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What's Bred in the Bone

by

Grant Allen

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WHAT'S BRED IN THE BONE.

£1000 *PRIZE NOVEL.*

BY

GRANT ALLEN,

AUTHOR OF "THE TENTS OF SHEM," "THE DEVIL'S DIE,"
"THIS MORTAL COIL," ETC.

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WHAT'S BRED IN THE BONE.

CHAPTER I.

ELMA'S STRANGER.

It was late when Elma reached the station. Her pony had jibbed on the way downhill, and the train was just on the point of moving off as she hurried upon the platform. Old Matthews, the stout and chubby-cheeked station-master, seized her most unceremoniously by the left arm, and bundled her into a carriage. He had known her from a child, so he could venture upon such liberties.

"Second class, miss? Yes, miss. Here y'are. Look sharp, please. Any more goin' on? All right, Tom! Go ahead there!" And lifting his left hand, he whistled a shrill signal to the guard to start her.

As for Elma, somewhat hot in the face with the wild rush for her ticket, and grasping her uncounted change, pence and all, in her little gloved hand, she found herself thrust, hap-hazard, at the very last

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moment, into the last compartment of the last carriage —alone—with an artist.

Now, you and I, to be sure, most proverbially courteous and intelligent reader, might never have guessed at first sight, from the young man's outer aspect, the nature of his occupation. The gross and clumsy male intellect, which works in accordance with the stupid laws of inductive logic, has a queer habit of requiring something or other, in the way of definite evidence, before it commits itself offhand to the distinct conclusion. But Elma Clifford was a woman; and therefore she knew a more excellent way. *Her* habit was, rather to look things once fairly and squarely in the face, and then, with the unerring intuition of her sex, to make up her mind about them firmly, at once and for ever. That's one of the many glorious advantages of being born a woman. You don't need to learn in order to know. You know instinctively. And yet our girls want to go to Girton, and train themselves up to be senior wranglers!

Elma Clifford, however, had *not* been to Girton, so, as she stumbled into her place, she snatched one hurried look at Cyril Waring's face, and knew at a glance he was a landscape painter.

Now, this was clever of her, even in a woman, for Cyril Waring, as he fondly imagined, was travelling that line that day disguised as a stock-broker. In other words, there was none of the brown velveteen affectation about his easy get-up. He was an artist,

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to be sure, but he hadn't assiduously and obtrusively dressed his character. Instead of cutting his beard to a Vandyke point, or enduing his body in a Titianesque coat, or wearing on his head a slouched Rembrandt hat, stuck carelessly just a trifle on one side in artistic disorder, he was habited, for all the world like anybody else, in the grey tweed suit of the common British tourist, surmounted by the light felt hat (or bowler), to match, of the modern English country gentleman. Even the soft silk necktie of a delicate æsthetic hue that adorned his open throat didn't proclaim him at once a painter by trade. It showed him merely as a man of taste, with a decided eye for harmonies of colour.

So when Elma pronounced her fellow-traveller immediately, in her own mind, a landscape artist, she was exercising the familiar feminine prerogative of jumping, as if by magic, to a correct conclusion. It's a provoking way they have, those inscrutable women, which no mere male human being can ever conceivably fathom.

She was just about to drop down, as propriety demands, into the corner seat diagonally opposite to—and therefore as far as possible away from—her handsome companion, when the stranger rose, and, with a very flushed face, said, in a hasty, though markedly deferential and apologetic tone—

"I beg your pardon, but—excuse me for mentioning it—I think you're going to sit down upon—ur—pray don't be frightened—a rather large snake of mine."

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There was something so comically alarmed in the ring of his tone—as of a naughty schoolboy detected in a piece of mischief—that, propriety to the contrary notwithstanding, Elma couldn't for the life of her repress a smile. She looked down at the seat where the stranger pointed, and there, sure enough, coiled up in huge folds, with his glossy head in attitude to spring at her, a great banded snake lay alert and open-eyed.

"Dear me," Elma cried, drawing back a little in surprise, but not at all in horror, as she felt she ought to do. "A snake! How curious! I hope he's not dangerous."

"Not at all," the young man answered, still in the same half-guilty tone of voice as before. "He's of a poisonous kind, you know; but his fangs have been extracted. He won't do you any injury. He's perfectly harmless. Aren't you, Sardanapalus? Eh, eh, my beauty? But I oughtn't to have let him loose in the carriage, of course," he added, after a short pause. "It's calculated to alarm a nervous passenger. Only I thought I was alone, and nobody would come in; so I let him out for a bit of a run between the stations. It's so dull for him, poor fellow, being shut up in his box all the time when he's travelling."

Elma looked down at the beautiful glossy creature with genuine admiration. His skin was like enamel; his banded scales shone bright and silvery. She didn't know why, but somehow she felt she wasn't in the least afraid of him. "I suppose one ought to be

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repelled at once by a snake," she said, taking the opposite seat, and keeping her glance fixed firmly upon the reptile's eye; "but then, this is such a handsome one! I can't say why, but I don't feel afraid of him at all as I ought to do. Every right-minded person detests snakes, don't they? And yet, how exquisitely flexible and beautiful he is! Oh, pray don't put him back in his box for me. He's basking in the sun here. I should be sorry to disturb him."

Cyril Waring looked at her in considerable surprise. He caught the creature in his hands as he spoke, and transferred it at once to a tin box, with a perforated lid, that lay beside him. "Go back, Sardanapalus," he said, in a very musical and pleasant voice, forcing the huge beast into the lair with gentle but masterful hands. "Go back, and go to sleep, sir. It's time for your nap. . . . Oh no, I couldn't think of letting him out any more in the carriage to the annoyance of others. I'm ashamed enough as it is of having unintentionally alarmed you. But you came in so unexpectedly, you see, I hadn't time to put my queer pet away; and, when the door opened, I was afraid he might slip out, or get under the seats, so all I could do was just to soothe him with my hand, and keep him quiet till the door was shut to again."

"Indeed, I wasn't at all afraid of him," Elma answered, slipping her change into her pocket, and looking prettier through her blush than even her usual self. "On the contrary, I really liked to see him.

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He's such a glorious snake! The lights and shades on his back are so glancing and so wonderful! He's a perfect model. Of course, you're painting him."

The stranger started. "I'm painting him—yes, that's true," he replied, with a look of sudden surprise; "but why 'of course,' please? How on earth could you tell I was an artist even?"

Elma glanced back in his face, and wondered to herself, too. Now she came to think of it, *how* did she know that handsome young man, with the charming features, and the expressive eyes, and the neatly-cut brown beard, and the attractive manner, was an artist at all, or anything like it? And how did she know the snake was his model? For the life of her, she couldn't have answered those questions herself.

"I suppose I just guessed it," she answered, after a short pause, blushing still more deeply at the sudden way she had thus been dragged into conversation with the good-looking stranger. Elma's skin was dark—a clear and creamy olive-brown complexion, such as one sometimes sees in southern Europe, though rarely in England; and the effect of the blush through it didn't pass unnoticed by Cyril Waring's artistic eye. He would have given something for the chance of transferring that delicious effect to canvas. The delicate transparency of the blush threw up those piercing dark eyes, and reflected lustre even on the glossy black hair that fringed her forehead. Not an English type of beauty at all, Elma Clifford's, he thought to himself

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as he eyed her closely: rather Spanish or Italian, or say even Hungarian.

"Well, you guessed right, at any rate," he went on, settling down in his seat once more, after boxing his snake, but this time face to face with her. "I'm working at a beautiful bit of fern and foliage—quite tropical in its way—in a wood hereabout; and I've introduced Sardanapalus, coiled up in the foreground, just to give life to the scene, don't you know, and an excuse for a title. I mean to call it 'The Rajah's Rest.' Behind, great ferns and a mossy bank; in front, Sardanapalus, after tiffin, rolled spirally round, and taking his siesta."

This meeting was a long-wished-for occasion. Elma had never before met a real live painter. Now, it was the cherished idea of her youth to see something some day of that wonderful non-existent fantastic world which we still hope for and dream about and call Bohemia. She longed to move in literary and artistic circles. She had fashioned to herself, like many other romantic girls, a rose-coloured picture of Bohemian existence; not knowing indeed that Bohemia is now, alas! an extinct province, since Belgravia and Kensington swallowed it bodily down, digested, and assimilated it. So this casual talk with the handsome young artist in the second-class carriage, on the Great Southern line, was to Elma as a charming and delightful glimpse of an enchanted region she could never enter. It was Paradise to the Peri. She turned the conversation at

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once, therefore, with resolute intent upon art and artists, determined to make the most while it lasted of this unique opportunity. And since the subject of self, with an attentive listener, is always an attractive one, even to modest young men like Cyril Waring—especially when it's a pretty girl who encourages you to dilate upon it—why, the consequence was, that before many minutes were over, the handsome young man was discoursing from his full heart to a sympathetic soul about his chosen art, its hopes and its ideals, accompanied by a running fire of thumb-nail illustrations. He had even got so far in the course of their intimacy as to take out the portfolio, which lay hidden under the seat—out of deference to his disguise as a stock-broker, no doubt—and to display before Elma's delighted eyes, with many explanatory comments as to light and shade, or perspective and foreshortening, the studies for the picture he had just then engaged upon.

By-and-by, as his enthusiasm warmed under Elma's encouragement, the young artist produced Sardanapalus himself once more from his box, and with deftly persuasive fingers coiled him gracefully round on the opposite seat into the precise attitude he was expected to take up when he sat for his portrait in the mossy foreground.

Elma couldn't say why, but that creature fascinated her. The longer she looked at him the more intensely he interested her. Not that she was one bit afraid of him, as she might reasonably have expected to be, according to all womanly precedent. On the contrary,

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she felt an overwhelming desire to take him up in her own hands and stroke and fondle him. He was so lithe and beautiful; his scales so glistened! At last she stretched out one dainty gloved hand to pet the spotted neck.

"Take care," the painter cried, in a warning voice; "don't be frightened if he springs at you. He's vicious at times. But his fangs are drawn; he can't possibly hurt you."

The warning, however, was quite unnecessary. Sardanapalus, instead of springing, seemed to recognise a friend. He darted out his forked tongue in rapid vibration, and licked her neat grey glove respectfully. Then, lifting his flattened head with serpentine deliberation, he coiled his great folds slowly, slowly, with sinuous curves, round the girl's soft arm till he reached her neck in long, winding convolutions. There he held up his face, and trilled his swift, sibilant tongue once more with evident pleasure. He knew his place. He was perfectly at home at once with the pretty, olive-skinned lady. His master looked on in profound surprise.

"Why, you're a perfect snake-charmer," he cried at last, regarding her with open eyes of wonder. "I never saw Sardanapalus behave like that with a stranger before. He's generally by no means fond of new acquaintances. You must be used to snakes. Perhaps you've kept one? You're accustomed of old to their ways and manners?"

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"No, indeed," Elma cried, laughing in spite of herself, a clear little laugh of feminine triumph; for she had made a conquest, she saw, of Sardanapalus; "I never so much as touched one in all my life before. And I thought I should hate them. But this one seems quite tame and tractable. I'm not in the least afraid of him. He is so soft and smooth, and his movements are all so perfectly gentle."

"Ah, that's the way with snakes, always," Cyril Waring put in, with an admiring glance at the pretty, fearless brunette and her strange companion. "They know at once whether people like them or not, and they govern themselves accordingly. I suppose it's instinct. When they see you're afraid of them, they spring and hiss; but when they see you take to them by nature, they make themselves perfectly at home in a moment. They don't wait to be asked. They've no false modesty. Well, then, you see," he went on, drawing imaginary lines with his ticket on the sketch he was holding up, "I shall work in Sardanapalus just there, like that, coiled round in a spire. You catch the idea, don't you?"

As he spoke, Elma's eye, following his hand while it moved, chanced to fall suddenly on the name of the station printed on the ticket with which he was pointing. She gave a sharp little start.

"Warnworth!" she cried, flushing up, with some slight embarrassment in her voice; "why, that's ever so far back. We're long past Warnworth. We ran by it

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three or four stations behind; in fact, it's the next place to Chetwood, where I got in at."

Cyril Waring looked up with a half-guilty smile as embarrassed as her own.

"Oh yes," he said quietly. "I knew that quite well. I'm down here often. It's half-way between Chetwood and Warnworth I'm painting. But I thought—well, if you'll excuse me saying it, I thought I was so comfortable and so happy where I was, that I might just as well go on a station or two more, and then pay the difference, and take the next train back to Warnworth. You see," he added, after a pause, with a still more apologetic and penitent air, "I saw you were so interested in—well, in snakes, you know, and pictures."

Gentle as he was, and courteous, and perfectly frank with her, Elma, nevertheless, felt really half inclined to be angry at this queer avowal. That is to say, at least, she knew it was her bounden duty, as an English lady, to seem so; and she seemed so accordingly with most Britannic severity. She drew herself up in a very stiff style, and stared fixedly at him, while she began slowly and steadily to uncoil Sardanapalus from her imprisoned arm with profound dignity.

"I'm sorry I should have brought you so far out of your way," she said, in a studied cold voice—though that was quite untrue, for, as a matter of fact, she had enjoyed their talk together immensely. "And besides, you've been wasting your valuable time when you ought to have been painting. You'll hardly get any work done

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now at all this morning. I must ask you to get out at the very next station."

The young man bowed with a crestfallen air. "No time could possibly be wasted," he began, with native politeness, "that was spent——" Then he broke off quite suddenly. "I shall certainly get out wherever you wish," he went on, more slowly, in an altered voice; "and I sincerely regret if I've unwittingly done anything to annoy you in any way. The fact is, the talk carried me away. It was art that misled me. I didn't mean, I'm sure, to obtrude myself upon you."

And even as he spoke they whisked, unawares, into the darkness of a tunnel.

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CHAPTER II.

TWO'S COMPANY.

ELMA was just engaged in debating with herself internally how a young lady of perfect manners and impeccable breeding, travelling without a chaperon, ought to behave under such trying circumstances, after having allowed herself to be drawn unawares into familiar conversation with a most attractive young artist, when all of a sudden a rapid jerk of the carriage succeeded in extricating her perforce, and against her will, from this awkward dilemma. Something sharp pulled up their train unexpectedly. She was aware of a loud noise and a crash in front, almost instantaneously followed by a thrilling jar—a low dull thud—a sound of broken glass—a quick blank stoppage. Next instant she found herself flung wildly forward into her neighbour's arms, while the artist, for his part, with outstretched hands, was vainly endeavouring to break the force of the fall for her.

All she knew for the first few minutes was merely that there had been an accident to the train, and they were standing still now in the darkness of the tunnel.

For some seconds she paused, and gasped hard for

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breath, and tried in vain to recall her scattered senses. Then slowly she sank back on the seat once more, vaguely conscious that something terrible had happened to the train, but that neither she nor her companion were seriously injured.

As she sank back in her place, Cyril Waring bent forward towards her with sympathetic kindliness.

"You're not hurt, I hope," he said, holding out one hand to help her rise. "Stand up for a minute, and see if you're anything worse than severely shaken. No? That's right, then! That's well, as far as it goes. But I'm afraid the nervous shock must have been very rough on you."

Elma stood up, with tears gathering fast in her eyes. She'd have given the world to be able to cry now, for the jar had half stunned her and shaken her brain; but before the artist's face she was ashamed to give free play to her feelings. So she only answered, in a careless sort of tone—

"Oh, it's nothing much, I think. My head feels rather queer; but I've no bones broken. A collision, I suppose. Oughtn't we to get out at once and see what's happened to the other people?"

Cyril Waring moved hastily to the door, and, letting down the window, tried with a violent effort to turn the handle from the outside. But the door wouldn't open. As often happens in such accidents, the jar had jammed it. He tried the other side, and with some difficulty at last succeeded in forcing it open.

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Then he descended cautiously on to the six-foot-way, and held out his hand to help Elma from the carriage.

It was no collision, he saw at once, but a far more curious and unusual accident.

Looking ahead through the tunnel, all was black as night. A dense wall of earth seemed to block and fill in the whole space in front of them. Part of one broken and shattered carriage lay tossed about in wild confusion on the ground close by. Their own had escaped. All the rest was darkness.

In a moment, Cyril rightly divined what must have happened to the train. The roof of the tunnel had caved in on top of it. At least one carriage—the one immediately in front of them—had been crushed and shattered by the force of its fall. Their own was the last, and it had been saved as if by a miracle. It lay just outside the scene of the subsidence.

One thought rose instinctively at once in the young man's mind. They must first see if any one was injured in the other compartments, or among the *débris* of the broken carriage; and then they must make for the open mouth of the tunnel, through which the light of day still gleamed bright behind them.

He peered in hastily at the other three windows. Not a soul in any one of the remaining compartments! It was a very empty train, he had noticed himself, when he had got in at Tilgate; the one solitary occupant of the front compartment of their carriage, a fat old lady with a big black bag, had bundled out at Chetwood.

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They were alone in the tunnel—at this end of the train, at least; their sole duty now was to make haste and save themselves.

He gazed overhead. The tunnel was bricked in with an arch on top. The way through in front was blocked, of course, by the fallen mass of water-logged sandstone. He glanced back towards the open mouth. A curious circumstance, half-way down to the opening, attracted at once his keen and practised eye.

Strange to say, the roof at one spot was not a true arc of a circle. It bulged slightly downwards, in a flattened arch, as if some superincumbent weight were pressing hard upon it. Great heavens, what was this? Another trouble in store! He looked again, still more earnestly, and started with horror.

In the twinkling of an eye, his reason told him, beyond the shadow of a doubt, what was happening at the bulge. A second fall was just about to take place close by them. Clearly there were *two* weak points in the roof of the tunnel. One had already given way in front; the other was on the very eve of giving way behind them. If it fell, they were imprisoned between two impassable walls of sand and earth. Without one instant's delay, he turned and seized his companion's hand hastily.

"Quick! quick!" he cried, in a voice of eager warning. "Run, run for your life to the mouth of the tunnel! Here, come! You've only just time! It's going, it's going!"

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But Elma's feminine instinct worked quicker and truer than even Cyril Waring's manly reason. She didn't know why; she couldn't say how; but in that one indivisible moment of time she had taken in and grasped to the full all the varying terrors of the situation. Instead of running, however, she held back her companion with a nervous force she could never before have imagined herself capable of exerting.

"Stop here," she cried authoritatively, wrenching his arm in her haste. "If you go you'll be killed. There's no time to run past. It'll be down before you're there. See, see, it's falling."

Even before the words were well out of her mouth, another great crash shook the ground behind them. With a deafening roar, the tunnel gave way in a second place beyond. Dust and sand filled the air confusedly. For a minute or two all was noise and smoke and darkness. What exactly had happened neither of them could see. But now the mouth of the tunnel was blocked at either end alike, and no daylight was visible. So far as Cyril could judge, they two stood alone, in the dark and gloom, as in a narrow cell, shut in with their carriage between two solid walls of fallen earth and crumbling sandstone.

At this fresh misfortune, Elma sat down on the footboard with her face in her hands, and began to sob bitterly. The artist leaned over her and let her cry for a while in quiet despair. The poor girl's nerves, it was clear, were now wholly unstrung. She was brave, as

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women go, undoubtedly brave; but the shock and the terror of such a position as this were more than enough to terrify the bravest. At last Cyril ventured on a single remark.

"How lucky," he said, in an undertone, "I didn't get out at Warnworth after all. It would have been dreadful if you'd been left all alone in this position."

Elma glanced up at him with a sudden rush of gratitude. By the dim light of the oil lamp that still flickered feebly in the carriage overhead, she could see his face; and she knew by the look in those truthful eyes that he really meant it. He really meant he was glad he'd come on and exposed himself to this risk, which he might otherwise have avoided, because he would be sorry to think a helpless woman should be left alone by herself in the dark to face it. And, frightened as she was, she was glad of it too. To be alone would be awful. This was pre-eminently one of those many positions in life in which a woman prefers to have a man beside her.

And yet most men, she knew, would have thought to themselves at once, "What a fool I was to come on beyond my proper station, and let myself in for this beastly scrape, just because I'd go a few miles further with a pretty girl I never saw in my life before, and will probably never see in my life again, if I once get well out of this precious predicament."

But that they would ever get out of it at all seemed to both of them now in the highest degree improbable.

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Cyril, by reason, Elma, by instinct, argued out the whole situation at once, and correctly. There had been much rain lately. The sandstone was water-logged. It had caved in bodily, before them and behind them. A little isthmus of archway still held out in isolation just above their heads. At any moment that isthmus might give way too, and, falling on their carriage, might crush them beneath its weight. Their lives depended upon the continued resisting power of some fifteen yards or so of dislocated masonry.

Appalled at the thought, Cyril moved from his place for a minute, and went forward to examine the fallen block in front. Then he paced his way back with groping steps to the equally ruinous mass behind them. Elma's eyes, growing gradually accustomed to the darkness and the faint glimmer of the oil lamps, followed his action with vague and tearful interest.

"If the roof doesn't give way," he said calmly at last, when he returned once more to her, "and if we can only let them know we're alive in the tunnel, they may possibly dig us out before we choke. There's air enough here for eighteen hours for us."

He spoke very quietly and reassuringly, as if being shut up in a fallen tunnel between two masses of earth were a matter that needn't cause one the slightest uneasiness; but his words suggested to Elma's mind a fresh and hitherto unthought-of danger.

"Eighteen hours," she cried, horror-struck. "Do you mean to say we may have to stop here, all alone,

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for eighteen hours together? Oh, how very dreadful! How long! How frightening! And if they don't dig us out before eighteen hours are over, do you mean to say we shall die of choking?"

Cyril gazed down at her with a very regretful and sympathetic face.

"I didn't mean to frighten you," he said; "at least, not more than you're frightened already; but, of course, there's only a certain amount of oxygen in the space that's left us; and as we're using it up at every breath, it'll naturally hold out for a limited time only. It can't be much more than eighteen hours. Still, I don't doubt they'll begin digging us out at once; and if they dig through fast, they may yet be in time, even so, to save us."

Elma bent forward with her face in her hands again, and, rocking herself to and fro in an agony of despair, gave herself up to a paroxysm of utter misery. This was too, too terrible. To think of eighteen hours in that gloom and suspense; and then to die at last, gasping hard for breath, in the poisonous air of that pestilential tunnel.

For nearly an hour she sat there, broken down and speechless; while Cyril Waring, taking a seat in silence by her side, tried at first with mute sympathy to comfort and console her. Then he turned to examine the roof, and the block at either end, to see if perchance any hope remained of opening by main force an exit anywhere. He even began by removing a little of the sand at the

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side of the line with a piece of shattered board from the broken carriage in front; but that was clearly no use. More sand tumbled in as fast as he removed it. He saw there was nothing left for it but patience or despair. And of the two, his own temperament dictated rather patience.

He returned at last, wearied out, to Elma's side. Elma, still sitting disconsolate on the footboard, rocking herself up and down, and moaning low and piteously, looked up as he came with a mute glance of inquiry. She was very pretty. That struck him even now. It made his heart bleed to think she should be so cowed and terrified.

"I'm sorry to bother you," he said, after a pause, half afraid to speak, "but there are four lamps all burning hard in these four compartments, and using up the air we may need by-and-by for our own breathing. If I were to climb to the top of the carriage—which I can easily do—I could put them all out, and economize our oxygen. It would leave us in the dark, but it'd give us one more chance of life. Don't you think I'd better get up and turn them off, or squash them?"

Elma clasped her hands in horror at the bare suggestion.

"Oh dear, no!" she cried hastily. "Please, *please*, don't do that. It's bad enough to choke slowly, like this, in the gloom. But to die in the dark—that would be ten times more terrible. Why, it's a perfect Black Hole of Calcutta, even now. If you were to turn out the lights I could never stand it."

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Cyril gave a respectful little nod of assent.

"Very well," he answered, as calm as ever. "That's just as you will. I only meant to suggest it to you. My one wish is to do the best I can for you. Perhaps"—and he hesitated—"perhaps I'd better let it go on for an hour or two more, and then, whenever the air begins to get very oppressive—I mean when one begins to feel it's really failing us—one person, you know, could live on so much longer than two . . . it would be a pity not to let you stand every chance. Perhaps I might——"

Elma gazed at him aghast in the utmost horror. She knew what he meant at once. She didn't even need that he should finish his sentence.

"Never!" she said, firmly clenching her small hand hard. "It's so wrong of you to think of it, even. I could never permit it. It's your duty to keep yourself alive at all hazards as long as ever you can. You should remember your mother, your sisters, your family."

"Why, that's just it," Cyril answered, a little crest-fallen, and feeling he had done quite a wicked thing in venturing to suggest that his companion should have every chance for her own life. "I've got no mother, you see, no sisters, no family. Nobody on earth would ever be one penny the worse if *I* were to die, except my twin brother; he's the only relation I ever had in my life; and even *he*, I dare say, would very soon get over it. Whereas *you*"—he paused and glanced at her com-

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passionately—"there are probably many to whom the loss would be a very serious one. If I could do anything to save you——" He broke off suddenly, for Elma looked up at him once more with a little burst of despair.

"If you talk like that," she cried, with a familiarity that comes of association in a very great danger, "I don't know what I shall do; I don't know what I shall say to you. Why, I couldn't bear to be left alone here to die by myself. If only for *my* sake, now we're boxed up here together, I think you ought to wait and do the best you can for yourself."

"Very well," Cyril answered once more, in a most obedient tone. "If you wish me to live to keep you company in the tunnel, I'll live while I may. You have only to say what you wish. I'm here to wait upon you."

In any other circumstances, such a phrase would have been a mere piece of conversational politeness. At that critical moment, Elma knew it for just what it was—a simple expression of his real feeling.

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CHAPTER III.

CYRIL WARING'S BROTHER.

It was nine o'clock that self-same night, and two men sat together in a comfortable sitting-room under the gabled roofs of Staple Inn, Holborn. It was as cosy a nook as any to be found within the four-mile radius, and artistic withal in its furniture and decorations.

In the biggest arm-chair by the empty grate, a young man with a flute paused for a moment, irresolute. He was a handsome young man, expressive eyes, and a neatly-cut brown beard—for all the world like Cyril Waring's. Indeed, if Elma Clifford could that moment have been transported from her gloomy prison in the Lavington tunnel to that cosy room at Staple Inn, Holborn, she would have started with surprise to find the young man who sat in the arm-chair was to all outer appearance the self-same person as the painter she had just left at the scene of the accident. For the two Warings were truly "as like as two peas"; a photograph of one might almost have done duty for the photograph of the other.

The other occupant of the room, who leaned carelessly against the mantelshelf, was taller and older;

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though he, too, was handsome, but with the somewhat cynical and unprepossessing handsomeness of a man of the world. His forehead was high; his lips were thin; his nose inclined toward the Roman pattern; his black moustache was carefully curled and twisted at the extremities. Moreover, he was musical; for he held in one hand the bow of a violin, having just laid down the instrument itself on the sofa after a plaintive duet with Guy Waring.

"Seen this evening's paper, by the way, Guy?" he asked, after a pause, in a voice that was all honeyed charm and seductiveness. "I brought the *St. James's Gazette* for you, but forgot to give you it; I was so full of this new piece of mine. Been an accident this morning, I see, on the Great Southern line. Somewhere down Cyril's way, too; he's painting near Chetwood; wonder whether he could possibly, by any chance, have been in it?"

He drew the paper carelessly from his pocket as he spoke, and handed it with a graceful air of inborn courtesy to his younger companion. Everything that Montague Nevitt did, indeed, was naturally graceful and courteous.

Guy Waring took the printed sheet from his hands without attaching much importance to his words, and glanced over it lightly.

"At ten o'clock this morning," the telegram said, "a singular catastrophe occurred in a portion of the Lavington tunnel on the Great Southern Railway. As

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the 9.15 way-train from Tilgate Junction to Guildford was passing through, a segment of the roof of the tunnel collapsed, under pressure of the dislocated rock on top, and bore down with enormous weight upon the carriages beneath it. The engine, tender, and four front waggons escaped unhurt; but the two hindmost, it is feared, were crushed by the falling mass of earth. It is not yet known how many passengers, if any, may have been occupying the wrecked compartments; but every effort is now being made to dig out the *débris*."

Guy read the paragraph through unmoved, to the outer eye, though with a whitening face, and then took up the dog-eared "Bradshaw" that lay close by upon the little oak writing-table. His hand trembled. One glance at the map, however, set his mind at rest.

"I thought so," he said quietly. "Cyril wouldn't be there. It's beyond his beat. Lavington's the fourth station this way on the up-line from Chetwood. Cyril's stopping at Tilgate town, you know—I heard from him on Saturday—and the bit he's now working at's in Chetwood Forest. He couldn't get lodgings at Chetwood itself, so he's put up for the present at the White Lion, at Tilgate, and runs over by train every day to Warnworth. It's three stations away—four off Lavington. He'd have been daubing for an hour in the wood by that time."

"Well, I didn't attach any great importance to it myself," Nevitt went on, unconcerned. "I thought

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most likely Cyril wouldn't be there. But still I felt you'd like, at any rate, to know about it."

"Oh, of course," Guy answered, still scanning the map in "Bradshaw" close. "He couldn't have been there; but one likes to know. I think, indeed, to make sure, I'll telegraph to Tilgate. Naturally, when a man's got only one relation in the whole wide world—without being a sentimentalist—that one relation means a good deal in life to him. And Cyril and I are more to one another, of course, than most ordinary brothers." He bit his thumb. "Still, I can't imagine how he could possibly be there," he went on, glancing at "Bradshaw" once more. "You see, if he went to work, he'd have got out at Warnworth; and if he meant to come to town to consult his dentist, he'd have taken the 9.30 express straight through from Tilgate, which gets up to London twenty-five minutes earlier."

"Well, but why to consult his dentist in particular?" Nevitt asked with a smile. He had very white teeth, and he smiled accordingly perhaps a little oftener than was quite inevitable. "You Warings are so absolute. I never knew any such fellows in my life as you are. You decide things so beforehand. Why mightn't he have been coming up to town, for example, to see a friend, or get himself fresh colours?"

"Oh, I said 'to consult his dentist,'" Guy answered, in the most matter-of-fact voice on earth, suppressing a tremor, "because you know I've had toothache off and on myself, one day with another, for the whole last

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fortnight. And it's a tooth that never ached with either of us before—this one, you see"—he lifted his lip with his forefinger—"the second on the left after the one we've lost. If Cyril was coming up to town at all, I'm pretty sure it'd be his tooth he was coming up to see about. I went to Eskell about mine myself last Wednesday."

The elder man seated himself and leaned back in his chair, with his violin in his lap; then he surveyed his friend long and curiously.

"It must be awfully odd, Guy," he said at last, after a good hard stare, "to lead such a queer sort of duplicate life as Cyril and you do! Just fancy being the counterfoil to some other man's cheque! Just fancy being bound to do, and think, and speak, and wish as he does! Just fancy having to get a toothache, in the very same tooth and on the very same day! Just fancy having to consult the identical dentist that he consults simultaneously! It'd drive *me* mad. Why, it's clean rideeklous!"

Guy Waring looked up hastily from the telegraph form he was already filling in, and answered, with some warmth—

"No, no; not quite so. It isn't like that. You mistake the situation. We're both cheques equally, and neither is a counterfoil. Cyril and I depend for our characters, as everybody else does, upon our father and mother and our remoter progenitors. Only being twins, and twins cast in very much the same sort of

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mould, we're naturally the product of the same two parents, at the same precise point in their joint life history; and therefore we're practically all but identical."

As he rose from his desk, with the telegram in his hand, the porter appeared at the door with letters. Guy seized them at once, with some little impatience. The first was from Cyril. He tore it open in haste, and skimmed it through rapidly. Montague Nevitt meanwhile sat languid in his chair, striking a pensive note now and again on his violin, with his eyes half closed and his lips parted. Guy drew a sigh of relief as he skimmed his note.

"Just what I expected," he said slowly. "Cyril couldn't have been there. He writes last night—the letter's marked 'Delayed in transmission'; no doubt by the accident—'I shall come up to town on Friday or Saturday morning to see the dentist. One of my teeth is troublesome; I suppose you've had the same; the second on the left from the one we've lost; been aching a fortnight. I want it stopped. But to-morrow I really *can't* leave work. I've got well into the swing of such a lovely bit of fern, with Sardanapalus just gleaming like gold in the foreground.' So that settles matters somewhat. He can't have been there. Though, I think, even so, I'll just telegraph for safety's sake and make things certain."

Nevitt struck a chord twice with a sweep of his hand, listened to it dreamily for a minute with far-

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away eyes, and then remarked once more, without even looking up, "The same tooth lost, he says? You both had it drawn! And now another one aches in both of you alike! How very remarkable! How very, very curious!"

"Well, that *was* queer," Guy replied, relaxing into a smile, "queer even for us; I won't deny it; for it happened this way. I was over in Brussels at the time, as correspondent for the *Sphere* at the International Workmen's Congress, and Cyril was away by himself just then on his holiday in the Orkneys. We both got toothache in the self-same tooth on the self-same night; and we both lay awake for hours in misery. Early in the morning we each of us got up—five hundred miles away from one another, remember—and as soon as we were dressed *I* went into a dentist's in the Montagne de la Cour, and Cyril to a local doctor's at Larwick; and we each of us had it out, instanter. The dentists both declared they could save them if we wished; but we each preferred the loss of a tooth to another such night of abject misery."

Nevitt stroked his moustache with a reflective air. This was almost miraculous. "Well, I should think," he said at last, after close reflection, "where such sympathy as that exists between two brothers, if Cyril had really been hurt in this accident, you must surely in some way have been dimly conscious of it."

Guy Waring, standing there, telegram in hand, looked

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down at his companion with a somewhat contemptuous smile.

"Oh dear, no," he answered, with common-sense confidence; for he loved not mysteries. "You don't believe any nonsense of that sort, do you? There's nothing in the least mystical in the kind of sympathy that exists between Cyril and myself. It's all purely physical. We're very like one another. But that's all. There's none of the Corsican Brothers sort of hocus-pocus about us in any way. The whole thing is a simple caste of natural causation."

"Then you don't believe in brain-waves?" Nevitt suggested, with a gracefully appropriate undulation of his small white hand.

Guy laughed incredulously. "All rubbish, my dear fellow," he answered, "all utter rubbish. If any man knows, it's myself and Cyril. We're as near one another as any two men on earth could possibly be; but when we want to communicate our ideas, each to each, we have to speak or write, just like the rest of you. Every man is like a clock wound up to strike certain hours. Accidents may happen, events may intervene, the clock may get smashed, and all may be prevented. But, bar accidents, it'll strike all right, under ordinary circumstances, when the hour arrives for it. Well, Cyril and I, as I always say, are like two clocks wound up at the same time to strike together, and we strike with very unusual regularity. But that's the whole mystery. If *I* get

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smashed by accident, there's no reason on earth why Cyril shouldn't run on for years yet as usual; and if Cyril got smashed, there's no reason on earth why I should ever know anything about it except from the newspapers."

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CHAPTER IV.

INSIDE THE TUNNEL.

AND, indeed, if brain-waves had been in question at all, they ought, without a doubt, to have informed Guy Waring that at the very moment when he was going out to send off his telegram, his brother Cyril was sitting disconsolate, with dark blue lips and swollen eyelids, on the footboard of the railway carriage in the Lavington tunnel. Cyril was worn out with digging by this time, for he had done his best once more to clear away the sand towards the front of the train in the vague hope that he might succeed in letting in a little more air to their narrow prison through the chinks and interstices of the fallen sandstone. Besides, a man in an emergency must do something, if only to justify his claim to manliness—especially when a lady is looking on at his efforts.

So Cyril Waring had toiled and moiled in that deadly atmosphere for some hours in vain, and now sat, wearied out and faint from foul vapours, by Elma's side on the damp, cold footboard. By this time the air had almost failed them. They gasped for breath, their heads swam vaguely. A terrible weight seemed

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to oppress their bosoms. Even the lamps in the carriages flickered low and burned blue. The atmosphere of the tunnel, loaded from the very beginning with sulphurous smoke, was now all but exhausted. Death stared them in the face without hope of respite —a ghastly, slow death by gradual stifling.

"You *must* take a little water," Elma murmured, pouring out the last few drops for him into the tin cup —for Cyril had brought a small bottleful that morning for his painting, as well as a packet of sandwiches for lunch. "You're dreadfully tired. I can see your lips are parched and dry with digging."

She was deathly pale herself, and her own eyes were livid, for by this time she had fairly given up all hope of rescue; and, besides, the air in the tunnel was so foul and stupefying, she could hardly speak; indeed, her tongue clung to her palate. But she poured out the last few drops into the cup for Cyril and held them up imploringly, with a gesture of supplication. These two were no strangers to one another now. They had begun to know each other well in those twelve long hours of deadly peril shared in common.

Cyril waved the cup aside with a firm air of dissent.

"No, no," he said, faintly, "you must drink it yourself. Your need is greater far than mine."

Elma tried to put it away in turn, but Cyril would not allow her. So she moistened her mouth with those scanty last drops, and turned towards him gratefully.

"There's no hope left now," she said, in a very

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resigned voice. "We must make up our minds to die where we stand. But I thank you, oh, I thank you so much, so earnestly."

Cyril, for his part, could hardly find breath to speak. "Thank you," he gasped out, in one last despairing effort. "Things look very black; but while there's life there's hope. They may even still, perhaps, come up with us."

As he spoke, a sound broke unexpectedly on the silence of their prison. A dull thud seemed to make itself faintly heard from beyond the thick wall of sand that cut them off from the daylight. Cyril stared with surprise. It was a noise like a pick-axe. Stooping hastily down, he laid his ear against the rail beside the shattered carriage.

"They're digging!" he cried earnestly, finding words in his joy. "They're digging to reach us! I can hear them! I can hear them!"

Elma glanced up at him with a certain tinge of half-incredulous surprise.

"Yes, they're digging, of course," she said quickly. "I knew they'd dig for us, naturally, as soon as they missed us. But how far off are they yet? That's the real question. Will they reach us in time? Are they near or distant?"

Cyril knelt down on the ground as before, in an agony of suspense, and struck the rail three times distinctly with his walking-stick. Then he put his ear to it and listened, and waited. In less than half a minute

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three answering knocks rang, dim but unmistakable, along the buried rail. He could even feel the vibration on the iron with his face.

"They hear us! They hear us!" he cried once more, in a tremor of excitement. "I don't think they're far off. They're coming rapidly towards us."

At the words Elma rose from her seat, still paler than ever, but strangely resolute, and took the stick from his hand with a gesture of despair. She was almost stifled. But she raised it with method. Knocking the rail twice, she bent down her head and listened in turn. Once more two answering knocks rang sharp along the connecting line of metal. Elma shook her head ominously.

"No, no, they're a very long way off still," she murmured, in a faltering tone. "I can hear it quite well. They can never reach us!"

She seated herself on a fragment of the broken carriage, and buried her face in her hands once more in silence. Her heart was full. Her head was very heavy. She gasped and struggled. Then a sudden intuition seized her, after her kind. If the rail could carry the sound of a tap, surely it might carry the human voice as well. Inspired with the idea, she rose again and leant forward.

A second time she knocked two quick little taps, ringing sharp on the rail, as if to bespeak attention; then, putting her mouth close to the metals, she shouted aloud along them with all the voice that was left her—

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"Hallo, there, do you hear? Come soon, come fast. We're alive, but choking!"

Quick as lightning an answer rang back as if by magic, along the conducting line of the rail—a strange unexpected answer.

"Break the pipe of the wires," it said, and then subsided instantly.

Cyril, who was leaning down at her side at the moment with his ear to the rail, couldn't make out one word of it. But Elma's sharp senses, now quickened by the crisis, were acute as an Oriental's and keen as a beagle's.

"Break the pipe of the wires," they say, she exclaimed, starting back and pondering. "What on earth can they mean by that? What on earth can they be driving at? 'Break the pipe of the wires.' I don't understand them."

Hardly had she spoken, when another sharp tap resounded still more clearly along the rail at her feet. She bent down her head once more, and laid her eager ear beside it in terrible suspense. A rough man's voice —a navvy's, no doubt, or a fireman's—came speeding along the metal; and it said in thick accents—

"Do you hear what I say? If you want to breathe freer, break the pipe of the wires, and you'll get fresh air from outside right through it."

Cyril this time had caught the words, and jumped up with a sudden air of profound conviction. It was very dark, and the lamps were going out, but he took his

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fusee-box from his pocket and struck a light hastily. Sure enough, on the left-hand side of the tunnel, half buried in rubbish, an earthenware pipe ran along by the edge near the wall of the archway. Cyril raised his foot and brought his heel down upon it sharply with all the strength and force he had still left in him. The pipe broke short, and Cyril saw within it a number of telegraph wires for the railway service. The tube communicated directly with the air outside. They were saved! They were saved! Air would come through the pipe! He saw it all now! He dimly understood it!

At the self-same moment, another sound of breaking was heard more distinctly at the opposite end, some thirty or forty feet off through the tunnel. Then a voice rang far clearer, as if issuing from the tube, in short, sharp sentences—

"We'll pump you in air. How many of you are there? Are you all alive? Is any one injured?"

Cyril leant down and shouted back in reply—

"We're two. Both alive. Not hurt. But sick and half dead with stifling. Send us air as soon as ever you can. And if possible pass us a bottle of water."

Some minutes elapsed—three long, slow minutes of intense anxiety. Elma, now broken down with terror and want of oxygen, fell half fainting forward towards the shattered tube. Cyril held her up in his supporting arms, and watched the pipe eagerly. It seemed an age; but, after a time, he became conscious of a gust of air

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blowing cold on his face. The keen freshness revived him.

He looked about him and drew a deep breath. Cool air was streaming in through the broken place. Quick as thought, he laid Elma's mouth as close as he could lay it to the reviving current. Her eyes were closed. After a painful interval, she opened them languidly. Cyril chafed her hands with his, but his chafing seemed to produce very little effect. She lay motionless now with her eyelids half shut, and the whites of her eyes alone showing through them. The close, foul air of that damp and confined spot had worked its worst, and had almost asphyxiated her. Cyril began to fear the slight relief had arrived five minutes too late. And it must still in all probability be some hours at least before they could be actually disentombed from that living vault or restored to the open air of heaven.

As he bent over her and held his breath in speechless suspense, the voice called out again more loudly than ever—

"Look out for the ball in the tube. We're sending you water!"

Cyril watched the pipe closely and struck another light. In a minute, a big glass marble came rattling through, with a string attached to it.

"Pull the string!" the voice cried; and Cyril pulled with a will. Now and again, the object attached to it struck against some projecting ledge or angle where the pipes overlapped. But at last, with a little humouring,

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it came through in safety. At the end was a large india-rubber bottle, full of fresh water, and a flask of brandy. The young man seized them both with delight and avidity, and bathed Elma's temples over and over again with the refreshing spirit. Then he poured a little into the cup, and filling it up with water, held it to her lips with all a woman's tenderness. Elma gulped the draught down unconsciously, and opened her eyes at once. For a moment she stared about her with a wild stare of surprise.

Then, of a sudden, she recollected where she was, and why, and seizing Cyril's hand, pressed it long and eagerly.

"If only we can hold out for three hours more," she cried, with fresh hope returning, "I'm sure they'll reach us; I'm sure they'll reach us!"

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CHAPTER V.

GRATITUDE.

"THERE were only two of you, then, in the last carriage?" Guy asked with deep interest, the very next morning, as Cyril, none the worse for his long imprisonment, sat quietly in their joint chambers at Staple Inn, recounting the previous day's adventures.

"Yes. Only two of us. It was awfully fortunate. And the carriage that was smashed had nobody at all, except in the first compartment, which escaped being buried. So there were no lives lost, by a miracle, you may say. But several of the people in the front part of the train got terribly shaken."

"And you and the other man were shut up in the tunnel there for fifteen hours at a stretch?" Guy went on reflectively.

"At least fifteen hours," Cyril echoed, without attempting to correct the slight error of sex, for no man, he thought, is bound to criminate himself, even in a flirtation. "It was two in the morning before they dug us quite out. And my companion by that time was more dead than alive, I can tell you, with watching and terror."

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"Was he, poor fellow?" Guy murmured, with a sympathetic face; for Cyril had always alluded casually to his fellow-traveller in such general terms that Guy was as yet unaware there was a lady in the case. "And is he all right again now, do you know? Have you heard anything more about him?"

But before Cyril could answer there came a knock at the door, and the next moment Mr. Montague Nevitt, without his violin, entered the room in some haste, all agog with excitement. His face was eager and his manner cordial. It was clear he was full of some important tidings.

"Why, Cyril, my dear fellow," he cried, grasping the painter's hand with much demonstration of friendly warmth, and wringing it hard two or three times over, "how delighted I am to see you restored to us alive and well once more. This is really too happy. What a marvellous escape! And what a romantic story! All the clubs are buzzing with it. A charming girl! You'll have to marry her, of course, that's the necessary climax. You and the young lady are the staple of news, I see, in very big print, in all the evening papers!"

Guy drew back at the words with a little start of surprise. "Young lady!" he cried aghast. "A charming girl, Nevitt! Then the person who was shut up with you for fifteen hours in the tunnel was a girl, Cyril!"

Cyril's handsome face flushed slightly before his

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brother's scrutinizing gaze; but he answered with a certain little ill-concealed embarrassment:

"Oh, I didn't say so, didn't I? Well, she *was* a girl then, of course; a certain Miss Clifford. She got in at Chetwood. Her people live somewhere down there near Tilgate. At least, so I gathered from what she told me."

Nevitt stared hard at the painter's eyes, which tried, without success, to look unconscious.

"A romance!" he said, slowly, scanning his man with deep interest. "A romance, I can see. Young, rich, and beautiful. My dear Cyril, I only wish I'd had half your luck. What a splendid chance, and what a magnificent introduction! Beauty in distress! A lady in trouble! You console her alone in a tunnel for fifteen hours by yourself at a stretch. Heavens, what a *tête-à-tête!* Did British propriety ever before allow a man such a glorious opportunity for chivalrous devotion to a lady of family, face, and fortune?"

"Was she pretty?" Guy asked, coming down at once to a more realistic platform.

Cyril hesitated a moment. "Well, yes," he answered, somewhat curtly, after a short pause. "She's distinctly good-looking." And he shut his mouth sharp. But he had said quite enough.

When a man says that of a girl, and nothing more, in an unconcerned voice, as if it didn't matter twopence to him, you may be perfectly sure in your own mind he's very deeply and seriously smitten.

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"And young?" Guy continued.

"I should say about twenty."

"And rich beyond the utmost dreams of avarice?" Montague Nevitt put in, with a faintly cynical smile.

"Well, I don't know about that," Cyril answered truthfully. "I haven't the least idea who she is, even. She and I had other things to think about, you may be sure, boxed up there so long in that narrow space, and choking for want of air, than minute investigations into one another's pedigrees."

"*We've* got no pedigree," Guy interposed, with a bitter smile. "So the less she investigates about that the better."

"But *she* has, I expect," Nevitt put in hastily; "and if I were you, Cyril, I'd hunt her up forthwith, while the iron's hot, and find out all there is to find out about her. Clifford—Clifford? I wonder whether by any chance she's one of the Devonshire Cliffords, now? For if so, she might really be worth a man's serious attention. They're very good business. They bank at our place; and they're by no means paupers." For Nevitt was a clerk in the well-known banking firm of Drummond, Coutts, and Barclay, Limited; and being a man who didn't mean, as he himself said, "to throw himself away on any girl for nothing," he kept a sharp look-out on the current account of every wealthy client with an only daughter.

Ten minutes later, as the talk ran on, some further light was unexpectedly thrown upon this interesting

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topic by the entrance of the porter with a letter for Cyril. The painter tore it open, and glanced over it, as Nevitt observed, with evident eagerness. It was short and curt, but in its own way courteous.

"'Mr. Reginald Clifford, C.M.G., desires to thank Mr. Cyril Waring for his kindness and consideration to Miss Clifford during her temporary incarceration——'

"Incarceration's good, isn't it? How much does he charge a thousand for that sort, I wonder?——

"'during her temporary incarceration in the Lavington tunnel yesterday. Mrs. and Miss Clifford wish also to express at the same time their deep gratitude to Mr. Waring for his friendly efforts, and trust he has experienced no further ill effects from the unfortunate accident to which he was subjected.

"'Craighton, Tilgate, Thursday morning.'"

"She *might* have written herself," Cyril murmured half aloud. He was evidently disappointed at this very short measure of correspondence on the subject.

But Montague Nevitt took a more cheerful view. "Oh, Reginald Clifford, of Craighton!" he cried with a smile, his invariable smile. "I know all about *him*. He's a friend of Colonel Kelmscott's down at Tilgate Park. C.M.G., indeed! What a ridiculous old peacock. He was administrator of St. Kitts once upon a time, I believe, or was it Nevis or Antigua? I don't quite recollect, I'm afraid; but anyhow, some comical little speck of a sugary, niggery, West Indian Island; and he was made a Companion of St. Michael and St. George

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when his term was up, just to keep him quiet, don't you know, for he wanted a knighthood, and to shelve him from being appointed to a first-class post like Barbados or Trinidad. If it's Elma Clifford you were shut up with in the tunnel, Cyril, you might do worse, there's no doubt, and you might do better. She's an only daughter, and there's a little money at the back of the family, I expect; but I fancy the Companion of the Fighting Saints lives mainly on his pension, which, of course, is purely personal, and so dies with him."

Cyril folded up the note without noticing Nevitt's words and put it in his pocket, somewhat carefully and obtrusively. "Thank you," he said, in a very quiet tone, "I didn't ask you about Miss Clifford's fortune. When I want information on that point I'll apply for it plainly. But meanwhile I don't think any lady's name should be dragged into conversation and bandied about like that, by an absolute stranger."

"Oh, now you needn't be huffy," Nevitt answered, with a still sweeter smile, showing all those pearly teeth of his to the greatest advantage. "I didn't mean to put your back up, and I'll tell you what I'll do for you. I'll heap coals of fire on your head, you ungrateful man. I'll return good for evil. You shall have an invitation to Mrs. Holker's garden party on Saturday week at Chetwood Court, and there you'll be almost sure to meet the beautiful stranger."

But at that very moment, at Craighton, Tilgate, Mr. Reginald Clifford, C.M.G., a stiff little withered-up

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official Briton, half mummified by long exposure to tropical suns, was sitting in his drawing-room with Mrs. Clifford, his wife, and discussing—what subject of all others on earth but the personality of Cyril Waring?

"Well, it was an awkward situation for Elma, of course, I admit," he was chirping out cheerfully, with his back turned by pure force of habit to the empty grate, and his hands crossed behind him. "I don't deny it was an awkward situation. Still, there's no harm done, I hope and trust. Elma's happily not a fanciful or foolishly susceptible sort of girl. She sees it's a case for mere ordinary gratitude. And gratitude, in my opinion, towards a person in his position, is sufficiently expressed once for all—by letter. There's no reason on earth she should ever again see or hear any more of him."

"But girls are so romantic," Mrs. Clifford put in doubtfully, with an anxious air. She herself was by no means romantic to look at, being, indeed, a person of a certain age, with a plump, matronly figure, and very staid of countenance; yet there was something in her eye, for all that, that recalled at times the vivid keenness of Elma's, and her cheek had once been as delicate and creamy a brown as her pretty daughter's.

"Girls are so romantic," Mrs. Clifford repeated once more, in a dreamy way, "and she was evidently impressed by him."

"Well, I'm glad I made inquiries at once about these

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two young men, anyhow," the Companion of St. Michael and St. George responded with fervour, clasping his wizened little hands contentedly over his narrow waistcoat. "It's a precious odd story, and a doubtful story, and not at all the sort of story one likes one's girl to be any way mixed up with. For my part, I shall give them a very wide berth indeed in future; and there's no reason why Elma should ever knock up against them."

"Who told you they were nobodies?" Mrs. Clifford inquired, drawing a wistful sigh.

"Oh, Tom Clark was at school with them," the ex-administrator continued, with a very cunning air, "and he knows all about them—has heard the whole circumstances. Very odd, very odd; never met anything so queer in all my life; most mysterious and uncanny. They never had a father; they never had a mother; they never had anybody on earth they could call their own; they dropped from the clouds, as it were, one rainy day, without a friend in the world, plump down into the Charterhouse. There they were well supplied with money, and spent their holidays with a person at Brighton, who wasn't even supposed to be their lawful guardian. Looks fishy, doesn't it? Their names are Cyril and Guy Waring—and that's all they know of themselves. They were educated like gentlemen till they were twenty-one years old; and then they were turned loose upon the world, like a pair of young bears, with a couple of hundred pounds of capital apiece to

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shift for themselves with. Uncanny, very; I don't like the look of it. Not at all the sort of people an impressionable girl like our Elma should ever be allowed to see too much of."

"I don't think she was very much impressed by him," Mrs. Clifford said with confidence. "I've watched her to see, and I don't think she's in love with him. But by to-morrow, Reginald, I shall be able, I'm sure, to tell you for certain."

The Companion of the Militant Saints glanced rather uneasily across the hearth-rug at his wife. "It's a marvellous gift, to be sure, this intuition of yours, Louisa," he said, shaking his head sagely, and swaying himself gently to and fro on the stone kerb of the fender. "I frankly confess, my dear, I don't quite understand it. And Elma's got it too, every bit as bad as you have. Runs in the family, I suppose—runs somehow in the family. After living with you now for twenty-two years—yes, twenty-two last April—in every part of the world and every grade of the service, I'm compelled to admit that your intuition in these matters is really remarkable—simply remarkable."

Mrs. Clifford coloured through her olive-brown skin, exactly like Elma, and rose with a somewhat embarrassed and half-guilty air, avoiding her husband's eyes as if afraid to meet them.

Elma had gone to bed early, wearied out as she was with her long agony in the tunnel. Mrs. Clifford crept up to her daughter's room with a silent tread, like some

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noiseless Oriental, and, putting her ear to the keyhole, listened outside the door in profound suspense for several minutes.

Not a sound from within; not a gentle footfall on the carpeted floor. For a moment she hesitated; then she turned the handle slowly, and, peering before her, peeped into the room. Thank Heaven! no snake signs. Elma lay asleep, with one arm above her head, as peacefully as a child, after her terrible adventure. Her bosom heaved, but slowly and regularly. The mother drew a deep breath, and crept down the stairs with a palpitating heart to the drawing-room again.

"Reginald," she said, with perfect confidence, relapsing once more at a bound into the ordinary every-day British matron, "there's no harm done, I'm sure. She doesn't think of this young man at all. You may dismiss him from your mind at once and for ever. She's sleeping like a baby."

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CHAPTER VI.

TWO STRANGE MEETINGS.

"MRS. HUGH HOLKER, at home, Saturday, May 29th, 3 to 6.30. Chetwood Court; tennis."

Cyril Waring read it out with a little thrill of triumph. To be sure, it was by no means certain that Elma would be there; but still, Chetwood Court was well within range of Tilgate town, and Montague Nevitt felt convinced, he said, the Holkers were friends of the Cliffords and the Kelmscotts.

"For my part," Guy remarked, balancing a fragment of fried sole on his fork as he spoke, "I'm not going all that way down to Chetwood merely to swell Mrs. Holker's triumph."

"I wouldn't if I were you," Cyril answered, with quiet incisiveness. He hadn't exactly fallen in love with Elma at first sight, but he was very much interested in her, and it struck him at once that what interested him was likely also to interest his twin brother. And this is just one of those rare cases in life where a man prefers that his interest in a subject should not be shared by any other person.

Before Saturday, the 29th, arrived, however, Guy

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had so far changed his mind in the matter, that he presented himself duly with Nevitt at Waterloo to catch the same train to Chetwood station that Cyril went down by.

"After all," he said to Nevitt, as they walked together from the club in Piccadilly, "I may as well see what the girl's like, anyhow. If she's got to be my sister-in-law — which seems not unlikely now—I'd better have a look at her beforehand, so to speak, on approbation."

The Holkers' grounds were large and well planted, with velvety lawns on the slope of a well-wooded hill overlooking the boundless blue weald of Surrey, Nevitt and the Warings were late to arrive, and found most of the guests already assembled before them.

After a time Guy found himself, to his intense chagrin, told off by his hostess to do the honours to an amiable old lady of high tonnage and great conversational powers, who rattled on uninterruptedly in one silvery stream about everybody on the ground, their histories and their pedigrees. She took the talking so completely off his hands, however, that, after a very few minutes, Guy, who was by nature of a lazy and contemplative disposition, had almost ceased to trouble himself about what she said, interposing "indeeds" and "reallys" with automatic politeness at measured intervals; when suddenly the old lady, coming upon a bench where a mother and daughter were seated in the shade, settled down by their sides in a fervour of welcome, and shook

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hands with them both effusively in a most demonstrative fashion.

The daughter was pretty—yes, distinctly pretty. She attracted Guy's attention at once by the piercing keenness of her lustrous dark eyes, and the delicate olive-brown of her transparent complexion. Her expression was merry, but with a strange and attractive undertone, he thought, of some mysterious charm. A more taking girl, indeed, now he came to look close, he hadn't seen for months. He congratulated himself on his garrulous old lady's choice of a bench to sit upon, if it helped him to an introduction to the beautiful stranger.

But before he could even be introduced, the pretty girl with the olive-brown complexion had held out her hand to him frankly, and exclaimed in a voice as sunny as her face—

"I don't need to be told your friend's name, I'm sure, Mrs. Godfrey. He's so awfully like him. I should have known him anywhere. Of course, you're Mr. Waring's brother, aren't you?"

Guy smiled, and bowed gracefully; he was always graceful.

"I refuse to be merely *Mr. Waring's brother*," he answered, with some amusement, as he took the proffered hand in his own warmly. "If it comes to that, I'm Mr. Waring myself; and Cyril, whom you seem to know already, is only my brother."

"Ah, but *my* Mr. Waring isn't here to-day, is he?" the olive-brown girl put in, looking around with

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quite an eager interest at the crowd in the distance. "Naturally, to me, he's *the* Mr. Waring, of course, and you are only *my* Mr. Waring's brother."

"Elma, my dear, what on earth will Mr. Waring think of you?" her mother put in, with the conventional shocked face of British propriety. "You know," she went on, turning round quickly to Guy, "we're all so grateful to your brother for his kindness to our girl in that dreadful accident the other day at Lavington, that we can't help thinking and talking of him all the time as our Mr. Waring. I'm sorry he isn't here himself this afternoon to receive our thanks. It would be such a pleasure to all of us to give them to him in person."

"Oh, he is about, somewhere," Guy answered carelessly, still keeping his eye fixed hard on the pretty girl. "I'll fetch him round by-and-by to pay his respects in due form. He'll be only too glad. And this, I suppose, must be Miss Clifford that I've heard so much about."

As he said those words, a little gleam of pleasure shot through Elma's eyes. Her painter hadn't forgotten her, then. He had talked much about her.

"Yes, I knew who you must be the very first moment I saw you," she answered, blushing; "you're so much like him in some ways, though not in all. . . . And he told me that day he had a twin brother."

"So much like him in some ways," Guy repeated, much amused. "Why, I wonder you don't take me for Cyril himself at once. You're the very first person I

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ever knew in my life, except a few old and very intimate friends, who could tell at all the difference between us."

Elma drew back, almost as if shocked and hurt at the bare suggestion.

"Oh, dear no," she cried quickly, scanning him over at once with those piercing keen eyes of hers; "you're like him, of course—I don't deny the likeness—as brothers may be like one another. Your features are the same, and the colour of your hair and eyes, and all that sort of thing; but still, I knew at a glance you weren't my Mr. Waring. I could never mistake you for him. The expression and the look are so utterly different."

"You must be a very subtle judge of faces," the young man answered, still smiling, "if you knew us apart at first sight; for I never before in my life met anybody who'd seen my brother once or twice, and who didn't take me for him, or him for me, the very first time he saw us apart. But then," he added, after a short pause, with a quick dart of his eyes, "you were with him in the tunnel for a whole long day; and in that time, of course, you saw a good deal of him."

Elma blushed again, and Guy noticed in passing that she blushed very prettily.

"And how's Sardanapalus?" she asked, in a somewhat hurried voice, making an inartistic attempt to change the subject.

"Oh, Sardanapalus is all right," Guy answered, laughing. "Cyril told me you had made friends with

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him, and weren't one bit afraid of him. Most people are so dreadfully frightened of the poor old creature."

"But he isn't old," Elma exclaimed, interrupting him with some warmth. "He's in the prime of life. He's so glossy and beautiful. I quite fell in love with him."

"And who is Sardanapalus?" Mrs. Clifford asked, with a vague maternal sense of discomfort and doubt. "A dog or a monkey?"

"Oh, Sardanapalus, mother—didn't I tell you about him?" Elma cried enthusiastically. "Why, he's just lovely and beautiful. He's such a glorious green and yellow-banded snake; and he coiled around my arm as if he'd always known me."

Mrs. Clifford drew back with a horror-stricken face, darting across at her daughter the same stealthy sort of look she had given her husband the night after Elma's adventure.

"A snake!" she repeated, aghast, "a snake! Oh, Elma! Why, you never told me that. And he coiled round your arm. How horrible!"

But Elma wasn't to be put down by exclamations of horror.

"Why, you're not afraid of snakes yourself, you know, mother," she went on, undismayed. "I remember papa saying that when you were at St. Kitts with him you never minded them a bit, but caught them in your hands like an Indian juggler, and treated them as playthings, so I wasn't afraid either. I suppose it's hereditary."

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Mrs. Clifford gazed at her fixedly for a few seconds with a very pale face.

"I suppose it is," she said slowly and stiffly, with an evident effort. "Most things are, in fact, in this world we live in. But I didn't know *you* at least had inherited it, Elma."

Just at that moment they were relieved from the temporary embarrassment which the mention of Sardanapalus seemed to have caused the party, by the approach of a tall and very handsome man, who came forward with a smile towards where their group was standing. He was military in bearing, and had dark brown hair, with a white moustache; but he hardly looked more than fifty for all that, as Guy judged at once from his erect carriage and the singular youthfulness of both face and figure. That he was a born aristocrat one could see in every motion of his well-built limbs. His mien had that ineffable air of grace and breeding which sometimes marks the members of our old English families. Very much like Cyril, too, Guy thought to himself, in a flash of intuition; very much like Cyril, the way he raised his hat and then smiled urbanely on Mrs. Clifford and Elma. But it was Cyril grown old and prematurely white, and filled full with the grave haughtiness of an honoured aristocrat.

"Why, here's Colonel Kelmscott!" Mrs. Clifford exclaimed, with a sigh of relief, not a little set at ease by the timely diversion. "We're so glad you've come, Colonel. And Lady Emily too; she's over yonder, is

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she? Ah, well, I'll look out for her. We heard you were to be here. Oh, how kind of you; thank you. No, Elma's none the worse for her adventure, thank Heaven! just a little shaken, that's all, but not otherwise injured. And this gentleman's the brother of the kind friend who was so good to her in the tunnel. I'm not quite sure of the name. I think it's——"

"Guy Waring," the young man interposed blandly.

Hardly any one who looked at Colonel Kelmscott's eyes could even have perceived the profound surprise this announcement caused him. He bowed without moving a muscle of that military face. Guy himself never noticed the intense emotion the introduction aroused in the distinguished stranger. But Mrs. Clifford and Elma, each scanning him closely with those keen grey eyes of theirs, observed at once that, unmoved as he appeared, a thunderbolt falling at Colonel Kelmscott's feet could not more thoroughly or completely have stunned him. For a second or two he gazed in the young man's face uneasily, his colour came and went, his bosom heaved in silence; then he roped his moustache with his trembling fingers, and tried in vain to pump up some harmless remark appropriate to the occasion. But no remark came to him. Mrs. Clifford darted a furtive glance at Elma, and Elma darted back a furtive glance at Mrs. Clifford. Neither said a word, and each let her eyes drop to the ground at once as they met the other's. But each knew in her heart that something passing strange had astonished Colonel

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Kelmscott; and each knew, too, that the other had observed it.

Mother and daughter, indeed, needed no spoken words to tell these things plainly to one another. The deep intuition that descended to both was enough to put them in sympathy at once without the need of articulate language.

"Yes, Mr. Guy Waring," Mrs. Clifford repeated at last, breaking the awkward silence that supervened upon the group. "The brother of Mr. Cyril Waring, who was so kind the other day to my daughter in the tunnel."

The Colonel started imperceptibly to the naked eye again.

"Oh, indeed," he said, forcing himself with an effort to speak at last. "I've read about it, of course; it was in all the papers. . . . And—eh—is your brother here, too, this afternoon, Mr. Waring?"

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CHAPTER VII.

KELMSCOTT OF TILGATE.

To both Elma and her mother this meeting between Colonel Kelmscott and Guy Waring was full of mystery. For the Kelmscotts, of Tilgate Park, were the oldest county family in all that part of Surrey; and Colonel Kelmscott himself passed as the proudest man of that haughtiest house in Southern England. What, therefore, could have made him give so curious and almost imperceptible a start the moment Guy Waring's name was mentioned in conversation? Not a word that he said, to be sure, implied to Guy himself the depth of his surprise; but Elma, with her marvellous insight, could see at once, for all that, by the very haze in his eyes, that he was fascinated by Guy's personality, somewhat as she herself had been fascinated the other day in the train by Sardanapalus. Nay, more; he seemed to wish, with all his heart, to leave the young man's presence, and yet to be glued to the spot, in spite of himself, by some strange compulsion.

It was with a dreamy, far-away tone in his voice that the Colonel uttered those seemingly simple words, "And is your brother here, too, this afternoon, Mr. Waring?"

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"Yes, he's somewhere about," Guy answered carelessly. "He'll turn up by-and-by, no doubt. He's pretty sure to find out, sooner or later, Miss Clifford's here, and then he'll come round this way to speak to her."

For some time they stood talking in a little group by the bench, Colonel Kelmscott meanwhile thawing by degrees and growing gradually interested in what Guy had to say, while Elma looked on with a devouring curiosity.

"Your brother's a painter, you say," the Colonel murmured once under that heavy white moustache of his; "yes, I think I remember. A rising painter. Had a capital landscape in the Grosvenor last year, I recollect, and another in the Academy this spring, if I don't mistake—skied—skied, unfairly; yet a very pretty thing, too; 'At the Home of the Curlews.'"

"He's painting a sweet one now," Elma put in quickly, "down here, close by, in Chetwood Forest. He told me about it; it must be simply lovely—all fern and mosses, with, oh! such a beautiful big snake in the foreground."

"I should like to see it," Colonel Kelmscott said slowly, not without a pang. "If it's painted in the forest—and by your brother, Mr. Waring—that would give it, to me, a certain personal value." He paused a moment; then he added, in a little explanatory undertone, "I'm lord of the manor, you know, at Chetwood; and I shoot the forest."

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"Cyril would be delighted to let you see the piece when it's finished," Guy answered lightly. "If you're ever up in town our way—we've rooms in Staple Inn. I dare say you know it—that quaint, old-fashioned looking place, with big lattice windows, that overhangs Holborn."

Colonel Kelmscott started, and drew himself up still taller and stiffer than before.

"I may have some opportunity of seeing it some day in one of the galleries," he answered coldly, as if not to commit himself. "To tell you the truth, I seldom have time to lounge about in studios. It was merely the coincidence of the picture being painted in Chetwood Forest that made me fancy for a moment I might like to see it. But I'm no connoisseur. Mrs. Clifford, may I take you to get a cup of tea? Tea, I think, is laid out in the tent behind the shrubbery."

It was said in a tone to dismiss Guy politely; and Guy, taking the hint, accepted it as such, and fell back a pace or two to his garrulous old lady. But before Colonel Kelmscott could walk off Mrs. Clifford and her daughter to the marquee for refreshments, Elma gave a sudden start, and blushed faintly pink through that olive-brown skin of hers.

"Why, there's *my* Mr. Waring!" she exclaimed, in a very pleased tone, holding out her hand, with a delicious smile; and as she said it, Cyril and Montague Nevitt strolled up from behind a great clump of lilacs beside them.

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Two pairs of eyes watched those young folks closely as they shook hands once more — Guy's and Mrs. Clifford's. Guy observed that a little red spot rose on Cyril's cheek he had rarely seen there, and that his voice trembled slightly as he said, "How do you do?" to his pretty fellow-traveller of the famous adventure. Mrs. Clifford observed that the faint pink faded out of the olive-brown skin as Elma took Cyril Waring's hand in hers, and that her face grew pale for three minutes afterwards. And Colonel Kelmscott, looking on with a quietly observant eye, remarked to himself that Cyril Waring was a very creditable young man indeed, as handsome as Guy, and as like as two peas, but if anything perhaps even a trifle more pleasing.

For the rest of that afternoon, they six kept constantly together.

Elma noted that Colonel Kelmscott was evidently ill at ease; a thing most unusual with that proud, self-reliant aristocrat. He held himself, to be sure, as straight and erect as ever, and moved about the grounds with that same haughty air of perfect supremacy, as of one who was monarch of all he surveyed in the county of Surrey. But Elma could see, for all that, that he was absent-minded and self-contained; he answered all questions in a distant, unthinking way; some inner trouble was undoubtedly consuming him. His eyes were all for the two Warings. They glanced nervously right and left every minute in haste, but returned after each excursion straight to Guy and Cyril.

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The Colonel noted narrowly all they said and did; and Elma was sure he was very much pleased at least with her painter. How could he fail to be, indeed?—for Mr. Waring was charming. Elma wished she could have strolled off with him about the lawn alone, were it only ten paces in front of her mother. But somehow the fates that day were unpropitious. The party held together as by some magnetic bond, and Mrs. Clifford's eye never for one moment deserted her.

The Colonel glowered. The Colonel was moody. His speech was curt. He occupied himself mainly in listening to Guy and Cyril. A sort of mesmeric influence seemed to draw him towards the two young men.

He drew them out deliberately. Yet the start he had given as either young man came up towards his side was a start, not of mere neutral surprise, but of positive disinclination and regret at the meeting. Nay, even now he was angling hard, with all the skill of a strategist, to keep the Warings out of Lady Emily's way. But the more he talked to them, the more interested he seemed. It was clear he meant to make the most of this passing chance—and never again, if he could help it, Elma felt certain, to see them.

Once, and once only, Granville Kelmscott, his son, strolled casually up and joined the group by pure chance for a few short minutes. The heir of Tilgate Park was tall and handsome, though less so than his father; and Mrs. Clifford was not wholly indisposed to throw him and Elma together as much as possible,

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Younger by a full year than the two Warings, Granville Kelmscott was not wholly unlike them in face and manner. As a rule, his father was proud of him, with a passing great pride, as he was proud of every other Kelmscott possession. But to-day, Elma's keen eye observed that the Colonel's glance moved quickly in a rapid dart from Cyril and Guy to his son Granville, and back again from his son Granville to Guy and Cyril. What was odder still, the hasty comparison seemed to redound not altogether to Granville's credit. The Colonel paused, and stifled a sigh as he looked; then, in spite of Mrs. Clifford's profound attempts to retain the heir by her side, he sent the young man off at a moment's notice to hunt up Lady Emily. Now why on earth did he want to keep Granville and the Warings apart? Mrs. Clifford and Elma racked their brains in vain; they could make nothing of the mystery.

It was a long afternoon, and Elma enjoyed it, though she never got her *tête-à-tête* after all with Cyril Waring. Just a rapid look, a dart from the eyes, a faint pressure of her hand at parting—that was all the romance she was able to extract from it, so closely did Mrs. Clifford play her part as chaperon. But as the two young men and Montague Nevitt hurried off at last to catch their train back to town, the Colonel turned to Mrs. Clifford with a sigh of relief.

"Splendid young fellows, those," he exclaimed, looking after them. "I'm not sorry I met them. Ought

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to have gone into a cavalry regiment early in life; what fine leaders they'd have made, to be sure, in a dash for the guns or a charge against a battery! But they seem to have done well for themselves in their own way: carved out their own fortunes, each after his fashion. Very plucky young fellows. One of them's a painter, and one's a journalist; and both of them are making their mark in their own world. I really admire them."

And on the way to the station, that moment, Mr. Montague Nevitt, as he lit his cigarette, was saying to Cyril, with an approving smile, "Your Miss Clifford's pretty."

"Yes," Cyril answered drily, "she's not bad looking. She looked her best to-day. And she's capital company."

But Guy broke out unabashed into a sudden burst of speech.

"Not bad looking!" he cried contemptuously. "Is that all you have to say of her? And you a painter, too! Why, she's beautiful! She's charming! If Cyril was shut up in a tunnel with *her*——"

He broke off suddenly.

And for the rest of the way home he spoke but seldom. It was all too true. The two Warings were cast in the self-same mould. What attracted one, it was clear, no less surely and certainly attracted the other.

As they went to their separate rooms in Staple Inn

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that night, Guy paused for a moment, candle in hand, by his door, and looked straight at Cyril.

"You needn't fear *me*," he said, in a very low tone. "She's yours. You found her. I wouldn't be mean enough for a minute to interfere with your find. But I'm not surprised at you. I would do the same myself, if I could have seen her first. I won't see her again. I couldn't stand it. She's too beautiful to see and not to fall in love with."

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CHAPTER VIII.

ELMA BREAKS OUT.

MRS. CLIFFORD returned from Chetwood Court that day in by no means such high spirits as when she went there. In the first place, she hadn't succeeded in throwing Elma and Granville Kelmscott into one another's company at all, and in the second place Elma had talked much under her very nose, for half-an-hour at a stretch, with the unknown young painter fellow. When Elma was asked out anywhere else in the country for the next six weeks or so, Mrs. Clifford made up her mind strictly to inquire in private, before committing herself to an acceptance, whether that dangerous young man was likely or not to be included in the party.

For Mrs. Clifford admitted frankly to herself that Cyril was dangerous; as dangerous as they make them. He was just the right age; he was handsome, he was clever, his tawny brown beard had the faintest little touch of artistic redness, and was trimmed and dressed with provoking nicety. He was an artist too; and girls nowadays, you know, have such an unaccountable

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way of falling in love with men who can paint, or write verses, or play the violin, or do something foolish of that sort, instead of sticking fast to the solid attractions of the London Stock Exchange or of ancestral acres.

Mrs. Clifford confided her fears that very night to the sympathetic ear of the Companion of the Militant and Guardian Saints of the British Empire.

"Reginald," she said solemnly, "I told you the other day, when you asked about it, Elma wasn't in love. And at the time I was right, or very near it. But this afternoon I've had an opportunity of watching them both together, and I've half changed my mind. Elma thinks a great deal too much altogether, I'm afraid, about this young Mr. Waring."

"How do you know?" Mr. Clifford asked, staring her hard in the face, and nodding solemnly.

The British matron hesitated. "How do I know anything?" she answered at last, driven to bay by the question. "I never know how. I only know I know it. But whatever we do we must be careful not to let Elma and the young man get thrown together again. I should say myself it wouldn't be a bad plan if we were to send her away somewhere for the rest of the summer, but I can tell you better about all this to-morrow."

Elma, for her part, had come home from Chetwood Court more full than ever of Cyril Waring. He looked so handsome and so manly that afternoon at the

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Holkers', Elma hoped she'd be asked out where he was going to be again.

She sat long in her own bedroom, thinking it over with herself, while the candle burnt down in its socket very low, and the house was still, and the rain pattered hard on the roof overhead, and her father and mother were discussing her by themselves downstairs in the drawing-room.

She sat long on her chair without caring to begin undressing. She sat and mused with her hands crossed on her lap. She sat and thought, and her thoughts were all about Cyril Waring.

For more than an hour she sat there dreamily, and told herself over, one by one, in long order, the afternoon's events from beginning to the end of them. She repeated every word Cyril had spoken in her ear. She remembered every glance, every look he had darted at her. She thought of that faint pressure of his hand as he said farewell. The tender blush came back to her brown cheek once more with maidenly shame as she told it all over. He was so handsome and so nice, and so very, very kind, and, perhaps, after this, she might never again meet him. Her bosom heaved. She was conscious of a new sense just aroused within her.

Presently her heart began to beat more violently. She didn't know why. It had never beaten in her life like that before—not even in the tunnel, nor yet when Cyril came up to-day and spoke first to her. Slowly,

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slowly, she rose from her seat. The fit was upon her. Could this be a dream? Some strange impulse made her glide forward and stand for a minute or two irresolute, in the middle of the room. Then she turned round, once, twice, thrice, half unconsciously. She turned round, wondering to herself all the while what this strange thing could mean; faster, faster, faster, her heart within her beating at each turn with more frantic haste and speed than ever. For some minutes she turned, glowing with red shame, yet unable to stop, and still more unable to say to herself why or wherefore.

At first that was all. She merely turned and panted. But as she whirled and whirled, new moods and figures seemed to force themselves upon her. She lifted her hands and swayed them about above her head gracefully. She was posturing she knew, but why she had no idea. It all came upon her as suddenly and as uncontrollably as a blush. She was whirling around the room, now slow, now fast, but always with her arms held out lissom, like a dancing-girl's. Sometimes her body bent this way, and sometimes that, her hands keeping time to her movements meanwhile in long graceful curves, but all as if compelled by some extrinsic necessity.

It was an instinct within her over which she had no control. Surely, surely, she must be possessed. A spirit that was not her seemed to be catching her round the waist, and twisting her about, and making her spin

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headlong over the floor through this wild fierce dance. It was terrible, terrible. Yet she could not prevent it. A force not her own seemed to sustain and impel her.

And all the time, as she whirled, she was conscious also of some strange dim need. A sense of discomfort oppressed her arms. She hadn't everything she required for this solitary orgy. Something more was lacking her. Something essential, vital. But what on earth it could be she knew not; she knew not.

By-and-by she paused, and, as she glanced right and left, the sense of discomfort grew clearer and more vivid. It was her hands that were wrong. Her hands were empty. She must have something to fill them. Something alive, lithe, curling, sinuous. These wavings and swayings, to this side and to that, seemed so meaningless and void—without some life to guide them. There was nothing for her to hold; nothing to tame and subdue; nothing to cling and writhe and give point to her movements. Oh! heavens, how horrible!

She drew herself up suddenly, and by dint of a fierce brief effort of will repressed for awhile the mad dance that overmastered her. The spirit within her, if spirit it were, kept quiet for a moment, awed and subdued by her proud determination. Then it began once more and led her resistlessly forward. She moved over to the chest of drawers still rhythmically and with set steps, but to the phantom strain of some unheard low music. The music was running vaguely through her head all the time—wild Æolian music—it sounded like

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a rude tune on a harp or zither. And surely the cymbals clashed now and again overhead; and the timbrel rang clear; and the castanets tinkled, keeping time with the measure. She stood still and listened. No, no, not a sound save the rain on the roof. It was the music of her own heart, beating irregularly and fiercely to an intermittent lilt, like a Hungarian waltz or a Roumanian tarantella.

By this time, Elma was thoroughly frightened. Was she going mad? she asked herself, or had some evil spirit taken up his abode within her? What made her spin and twirl about like this—irresponsibly, unintentionally, irrepressibly, meaninglessly? Oh, what would her mother say, if only she knew all? And what on earth would Cyril Waring think of her?

Cyril Waring! Cyril Waring! It was all Cyril Waring. And yet, if he knew—oh, mercy, mercy!

Still, in spite of these doubts, misgivings, fears, she walked over towards the chest of drawers with a firm and rhythmical tread, to the bars of the internal music that rang loud through her brain, and began opening one drawer after another in an aimless fashion. She was looking for something—she didn't know what; and she never could rest now until she'd found it.

Drawer upon drawer she opened and shut wearily, but nothing that her eyes fell upon seemed to suit her mood. Dresses and jackets and underlinen were there; she glanced at them all with a deep sense of profound contempt; none of these gewgaws of civilized life could

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be of any use to supply the vague want her soul felt so dimly and yet so acutely. They were dead, dead, dead, so close and clinging! Go further! Go further! At last she opened the bottom drawer of all, and her eye fell askance upon a feather boa, curled up at the bottom —soft, smooth, and long; a winding, coiling, serpentine boa. In a second, she had fallen upon it bodily with greedy hands, and was twisting it round her waist, and holding it high and low, and fighting fiercely at times, and figuring with it like a posturant. Some dormant impulse of her race seemed to stir in her blood, with frantic leaps and bounds, at its first conscious awakening. She gave herself up to it wildly now. She was mad. She was mad. She was glad. She was happy.

Then she began to turn round again, slowly, slowly, slowly. As she turned, she raised the boa now high above her head; now held it low on one side, now stooped down and caressed it. At times, as she played with it, the lifeless thing seemed to glide from her grasp in curling folds and elude her; at others, she caught it round the neck like a snake, and twisted it about her arm, or let it twine and encircle her writhing body. Like a snake! like a snake! That idea ran like wildfire through her burning veins. It was a snake, indeed, she wanted; a real live snake; what would she not have given, if it were only Sardanapalus!

Sardanapalus, so glossy, so beautiful, so supple, that glorious green serpent, with his large smooth coils, and his silvery scales, and his darting red tongue, and his

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long lithe movements. Sardanapalus, Sardanapalus, Sardanapalus! The very name seemed to link itself with the music in her head. It coursed with her blood. It rang through her brain. And another as well. Cyril Waring, Cyril Waring, Cyril Waring, Cyril Waring! Oh! great heavens, what would Cyril Waring say now, if only he could see her in her mad mood that moment!

And yet it was not she, not she, not she, but some spirit, some weird, some unseen power within her. It was no more she than that boa there was a snake. A real live snake. Oh, for a real live snake! And then she could dance—tarantel, tarantella—as the spirit within her prompted her to dance it.

"Faster, faster," said the spirit; and she answered him back, "Faster!"

Faster, faster, faster, faster she whirled round the room; the boa grew alive; it coiled about her; it strangled her. Her candle failed; the wick in the socket flickered and died; but Elma danced on, unheeding, in the darkness. Dance, dance, dance, dance; never mind for the light! Oh! what madness was this? What insanity had come over her? Would her feet never stop? Must she go on till she dropped? Must she go on for ever?

Ashamed and terrified with her maidenly sense, overawed and obscured by this hateful charm, yet unable to stay herself, unable to resist it, in a transport of fear and remorse, she danced on irresponsibly. Check herself she couldn't, let her do what she would. Her whole

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being seemed to go forth into that weird, wild dance. She trembled and shook. She stood aghast at her own shame. She had hard work to restrain herself from crying aloud in her horror.

At last, a lull, a stillness, a recess. Her limbs seemed to yield and give way beneath her. She half fainted with fatigue. She staggered and fell. Too weary to undress, she flung herself upon the bed, just as she was, clothes and all. Her overwrought nerves lost consciousness at once. In three minutes she was asleep, breathing fast but peacefully.

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CHAPTER IX.

AND AFTER?

WHEN Elma woke up next morning, it was broad daylight. She woke with a start, to find herself lying upon the bed where she had flung herself. For a minute or two she couldn't recollect or recall to herself how it had all come about. It was too remote from anything in her previous waking thought, too dream-like, too impossible. Then an unspeakable horror flashed over her unawares. Her face flushed hot. Shame and terror overcame her. She buried her head in her hands in an agony of awe. Her own self-respect was literally outraged. It wasn't exactly remorse; it wasn't exactly fear; it was a strange creeping feeling of ineffable disgust and incredulous astonishment.

There could be but one explanation of this impossible episode. She must have gone mad all at once! She must be a frantic lunatic!

A single thought usurped her whole soul. If she was going mad—if this was really mania—she could never, never, never—marry Cyril Waring.

For in a flash of intuition she knew that now. She knew she was in love. She knew he loved her.

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In that wild moment of awakening all the rest mattered nothing. The solitary idea that ran now through her head, as the impulse to dance had run through it last night, was the idea that she could never marry Cyril Waring. And if Cyril Waring could have seen her just then! her cheeks burned yet a brighter scarlet at that thought than even before. One virginal blush suffused her face from chin to forehead. The maidenly sense of shame consumed and devoured her.

Was she mad? Was she mad? And was this a lucid interval?

Presently, as she lay still on her bed all dressed, and with her face in her hands, trembling for very shame, a little knock sounded tentatively at the door of her bedroom. It was a timid, small knock, very low and soft, and, as it were, inquiring. It seemed to say in an apologetic sort of undertone, "I don't know whether you're awake or not just yet; and if you're still asleep, pray don't let me for a moment disturb or arouse you."

"Who's there?" Elma mustered up courage to ask, in a hushed voice of terror, hiding her head under the bed-clothes.

"It's me, darling," Mrs. Clifford answered, very softly and sweetly. Elma had never heard her mother speak in so tender and gentle a tone before, though they loved one another well, and were far more sympathetic than most mothers and daughters. And besides, that knock was so unlike mamma's. Why so soft and low?

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Had mamma discovered her? With a despairing sense of being caught she looked down at her tell-tale clothes and the unslept-in bed.

"Oh, what shall I ever do?" she thought to herself, confusedly. "I can't let mamma come in and catch me like this. She'll ask why on earth I didn't undress last night. And then what could I ever say? How could I ever explain to her?"

The awful sense of shame-facedness grew upon her still more deeply than ever. She jumped up and whispered through the door, in a very penitent voice, "Oh, mother, I can't let you in just yet. Do you mind waiting five minutes? Come again by-and-by. I—I—I'm so awfully tired and queer this morning somehow."

Mrs. Clifford's voice had an answering little ring of terror in it, as she replied at once, in the same soft tone—

"Very well, darling. That's all right. Stay as long as you like. Don't trouble to get up if you'd rather have your breakfast in bed. And don't hurry yourself at all. I'll come back by-and-by and see what's the matter."

Elma didn't know why, but by the very tone of her mother's voice she felt dimly conscious something strange had happened. Mrs. Clifford spoke with unusual gentleness, yet with an unwonted tremor.

"Thank you, dear," Elma answered through the door, going back to the bedside and beginning to undress in a tumult of shame. "Come again by-and-

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by. In just five minutes." It would do her good, she knew, in spite of her shyness, to talk with her mother. Then she folded her clothes neatly, one by one, on a chair; hid the peccant boa away in its own lower drawer; buttoned her neat little embroidered night-dress tightly round her throat; arranged her front hair into a careless disorder; and tried to cool down her fiery red cheeks with copious bathing in cold water. When Mrs. Clifford came back five minutes later, everything looked to the outer eye of a mere casual observer exactly as if Elma had laid in bed all night, curled up between the sheets, in the most orthodox fashion.

But all these elaborate preparations didn't for one moment deceive the mother's watchful glance, or the keen intuition shared by all the women of the Clifford family. She looked tenderly at Elma—Elma with her face half buried in the pillows, and the tell-tale flush still crimsoning her cheek in a single round spot; then she turned for a second to the clothes, too neatly folded on the chair by the bedside, as she murmured low—

"You're not well this morning, my child. You'd better not get up. I'll bring you a cup of tea and some toast myself. You don't feel hungry, of course. Ah, no, I thought not. Just a slice of dry toast—yes, yes. I have been there. Some *eau de Cologne* on your forehead, dear? There, there, don't cry, Elma. You'll be better by-and-by. Stop in bed till lunch-time. I won't let Lucy come up with the tea, of course. You'd rather be alone. You were tired last night. Don't be afraid,

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my darling. It'll soon pass off. There's nothing on earth, nothing at all to be alarmed at."

She laid her hand nervously on Elma's arm. Half dead with shame as she was, Elma noticed it trembled. She noticed, too, that mamma seemed almost afraid to catch her eye. When their glance met for an instant the mother's eyelids fell, and her cheek, too, burned bright red, almost as red, Elma felt, as her own that nestled hot so deep in the pillow. Neither said a word to the other of what she thought or felt. But their mute sympathy itself made them more shame-faced than ever. In some dim, indefinite, instinctive fashion, Elma knew her mother was vaguely aware what she had done last night. Her gaze fell half unconsciously on the bottom drawer. With quick insight, Mrs. Clifford's eye followed her daughter's. Then it fell as before. Elma looked up at her terrified, and burst into a sudden flood of tears. Her mother stooped down and caught her wildly in her arms. "Cry, cry, my darling," she murmured, clasping her hard to her breast. "Cry, cry; it'll do you good; there's safety in crying. Nobody but I shall come near you to-day. Nobody else shall know! Don't be afraid of me! Have not I been there, too? It's nothing, nothing."

With a burst of despair, Elma laid her face in her mother's bosom. Some minutes later, Mrs. Clifford went down to meet her husband in the breakfast-room.

"Well?" the father asked, shortly, looking hard at

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his wife's face, which told its own tale at once, for it was white and pallid.

"Well!" Mrs. Clifford answered, with a pre-occupied air. "Elma's not herself this morning at all. Had a nervous turn after she went to her room last night. I know what it is. I suffered from them myself when I was about her age." Her eyes fell quickly and she shrank from her husband's searching glance. She was a plump-faced and well-favoured British matron now, but once, many years before, as a slim young girl, she had been in love with somebody—somebody whom by superior parental wisdom she was never allowed to marry, being put off instead with a well-connected match, young Mr. Clifford of the Colonial Office. That was all. No more romance than that. The common romance of every woman's heart. A forgotten love. Yet she tingled to remember it.

"And you think?" Mr. Clifford asked, laying down his newspaper and looking very grave.

"I don't think. I know," his wife answered hastily. "I was wrong the other day, and Elma's in love with that young man, Cyril Waring. I know more than that, Reginald; I know you may crush her; I know you may kill her; but if you don't want to do that, I know she must marry him. Whether we wish it, or whether we don't, there's nothing else to be done. As things stand now, it's inevitable, unavoidable. She'll never be happy with anybody else—she must have *him*—and I, for one, won't try to prevent her."

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Mr. Reginald Clifford, C.M.G., sometime Administrator of the island of St. Kitts, gazed at his wife in blank astonishment. She spoke decidedly; he had never heard her speak with such firmness in his life before. It fairly took his breath away. He gazed at his wife blankly as he repeated to himself in very slow and solemn tones, each word distinct, "You, for one, won't try to prevent her!"

"No, I won't," Mrs. Clifford retorted defiantly, assured in her own mind she was acting right. "Elma's really in love with him; and I won't let Elma's life be wrecked—as some lives have been wrecked, and as some mothers would wreck it."

Mr. Clifford leaned back in his chair, one mass of astonishment, and let the Japanese paper-knife he was holding in his right hand drop clattering from his fingers. "If I hadn't heard you say it yourself, Louisa," he answered, with a gasp, "I could never have believed it. I could—never—have—believed it. I don't believe it even now. It's impossible, incredible."

"But it's true," Mrs. Clifford repeated. "Elma must marry the man she's in love with."

Meanwhile poor Elma lay alone in her bedroom upstairs, that awful sense of remorse and shame still making her cheeks tingle with unspeakable horror. Mrs. Clifford brought up her cup of tea herself. Elma took it with gratitude, but still never dared to look her mother in the face. Mrs. Clifford, too, kept her

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own eyes averted. It made Elma's self-abasement even profounder than before to feel that her mother instinctively knew everything.

The poor child lay there long, with a burning face and tingling ears, too ashamed to get up and dress herself and face the outer world, too ashamed to go down before her father's eyes, till long after lunch-time. Then there came a noise at the door once more; the rustling of a dress; a retreating footstep. Somebody pushed an envelope stealthily under the door. Elma picked it up and examined it curiously. It bore a penny stamp, and the local postmark. It must have come then by the two o'clock delivery, without a doubt; but the address, why, the address was written in some unknown hand, and in printing capitals. Elma tore it open with a beating heart, and read the one line of manuscript it contained, which was also written in the same print-like letters.

"Don't be afraid," the letter said. "It will do you no harm. Resist it when it comes. If you do, you will get the better of it."

Elma looked at the letter over and over again in a fever of dismay. She was certain it was her mother had written that note. But she read it with tears, only half-reassured—and then burnt it to ashes, and proceeded to dress herself.

When she went down to the drawing-room, Mrs. Clifford rose from her seat, and took her hand in her own, and kissed her on one cheek as if nothing out of

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the common had happened in any way. The talk between them was obtrusively commonplace. But all that day long, Elma noticed her mother was far tenderer to her than usual; and when she went up to bed Mrs. Clifford held her fingers for a moment with a gentle pressure, and kissed her twice upon her eyes, and stifled a sigh, and then broke from the room as if afraid to speak to her.

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CHAPTER X.

COLONEL KELMSCOTT'S REPENTANCE.

ELMA CLIFFORD wasn't the only person who passed a terrible night and suffered a painful awakening on the morning after the Holkers' garden-party. Colonel Kelmscott, too, had his bad half-hour or so before he finally fell asleep; and he woke up next day to a sense of shame and remorse far more definite, and, therefore, more poignant and more real than Elma's.

Hour after hour, indeed, he lay there on his bed, afraid to toss or turn lest he should wake Lady Emily, but with his limbs all fevered and his throat all parched, thinking over the strange chance that had thus brought him face to face, on the threshold of his honoured age, with the two lads he had wronged so long and so cruelly.

The shock of meeting them had been a sudden and a painful one. To be sure, the Colonel had always felt the time might come when his two eldest sons would cross his path in the intricate maze of London society. He had steeled himself, as he thought, to meet them there with dignity and with stoical reserve. He had made up his mind that if ever the names he had im-

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posed upon them were to fall upon his startled ears, no human being that stood by and looked on should note for one second a single tremor of his lips, a faint shudder of surprise, an almost imperceptible flush or pallor on his impassive countenance. And when the shock came, indeed, he had borne it, as he meant to bear it, with military calmness. Not even Mrs. Clifford, he thought, could have discovered from any undertone of his voice or manner that the two lads he received with such well-bred unconcern were his own twin sons, the true heirs and inheritors of the Tilgate Park property.

And yet, the actual crisis had taken him quite by surprise, and shaken him far more than he could ever have conceived possible. For one thing, though he quite expected that some day he would run up unawares against Guy and Cyril, he did *not* expect it would be down in the country, and still less within a few miles' drive of Tilgate. In London, of course, all things are possible. Sooner or later, there, everybody hustles and clashes against everybody. For that reason, he had tried to suggest, by indirect means, when he launched them on the world, that the twins should tempt their fortune in India or the colonies. He would have liked to think they were well out of his way, and out of Granville's, too. But, against his advice, they had stayed on in England. So he expected to meet them some day, at the Academy private view, perhaps, or in Mrs. Bouverie Barton's literary

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saloon, but certainly *not* on the close sward of the Holkers' lawn, within a few short miles of his own home at Tilgate.

And now he had met them, his conscience, that had lain asleep so long, woke up of a sudden with a terrible start, and began to prick him fiercely.

If only they had been ugly, misshapen, vulgar; if only they had spoken with coarse, rough voices, or irritated him by their inferior social tone, or shown themselves unworthy to be the heirs of Tilgate—why then, the Colonel might possibly have forgiven himself! But to see his own two sons, the sons he had never set eyes on for twenty-five years or more, grown up into such handsome, well-set, noble-looking fellows—so clever, so bright, so able, so charming—to feel they were in every way as much gentlemen born as Granville himself, and to know he had done all three an irreparable wrong, oh, *that* was too much for him. For he had kept two of his sons out of their own all these years, only in order to make the position and prospects of the third, at last, certainly doubtful, and perhaps wretched.

There was much to excuse him to himself, no doubt, he cried to his own soul piteously in the night watches. Proud man as he was, he could not so wholly abase himself even to his inmost self as to admit he had sinned without deep provocation. He thought it all over in his heart, just there, exactly as it all happened, that simple and natural tale of a common wrong, that

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terrible secret of a lifetime that he was still to repent in sackcloth and ashes.

It was so long before—all those twenty-six years, or was it twenty-eight?—since his regiment had been quartered away down in Devonshire. He was a handsome subaltern then, with a frank open face—Harry Kelmscott, of the Greys—just such another man, he said to himself in his remorse, as his son Granville now—or rather, perhaps, as Guy and Cyril Waring. For he couldn't conceal from himself any longer the patent fact that Lucy Waring's sons were like his own old self, and sturdier, handsomer young fellows into the bargain than Lady Emily Kelmscott's boy Granville, whom he had made into the heir of the Tilgate manors. The moor, where the Greys were quartered that summer, was as dull as ditch-water. No society, no dances, no hunting, no sport; what wonder a man of his tastes, spoiling for want of a drawing-room to conquer, should have kept his hand in with pretty Lucy Waring?

But he married her—he married her. He did her no wrong in the end. He hadn't that sin at least to lay to his conscience.

Ah, well, poor Lucy! he had really been fond of her; as fond as a Kelmscott of Tilgate could reasonably be expected ever to prove towards the daughter of a simple Dartmoor farmer. It began in flirtation, of course, as such things will begin; and it ended, as they will end, too, in love, at least on poor Lucy's side, for what can you expect from a Kelmscott of Tilgate? And, indeed,

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indeed, he said to himself earnestly, he meant her no harm, though he seemed at times to be cruel to her. As soon as he gathered how deeply she was entangled—how seriously she took it all—how much she was in love with him—he tried hard to break it off, he tried hard to put matters to her in their proper light; he tried to show her that an officer and a gentleman, a Kelmscott of Tilgate, could never really have dreamed of marrying the half-educated, half-peasant daughter of a Devonshire farmer. Though, to be sure, she was a lady in her way, too, poor Lucy; as much of a lady in manner and in heart as Emily herself, whose father was an earl, and whose mother was a marquis's eldest daughter.

So much a lady in her way, in deed, in thought, and all that—one of nature's gentlewomen—that when Lucy cried and broke her heart at his halting explanations, he was unmanned by her sobs, and did a thing no Kelmscott of Tilgate should ever have stooped to do—yes, promised to marry her. Of course, he didn't attempt in his own heart to justify that initial folly, as he thought it, to himself. He didn't pretend to condone it. He only allowed he had acted like a fool. A Kelmscott of Tilgate should have drawn back long before, or else, having gone so far, should have told the girl plainly—at whatever cost, to her—he could go no further and have no more to say to her.

To be sure, that would have killed the poor thing outright. But a Kelmscott, you know, should respect

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his order, and shouldn't shrink for a moment from these trifling sacrifices!

However, his own heart was better, in those days, than his class philosophy. He couldn't trample on poor Lucy Waring. So he made a fool of himself in the end—and married Lucy. Ah, well! ah, well! every man makes a fool of himself once or twice in his life; and though the Colonel was ashamed now of having so far bemeaned his order as to marry the girl, why, if the truth must out, he would have been more ashamed still, in his heart of hearts, even then, if he hadn't married her. He was better than his creed. He could never have crushed her.

Married her, yes; but not publicly, of course. At least, he respected public decency. He married her under his own name, to be sure, but by special licence, and at a remote little village on the far side of the moor, where nobody knew either himself or Lucy. In those days, he hadn't yet come into possession of the Tilgate estates; and if his father had known of it—well, the Admiral was such a despotic old man that he'd have insisted on his son's selling out at once, and going off to Australia or heaven knows where, on a journey round the world, and breaking poor Lucy's heart by his absence. Partly for her sake, the Colonel said to himself now in the silent night, and partly for his own, he had concealed the marriage—for the time being—from the Admiral.

And then came that horrible embroilment—oh, how

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well he remembered it. Ah me, ah me, it seemed but yesterday—when his father insisted he was to marry Lady Emily Croke, Lord Aldeburgh's daughter; and he dared not marry her, of course, having a wife already, and he dared not tell his father, on the other hand, why he couldn't marry her. It was a hateful time. He shrank from recalling it. He was keeping Lucy, then his own wedded wife, as Mrs. Waring, in small rooms in Plymouth; and yet he was running up to town now and again, on leave, as the gay young bachelor, the heir of Tilgate Park—and meeting Emily Croke at every party he went to in London—and braving the Admiral's wrath by refusing to propose to her. What he would ever have done if Lucy had lived, he couldn't imagine. But, there! Lucy *didn't* live; so he was saved that bother. Poor child, it brought tears to his eyes even now to think of her. He brushed them furtively away, lest he should waken Lady Emily.

And yet it was a shock to him, the night Lucy died. Just then, he could hardly realize how lucky was the accident. He sat there by her side, the day the twins were born, to see her safely through her trouble; for he had always done his duty, after a fashion, by Lucy. When a girl of that class marries a gentleman, don't you see, and consents, too, mind you, to marry him privately, she can't expect to share much of her husband's company. She can't expect he should stultify himself by acknowledging her publicly before his own class. And, indeed, he always meant to acknowledge

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her in the end—after his father's death, when there was no fear of the Admiral's cutting off his allowance.

But how curiously events often turn out of themselves. The twins were born on a Friday morning, and by the Saturday night, poor Lucy was lying dead, a pale, sweet corpse, in her own little room, near the Hoe, at Plymouth. It was a happy release for him though he really loved her. But still, when a man's fool enough to love a girl below his own station in life—the Colonel paused and broke off. It was twenty-seven years ago now, yet he really loved her. He couldn't find it in his heart even then to indorse to the full the common philosophy of his own order.

So there he was left with the two boys on his hands, but free, if he liked, to marry Lady Emily. No reason on earth, of course, why he shouldn't marry her now. So, naturally, he married her—after a fortnight's interval. The Admiral was all smiles and paternal blessings at this sudden change of front on his son's part. Why the dickens Harry hadn't wanted to marry the girl before, to be sure he couldn't conceive; hankering after some missy in the country, he supposed, that silly rot about what they call love, no doubt; but now that Harry had come to his senses at last, and taken the Earl's lass, why, the Admiral was indulgence and munificence itself; the young people should have an ample allowance, and my daughter-in-law, Lady Emily, should live on the best that Tilgate and Chetwood could possibly afford her.

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What would you have? the Colonel asked piteously, in the dead of night, of his own conscience. How else could he have acted? He said nothing. That was all, mind you, he declared to himself more than once in his own soul. He told no lies. He made no complications. While the Admiral lived, he brought up Lucy's sons, quite privately, at Plymouth. And as soon as ever the Admiral died, he really and truly meant to acknowledge them.

But fathers never die—in entailed estates. The Admiral lived so long—quite, quite too long for Guy and Cyril. Granville was born, and grew to be a big boy, and was treated by everybody as the heir to Tilgate. And now the Colonel's difficulties gathered thicker around him. At last, in the fulness of time, the Admiral died, and slept with his fathers, whose Elizabethan ruffs were the honour and glory of the chancel at Tilgate; and then the day of reckoning was fairly upon him. How well he remembered that awful hour. He couldn't, he couldn't. He knew it was his duty to acknowledge his rightful sons and heirs, but he hadn't the courage. Things had all altered so much.

Meanwhile, Guy and Cyril had gone to Charterhouse as nobody's wards, and been brought up in the expectation of earning their own livelihood, so no wrong, he said casuistically, had been done to *them*, at any rate. And Granville had been brought up as the heir of Tilgate. Lady Emily naturally expected her son to

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succeed his father. He had gone too far to turn back at last. And yet—

And yet, in his own heart, disguise it as he might, he knew he was keeping his lawful sons out of their own in the end, and it was his duty to acknowledge them as the heirs of Tilgate.

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CHAPTER XI.

A FAMILY JAR.

HOUR after hour the unhappy man lay still as death on his bed and reasoned in vain with his accusing conscience. To be sure, he said to himself, no man was bound by the law of England to name his heir. It is for the eldest son himself to come forward and make his claim. If Guy and Cyril could prove their title to the Tilgate estates when he himself was dead, that was their private business. He wasn't bound to do anything special to make the way easy for them beforehand.

But still, when he saw them, his heart arose and smote him. His very class prejudices fought hard on their behalf. These men were gentlemen, the eldest sons of a Kelmscott of Tilgate—true Kelmscotts to the core—handsome, courtly, erect of bearing. Guy was the very image of the Kelmscott of Tilgate Park who bled for King Charles at Marston Moor; Cyril had the exact mien of Sir Rupert Kelmscott, Knight of Chetwood, the ablest of their race, whose portrait, by Kneller, hung in the great hall between his father, the Admiral, and his uncle, Sir Frederick. They had all

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the qualities the Colonel himself associated with the Kelmscott name. They were strong, brave, vigorous, able to hold their own against all comers. To leave them out in the cold was not only wrong—it was also, he felt in his heart of hearts, a treason to his order.

At last, after long watching, he fell asleep. But he slept uneasily. When he woke, it was with a start. He found himself murmuring to himself in his troubled sleep, "Break the entail, and settle a sum on the two that will quiet them."

It was the only way left to prevent public scandal, and to save Lady Emily and his son Granville from a painful disclosure: while, at the same time, it would to some extent satisfy the claims of his conscience.

Compromise, compromise; there's nothing like compromise. Colonel Kelmscott had always had by temperament a truly British love of compromise.

To carry out his plan, indeed, it would be necessary to break the entail twice; once formally, and once again really. He must begin by getting Granville's consent to the proposed arrangement, so as to raise ready money with which to bribe the young men; and as soon as Granville's consent was obtained, he must put it plainly to Guy and Cyril, as an anonymous benefactor, that if they would consent to accept a fixed sum in lieu of all contingencies, then the secret of their birth would be revealed to them at last, and they would be asked to break the entail on the estates as eldest sons of a gentleman of property.

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It was a hard bargain; a very hard bargain; but then these boys would jump at it, no doubt; expecting nothing as they did, they'd certainly jump at it. It's a great point, you see, to come in suddenly, when you expect nothing, to a nice lump sum of five or six thousand!

So much so, indeed, that the real difficulty, he thought, would rather lie in approaching Granville.

After breakfast that morning, however, he tapped his son on the shoulder as he was leaving the table, and said to him, in his distinctly business tone, "Granville, will you step with me into the library for ten minutes' talk? There's a small matter of the estate I desire to discuss with you."

Granville looked back at him with a curiously amused air.

"Why, yes," he said shortly. "It's a very odd coincidence. But do you know, I was going this morning myself to ask for a chance of ten minutes' talk with you."

He rose, and followed his father into the oak-panelled library. The Colonel sat down on one of the uncomfortable library chairs, especially designed, with their knobs and excrescences, to prevent the bare possibility of serious study. Granville took a seat opposite him, across the formal oak table. Colonel Kelmscott paused, and cleared his throat nervously. Then, with military promptitude, he darted straight into the very thick of the fray.

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"Granville," he said abruptly, "I want to speak with you about a rather big affair. The fact of it is, I'm going to break the entail. I want to raise some money."

The son gave a little start of surprise and amusement. "Why, this is very odd," he exclaimed once more, in an astonished tone. "That's just the precise thing I wanted to talk about with you."

Colonel Kelmscott eyed him with an answering start.

"Not debts!" he said slowly. "My boy, my boy, this is bad. Not debts surely, Granville; I never suspected it."

"Oh, dear no," Granville answered frankly. "No debts, you may be sure. But I wanted to feel myself on a satisfactory basis—as to income and so forth: and I was prepared to pay for my freedom well. To tell you the truth outright, I want to marry."

Colonel Kelmscott eyed him close with a very puzzled look. "Not Elma Clifford, my boy," he said again quickly. "For of course, if it is her, Granville, I need hardly say——"

The young man cut him short with a hasty little laugh. "Elma Clifford," he repeated, with some scorn in his musical voice, "Oh, dear no, not *her*. If it had been her you may be sure there'd be no reason of any sort for breaking the entail. But the fact is this: I dislike allowances one way or the other. I want to feel once for all I'm my own master. I want to marry —not this girl or that, but whom ever I will. I don't

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care to come to you with my hat in my hand, asking how much you'll be kind enough to allow me if I venture to take Miss So-and-so or Miss What-you-may-call-it. And as I know you want money yourself for this new wing you're thinking of, why, I'm prepared to break the entail at once, and sell whatever building land you think right and proper."

The father held his breath. What on earth could this mean? "And who is the girl, Granville?" he asked, with unconcealed interest.

"You won't care to hear," his son answered carelessly.

Colonel Kelmscott looked across at him with a very red face. "Not some girl who'll bring disgrace upon your mother, I hope?" he said, with a half-pang of remorse, remembering Lucy. "Not some young woman beneath your own station in life. For to that, you may be sure, I'll never consent under any circumstances."

Granville drew himself up proudly, with a haughty smile. He was a Kelmscott, too, as arrogant as the best of them.

"No, that's not the difficulty," he answered, looking rather amused than annoyed or frightened. "My tastes are *not* low. I hope I know better than to disgrace my family. The lady I want to marry, and for whose sake I wish you to make some arrangement beforehand is—don't be surprised—well, Gwendoline Gildersleeve."

"Gwendoline Gildersleeve," his father echoed, astonished; for there was feud between the families.

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"That rascally, land-grabbing barrister's daughter! Why, how on earth do you come to know anything of her, Granville? Nobody in Surrey ever had the impertinence yet to ask me or mine to meet the Gildersleeves anywhere, since that disgraceful behaviour of his about the boundary fences. And I didn't suppose you'd ever even seen her."

"Nobody in Surrey ever did ask me to meet her," Granville answered somewhat curtly. "But you can't expect every one in London society to keep watch over the quarrels of every country parish in provincial England! It wouldn't be reasonable. I met Gwendoline, if you want to know, at the Bertrams', in Berkeley Square, and she and I got on so well together that we've—well, we've met from time to time in the Park, since our return from town, and we think by this time we may consider ourselves informally engaged to one another."

Colonel Kelmscott gazed at his son in a perfect access of indignant amazement. Gilbert Gildersleeve's daughter! That rascally Q.C.'s! At any other moment such a proposal would have driven him forthwith into open hostilities. If Granville chose to marry a girl like that, why, Granville might have lived on what his father would allow him.

Just now, however, with this keen fit of remorse quite fresh upon his soul about poor Lucy's sons, Colonel Kelmscott was almost disposed to accept the opening thus laid before him by Granville's proposal,

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So he temporized for awhile, nursing his chin with his hand, and then, after much discussion, yielded at last a conditional consent—conditional upon their mutual agreement as to the terms on which the entail was to be finally broken.

"And what sort of arrangement do you propose I should make for your personal maintenance, and this Gildersleeve girl's household?" the Colonel asked at length, with a very red face, descending to details.

His son, without appearing to notice the implied slight to Gwendoline, named the terms that he thought would satisfy him.

"That's a very stiff sum," the master of Tilgate retorted; "but perhaps I could manage it; per—haps I could manage it. We must sell the Dowlands farm at once, that's certain, and I must take the twelve thousand or so the land will fetch for my own use, absolutely and without restriction."

"To build the new wing with?" the son put in, with a gesture of assent.

"To build the new wing with? Why, certainly not," his father answered angrily. "Am I to bargain with my son what use I'm to make of my own property? Mark my words, I won't submit to interference. To do precisely as I choose with, sir. To roll in if I like! To fling into the sea, if the fancy takes me!"

Granville Kelmscott stared hard at him. Twelve thousand pounds! What on earth could his father mean by this whim? he wondered. "Twelve thousand

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pounds is a very big sum to fling away from the estate without a question asked," he retorted, growing hot "It seems to me, you too closely resemble our ancestors who came over from Holland. In matters of business, you know, the fault of the Dutch is giving too little and asking too much."

His father glared at him. That's the worst of this huckstering and higgling with your own flesh and blood. You have to put up with such intolerable insults. Bnt he controlled himself, and continued. The longer he talked, however, the hotter and angrier he became by degrees. And what made him the hottest and angriest of all was the knowledge meanwhile that he was doing it every bit for Granville's own sake; nay, more, that consideration for Granville alone had brought him originally into this peck of trouble.

At last he could contain himself with indignation no longer. His temper broke down. He flared up and out with it. "Take care what you do!" he cried. "Take care what you say, Granville! I'm not going to be bearded with impunity in my den. If you press me too hard, remember, I'll ruin all. I can cut you off with a shilling, sir, if I choose—cut you off with a shilling. Yes, and do justice to others I've wronged for your sake. Don't provoke me too far, I say. If you do, you'll repent it."

"Cut me off with a shilling, sir!" his son answered angrily, rising and staring hard at him. "Why, what

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do you mean by that? You know you can't do it. My interest in the estate's as good as your own. I'm the eldest son——"

He broke off suddenly; for at those fatal words, Colonel Kelmscott's face, fiery red till then, grew instantly blanched and white with terror. "Oh, what have I done?" the unhappy man cried, seeing his son's eyes read some glimpse of the truth too clearly in his look. "Oh, what have I said? Forget it, Granny, forget it! I didn't mean to go so far as I did in my anger. I was a fool—a fool! I gave way too much. For Heaven's sake, my boy, forget it, forget it!"

The young man looked across at him with a dazed and puzzled look, yet very full of meaning. "I shall never forget it," he said slowly. "I shall learn what it means. I don't know how things stand; but I see you meant it. Do as you like about the entail. It's no business of mine. Take your pound of flesh, your twelve thousand down, and pay your hush-money! I don't know whom you bribe, and I have nothing to say to it. I never dragged the honour of the Kelmscotts in the dust. I won't drag it now. I wash my hands clean from it. I ask no questions. I demand no explanations. I only say this. Until I know what you mean—know whether I'm lawful heir to Tilgate Park or not, I won't marry the girl I meant to marry. I have too much regard for her, and for the honour of our house, to take her on what may prove to be false expectations. Break the entail, I say! Raise your

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twelve thousand. Pay off your bloodhounds. But never expect me to touch a penny of your money, henceforth and for ever, till I know whether it was yours and mine at all to deal with."

Colonel Kelmscott bent down his proud head meekly. "As you will, Granville," he answered, quite broken with remorse, and silenced by shame. "My boy, my boy, I only wanted to save you!"

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CHAPTER XII.

IN SILENCE AND TEARS.

WHEN he had time to think, Colonel Kelmscott determined in his own mind that he would still do his best to save Granville, whether Granville himself wished it or otherwise. So he proceeded to take all the necessary steps for breaking the entail and raising the money he needed for Guy and Cyril.

In all this, Granville neither acquiesced nor dissented. He signed mechanically whatever documents his father presented to him, and he stood by his bargain with a certain sullen, undeviating, hard-featured loyalty; but he never forgot those few angry words in which his father had half let out his long-guarded life secret.

Thinking the matter over continually with himself, however, he came in the end to the natural conclusion that one explanation alone would fit all the facts. He was not his father's eldest son at all. Colonel Kelmscott must have been married to some one else before his marriage with Lady Emily. That some one else's son was the real heir of Tilgate. And it was to him that his father, in his passionate penitence, proposed, after many years, to do one-sided justice. Now Gran-

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ville Kelmscott, though a haughty and somewhat headstrong fellow, after the fashion of his race, was a young man of principle and of honour. The moment this hideous doubt occurred to his mind, he couldn't rest in his bed till he had cleared it all up and settled it for ever, one way or the other. If Tilgate wasn't his, by law and right, he wanted none of it. If his father was trying to buy off the real heir to the estate with a pitiful pittance, in order to preserve the ill-gotten remainder for Lady Emily's son, why, Granville for his part would be no active party to such a miserable compromise. If some other man was the Colonel's lawful heir, let that other man take the property and enjoy it; but he, Granville Kelmscott, would go forth upon the world, an honest adventurer, to seek his fortune with his own right hand wherever he might find it.

Still, he could take no active step, on the other hand, to hunt up the truth about the Colonel's real or supposed first marriage. For here an awful dilemma blocked the way before him. If the Colonel had married before, and if by that former marriage he had a son or sons—how could Granville be sure the supposed first wife was dead before the second was married? And supposing, for a moment, she was not dead—supposing his father had been even more criminal and more unjust than he at first imagined—how could he take the initiative himself in showing that his own mother, Lady Emily Kelmscott, was no wife at all in the sight of the law? that some other woman was his

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father's lawful consort? The bare possibility of such an issue was too horrible for any son on earth to face undismayed. So, tortured and distracted by his divided duty, Granville Kelmscott shrank alike from action or inaction.

In the midst of such doubts and difficulties, however, one duty shone out clear as day before him. Till the mystery was cleared up, till the problem was solved, he must see no more of Gwendoline Gildersleeve. He had engaged himself to her as the heir of Tilgate. She had accepted him under that guise, and looked forward to an early and happy marriage. Now, all was changed. He was, or might be, a beggar and an outcast. To be sure, he knew Gwendoline loved him for himself; but how could he marry her if he didn't even know he had anything of his own in the world to marry upon? The park and fallow deer had been a part of himself; without them, he felt he was hardly even a Kelmscott. It was his plain duty, now, for Gwendoline's sake, to release her from her promise to a man who might perhaps be penniless, and who couldn't even feel sure he was the lawful son of his own father. And yet—for Lady Emily's sake—he mustn't hint, even to Gwendoline, the real reason which moved him to offer her this release. He must throw himself upon her mercy, without cause assigned, and ask her for the time being to have faith in him and to believe him.

So, a day or two after the interview with his father in the library, the self-disinherited heir of Tilgate took

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the path through the glade that led into the dell beyond the boundary fence—that dell which had once been accounted a component part of Tilgate Park, but which Gilbert Gildersleeve had proved, in his cold-blooded documentary legal way, to belong in reality to the grounds of Woodlands. It was in the dell that Granville sometimes ran up against Gwendoline. He sat down on the broken ledge of ironstone that overhung the little brook. It was eleven o'clock gone. By eleven o'clock, three mornings in the week, chance—pure chance—the patron god of lovers, brought Gwendoline into the dell to meet him.

Presently, a light footfall rang soft upon the path, and next moment a tall and beautiful girl, with a wealth of auburn hair, and a bright colour in her cheeks, tripped lightly down the slope, as if strolling through the wood in maiden meditation, fancy free, unexpecting any one.

"What, you here, Mr. Kelmscott?" she exclaimed, as she saw him, her pink cheek deepening as she spoke to a still profounder crimson.

"Yes, I'm here, Gwendoline," Granville Kelmscott answered, with a smile of recognition at her maidenly pretence of an undesigned coincidence. "And I'm here, to say the truth, because I quite expected this morning to meet you."

He took her hand gravely. Gwendoline let her eyes fall modestly on the ground, as if some warmer greeting were more often bestowed between them. The young

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man blushed with a certain manly shame. "No, not to-day, dear," he said, with an effort, as she held her cheek aside, half courting and half deprecating the expected kiss. "Oh, Gwendoline, I don't know how to begin. I don't know how to say it. But I've got very sad news for you—news that I can't bear to break—that I can't venture to explain—that I don't even properly understand myself. I must throw myself upon your faith. I must just ask you to trust me."

Gwendoline let him seat her, unresisting, upon the ledge by his side, and her cheek grew suddenly ashy pale, as she answered with a gasp, forgetting the "Mr. Kelmscott" at this sudden leap into the stern realities of life, "Why, Granville, what do you mean? You know I can trust you. You know, whatever it may be, I believe you implicitly."

The young man took her hand in his with a tender pressure. It was a terrible message to have to deliver. He bungled and blundered on, with many twists and turns, through some inarticulate attempt at an indefinite explanation. It wasn't that he didn't love her—oh, devotedly, eternally, she must know that well; she never could doubt it. It wasn't that any shadow had arisen between him and her, it wasn't anything he could speak about, or anything she must say to any soul on earth—oh, for his mother's sake, he hoped and trusted she would religiously keep his secret inviolate! But something had happened to him within the last few days — something unspeakable, indefinite,

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uncertain, vague, yet very full of the most dreadful possibilities; something that might make him unable to support a wife; something that at least must delay or postpone for an unknown time the long-hoped-for prospect of his claiming her and marrying her. Some day, perhaps—he broke off suddenly, and looked with a wistful look into her deep grey eyes. His resolution failed him. "One kiss," he said, "Gwendoline!" His voice was choking. The beautiful girl, turning towards him with a wild sob, fell, yielding herself on his breast, and cried hot tears of joy at that evident sign that, in spite of all he said, he still really loved her.

They sat there long, hand in hand, and eye on eye, talking it all over, as lovers will, with infinite delays, yet getting no nearer towards a solution either way. Gwendoline, for her part, didn't care, of course—what true woman does?—whether Granville was the heir of Tilgate or not; she would marry him all the more, she said, if he were a penniless nobody. All she wanted was to love him and be near him. Let him marry her now, marry her to-day, and then go where he would in the world to seek his livelihood. But Granville, poor fellow, alarmed at the bare suggestion—for his mother's sake—that Tilgate might really not be his, checked her at once in her outburst with a grave, silent look; he was still, he said calmly, the inheritor of Tilgate. It wasn't that. At least, not as she took it. He didn't know precisely what it was himself. She must have faith in him and trust him. She must wait and see.

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In the end, he hoped, he would come back and marry her.

And Gwendoline made answer, with many tears, that she knew it was so, and that she loved him and trusted him. So, after sitting there long, hand locked in hand, and heart intent on heart, the two young people rose at last to go, protesting and vowing their mutual love on either side, as happy and as miserable in their divided lives as two young people in all England that moment. Over and over again they kissed and said good-bye; then they stood with one another's fingers clasped hard in their own, unwilling to part, and unable to loose them. After that, they kissed again, and declared once more they were broken-hearted, and could never leave one another. But still, Granville added, half aside, he must make up his mind not to see Gwendoline again—honour demanded that sacrifice—till he could come at last a rich man to claim her. Meanwhile, she was free; and he—he was ever hers, devotedly, whole-souledly. But they were no longer engaged. He was hers in heart only. Let her try to forget him. He could never forget her.

And Gwendoline, sobbing and tearful, but believing him implicitly, retreated with slow steps, looking back at each turn of the zigzag path, and sending the ghosts of dead kisses from her finger-tips to greet him.

Below in the dell Granville stood still, and watched her depart in breathless silence. Then, in an agony of despair, he flung himself down on the ground and burst

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into tears, and sobbed like a child over his broken daydream.

Gwendoline, coming back to make sure, saw him lying and sobbing so; and, woman-like, felt compelled to step down just one minute to comfort him. Granville in turn refused her proffered comfort—it was better so—he mustn't listen to her any more; he must steel himself to say No; he must remember it was dishonourable of him to drag a delicately nurtured girl into a penniless marriage. Then they kissed once more and made it all up again; and they sobbed and wept as before, and broke it off for ever; and they said good-bye for the very last time; and they decided they must never meet till Granville came back; and they hoped they would sometimes catch just a glimpse of one another in the outer world, and whatever the other one said or did, they would each in their hearts be always true to their first great love; and they were more miserable still, and they were happier than they had ever been in their lives before; and they parted at last, with a desperate effort, each perfectly sure of the other's love, and each vowing in soul they would never, never see one another again, but each, for all that, perfectly certain that some day or other they would be husband and wife, though Tilgate and the wretched little fallow deer should sink, unwept, to the bottom of the ocean.

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CHAPTER XIII.

BUSINESS FIRST.

THE manager at Messrs. Drummond, Coutts and Barclay's, Limited, received Colonel Kelmscott with distinguished consideration. A courteous, conciliatory sort of man, that manager, with his close-shaven face and his spotless shirt-front.

"Five minutes, my dear sir?" he exclaimed, with warmth, motioning his visitor blandly into the leather-covered chair. "Half an hour, if you wish it. We always have leisure to receive our clients. Any service we can render them, we're only too happy."

"But this is a very peculiar bit of business," Colonel Kelmscott answered, humming and hawing with obvious hesitation. "It isn't quite in the regular way of banking, I believe. Perhaps, indeed, I ought rather to have put it into the hands of my solicitor. But, even if you can't manage the thing yourself, you may be able to put me in the way of finding out how best I can get it managed elsewhere."

The manager bowed. His smile was a smile of genuine satisfaction. Colonel Kelmscott of Tilgate was

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in a most gracious humour. The manager, with deference, held himself wholly at his client's disposition.

So the Colonel proceeded to unfold his business. There were two young men, now knocking about town, of the names of Guy and Cyril Waring—the one a journalist, the other a painter—and they had rooms in Staple Inn, Holborn, which would doubtless form a sufficient clue by which to identify them. Colonel Kelmscott desired unobtrusively to know where these young men banked—if indeed they were in a position to keep an account; and when that was found out, he wished Messrs. Drummond, Coutts and Barclay, Limited, to place a sum of money at their bankers to their credit, without mentioning the name of the person so placing it, as well as to transmit to them a sealed envelope, containing instructions as to the use to be made of the money in question.

The manager nodded a cautious acquiescence. To place the money to the credit of the two young men, indeed, would be quite in their way. But to send the sealed envelope, without being aware of its contents, or the nature of the business on which it was despatched, would be much less regular. Perhaps the Colonel might find some other means of managing without their aid that portion of the business arrangement.

The Colonel, for his part, fell in readily enough with this modest point of view. It amply sufficed for him if the money were paid to the young men's credit, and

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a receipt forwarded to him in due course, under cover of a number, to the care of the bankers.

"Very well," the manager answered, rubbing his hands contentedly. "Our confidential clerk will settle all that for you. A most sagacious person, our confidential clerk. No eyes, no ears, no tongue for anything but our clients' interests."

The Colonel smiled, and sat a little longer, giving further details as the precise amount he wished sent, and the particular way he wished to send it—the whole sum to be, in fact, twelve thousand pounds, amount of the purchase money of the Dowlands farms, whereof only six thousand had as yet been paid down; and that six thousand he wished to place forthwith to the credit of Cyril Waring, the painter. The remaining six thousand, to be settled, as agreed, in five weeks' time, he would then make over under the self-same conditions to the other brother, Guy Waring, the journalist. It had gone a trifle too cheap, that land at Dowlands, the Colonel opined; but still, in days like these he was very glad, indeed, to find a purchaser for the place at anything like its value.

"I think a Miss Ewes was the fortunate bidder, wasn't she?" the manager asked, just to make a certain decent show of interest in his client's estate.

"Yes, Miss Elma Ewes of Kenilworth," the Colonel answered, letting loose for a moment his tongue, that unruly member. "She's the composer, you know—writes songs and dances; remotely connected with

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Reginald Clifford, the man who was Governor of some West Indian Dutch-oven—St. Kitts, I think, or Antigua—he lives down our way, and he's a neighbour of mine at Tilgate. Or rather she's connected with Mrs. Clifford, the Governor's wife, who was one of the younger branch, a Miss Ewes of Worthing, daughter of the Ewes who was Dean of Dorchester. Elma's been a family name for years with all the lot of Eweses, good, bad, or indifferent. Came down to them, don't you know, from that Roumanian ancestress."

"Indeed," the manager answered, now beginning to be really interested—for the Cliffords were clients too, and it behoves a banker to know everything about everybody's business. "So Mrs. Clifford had an ancestress who was a Roumanian, had she? Well, I've noticed at times her complexion looked very southern and gipsy-like—distinctly un-English."

"Oh, they call it Roumanian," Colonel Kelmscott went on in a confidential tone, roping his white moustache, and growing more and more conversational; "they call it Roumanian, because it sounds more respectable; but I believe, if you go right down to the very bottom of the thing, it was much more like some kind of Oriental gipsy. Sir Michael Ewes, the founder of the house, in George the Second's time, was ambassador for awhile at Constantinople. He began life, indeed, I believe, as a Turkey merchant. Well, at Pera one day, so the story goes—you'll find it all in Horace Walpole's diary—he picked up with this dark-

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skinned gipsy-woman, who was a wonderful creature in her way, a sort of mesmeric sorceress, who belonged to some tribe of far eastern serpent charmers. It seems that women of this particular tribe were regularly trained by the men to be capering priestesses—or fortune-tellers, if you like—who performed some extraordinary sacred antics of a mystical kind, much after the fashion of the howling dervishes. However that may be, Sir Michael, at any rate, pacing the streets of Pera, saw the woman that she was passing fair, and fell in love with her outright at some dervish entertainment. But being a very well-behaved old man, combining a liking for Orientals with a British taste for the highest respectability, he had the girl baptized and made into a proper Christian first; and then he married her offhand and brought her home with him as my Lady Ewes to England. She was presented at Court, to George the Second; and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu stood her sponsor on the occasion."

"But how did it all turn out?" the manager asked, with an air of intelligent historical interest.

"Turn out? Well, it turned out in a thumping big family of thirteen children," the Colonel answered; "most of whom, happily for the father, died young. But the five who survived, and who married at last into very good connections, all had one peculiarity, which they transmitted to all their female descendants. Very odd these hereditary traits, to be sure. Very singular! Very singular!"

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"Ah, to be sure," the manager answered, turning over a pile of letters. "And what was the hereditary trait handed down, as you say, in the family of the Roumanian lady?"

"Why, in the first place," the Colonel continued, leaning back in his chair, and making himself perfectly comfortable, "all the girls of the Ewes connection, to the third and fourth generation, have olive-brown complexions, creamy and soft, but clear as crystal. Then again, they've all got most extraordinary intuition—a perfectly marvellous gift of reading faces. By George, sir," the Colonel exclaimed, growing hot and red at the memory of that afternoon on the Holkers' lawn, "I don't like to see those women's eyes fixed upon my cheek when there's anything going on I don't want them to know. A man's transparent like glass before them. They see into his very soul. They look right through him."

"If the lady who founded the family habits was a fortune-teller," the manager interposed, with a scientific air, "that's not so remarkable; for fortune-tellers must always be quick-witted people, keen to perceive the changes of countenance in the dupes who employ them, and prompt at humouring all the fads and fancies of their customers, mustn't they?"

"Quite so," the Colonel echoed. "You've hit it on the nail. And this particular lady—Esmeralda they call her, so that Elma, which is short for Esmeralda, understand, has come to be the regular Christian name

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among all her women descendants—this particular lady belonged to what you might call a caste or priestly family, as it were, of hereditary fortune-tellers, every one of whose ancestors had been specially selected for generations for the work, till a kind of transmissible mesmeric habit got developed among them. And they do say," the Colonel went on, lowering his voice a little more to a confidential whisper, "that all the girls descended from Madame Esmeralda—Lady Ewes of Charlwood, as she was in England—retain to this day another still odder and uncannier mark of their peculiar origin; but, of course, it's a story that would be hard to substantiate, though I've heard it discussed more than once among the friends of the family."

"Dear me! What's that?" the manager asked, in a tone of marked curiosity.

"Why, they do say," the Colonel went on, now fairly launched upon a piece of after-dinner gossip, "that the eastern snake-dance of Madame Esmeralda's people is hereditary even still among the women of the family, and that, sooner or later, it breaks out unexpectedly in every one of them. When the fit comes on, they shut themselves up in their own rooms, I've been told, and twirl round and round for hours like dancing dervishes, with anything they can get in their hands to represent a serpent, till they fall exhausted with the hysterical effort. Even if a woman of Esmeralda's blood escapes it at all other times, it's sure to break out when she first sees a real live snake, or falls in love for the first time.

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Then the dormant instincts of the race come over her with a rush, at the very dawn of womanhood, all quickened and aroused, as it were, in the general awakening."

"That's very curious!" the manager said, leaning back in his chair in turn, and twirling his thumbs, "very curious indeed; and yet, in its way, very probable, very probable. For habits like those must set themselves deep in the very core of the system, don't you think, Colonel? If this woman, now, was descended from a whole line of ancestresses, who had all been trained for their work into a sort of ecstatic fervour, the ecstasy and all that went with it must have got so deeply ingrained——"

"I beg your pardon," the Colonel interrupted, consulting his watch and seizing his hat hastily—for as a Kelmscott, he refused point-blank to be lectured—"I've an appointment at my club at half-past three, and I must not wait any longer. Well, you'll get these young men's address for me, then, at the very earliest possible opportunity?"

The manager pocketed the snub, and bowed his farewell. "Oh, certainly," he answered, trying to look as pleased and gracious as his features would permit. "Our confidential clerk will hunt them up immediately. We're delighted to be of use to you. Good morning. Good morning."

And as soon as the Colonel's back was turned, the manager rang twice on his sharp little bell for the confidential clerk to receive his orders.

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Mr. Montague Nevitt immediately presented himself in answer to the summons.

"Mr. Nevitt," the manager said, with a dry, small cough, "here's a bit of business of the most domestic kind—strict seal of secrecy, not a word on any account. Colonel Kelmscott of Tilgate wants to know where two young men, named Guy and Cyril Waring, keep their banking account, if any; and, as soon as he knows, he wishes to pay in a substantial sum, quite privately, to their credit."

Mr. Montague Nevitt bowed a bow of assent, without the faintest sign of passing recognition. "Guy and Cyril Waring," he repeated to himself, looking close at the scrap of paper his chief had handed him; "Guy and Cyril Waring, Staple Inn, Holborn. I can find out to-day, sir, if you attach any special and pressing importance to promptitude in the matter."

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CHAPTER XIV.

MUSIC HATH POWER.

For Mr. Montague Nevitt was a cautious, cool, and calculating person. He knew better than most of us that knowledge is power. So when the manager mentioned to him casually in the way of business the names of Guy and Cyril Waring, Mr. Montague Nevitt didn't respond at once, "Oh, dear yes; one of them's my most intimate personal friend, and the other's his brother," as a man of less discretion might have been tempted to do. For, in the first place, by finding out, or seeming to find out, the facts about the Warings that very afternoon, he could increase his character with his employers for zeal and ability. And, in the second place, if he had let out too soon that he knew the Warings personally, he might most likely on that very account have been no further employed in carrying into execution this delicate little piece of family business.

So Nevitt held his peace discreetly, like a wise man that he was, and answered merely, in a most submissive voice, "I'll do my best to ascertain where they bank, at once," as if he had never before in his life heard the name of Waring.

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For the self-same reason, Mr. Montague Nevitt didn't hint that evening to Guy that he had become possessed during the course of the day of a secret of the first importance to Guy's fortune and future. Of course, a man so astute as Montague Nevitt jumped at once at the correct conclusion, that Colonel Kelmscott must be the two Warings' father. But he wasn't going to be fool enough to chuck his chance away by sharing that information with any second person. A secret is far too valuable a lever in life to be carelessly flung aside by a man of ambition. And Montague Nevitt saw this secret in particular was doubly valuable to him. He could use it, wedge-wise, with both the Warings in all his future dealings, by promising to reveal to one or other of them a matter of importance and probable money-value, and he could use it also as a perpetual threat to hold over Colonel Kelmscott, if ever it should be needful to extort blackmail from the possessor of Tilgate, or to thwart his schemes by some active interference.

So when Nevitt strolled round about nine o'clock that night to Staple Inn, violin-case in hand, and cigarette in mouth, he gave not a sign of the curious information he had that day acquired, to the person most interested in learning the truth as to the precise genealogy of the Waring family.

There was no great underlying community of interests between the clever young journalist and his banking companion. A common love for music was the main

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bond of union between the two men. Yet Montague Nevitt exercised over Guy a strange and fatal fascination which Cyril always found positively unaccountable. And on this particular evening, as Nevitt stood swaying himself to and fro upon the hearth-rug before the empty grate, with his eyes half closed, drawing low, weird music with his enchanted bow from those submissive strings, Guy leaned back on the sofa and listened, entranced, with a hopeless feeling of utter inability ever to approach the wizard-like and supreme execution of that masterly hand and those superhuman fingers. How he twisted and turned them as though his bones were india-rubber. His palms were all joints, and his eyes all ecstasy. He seemed able to do what he liked with his violin. He played on his instrument, indeed, as he played on Guy—with the consummate art of a skilful executant.

"That's marvellous, Nevitt," Guy broke out at last; "never heard even Sarasate himself do anything quite so wild and weird as that. What's the piece called? It seems to have something almost impish or sprite-like in its wailing music. It's Hungarian, of course, or Polish or Greek; I detect at once the Oriental tinge in it."

"Wrong for once, my dear boy," Nevitt answered, smiling, "it's English, pure English, and by a lady what's more—one of the Eweses of Kenilworth. She's a distant relation of Cyril's Miss Clifford, I believe. An Elma, too; name runs in the family. But she

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composes wonderfully. Everything she writes is in that mystic key. It sounds like a reminiscence of some dim and lamp-lit eastern temple. The sort of thing a nautch-girl might be supposed to compose, to sing to the clash and clang of cymbals, while she was performing the snake-dance before some Juggernaut idol!"

"Exactly," Guy answered, shutting his eyes dreamily. "That's just the very picture it brings up before my mind's eye—as you render it, Nevitt. I seem to see vague visions of some vast and dimly-lighted rock-hewn cavern, with long vistas of pillars cut from the solid stone, while dark-limbed priestesses, clad in white muslin robes, swing censers in the foreground to solemn music. Upon my word, the power of sound is something simply wonderful. There's almost nothing, I believe, good music wouldn't drive me to—or rather lead me to; for it sways one and guides even more than it impels one."

"And yet," Nevitt mused, in slow tones to himself, taking up his violin again, and drawing his bow over the chords, with half-closed eyes, in a seemingly listless, aimless manner, "I don't believe music's your real first love, Guy. You took it up only to be different from Cyril. The artistic impulse in both of you is the same at bottom. If you'd let it have it's own way, you'd have taken, not to this, I'm sure, but to painting. But Cyril painted, so, to make yourself different, you went in for music. That's you all over! You always have such a hankering after being what you are not!"

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"Well, hang it all, a man wants to have *some* individuality," Guy answered apologetically. "He doesn't like to be a mere copy or repetition of his brother."

Nevitt reflected quietly to himself that Cyril never wanted to be different from Guy, his was by far the stronger nature of the two: he was content to be himself without regard to his brother. But Nevitt didn't say so. Indeed, why should he? He merely went on playing a few disconnected bars of a very lively, hopeful utopian sort of a tune—a tune all youth and health, and go and gaiety—as he interjected from time to time some brief financial remarks on the numerous good strokes he'd pulled off of late in his transactions in the City.

"Can't do them in my own name, you know," he observed lightly, at last laying down his bow, and replacing the dainty white rose in his left top buttonhole. "Not official for a bank *employé* to operate on the Stock Exchange. The chiefs object to it. So I do my little ventures in Tom's name instead, my brother-in-law, Tom Whitley's. Those Cedulas went up another eighth yesterday. Well hit again: I'm always lucky. And that was a good thing I put you on last week, too, wasn't it? Did you sell out to-day? They're up at 96, and you bought in at 80."

"No, I didn't sell to-day," Guy answered, with a yawn. "I'm holding on still for a further rise. I thought I'd sell out when they reached the even hundred."

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"My dear fellow, you're wrong," Nevitt put in eagerly. "You ought to have sold to-day. It's the top of the market. They'll begin to decline soon, and when once they begin they'll come down with a crash, as P.L.'s did on Saturday. You take my advice and sell out first thing to-morrow morning. You'll clear sixteen pounds on each of your shares. That's enough for any man. You bought ten shares, I think, didn't you? Well, there you are, you see; a hundred and sixty off-hand for you on your bargain."

Guy paused and reflected a doubtful moment. "Yes, I'll sell out to-morrow, Nevitt," he said, after a struggle, "or what comes to the same thing, you can sell out for me. But, do you know, my dear fellow, I sometimes fancy I'm a fool for my pains, going in for all this silly speculation. Better stick to my guinea a column in the *Morning Mail*. The risks are so great, and the gains so small. I don't believe outsiders ought to back their luck at all like this on the Stock Exchange."

Montague Nevitt acquiesced with cheerful promptitude. "I agree with you down to the ground," he said, lighting a cigarette, and puffing away at it vigorously. "Outsiders ought not to back their luck on the Stock Exchange. That, I take it, is a self-evident proposition. But the point is, here, that you're not an outsider; and you don't back your luck, which alters the case, you'll admit, somewhat. You embark on speculations on my advice only, and I'm in a position to judge, as well as

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any other expert in the City of London, what things are genuine and what things are not worth a wise man's attention."

He stretched himself on the sofa with a lazy, luxurious air, and continued to puff away in silence at his cigarette for another ten minutes. Then he drew unostentatiously from his pocket a folded sheet of foolscap paper, printed after the fashion of the common company prospectus. For a second or two he read it over to himself in silence, till Guy's curiosity was sufficiently roused by his mute proceeding.

"What have you got there?" the journalist asked at last, eyeing it inquiringly, as the fly eyes the cobweb.

"Oh, nothing," Nevitt answered, folding the paper up neatly and returning it to his pocket. "You've sworn off now, so it does not concern you. Just the prospectus of a little fresh thing coming out next week —a very exceptional chance—but you don't want to go in for it. I mean to apply for three hundred shares myself, I'm so certain of its success; and I had thought of advising you to take a hundred and fifty on your own account as well, with that hundred and fifty you cleared over the Cordova Cattle bonds. They're ten-pound shares, at a merely nominal price—ten bob on application and ten on allotment—so you could take a hundred and fifty as easy as look at it. No further calls will ever be made. It's really a most remarkable investment."

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"Let me see the prospectus," Guy murmured, faltering, the fever of speculation once more getting the better of him.

Nevitt pretended to hang back like a man with fine scruples. "It's the Rio Negro Diamond and Sapphire Mine, Limited," he said, with a deprecatory air. "But you'd better not go in for it. I expect to make a pot out of the thing myself. It's a unique occasion. Still, no doubt you're right, and I don't like the responsibility of advising any other fellow. Though you can see for yourself what the promoters say. Very first-class names. And Klink thinks most highly of it."

He handed Guy the paper, and took up his violin as if by pure accident, while Guy scanned it closely.

The journalist bent over the prospectus with eager eyes, and Nevitt poured forth strange music as he read, music like the murmur of the stream of Pactolus. It was an inspiring strain; the violin seemed to possess the true Midas touch; gold flowed like water in liquid rills from its catgut. Guy finished, and rose, and dipped a pen in the ink-pot. "All right," he said low, half hesitating still. "I'll give you an order to sell out at once, and I'll fill up this application for three hundred shares—why not three hundred? I may as well go as many as you do. If it's really such a good thing as you say, why shouldn't I profit by it? Send this to Klink to-morrow early; strike while the iron's hot, and get the thing finished."

Nevitt looked at the paper with an attentive eye,

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"How curious it is," he said, regarding the signature narrowly, "that you and Cyril, who are so much alike in everything else, should write so differently. I should have expected your hands to be almost identical."

"Oh, don't you know why that is?" Guy answered, with an innocent smile. "I do it on purpose. Cyril writes sloping forward, the ordinary way, so I slope backward just to prevent confusion. And I form all my letters as unlike his as I can, though if I follow my own bent they turn out the same; his way is more natural to me, in fact, than the way I write myself. But I must do something to keep our letters apart. That's why we always bank at a different banker's. If I liked I could write exactly like Cyril. See, here's his own signature to his letter this morning, and here's my imitation of it, written off-hand, in my own natural manner. No forger on earth could ever need anything more absolutely identical."

Montague Nevitt took it up, and examined it with interest. "Well, this is wonderful," he said, comparing the two, stroke for stroke, with the practised eye of an expert. "The signatures are as if written by the self-same hand. Any cashier in England would accept your cheque at sight for Cyril's."

He didn't add aloud that such similarity was very convenient. But, none the less, in his own mind he thought so.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE PATH OF DUTY.

Down at Tilgate, meanwhile, Elma Clifford had met more than once with Cyril Waring at friends' houses around, for ever since the accident, Society had made up its mind that Elma ought to marry her companion in the tunnel; and, when Society once makes up its mind on a question of this sort, why, it does its level best in the long run to insure the fulfilment of its own prediction.

Wherever Elma had met her painter, however, during those few short weeks, she had seen him only before the quizzing eyes of all the world; and though she admitted to herself that she liked him very much, she was nevertheless so thoroughly frightened by her own performance after the Holkers' party that she almost avoided him, in spite of officious friends—partly, it is true, from a pure feeling of maidenly shame, but partly also from a deeper-seated and profoundly moral belief that with this fierce mad taint upon her as she naturally thought, it would be nothing short of wrong in her even to marry. She couldn't meet Cyril now without thinking at once of that irresistible impulse which had

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seized her by the throat, as it were, and bent her to its wild will in her own room after their interview at the Holkers'; and the thought did far more than bring a deep blush into her rich brown cheek—it made her feel most acutely she must never dream of burdening him with that terrible uncertainty and all it might enclose in it of sinister import.

For Elma felt sure she was mad that night. And, if so, oh, how could she poison Cyril Waring's life with so unspeakable an inheritance for himself and his children?

She didn't know, what any psychologist might at once have told her, that no one with the fatal taint of madness in her blood could ever even have thought of that righteous self-denial. Such scruples have no place in the selfish insane temperament; they belong only to the highest and purest types of moral nature.

One morning, however, a few weeks later, Elma had strolled off by herself into Chetwood Forest, without any intention of going anywhere in particular, save for a solitary walk, when suddenly, a turn round the corner of a devious path brought her face to face all at once with a piece of white canvas, stretched opposite her on an easel; at the other side of which, to her profound dismay, an artist in a grey tweed suit was busily working.

The artist, as it happened, didn't see her at once, for the canvas stretched between them, shutting her out from his eyes, and Elma's light footstep on the

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mossy ground hadn't aroused his attention. So the girl's first impulse was to retrace her way unobtrusively without exchanging a word, and retire round the corner again before Cyril could recognise her. But somehow, when she came to try, she couldn't. Her feet refused point blank to obey her will. And this time, in her own heart, she knew very well why. For there in the background, coiled up against the dense wall of rock and fern, Sardanapalus lay knotted in sleepy folds, with his great ringed back shining blue in the sunlight that struggled in round patches through the shimmering foliage. More consciously now than even in the train, the beautiful deadly creature seemed to fascinate Elma and bind her to the spot. For a moment she hesitated, unable to resist the strange, inexplicable attraction that ran in her blood. That brief interval settled it. Even as she paused, Cyril glanced round at the snake to note the passing effect of a gleam of light that fell slantwise through the leaves to dapple his spotty back—and caught sight of Elma. The poor girl gave a start. It was too late now to retreat. She stood there rooted.

Cyril moved forward to meet her with a frankly outstretched hand. "Good morning, Miss Clifford," he said, in his cheery manly voice. "So you've dropped down by accident upon my lair here, have you? Well, I'm glad you've happened to pass by to-day, for this, do you know, is my very last morning. I'm putting the finishing touches upon my picture now before I

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take it back to town. I go away to-morrow, perhaps to North Wales, perhaps to Scotland."

Elma trembled a little at those words, in spite of resolution; for though she could never, never, never marry him, it was nice, of course, to feel he was near at hand, and to have the chance of seeing him, and avoiding him as far as possible, on other people's lawns at garden parties. She trembled and turned pale. She could never *marry* him, to be sure; but then she could never marry any one else either; and that being so, she liked to *see* him now and again, on neutral ground, as it were, and to know he was somewhere that she could meet him occasionally. Wales and Scotland are so distant from Surrey. Elma showed in her face at once that she thought them both unpleasantly remote from Craighton, Tilgate.

With timid and shrinking steps, she came in front of the picture, and gazed at it in detail long and attentively. Never before did she know how fond she was of art.

"It's beautiful," she said, after a pause; "I like it immensely. That moss is so soft, and the ferns are so delicate. And how lovely that patch of rich golden light is on Sardanapalus's shoulder."

The painter stepped back a pace or two and examined his own handicraft, with his head on one side, in a very critical attitude. "I don't know that I'm quite satisfied after all with the colour-scheme," he said, glancing askance at Elma. "I fancy it's, perhaps,

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just a trifle too green. It looks all right, of course, out here in the open; but the question is, when it's hung in the Academy, surrounded by warm reds, and purples, and blues, won't it look by comparison much too cabbagey and too grassy?"

Elma drew a deep breath.

"Oh, Mr. Waring," she cried, in a deprecating tone, holding her breath for awe.

It pained her that anybody—even Cyril himself—should speak so lightly about so beautiful a picture.

"Then you like it?" Cyril asked, turning round to her full face and fronting her as she stood there, all beautiful blushes through her creamy white skin.

"Like it? I love it," Elma answered enthusiastically. "Apart from its being yours, I think it simply beautiful."

"And you like *me*, too, then?" the painter asked, once more, making a sudden dash at the question that was nearest to both their hearts, after all, that moment. He was going away to-morrow, and this was a last opportunity. Who could tell how soon somebody might come up through the woods and interrupt their interview? He must make the best use of his time. He must make haste to ask her.

Elma let her eyes drop, and her heart beat hard. She laid her hand upon the easel to steady herself as she answered slowly, "You know I like you, Mr. Waring; I like you very, very much indeed. You were so kind to me in the tunnel. And I felt your

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kindness. You could see that day I was—very, very grateful to you."

"When I asked you if you liked my picture, Elma," the young man said reproachfully, taking her other hand in his, and looking straight into her eyes, "you said, 'Like it? I love it.' But when I ask you if you like me—ask you if you will take me—you only say you're very, very grateful."

Elma let him take her hand, all trembling, in his. She let him call her by her name. She let him lean forward and gaze at her, lover-like. Her heart throbbed high. She couldn't refuse him. She knew she loved him. But to marry him—oh no. That was quite another thing. There duty interposed. It would be cruel, unworthy, disgraceful, wicked.

She drew herself back a little with maidenly dignity, as she answered low, "Mr. Waring, we two saw into one another's hearts so deep in the tunnel that day we spent together, that it would be foolish for us now to make false barriers between us. I'll tell you the plain truth." She trembled like an aspen-leaf. "I love you, I think; but I can never marry you."

She said it so simply, yet with such an earnestness of despair, that Cyril knew with a pang she really meant it.

"Why not?" he cried eagerly, raising her hand to his lips, and kissing it with fervour. "If you tell me you love me, Elma, all the rest must come. Say that, and you say all. So long as I've gained your heart, I don't care for anything."

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Elma drew her hand away with stately reserve. "I mean it, Mr. Waring," she said slowly, sitting down on the bank, and gasping a little for air, just as she had done in the tunnel. "I really mean it. I *liked* you in the train that day; I was *grateful* to you in the accident; I knew I *loved* you the afternoon we met at the Holkers'. There, I've told you that plainly—more plainly than I thought I ever could tell it to any man on earth—because we knew one another so well when we thought we were dying side by side, and because—because I can see you really love me. . . . Well, it can never be. I can never marry you."

She gazed at him wistfully. Cyril sat down by her side, and talked it all over with her from a hundred points of view. He pressed his suit hard, till Elma felt, if words could win, her painter would have won her. But she couldn't yield, she said for *his* sake a thousand times more than for her own, she must never marry. As the man grew more earnest the girl in turn grew more frank and confiding. She could never marry *him*, to be sure, she said fervently, but then she could never, never, never marry any one else. If she married at all she would marry Cyril. He took her hand again. Without one shadow of resistance she let him take it and hold it. Yes, yes, he might love her, if he liked, no harm at all in that; and *she*, she would always, always love him. All her life through, she cried, letting her passionate southern nature get the better of her at last, she would love him every hour

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of every day in the year, and love him only. But she could never marry him. Why, she must never say. It was no use his trying to read her secret. He must never find it out; never, never, never. But she, for her part, could never forget it.

So Cyril, eagerly pressing his suit with every art he knew, was forced in the end to content himself with that scanty measure. She would love him, she would write to him, even; but she would never marry him.

At last the time came when they must really part, or she would be late for lunch, and mamma would know all; mamma would read everything. He looked her wistfully in the face. Elma held out her lips, obedient to that mute demand, with remorseful blush of maidenly shame on her cheek. "Only once," she murmured. "Just to seal our compact. For the first and last time. You go away to-morrow."

"That was *before* you said you loved me," Cyril cried with delight, emboldened by success. "Mayn't I stay on now, just one little week longer?"

At the proposal, Elma drew back her face in haste before he had time to kiss it, and answered, in a very serious voice—

"Oh no, don't ask me. After this, I daren't stand the strain of seeing you again—at least not just now—not so very, very soon. Please, please, don't ask me. Go to-morrow, as you said. If you don't, I can't let you," she blushed, and held out her blushing face once more. "Only if you promise me to go to-morrow,

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mind," she said, with a half-coquettish, half-tearful smile at him.

Cyril hesitated for a second. He was inclined to temporize. "Those are very hard terms," he said. Then impulse proved too much for him. He bent forward, and pressed his lips just once on that olive-brown cheek. "But I may come back again very soon," he murmured, pushing home his advantage.

Elma seized his hand in hers, wrung it hard and tremulously, and then turned and ran like a frightened fawn, without pausing to look back, down the path homeward. Yet she whispered one broken sentence through her tears, for all that, before she went.

"I shall love you always; but spare me, spare me."

And Cyril was left behind by himself in the wood, completely mystified.

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CHAPTER XVI.

STRUGGLE AND VICTORY.

ELMA hurried home full of intense misgivings. She dreaded having to meet her mother's eye. How on earth could she hide from that searching glance the whole truth as to what had happened in the wood that morning? When she reached home, however, she learned to her relief, from the maid who opened the door to her, that their neighbour, Mr. Gilbert Gilder-sleeve, the distinguished Q.C., had dropped in for lunch, and this chance diversion supplied Elma with a little fresh courage to face the inevitable. She went straight up to her own room the moment she entered the house, without seeing her mother, and there she waited, bathing her face copiously till some minutes after the lunch bell had rung. For she felt sure she would blush crimson when she met her mother; but as she blushed habitually when strangers came in, the cause of it might thus, perhaps, she vainly flattered herself, escape even those lynx-like eyes of Mrs. Clifford's.

The great Q.C., a big, overbearing man, with a pair of huge burly hands that somehow seemed to form his

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chief feature, was a little bit blustering in his talk, as usual; the more so because he had just learned incidentally that something had gone wrong between his daughter Gwendoline and Granville Kelmscott. For though that little episode of private wooing had run its course nominally without the knowledge or consent of either family, Mr. Gilbert Gildersleeve, at least, had none the less been aware for many weeks past of the frequent meetings between Gwendoline and Granville in the dell just beyond the disputed boundary line. And as Mr. Gildersleeve disliked Colonel Kelmscott of Tilgate Park, for a pig-headed esquire, almost as cordially as Colonel Kelmscott disliked Mr. Gildersleeve in return for a rascally lawyer, it had given the great Q.C. no little secret satisfaction in his own soul to learn that his daughter Gwendoline was likely to marry the Colonel's son and heir, directly against the wishes and consent of his father.

Only that very morning, however, poor Mrs. Gildersleeve, that tired, crushed wife, had imparted to her lord and master, in fear and trembling, the unpleasant intelligence that, so far as she could make out, there was something wrong between Granville and Gwendoline. And this something wrong she ventured to suggest was no mere lover's tiff of the ordinary kiss-and-make-it-up description, but a really serious difficulty in the way of their marriage. So Mr. Gildersleeve, thus suddenly deprived of his expected triumph, took it out another way by more than even his wonted

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boisterousness of manner in talking about the fortunes of the Kelmscott family.

"I fancy, myself, you know, Mrs. Clifford," he was saying, very loud, as Elma entered, "there's a screw loose just now in the Kelmscott affairs—something rotten somewhere in the state of Denmark. That young fellow, Granville, who's by no means such a bad lot as his father all round—too good for the family, in fact; too good for the family—Granville's been accustomed of late to come over into my grounds, beyond the boundary wall, and being anxious above all things to cultivate friendly relations with all my neighbours in the county, I've allowed him to come—I've allowed him, and I may even say to a certain extent I've encouraged him. There at times he's met by accident my daughter Gwendoline. Oh, dear no"—with uplifted hand, and deprecating lips—"I assure you, nothing of *that* sort, my dear Mrs. Clifford. Gwendoline's far too young, and I couldn't dream of allowing her to marry into Colonel Kelmscott's family. But, however, be that as it may, he's been in the habit of coming there, till very recently, when all of a sudden, only a week or ten days back, to my immense surprise he ceased at once, and ever since has dropped into the defensive, exactly as he used to do. And I interpret it to mean——"

Elma heard no more of that pompous speech. Her knees shook under her. For she was aware only of Mrs. Clifford's eyes, fixed mildly and calmly upon her face, not in anger, as she feared, or reproach, but rather

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in infinite pity. For a second their glances met in mute intercourse of soul, then each dropped their eyelashes as suddenly as before. Through the rest of that lunch Elma sat as in a maze, hearing and seeing nothing. What she ate, or drank, or talked about, she knew not. Mr. Gildersleeve's pungent and embellished anecdotes of the Kelmscott family and their unneighbourly pride went in at one ear and out at the other. All she was conscious of was her mother's sympathetic yet unerring eye; she felt sure that at one glance that wonderful thought-reader had divined everything, and seen through and through their interview that morning.

After lunch, the two men strolled upon the lawn to enjoy their cigars, and Elma and her mother were left alone in the drawing-room.

For some minutes neither could make up her mind to break the ice and speak. They sat shame-faced beside one another on the sofa, like a pair of shy and frightened maidens. At last Mrs. Clifford braced herself up to interrupt the awkward silence. "You've been in Chetwood Forest, Elma," she murmured low, looking down and averting her eyes carefully from her trembling daughter.

"Yes, mother," Elma answered, all aglow with conscious blushes. "In Chetwood Forest."

"And you met him, dear?" The mother spoke tenderly and sympathetically.

Elma's heart stood still. "Yes, mother, I met him."

"And he had the snake there?"

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Elma started in surprise. Why dwell upon that seemingly unimportant detail? "Oh yes," she answered, still redder and hotter than ever. "He had it there. He was painting it."

Mrs. Clifford paused a minute. Then she went on, with pain. "And he asked you, Elma?"

Elma bowed her head. "Yes, he asked me—and I refused him," she answered, with a terrible wrench.

"Oh, darling; I know it," Mrs. Clifford cried, seizing both cold hands in hers. "And I know why, too. But, Elma, believe me, you needn't have done it. My daughter, my daughter, you might just as well have taken him."

"No, never," Elma cried, rising from her seat and moving towards the door in an agony of shame. "I couldn't. I daren't. It would be wrong. It would be cruel. But, mother, don't speak to me of it. Don't mention it again. Even before you it makes me more wretched and ashamed than I can say to allude to it."

She rushed from the room, with cheeks burning like fire. Come what might, she never could talk to any living soul again about that awful episode.

But Mrs. Clifford sat on, on the sofa where Elma left her, and cried to herself silently, silently, silently. What a mother should do in these hateful circumstances she could hardly even guess. She only knew she could never speak it out, and even if she did, Elma would never have the courage or the heart to listen to her.

That same evening, when Elma went up to bed, a

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strange longing came across her to sit up late, and think over to herself again all the painful details of the morning's interview. She seated herself by her bedside in her evening dress, and began to think it all out again, exactly as it happened. As she did so, the picture of Sardanapalus, on his bed of fern, came up clear in her mind, just as he lay coiled round in Cyril Waring's landscape. Beautiful Sardanapalus, so sleek and smooth and glossy, if only she had him here now—she paused and hesitated. In a moment, the wild impulse rushed upon her once more. It clutched her by the throat; it held her fast as in a vice. She must get up and dance; she must obey the mandate; she must whirl till she fell in that mystical ecstasy.

She rose, and seemed for a moment as though she must yield to the temptation. The boa—the boa was in the lower drawer. Reluctantly, remorsefully, she opened the drawer and took it out in her hands. Fluff and feathers, fluff and feathers—nothing more than that! But oh, how soft, how smooth, how yielding, how serpentine! With a violent effort she steadied herself, and looked round for her scissors. They lay on the dressing-table. She took them up with a fixed and determined air. "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off," she thought to herself. Then she began ruthlessly hacking the boa into short little lengths of a few inches each, which she gathered up in her hands as soon as she had finished, and replaced with care in the drawer where she had originally found them.

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After that her mind felt somewhat more at ease and a trifle less turbulent. She loved Cyril Waring—oh yes, she loved him with all her heart; it was hard to give him up; hard not to yield to that pressing impulse in such a moment of doubt and despondency. The boa had said to her, as it were, "Come, dance, go mad, and forget your trouble!" But she had resisted the temptation. And now—

Why, now, she would undress, and creep into bed, like any other good English girl under similar circumstances, and cry herself asleep with thoughts of Cyril.

And so she did in truth. She let her emotion take its natural outlet. She lay awake for an hour or two, till her eyes were red and sore and swollen. Then at last she dropped off, for very weariness, and slept soundly an unbroken sleep till morning.

At eight o'clock, Mrs. Clifford knocked her tentative little knock at the door. "Come in, mother," Elma cried, starting up in her surprise; and her mother, much wondering, turned the handle and entered.

When she reached the bed, she gave a little cry of amazement. "Why, Elma," she exclaimed, staring her hard and long in the face; "my darling, what's this? Your eyes are red! How strange! You've been crying!"

"Yes, mother," Elma answered, turning her face to the wall, but a thousand times less ashamed than she had been the day before when her mother spoke to her. "I couldn't help it, dearest." She took that soft white

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hand in hers and pressed it hard in silence. "It's no wonder, you know," she said at last, after a long deep pause. "He's going away from Chetwood to-day—and it was so very, very hard to say good-bye to him for ever."

"Oh yes, I know, darling," Mrs. Clifford answered, eyeing her harder than ever now with a half-incredulous look. "I know all that. But—you've had a good night in spite of everything, Elma."

Elma guessed what she meant. They two could converse together quite plainly without words. "Well, yes, a better night," she answered, hesitating, and shutting her eyes under the bed-clothes for very shame. "A little disturbed—don't you know—just at first; but I had a good cry very soon, and then that mended everything."

Her mother still looked at her, half doubting and half delighted. "A good cry's the right thing," she said slowly, in a very low voice. "The exact right thing, perfectly proper and normal. A good cry never did any girl on this earth one atom of harm. It's the best safety-valve. You're lucky, Elma, my child, in being able to get one."

"Yes, dear," Elma answered, with her head still buried. "Very lucky indeed. So I think, too, mother."

Mrs. Clifford's eye fell aimlessly upon certain tiny bits of feathery fluff that flecked the floor here and there like floating fragments of thistledown. In a second, her keen instinct divined what they meant.

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Without one word she rose silently and noiselessly, and opened the lower drawer, where the boa usually reposed among the furs and feathers. One glimpse of those mangled morsels showed her the truth at a glance. She shut the drawer again noiselessly and silently as she had opened it. But Elma, lying still with her eyes closed tight, yet knew perfectly well how her mother had been occupied.

Mrs. Clifford came back, and, stooping over her daughter's bed, kissed her forehead tenderly. "Elma, darling," she said, while a hot tear or two fell silently upon the girl's burning cheek, "you're very, very brave. I'm so pleased with you, so proud of you! I couldn't have done it myself. You're stronger-minded than I am. My child, he kissed you for good-bye yesterday. You needn't say yes, you needn't say no. I read it in your face. No need for you to tell me of it. Well, darling, it wasn't good-bye after all, I'm certain of that. Believe me, my child, he'll come back some day, and you'll know you can marry him."

"Never!" Elma cried, hiding her face still more passionately and wildly than before beneath great folds of the bed-clothes. "Don't speak to me of him any more, mother! Never! Never! Never!"

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CHAPTER XVII.

VISIONS OF WEALTH.

CYRIL WARING, thus dismissed, and as in honour bound, hurried up to London with a mind preoccupied by many pressing doubts and misgivings. He thought much of Elma, but he thought much, too, of sundry strange events that had happened of late to his own private fortunes. For one thing he had sold, and sold mysteriously, at a very good price, the picture of Sardanapalus in the glade at Chetwood. A well-known London dealer had written down to him at Tilgate making an excellent offer for the unfinished work, as soon as it should be ready, on behalf of a customer whose name he didn't happen to mention. And who could that customer be, Cyril thought to himself, but Colonel Kelmscott? But that wasn't all. The dealer who had offered him a round sum down for "The Rajah's Rest" had also at the same time commissioned him to go over to the Belgian Ardennes to paint a picture or two, at a specified price, of certain selected scenes upon the Meuse and its tributaries. The price offered for the work was a very respectable one, and yet—he had some internal misgivings, somehow, about this mysterious

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commission. Could it be to get rid of him? He had an uncomfortable suspicion in the back chambers of his mind, that whoever had commissioned the pictures might be more anxious to send him well away from Tilgate than to possess a series of picturesque sketches on the Meuse and its tributaries.

And who could have an interest in keeping him far from Tilgate? That was the question. Was there anybody whom his presence there could in any way incommode? Could it be Elma's father who wanted to send him so quickly away from England?

And what was the meaning of Elma's profound resolution, so strangely and strongly expressed, never, never to marry him?

A painful idea flitted across the young man's puzzled brain. Had the Cliffords alone discovered the secret of his birth? and was that secret of such a disgraceful sort that Elma's father shrank from owning him as a prospective son-in-law, while even Elma herself could not bring herself to accept him as her future husband? If so, what could that ghastly secret be? Were he and Guy the inheritors of some deadly crime? Had their origin been concealed from them, more in mercy than in cruelty, only lest some hideous taint of murder or of madness might mar their future and make their whole lives miserable?

When he reached Staple Inn, he found Guy and Montague Nevitt already in their joint rooms, and arrears of three days' correspondence awaiting him,

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A close observer—like Elma Clifford—might perhaps have noted in Montague Nevitt's eye certain well-restrained symptoms of suppressed curiosity. But Cyril Waring, in his straightforward, simple English manliness, was not sharp enough to perceive that Nevitt watched him close while he broke the envelopes and glanced over his letters; or that Nevitt's keen anxiety grew at once far deeper and more carefully concealed as Cyril turned to one big missive with an official-looking seal and a distinctly important legal aspect. On the contrary, to the outer eye or ear all that could be observed in Montague Nevitt's manner was the nervous way he went on tightening his violin strings with a tremulous hand and whistling low to himself a few soft and tender bars of some melancholy scrap from Miss Ewes's refectory.

As Cyril read through that letter, however, his breath came and went in short little gasps, and his cheek flushed hotly with a sudden and overpowering flood of emotion.

"What's the matter?" Guy asked, looking over his shoulder curiously. And Cyril, almost faint with the innumerable ideas and suspicions that the tidings conjured up in his brain at once, said with an evident effort, "Read it, Guy; read it."

Guy took the letter and read, Montague Nevitt gazing at it by his side meanwhile with profound interest.

As soon as they had glanced through its carefully-

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worded sentences, each drew a long breath and stared hard at the other. Then Cyril added in a whirl, "And here's a letter from my own bankers saying they've duly received the six thousand pounds and put it to my credit."

Guy's face was pale, but he faltered out none the less with ashy lips, staring hard at the words all the time, "It isn't only the money, of course, one thinks about, Cyril; but the clue it seems to promise us to our father and mother."

"Exactly," Cyril answered, with a responsive nod. "The money I won't take. I don't know what it means. But the clue I'll follow up till I've run to earth the whole truth about who we are and where we come from."

Montague Nevitt glanced quickly from one to the other with an incredulous air. "Not take the money," he exclaimed, in cynical surprise. "Why, of course you'll take it. Twelve thousand pounds isn't to be sneezed at in these days, I can tell you. And as for the clue, why, there isn't any clue. Not a jot or a tittle, a ghost or a shadow of it. The unnatural parent, whoever he may be—for I take it for granted the unnatural parent's the person at the bottom of the offer—takes jolly good care not to let you know who on earth he is. He wraps himself up in a double cloak of mystery. Drummonds pay in the money to your account at your own bank, you see, and while they're authorized to receive your acknowledgment of the sum remitted, they are clearly *not* authorized to receive to the sender's

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credit any return cheque for the amount or cash in repayment. The unnatural parent evidently intends to remain, for the present at least, strictly anonymous.

"Couldn't you find out for us at Drummond, Coutts and Barclay's who the sender is?" Guy asked, with some hesitation, still turning over in his hand the mysterious letter.

Nevitt shook his head with prompt decision. "No, certainly not," he answered, assuming an air of the severest probity. "It would be absolutely impossible. The secrets in a bank are secrets of honour. We are the depositaries of tales that might ruin thousands, and we never say a word about one of them to anybody."

As for Cyril, he felt himself almost too astonished for words. It was long before he could even discuss the matter quietly. The whole episode seemed so strange, so mysterious, so uncanny. And no wonder he hesitated. For the unknown writer of the letter with the legal seal had proposed a most curious and unsatisfactory arrangement. Six thousand pounds down on the nail to Cyril, six thousand more in a few weeks to Guy. But not for nothing. As in all law business, "valuable consideration" loomed large in the background. They were both to repair, on a given day, at a given hour, to a given office, in a given street, where they were to sign without inquiry, and even without perusal, whatever documents might then and there be presented to them. This course, the writer pointed out, with perspicuous plainness, was all in the end to their own greater advantage.

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For unless they signed, they would get nothing more, and it would be useless for them at attempt the unravelling of the mystery. But if they consented to sign, then, the writer declared, the anonymous benefactor at whose instigation he wrote would leave them by his will a further substantial sum, not one penny of which would ever otherwise come to them.

And Montague Nevitt, as a man of business, looking the facts in the face, without sentiment or nonsense, advised them to sign, and make the best of a good bargain.

For Montague Nevitt saw at once in his own mind that this course would prove the most useful in the end for his own interests, both as regards the Warings and Colonel Kelmscott.

The two persons most concerned, however, viewed the matter in a very different light. To them, this letter, with its obscure half-hints, opened up a chance of solving at last the mystery of their position which had so long oppressed them. They might now perhaps find out who they really were, if only they could follow up this pregnant clue; and the clue itself suggested so many things.

"Whatever else it shows," Guy said emphatically, "it shows we must be the lawful sons of some person of property, or else why should he want us to sign away our rights like this, all blindfold? And whatever the rights themselves may be, they must be very considerable, or else why should he bribe us so heavily to

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sign ourselves out of them? Depend upon it, Nevitt, it's an entailed estate, and the man who dictated that letter is in possession of the property, which ought to belong to Cyril and me. For my part, I'm opposed to all bargaining in the dark. I'll sign nothing, and I'll give away nothing, without knowing what it is. And that's what I advise Cyril to write back and tell him."

Cyril, however, was revolving in his own mind meanwhile a still more painful question. Could it be any blood-relationship between himself and Elma, unknown to him, but just made known to her, that gave rise to her firm and obviously recent determination never to marry him? A week or two since, he was sure, Elma knew of no cause or just impediment why they should not be joined together in holy matrimony. Could she have learned it meanwhile, before she met him in the wood? and could the fact of her so learning it have thus pricked the slumbering conscience of their unknown kinsman or their supposed supplanter?

They sat there long and late, discussing the question from all possible standpoints—save the one thus silently started in his own mind by Cyril. But, in the end, Cyril's resolution remained unshaken. He would leave the six thousand pounds in the bank, untouched; but he would write back at once to the unknown sender, declining plainly, once for all, to have anything to do with it or with the proposed transactions. If anything was his by right, he would take it as of right, but he would be no party to such hole-and-corner renuncia-

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tions of unknown contingencies as the writer suggested. If the writer was willing to state at once all the facts of the case, in clear and succinct language, and to come to terms thus openly with himself and his brother, why then, Cyril averred, he was ready to promise they would deal with his claims in a spirit of the utmost generosity and consideration. But if this was an attempt to do them out of their rights by a fraudulent bribe, he for one would have nothing to say to it. He would therefore hold the six thousand pounds paid in to his account entirely at his anonymous correspondent's disposition.

"And as there isn't any use in my wasting the summer, Guy," he said, in conclusion, "I won't let this red-herring, trailed across my path, prevent me from going over at once, as I originally intended, to Dinant and Spa, and fulfilling the commission for those pictures of Dale and Norton's. You and Nevitt can see meanwhile what it's possible for us to do in the matter of hunting up this family mystery. You can telegraph if you want me, and I'll come back at once. But more than ever now I feel the need of redeeming the time and working as hard as I can go at my profession."

"Well, yes," Guy answered, as if both their thoughts ran naturally in the self-same channel. "I agree with you there. She's been accustomed to luxury. No man has a right to marry any girl if he can't provide for her in the comfort and style she's always been used to. And from that point of view, when one looks it in the face, Cyril, six thousand pounds would come in handy."

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CHAPTER XVIII.

GENTLE WOOER.

MR. MONTAGUE NEVITT rubbed his hands with delight in the sacred privacy of his own apartment. Mr. Nevitt, indeed, had laid his plans deep. He had everybody's secrets all round in his hands, and he meant to make everybody pay dear in the end for his information.

Mr. Nevitt was free. His holidays were on at Drummond, Coutts and Barclay's, Limited. He loved the sea, the sun, and the summer. He was off that day on a projected series of short country runs, in which it was his intention strictly to combine business and pleasure. Dartmoor, for example, as everybody knows, is a most delightful and bracing tourist district; but what more amusing to a man of taste than to go a round of the Moor with its heather-clad tors, and at the same time hunt up the parish registers of the neighbourhood for the purpose of discovering, if possible, the supposed marriage record of Colonel Kelmscott of Tilgate with the Warings' mother? For that there *was* a marriage Montague Nevitt felt certain in his own wise mind, and having early arrived at that correct conclusion, why, he had quietly offered forthwith, in Plymouth papers, a

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considerable reward to parish clerks and others who would supply him with any information as to the births, marriages, or deaths of any person or persons of the name of Waring for some eighteen months or so before or after the reputed date when Guy and Cyril began their earthly pilgrimage.

For deaths, Nevitt said to himself, with a sinister smile, were every bit as important to him as births or marriages. He knew the date of Colonel Kelmscott's wedding with Lady Emily Croke, and if at that date wife number one was not yet dead, when the Colonel took to himself wife number two, who now did the honours of Tilgate Park for him, why, there you had as clear and convincing a case of bigamy as any man could wish to find out against another, and to utilize some day for his own good purposes.

As he thought these thoughts, Montague Nevitt gave the last delicate twirl, the final touch of art, to the wire-like ends of his waxed moustache, in front of his mirror, and, after surveying the result in the glass with considerable satisfaction, proceeded to set out, on very good terms with himself, for his summer holiday.

Devonshire, however, wasn't his first destination. Montague Nevitt, besides being a man of business and a man of taste, was also in due season a man of feeling. A heart beat beneath that white rosebud in his left top button-hole. All his thoughts were not thoughts of greed and of gain. He was bound to Tilgate to-day, and to see a lady.

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It isn't so easy in England to see a lady alone. But fortune favours the brave. Luck always attended Mr. Montague Nevitt's most unimportant schemes. Hardly had he got into the field path across the meadows between Tilgate station and the grounds of Woodlands than, at the seat by the bend, what should he see but a lady sitting down in an airy white summer dress, her head leaning on her hand, most pensive and melancholy. Montague Nevitt's heart gave a sudden bound. In luck once more. It was Gwendoline Gildersleeve.

"Good morning!" he said briskly, coming up before Gwendoline had time to perceive him—and fly. "This is really most fortunate. I've run down from town to-day on purpose to see you, but hardly hoped I should have the good fortune to get a *tête-à-tête* with you—at least so easily. I'm so glad I'm in time. Now, don't look so cross. You must at any rate admit, you know, my persistence is flattering."

"I don't feel flattered by it, Mr. Nevitt," Gwendoline answered coldly, holding out her gloved hand to him with marked disinclination. "I thought last time I had said good-bye to you for good and for ever."

Nevitt took her hand, and held it in his own a trifle longer than was strictly necessary. "Now don't talk like that, Gwendoline," he said coaxingly. "Don't crush me quite flat. Remember at least that you *once* were kind to me. It isn't my fault, surely, if *I* still recollect it."

Gwendoline withdrew her hand from his with yet

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more evident coolness. "Circumstances alter cases," she said severely. "That was before I really knew you."

"That was before you knew Granville Kelmscott, you mean," Nevitt responded with an unpleasantly knowing air. "Oh yes, you needn't wince; I've heard all about that. It's my business to hear and find out everything. But circumstances alter cases, as you justly say, Gwendoline. And I've discovered some circumstances about Granville Kelmscott that may alter the case as regards your opinion of that rich young man, whose estate weighed down a poor fellow like me in what you've graciously pleased to call your affections."

Gwendoline rose, and looked down at the man contemptuously. "Mr. Nevitt," she said, in a chilling voice, "you've no right to call me Gwendoline any longer now. You've no right to speak to me of Mr. Granville Kelmscott. I refused your advances, not for any one else's sake, or any one else's estate, but simply and solely because I came to know you better than I knew you at first; and the more I knew of you the less I liked you. I am *not* engaged to Mr. Granville Kelmscott. I don't mean to see him again. I don't mean to marry him."

Nevitt took his cue at once, like a clever hand that he was, and followed it up remorselessly. "Well, I'm glad to hear that anyhow," he answered, assuming a careless air of utter unconcern, "for your sake as well as

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for his, Miss Gildersleeve; for Granville Kelmscott, as I happen to know in the course of business, is a ruined man—a ruined man this moment. He isn't, and never was, the heir of Tilgate. And I'm sure it was very honourable of him, the minute he found he was a penniless beggar, to release you from such an unequal engagement."

He had played his card well. He had delivered his shot neatly. Gwendoline, though anxious to withdraw from his hateful presence, couldn't help but stay and learn more about this terrible hint of his. A light broke in upon her even as the fellow spoke. Was it this, then, that had made Granville talk so strangely to her that morning by the dell in the Woodlands? Was it this which, as he told her, rendered their marriage impossible? Why, if *that* were all—Gwendoline drew a deep breath and clasped her hands together in a sudden access of mingled hope and despair. "Oh, what do you mean, Mr. Nevitt," she cried eagerly. "What can Granville have done? Don't keep me in suspense! Do tell me what you mean by it."

Montague Nevitt, still seated, looked up at her with a smile of quiet satisfaction. He played with her for a moment as a cat plays with a mouse. She was such a beautiful creature, so tall and fair and graceful, and she was so awfully afraid, and he was so awfully fond of her, that he loved to torture her thus and hold her dangling in his power. "No, Gwendoline," he

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said slowly, drawing his words out by driblets, so as to prolong her suspense, "I oughtn't to have mentioned it at all. It's a professional secret. I retract what I said. Forget that I said it. Excuse me on the ground of my natural reluctance to see a woman I still love so deeply and so purely—whatever she may happen to think of *me*—throw herself away on a man without a name or a penny. However, as Kelmscott seems to have done the honourable thing of his own accord, and given you up the minute he knew he couldn't keep you in the way you've been accustomed to—why, there's no need, of course, of any warning from me. I'll say no more on the subject."

His studied air of mystery piqued and drew on his victim. Gwendoline knew in her own heart she ought to go at once; her own dignity demanded it, and she should consult her dignity. But still, she couldn't help longing to know what Nevitt's half-hints and innuendoes might mean. After all, she was a woman! "Oh, do tell me," she cried, clasping her hands in suspense once more; "what have you heard about Mr. Kelmscott? I'm not engaged to him; I don't want to know for that, but——" she broke down, blushing crimson, and Montague Nevitt, gazing fixedly at her delicate peach-like cheek, remarked to himself how extremely well that blush became her.

"No, but remember," he said in a very grave voice, in his favourite impersonation of the man of honour, "whatever I tell you—if I give way at all and tell you

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anything—you must hear in confidence, and must repeat to nobody. If you do repeat it, you'll get me into very serious trouble. And not only so, but as nobody knows it except myself, you'll as good as proclaim to all the world that you heard it from *me*. If I tell you what I know, will you promise me this—not to breathe a syllable of what I say to anybody?"

Gwendoline, glancing down, and thoroughly ashamed of herself, yet answered in a very low and trembling voice, "I'll promise, Mr. Nevitt."

"Then the facts are these," the man of feeling went on, with an undercurrent of malicious triumph in his musical voice. "Kelmscott is *not* his father's eldest son; he's *not*, and never was, the heir of Tilgate. More than that, nobody knows these facts but myself. And I know the true heirs, and I can prove their title. Well, now, Miss Gildersleeve—if it's to be Miss Gildersleeve still—this is the circumstance that alters the case as regards Granville Kelmscott. I have it in my hands to ruin Kelmscott. And what I've taken the trouble to come down and say to you to-day is simply this for your own advantage; beware, at least, how you throw yourself away upon a penniless man, with neither name nor fortune! When you've quite got over that dream, you'll be glad to return to the man you threw overboard for the rich squire's son. No circumstances have ever altered him. He loved you from the first, and he will always love you."

Gwendoline looked him back in the face again, as

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