there was silence in the hut for several minutes. Then Miss Jenny grew tired of looking out of doors, and wandered round the room, exam-

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ining the prints on the walls. Many of these she remembered in the English and Colonial illustrated papers. One from the *Sketcher*—one that occupied a place of honour 'on the line'—she remembered particularly well; for it represented a scene from an opera of which she was passionately fond, in her passionate little way. The opera was *La Traviata*. In a twinkling Verdi's airs were chasing each other in her ears. Half unconsciously she began humming the one that came first. This was the duet beginning 'Parigi, o cara,' which had made a great impression on Miss Jenny once (nay, many times more than once), all because of the soulful tenor who had played Alfred. With this tenor, in fact—one Signor Roberto—Miss Howard, in common with other little sentimentalists, had fallen innocently and entirely in love during the run of *Traviata* at the opera-house.

But before she had hummed the second bar of that duet, Miss Jenny turned sharply round—with animation practically suspended; for from some quarter of the hut, as if by magic, a tenor voice like unto the divine Roberto's

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was boldly singing the lines that had risen faintly and formlessly to the girl's lips—

'Parigi, o cara, noi lasceremo. . . .'

Genevieve disbelieved her ears; their evidence should have been corroborated by her eyes, but it was not. She rubbed her eyes, and fastened them upon the one possible and visible owner of a tenor voice; but the whim-driver still sat at ease upon his heels, with his face turned to the fire and his back to Miss Jenny; and, before she could make up her mind that the whim-driver and the singer were one, the voice ceased softly.

Miss Jenny knew what ought to happen now: the soprano ought to catch up the refrain, and repeat the solo. It was only a little bit of a solo, of two dozen bars or so; then why not?

Wild with excitement, knowing the thing by heart, she opened her lips, and out it came. It was no humming matter now; Miss Jenny was on her mettle; and if there was a slight nervous tremor in the notes, they were none the less true for that, and all the more tender.

A moment later the pace quickened, and

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both voices were in the running. Then it was that Jim rose to his feet—that the singers faced one another with sparkling eyes—that the whole hut rang and trembled with enchanting sounds. After that the voices sank and slackened, and died away in a soft embrace—pianissimo. And poor little Miss Jenny knew what she had done, and was instantly stunned by the buffets of a dozen different emotions.

'I've no right to know Italian; please keep it quiet, miss,' said Jim humbly, speaking first, and as though nothing much had happened, yet with a rather sad smile; 'and some day I'll—show you how the whim works.'

For at this moment Macdonald's buggy swept in front of the hut and pulled up.

And Jim said that night to his mate:

'Stumpy, you recollect what I was saying to you not so long since about wimmin? Keep clear of 'em, Stumps, my son. Never let me catch you frightening 'em no more, and getting your master mixed up in it, or I'll chuck you down the blessed whim, little Christian though you are!'

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III

About this time a change came over the whim-driver at the Seven-mile. It was noticed by young Parker, who saw him frequently, and lamented by the landlord of the Governor Loftus Hotel, the nearest grog-shanty, where Jim and his cheque were now several weeks overdue. The fact was, Jim had renounced the luxury of the periodical 'drunk,' and was coming out as a bush dandy. He shaved himself every morning of his life; he appeared in none but the snowiest moleskins and the pinkest and most becoming of striped cotton shirts; he even went to the extreme lunacy of shining his boots every evening before retiring to his bunk. But, what was far more remarkable, his speech was the speech of Jim-of-the-Whim no more. He dropped no aspirates, his sentences were grammatical; and without any specific deduction from his case, it may be noted as a curious fact that errors of speech may be easily acquired by any educated man who chooses to live long enough in a low grade, and takes pains to for-

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get what culture he once possessed. He seldom swore, and when he did the short sharp pistol-crack was a mere mockery of his former bullock-driving broadside. Stumpy, could he but have spoken, would have borne valuable testimony on the latter point, since he was the party most affected (not forgetting the whim-horse, a hardened drudge) by his master's change in this respect; and the sagacious little animal would have assured you that the endearing epithets now showered upon him were entirely inoffensive in their nature.

It would have been taxing feline intelligence unfairly, however, to have expected the little cat to note the subtler indications of the change in Jim: the look of expectancy and hope with which he rose of mornings, the disappointment in his face at evening, the glances he would cast all day along the track towards the homestead, the frequency with which he sang, whistled, and hummed one tune. These points were too fine for the cleverest cat in the world —even Dick Whittington's might have missed them.

But events long looked for come in the end

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when least expected; and the coming of Jim's goddess was a case in point.

The whim was out of order, and Jim for once idle, waiting for the blacksmith, who had been sent out from the homestead, and gone back to his forge there with a bit of greasy paper covered with diagrams. Jim sat outside on the ground in the shade of the hut, toes up, arms folded, eyes closed. A clay pipe was between his teeth, but the ashes in the bowl were cold. Jim was asleep, and dreaming of her who was alternately minx and angel in his waking mind, but always angel in his dreams. Suddenly he awoke: and the angel sat not far from him in her saddle.

The pipe fell from Jim's lips as his jaw dropped. Next moment he had sprung to his feet, and a dusky colour flooded his face with one swift wave.

'Good afternoon,' he said, snatching off his wideawake. 'I—I beg your pardon, miss.'

Miss Jenny begged his. 'I have come to be shown how a whim works,' said she.

'Ah, I feared you had forgotten all about that!'

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'So I had,' declared Miss Jenny with unblushing readiness. 'I never thought of it until, riding this way again, the whim reminded me. I am ready to be shown at once, if'—severely—'you are not too busy!'

Jim stepped diffidently forward, gnawing at his moustache, and proffered his aid as formerly. But she cut him short.

'No, thank you; I'm not going to get off; I can't stay a moment longer than just to see this wonderful whim—then I'm off.'

This was delicious. If the whim were admitted to be out of gear she would simply canter away without a thank-you; therefore Jim would admit nothing. In silence he led the way to the whim, Miss Jenny riding after him at a walk. Under the black ugly wooden framework, which was high enough for Miss Jenny to continue sitting upright in her saddle, they both stopped; and Jim began to explain.

He began with the great wooden drum above their heads, and step by step expounded the working of the whim; but when he led the lady's hack into such a position that Miss

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Jenny could see down into the shaft, he had not yet mentioned that an accident had suspended the working.

The sides of the shafts were lined with horizontal slabs of wood; and the mischief was that one of the slabs near the top had become loose, and had at last fallen the full depth of a hundred feet, and so smashed and jammed the bucket, which was just clear of the water at the bottom, as to make it immovable. One slab having loosened itself, others were likely to do the same; the shafts were no longer secure, and the danger of descending to the injured bucket (without testing every slab on the way, as the blacksmith proposed) was great.

There was only one shaft for Miss Jenny to look down, for the uninjured bucket hung at the mouth of the other. She did not much like looking down the smooth-sided, damp, narrow shaft; it put her in mind of the bottomless pit; yet to gaze down, down, down, rather fascinated her.

'You have not yet shown me how it works,' she said presently, glancing across the raised lips of the shaft at the whim-driver, who was

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leaning over them and grasping the perpendicular rope a little higher than his head.

'The whim's not in working order.'

As he spoke Jim watched her face, with a rather reckless light in his blue eyes, for the effect of his little sell. He expected her to ride off at once; but she did nothing of the kind. She exhibited no annoyance at all, but would know all about the jamming of the bucket at the bottom.

'Then will some one have to go to the bottom?' she asked, shuddering—'down this endless awful rope?'

'Some one will. There's nothing else for it.'

Miss Jenny's eyes had been downcast; now she raised them swiftly. Her eyes often were downcast, and she as often raised them thus.

'Dare *you*?'

'I shouldn't wonder.'

The next sound was a sharp shrill cry from Miss Jenny. The little dainty riding-whip—which she had never once dropped on all her long and lonely rides—had somehow slipped from her fingers and fallen fairly into the mouth of the shaft, and so out of sight.

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Then came a shriller, sharper cry from Miss Jenny, followed by the exclamation, 'Don't!' reiterated in great alarm.

But it was too late: Jim was descending the single rope into the horrible pit, hand under hand. Jenny's vision grew dim; she lost sight of him in the deeper gloom of the shaft; and as she saw him last his upturned eyes were fixed upon her with a strange, smiling, singular expression.

Suddenly the rope, on which the girl now concentrated her trembling, anxious gaze, ceased to vibrate. He had reached the bottom, then. But why did he not shout up to her his safety? She swayed in her saddle with the suspense.

Watching the rope with an agonised face, she hardly breathed until it began once more to vibrate; then she lowered her eyes into the impenetrable gloom; and at length a figure, spattered and stained with dirt, sweat streaming from the white forehead, and blots of blood upon the hands, with the little riding-whip between his teeth—a figure that ten minutes of strenuous effort had turned into an apparition—

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climbed slowly into sight, and so, hand over hand, into the open air.

A Count de Lorge would have struck the lady with the whip; but Jim just handed it over without a word, and flung himself upon the ground. Without a word Miss Jenny received her whip; she could not speak; but she could see four deep dents in the whalebone, where Jim's teeth had done their best to meet, in the struggle of the stifling upward climb.

All at once a noise came from the shaft—a thumping and a bumping against its sides—growing more distant, but ending in a loud metallic crash. Jim had leapt to his feet, and was gazing down the shaft.

'What is it?' asked Miss Jenny tremulously; her nerves were shaken.

'Only another slab, miss. It'll about do for the old bucket.'

'Are the slabs so heavy?'

'Damp, and heavy as lead.'

'Suppose—oh, suppose you had been down below a minute longer!'

'Why, miss, I should have been a stiff 'un!'

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There was a long pause between them. Miss Jenny broke it at last in a whisper—

'Did you know the—the danger—before you went down?'

The whim-driver laughed without answering; and a minute later a cloud of orange-coloured sand, far over the plain, was all that could be seen of Miss Jenny from the whim, even from the top of the framework, on which Jim had mounted.

IV

The gate between the home-paddock and the horse-paddock, half a mile from the homestead: half-past nine on a hot Sunday evening in December.

A slim figure all in white leant over the gate, and the full moon shone so brilliantly that any one within a hundred yards might have seen that it was Miss Jenny. Moreover, but for the hindering box clump on the other side of the gate, Miss Jenny might herself have seen some one hurrying across the paddock towards

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her, and have conquered her uneasiness; for this was Jim-of-the-Whim.

It was their first meeting by design, but there had been accidental meetings, one, two and three, since Jim's risky descent of the whim-shaft: at least, they appeared to be accidents—like the slipping of the whip that day from Miss Jenny's fingers.

All at once the night air was filled with a music that should have silenced every chirruping locust in the land—music whereat Miss Jenny sighed her deep relief and fluttered with delight.

'La donna è mobile' sang the voice, and came nearer every second. It was Verdi at his most tuneful: in the moonlit wilderness: by the sweetest tenor out of Italy.

Miss Jenny had heard *Rigoletto* with the same tenor that took more than her fancy in *Traviata*. For the first time—for she had only heard Jim sing once before—she compared his voice with the heavenly Roberto's. And then and there a suspicion entered her soul that would have been torture had not the opportunity of satisfying it been immediately at

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hand. For the song had come to an undignified end in the full tide of the second verse, and—and Miss Jenny was on one side of the gate and Jim on the other.

'You were singing *Rigoletto*?' said Jenny.

'Yes; I was forced to sing something for very joy.'

'I have heard Roberto sing that thing; and, do you know, you sing exactly like Roberto, and look like him too!'

No answer.

'*Are you* Roberto?' cried Jenny, in the greatest excitement.

'Can it make any difference to you? Even so, should I not be miles beneath you still?'

Miss Jenny did not answer.

'You own that I should—and,' cried Jim, 'that's the best of it! You take me for what I am. Very well; I'll tell you what I was—I *was* Roberto! Does it make any difference?'

It did not—but it made them practically silent. The full moon sank lower, and peeped under the very broad brim of Jim's wideawake. That was bad taste on the moon's part.

'You were to tell me your whole history,'

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but at the same time, to do her justice, she was thinking of her own little dower, and of its possibilities as an aid to reconciling her future husband with his family. Yet she would have given something to know what Jim's original crime had been.

Jim would not answer. He said that it was a long story, and his face showed that the memory pained him still. Nor would he say why he had quitted the stage, on which he had achieved a great though brief reputation throughout the Colonies.

Soon Miss Jenny looked at her watch, and said she must fly. Whereupon Jim opened the gate to fly with her as far as he dare. But they did not fly at all; they walked very slowly indeed; and on this walk they made their final arrangements. There is nothing to conceal in these arrangements. In the circumstances, they were the simplest and most natural in the world. Jim was to get his cheque next day, and set off walking for Wagga-Wagga. He was to wait in that town; if not in the church-porch, at any rate on the platform of the railway-station. He would not have to wait

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many days, though the date of Miss Howard's departure from her brother-in-law's station was not absolutely settled. She was preparing, however, to go down to Melbourne for Christmas, and she intended travelling by rail from Hay, by way of Wagga and Albury, instead of in the coach by the more direct route to Deniliquin. She would leave the train at Wagga, and be married then and there.

After that, as Jim said, the world lay at their feet. They would go to England. His father would forgive everything; all would be well; the years of exile and degradation should be forgotten. Nor were all Jim's prophecies so vague, and Genevieve quickly shared his high hopes; for among her own people the realisation of half the golden programme that Jim now unfolded would atone for the rash plunge she was going to take. She was intoxicated with joy, for there were prospects, as it turned out, undreamed of till now, though she had suspected from the beginning that Jim had sunk from some better state. But her little heart was honestly on fire as it had never quite been before; and in her

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happiness she for once shook off the haunting vision of poor Clinton, who at that moment was walking home to his Melbourne lodgings from Sunday supper at the parsonage, hugging to his heart the velvet embroidered case that had 'inspired' his evening sermon.

As for Jim, he carolled all the way back to the hut—still in Italian.

V

On Mr. Parker's high office-stool at the desk in the store sat Miss Jenny—deep in the composition of a letter. This letter was a long business, and, what was worse, it cost the writer tribulation over every word; when from time to time she looked up, her eyes were swimming with tears. Her letter, in fact, was full of sorrow and remorse: its frankness did the writer some credit—it was the letter of a weak nature rising almost to strength in the honest admission of its weakness: it was a letter to Clinton Browne.

It was strange that she should have the

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store all to herself this sultry afternoon; but the fact was that all hands were away 'mustering' in a distant paddock; and, as it was mail-day, Macdonald had intrusted the key of the store to his sister-in-law, with injunctions about the despatch of one mail-bag, and permission to open the other.

At last the dreadful letter was written, directed, stamped, and dropped into the outgoing bag. Then Miss Jenny dried her eyes, tied string round the mouth of the bag, and sealed it as she had once or twice seen Mr. Parker do. The wax was still warm when the inward mail was fetched into the store.

'The other bag is ready,' said Miss Jenny, pointing to it. 'You'd better take it.'

'No; I'll come back for it in an hour, when me and my 'orse has had a snack. Lots o' time for the other bag then.' And the highly Colonial mail-boy swaggered out with characteristic independence, not having demeaned himself by a single 'miss,' 'please,' or 'thank you.'

The weekly mail had always been a source of pleasurable excitement to Miss Jenny,

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though of late she had neglected her formerly enormous correspondence, and allowed it to dwindle. Still, there were a hundred people from whom she *might* hear to-day; and it was not a little disappointing to find absolutely nothing addressed to Miss Howard. There was, however, a letter bearing the name that was soon to become her own, and its mere exterior interested Miss Jenny more than whole sheets addressed to herself could have done.

This letter she kept in front of her on the desk after she had poured everything else back into the bag. It bore the postmark of an English town which, until the other day, had been no more than a name to her. It was superscribed in a firm, businesslike, masculine hand. Without doubt it was from Jim's father! Miss Jenny toyed musingly with the envelope. She tried to guess the contents; she even held the letter up to the light; but the paper of the envelope was provokingly opaque. If the letter itself was written on such thick paper it must be a pretty short letter. It has been said that Genevieve was naturally in-

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quisitive; other unfortunate qualities of hers combined to strengthen the temptation now thrown in her way.

Perhaps the drowsy stillness of the store and her entire solitude fed that temptation; perhaps, on the contrary, she argued that she had almost a right to read the letters of the man she meant to marry next week; or it may even have crossed her mind that possibly she held in her hands words of forgiveness from father to son, and that in this case Providence had clearly reserved it for her to break the good news to Jim. In any case, the fact remains that she opened the envelope with a paper-knife, and so cleverly that she separated the flap without tearing it. Having done this she was startled. She told herself that she had done it without thinking. This was partly true, for she made more bones about reading the letter now that it was opened than about opening it. It may have been the sight of a gum-bottle and brush among the inkstands that helped to decide her the wrong way.

When Genevieve Howard had read three lines of the letter to the man she had promised

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to marry, she sank forward on the sloping desk as if in a swoon, and the letter fluttered to the floor. There it lay in the dust—after all, not much more than the three lines that had been read.

'Dear James,' the letter ran, 'when I refused to see you or communicate with you any more, after your disgraceful marriage with an opera singer, I took the step after due deliberation. My decision was therefore irrevocable, and I am sorry you again compel me to emphasise it. I am not surprised to learn that this woman has proved your final ruin. That you have separated from her and left the stage may possibly be for your comparative good, unless you once more go from bad to worse. But I must repeat, and I trust for the last time, that you cheat and deceive yourself in looking to a reconciliation, no matter at how distant a date, with—your father.'

A jingle of spurs sounded along the verandah outside. The mail-boy re-entered the store.

'I'll take the bag now,' said this young Australian; and he was walking off with it when Miss Howard started up from the desk

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with burning cheeks and flashing eyes, and stopped him.

'Bring it to me!' she cried. 'There is a letter in the bag that must not go!'

She cut the string, extracted the letter addressed to Clinton Browne, and tore it into a hundred fragments before the mail-boy's eyes. He saw her tie up and seal the bag once more; he saw her hands tremble so that she burnt herself with the sealing-wax. In his uncouth way he lent a hand; and he went out and told all the men at the hut that 'his girl' was certainly 'taken worse.' Nor did Miss Jenny's white face that evening escape the notice of her brother-in-law, though he said nothing until she told him that she had given up the idea of rail from Hay to Albury *vid* Wagga, and so on, in favour of the more direct and cheaper coach journey to Deniliquin; and then he merely praised her economy, which was after his own heart.

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VI

On the railway platform at Wagga-Wagga there was to be seen daily, right through the busy time of the Christmas holidays, and principally at the hour when the train came in from Hay, a man whose appearance, at first gentlemanlike and irreproachable in point of dress, became rapidly shabby-genteel. This man attracted attention at first by reason of his good looks, and at last because people remembered his good looks, and wondered what had become of them. His expression, however, forbade inquiry; and as he never was seen in even the primary and confidential stage of intoxication (being evidently a tectotaller, since he was sober on Christmas Day) he was left unmolested. Just before he disappeared from Wagga, towards the end of January, this man presented an appearance that is familiar enough in cities: he had good clothes on his back and no money to live up to them; his cheeks were sunken, his chin stubbly, his linen grimy. At the first glance the man looked well to do;

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at the second, you could see that he was starving.

About a fortnight later the same man walked into the store at Macdonald's station, and young Parker cried out in surprise across the ledger—

'Jim-of-the-Whim!'

There was nothing surprising about Jim's return, though he had never before stayed away quite so long. What was surprising was the urban cut and texture of his clothes. Parker attempted to interrogate him lightly on the point, but got short answers. The fact was, the clothes were Jim's wedding garments, which had been made for him immediately after his arrival in Wagga, and which he would not part with though everything else had to go to buy him bread, while he waited for the bride who never came.

Parker gave up the dress riddle, and informed Jim that he had come back in the nick of time, his successor at the whim having that very morning rolled up his swag, got his cheque, and gone.

At the news Jim's eyes lighted up ever so little.

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'Is the little cat there still, sir?' he asked suddenly.

'He was this morning,' returned Parker—and the light in Jim's eyes grew stronger. 'By the way, Jim, here's a letter for you—came the day after you went.'

Jim read his father's ultimatum with complete apathy. It was the few words in pencil at the end, in a different hand, over a different signature, that caused him to stagger as though drunk, and to sink down on the nearest box.

Young Parker was going on with his entries, and his back was turned to Jim.

Jim read the pencilled words over and over again without grasping their meaning; yet they were simple enough. They told very shortly how the letter had been opened, what its first words revealed, how the writer would see him no more, yet forgave him, and wished him well. There was not one syllable of reproach. Jim blessed her in his heart.

In a few minutes, when he was quite calm again, he put his hand into an inner pocket, and drew out an old and dirty blue envelope, the same that Parker had handed to him in the hut

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on the day when he first heard of Miss Jenny, and would not listen. From this envelope Jim took the newspaper cutting which had agitated him on that occasion: it was an announcement of the death of Jim's wife at Sydney.

Jim rose and obtained from the storekeeper a clean envelope, into which he slipped his newspaper cutting, closing up the envelope without adding a written word; merely underlining the date of his wife's death.

'Mr. Parker, will you be so kind as to address this to the young lady that was staying here—Miss Howard, wasn't her name? You needn't whistle; it's only a cutting that'll interest her. Come, sir, as a favour to me.'

That was what Jim said. But he was thinking—'I won't add a word. She'll see it all and write. Then I'll go down to her, and after all—after all—after all——'

'Her name *isn't* Howard, Jim,' said Parker, taking the envelope.

'What is it, then?'

'This,' said young Parker, squaring his elbows to direct the envelope: and the address began: 'Mrs. Clinton Browne.'

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NETTLESHIP'S SCORE

I

IT was Nettleship's match; or rather, the University match that cricketers persist in calling Nettleship's, because it is generally held to have been Nettleship's long score (and apparently nothing else) that ultimately won the game for Oxford. It was the second day of the match, and the luncheon interval, which occurred shortly after Nettleship had gone in.

The day was gorgeous, as those who were up at Lord's will remember; and the dresses of the ladies were in keeping with the day, as half a dozen newspapers observed next morning. Never, it was agreed, had the well-appointed ground in St. John's Wood presented a fairer spectacle than during that interval. A perfect

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galaxy of beauty floated before your eyes across the trim green sward; behind you the dainty picnic was already in full swing on the tops of the handsome drags; and over all shone the hot June sun. So the papers said, and not without truth. Personally, however, it is more than likely that you took little or no interest in these phenomena. You knew them by heart as well as the descriptive gentlemen who reported them, at long range, from Fleet Street. More probably you spent the time in those exceptionally delightful recognitions which come but once a year, and at Lord's; where you have the annual opportunity of offering a good cigar to your old house-master (who had you flogged for smoking in your study), and of patronising the snob you used to fag for. You and some other fellow strolled about the ground together, sought out the old set, and criticised them horribly; and, no doubt, among other objects, you drew his attention to one of the players who was lunching in a landau, and was somewhat conspicuous, being the only one of the twenty-two, so far as could be seen, who preferred this sort of discomfort to the regular

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thing under cover. 'That's Nettleship,' you said; 'he's in, you know.' And of course the other fellow said pointedly that he could see that Nettleship was having his innings, and laughed; and you laughed too, indulgently, but drew nearer, to stare at the man who seemed already to have collared the Cambridge bowling.

All Oxford knew Nettleship by sight, and probably so did most Cambridge men. He had played the three previous years at Lord's, and though he had been a disappointment in those three matches, no one who had seen him in the field was likely to forget him; not so much because he was the finest cover-point in either team, but almost entirely on account of his good looks, which were not at all of the conventional order. His jet-black hair was a sheer anachronism in its length and curliness, and would have been considered extremely bad form in anybody but Nettleship. Also, his pale face was vexatiously deprived of the moustache which might at least have modernised him; but then his features were notably of a classic cast. So, at least, they had seemed when Nettleship played his first match at

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Lord's as a freshman. They were now, it was remarked, a trifle sharp and angular. In short —though it was the face of a determined, severing poet, at least looking the part, rather than that of a born athlete—it was a face that every one knew. Even the ladies at Lord's, who notoriously never look at the cricket, except to furnish their annual supply of high-class 'comic copy' in the form of artless comment—even the ladies knew Mr. Nettleship by sight, and really watched the game if he fielded close to the ropes. As for the men of his time, it has been hinted that they judged him by no ordinary standard of 'form,' though they may have regarded him as a dangerous and even impossible model. It may be added that they did not even speak of him in the ordinary way. It is Brown of Oriel, Jones of Brasenose, Robinson of New. It was Nettleship of the 'Varsity—Nettleship of Oxford. And Nettleship of Oxford was having his innings, it was observed; and the reference was not so much to the thirty or forty runs he had already made, and the hundred he was possibly good for, as to the fact that Nettleship was calmly

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eating salmon mayonnaise by the side of one of the loveliest girls on the ground, on the apex of whose parasol flaunted a dark blue knot.

The landau patronised by the celebrated Oxonian was a new one, though in point of existence the crest upon the door was a good deal newer. The liveries of footman and page were also very new, and their wearers were at any rate new to London (which was plain from their behaviour). In fact, Nettleship of the 'Varsity was with painfully new people. Their name was M'Ilwraith; old M'Ilwraith was one of the newest of the new M.P.'s; and their town house was an institution whose age in weeks could be reckoned on the fingers of two hands.

Nettleship finished his salmon mayonnaise as regardless of the world's eyes as though he were still at the wicket.

'Let me take your plate,' said the lovely girl at his side; and Nettleship let her, or at any rate did not attempt to prevent her until too late. Then he apologised, of course, but coolly.

'Elaine!' said the girl's mother with some severity. 'That is Thomas's business. Thomas!'

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Thomas, the page, arose somewhat flushed from a playful bear-fight with the Masters M'Ilwraith under the carriage, and was within an ace of spilling the remains of the mayonnaise over Miss M'Ilwraith's dress, in his self-consciousness.

'That boy is quite unbearable,' said Mrs. M'Ilwraith with irritation. 'Mr Nettleship,' she continued, in tones that were artificially hospitable but unmistakably cold, 'what dare we offer you? My eldest boy has told me such terrible tales about training, that really one does not know, you know.'

There was a moral wheeze in the lady's voice that Nettleship's ear detected with the celerity and certainty of a stethoscope. At once he became alert and attentive. He wanted nothing more—not that cricket demanded any particular training, like the Sports—but what might he get for Mrs. M'Ilwraith? Oyster patties, salad, strawberries, an ice, champagne? He must be allowed to make himself useful, he protested; and for some minutes Mrs. M'Ilwraith received more assiduous attention at his hands than she had ever seen him pay her daughter, or any

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other woman, young or old. This, of course, may have been diplomacy in Nettleship. His eyes were blue, and keen, and searching; his smile had of late taken a cynical curl; and indeed there were diplomatic potentialities in every corner of his mobile, clear-cut countenance. But there was enough of careless candour in his smiling glance—enough to be largely genuine.

This glance, too, was levelled exclusively at the elder lady. Nor could it have done any violence to his optic nerves to contemplate Mrs. M'Ilwraith closely and long, for, as elderly ladies go, she was among the very prettiest. Stout she undoubtedly was, but her hair was still golden, almost, and her own entirely; while her complexion had resolutely refused to grow any older some thirty years ago, and had carried out its independent resolve without the aid of a single cosmetic. She was dimpled, too, with sympathetic, poetical dimples not in complete harmony with her present character, though they had very well suited those idyllic and comparatively humble days in which Mrs. M'Ilwraith had read her 'Tennyson' to such

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practical purpose as to christen every child out of the well-loved volume. In addition to these lingering charms of a simple girlhood, there was her later, more worldly, but scarcely less pleasing attribute of being always thoroughly well dressed in the best possible taste. This, of course, was greatly *en évidence* to-day; while, as usual, her face offered a choice study in comfortable serenity. As for Elaine M'Ilwraith, she was precisely what it was plain that her mother had been at Elaine's age; only prettier, you would have said; and less shallow, I happen to know.

'You say you are living in town now?' said Mrs. M'Ilwraith.

'For the last few months,' Nettleship replied. 'Since I got back from my globe trot.'

'Then how does it happen that you are playing for your College still?'

'For his University,' Elaine suggested.

'Oh, we are allowed to play four seasons, don't you know?' Nettleship explained. 'It wasn't my intention to play this year, and I haven't been up once this term; but they bothered me about the London matches, and

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I suppose I was too keen, myself, to refuse.'

At this moment an elephantine young man rolled up to the carriage and leant heavily upon the door. He was very stout indeed, and extremely like Mrs. M'Ilwraith in face. In fact, he was her eldest boy. But those terrible tales of training mentioned by that lady were evidently not her son's personal experiences.

'Ned, my boy,' cried this young man, slapping Nettleship heavily upon the shoulder, 'you're drinking nothing! Thomas—champagne for Mr. Nettleship.'

'Arthur,' said Nettleship, 'I don't want any.'

Arthur insisting, however, he took the glass, put it once to his lips, and seized an early opportunity of surreptitiously conveying it over the far side of the carriage into the hands of young Launcelot M'Ilwraith, who shared it (unfairly) with the still younger Enoch Arden M'Ilwraith; who flung the dregs in the footman's face.

The bell for clearing the ground was now likely to ring at any moment. Luncheon, so

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far as Nettleship was concerned, was long over. He took the opportunity, however, before going back to the pavilion, afforded by Arthur's whispering into his mother's ear the names of some nobles on a neighbouring drag, in fulfilment of a solemn charge delivered before leaving home—Nettleship took this opportunity to turn and speak to Elaine.

'What ages it is since we met!' he said, looking at her critically.

'It is just a year and a half,' Elaine said simply.

He, for his part, had no idea when it was; he would not have owned to one in any case; but Elaine's long memory did not displease him, and he answered with a laugh:

'Is it really all that? I say, Elaine, how old we are all getting! You must be—let me see—twenty—what?'

'How ridiculous you are! Twenty's a year away still. I'm nineteen on Friday, as you might know if you—if——'

'Friday! Oho, your birthday's on Friday!' whistled Nettleship—as though, until the other year, he had not sent her presents, regularly as

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the calendar, on that day. 'You ought to celebrate it, Elaine, in Sussex Square.'

'What is that, Mr. Nettleship?' said Mrs. M'Ilwraith sharply. Her face, however, did not for a moment lose its serenity. That was its way.

'I made so bold as to suggest a birthday party in Elaine's honour,' said Nettleship, with the coolness of an old-established family friend.

Arthur, having detected his small brothers in the act of opening a fresh bottle of champagne in their inferno under the carriage, was engaged in brotherly chastisement, so he did not hear what followed.

'A party!' cried Mrs. M'Ilwraith, taken aback for the moment, but yet able promptly to press her daughter's foot with her own. 'Oh, I see, an "At Home," a Reception. And all because of a birthday! Why, really, Mr. Nettleship—the children are not children now!'

'It appears not,' said Nettleship, rising as the bell rang in the pavilion; 'when they were I was "Ned" to you all!' And with a somewhat cold smile, and a short leave-taking, he was gone.

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A thousand glances followed his retreating form, in the jacket that was no longer dark blue, but honourably faded. It was its fourth and last appearance at Lord's on this great occasion. A thousand tongues talked 'Nettleship' for the moment. It was his last chance in the 'Varsity match. He had never done anything in it before. Yet he was the best bat in the eleven; he had begun well; he did look like rising to the occasion this time, and coming off at last.

But in the new landau Elaine ventured at once upon a mild remonstrance with her mother.

'How very odd of you not to tell him about Friday evening, mamma! You implied an untruth, even if you didn't tell one.'

'If it was only "a lie which is half a truth,"' said Mrs. M'Ilwraith blandly, remembering a phrase but entirely forgetting the context; 'if it was only that, my dear, I am sorry. It shows that I need practice. Don't look absurd, Elaine! Town life would be unbearable without the fib—the little, necessary fib. I settled that before we left the country.'

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'But why on earth not ask him, when we know him so well?'

'Why on earth? Every reason on earth,' smiled Mrs. M'Ilwraith, in perfect good-humour. 'Must I remind you of some of them? Well, then, they are losing money, the Nettleships, as fast as ever they can. Before long they will fail; nothing can prevent it. Your father has reason to know this. Your father saw reason to cease doing business with them at least a year ago. This young man has no longer any prospects. Why did he hurry home from abroad, after six months, when he went for eighteen, if it was not that supplies ceased? Yes, all the sons had a few thousands from their mother, I know that; but it is the merest pittance, and goodness knows what he is doing for a living in town, or how he dare be playing here. These are a few of the reasons on earth; and they are reasons enough for our not going out of our way to ask him to the house. Because a young man has a room in the Temple, Elaine, it doesn't follow—— Elaine! you are not listening! Why, the girl is clapping her hands like a lunatic! What is it?'

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'Ned hit two fourers the first over!' Elaine replied, without taking her sparkling eyes from the game.

'Ned, indeed!' said Mrs. M'Ilwraith. But it was obviously of no use to say more just then, when Elaine was so shamefully excited. Mrs. M'Ilwraith subsided into composed silence. After all, it was not so very hard to get into town ways; and, really, when one tried, it came quite natural to show the cold shoulder to one's oldest country friends. . . . Ned, indeed!

Mrs. M'Ilwraith raised her eyes to the box of the vehicle. There sat Enid, the second Miss M'Ilwraith, and by her side a most satisfactory young man. These two were really delightfully engrossed in one another. They were in a planet of their own, from which it seldom occurred to them to turn their heads and look down. The young man was enormously wealthy, though lineally of small account. But everything was not to be compassed at once. There should be no taint of trade in Elaine's bargain, not even of successful trade. The idea of 'Ned!'

The hot afternoon wore on, and the fields-

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men's shadows became longer and narrower every over. Launcelot, Enoch, and their friend the page snored happily under the axle-trees. As for Mrs. M'Ilwraith, she had become inured to rounds of applause that did not in the least excite her curiosity, and was herself on the point of dozing, when a peculiarly long and loud uproar induced her to open her eyes. She opened them upon the strangely pale face of Elaine.

'Whatever is the matter?' cried Mrs. M'Ilwraith.

'Hush!' Elaine whispered. 'He's out! Wait a moment! There!'

Mrs. M'Ilwraith had descried the figure of young Nettleship walking slowly from the wicket, with bent shoulders—after the first outburst, in dead silence. But as he neared the densely crowded pavilion the shouting and clapping of hands burst forth again with redoubled enthusiasm. Elaine clapped too, clapped wildly, and the pink was back in her face.

'Dear me, it must be something quite out of the way to make all this fuss about,' said Mrs. M'Ilwraith, perceiving at last that the

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occasion was a great one. 'In whose honour, pray, is all this din?'

'In Ned's—Ned's!' cried Elaine, still clapping furiously. 'See, the other side are clapping too! Oh, I do hope it is a hundred—it must be a hundred—it can't be short of a hundred!'

But it was—by one run. Nettleship's memorable score was exactly ninety-nine!

Sympathy at once made itself felt in a fresh and touching roar. But as for Elaine, tears sprang into her fine, flashing eyes; she leant back in the landau, and the match interested her no more.

Her mother appeared to be thinking. At last she said:

'Has he distinguished himself so *very* much, my dear?'

'Oh, mamma—tremendously!'

A pause. 'Then,' said Mrs. M'Ilwraith naively, 'why don't he come back and sit with us?'

'He might, perhaps,' answered Elaine, 'if he had distinguished himself less.' And for a moment her wishes were at variance.

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'Elaine,' said her mother, after another and a longer pause, 'will there be anything about him in the papers to-morrow?'

'Anything? Columns!'

'And people will talk about him?'

'Of course, mamma—as the hero of the match!'

'Elaine,' said Mrs. M'Ilwraith at last (it was just as they were going), 'send Mr. Nettleship a card this evening—for Friday, you know!'

II

So many men get a hundred runs in the University match, that it would be superfluous to describe the variety of congratulations—from excited clergymen and hardened Old Blues, from hoary veterans and beardless boys—which assailed Nettleship in the pavilion. Of late years 'centuries' in first-class cricket have become so terribly common, and at least one century in the University match so entirely inevitable, that Nettleship was rather glad than otherwise to have fallen just short of the

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commonplace three figures. He had achieved a record all to himself, for ninety-nine is the rarest of scores, and has never before or since been made in the Oxford and Cambridge matches. Indeed, Nettleship would have been perfectly contented but for the tiresome expressions of sympathy, on account of that one run short, which mingled largely with the praises buzzing in his ears. The popular commiseration savoured of strained sentiment, for it could not have been more demonstrative if he had got no runs at all, and it bored Nettleship supremely; in fact, it had a good deal to do with his leaving the ground when he did, half an hour before play ceased, there being no danger of Oxford having to field again that evening.

He tried to get away unobserved; but the penalties of a public personality are inexorable, and the invitations and questions that pelted him between the pavilion and the gates were a little trying. Nettleship refused the invitations, ignored the questions, and eventually rattled off alone in a hansom.

Speeding towards the City in that hansom, the young man underwent a swift transfigura-

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tion. His head drooped in dejection, his pointed features grew sensibly sharper, his eyes filled with bitterness; and an ugly distortion—a mere parody of a smile, and a poor one—froze upon his lips. Two pictures, both of himself, were in his mind. Lord's cricket-ground was the background of the one, an ill-furnished room in the Temple that of the other. His back was turned upon the first, his face was set towards the second; and the iron was deep in his soul. He had carried off the honours of this afternoon pretty coolly, if not (from purely physical causes) exactly in cold blood; yet, looking at him now, one would have taken him for a young man denied all his life the happiness of a single triumphal hour. In point of fact, Nettleship was to be pitied; but not at his own computation. For young men are the worst judges of their own hardships; and this one was driving to chambers in the Temple, not to a garret—driving, too, not walking—and had an income upon which it was quite possible to live in tolerable comfort, dress decently, and occasionally even to drink wine at meals. What was impossible

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for Nettleship was to live as he had been accustomed to live; as he considered Nature had intended him to live from the first; as all the men he had been playing with to-day lived. But, misery being purely a matter of comparison, even this qualified form of it was in Nettleship's case considerable, not to say grievous.

The hansom was half-way to the Temple when, apparently on a sudden impulse, the fare knocked violently with his knuckles upon the trap overhead. A square of blue sky was stamped for a moment in the roof of the cab, and then hidden by a sun-flayed ear and whiskered cheek. Into that ear Nettleship pronounced the name of a celebrated emporium of fashionable virtu and saleable conceits in metal and fabric. Three minutes later he was in the artistic precincts of the shop itself, asking for the manager by name, and giving his own. The manager came forward at once.

'Ah!' said he, 'about your curios; follow me, sir.'

Nettleship did so. They paused before a

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table, artistic in itself, upon which a number of Asiatic curios were effectively arranged.

'Here they are, sir, and in advantageous position, as I think you will admit. But I am sorry to say their number is undiminished—undiminished, sir, by so much as a single spear-head. I told you my fears frankly, I think, at the first; so far, I regret to say, they have been realised. There is no sale for curios now. They have gone out. They are not the Craze, sir. You know what the Craze is now, sir; and two Crazes cannot be co-existent. I am perfectly frank—they must be done to death one at a time, sir, *seniores priores*.' Nettleship smiled. 'Now, a year ago it would have been different. *We* would have speculated in these things then, sir—for they are very pretty things indeed, Mr. Nettleship—we would have nothing to do with them at all, not even on the present terms, if they were not such exceedingly pretty things. But, as it is, we dare not speculate in them; as it is, the speculation must be yours, sir.'

The man was voluble, and knew his business. Considering everything, there was a

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pinch of humour in the situation. Nettleship smiled again, not entirely in bitterness.

'There has been no inquiry at all about the things, then?' said Nettleship, preparing to leave the shop.

'None to my knowledge. But stay: I will make sure before you go.'

The manager left him. In less than a minute he returned.

'There *has* been an inquiry, after all—and a good deal of interest shown—about this.' He took up a small bronze water-vase, delicately traced with strange figures. It was the one thing in his collection that Nettleship had supposed to be of real value, though he had kept tobacco in it until the day it occurred to him to make money out of his curios.

'But,' said Nettleship, 'nothing came of it, you say?'

'No, because we named your price. It will never go at fifty guineas, sir; it's too tall altogether.'

Nettleship looked coldly at the man of business: he had a keen eye for Crazes, no doubt, but what was he to know about the

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antique art of India? On the other hand, Nettleship himself was completely ignorant of that subject. He had only some chance acquaintance's word for it, out in India, that this little vase was a valuable property. Nettleship looked at the man of business very coldly indeed.

'Look here,' he said slowly, and in the preternaturally calm tones in which one might warn a fellow-creature of one's immediate intention of throwing him through the window. 'Look here: next time any one asks, let it go for thirty!'

Without another word he stalked from the shop. The hansom rattled on until it stopped at Middle Temple Lane. There Nettleship got out, walked into Brick Court, and up the stone stairs to his chambers. For the next hour he lounged in a chair, thinking the vagrant thoughts that are encouraged, if not inspired, by the smoking of several cigarettes at a sitting. Naturally, in his case, they were not the pleasantest thoughts in the world; yet, when he got up and stretched himself, and went out to dine, his mood had improved. It was then

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eight o'clock. He returned at five minutes to nine; so that his dinner, wherever he got it, could not have been a very elaborate affair. Dropping once more into his armchair, he abandoned himself to further thought. Possibly his thoughts were of a more concentrated character than before, for a single cigarette sustained them. The long summer twilight went through all its mellow gradations, and finally deepened into complete darkness, before the young man at last rose and lit the lamp. This done, he carried the lamp to a pedestal desk, and sitting down at the desk drew up his chair close. There was now an appearance of settled purpose in his manner, and his face was full of cool determination; it wore, in fact, the identical expression which the Cambridge bowlers of that year have such good reason to remember.

Nettleship had not sat down to write, however. Unlocking a drawer in the left-hand pedestal, he took out of it handfuls of photographs of various sizes, which he heaped together on the flat part of the desk, close to the lamp. Without more ado he proceeded

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