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MRS ALICK MACLEOD

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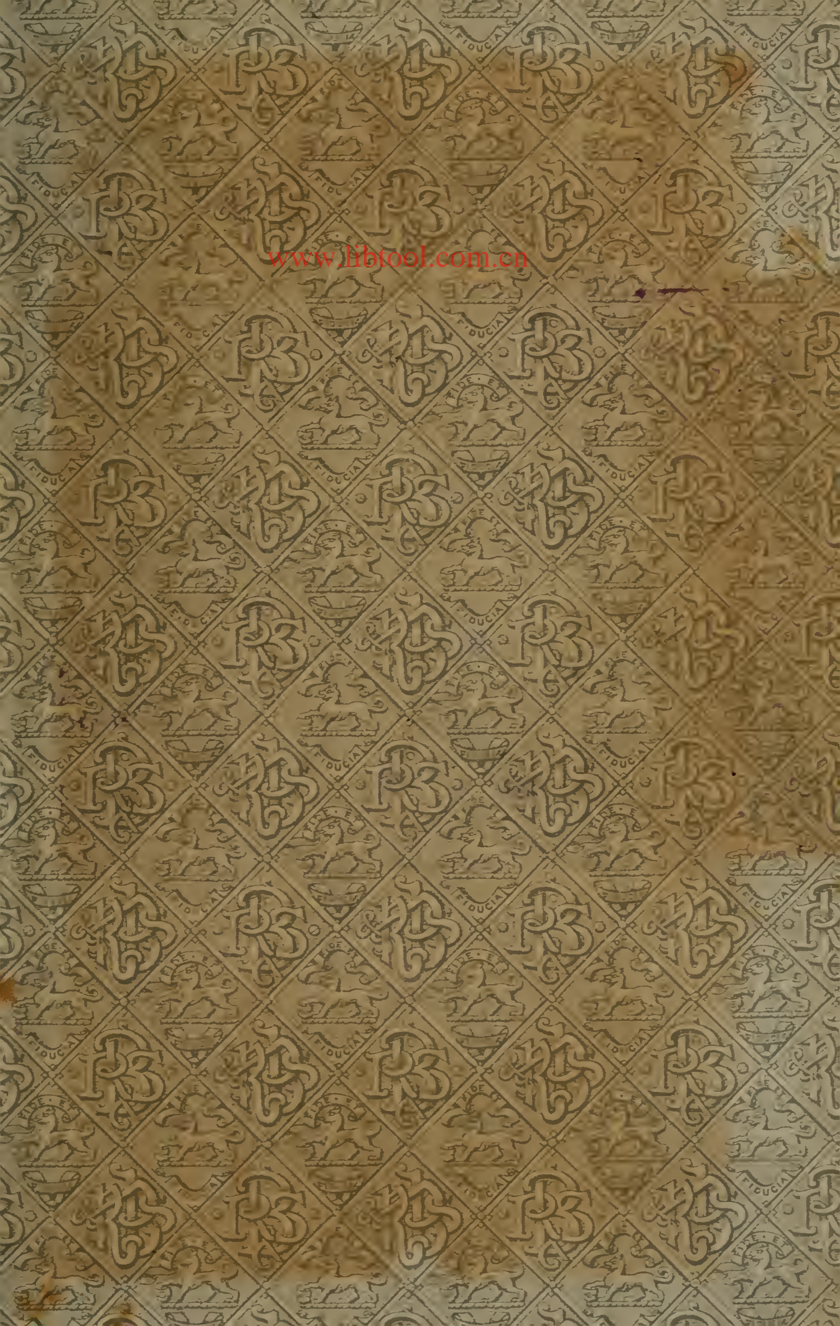

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THE SILENT SEA

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BY

MRS. ALICK MACLEOD

AUTHOR OF 'AN AUSTRALIAN GIRL'

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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THE SILENT SEA

CHAPTER I.

As for Victor, he was lost in that tide of unreasoning, tumultuous bliss which comes to a man but once in his life-time, and in his youth or not at all. He reflected when it was too late that his purpose had been to speak no word of love to Doris till after he had seen Miss Paget; but it was all too inevitable, and now he was too restlessly happy to sleep. The night was very still, but cool, and full of starlight. He went outside, and walked to the top of the reef. The throbbing of the air-compressors and the din of the engine travelled far into the night. By that sound he knew it must be

after twelve, for on Sunday work was not resumed till midnight. As he stood looking into the vast spaces of the plains all round, www.libtool.com.cn vague and gray and level, without form or motion, he was thrilled with wonder as he thought of the sequence of events which had brought Doris into the heart of so desolate and melancholy a region—thrilled with the thought that here, where nature was at its sternest and man's existence in its barest form, they two should find each other and the great happiness of their lives. While lost in these reflections, a man came hurrying up the reef from the mine, and paused within a few paces of Victor, saying :

'Is that you, cap'en ?'

'No, 'Zilla, it isn't the captain,' answered Victor, who recognised the voice.

Something had gone wrong, and the engineer wanted to consult the manager.

'I bait and bait at 'is door, but 'e ain't in, and I thoft 'e must a-come to ask for Mr. Challoner.'

On hearing the captain was not at Stonehouse, 'Zilla stood for a moment in deep thought.

'Perhaps he's in by this time. He may have gone for a stroll somewhere,' suggested Victor.

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But 'Zilla didn't fall in with this view. It was now nearly half an hour since he had first gone to the captain's rooms, just ten minutes after he had been at the shaft's mouth seeing the men go below. 'Zilla had waited and gone again, but the rooms were in darkness, and still no sign of Trevaskis. Victor suggested that he might be asleep.

''E may be took in a fit, but 'e couldn't be asleep and not 'ear the knocks I give. I wish you'd come down, sir, and go to 'is rooms by the inside way, and make sure. The cap'en looks very bad to me lately, and very bad-tempered; like a hedgaboor at the least word, and when a man don't mean nothin' in the world.'

They were descending the reef by this time. Victor went into his office as suggested, and through the four rooms intervening, followed by 'Zilla. He knocked at the door and called out 'Captain!' repeatedly in a lusty voice. But there was no response. As they were leaving the

purser's office the engineer came up. The driving-wheel of the pan-shaft had got out of gear, and he was anxious to hang up the battery and stop the machinery.

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'But if I do it off my own hook he'll most likely make a devil of a row,' he said; 'more especially as the fortnightly cleaning-up is so near.'

'He can't be in,' said Victor; 'it's impossible.'

They walked back to the pan-room and waited another half-hour. The driving-wheel had worked loose and could not be righted without a stoppage.

'But if I stop without his orders he'll damn my eyes till he's black in the face, and want to know who's master here,' said the engineer, a quiet, steady-going Scotchman, who found the Trevaskis régime rather an exasperating one. 'I'll tell you what, Mr. Purser,' he said, when the half-hour was up, 'you come with me to the manager's office, and if I can't make him hear I'll break a pane, open the window, and go in to make sure. If he isn't on the premises I'll stop the machinery on my own

responsibility. If he goes gallivanting about at night, God knows where, it's his look out.'

Victor agreed to this arrangement, and the three once more walked up to the manager's office.

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They knocked and shouted with the same result as before. Then the engineer got a stone, and, making a clean break in one of the lower panes, opened the window of the manager's office and got in. He struck a light and passed into the bedroom. It was empty, and the bed had not been slept in. As he was getting out, the door of the office that led into the iron passage was unlocked, and Trevaskis entered, a bull's-eye lantern in one hand, a parcel in the other. He gave a savage yell when he caught sight of a man disappearing through the window. Either by accident or design, the lantern fell from him with a crash and the candle was extinguished.

He rushed to the window, and, seeing three men dimly in the darkness, broke into an excited volley of abuse, in a thick, strange voice. The engineer attempted to speak, but could not at first make him

self heard. They were thieves—they were consigned to eternal and active perdition; but first they would be hauled to gaol.

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'If you've quite finished, sir, perhaps you'll allow me to tell you that I'm the engineer.' He drew nearer to the open window as he spoke, and Trevaskis gave a muffled exclamation. 'Please take notice,' the engineer went on, in tones quivering with anger, 'that it was on the business of the company I forced my way into the manager's rooms, as Mr. Fitz-Gibbon, the purser, will bear witness.'

The mention of this name had a singular effect on Trevaskis. He remained quite silent for a moment, attempting neither to light candle or lamp nor to make any reply. The engineer had again to ask for instructions before Trevaskis spoke. Then, seeing Victor turning to leave, he called out to him to wait a moment.

'I'll be down after you in five minutes,' he said, and on this Bruce and 'Zilla returned to the engine-room. Trevaskis went into his bedroom and came out in a few minutes, locking the doors after him.

'Of course you're making all sorts of conclusions about my being in the cave room, Mr. Fitz-Gibbon? And your being about here at this time of night proves that you are full of suspicions.'

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He had begun in a calm tone, but again that curious sudden change ensued: a loud, uncontrollable fierceness crept into his voice. Victor could see in the starlight that the manager's eyes were glaring wildly, that his hands were twitching, and that his face was working convulsively.

'He must be drunk,' was the thought that passed through his mind. And there was some truth in the supposition, though there was much more than ordinary intoxication to account for Trevaskis' uncontrollable excitement. He had been working on Friday night till near daylight. On Saturday night, after receiving official instructions to clear out the late manager's effects, he had not gone to bed at all. He had worked all night and part of Sunday; now it was two o'clock on Monday morning, and after all he had been almost caught with his pots and bars of gold. All his

sleepless nights and brilliant visions of success, all his schemes and contrivances, had been in vain. This boy, who had from the first come to spy on him, had over-reached him in the end. His brain whirled and everything swam round him as he spoke. A sudden murderous instinct rose within him to take Victor by the throat and crush the life out of him. The paroxysm passed away, leaving him miserably shaken, and with an almost insane longing to tell Fitz-Gibbon the whole truth—to take him into the cave room there and then, and show him the great gleaming heap of gold in massy bars, the bottles full of amalgam, and cry: 'This all belongs to the company!'

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Victor, perceiving that the man was labouring under some cruel emotion, and believing that his brain and imagination were demoralized just then by strong drink, answered him in the tones that turn away wrath. Great personal happiness makes even hardened natures magnanimous, much more one that is innately generous and has not as yet been indurated neither by time

or calamity. The imputations thrown out against him by Trevaskis would, under ordinary circumstances, have prevented Victor offering any explanation as to his presence at the office with the engineer. But it had been forced on him that the manager's morbid suspicions were like a disease which he was unable to get rid of. He therefore fully explained his meeting with Jenkins, and Trevaskis listened and believed. But when, after mid-day on the morrow, he met Victor coming out of the telegraph-office, all his old suspicions returned. He himself had gone there to send a message to his brother, imploring him to come at all hazards, without a day's longer delay.

Trevaskis had resolved, as a last resource, to shift all the gold and amalgam to the hut he had erected on the claim near the broken-down whim as soon as his brother could arrive. He had this morning bought a strong spring-cart and a stout horse from a man who had left the diggings at the Creek very much down on his luck. He was negotiating with the company for the

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purchase of certain old machinery, which they were only too glad to sell. There would be two or three loads in all. In the dead of night he would load the cart with the gold and amalgam, tied up in old sacks. In the morning he would have some of the machinery fixed in the cart, with Dan to help, and after Dan started he would overtake him on horseback, and explain that his load was worth, not an old song for old iron, but twenty thousand pounds!

Even in the thick of all his terrors and anxieties, and the profound physical nervousness that assailed him from time to time, he would dwell with a sense of intoxicating elation on the sense of getting the gold all safe away. He would see Dan driving slowly on the big dusty track towards Broombush Creek, looking from time to time around him as he got halfway for the great white posts of the broken-down whim, beyond which he was to slue off to the left for a mile and a half to the lonely hut, which could be clearly seen from the vicinity of the old well.

Then he would go galloping after him,

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and that night they would make a recess in the floor of the hut in which to hide the gold.

'That quartz claim will turn out the richest in the history of Australian mining, only this won't get into history,' he thought. And then he chuckled to himself as he pictured Fitz-Gibbon going solemnly into the cave room and making his ineffectual search. But all this hung on Dan's speedy arrival. He despatched his telegram, wording it as strongly as possible. As he came out of the telegraph-office, he met Victor face to face. Was he going to send a message as to the further delay in his search of the cave room? He resolved to keep a brave front to the last, and fight to the uttermost for delay, hoping for Dan's speedy return. A few minutes after he had seen Victor go back to his office, Trevaskis followed him, to make a certain statement regarding the search of the cave room. As soon as he entered Victor rose, saying:

'I was just coming to see you, captain. I want to get away to town for a few days.'

'To town for a few days?' repeated Trevaskis mechanically.

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'Yes; will you be well enough to clean up the gold this week?'

'I intend to do so on Thursday.'

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'Oh, that will suit me famously. I can then start by the afternoon coach on Friday, and pay the men when I return.'

'How long shall you be away?'

'Not more than four or five days at the longest.'

'Not more than four or five days?' repeated the manager, in the same mechanical voice in which he had first responded to the purser's announcement.

It would be impossible to disentangle the chaos of thoughts that darted through his mind. But clear above all else rose the conviction: 'He is now sure about the treasure; he is going to secure police assistance.' Trevaskis struggled to act on the belief. It seemed as if he spent several moments in trying to utter the words: 'You'd better come down into the cave room this morning and have a look round. The half-search I made last night makes me believe there's some gold hidden there.'

But every instinct of his nature rose up

in revolt against this surrender. Each faculty of his mind became centred in one supreme effort to gain time. To have so much wealth in his possession—the end and aim of his dearest ambitions, the object of his most jealous passions—and then to give it all up! No, no! not so long as the ghost of a chance of success remained.

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'I suppose I could put off paying the men till I returned on Tuesday or Wednesday?' said Victor, looking a little wonderingly at the manager's haggard face.

'Certainly, that will be all right; I came in to say that, owing to the arrears of work caused by my sore eyes, I cannot go into the cave room with you for a few days.'

'Oh, we'll let it slide till I return,' said Victor carelessly.

The manager looked at him narrowly. Then, sinking his voice and speaking in a semi-confidential tone, he said:

'The fact is that, judging from a cursory examination, I am under the impression that Dunning's effects were tampered with after his death. It will be therefore better that we should act conjointly in this matter.'

'But the keys were in *Searle's* possession till he delivered them to you,' said Victor quickly.

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'Exactly, and therefore I am going to write a note to him asking a few leading questions,' answered Trevaskis coldly as he walked away. When he reached the door he turned as if struck by an after-thought.

'It will be about the eighth of December when you get away. You have spoken about leaving the mine at Christmas-time. Do you think of making any arrangement about resigning when you are in town?'

Victor hesitated before replying. He could not explain that his movements depended on the course of events at Stonehouse, nor did he think it advisable to say that he knew of a suitable candidate ready to apply for the pursership as soon as it was vacant. His friend Maurice Cumming had recently bespoken Victor's interest in the matter, finding that a little extra ready money for a year to come would materially aid himself and his brother in their strenuous fight at Wynans against the rabbits. Victor by this time knew enough

of the manager's jealous and suspicious temperament to feel sure that to speak of his friend's appointment as a foregone conclusion would be an impolitic measure. He therefore compromised the matter by saying :

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'I don't think I shall decide about the date of my leaving till later on. I believe we shall find no difficulty in getting a purser at a short notice.'

Of course, the half-embarrassed pause and the cautious reply could bear but one interpretation to Trevaskis.

'I knew it—I knew it ! He is going to try and snare me like a rat in a hole !' he muttered to himself as he strode away.

He hurried into his office, fearful of betraying the passion of impotent rage which he felt threatened to carry him beyond all bounds. As soon as he had gained his own room he broke into a volley of the most horrible imprecations ; his eyes started in their sockets, and he foamed at the mouth.

His first coherent thought was one of terror. 'I am going mad—I am going mad !' he said to himself repeatedly, staring

at his face in a small square looking-glass that hung above the washstand in his bedroom. His wild, distorted eyes; his livid skin; the great cold drops of perspiration that stood on his forehead; the tremor which at short intervals shook him from head to foot, were all repetitions of the paroxysm that had overtaken him for the first time in his life in the small hours of the morning.

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He tried to reason, but thought failed him. He lost all grasp of the subject or the plan that struggled through his mind. One after the other, terrible pictures rose before him, irrespective of mental volition. He followed one man who crept with treacherous footsteps to commit murder; he saw another suddenly stricken down dead; and still another writhing in madness. . . .

When he grew calmer, he reasoned with himself that it was not incipient madness that had attacked him, but the result of constantly dwelling on exciting thoughts; of utter sleeplessness for three days and two nights; the want of proper food; a

dangerous use of stimulants; and, to crown the whole, this sudden overwhelming terror that all would be in vain—that Fitz-Gibbon had acquired a certain knowledge of the stolen gold, and was dogging all his actions. Probably he had last night bribed the engineer to tamper with the pan-shaft, so as to have witnesses as to the manager's absence in the cave room.

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Now he was going to the directors with his tale; of what use would it be to try and hide so great a quantity? A black tracker, or even an ordinary detective, would trace it like a beaten highway. He must think of some plan—something that would give him time, that would save him. But the moment that he tried to think or frame a plan, a throbbing came in the back of his head, like the rapid echoes of a hammer beating persistently, maddeningly. He must sleep for seven or eight hours at a stretch.

He took one of his accustomed rounds, seeing to all that was being done; he gave some directions to the shift-bosses who would be in charge of the night-gangs underground. Then he summoned Mick,

and told him to let no one knock at his office-door, or disturb him in any way; he was feeling ill, and was going to have a
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good sleep. He undressed and went to bed at four o'clock in the afternoon. But the room seemed full of sounds; sudden cries, strange voices and violent shouts rent the air. He drank glass after glass of almost undiluted brandy; but instead of serving as a soporific, this for a time made him more acutely conscious of the ruin that stared him in the face, while his power of connected thought had absolutely deserted him. At last he fell into a deep dreamless stupor, from which he did not awaken till near sunrise the next morning.

His head was aching, but the long rest and unconsciousness had in a measure restored his mental balance. He brewed himself a pot of tea, and drank cup after cup, hot and strong, till his headache was almost gone. But the moment his anxieties and fears and surmises returned upon him, he felt that dull, persistent, all-absorbing beat in his brain—that vague wandering of mind; his train of thought lost suddenly,

as if in an unsounded deep—which had before terrified him. He went about the business of the mine all that morning, resolutely turning his mind away from the torturing and distracting thoughts of the cave room. He reflected that the cleaning-up on Thursday would yield the largest average to the ton of quartz which had ever been reported at the Colmar. There had been a steady and continuous increase of gold since he came, while at the same time the working expenses of the mine had been, by his unrelaxing vigilance in every department, considerably diminished.

Nor had any of these points escaped recognition by the directors. Within the last month they had given him a considerable rise in his salary, at the same time complimenting him highly on the unprecedented success which had marked his tenure of management, and expressing a hope that he would see his way to enter on a fixed term of office. This Trevaskis had so far refrained from doing, on the ground that circumstances might in any month compel him to resign.

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Thinking over these things as he went through the routine of his mine work on Tuesday forenoon, Trevaskis reflected that though Drummond might lend a willing ear to his nephew's tales, the directors as a body would be very loath to take any action that would reflect on a manager who had in less than three months made his value felt in so marked a manner. . . . If he could only by some means fasten a quarrel upon Fitz-Gibbon apart from the matter of the cave room—some stigma of carelessness, of neglect of duty!

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It would be so readily believed that a young man of independent means, who came to the mine for a mere freak, and who could leave it at any moment without the least detriment to his prospects, should fail in some respects to work like a man whose daily bread depended on his daily work. . . . But as Trevaskis reviewed the manner in which Victor discharged his duties, he failed to recall any instance of negligence more serious than forgetting to lock the office-door on one or two occasions when he left for the night.

Arrived at this point in his cogitations, Trevaskis suddenly stood motionless. He was in the pan-room, where the loosened wheel was giving some trouble. But he had decided not to have it touched till Thursday, so that the yield of gold should not be impaired by any stoppage. The din around him seemed all at once to sharpen his faculties, so that he saw, as in a completed picture, the scheme after which he had been vainly groping. He had found it—he held the clue.

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Towards sunset he saddled his horse and rode across to his claim near the broken-down whim, so as to get his scheme all clear and straight before him. This was the plan he formed; on Thursday, after he and Fitz-Gibbon had cleaned up the gold and locked it in the safe as usual, he would hand his key to the purser and ask him to keep it till Friday morning, as he was going across to Broombush Creek and would most likely stay there that night. He had done this three weeks ago, so there would be nothing unusual in either action; the unusual part would come later on. He

would return shortly after midnight, get the duplicate keys which he had found in Dunning's private box, go into the purser's office through the inside entrance, and take away the seven hundred ounces of gold.

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In the morning, when Victor gave him back the key, he would, as was customary under such circumstances, have the safe unlocked, so as to make sure that all was right. The safe would be empty! A hue and cry would be raised. His first duty as manager would be to send an official telegram to the directors. The police trooper would at once begin to search round; so would he—Trevaskis; and that night he would discover the gold where the thief had secreted it. Then Fitz-Gibbon would no doubt go on to town as he proposed. He might, perhaps, be confident that the keys had not been out of his possession; but there the facts would be public and patent to all. The same train that conveyed Fitz-Gibbon to town would carry a letter to the directors from the mine-manager, declining to act any longer with a purser whose negligence had so nearly

cast an irretrievable slur on them both. He would point out that if the thief had succeeded in carrying off the gold as easily as he had obtained possession of the keys and rifled the safe, the consequences to him as a poor man, with a wife and family dependent on his sole exertions for a livelihood, would have been serious in the extreme. Any insinuations made against him by Fitz-Gibbon would then bear a very suspicious aspect. If he went to the trouble of stirring up an inquiry as to the cave room, he would take up the position that he had special reasons for not caring to interfere with Dunning's effects till his legal representative was on the spot. By the time that a week or two was consumed, the treasure would be secured in a way that would leave no possibility of recovery. Then they could search till they were black in the face.

Trevaskis laughed aloud in his glee as he saw himself at last triumphing over all dangers and obstacles. He went over the whole scheme time after time, strengthening lame places and elaborating little details,

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during his ride to and from his quartz claim. He worked that night in the cave room again for several hours, after finding that he could not close his eyes in sleep.

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During the next two days his demeanour to Victor was more friendly than usual. He was most of the time slightly under the influence of drink. He tried to refrain, feeling that in his excited state the use of stimulants was dangerous. But the tension of his nerves, the fits of miserable uncertainty which assailed him, the almost total lack of appetite, and the loss of sleep, made it impossible for him to bear up without a liberal recourse to the old Bordeaux brandy of which he had a case in his office. Nor had he any dread that the habit to which he yielded at this pinch would take a mischievous hold of him. He regarded his drams as a sort of medicine that would help him over a steep pull, like doses of quinine for ague fever.

The gold cleaning-up was over by half-past six o'clock on Thursday.

'I am going over to Broombush Creek, to see one of the managers there. I'll most

likely stay the night, and perhaps have a little turkey-shooting on the way back. I'd better leave my key in your charge,' said Trevaskis, as he was leaving the office, after the two bars of gold were locked up.

'All right. Of course you'll be back before I leave?'

'Oh yes. I'll be here by eleven in the morning at latest.'

And with that the two parted.

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CHAPTER II.

A CELEBRATED Greek philosopher was of opinion that women were only created when Nature found that the imperfection of matter did not permit her to carry on the world without them. It is possible that some might demur to this ; but most of us would be ready to admit that letters are written chiefly because of the imperfect development of our senses. And yet there are certain communications which one might prefer to make in a little note, even if telepathy were an assured and exact science.

Of this kind was the announcement that Victor had to make to Miss Paget. He had put away the thought of their actual meeting as often as it had arisen ; but now that he was to set out on the morrow, and

the hour was drawing so near in which his story must be told, its awkwardness came home to him more and more.

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He reflected how very frequently he had found Mrs. Tillotson installed with Helen for the afternoon or evening, how often she was summoned by her father into the library, and, still more embarrassing, he thought how very foolish he would feel when it gradually dawned on Miss Paget that he had come, not to woo, but to make a confession and ride away. Yes, on the whole, it would be better to write a little note—one which, without going into tedious details, would put Helen *en rapport* with his position. This he would leave at Lancaster House personally as soon as he reached town, leaving a message that he should call an hour later. He had almost succeeded in persuading himself that his mother's suggestion was true—that Miss Paget had fixed a term of probation not so much to test his fidelity as to let him down gently without too abrupt a refusal. But as he sat at his desk to write his little preparatory letter after Trevaskis had left the office,

certain recollections arose which made his task a difficult one.

He wanted to find words that would put the matter adroitly and delicately, but all the finer *nuances* of expression seemed to escape from his pen. After writing half a sheet he stared at it discontentedly, and then sat resting his head on his hand. The day had been sultry and airless. He had been at work from five in the morning, and it was now nearly seven. The pen slipped from his hand. He did not fall asleep, but he went off into a waking dream. Some lines he had read in an old poet came back to him:

> 'Open the temple gates unto my love;
> Open them wide, that she may enter in.'

A look of beatitude overspread his face. Suddenly he was startled by the sound of a dull loud report, speedily followed by a second and a third. He thrust his unfinished letter into the drawer of his desk and went to the outer door of the assay-room. Roby stood talking to the mine blacksmith a few paces away.

'What are these reports, Roby? Are they making another grave?' asked Victor.

'Ah, Mr. Purser, in the midst o' life we are in death!' answered Roby, with the strong nasal accent habitual to him when giving expression to any serious sentiment. Then he explained that one of the Connell children had died of fever that morning. The father and another miner were now employed in blasting out a grave in the little cemetery, which was within half a mile of the mine, where the ground was so adamantine that it could not be dug out in the ordinary way. Victor had recognised the sounds, having heard them on a few occasions previously. This process of forcing a last resting-place from the blue clay slate rock had always seemed to him a rather horrible preface to being buried. Just then, when he was lost in blissful waking dreams, the thought of death struck a sudden chill to his heart. He was turning impatiently away from Roby, who seemed inclined to improve the occasion, when Michael reached the door of the assay-room with a message for the purser. It was to the effect that Circus Bill's trap with passengers from Broombush Creek was going to start at

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daybreak, so as to reach Nilpeena in time for the early train to town.

'I thoht, as ye were going, sor, to-morrow, ye moight loike to start early, so as to save the waiting at Nilpeena. 'Tis a sthrange droiver, Circus himself being laid up at Broombush wid a touch av sunsthroke. It's glad oi am he washn't tuk wid the same on the way from Nilpeena, for the sake av the lady that come to Shtonehouse.'

'Has a lady come to Stonehouse?' asked Victor. 'At what time? Have you heard who she is?'

Michael, who spoke of the new arrival solely because he divined that anything which related to Stonehouse was of passing importance to the young purser, was not surprised to find the eager interest with which he received the news. He, however, knew nothing beyond the fact that a lady had arrived by Circus Bill's trap half an hour before the mail-coach came in. As soon as Victor had despatched the little man to ask the driver to secure a seat in the early trap, he went across to Stonehouse. When he reached the house he found an air

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of unusual bustle pervading it. Shung-Loo was flitting about the place with as near an approach to a smile as his face ever wore.
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Bridget was hurrying in and out between the kitchen and dining-room ; Euphemia had a large basket of flowers in the veranda, which she was arranging in vases on the little wicker table. When Victor joined her she had a great deal to tell him. Her aunt, Mrs. Murray, had come from Ouranie, Doris's old home. She had all at once made up her mind when she found that Mr. Challoner's illness was likely to be a lingering one.

'She has come to stay and help to nurse father, and see that mother gets plenty of sleep, and that Doris does not do too much. Aunt thinks she is looking rather too pale.'

'But there is nothing wrong with her. She was well this morning,' interrupted Victor anxiously.

'Oh yes ; she isn't ill, you know,' answered Euphemia placidly. 'But she went to see Milly Connell—that little girl who has been so ill—and found she had died. Then aunt came and brought a lot of

things from Ouranie. . . . Doris is in her own room now, reading over and over a little old book that belonged to her mother. www.libtool.com.cn You can always tell when she thinks of her mother. . . she sits so still and her eyes get so large and dark.'

A summons to dinner put an end to Euphemia's confidences. As the patient had fallen into a sound sleep, all the household assembled at this meal. Victor was duly introduced to the new-comer — a bright, active little woman, who treated her journey of over two hundred miles to the Salt-bush Country as if it were an afternoon drive.

'You all look as if you needed twelve hours' sleep on end,' she said, glancing at her sister and the two girls. 'I think I had better send you all to bed in an hour after dinner.'

But there was a general outcry against this. One who had come off a long fatiguing journey could not be allowed to sit up on any pretence.

'It is you who must go to bed soon after dinner, auntie, and in my little room,' said Euphemia.

But Doris objected to this proposition.

Her room was much larger; besides, there was a couch in it, and on that she herself could sleep very well. On this Victor joined in.

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'I know it is not in human nature to sleep in three rooms at once; but as my room will be empty, I think it ought to have the honour of Mrs. Murray's presence.'

He went on to explain that as he intended to start by Circus Bill's trap, which was going to Nilpeena in the small hours of the morning, it would be more convenient for him to sleep on the bunk in his office, where he would be nearer Scroog's place, from which the trap started. As Victor made this announcement he met Doris's eyes with a half inquiring, wistful little look in them, which made him thrill with pleasure.

'Tell me, Doris, are you sorry I am going away for a few days?' he asked a little later, with all the egotism of a young lover.

They had adjourned to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Murray, instead of taking it easy, as behoved a wearied traveller, began to write a long letter to her husband. Mrs. Challoner had returned to the sick

room, and Euphemia was engaged in rifling the numerous vases she had recently filled of some of the white flowers they contained.

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'Yes. I am a little sad even when you go away to the mine in the morning. I always look after you, though you do not see me.'

'Oh, you perfect little darling!' murmured the young man in a voice made tremulous with joy.

'How strange it would be,' continued Doris, 'if one of us two died like that little——'

'Oh, don't, Doris—don't speak or think of anything so dreadful!' said Victor, in an imploring voice.

She was silent for a little time, and then said softly:

'But, Victor, you must think of it one day. Even if we lived here a hundred years, what a tiny speck of time it is compared to the thousands and thousands that have come and gone! Everything and everyone goes away after a little time. That is why I try so often to think what the other world can be like.'

'But, my own Doris, is not this world enough for you just now? Why think of any other?'

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'I must think of another, because maman is no longer here,' she answered, fixing her wide-opened eyes on his face. Then, after a little pause: 'Did you ever lose anyone that you loved very much?'

'No. I can hardly remember my father.'

'Ah, that is the reason that you like to think only of this life. If you had lost anyone that you loved as I love mother, you could not help trying to imagine day by day where she is, and what she is doing or saying. You could not help feeling oftentimes that she still thinks about you. Oh, how much I should like to know whether the flowers that she loved so much grow there, and whether "the river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God," looks to her like the waters of Gauwari! Perhaps you do not like me to talk like this to you?'

'Oh yes, Doris. Only—I know I am a selfish wretch—I would rather that

thoughts of me pushed nearly all others out of your mind.’

‘So they often do—all but mother. And to-day, more than ever, I keep thinking of her all the time. First, when I went down to see little Mamie Connell, and found that she had gone away in the night——’

‘Gone away?’ repeated Victor wonderingly.

‘Yes; that is what really happens, you know, when people die. The mother was crying in a loud way. I don’t know why, but it made me feel almost unkind to her, when she made such a noise. She kept on sobbing because there was no priest. As if that could matter, when the poor dear child went home to God!’

‘Oh, you little Protestant! You must know that I am of Mrs. Connell’s way of thinking. If I were dying I should be very uncomfortable if there were no priest to look after me. Not that there need be the same fear for poor little Mamie.’

‘But why should you want a priest?’

‘Because he would, I hope, help to make things a little straight for me.’

'Wouldn't you feel sure that you were going to heaven?'

'No—not at all.'
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'Then what do you think might become of you?'

'Dearie, I would rather not say. I am awfully weak in theology. Besides, I want to hear you talk. I want to hear about the rest of your day.'

'When I saw Mamie she made me think so much of darling mother. I felt as if I wanted to go to her that moment.'

'Oh, Doris! didn't you think of me?'

'Not just then; I could only think of mother. As I stood at the door of Mrs. Connell's house, telling her I would bring some of the flowers that Mamie used to like so much, a trap passed by quickly, with a lady on the front seat. I thought she looked very much like Mrs. Murray, only I couldn't be sure. Then when I reached home here she was. She brought a boxful of things from Ouranie: some of the early fruits; flowers from the garden, and grasses from the banks of the lake; pictures and books. One of them is full of little old

French rhymes that mother used to sing to me when I was a small child.'

'Tell me some of them, if you please—that is, if you remember any.'

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'Oh yes; I shall never forget them. They are old *berceuses* with words strung together that have a sleepy sound, like this:

'"Som, som, som, beni, beni, beni, beni,
Beni d'endacoui,
Som, som, beni d'endacou."'

Doris crooned the words in a low, monotonous voice.

'That sounds very dreamy and wise,' said Victor. 'Perhaps I should not ask what "Som, som, som," means.'

'It is like asking sleep to come. They are not all nonsense-words; they are chants to make you happy and good. "Come, Sleep," say some of them, "and keep the child safe and quiet. Mother has to work, and father has togo into the woods." Often these little *chansons* come to me when I am asleep, just as mother used to sing them. Sometimes the little "Som, soms" promise to give a good child towns and villages—even Constantinople.'

'That ought to make any right-thinking baby fall fast asleep, I should think.'

Doris smiled, and then said :

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'The one I like best begins, "Dors, dors, doux oiseau de la prairie."'

'Say it in English, like a good child.'

'"Sleep, sleep, gentle bird of the plain ; take thy repose, red-breast, take thy repose ; God will awake thee in His good time. Sleep is at the door, and says : 'Is there not here a little infant—a little infant sleeping in its cradle—a little infant swaddled—a little infant reposing on a blanket of wool ?' Here——"'

'Doris, do you think there will be enough to make this cross for Mrs. Connell ?' said Euphemia, approaching the two with a basketful of white flowers, chiefly moss roses, marguerites, and jasmine.

'Yes — more than enough, I think,' answered Doris ; 'only I hardly know how to make it. Mrs. Connell said she would like the flowers made into a cross,' she said, turning to Victor, who sat looking at Euphemia, wondering whether any providential circumstance would arise to call her away.

On hearing Doris's explanation he, of course, volunteered his help. He went out into Mr. Challoner's workshop, and soon returned with a cross formed by nailing together two small flat boards, fashioned according to the proportions of a small gold cross which he had on his watch-chain. He watched Doris covering this artless wooden cross with flowers, fastening them by the stems with a narrow white ribbon, while he handed her the flowers and Euphemia looked on.

'Sing me another little "Som, som,"' said Victor, after some moments, half resenting Doris's absorption in this pathetic little task.

Then in a low, half-mysterious voice Doris crooned the words:

> '"Dedans le bois, dedans le bois,
> Savez-vous ce qu'il y a?
> Il y a un arbre
> Le plus beau des arbres;
> L'arbre est dans le bois.
> Oh, oh, oh, le bois—
> Le plus joli de tous les bois!"'

* * * * *

At last Victor was forced to go and pack his portmanteau. When he returned to say

good-bye Mrs. Murray's letter was finished, and she sat talking with the two girls. Doris had completed her last offering to the little one who had 'gone away' so early that morning. It lay on the table, the great symbol of renunciation, wreathed with soft snow-white blooms. Doris held it up for Victor to see; but he hardly looked at it—his eyes were fixed on her face.

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There was no further opportunity for speaking to her alone; but as he bade her good-bye, she held out both hands to him, her face irradiated with an expression of confiding love, which made him feel that it was worth while to go away for the sake of such a look.

It was after ten when he reached his office. He had to write up some entries in the cash-book. He began to nod over this, and it was with difficulty he kept himself awake till the work was finished. At last the books were put away, and merely removing his coat, waistcoat, and boots, Victor threw himself on the bunk with a travelling-rug over his feet.

But just as he was falling asleep, he recol-

lected that he had the manager's key, and that he would be gone hours before Trevaskis returned. With an effort he roused himself to consider how he should leave it in a place of safety. He relit the lamp, put the safe-key in an official envelope addressed to Trevaskis, locking it in the right-hand drawer of the table at which he habitually sat. Then he wrote a memo. to say that he was taking advantage of Circus Bill's trap going so early, so as to save waiting at Nilpeena; that he had locked the safe-key in the drawer, and that the key thereof was enclosed in this memo. He took both to the manager's office, going to it through the intermediate store-rooms. He took his bunch of office-keys with him, expecting that he should have to unlock at least two of the three doors which intervened between his own and the manager's office; but they were all unlocked, and feeling sure that Trêvaskis must have left them thus for some reason of his own, Victor left them as he found them.

This excursion wakened him up so thoroughly that it was close upon twelve

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when he dozed off again. Before he could be said to have fallen asleep he was roused by some movement; but he was so loath to get up the second time that he did not move till he distinctly heard the sound of a key being thrust into the lock of the safe.

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CHAPTER III.

Treváskis returned to the mine at a quarter to twelve, after drinking heavily at the leading hotel at Broombush Creek. He had abstained from all stimulant during the day, and meant to keep absolutely cool and sober till this crucial affair of temporary theft was done with ; but the fatigue and heat of the day, combined with his inability to eat, and the tense excitement under which he laboured, combined to break down his resolution. So far, however, from feeling incapacitated for carrying out his plans, it seemed to him that the fillip which brandy gave his spirits and imagination formed an additional element of success.

He put his horse in the stable, and then went into his rooms by the outer door of

his office. He had, in the course of the afternoon, come through the intermediate rooms from Victor's, leaving the doors unlocked, so that he might pass through in the dark without a light. After much consideration, he had decided to hide the gold in the safe in his own room. It would be the safest plan. Then, as soon as darkness fell, on the succeeding night, he would go out with the gold, and come down the face of the reef with it, nearly opposite the engine-room, triumphantly displaying the two bars, as he had recovered them, wrapped round with a piece of stained cloth, where they had, no doubt, been hidden by the thief, under some stones, till he should be able to carry them off at his leisure.

It was these after-details that occupied his mind as he reached the safe with the pair of duplicate keys. He was so sure of his ground that he could manage all without lighting even a match. He knew that there were always some of the miners who lingered at the inn till after midnight, and who, on returning, would sometimes

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stroll to the engine-house. If they saw a light at so unusual an hour in the purser's office, they would as likely come as not, in their idle irresponsible way, to see what 'was up.' He shot back both bolts, and was in the act of taking up the first bar of gold, when he thought he heard footsteps at the door. He had not time to withdraw his head from the safe, when a strong grip on his arm for a moment paralyzed him, and a voice cried at his ear :

'Who are you? What are you doing here?'

In a moment he had recovered from his stupefaction. With the fury of a beast of prey suddenly attacked, he closed in the darkness with the man, whose grasp warned him that he was not one who could be lightly shaken off. Backing out from the safe, and without uttering a word, he threw both arms round his antagonist like a vice, and flung him fiercely round. As he did this, the man's head came against the edge of the iron safe with a horrible dull thud. At once his hold relaxed. He gave one low shuddering moan, and Trevaskis felt

him in his arms a limp, inanimate burden. He slowly released him, letting him slide to the ground without allowing him to fall heavily. He lay there without a movement, or even the sound of breathing. And then an awful silence fell on the room.

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Trevaskis was incapable of coherent thought. His first instinct was to recover the keys and make off; but he had dropped a bar of gold. It was under the man's motionless form. As he groped about, he came on a fine cambric handkerchief—one that had a suspicion of the breath of violets on it. Then, with a cold, trembling hand, he touched the man's face. The cheeks were smooth; on the upper lip there was a slight silken moustache. A suspicion of the truth flashed on him. He remembered that a lamp usually stood on the window-sill; he groped for it, and lit it after he had ineffectually struck two or three matches. He could never recollect the first instant in which the prostrate man's face became visible to him. After what seemed long moments, he found himself with a heart that throbbed to bursting,

his eyes riveted on Fitz-Gibbon, who lay as he fell, without sound or motion. And, as he looked, the words came to him like the hiss of a serpent: 'By-and-by you get over that, and you go on and on till——' *Now* the blank was filled. Trembling in every limb, he knelt down beside Victor.

'My God! I have killed him! I have killed him! I have killed him!' He murmured the words over and over automatically, while the perspiration rolled in great cold beads down his face.

For some moments the power of thought was suspended. He tried in a stupefied mechanical way to recollect what he had proposed to do. But here, even if his memory had been clear and active, it would have afforded him little assistance. It was all the work of less than three minutes; but in that infinitesimal space of time he found himself in the grim clutches of a deed wholly at variance with the purpose which had called it into being.

It is this tragic, unlooked-for evolution of events that, all through man's history,

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makes him so largely the puppet of forces with which he may gamble, but which he can never wholly control. Nearly all the criminals who become such through accident, rather than temperament, owe their first plunge into lawlessness to the unforeseen development of circumstances rather than to determined purpose.

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'No, no; he doesn't move nor breathe; he is dead—he is dead—he is dead!' moaned Trevaskis under his breath, his eyes fixed on the livid bruise above Victor's right temple. He felt for a pulse in vain; he held the glass of his watch against the parted lips; he placed his hand above the heart; but he found no symptom of life. Trevaskis rose up, looking wildly around. His brain, which had been demoralized for so many days by fiery stimulant, by ceaseless excitement, without proper rest or nourishment, had at this crisis lost all power of initiative.

Twice he essayed to blow out the lamp, with a vague purpose of going away, of saddling his horse and riding back to Broombush; but no, even already he felt

himself in the toils. He had kept away from the main track on his return, so as to avoid anyone he knew, and yet, within two miles of Colmar, he had been accosted in the starlight by three horsemen, one of them the manager who had dined at the Colmar Arms on the day that Vansittart made up his story about the fortune he had discovered at a gold mine. The thought of this chance encounter made him feel as if all effort at concealing his guilt would be abortive. Whichever way he turned he seemed to see himself beset by unknown risks, from which he could find no ultimate escape.

'I have murdered him! I have murdered him!' he gasped hoarsely, staring at the prostrate body, his face gray with terror. Presently, with a wild rebellion against the horror of it all, he flung himself down once more by Victor's motionless form, chafing his hands, uncovering his chest, and raising his head. Then he got some water, with which he wetted the young man's lips, face, and hands. But there was no tremor of returning life—all its pulses seemed to have ceased.

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Oh God! he was already growing cold and stiff!

As this conviction fastened on him, Trevaskis stood once more rooted to the spot. He was overtaken by a nightmare sort of horror, in which all his consciousness was centred on one awful thought. He saw, as if in a series of pictures, the ghastly consequences of this night's work. His arrest, his trial, the witnesses that would arise on every side, the damning evidence that would be supplied by the contents of the cave room.

'They won't believe I didn't mean to kill him,' he said, uttering the words in a horrified whisper, his parched lips cleaving to his teeth. 'And yet I didn't—I didn't—so help me God! I had no thought of harming him.' One or two hot tears trickled down his cheeks. Gradually the very poignancy of his sufferings seemed to restore his stricken faculties. Part of one of the projects that had floated hazily through his brain, when rendered desperate by the thought of seeing the cave room searched, now came back to him. He hurried through

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the store-rooms to his office, and opened the door leading into the iron passage. Then he put a lighted candle in the cave room, preparatory to carrying Victor there.

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At first it seemed as if he were wholly unequal to the task. But as he thought of all that lay at stake, the blood leapt in his veins with those throbs that chronicle moments during which physical impossibilities disappear. He lifted Victor in his arms, and, without once pausing on the way, carried him through the offices and the iron passage into the cave room. On reaching it he placed the inanimate form on the bunk near the entrance. As soon as he had done this, he hurried back into one of the stores in which a small quantity of dynamite was kept. He took five plugs and a cartridge, with the necessary wire to explode the charge, from a magneto-electric battery in his own office. Then he took the lamp back to the purser's office, intending to extinguish it and leave it there. But he dared not. A sudden unreasoning, overwhelming horror came over him, that, if he went back in the dark, the face of the dead

would stare at him from every side. Even at that moment, with the light full in his eyes, a conviction seized him that close www.libtool.com.cn behind, just over his shoulder if he looked, he would see a sight that would freeze his blood with terror. He leant across the desk at which Victor used to work, and moaned piteously:

'O God! O God! is this to be my life after this? Wherever I go, wherever I am, whatever I do, is this thing to be with me—never to leave me? And I was warned, I was warned, but I would go on my way! But, oh, God in heaven! though no one else would believe it, you know I did not mean to kill him, nor to lay a finger on him.' Tears coursed down his cheeks as he spoke, half in prayer, half in exculpation. No, he had not meant it; surely that would take away the guilt of the deed. This little outburst seemed to lessen the pressure on his brain.

Yet, as he went back, he peered with wild eyes from side to side. When he reached the cave room he put the lamp on the little deal table, taking care not to let his eyes

wander towards the bunk on which Victor was lying.

Trevaskis' plan was to let this charge off, so that it might appear Victor's death was due to the discharge while engaged in searching the place prior to his going to town. There would be the letter which he, the manager, had received on the subject less than a week ago, to bear witness to Fitz-Gibbon's wish to overhaul the cave room. Everyone that knew anything of it knew that the place was littered with all sorts of odds and ends. A few plugs of damaged dynamite accidentally ignited would be the supposed cause of the explosion, and of the young man's death. But before firing the charge he would remove the smelted gold. He had hidden the bars underground close to the bunk.

As he was about to uncover them his gaze involuntarily rested on Victor. The next instant he was kneeling beside him with a low cry. If his eyes had not deluded him there was a slight tremor of the eyelids. Now, as he felt the pulses afresh, he thought he could detect a faint, uncertain

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beat. When he put his hand over the region of the heart he was sure of it.

Like most men who have lived much www.libtool.com.cn in the bush with workmen under them, Trevaskis had picked up some rough knowledge of surgery. Now that the first overmastering terror and excitement had passed away, leaving him comparatively sober, he noted symptoms in Victor's condition that pointed to concussion of the brain. The inflexibility of the limbs, the coldness of the body, the all but imperceptible pulse and breath, he had noted these before in such cases. But as he recollected this, he also recalled how, in the two worst instances that had come under his notice of concussion of the brain, the patients had, after lingering some days, died unconscious. . . . Would Fitz-Gibbon recover or die?

With this thought arose the question as to what should be done with him under these altered circumstances. Should he take him back to the office and leave him till he was found lying there? No one would have any clue as to the way the accident happened. Only, if he died, would not a

chain of evidence be somehow forged that would incriminate the real culprit? At this thought Trevaskis stood for a moment irresolute. At last he determined to take Victor back and leave him on the floor in the office, with his head slightly raised.

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But when he attempted to carry him, as he had done before, he found himself quite unequal to the task. The stimulus of extreme terror was gone. The reaction had set in. The varying emotions he had passed through had dissipated his strength. He went to his room to fortify himself with a dose of brandy. All the time he was torn in two directions, whether to hide Victor in the cave room and tend him till he found whether he died or recovered, or take him back and allow him to be discovered in his unconscious state on the morrow in the ordinary course of events.

He lit a candle in his room and helped himself to some brandy and water. As he was in the act of drinking this, he noticed Victor's note on the table, with the key of his drawer. He had barely taken in the fact that the young man's presence in the

office was due to his intention to start by Circus Bill's trap at four in the morning, when he heard a low continuous knocking at his office door. He instantly blew out the light and waited in silence, to find whether he was the victim of the insane fears that in so short a time had taken fast hold of him. But no, the knocking after a short intermission was renewed. He went to the office window and drew up the blind.

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'Be 'ee there, Bill?' said a voice which he recognised as his brother's. He went out to him at once, finding a strange relief in the prospect of friendly companionship. At first he heard his brother's voice as if from a great distant. Dan Trevaskis was in dire trouble, and, all unconscious of the wild dismay in which he found his brother, he began to relate his tale. On the journey from Melbourne he had met his boy Dick on the way thereto—ran against him accidentally at one of the stations at which both trains called. He was looking miserably ill, and on being questioned he confessed to his father that he had embezzled some money, that he had left the Bank on ten days'

leave of absence, and meant to run away somewhere. His father had brought him back with him; had walked with him from Yarranalla, twelve miles further off than Nilpeena. They had come by an indirect route, so as to meet no one on the way.

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'I want to hide 'e, Bill. The lad can stay by me at that claim where I'm to work alone. Why, what 'ud be the good of 'e trying to run away? I'll make the money good to the Bank; but I can't abear to let 'em 'ave the boy to put in prison. I'd sooner die, by God I would!'

'Where is he now?' said Trevaskis, in a dull heavy voice.

''E's restin' a bit away from here. . . . I didn't like to bring 'e up, in case anyone might be about with 'e.'

Gradually, as Trevaskis listened to his brother, a scheme unfolded itself, vague at first, but gathering coherence as he thought it over.

In this youth fleeing from justice, and in his father eager above all things to screen him from the reach of the law, he might find the very instruments needed to free

him from the horrible dilemma in which he found himself. To send this youth away under the name of Victor Fitz-Gibbon would www.libtool.com.cn afford him all the time necessary to secure the treasure and to see whether Victor recovered. If he did, he could be drugged, and left in the wastes around somewhere till he was discovered. Others might be suspected, and others might suffer, but at any rate this great crisis could be tided over. Only, till the boy was safely despatched, secrecy would be necessary as to that stricken life now hidden underground. If the worst came to the worst—if he died, he could get rid of the remains in a way that would absolutely defy detection. There was the limestone kiln all this week and the next, and at any time that the manager would choose to set it going, ready to calcine any matter that was cast into its depths.

A short time before Trevaskis left town, he had seen a play in which a murderer—a man who had designedly killed another for the sake of gain—had disposed of his victim in that manner.

'This is what people mean when they say

the stage has such good moral effects,' he thought; 'it helps them to scheme how to get away from a coil of suspicions. No one would believe that I hadn't killed Fitz-Gibbon because he was on the track of the hidden gold. But I didn't; it was all accidental. Now here's the way to get out of it all.' He felt his courage rising every moment.

'What do you think, Bill? Can't I keep him with myself all unbeknownst to anyone else?' said Dan, in an imploring voice.

'No, Dan, you can't; the thing has been tried over and over again, and always comes to grief,' answered Trevaskis coldly. And then, in the pause that ensued, he keenly noted the despair of the unhappy man, who was ready to embrace any scheme to save his boy from the shame and open disgrace that threatened him.

'There's only one plan that I can see to save him,' said Trevaskis in a moody, yet half indifferent tone.

'What is that, Bill? Tell me, for God's sake!' cried Dan.

There was silence for a moment or two,

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and then Trevaskis answered, in the tones of one who is not supremely interested :

'There is a young swell here who wants for some reasons of his own to be quit of his friends for a time without leaving the country. There is a wool-ship leaving Port Pellew the day after to-morrow. If anyone left by that vessel in his name I believe he would pay handsomely——'

'Oh, Bill! Bill! would 'e let my boy go?—but tell me, has this young swell done nothing 'isself?' cried Dan with breathless eagerness.

'Nothing in the world, in the way you mean,' answered Trevaskis, still maintaining the cold aspect of a man not committed to one side or the other.

'Would 'e let my lad Dick go in place of 'e?'

'I believe he would, and pay his way,' answered Trevaskis, turning to fumble for his pipe and tobacco-pouch. He smoked as a rule only at night, and kept these on the mantelpiece of his office. He had lit only a candle, and he felt somehow safer to be away from his brother's observation while

he threw out these baits as if they were half-random suggestions, unconnected with any vital interests of his own.

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'Then, Bill, for God's sake let my boy go for him!' cried Dan, standing up and placing his hand on Trevaskis' arm.

'Go and call him in,' said Trevaskis curtly. Dan at once hurried outside. Then Trevaskis unlocked the iron safe in his office and took out a little leathern bag which held a hundred sovereigns. He had thought it safer to keep some gold coin by him, and now his forecasts were strangely confirmed. He was fast approaching the old self-complacent standpoint, in which his 'luck' appeared to him as a definite valuable possession, to be calculated and acted upon. With this bag of sovereigns in his possession he went with a lighted candle into the purser's office. There was Victor's Gladstone bag all ready packed, with his ulster and travelling cap on a chair by the sofa on which he had thrown himself down under his travelling rug. He unlocked the drawer of the desk at which Victor habitually worked, and found the large envelope en-

closing the safe key addressed in his bold running hand :

Captain Trevaskis,
Colmar Mine.

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The envelope had been so hurriedly closed that by slipping in the point of his penknife the paper yielded under a little pressure without the least tear.

Trevaskis reflected that someone might call by arrangement to waken the purser before four. He therefore threw the window wide open, poured water into the wash-hand basin, which stood in an iron frame near it, washed his hands, and threw the wetted towel carelessly on the edge of the stand, and then flung various articles about on the bunk, giving the place that air of disorder which a room wears when one leaves it hurriedly. Then he gathered up Victor's effects and took them to his own room. There the father and son awaited him.

Trevaskis wasted no time in preambles of any kind.

'I'm going to help you out of this mess you've got into, Dick, but mind, you have to

keep your wits about you. You'll get out of the train at Oswald township, and change into the one for Port Pellew at mid-day. www.libtool.com.cn You'll get into the Port at seven in the evening, and put up at the Kangaroo Inn. It's about the middle of the township, facing the jetty, and the nearest inn to the station. Here's a note-book and pencil; just enter these directions. . . . Yes—well—there are two wool-ships advertised to sail on Saturday, early in the day. Go by the first one that sails. Now, mark me, your line is to leave evidence which will lead people to believe you are one Victor Fitz-Gibbon, but you are not to go in his name. Dan, what name had this unfortunate boy better go under? W. T. had better be the initials, because he'll have to take a stock of my things. William Thompson—that will do—that will do.'

'And 'ow's 'e to give out that 'e's Fitz-Gibbon, Bill? Is 'e to make any statement?' said Dan, who was quivering with excitement as he listened.

'Nothing of the sort,' answered Trevaskis. 'In the first place, he's to post me this letter the first thing.' He produced the

envelope Victor had addressed, and into it he put two or three folded official documents that he took off his own table—papers of the kind that might have been casually in the purser's possession.

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'See, I'll put a stamp on it, and it will be all ready for posting, and mind you post it the very first thing before you go to the inn. Then, in your bedroom, be careful to forget this little packet—look, there are three letters, all addressed "Victor Fitz-Gibbon, Colmar Mine, Colmar," as well as a couple of his visiting-cards. Go into your room the last thing before starting, and put these into a drawer in the toilet-table or some such place. Your name won't appear at all; they don't treat these ships like passenger vessels. You'll pay the captain for your passage. You'll go first class, and directly you land in London go to the post-office; there will be letters awaiting you there, and I'll make arrangements with a friend in the City to give you some work in an office till we can see our way to your coming back. Here's a hundred sovereigns for you.'

Trevaskis, as he spoke, emptied the little leathern bag on the table, and the money fell in a glittering shower.

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'Oh, uncle, that is too much! You are too good to me,' said Dick, penetrated with the thought of his kinsman's disinterested generosity.

He was a tall, loose-jointed youth, with pale eyes and rather a foolish mouth, but there were as yet no vicious lines in his face, and the sight of his father's silent misery pierced him to the heart.

Trevaskis filled one of his largest portmanteaus with clothes and linen. As the preparations drew to a close, poor Dan began to feel certain misgivings.

'Oh, Bill! don't 'ee think if 'ee spoke for my lad to the directors and managers they'd look over this? I'd be more nor willin' to make up the money. 'Twas only fifty pound, all told,' he said, speaking to Trevaskis in a low voice.

'Just enough to get him four years in the stockade, and put the stain of a convict on him for life,' answered Trevaskis, closing the portmanteau with a sharp click. 'As for my

speaking to anyone on his behalf, if I was a wealthy member of Parliament, and all the rest of it, I might do some good; as it is, I should only give them the clue where to send the police for him.'

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Dan shrank back as if he were struck, and offered no further resistance. At three all was ready.

'You had better walk down with your portmanteau, and wait a little beyond Scroog's inn till the coach starts,' said Trevaskis, turning to his nephew. But the father in Dan rose tyrannously.

'Just 'alf a minute for myself and the lad, Bill!' he said in a tremulous voice, and then he stepped outside with his son. The night was very sultry, the sky heavily overcast with clouds. There was a high, hot wind, dense with dust.

'Dick, my boy, you're going far from me. I want to say a few words to you, but I'm whizzy like.'

Dan stopped abruptly. He made an effort to go on, but the words ended in short stifled sobs. There was so much he would like to have said, now that the moment of

parting had come, and he thought bitterly that to send his son away to the far ends of the earth, with a lie in his mouth as it were, was not a hopeful antidote for the evil courses into which he had fallen. But probably no form of set words or remonstrances could have reached the heart and conscience of the lad as did the sound of his father's broken voice.

'I oft to have set you a better ensample, I know,' he went on, when he could make his voice audible.

'Oh, father, don't say that; you've always been too good to me!' cried Dick, his own voice shattered and full of tears. 'You kept me long at school, and got me a good easy billet, and now I've given you nothing but trouble.'

'If you was only a little youngster once more, Dick, and I could keep you! but to be going from me like this, it takes the 'eart out o' me.'

Dan looked round, as if with some wild and sudden thought of escape. The silent and desolate salt-bush plains did not seem to him as forbidding as the wide, cruel

world beyond, to which his boy was fleeing in disgrace.

'But if I kep' you they would tear you from me, and make a gaol-bird of you. Oh, Dick! will you come to that after all? Oh, I'm afeerd, I'm afeerd——'

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'No, father, no! I promise you on my knees!' cried the lad in an agony of remorse and grief, kneeling down where he stood.

'Say your prayers to me, Dick, as you used to when you was a little chap,' whispered the father.

When they re-entered Trevaskis' office it was half-past three. He had some tea and bread-and-butter ready, and Dick did his best to eat and drink; but it was rather a melancholy failure. The first gleams of daylight were struggling through the warm dust-laden air as he went on his way. Half an hour later the coach started from Scroog's inn, amid a lusty chorus. Several of the passengers were lucky diggers, who had spent the night in drinking and gambling. The refrain

'We won't go home till morning,
Till daylight does appear,'

fell on Dan's ears with a mocking hilarity, as he watched the trap whirling away, with Dick wedged in between two other passengers on the back-seat.

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CHAPTER IV.

It would be hard to say which of the two men who watched Circus Bill's trap disappear in a great cloud of red dust felt most perplexed and miserable.

'I wish to Gord I 'ad a-took 'e back to the boss o' the bank, sooner than let 'e slide like this,' said Dan slowly, his massive face quivering, his eyes dim and bloodshot.

Trevaskis made no reply. In the calm dawn of day the conviction grew on him that his action in hiding Victor in the cave room was a plan so dangerous that it could have originated only in an intoxicated brain; but now the die was cast, and so far chance had favoured him. All the passengers, except Dick, were people from the diggings, and the driver who had

taken Bill's place was a stranger to the mine.

He pondered how and when he should reveal the real situation to Dan. Suppose Fitz-Gibbon should die? Trevaskis felt the possibility had to be faced, and he decided that in such an event he must have no confidant. He decided, too, that in any case it would be best to let his brother remain in ignorance till Dick was beyond recall.

'You're low and miserable, Dan, and I don't wonder at it,' he said kindly, putting his hand on his brother's shoulder. 'Come in, old man, and have a good stiff nobbler or two of brandy, and go to bed. I'll make one up for you in the room off my office; I've had it cleared out on purpose. But perhaps you'd better not go to bed for an hour or two. Hang about and show yourself when the night core comes up, and the morning one goes down; we don't want to give anyone the chance of saying you're hiding here.'

'You're right there, Bill,' answered Dan; 'I'll go across to the ingin-room and 'ave

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a pitch wi' 'Zilla. . . . And, Bill, do'ee not leave the grog about. . . . Thee know'st 'tis not pors'ble for me to 'ave just one nip, and be ended . . . and I want to keep feer sober and daicent, and say a word or two to the Lord for my boy, night and day. 'E may turn a deef ear, but I'll just give 'E a chance to 'ear me.'

But Trevaskis had no thought of furthering those good intentions. He prepared a bed for Dan in the empty room between his own office and the ironmongery store, locking the door that led into the latter. On a box beside the bed he put a tin of biscuits, a jug of water, a tumbler, and a freshly-opened bottle of brandy. On the evening of the next day this was empty, and Trevaskis filled it once more with the same liquor. It was late on Monday before Dan recovered his senses, sick and sorry, and ashamed and miserable, to the last degree.

In these four days Trevaskis felt as if he had lived as many years. During the first day every succeeding hour seemed to deepen his despairing hopelessness, his im-

potent rage at his own imbecility. If he had only left Victor lying senseless with the keys in the safe! But his brain had been paralyzed. At first the plan of making it appear that Victor had taken ship from Port Pellew had seemed a god-send; now he perceived quicksands on every side, and felt that each step he took to avoid suspicion and inquiry might eventually become a strong link in a chain of damning evidence.

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At the end of forty-eight hours Victor showed signs of returning consciousness. After that, when Trevaskis attended him, he wore the wig and long gray beard which transformed him into an old man. To ensure himself still more against recognition, he also wore the smoke-coloured sun-glasses. On Monday morning, after giving Victor an egg beaten up with water and sugar, Trevaskis noticed him looking round, and trying to raise one of his hands. If he were well attended to, he might be himself again in a few days. As this accident had taken place without any design on his part, might it not be better to leave the young

man alone for a day or two? This would at least retard his recovery.

As Trevaskis pondered the question, he went out through his office door and walked round the mine. 'Stone dead hath no fellow.' The words seemed to resound in his ears, to be hissed at him by everything he passed. Could he—would he do it? In imagination, he followed himself, on a dark night, with a strange burden to the edge of the lime-kiln pit, with its lurid flames leaping high. . . . Was this what he was coming to hour by hour, and step by step?

'No, no, no! never! never!' he cried, starting back as if from an obstructing barrier. He returned to his office. On the table lay the mail, as it had been delivered to him untouched. Now, on turning over the papers and letters, he found two from Port Pellew. One was for Dan. He opened it, and read the following lines:

'Dear Father,

'Don't be uneasy about me. I'll never, never forget what you and uncle

have done for me. I'm sailing by the *Arcadia* in an hour. I've done everything uncle arranged. Father, I'll never forget my promise to you.

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'DICK.'

The look of the other envelope, addressed in Victor's bold, careless handwriting, with the Port Pellew post-mark and date, sharp and clear, revived Trevaskis' courage in a wonderful way. He instantly wrote a few lines to Mr. Drummond, expressing a little surprise that Mr. Fitz-Gibbon had gone to Port Pellew, without mentioning his change of plan. At least he (Trevaskis) inferred he had gone there, from the receipt of the enclosed envelope, which merely contained a few official documents, He had entrusted some commissions to Mr. Fitz-Gibbon, which needed prompt attention, and he would be glad therefore to know whether he had yet reached town. In order to save time, he was making inquiries at Port Pellew by the same post.

Then he wrote to the landlord of the Kangaroo Inn, asking whether a Mr. Victor

Fitz-Gibbon had put up at his hotel on Friday last, and if so whether he was still there.

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After that he felt reassured, till on going to see Victor again near sunset.

He found him murmuring some words over and over. He listened intently, and heard him say:

'Have you my letter, Helen? Helen, have you my letter?'

Helen? Was it, then, possible that the young man's abrupt change of plan was due to some woman, and had nothing to do with the question of searching for gold? Here Trevaskis saw himself threatened with a hitherto unsuspected danger. He knew that Victor's mother was on the other side of the world, and that he had no sister. An uncle's anxiety might be easily satisfied; a brother would in all probability calmly accept the first version furnished by circumstantial evidence; other friends would smile and suspect the young man had some good reason for secretly setting off on a long voyage. . . . But a woman—one who perhaps loved him? Each circumstance that served to satisfy

others might in her estimation be a ground for added suspicion.

'Helen, have you my letter?'

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Trevaskis listened again with laboured breath, and a dull, heavy beating in his temples.

After a short time Victor fell fast asleep. Trevaskis, devoured with fresh terrors, went to the purser's office, with the purpose of searching for some clue to this new complication. In the table drawer he found the letter which Victor had begun to write to Miss Paget:

'Dear Helen,

'When, at the close of our voyage in the *Mogul*, I asked that our friendship might have a firmer basis, and you laughingly suggested that the sea breezes had got into my head, I thought you were laying too much stress on the difference in our ages; and when, a few days after landing, I asked you to become my wife, I thought you were a little hard-hearted in stipulating for a period of probation, so that the strength of my affection might be tested. But now I find

that you were wise. For though my esteem for you is and always will remain unaltered——'

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That was all. The letter broke off abruptly. But after reading this fragment, Trevaskis opened Victor's desk, and read one by one the letters which he had received from Miss Paget since coming to the mine. Then the telegram from King George's Sound completed the record. Trevaskis locked the unfinished letter where he had found it with a lightened mind. If this young lady were harder to satisfy than Victor's other friends, as to his hurried departure, this half-sheet of writing would probably prove very useful.

It was after sunset when Dan, haggard and miserable, with throbbing temples and confused faculties, staggered out of the room in which he had been lying most of the time unconscious since Friday afternoon.

Trevaskis met him with a hot, strong cup of what he called 'coffee royal,' which Dan took and gulped down in silence.

'Here's a letter from Dick,' said the younger brother after a pause.

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Dan read the few lines, and his shaking hands grew more tremulous.

'Thank Gord 'e's got safe away!' he murmured. 'But what's the use o' me taking Gord's name in vain? . . . I'm worse than the brute beasts that perish!' he added with bitter emphasis.

'You'll be better after this, Dan,' said Trevaskis, who, now that the moment for making his revelation had come, felt as if all capacity of emotion had been left far behind. He was conscious only of a cold curiosity as to how this hiding of an injured man underground would strike his brother.

'Yes, I'll be better,' repeated Dan slowly. Then after a pause, 'If I could only resist the devil. You meant it for the best, Bill; but I'd give anything I 'adn't 'ad this burst of drink. It's more 'n a year that I didn't give way till I went back to Bendigo, and now there's all that time to make up. For a few months at a time I don't feel no satersfaction for keeping from the drink, for I allays says to myself, "You've gone this

length before, old boy, but you was overcome at the end." There's some people as says there ain't no devil but what's in our own insides. But when a man finds 'isself doin' something as drags him down and down, and makes 'im bad in body and soul, 'ow are you to give a haccount of it but through the devil?'

Dan was not skilful in dialectics, but probably the most subtle metaphysician could not better define that tragic contest which is constantly going on in human life, between conscience and appetite, with such varying and infinitely disastrous results.

'I don't know! Sometimes to forget everything that's ever happened or can come to you is the best you can do,' returned Trevaskis sombrely.

'Well, I'm thankful, Bill, that though you've your hups and downs in money, you don't know nothing of that sort of misfortune,' said Dan.

Trevaskis looked hard into his brother's face without speaking.

'Leastaways, I 'opes not, Bill. But you look very bad—is anything the matter?'

'Just come with me for a bit,' said

Trevaskis, and in silence the two men walked down through the narrow iron passage till they came to the entrance of the cave room. Here Trevaskis lit a shaded kerosene lamp, and went to the recess on the right-hand side of the room, in which Victor was lying.

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When Dan caught sight of the still, stretched form and white face, he gave one of those sudden violent starts which may often be seen on the stage, and occasionally in real life. As for Trevaskis, he stood holding the lamp in his right hand, and staring straight before him, till his brother's hoarse, terror-stricken whisper broke the silence.

'O Lord in heaven, Bill, what is this? You didn't do it, you didn't! Tell me you didn't strike 'e down, and that 'e ain't a-dying!'

The horror of Dan's voice and face and action gave a curious stimulus to Trevaskis' imagination.

'No, Dan, I didn't do it, not wilfully. I'm as innocent in the matter as the babe unborn: only who would believe that? I'll tell you

how it was in a few words. I found the buried gold I told you about, partly smelted, partly amalgam. www.libtool.com.cn I put it here for safety till you should come and cart it to the broken-down whim. This young man, who was purser at the mine, must have taken it into his head to come prowling about the night before he was to go on a journey. It was after midnight on Friday night. I was here, stooping over the gold, with only a candle stuck in a bottle—the one you see broken there. All at once some one rushes at me, catching me round the throat. I closed with him and flung him down in the dark, for the bottle with the candle was thrown down before I could turn round. When I lit it again I found it was Fitz-Gibbon, badly hurt.'

'Was it in place of 'e my boy went away?' asked Dan in a choking voice.

'Yes, I found out Fitz-Gibbon somehow had reasons of his own for clearing out of the colony for a bit,' answered Trevaskis, plunging deeper into falsifications than he had any intention of doing when he began his garbled story. 'Then, as I was in the

thick of it all, wondering what I was to do, you and Dick came along. . . . I was stupid to go so far for the sake of your boy; but it was in my head, like the beat of a hammer, how our name would be all over the country as criminals—your boy for theft; me for a murderous assault. But it will be all right yet, Dan; only let us stick by each other like men. I've written to the manager of the bank, enclosing a cheque for the full amount of Dan's stealings.'

'Don't, Bill, don't call it by that name; it go to my heart, it do,' said Dan, in a smothered voice.

Ultimately he fell in with all his brother's proposals. He consented to nurse Victor until he was sufficiently recovered to be conveyed by night, and left where he would be speedily found, either near Broombush Creek or Hooper's Luck. He fed and tended him day and night, sleeping on a shake-down near him. At the end of five days the drowsy stupor in which Victor lay the greater part of the time began to pass away; he was still delirious,

but now and then he looked around and asked lucid questions.

When this improvement took place, Trevaskis thought it advisable to keep his faculties clouded till he should be strong enough to be moved; he therefore measured doses of laudanum from time to time out of the bottle he had found among Dunning's effects, and these doses Dan administered, knowing nothing of the nature of the drug. Its effects were varied. At times Victor became feverish and wildly delirious; at others he lay completely stupefied. At last Dan's suspicions were aroused. On the tenth night following the Monday on which he had taken charge, he slept very soundly. It was after six on Friday morning when he awoke; he found Victor lying awake, and talking at intervals, more calmly than he had done for days back.

'Have you any letters for me?' he asked, as Dan was busy warming some preserved chicken-broth over the spirit-lamp which he had for such purposes.

It should be here noted that Trevaskis had telegraphed to one of the grocers in

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town for a complete store of invalid requisites, and these had speedily arrived by the mail-coach from Nilpeena.

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'I don't think there's any letters to-day; perhaps we may get some to-morrow. . . . But just now take this mug of broth, with a crumb of bread in it,' said Dan soothingly.

He helped Victor into a sitting position, propped him up with some pillows, and fed him.

'You are very good to me. . . . Have I seen you much before this?' asked Victor, in a puzzled tone; and then he began to look around him, into the dim slopes and irregularities of the place, in the midst of which the solitary kerosene lamp made but a faint island of light.

In half an hour after he had taken food, Dan gave his patient the dose of medicine that had been, as usual, mixed by Trevaskis on the previous night. In a quarter of an hour Victor sank into a state of stupor. When he woke up his talk was wildly incoherent.

After dark the manager came in with a brisk, cheerful air. From the hour that

he was relieved from attendance on his victim, he had gained in health of mind and body. On the Monday night, when Dan took charge, Trevaskis had gone to bed at nine o'clock, and slept without a break till seven next morning. By Wednesday's mail he received two letters—one was from Victor's uncle, the other from the landlord of the Kangaroo Inn at Port Pellew.

Mr. Drummond was surprised at his nephew's sudden change of plan, but felt no alarm. He knew nothing of his proposed journey to town, and could only suppose that some circumstance, of which he was as yet ignorant, had caused Mr. Fitz-Gibbon to go to Port Pellew instead. He asked the manager to lose no time in communicating any further particulars that might come to his knowledge regarding the matter.

This Trevaskis was able to do to good effect. By that day's return mail he forwarded the note received from the landlord at Port Pellew, enclosing the visiting-cards and the envelopes addressed to Mr. V. Fitz-Gibbon

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which had been found in a drawer of the room occupied by that gentleman at the Kangaroo Inn on the previous Friday night. On the next morning, Saturday, he had taken passage by one of the sailing vessels which had left Port Pellew that day. In reply to this letter, one came from Mr. Drummond on Saturday, thanking Trevaskis for the trouble he had taken in the matter, saying that no letters had been received from Mr. Fitz-Gibbon prior to his departure, and that his brother had suggested Victor must have written some letters which had gone astray, and inquiries were accordingly being made at the Pellew post-office. Then, with this an official letter had come from the secretary of the company, relative to the appointment of a new purser at the Colmar. No word was written as to working or searching the cave room for gold, so it was evident that no importance had been attached to the matter, apart from Fitz-Gibbon's whim.

And now Trevaskis saw himself successful all along the line. Day by day the gold which he had first stolen and invested

in mining shares was increasing. He was constantly studying the share-list, and telegraphing some fresh instructions to his broker. Almost every fresh sale, and each new investment, added to his wealth. What could he not do with the command of £20,000 in ready money? The longer he dwelt on the dazzling prospects before him, the more blind he became to the miserable fears which beset Dan in his strange and uncongenial task.

'Why, Dan, you are a first-rate nurse,' he said in high good-humour, as he came into the cave room on this Friday evening. 'I think you'd better take a turn in the open air, and I'll sit by your patient till you come back,' he added, either not seeing or ignoring the fixed, questioning look with which his brother regarded him.

'I don't much care to go out, Bill,' answered Dan slowly. 'Hanyone as meets me looks at me in a curious way, as much as to say, "This is the bloke as is down with fever." The larst time I went out I met 'Zilla——'

'What the devil does it matter who you

meet?' answered Trevaskis roughly. 'You'd better have a mouthful of fresh air, for on Saturday I shall be busy all day, and in the evening I may have to ride across to Nilpeena, and not be back till late Sunday. He sleeps well, don't he?' he added, glancing carelessly at Victor.

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'I think he sleeps too well, Bill. This mornin' he was nearly 'imself, lookin' at me and speakin' quite clear-like——'

'And then after his medicine he wasn't quite so clear in the head,' put in Trevaskis, who thought it, on the whole, more prudent at this juncture to let his brother know the real state of affairs.

Dan nodded, looking at his brother with gloomy suspicion.

'Don't you see,' said Trevaskis, 'that if he's to be kept here another two weeks or so——'

'Two weeks!' cried Dan, starting to his feet. 'Ah, you're druggin' 'e—you're druggin' 'e! You want to make 'e whizzy and gone in the mind. . . . I won't do it . . . I won't . . . I'll nurse 'e right or not at all.'

A tempestuous scene followed between the two. It ended in Trevaskis consenting to have Victor removed from the mine in five days from that time. After receiving this assurance, Dan went out into the fresh air. He walked towards Broombush Creek, and was away for two hours. During his absence Victor woke up and called Trevaskis by name several times. In his terror, Trevaskis gave him a larger dose of laudanum than he meant to administer. All that night, and till late in the afternoon of the next day, Victor lay in a torpid state, Dan sleeping and watching beside him, waking up now and then from miserable dreams, in which he was constantly occupied in carrying a corpse, and vainly seeking some spot in which it might be hidden. He became at last wild with the horror of it all. The rigid form and white, set face of the young man, the loneliness, the silence, the underground gloom, broken only by the feeble light of a lamp, drove him to desperation.

At last, within an hour of sunset, he made a sudden resolve to take Victor into Trevaskis' room, where he could have light

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and fresh air. He cleaned the invalid chair that was lying among the lumber of the cave room. One of the wheels was off, but he replaced it, and speedily improvised a linch-pin out of an old wire-nail. Then he placed Victor in the chair, with a pillow under his head and a rug folded round him, and wheeled him slowly through the passage up to the offices.

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'I don't care what Bill says to this,' he thought. 'The boy is dwinin' away for fresh air and light, and I won't sit by and see 'e die. Oh, A'mighty Gord, if everything is in your hands, give me a lift just now,' he said, pausing when close to the offices, near one of the little square windows that lit the iron passage, and gazing with affrighted eyes at Victor's livid face. To Dan's distempered brain it seemed as if the young man's breathing had entirely ceased. He knelt by him, feeling his pulses with rough, tremulous fingers. Presently his growing terror was relieved by hearing Victor give a long low sigh. At the same instant a dog sprang up outside against the four small panes of glass, with short, joyous

barks of recognition. A clear sweet voice called out 'Spot, Spot!' but the dog did not move. And then, as Dan was in the act of beginning to wheel the chair once more, he suddenly caught sight of a beautiful young girl looking in at the window. He reached it with one leap, and tore down the dark-green blind which was fastened above the panes of glass. In less than sixty seconds he had gained Trevaskis' bedroom and lifted Victor on to the bed.

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CHAPTER V.

Solomon Olsen's general store was a great resort for the miners' wives on Saturday afternoons. On these occasions the weekly bills were paid, and supplies for the coming week were bought. Those who had young babies nourished them with frank unreserve, sitting by the counters on each side of the store, and giving their orders after a very leisurely fashion. They filled up the pauses between their purchases with such gossip as the Colmar Mine afforded them, after they had exhausted the more engrossing events of a domestic nature.

'And did you hear that Jack Teague was sent to the right-about because 'e missed two shifts through illness?' one would say. 'Yes, when 'e went back at 'leven at night,

the cap'en said to 'e, "'Ump your bluey and clear." But 'tis not so easy clearin', I think, wi' a wife and mother-in-law and three youngsters.'

'The manager be getten' more and more onreasonable,' another would respond. 'There's my boy Jan, as hard-workin' a chap as ye'll find. And the cap'en 'e come along t'other day. "Jan," sez 'e, "thee beest a pretty man for an 'ammer. Thee beat'st just like a thing. Can't 'ee thump better 'n that?"' and so forth.

On this special Saturday afternoon, however, the great theme was the conduct of Dr. Magann, the mine-doctor, as he was generally called, being in point of fact almost entirely supported by the miners, who, since he settled at Colmar, were pledged to pay him so much weekly out of their wages. A few days previously a woman had been taken suddenly ill, but the doctor, when sent for, was found to be too unwell to leave his bed. So the patient had died 'without the help of no doctor,' as the people phrased it.

'Mind you, I don't say as he'd do she a mossel o' good,' one voluble woman explained.

'But it don't seem right to 'ave a post-mortor affair on a decent female in 'er own 'ouse, as if she was a unbeknown tramp, as died through the wisitation o' Gord A'mighty through bein' drunk four week on end.'

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'And what is this deep larned complaint the doctor said at th' inkwest she died of?' said another, who had opened the weekly paper she had called for at the post on her way to the store.

'Hanererism,' said a neighbour, peeping over her shoulder. 'Who'd a-thought that 'ad anything to do with the 'eart. It's just wonderful 'ow them doctors finds things out, and calls 'em by names as nobody would think of.'

'Indeed, as for that, Mrs. Penlevin,' said the woman who held the newspaper, 'I thenk they inwents diseases, the same as they does pills. It don't seem reasonable as they can tell so many things from another as goes on quite inside o' folkses.'

'Well, but that's why they cut open frogs and corpses, Mrs. Piersen, so as to find out the proper nateral name o' hillnesses,' returned Mrs. Penlevin slowly.

'Indeed, then I can't believe as 'ow the karkiss o' a toad, be it iver so wise as some people says, can learn them so much about the inside o' a Christian,' said another sceptic. 'An' if we're to be cut hopen, and put in the papers for dyin' peaceable to 'ome, I don't see much good in paying for a doctor. Why, Miss Lindsay, as comes about to us, does three times more good, wi' 'er flowers, an' jellies, an' sweet looks.'

'Oh, she's a hanjull, she is, and no mistake!' said a dark-faced little woman, who was nursing a two-months-old baby near the open door. 'And there she is a-comin' at this moment,' she added, looking out.

Doris had alighted from the pony-chaise and given the reins to Shung-Loo. When she came into the store she stood speaking to one and all of the women assembled there. Mr. Olsen was at one counter, his wife at the other. Solomon Olsen was a large, thick-set man, with a swarthy complexion, a big hooked nose, black hair and whiskers, a retreating forehead, and restless black eyes swimming in fat. He had a loud, voluble utterance and an invincible self-assurance.

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He looked as if his whole heart and soul were perpetually engrossed in small, mean plots for making more money than he ought out of his fellow-creatures. Yet on entering the little sitting-room behind the store, the first object that caught the eye was a faded picture on a parchment, hanging on the eastern wall. Above this was inscribed, in half-erased Hebrew characters, the words 'From this side blows the breath of life.' It was a picture of Jerusalem, that wonderful old ruined city, which has so long lain desolate in the sight of 'all that passed by,' and yet towards which, through the long ages, so many wistful eyes are turned from far-separated and alien lands in prayer, and at the hour of death, looking for the fulfilment of the words that were traced under this picture, also in Hebrew: 'Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate; I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it.'

It was opposite this curious old-world picture, with its mystical inscriptions, that

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Doris waited for Mrs. West, who was making a very slow recovery from the nervous illness which had followed the shock of her husband's terrible death and the total destruction of her home and all that it contained.

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Doris had been to see her several times previously. The last occasion was five days before this, and Mrs. West had then expressed a great wish to accept her brother's invitation to stay with him for some time at the Halfway House, the inn which he had opened midway between Colmar and Broombush Creek. But the passenger van was always so crowded with rowdy men, and she and Dick were so weak and easily shaken, that she could not yet undertake the journey. Poor little Dick had an attack of low fever hanging about him, which did not lay him up quite, but grew worse and better from day to day with lingering tediousness.

'He's laying down just now, and don't seem quite hisself, poor little man!' his mother said, as she came into the sitting-room. 'He keeps on talkin' o' the fire, and the smoke being in 'is heyes. I'm most sure

if I could get him away the change 'ud do 'im good.'

'That is partly why I came to-day,' said Doris. 'I know of a good way to get you over to your brother's. An old friend of ours, Mr. Kenneth Campbell——'

'The old man as sells awful religious books, and carries on so about people's souls and the Sabbarth day, is it, Miss Lindsay?' said Mrs. West, with a slight accent of alarm.

'Yes, he sells books, and often gives them away,' answered Doris, who hardly recognised Kenneth under this description. 'The day before yesterday he took poor Mick Doolan, and another man who had been very ill of fever, across to the hospital at Broombush Creek. He has a nice roomy waggon, covered in, and when I told him about you and little Dick, he said at once he would take you to your brother's.'

'I know 'e's very good and kind like, and always ready to do things for everybody as is in trouble; but it just seems to me as if I couldn't bear the thought of being spoke to about my soul, and what's to become o' me

in the other world, Miss Lindsay,' said the woman tearfully. 'You see, I'm so hard put to just now in this one, and it's so dismal about pore West, for if it's all true ole Campbell says, my pore man 'ud 'ave a bad time of it altogether, for I know he wasn't very sober. But I do think as the Lord 'ud take into account 'is bein' burnt to death, and not go on at 'im with the same like——'

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'Oh, don't think about such dreadful things, please don't,' said Doris in a pained voice. As she had never been taught anything regarding eternal torment, and had read very little on the subject, she had but a vague comprehension of Mrs. West's meaning. 'Poor dear Kenneth would never think of talking in a way that would worry you. He is ready to take you to-morrow afternoon.'

'An' bein' Sunday, too. Oh, Miss Lindsay, 'e could never keep 'is tongue off o' me.'

'Well, I will come with you; you'll see that poor old Kenneth is just the soul of kindness,' said Doris, half laughing and half vexed.

Mrs. West's face brightened at once.

'Oh, if you come, Miss Lindsay—but isn't it a deal too much, a young lady like you to come in that waggon, and all for me? Poor little Dick 'ull be that pleased; but it's just too much trouble.'

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'It's no trouble at all. I thought of taking you over in my pony-trap before, but Mrs. Challoner did not like me to go with only Chung to take care of me—the working men are so rude to the Chinese—and I want you and Dick to be safe away before we leave. Yes, we are to go a day or two after Christmas. Mr. Challoner is well enough to travel. The change to a cooler climate will do him good, and he wants to see his brother before he sails.'

Mrs. West was incoherently voluble as to the sorrow that would be felt at Doris's departure, and, indeed, at that of all the Stonehouse household. Then, as Doris rose to go, she said with sudden animation:

'There, now, I was as near as could be to forgettin' agin to ast you about Mr. Fitz-Gibbon. I've heerd so many rummers. Is it true, Miss Lindsay, as he went right

off in a wool or wheat ship to England or the Cape ?'

At the mention of Victor's name a quick tinge of colour mounted in Doris's face; but there was no perceptible change in her voice as she answered :

'Yes, it seems he sailed from Port Pellew two weeks ago to-day.'

'And never said nothin' to nobody about it ?'

'He spoke about the ships at Port Pellew to the manager the day before he left; but we think he could not have known then, and that it may have been some sudden message he got on the way.'

'Well, it may seem conceited, but I can't believe some'ow as he meant to go like that, when he started without saying a word to me. I don't know as you knew him much, Miss Lindsay. He was boardin' at the Arms with us till we was burnt out; and, of course, you know as he saved poor little Dick from the flames. A nicer, kinder-'earted young gentleman never lived. Not a day after the accident but he come in to see me and Dick. Last Wednesday was a fort-

night the last time he come. "I'm going to town for a few days," sez he. "Can I do anything for you, Mrs. West?" he says; and then he turns to Dick, and Dick climbs up on 'is knees. Blesh you, ma'am, that little chap was friendlier with him the first day he come to the Arms than ever he got to be with 'is own poor par, who 'adn't what you might call a sweet temper at no time. And we was out of a cook, and the way he would put up with everything, and smile and be as pleased! . . . "Well, Dick," he says that Wednesday, "what shall I bring you from town?" "A little cock to crow in the morning," says Dick; and then Mr. Fitz-Gibbon says: "Is there jam on your fingers, Dick? No, there isn't; nor butter, nor treacle. You're a wonderful young man this afternoon. Now, here's a little letter for you; hold it tight in your hand so, and don't open it till I'm gone, and give it to your ma to take care on." I just thought it was his pleasant way to amuse the child, but what do you think it was, Miss Lindsay?'

Miss Lindsay admitted her inability to

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guess, but she was listening with a look of vivid pleasure.

'Well, it was a five-pound note inside o' a little henvelope. No, I'm sure he never knowed he was going that there journey, and why should he? I don't know whether it's on account o' hillness and bein' nervis through misfortunes, Miss Lindsay, but several nights since I hear this tale I've lay awake hours and hours, wonderin' if nothin' hasn't gone amiss, or if it isn't one o' them strange things as 'appens sometimes.' Mrs. West's voice sank mysteriously as she said this.

'I think it is perhaps because you are feeling ill,' said Doris, after a little pause. 'What we think is, that he got a message from someone at Nilpeena; that he was wanted at the Cape of Good Hope, and that, as he knew a wheat-ship was going there direct, he went by it. He posted a letter to the manager from Port Pellew, and very likely he sent some others that went astray. I know several of our letters were lost at Buda.'

Doris was going over in detail the

laboured explanation that had been arrived at by several people in succession, in face of an inexplicable event. www.libtool.com.cn A loss her mother had sustained of some important documents, through the carelessness of the local post-master, whose children were found to have amused themselves with opening and tearing up letters, was fresh in Doris's recollection. Some similar catastrophe appeared to her to be the clue to Victor's strange silence, when, instead of going to Adelaide as he had arranged, he went and took ship to England or the Cape of Good Hope, no one was quite sure which.

A few days after Victor's supposed departure, before anything had taken place to make it apparent that his plans were not carried out, Trevaskis had gone to Stone-house to ask after Challoner. In the course of conversation with Mrs. Challoner, he had casually mentioned that it appeared Mr. Fitz-Gibbon, instead of going to Adelaide, had taken a trip to Port Pellew; that he had received a letter from him, posted from there.

'Perhaps he'll take a trip to the Cape

or to England from there,' he added, half laughingly.

Mrs. Challoner www.dbtoolcom.cn asked him what made him think so.

'Oh, it just struck me, when I got his letter posted from there, enclosing some papers without saying a word as to his altered arrangements. The day before he went away he said something about these sailing-ships. . . . But, at any rate, I'll know in a day or two, for there was something I wanted to find out, and I sent him a letter, in the care of the principal hotel-keeper of the place.'

Trevaskis all through maintained an easy, unperturbed tone, as if there would be nothing after all to surprise or alarm one if Victor had taken this extraordinary course.

Three days later the manager again called at Stonehouse.

'It is as I thought about Mr. Fitz-Gibbon,' he said, after a little talk on indifferent subjects. 'I got a letter from the landlord of the principal inn to-day. The young gentleman who had stopped a night at his place sailed on Saturday last by one

of the ships, and in his room he had found a little packet, which he enclosed to me. That little packet held three of Mr. Fitz-Gibbon's letters and two of his visiting-cards. So there's now no doubt of it. I hope he'll have a pleasant voyage.'

'But why should he go like that, without telling any of us? Did Mr. Fitz-Gibbon say anything to you girls about going to England shortly?' said Mrs. Challoner, turning to Doris and Euphemia, who were sitting near her and listening to all that passed.

'He spoke of going about the same time that we did to meet his mother,' said Doris, after a little pause.

A sudden light came into the manager's face.

'Ah, that's it, you may depend. Perhaps she came as far as the Cape, and, who knows? he may have written letters that have gone astray. I expect his uncle may know more. I've written to him all I know, and sent him the landlord's letter, and the only one that came to my hands from him.'

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So the evidence had been gradually built up. In the midst of the perplexity that often overcame Doris when she thought over this strange, sudden voyage, this firm conviction was her stay—Victor must have written to her, to explain all, and the letter must have been lost. She had not at any time been actively unhappy, but within the last two days a moral and physical languor had fallen upon her. She ate very little, her head often felt heavy, her sleep was uncertain and full of disturbed dreams. On the previous night she had been in a curiously clairvoyant state. The night was warm and the wind high, swaying the avenue trees around Stonehouse ceaselessly with weird melancholy sounds that awakened vague misgivings of she knew not what indefinable ills. She fell asleep and woke up, again and again, repeatedly dreaming evil dreams. She saw things as they actually were in life, without any of the haze or uncertainty of visions. Faces and tones floated round her of all the people she had ever known—a strange zone of foreboding sounds, of countenances averted, and fixed

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on someone who was lying motionless on a low couch underground. She could not get near this couch, and she did not see the face of the one who was lying on it; but gradually the conviction grew upon her that it was Victor. And when she awoke, feelings of dread and uneasiness for the first time took possession of her. They were now revived by Mrs. West's apprehensions.

'I can't think as 'ow everythink should 'appen together like that,' she said in answer to Doris's supposition about letters having gone astray. 'Do you know, Miss Lindsay, whether he was taking any gold with him to town?'

Doris had heard nothing of his doing so. Why should such an event, if it had occurred, have any significance?

'I dunno,' said Mrs. West slowly. 'There's so many wicked things done for the sake o' gold. When my brother-in-law Olsen told me as Mr. Fitz-Gibbon 'ad gone off secret like and sudden, I up and said at once, "There's suthin' at the bottom of this as isn't right. Perhaps someone is makin' believe in the

matter because of some wickedness or another." '

The words kept ringing in Doris's ears as she drove slowly back. They so completely engrossed her thoughts that it was not until she had been in the house for some little time she remembered that she was to have called to see Mrs. Connell's elder little girl, who was now convalescent, and who looked forward to her visits from day to day with eager expectation. Doris could not bear the thought of Norah's disappointment. As it was now close on sunset, she could not stay any time, but she hastened down with a little coloured picture-book, which made the child very happy.

As Doris was returning, Spot behaved in a strange way. He ran up and down alongside the iron passage sniffing and barking, and absolutely refusing to leave it. Doris went out of her way and followed Spot along the passage for a little time, trying to coax him to follow her. She came opposite to one of the little square windows. At this Spot jumped up and began to bark with noisy joy. Doris looked

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in. At the same moment someone rushed to the window violently and drew down a blind. But not before a sight met her eyes so strange and incredible that her brain grew dizzy and her eyesight failed her.

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CHAPTER VI.

Doris stood motionless for a few moments, supporting herself against the iron wall. Before any coherent purpose had formed itself in her mind she saw Trevaskis leading a saddled horse towards the office.

In a few seconds she had reached him. Before she could speak he had turned to her, his face full of concern, saying:

'What is it, Miss Lindsay? Is there anything wrong?'

'Do you know that Mr. Fitz-Gibbon is in there?' she said, pointing to the iron passage, her hand trembling, her voice low and quivering.

Aided by the information he had gleaned through reading Victor's half-written letter to Miss Paget, Trevaskis with instinctive

quickness guessed all that underlay the girl's agitation.

'You are ill and nervous, Miss Lindsay,' he said in a studiously quiet and impressive voice. 'Would you like to come down through the iron passage and see for yourself?'

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'Thank you, I should like to come at once,' she answered.

Trevaskis fastened his horse to a bridle-post in front of the offices. Then he opened the outer door of his own, saying, 'I will just get the key.' He passed into his bedroom. Dan was sitting by the bed: on it Victor was lying in a state of somnolent unconsciousness, muttering from time to time in a thick inarticulate voice. Dan Trevaskis, with a face full of dull misery, fanned the sick man feebly from time to time.

'I've took 'e up, Bill. But, Gord 'elp us, 'e don't seem to me like as 'e'd live. 'Twas dreadful close down there; but 'tain't so much better 'ere. Bill, I must get a doctor to 'e some'ow or other. It breaks my 'eart to see and 'ear 'e, it do—it do. If you was——'

'Shut up, you miserable blatherskiter, will you!' cried Trevaskis, in an access of sudden fury. 'You went on mumbling and jabbering like this last night, and I told you we would get him away shortly; now you dared to take him up here without my leave—and what's the consequence? A girl comes to me with a white face, saying Fitz-Gibbon is in the iron passage.'

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Without waiting for a reply to this speech, muttered in a low menacing tone, Trevaskis closed the door after him, and rejoined Doris with a bunch of keys in his hand. To open the door leading into the passage, to traverse it to the end, to light a bull's-eye lantern and let the partial gleam of it fall on the outer portion of the cave room, was the work of a few moments.

'I suppose you have been hearing rumours of Mr. Fitz-Gibbon's disappearance, and have become anxious on his account, Miss Lindsay?' said Trevaskis in a suavely sympathetic tone, as he walked beside Doris on her way towards Stonehouse.

'I do not know what to think,' she answered in a shaken voice.

Spot, whom Trevaskis had been careful to keep outside, made a dash at the door when it was opened, and now that it was shut he stood close against it with his nose to the ground, his eyes full of fiery animation. But Doris heeded him no longer. She did not even notice that he lingered behind.

'At any rate, you see that your strange fancy was a delusion. I took you in without a moment's delay, so that you could be under no mistake. You see, Miss Lindsay, the key of this passage never goes out of my possession; so that whatever motive Mr. Fitz-Gibbon might have for hiding, he couldn't do it without my knowledge.'

'Hiding!' repeated Doris, raising her head with a sudden haughty gesture. 'He would never hide—why should he?'

'How, then, could you think that he would be there?'

'There were some words running in my head,' returned Doris in a faint colourless voice. '"Perhaps someone is making believe in the matter, because of some wickedness or another." And then I looked in at

the little window where Spot was bounding up, and there—half lying down, his eyes closed, and his face white—oh, I am glad I was deceived! It was terrible——'

'I am glad that I was on the spot,' said Trevaskis, speaking in a tone of kindly solicitude. His face had blanched visibly while Doris was speaking; now a dull red mounted in his cheeks, and settled in a deep rim under his eyes. 'I know what it is to be bothered with strange ideas—to fancy you see faces and things.'

'Have you sometimes seen things like that, then?' asked Doris, with a feeling of relief.

'I had a touch of fever on me once, and I couldn't close my eyes but I saw crowds of faces and animals, and heard people talking and shouting,' answered Trevaskis slowly. 'And not only so, but at last, when I went about—I was so placed that I could not keep in bed, as I should have done—I began to fancy I saw people in all sorts of ways—some dancing, others lying down as if they were dead.'

Doris drew a long sigh. They had now

reached the top of the reef, and looked down on Stonehouse with its surrounding trees, and the illimitable western plain, gray and silent, and lightly flushed with the crimson afterglow which lit up the sky.

'You are sure that no one but yourself can get into that iron passage?' she said. And then, without waiting for an answer, 'I think it would be better to search that underground room well.'

'I was down there for some hours this afternoon,' said Trevaskis, repressing with an effort the strong irritation roused by the persistence of her impression. 'It is very good of you to be so much interested in one who is almost a stranger to you. I had a letter from his uncle this morning. He does not seem so very much surprised. I have been wondering whether the young lady he was engaged to marry knows——'

'The young lady?' repeated Doris, looking up with a puzzled look, as if she had not heard aright.

'Yes; Miss Helen Paget. Mr. Fitz-Gibbon is engaged to be married to her, I believe,' answered Trevaskis with slow

emphasis, watching the girl's face as he spoke with malicious keenness. But he was not rewarded by any signs of distress or confusion. Her calm gravity was undisturbed, outwardly at least. A look of perplexity, perhaps of unbelief, rose in Doris's eyes. Trevaskis, disconcerted by her clear, unconfused gaze, took refuge in pulling out his watch, awaiting with nervous eagerness her reply. But she made none. Seeing Kenneth Campbell approach on his way towards the mine, she bowed to Trevaskis with simple dignity, saying:

'I am obliged to you for taking me into the passage, but I must not keep you any longer. I think I must talk to my old friend Mr. Campbell about poor Mrs. West. We are going to take her across to her brother's place to-morrow.'

Trevaskis retraced his steps with a feeling of baffled uncertainty which added fuel to the rage that smouldered in his mind against his brother. He had long ere this found the futility of endeavouring to act as though he were 'quite on the square.' He was terrified lest he should make some move

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that might wreck all in the end. For in the involved, dangerous game he was playing, circumstances were constantly forcing him to go on the hand to mouth plan. A much greater man than he was might be prone to commit blunders in such circumstances, because the want of proportion between his means and his ends progressively increases, and his mind is exhausted in fruitless efforts. He had to go on to see two of the directors of the Colmar, who had been examining an old mine further north and had telegraphed to him to be at Nilpeena to meet them on their way back to town. He had not much time to spare, but he could not go on without a word of warning to Dan. The word of warning turned into a violent altercation. Dan sat as if he had not moved during the last half hour, staring at Victor, who still lay for the most part motionless. Now and then he tossed feebly, and now and then he murmured half audible words. But he did not open his eyes, and there was no gleam of consciousness on his face.

When Dan saw his brother coming to the

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room a second time, he started up, his heavy eyes aflame. He said nothing till Trevaskis had entered the room, then he planted his back against the door with a look of dogged despair and determination, which checked the furious reproaches that rose to the lips of the younger brother.

'Look 'ere, Bill, if this job is to go on it must be at the awner's 'count,' he said in a low husky voice.

'I don't understand you,' returned Trevaskis.

'Then I'll put it feer, so as there cussn't be a mistake. Yistidday was a fortnight that I parted from my awnly cheeld to go as it were in the place of one as was anxious to make b'law 'e 'ad left the country. Friday and Saturday, Sunday and Monday, I was lyin' most of the time——'

'Dead drunk; yes, go on.'

'Why did 'e keep the drink to my 'and, knowin' well that in the low, haaf-sared state I were in I would keep on drinkin'? Why did 'e draw the coortins and keep the place quiet, so 'ut I might lie there without countin' day nor night? Why did 'e——'

'Suppose I don't choose to be cross-examined by you like this, as if I were a country bumpkin in the hands of a kerb-stone lawyer,' said Trevaskis, his eyes flashing ominously.

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'And then, when I coom a little to myself, you took me down to a hawl of a place, where this young man was lying, and you patched up some sort of a yarn, and I sucked in every word like Gospel truth. You didn't wait till I was clever and feelin' like a man,' said Dan, with a catch in his throat. But he overcame the weakness, and went on, with that tense indignation which sweeps all artifice before it: 'No, you made me b'law as 'twas for the sake of my lad partly, and that you wanted to take care o' the young man—to nuss 'e, to be good to 'e.'

'So I did——'

'So you did not. All the time you've been pizening 'e with drugs. Shame on you to do such a cowardly thing, and me takin' every care on 'e.'

'You fool! what is the good of exciting yourself like this?' cried Trevaskis, beyond

himself with rage, his eyes glowing like coals, his face ashen to the lips.

'I may be a fool and an idjit, but I won't be a murderer.'

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'A murderer!' cried Trevaskis, starting up with a threatening movement of his hand.

'Yes, a murderer, a murderer, a murderer!' cried Dan, raising his voice and drawing nearer to his brother, who gazed at him with a feeling akin to fear.

'For the good Lord's sake, hold your tongue!' said Trevaskis in a low voice. 'Do you want to draw a crowd of miners round the place? Do you want to have me accused of what I never meant to do? Do you want to have your own boy exposed to all the world as a thief? What good will all this do you? Come, Dan, be reasonable. We've both lost our heads a little. Give me your hand, like a good fellow. You needn't be afraid that anything will happen to this young man. A little laudanum won't kill anyone; and you must see that if he got his senses clean back, while he's here, it would be all up with me.'

Dan, who was rarely moved to great excitement, listened to his brother in stolid silence. In silence he took his proffered hand, and seemed to assent to what he said.

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'I don't mind your keeping him in this room to-night, only be careful, Dan, be careful. After I come back to-morrow, you must go away for a day and a night for a little change.'

Dan sat for nearly an hour after his brother went away, close to the bed on which Victor was lying. A terrible thought had fastened on his mind. It was a close, sultry night, with a hot wind blowing from the north-east. The sky was deeply overcast, the daylight was fading, and a darkness heavier than that of night had fallen on this man, bereaved, lonely, and despairing.

'I want to get up—I want to get away—why do you tie me like this?' Victor muttered, over and over again, throwing his hands about with a convulsive, helpless gesture. After a time he turned over, and gradually fell into a deep sleep, breathing heavily.

'Bill means to kill 'e—to give 'e a big dose when 'e gets me away, and then when I come back 'e'll make me bury 'e somewheres. 'E'll make me do everything. But I won't, I won't! I'll take 'e away somehow before he comes back; I'll take 'e away this very night.'

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Dan's brain seemed to be on fire. Even as he gasped out his determination to take prompt action, he was conscious of a creeping lassitude, of a total inability to plan or act. He felt dizzy, and the walls seemed to close around him. He went out, locking the outer door behind him, feeling that if he did not get away for a little time he would choke, or fall down in a fit. There was no fresh air to revive him; yet even the dismal wailing wind, full of sulphurous smoke, warm as if it had escaped from a seething caldron, thick with dust and mullock grit, was better than the close room in which Victor's motionless form and pale face struck an indefinable fear into Dan's soul. The long-continued tension, the morbid nervousness that had seized him on the day he had met his boy under such unhappy

circumstances, had now come to a climax. He walked bareheaded along the foot of the reef above the mine, with its dull roar of machinery and its flaring lights. A sort of blurred confusion fell on him ; he gave up trying to think what he should do. He saw someone coming towards him—someone who came close up against him. Dan stood aside to let him pass. But the man did not pass ; he came up to him, and gripped both his hands.

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'Dan, Dan, what's come to ye ? To-morrer I leave this mine for good, and I've been lookin' for you to say good-bye. I ast for you of the cap'en, and he shut me hup as if I was a cut-throat. My missis is bad again, and I won't come back 'ere no more.' Dan made a hoarse murmur by way of reply. 'P'raps 'tain't my business, but 'pears to me, Dan, there's summat wrong with you besides hillness.'

'Iss, 'Zilla, iss,' burst out Dan, not waiting to think or parley with himself, 'summat is wrong with me in body and soul, and if I don't get some 'elp I don't know what's to come to I.'

'Tell me what it be, Dan. You as good as saved my life once, and I don't forget that.'

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'You are goin' away to-morrer?'

'But I can wait.'

'No, don't wait; you can help me to-night. But swear on your knees, in the hearin' o' the living God—if so be as 'E cares to listen to we—that you'll never, never speak to anyone of what I tell ye, that you'll ax no question over what I say. Swear to me on your soul, as you hope to be saved from eternal damnation; swear to me, 'Zilla, for the sake o' old times.'

Dan's voice was hoarse with anguish. He was trembling, and his hands were cold and clammy. At that moment he clung to his old friend as to one providentially sent to save him from the terrible fate that, to his excited fancy, seemed momentarily drawing nearer.

'I swear, Dan, I swear to do what I can for you, short o' foul sin, and that you wouldn't ax o' me,' answered 'Zilla. 'What trouble be you in?'

'A man's been badly 'urt by accident——'

'A man on the mine—a young man?' cried 'Zilla, with a strange suspicion rising in his mind.

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'I didn't mean to do 'e 'arm, and it's no fault o' mine, and you must keep to your promise, 'Zilla, and ax no questions,' answered Dan doggedly.

'I won't, Dan, I won't! A man's been 'urt, you say?'

'And I've been trying to nuss 'e. I've been on the job for some time. Lord in heaven, I've lost count o' days!'

'On the mine here, Dan, without no doctor? There, I don't want a hanswer; only when you're swellin' with sore amazement you must let it off some'ow. You've been on the job for some time, Dan?'

'Yes, and I dussent tell a livin' soul, for fear o' being took by the throat and clapped into prison.'

'And you innercent, Dan?'

'Do you misbelieve me, 'Zilla?'

'No, my old mate—no, I don't; but—There—no, I won't—go on, Dan.'

'And now this night a hawful fear 'as come upon me, 'Zilla; a fear o' crime and

blood-guiltiness that 'ud hang round my neck like the nether millstone, and drag me low down below the very foundations o' hell.'

'Oh, Dan, Dan! 'e ain't a-dyin'? I won't ax another question; but tell me 'e ain't a-dyin'?'

'No, 'Zilla—no, no; but I want 'e to get better quicker nor I can make 'e wi' drugses out o' a bought box, made up by people as never saw the sick ones as swallers 'em. I want 'e to be took care of above ground, not down in a dark, lonesome cave place.'

'Down in a cave place, Dan? Slinkin' there alone and in secret with a man badly hurt? 'Ow in the name o' the Amoighty did you get into such a hawful fix, and you an innercent man?'

'Zilla's voice was full of consternation and wonder. He spoke without any afterthought as to his friend's veracity. Dan understood this, feeling that the whole affair was so full of perplexing mystery, that it was taking an unfair advantage of his old mate to appeal to him for help, while giving him so little confidence. It was a sudden fear, lest he should

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be tempted to betray his brother, that led him to reply in a gruff tone.

‘’Zilla, the world is full o’ liards. Don’t you go a-haddin’ to the number. You promised not to ax questions?’

‘I did, Dan, I did, and I won’t go back on my word. You want to have this man took to a place where ’e’ll be well took care of—say, to an ’orsepital?’

‘Iss, ’Zilla, and with money to pay for the best nussin’.’

‘There’s a private ’orsepital been lately opened at Broombush, for those as can pay well.’

‘Yes, that’s been running in my ’ead, ’Zilla. But——’

‘In course, you want to get him took there without you appearin’ in the matter?’

‘Nor you, ’Zilla, for that ’ud come to the same thing.’

‘I know that. Did you ever see a hold Scoty as goes about with an ’awker’s waggon, sellin’ religious books, and preachin’ on Sundays and week-days, when ’e can get chaps to listen as ’ow’s there’s few to be saved, and it’s very onlike it’s them?’

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'No, I never did!'

'And 'ave you some sort of a machine and a beast as you can make a start with this very night?'

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'I could borrer the light 'Merican waggon as belongs to the place, and there's a beast in the stable. But what do you mean, 'Zilla?'

'Zilla briefly explained that Kenneth Campbell was going on the morrow to take Mrs. West to her brother's at the Halfway House. That he was a man who was always on the look-out to do things for people in need, and had already taken several men, who were suffering from fever at the mine, to the hospital in Broombush Creek in his waggon.

'My idear is, if you was to make a start to-night, and meet him somewhere on the way——' said 'Zilla, pausing a little dubiously, as he saw that there were some grave obstacles. If Dan had a horse and trap, even one as fanatical for serving his fellow-creatures as Kenneth was, might wonder why the man who, with such conveniences, had come upon a helpless invalid in the bush,

did not at once convey him to a place of refuge, instead of appealing to a casual passer-by. But here the thoughts which had been slowly revolving in Dan's mind during the last endless days and nights, in connection with this matter, came to his aid.

'I won't meet the ould chap o' the road at all, 'Zilla,' he said eagerly. 'I 'aven't told you—we 'adn't much talk together sin' I coom this time—but I was goin' to work a claim theer, about a mile to the south o' what they call the broken-down whim.'

'That's feer within two miles and a arf o' the Arf-way 'Ouse, Dan! That 'ull be most on the track.'

'Iss, and there's a bit of a shanty there. I'll go this very night. I'll sturt in two hours, with the sick man on a mattress quite comfortable like, 'Zilla. Oh, 'Zilla! the weight as is took off my 'eart. I'll be like camped there, and this ould chap as is so given up to doin' things for people, he can coom along from the Arf-way 'Ouse.'

'Iss, Dan, you scratch me a few lines, and I'll go acrost and show them.'

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'And 'e'll be sartin sure to coom?'

'As sure as there's breath in 'is body, and anyone needin' 'is help,' answered 'Zilla solemnly.

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An hour later, 'Zilla went across to Stonehouse to see Kenneth. He was not in his waggon, and 'Zilla went to the kitchen to ask where he would be likely to find him.

''Tis about this journey o' his to-morrer,' he explained to Bridget, who stood at the door, fanning herself vigorously with a Chinese paper fan.

'Shure, thin, and if it's to take ahny more sick people it cahn't be done; for the mistress hersilf is going as far as the Half-way House, besides the sick woman and Miss Doris. Ye see, it's loike this,' said Bridget, who was always ready to offer elaborate explanations of every domestic project. 'Mrs. Challoner, she haven't been shlaping at ahl at ahl for days and noights; and it just tuk Mrs. Murray in the head, if she went for a dhroive in the waggon, it might lull her loike, and be a little change; so——'

Before Bridget's flowing narrative had come to an end, Kenneth came round the

back veranda, and 'Zilla gave him the note, which he had received from an old mate of his, who www.libtool.com.cn was at work somewhere not far from the Half-way House.

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CHAPTER VII.

It was close on four o'clock in the afternoon of the following day before Kenneth's roomy waggon reached the Half-way House. During the latter part of the journey Mrs. Challoner began to doze. As soon as they entered the little inn, which was empty of customers and very quiet, they induced her to lie down, and in a few minutes she was sound asleep. This was the result for which Mrs. Murray had so fervently hoped, when she induced her sister to take a long, slow drive. 'If she falls asleep, my dear, don't wake her up on any account,' were her last whispered words to Doris. And now Doris closed the door of the little bedroom softly, and went out to tell Kenneth that they must put off their return till Mrs. Challoner awoke.

Kenneth, with a somewhat blotted sheet of paper in his hand, was talking to the landlord, who was pointing out a slight rise some distance south off the highway, which led to the diggings. Doris waited till the two men had finished their talk, and then delivered her message to Kenneth. She was surprised to learn that he was going to a place beyond the broken-down whim, to take a sick man to the hospital at the diggings.

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'It was nearly nine last night when I got this,' he said, folding up the sheet of paper. 'Mrs. Murray thought I better say nothing about it to Mrs. Challoner; she might want to come on, or it might distract her mind. Thanks be to the Most High that He has sent her sleep,' said Kenneth, uncovering his head in his slow reverent way. 'I did not like this restless wakefulness night after night.'

'Someone ill—away in a place like that—quite alone, Kenneth? Has there been anyone looking after him?' asked Doris, with a startled air.

As so often happens when the mind is

much engrossed with any subject, her thoughts instantly reverted to the apparition of the preceding afternoon on hearing of this invalid.

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'This is all I know of the matter, Miss Doris,' answered Kenneth, handing her the sheet of paper with a few roughly-written lines.

'One and a half mile of Broke-down-wim.

''ZILLA JENKINS,

'i hev come acrost a young man as badly wants looken arter in a orsepetal or some such, wich beein' onable to do so myself, ef you nows of enyone kumin' along shortly to the Diggins would you ax him to kindly call at the broke' down w'im.

'A NOLD MAITE.'

It was a little difficult for Doris to make out the meaning conveyed by the unfamiliar orthography, but as soon as she had caught the gist of the lines a curious change came over her face. The pallid languor which had been settling on it within the last few days was replaced by a vivid flush; her

eyes glowed, her lips parted in eager expectancy.

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'Kenneth, I know where the broken-down whim is; I want to come with you,' she said, in a voice but little above a whisper.

And Kenneth, who had from her childhood obeyed the girl's slightest wish, found the few gentle objections he raised finally overruled.

'But you won't come to the diggings, dear Miss Doris,' he said, as he turned his horses' heads towards the rock that rose near the broken-down whim, and looked across the complete flatness of the intervening country as if it were within half a mile of the Half-way House. 'Mr. Keltie tells me that I'll have to come back to this road almost in a straight line, so as to get on the high-road to the diggings. So I'll leave you here on the way back; the journey would be too fatiguing for you, and forbye, it's very like this poor man is suffering from fever.'

This 'poor man.' The words woke a strange deep pain in the girl's heart. Could

there be any grounds for the thought that had lodged itself so obstinately in her mind? All through the past night she had lain in a sort of waking dream, seeing over and over again the prostrate form, and the blanched, motionless face, which for one brief instant had been as absolutely visible to her as the earth under her feet or the sky above. She was forced to believe that the sight was in some way a repetition of the feverish dreams that she had perpetually dreamt on the previous night. Some of her earliest childish recollections were of faces and voices seen and heard in sleep, that were as real to her as the voices and faces of waking hours. But might not these repeated dreams, and that vision seen in the daylight, be forecasts of what she was now about to see?

She recalled an old book on dreams, and what was called second sight, she had once been reading, and which, at her mother's wish, she put away, on being told she was not yet old enough to read such things. 'There was so much that darling maman used to tell me I would understand better

when I was older,' she thought, 'but I think things seem stranger and harder to understand the older I grow.' She put her head down wearily with a stifled sigh. The languor of the past few days weighed on Doris more than any of the household knew.

'Oh, Kenneth, can we not go a little faster?' she said, after a few moments, finding that Kenneth's horses seemed to have almost fallen asleep.

Kenneth was in truth deep in one of his beloved mystics, and the brooding reveries habitual to him when travelling. When Doris spoke he remonstrated with his horses, and soon afterwards they passed the broken-down whim, and the dark abrupt rock near it with its startling echoes.

Doris recalled every word and incident of the day she first saw this place, and Victor had spoken of going with them when they went across that other mysterious sea, full of colour and sound and motion; not gray and uniform and silent as this was. And yet not quite silent. A few sounds broke the torpor of the monotonous plain,

and were thrown back in lengthened echoes by this solitary rock beside a waterless well.

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The rumbling of the waggon, the solitary call of a white eagle poised in mid-air, the strokes of an axe in the distance, were repeated with clear lengthened reverberations that magnified the original notes into a cadenced volume of sounds with weird mocking undertones. The weather-board hut, standing over a mile beyond the broken-down whim, was on the border of a water-course, lined with small sandal-wood trees. As Kenneth drove up to the front of the hut, Dan came out to meet him. For a little time after Kenneth got out, Doris remained in the waggon. Now that they had reached the place the thought of finding her waking vision realized here, made the few moments that followed a time of sickening suspense.

'Oh no, no; it is impossible,' she said to herself, looking at the little hut, and overcome by a sudden conviction of the unreality of her imaginings. It must be true that her senses had been tricked by

some touch of fever. Was it not fever which at this moment made her head so hot and heavy, her sight so uncertain, and www.libtool.com.cn her hands so unsteady? Yet, as she doubted and reasoned with herself, she leant forward, eagerly watching for the next event.

As her eyes fell on Dan, a troubled recollection shot across her brain. Had she not caught a swift glimpse of his face yesterday, when that torturing vision of Victor had flashed on her for one incredible moment? For an instant her memory seemed sane and trustworthy, but then doubt and confusion fell upon her. She could but dumbly wait and watch. As for Dan, the moment he saw Doris, he recognised with a terrible misgiving the beautiful young face that for a few seconds had looked in through the little window of the iron passage. This was the young lady who had gone to his brother to declare that she had seen Mr. Fitz-Gibbon. Had she come now so as to be able to convict the two of them?

Dan, though in many respects quick to

perceive, was slow to act, more especially when placed in circumstances where prompt and masterful deception was necessary to ensure his safety. He had little of his brother's power of instantaneously producing a plausible story, according to the requirements of an unlooked-for emergency. Neither the bent of his mind nor the course of his life had fostered this gift. He stood listening to Kenneth without hearing a word he said, expecting that every second this girl with her deep wonderful eyes would step to his side, saying, 'Why did you hide this ailing man underground at the mine, and then carry him off to the wilds?' Had she done so, Dan in these first few moments could no more have attempted to lie to her than to an angel from heaven. But nothing of this kind happened. After the first quick, wondering look at him, the girl sat back in the waggon, neither moving nor speaking. As for Kenneth, his talk was not of a kind to call either for a ready answer nor for great vigilance on the part of anyone wishing to deceive him.

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When Dan recalled his scattered wits sufficiently to catch the drift of the old man's words, he found he was deep in a discourse on the blessings of solitude.

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'In the wilderness I have ever found the posterns of the dwelling of peace,' he was saying. 'It is in the midst of the world that the flesh gets its most signal victories, till it grows insolent and domineering, and drugs its poor fettered companion the spirit with carnal opiates till it loses all sight and hearing. . . . It was into the wilds of Arabia that St. Paul departed after his conversion, and saw visions and dreamed dreams it was not lawful to utter to uncircumcised ears. But why do I speak of mere man? Did not the King of Heaven, who was born for our sakes among the beasts of the field, who was fed on a little breast milk, and gave up His life between two criminals, also often go away into the unpeopled wastes? My friend, I hope that the solemn influences of these solitary plains are not unknown to you.'

'No, sir—oh no,' stammered Dan, quite at sea as to Kenneth's meaning. 'Gosh! 'Zilla didn't say as he was crazed,' was his

inward reflection. But as the conviction grew on him that he had to do with a man of unsound mind, he recovered his courage and presence of mind.

'I am glad of that, sincerely glad,' said Kenneth fervently. 'It is in such scenes as these that we recollect our vagrant thoughts, and renounce the exterior extravagancies of our conduct.'

'Was you goin' to take this poor young man as 'as come acrost me suffering from fever or some such to the diggins orsepital, sir?' asked Dan, who began to fear that, if he did not cut short the spates of the old man's eloquence, he might become entirely oblivious of the object of his visit.

'Ah, yes, yes. You have sheltered him and nursed him. But tell me, have you spoken to him of more important matters? Does he seem alive to the interests of his immortal soul?'

'He don't look much alive in any way just at present, I'm sorry to say,' answered Dan, leading the way to Victor's side, where he was lying with a rug over him on a mattress, on which Dan had conveyed him

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in the American waggon. Before leaving the mine, he had deemed it prudent to give him a dose out of the bottleful of medicine which Trevaskis had left. Dan would much sooner have given his patient no more of this, knowing it was a narcotic. But things being as they were, he recognised the necessity of keeping Victor unconscious while removing him. But either the quantity Dan had administered was too small, or repeated doses of the sedative for more than a week had rendered it partially ineffective. At any rate, this first dose, instead of making Victor sleep, had acted as a stimulant, so that, on the way to the hut, he made repeated efforts to get out of the waggon. Miss Paget, he said, wanted to see him; she was waiting for him; he had something very important to tell Helen, and he had been tied and kept in the dark for so long. Dan was reassured to find how much strength he retained. It was hard work to make him keep in the waggon, and when, after a little time, he complained of thirst, Dan had mixed a dose of laudanum with the beef-tea he gave him. Since then he

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had been lying for the most part unconscious.

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Now, as the two men stood by him, he turned over and muttered a few inarticulate words. Kenneth felt his pulse.

'I suppose it's fever he has, he seems greatly reduced. How long has he been with you?' he said, fixing his large melancholy eyes on Dan's face.

'A good few days. 'E speaks a lot sometimes, and a deal more wandering of late. From what I've picked up, I should say as 'e's been wanting to 'ide from his people for some reason,' said Dan, plunging with many qualms and pricks of conscience into the fictitious statements he had ready in case of being questioned.

'Ah, poor young man! poor young man! He cannot hide from the eyes of the Most High,' said Kenneth.

It was curious how the old man's readiness to speak of things not of this earth lessened Dan's fear of being caught tripping when making statements that had no foundation in fact.

''Ere's some gold as 'e 'ad on him,' he

said in a calm, confident voice, handing Kenneth the purse of sovereigns he had filled from his own store. 'I b'law there's a private orsepital now at the diggins. It'ull be best to take him there, bein' by all happearances a gentleman, and used to softer 'andling than 'e'd get among common folks. Now, sir, if you drawr the mattrass from under 'e, I'll take it and fix it in your machine.'

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Dan, as he spoke, lifted Victor in the rug and placed the pillows under his head. As he took up the mattress to carry it to the waggon, he asked Kenneth whether there was not someone in the vehicle. Kenneth replied that there was a young lady, the daughter of an old master of his, who had come with her friend, Mrs. Challoner, on an errand of mercy as far as the Half-way House. Dan was relieved of all apprehension by this reply. Yet, when on reaching the waggon he found Doris, after alighting and waiting on the further side, with an expression of strained expectancy on her face, he divined that all danger was not over. He touched his hat respectfully.

'I am going to laid the waggon a little nearer, so as to lift the sick man in,' he said, speaking without any sign of emotion, www.libtool.com.cn though his pulses were beating hard and fast as he anticipated the moment in which this lovely, grave-eyed young lady should catch the first sight of the patient.

'Is he so very ill?' she asked softly. She did not hear what Dan said in reply. He was leading the horses, and the rumbling of the wheels as the waggon was drawn as close as possible to the front of the hut overpowered his speech. Doris followed, and stood at a little distance. And then, as Kenneth and Dan carried the sick man out between them, she caught sight of his face. For an instant her heart seemed to stop, and then it fluttered like a bird suddenly snared, and all around grew dim.

'Oh, Kenneth!—Kenneth!—it is Victor!' She thought she was crying the words out aloud; but though her lips moved, her voice did not even reach whispering-point. She stood as if riveted to the ground, not even drawing nearer as they placed Victor on the mattress in the bottom of the waggon. They

were very gentle and careful in handling him—placing a pillow under his head and folding the soft striped rug round him. He moaned and murmured some words in an indistinct voice. Doris noted it all, standing speechless and motionless, her lips slightly parted, her face blanched and colourless as a lily.

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As soon as Victor was safe in the waggon, Kenneth began to look in the big miscellaneously-filled locker for a book of devotions he wished to give Dan, who took advantage of this interval to approach Doris. He knew that she was overpowered with emotion, but he pretended to notice nothing of this, and spoke in his ordinary tones.

'It ain't a putty place this for a man to be ill in. I've done my best for the gentleman sin' he coom to me; but——'

'Ah, I know him—he is a friend of ours—Mr. Victor Fitz-Gibbon, who used to be at the mine,' broke out Doris, who, like one in a nightmare, suddenly recovered the power of speech on being spoken to.

Dan threw as much astonishment as possible into his face and voice on hearing this.

Then Doris falteringly reached the end of the waggon, and looked, with all her soul in her eyes, at Victor, lying in such strange
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unconsciousness of her presence.

'’E's not so bad as ’e looks—’e's ’ad some medicine to make ’e sleep—’e'll wake up fo'mby quite fresh-like, and be ’isself in a few days,' said Dan soothingly, forced in spite of himself to say something to relieve the anguish of anxiety so touchingly visible on Doris's face.

'Yes—yes. I have to start—at once,' said Victor, moving restlessly.

The sound of his voice, and Dan's consoling assurance, lightened Doris's worst fears. Looking from Victor into Dan's face, she told him of the strange sight she had seen, or thought she had seen, in the iron passage at the mine.

'And you thoft you saw me as well as the young man?' said Dan in a wondering tone. 'Ah, ’tis just ’nough to ’maze one the way dreams come true at times.'

'But I was wide awake; and I looked in because Spot would stay and bark, as if there was someone he knew. If he were

here now you would see how he would recognise Mr. Fitz-Gibbon; we left him at home for fear he would waken Mrs. Challoner if she fell asleep,' explained Doris.

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The longer Dan spoke to her, the more completely he fell under the spell of those wonderful eyes, with their clear sincerity of gaze. He felt in a vague way that it was more disgraceful to lie to this girl than it was to deceive the common ruck of mankind. But he had to protect his boy fleeing from justice, and his brother from detection: his brother, the ex-Member of Parliament, the trusted manager, and upright Justice of the Peace, whose crafty dangerous game was now nearly at an end, leaving him scatheless, untouched by a breath of suspicion as to violence or fraud or falsehood. And the thought that this strange episode of imposition and concealment and sickening apprehensions was now really at an end stimulated Dan's imagination. He told Doris, in his homely, unpolished phrases, how he was fossicking about for gold, and how, more than a week ago, this young man came along, not feel-

ing very well, and how he had gradually got worse; how he seemed to have some reason for concealing from his friends where he was; and how since he had been delirious he kept on often calling on a young lady—'Helen' he sometimes called her—'Miss Paget' at other times.

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In saying this, Dan studiously looked away. He had not the slightest doubt that the young lady before him was the subject of Victor's troubled snatches of talk; that it was her name which had so often lingered on his lips as he made restless efforts to get to her. He divined, too, that his knowledge would not displease the girl, whose agonized anxiety on the young man's behalf had so clearly revealed her feelings. On hearing the names Dan repeated, Doris started, drawing in her breath like one who had received a sudden blow.

'And to think as ye who was wide awake had a sort o' vision of me, too, so many miles off,' said Dan in a tone of wonder, still looking towards the wavering course of the Broombush Creek, which in the vicinity of the broken-down whim was

more thickly-lined with slender sandal-wood trees than the shrub from which the water-course took its name. Rough and untutored www.libtool.com.cn as he was in the conventions of polite conduct, his instinctive delicacy led him to keep his eyes turned from the young lady's face for some little time after the revelation he had made to her. 'It 'minds me,' he went on reflectively, 'of what appeared to myself many years ago. I was after an 'ard stem, stoppin' a bock in a Cornish mine——'

'Here is the book I have been searching for,' said Kenneth, approaching the two with a small thick volume in his hands, turning over the leaves and glancing from passage to passage with the familiarity begotten by a long friendship. He gave it to Dan, saying, 'Take it, my friend, in remembrance of the Samaritan-like kindness you have shown to this young man. Read it day by day, and prize the privilege you enjoy of living here, in total abstraction from the carnal pleasures and excesses of the world.'

Dan made an uneasy motion, and gave a deprecatory little grunt. He understood

enough of Kenneth's speech to make him recall with dismay the two bottles of brandy he had 'put away' a short time before, in the course of four days. But the glamour of solitary reverie and absorption in the inner life was at this epoch strong on Kenneth, and he went on with rising enthusiasm :

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'Here where you do not go abroad at all, where you labour much and seldom talk, where you eat sparingly, without any of those dainty cates which tempt the senses, where you are clothed in homely attire, you have precious opportunities of living the higher life. You may rise at dawn to pray and meditate, you may read long and often, be vigilant against the snares of the enemy of souls, and persevere in the practice of holy exercises. In the lonely watches of the night——'

'The yowling of the dingoes is sometimes hawful, sir,' said Dan, anxious to bring the old man back to plain matters of fact. 'Do you know,' he added, lowering his voice, 'that this sick man is a friend of the young lady as is with you?'

Dan glanced at Doris as he spoke, his eyes full of puzzled apprehension. She was standing by the waggon, looking eastward into the vast gray plain with a tense fixed gaze. The pallor of her face was startling. Her silk dust-cloak and gauze veil were blown backward, and as her face and slight girlish form were fully revealed there was something in her look and attitude that brought a climbing sorrow into Dan's throat. It seemed as though she ought to be sheltered even from the dust-laden breath of the hot wind in her mother's arms. Yet here she stood in this arid solitude, with a strange seal of sorrow and loneliness on her face. Dan expected that Kenneth would receive the news he told him with interested surprise, and that he would instantly question the young lady as to the name, etc., of the sick man; but Kenneth merely replied :

'Ay, ay, he must have been at the mine then. The sun is lower than I thought; we must be going on our way.'

With a few parting injunctions as to the true welfare of the soul, Kenneth returned

by the track he had followed in coming. As the vehicle started, Dan gave a parting look at Victor lying in motionless slumber; at Doris, who, sitting sideways, kept her eyes almost constantly fixed on him; at Kenneth, whose lean grave face had already assumed the dreamy absent look which usually settled on it when slowly driving through the Bush.

'If I 'adn't told so many whoppers,' thought Dan, 'I'd fall on my knees and thank God for a hour on end.'

As soon as night set in he was on his way back to the Colmar mine, which he reached an hour after Trevaskis had returned from Nilpeena.

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CHAPTER VIII.

Kenneth's horses, which he had driven together for nearly five years, had gradually acquired the art of seeming to walk briskly, while in truth their pace was very slow. But on the way from the hut beyond the broken-down whim Doris took no note of this. For the first mile she sat as she had done in coming, on the front seat beside Kenneth, but watching Victor intently. She saw that when the waggon went over uneven ground the motion jolted him roughly. His head rolled from side to side, and he muttered uneasily. She could not bear that he should endure this discomfort.

'Kenneth, don't you think I had better sit so that I can support Mr. Fitz-Gibbon's head?' she said timidly, after the first mile had been got over.

'Yes, Miss Doris dear, it is very thoughtful of you. Then you know his name? To be sure, that good man—maybe I ought to have asked who he was—told me you had seen the sick man before. Perhaps you would wish to come all the way to the diggings, so that he should be better cared for?'

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'Oh, yes, yes! Please don't go to the Half-way House at all, Kenneth, till we return,' pleaded Doris.

'Just as you wish, Miss Doris. If Mrs. Challoner wakes before we get back, she'll know you're safe with me. I'm thinking, by the look of the sky, that there's a dust-storm coming on. But we're safe in the keeping of the Shepherd of Israel, who slumbers not nor sleeps.'

Kenneth took one of the movable seats of the waggon, and fixed it for Doris close beside the invalid. Then they went on their way once more. At sundown Kenneth halted to make some tea. Victor half woke up and drank a cupful. He looked at Kenneth as he supported his head and held the cup to his lips, and murmured some broken words.

The next instant he was once more in a state of drowsy unconsciousness. A quarter of an hour later, when within a mile of the diggings, a dust-storm broke over them with terrific violence. The horses refused to face it. Kenneth stopped on the sheltered side of a clump of sandal-wood trees, and made the tilt of the waggon as fast as possible against the dust. But it came in driving showers through every chink and cranny. Doris, stooping over Victor, shielded his face with her dust-cloak. Now that the motion of the waggon had ceased, his sleep was less broken, his breathing more regular.

As Doris sat holding her cloak over him, his head resting against her knees, all the conflicting emotions which had taken possession of her, when the incredible assertion made by Trevaskis on the preceding day had been so strangely confirmed by Dan's words, died away. He was safe, and he would live, and reach 'Helen' after he had been nursed back to health. As for herself, she was confused and very weary. Oh, if she could only go to her mother! The vital forces, which had been subtly under-

mined for some days back, flagged lower. She did not cling to the world or any of its bewildering, cruel stories. She could not understand them. She longed only for the profound love that had wrapped her round all her life, and never deceived or wounded her. She did not fear death. In her mind it was associated solely with the great peace that had reigned in that quiet room in her old home, full of roses and sunlight, in which but a few months ago her mother had awakened from the dream of life with a look of rapturous serenity on her face.

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The very memory of that dear countenance, stamped with a profound and unutterable peace, seemed to soothe every lingering regret. She could see the sky growing darker, even the sunset flush trembling into wanness, as the dust-storm raged with the fitful wails of a wind that rushes at its own wild caprice over boundless plains, without a solitary wall or hill, or even a line of trees, to impede its course. The grayness of the earth, in this region perpetually clad in dead colours, became even dimmer. The light waned in the sky, and the wind blew more

furiously. To Doris it seemed as though all around were mounting billows, ready to float her to the verge of the unknown shore which at some unknown distance must bound this unmeasured sea, before so silent, but now full of commotion, of shrill, tumultuous voices. But gradually they died away ; they swooned into the silence that sooner or later falls upon all the sounds and tumults of the world.

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The sickle of a young moon hung low on the horizon, and stars trembled into sight ; the cries of a long line of water-fowl, flying from some drought-stricken district, sounded far and thin overhead ; the rumble of the wheels, the beat of the horses' hoofs, the cries of the birds, the light of moon and stars in the sky, the sudden arrest of the emotion that formed the dominant pulse of her young life, happy, tender memories of her mother—all were woven by the mysterious shuttle of sleep into a delicate tissue that bore the mask of reality.

The wind had changed. It was soft and low, breathing from the west, with long lines of dreams in its wake—dreams that

were at first like vaguely luminous pictures. They seemed to fall from successive heights in slender streams of transparent foam, and then slowly invade the gray plains with silvery waves of light, lapping against the shore in numberless battalions that were perpetually renewed. . . . She was gliding over the yellow sands, and the light of the moon mingled with the glow of the dying sunlight; she could hear the beat of the waves, and the calls of the white seagulls wheeling above them. A boat drew near the shore, with milk-white sails, crowded with tall, strong angels, whose wings were folded on each side of them. She watched them idly sailing by, but as they passed she saw that at the further end her mother sat with outstretched arms. On that she called out; but the waves rose, and her voice was lost in their hissing . . .

Now it was night, and darkness was around her, the wind was rising into a storm; deep calling unto deep, and she was alone. The darkness thickened round her, and she was alone in a strange, desolate country; but in a moment one came

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calling her by name and holding her by the hand. It was Victor, and as she clung to him the light came back once more ; . . . but someone came between them and led him away, and she was alone. Then a strange terror fell on her—an inexpressible, unreasoning, creeping fear ; a fear, not of death, nor of the ghastly legends that men tell each other with blanched faces of how the soul, ardent, conscious, full of love and hope and infinite tenderness, is plunged in a moment of time into eternal oblivion like the carcase of a stall-fed ox. The horror that had fallen on her was a horror of life —a shrinking in terror from the days full of gay sunshine, carrying away with them, like the petals of faded roses, all that the heart clings to, all that makes the world a place in which it is pleasant to dwell.

She was in the midst of the Silent Sea—gray, voiceless, sinister, for ever the same—and she was alone. In the sleep that had overtaken her, Doris knew for the first and last time what is symbolized by the word 'despair.' She looked with conscious eyes into those remorseless depths of being in

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which the bereavements of death are seen to be gentle and loving and merciful, as compared with the robberies of life. She could not cry; but it was as though tears of flame were slowly falling one by one on her heart, and consuming it within her. The whole world seemed full of mounds, overgrown with grass, beneath which human souls were dropping piecemeal into clods of dust; and all around her the dead sombre colours of the Silent Sea—the gray, vague formlessness, the darkness on which no shadows could be cast. . . . How many, many hundred years had stealthily crept between her and the happy serenity of the days in which she had lived with her mother!

Her mother! The word was like a spell. As she breathed it, moving uneasily in her sleep, the terrors that had overpowered her fell away one by one. They were not true, they were part of a mocking nightmare; now she was awaking to the truth, and the truth was peace and blessedness, and light and healing. She heard a faint rustling, as of one drawing near her in flowing robes.

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Oh, joy unspeakable, and consolation never more to be wrested from her! her mother had come to her! Her arms were round her, her lips pressed on her cheek.

'Oh, maman, maman! did you hear me —have you come for me?' she murmured in a happy whisper, and with that she looked up into her mother's face. It was as gentle, as beautiful, as full of love, as real to her, as it had ever been. She waited in breathless eagerness for her mother's answer. And her mother's answer was to take her in her arms once more, and kiss her on her brow; and then she awoke, her eyes wet with happy tears, her brow warm with her mother's kiss. 'That was her answer—I am going to her,' she said to herself half aloud.

Then she knew that she had been asleep, that their journey had come to an end, that Kenneth stood talking to someone in the doorway of the hospital in which Victor was to be nursed. The waggon stood quite close to the front of it; the tilt had been drawn aside, and the light was shining in, so that she could see Victor's face distinctly.

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As she looked at him he moved and murmured some words. She bent over him. 'Helen, you understand, don't you?' he was saying, in a troubled tone. But the sound of another woman's name on his lips had now nothing of sorrow or fear for her. The bliss of her mother's summoning kiss wrapped her round like a garment which could be penetrated no more by the darts of any self-regardful sorrow.

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'Dear Victor, good-bye! God make you well and happy!' she murmured softly, stooping over him, and lightly touching his brow with her lips. He moved at the touch; he seemed struggling to awake.

'Darling, darling!' he said, half raising one of his hands.

'He is dreaming of Helen,' she thought.

In that instant Kenneth came with two men, one holding a light, the other to help him to take the patient inside. It was all the work of a few moments, and then they were on their way back to the Half-way House. When they reached it Mrs. Challoner was still asleep; only the landlord and one or two late travellers were astir. The

landlord pressed them to stay for the night, as it was now ten o'clock.

'The young lady looks so very pale; I am afraid she is ill,' he said.

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But Kenneth, looking steadfastly at Doris, saw that her eyes were shining, as if her heart were full of happy thoughts.

'Miss Doris is often pale,' he replied; and then he explained that he was pledged to set out on a long journey on the morrow, and that it would be better for Mrs. Challoner to travel in the cool of the night.

So Mrs. Challoner was awakened from her long sound sleep, and said she felt like a new creature.

Early next day Kenneth departed. Doris, who had slept very fitfully, was up to say good-bye to him. As he held her hands in his, they seemed to him very hot and dry.

'My dear Miss Doris, I hope the fever is not on you,' he said, looking into her face anxiously. Surely it was very pallid, and the shadows under her eyes very deep. Yet when she looked up at him there was that calm, exalted gladness in those wonder-

fully radiant eyes which had struck him on the previous night.

'I am well, thank you, Kenneth,' she answered, smiling at her old friend. 'Here is something I want you to keep always,' she added, giving him a small sandal-wood box. It held a large gold locket, with a photograph of her mother on one side and of herself on the other.

Kenneth looked from one to the other. As he looked at Mrs. Lindsay, he said with the soft, pensive intonations which had always in them something of the solemnity of solitary musings :

'Dear heart, sweet gentle lady, of thee it might always be said, "God hath given His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." Now thou art among the companies of the blessed, enjoying the sweetness of the contemplation of the Father for ever.'

'Kenneth, if you heard that I had gone to her, you would not think it was anything to grieve for, would you?' asked Doris softly.

'No, dear child ; you have ever had one

of those sweet and well-disposed natures which need little chastening to make them fit for the companionship of the sinless ones. . . . But though your life may be long in the land, something tells me we shall not meet again. To me the hour of my deliverance can never come amiss. Though we are drenched with matter, yet the better part of us faints oftentimes for converse with the spiritual world. If you return from over the sea and find that I am gone, you may know, dear Miss Doris, that what my soul longed for has come to pass.'

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During that and the following day the Challoner household were occupied with the manifold duties of their departure from the mine. Shung was, as usual, equal to two or three ordinary servants. But he kept a keen eye on his young mistress, and was more insistent than usual that she should spare herself all fatigue. One and another noticed her increasing silence, her lack of appetite, and an air of curious abstraction. It was a touch of the fever, they thought, and the doctor ratified the conclusion. It was a good thing they were going away, he

said, for the change would most likely arrest the disease. At times she heard and saw nothing of what went on around her. A whole world lay between her and the accustomed familiar details of life. The wondering speculations, the absorbing thoughts, which had taken possession of her when her mother died, returned to her with overwhelming vividness. Only the sting of separation was wonderfully removed. The earth and all that it contained had come to wear to her the aspect of a scene in which she had no stake.

The world was enclosed in a pearly light, shot through with golden sunbeams, the morning they left Nilpeena by the early train. Near mid-day they passed the confines of the Salt-bush country. The wide shadowy woods and softly swelling rises that succeeded the boundless horizons and arid monotony of that region exhilarated the spirits like an escape from captivity. Later they passed through districts full of great fields of wheat ripe for harvest. Flocks of sheep stood under the shade of old spreading gum-trees, by

permanent water-holes in the creeks; herds of cattle were feeding leisurely in well-grassed paddocks; enclosed hillsides were dotted with vineyards; the township had their meanest habitations surrounded by fruit-trees, bending under loads of fruit.

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Almost every succeeding scene on the way was intimately associated in Doris's mind with memories of her mother. They had made the journey so often together, that each little station at which they stopped, each township they passed, was perfectly familiar. To several dwellings, of which they caught merely brief glimpses in passing, Doris had given names, had even fitted them with stories to which her mother listened with smiling interest.

'The boy that went away from Pear-blossom Farm to get rubies as big as eggs has come back, maman, and they have built a new room for him—see it there, at the end of the house!' Doris would say eagerly, pointing out the new addition as they passed a house a little way off the railway line, surrounded by pear-trees, that in their season were clothed with a delicate splen-

dour of blossom seldom equalled elsewhere. She had fallen asleep after looking out through the window all the morning, but as they passed this well-known spot she awoke from a quiet, happy dream, in which she heard her mother saying :

'We are too late for the blossoms this time, Doris ; but see how the trees are bending under their young pears!'

She looked out at the window, and lo! there was Pear-blossom Farm with another new room to it—a large one with a bow-window.

'What has happened now, maman ?' she said, smiling softly. And then she remembered that her mother was no longer beside her. But the thought had no sting in it, till she overheard some whispered words in the carriage.

A guard, who on this route had often seen Mrs. Lindsay and her daughter travelling together, came in to check the tickets. He looked at the young lady, now in black, and without her mother, and said something in a low voice to Challoner. 'Dead ?' Doris heard him repeat the word in a low, startled

voice, and divining who was meant, her heart rose in rebellion against the thought. The things that had been for a short time so close and dear to her—these were dead: they had fallen from her like the fruit-blossoms whose time is overpast. But her mother, whose welcoming, reassuring kiss had released her from all pangs of sorrow, when her hour of desolation had come in the very heart of the Silent Sea, ah, she had never died! she had but 'awakened from the dream of life.'

From the moment that Nature was once more around her in the dear familiar aspects of beauty and fertility, the old close bond between Doris and her mother was more strongly renewed: not so much through memory, as a constant pervasive sense of communion which made all other interests dim, even a little unreal, in comparison. Not that she was indifferent, least of all to memories of that brief space during which an emotion more absorbing than she had ever felt before had overcome her. It was impossible to forget that, but she looked on it as something irreparably past,

while this quickening of the old life embraced almost the whole of her past, and would be linked with those coming experiences of which her chief forecasts came in dreams and long silent reveries.

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'Does your head ache, dear? Are you very tired?' Mrs. Challoner asked repeatedly during the latter part of the journey, and to all inquiries Doris answered that she was very well.

They were met at the railway-station by those old friends of Mrs. Lindsay who had written to ask Doris to stay with them in the early days of her bereavement. She now gladly consented to visit them for a week or ten days, according to the date at which Mr. Challoner's health enabled them to leave the colony. Her first care the next day was to send Shung to post a short letter she had written to Victor the day before she left Stonehouse, intending to send it that same evening; but it had been somehow overlooked. As Kenneth had said nothing of the invalid he had taken to the private hospital, Doris also maintained silence on the point. She felt

sure that Victor's presence in the district under such strange circumstances, after his supposed departure by ship from Port Pellew, would lead to much wonder, very likely to much blame; and blame for him she could not bear. She was not given to analyzing her thoughts, but even in their unprobed recesses there was no shade of anger against Victor. Though she felt there was something strange, something she could not comprehend, in what had happened, yet she did not pass any judgment. 'And what is life that we should moan? Why make we such ado?' These words, marked by her mother's hand years before, now seemed to sum up all.

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CHAPTER IX.

It was on the sixth day after her return from Colombo that Miss Paget heard the first rumour of Victor's abrupt departure for England or the Cape of Good Hope. There seemed to be a difference of opinion as to his destination even among those who knew the most, and in the end she found that no one knew very much except by implication. It was at a garden-party she heard the tidings—at the same house and near the self-same spot on which Victor three months before had charged her with inventing melancholy.

The entertainment was given in honour of a German nobleman who had travelled all over the Old World and the New, chiefly with the result of proving that cosmopolitan

dining did not impair his digestion. The house was moderately old, as age is reckoned in Australia, and the surroundings picturesque. The sea was quite near, and the grounds laid out in lawns, and numerous walks lined with Old-world trees mingled with those of native growth. There were winding lanes almost buried in shrubs and creepers, and the daintily-trimmed lawns were sprinkled with dwarf yellow honeysuckles, scented verbena, daphne bushes, and many others of the perfume-breathing kind. It was a warm day about the middle of December, and the sunshine seemed to extract their inmost essences from flowers and leaves, so that the air was loaded with perfume which, in places, might be too heavy, were it not for the fresh, keen savour of the sea-breezes.

Miss Paget, with her father and Professor Codrington, were among the last to arrive.

'It is all the fault of the Delphin Ordon,' she said, excusing herself to the hostess smilingly. 'Oh, don't ask me what it is! I only know it is shelves of old

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books, over which learned old gentlemen cannot keep the peace.'

'But Professor Codrington is not as old as your father, Helen,' returned the hostess, with a meaning smile, which made Miss Paget feel sure that already the pundit's mild infatuation for herself was the subject of gossip; for it was a fact that his intimacy with Miss Paget opened the Professor's mind for the first time to the thought that to form the subject of equivocal odes in the dead languages was not woman's sole function.

There were over three hundred people present, not counting the large blonde Count who was the centre of attraction. Miss Paget, after chatting with a group of ladies near the hostess, passed on with her father and his friend, talking to scores of people, many of whom they saw for the first time since their return. There was a band playing, and on every side much talk and laughter. Miss Paget, in one of her most becoming gowns, and with a constant succession of smiles, did honour to the occasion. But anyone observing her closely

would have noticed an expression of anxious scrutiny, of inquiring observation, in her face, as she looked round her from time to time.

Would Victor make his appearance perhaps to-day? If not, she would, at any rate, surely fall in with someone who could perhaps throw light on what was beginning to look like a mystery, and which, whether it was a mystery or not, filled her with insupportable apprehensions. Victor's telegram, saying that he would be in town on the evening of the day she landed, had awaited her on reaching home. It had been sent after his telegram to her at King George's Sound. She looked for him to come on Saturday evening, after the arrival of the late north train. But he neither came nor sent. On Sunday she made an excuse of not feeling well, and stayed at home from church, thinking he might turn up at any moment. Had something detained him at the mine? Or was he ill? Or—yes, she had said to herself repeatedly during the past few weeks that a certain change had come over Victor's letters; and

the thought was confirmed when she found that there was nothing beyond a telegram for her at the Sound. But then it was delightful that he should hurry down the very day she returned. And she resolved that she would show all the joy she felt. She would voluntarily shorten the time of probation, and their engagement would be announced forthwith—that is, if there was nothing wrong; and if there was—— She did not try to face the alternative. 'I suppose I shall pull through somehow,' she thought, and the words fairly express the history of the succeeding days of strained suspense.

She had shoals of visitors, and a rush of all sorts of social engagements. On the Tuesday succeeding their return, her father spent hours with her arranging a list of the friends he wished to be asked to a succession of small dinner-parties, to meet Professor Codrington, before they went away to Port Callunga for their annual stay at the seaside. Though Mr. Paget thought that he was easily bored, his partiality for this form of entertainment in his own house,

under his daughter's careful supervision, had, up to this, resisted the combined inroads of age, dulness and monotony.

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There were the momentous questions as to the relations between certain people—as to the advisability of asking two men at once, otherwise suitable, but whose wives conspired in being so immovably stupid that no party of ten could survive such absolute dead-weights, etc., *ad infinitum*. Then there was the even more important task of deciding on soups and entrées and wines to suit the company. It seemed as if the discussion would never, never come to an end. Yet Miss Paget did not flinch, though each time the door-bell rang, or the sound of footsteps passed the half-open door of the morning-room, in which this domestic conclave was held, her heart was in her throat with the question, 'Is it Victor?'

'My dear Helen, why do you persist in having the door open?' her father cried at last in a tone of irritation, seeing her eyes fastened on it when there was a subdued murmur of voices in the hall. 'It is almost the sole point in which you seem to betray

your Australian origin,' pursued Mr. Paget, who felt that the subject was serious enough to call for a digression from the point on hand. 'Professor Codrington said only the other day that in your society he quite lost sight of your not being English-born.'

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At another time Miss Paget would doubtless have indulged in some mental or audible remark as to the comic inability under which Professor Codrington, like the majority of the deeply respectable British middle classes, laboured, of being absolutely unable to imagine people are civilized in a country not even mentioned in their parents' geographies. But just then she merely said, with the greatest meekness:

'Did he, papa? I am glad; for I am sure it would worry him to have one different from the people he is used to. . . . But about the door. I would sooner have it a little ajar, if you do not mind much. I find it so close; I seem to need more air these last few days—as if I had a little touch of fever.'

Mr. Paget involuntarily drew back.

'I hope to goodness, Helen, you are not going to fall ill with all these arrangements

on hand. I wish you would let that maid who has been taken ill go to the hospital!'

'I assure you, papa, that has nothing to do with it. It is chiefly my throat; it sometimes ails a little like this in the early summer.'

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Her father resumed his suggestions and instructions, and Miss Paget did not allow her eyes to wander again towards the door. But when the conference was over she went out and took a cab off the nearest stand, and went into the General Post Office in the city, and sent a message to Victor at the Colmar: "Have you been unable to leave? Please send an immediate answer." That was all, beside her name and address. The reply came as they were leaving to go to the theatre. It was from the post and telegraph master at Colmar, with whom Victor had been on very friendly terms, and the answer was: "Mr. Fitz-Gibbon left here early on Friday morning."

'Is that from anyone unable to come to dinner to-morrow, Helen?' said her father, after they got into the carriage.

'Oh no, papa; it's a mere bagatelle—

nothing so important as that,' she managed to say with a smile, and all the time her heart was throbbing like the throat of a singing bird. Oh, how sick she was getting of this double life, and of everything around her : the great situations in dramas, which produce an immense effect, and the small situations in life, that make no outward change at all, and yet paralyze the very springs of action.

On the next day, Wednesday, they had their first dinner-party—seven of their most intimate neighbours. Mrs. Tillotson was not among the number. Her daughter Jane had influenza, and the good lady was waging an internecine strife with the nurse and the doctor on the subject of antipyrine, reading extracts to the patient out of the wrong magazines, and goading her son-in-law to desperation, by imploring him each morning at breakfast, and every evening at dinner, to have new and more enlightened advice as to the state of his lungs.

'Yes, my dear, Jane, I am glad to say, is a little better. What it has cost me to save her from being the victim of antipyrine

I would not like to tell you! However, I have the consolation of having done my duty, and I am coming home to-morrow,' she said to Helen, when they met at the garden-party on Thursday, where here and there, through the vistas of shadowy foliage, shimmering expanses of the Southern Ocean caught the eye.

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It was on a slight rise at the end of an elm avenue, commanding one of these views, that Miss Paget first caught sight of Mrs. Tillotson, sitting with another old friend on a rustic bench under a big gum-tree.

'You must tell me all the news—you know how hungry one is for news after being away so long,' said Miss Paget, who had been feverishly anxious to see Mrs. Tillotson, feeling sure she would be one of the first to hear if anything strange or unusual had happened to 'Mrs. Fitz-Gibbon's boy.' But she did not mention his name. She made Helen sit down beside her, and drenched her with showers of vapid twaddle, or what seemed so to her listener, who was indeed tired to death of perplexity and doubt and wonder. Once or twice she essayed to say in a careless tone,

'I wonder whether Victor Fitz-Gibbon is still at the mine'; but after saying 'I wonder' she gave the sentence a new turn, and the longer she delayed, the more impossible it became to utter the words without a violent effort or betraying too much emotion.

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All through the previous evening she had felt that she might at any moment step out of the room from her smiling guests, into one adjacent, to meet the tragedy of her life. . . . 'A tragedy only to myself, no matter what happens,' she thought. To these people, to everyone else, it would be a story to smile and wink over. A woman of her years breaking her heart over a boy just out of his teens! She cherished no illusions —she did not spare herself—but this did not lessen the pangs she endured. She had come out to-day determined in some way to end the suspense—to ask anyone or everyone who would be likely to know.

'But at least he has not been killed or had a bad accident—there would be a paragraph in the papers,' she said to herself, as

the two old friends between whom she sat gossiped on, and she sat staring at some white-sailed boats on the blue waves at the end of the avenue, motionless, as if asleep, with the shadow looking exactly like the substance, even to the tear at the tip of one of the sails. She knew the scene was one over which some people would rave as being very beautiful, but there was not a fibre of her nature that vibrated to its charm. It gave her rather a feeling akin to repulsion, almost one of helpless terror, like the presence of a great, serene implacable force profoundly indifferent to the sorrows and destinies of human beings.

She saw her father and Professor Codrington walking towards a marquee, near which the band was playing. She thought of asking her two old friends to go in a devious direction towards the same centre, on the chance of meeting someone who would know something of Victor, of meeting himself, perhaps. At that moment some words spoken between two ladies, who had met just behind the rustic bench on which she sat, caught her ear.

'Gone away in a sailing-ship? Didn't he write to tell anyone?'

'No, not a word. In fact, none of us in town knew he had left the mine till father heard from the captain—you know they call the men who manage the mines captains.—Ah, how do you do, dear? Isn't it too lovely? The band, and the views, and the Count—such a droll creature! . . . I hear he speaks every known tongue.'

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'Ah, the version I heard is that he *eats* every known tongue, down to that of a jew-lizard, and you know what used to be his waist is on my side of the story.'

Miss Paget had risen on catching the first words about one who 'had gone away in a sailing-ship.' The speaker, as she had divined by the voice, was Miss Stuart Drummond, talking to two or three other young ladies. The new-comer was Miss Mason, *fiancée* of Victor's elder brother.

She caught sight of Miss Paget, and came forward to speak to her.

'Doesn't the sea look exquisite just from this point of view?' said Miss Paget, leading her a little away from the rest. She had

not seen them, but a troop of sea-gulls opposite the avenue vista, circling widely over some booty of the waves, with out-
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spread snowy pinions and faint, complaining calls, gave a special point to the scene. Miss Mason, feeling she was expected to admire it all, made some polite remarks and then spoke of Colombo. Miss Paget must have enjoyed it very much, and then the getting home was always so nice. Wasn't it while she was away that poor dear old Mrs. Ridley died so suddenly?

'Yes, and do you know since I came here I heard a curious little rumour——'

'Oh, about Victor Fitz-Gibbon? Isn't it the most curious affair? but it can only be some whim, you know. There is nothing whatever amiss to account for it, as is so often the case when people go off like that, without saying a word to anyone.'

Miss Paget had rightly judged that Miss Mason would know all there was to tell. She went over in detail all that had béen learned, and what Lance said and thought. Victor had written indefinitely of coming to town before Christmas.

'We thought when he came down that he would be sure not to go back again, for, after all, it was a little absurd, his going there at all. And now he won't be at our wedding.'

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'It is to be soon?'

'In three or four weeks,' answered the girl with a dimpling smile; 'and Victor was to be groom's man. Oh, I *shall* scold him! You know Lance is almost sure he must have written, and that the letters were somehow lost — perhaps entrusted to some "sun-downer," like poor old Bertie Grayson's letters, when he wasn't heard of from that station beyond anywhere for months and months. As it is, no one had a letter from him but the manager of the mine.'

The theory of lost letters was confirmed by Miss Paget's own experience, though she could not make use of the confirmation. But it did not seem to be much needed. None of his people were greatly disquieted, only amazed, and a little inclined to be vexed at him.

'If his mother were here, you know, she would be distracted; but we others take it

calmly enough,' Lance Fitz-Gibbon explained to Miss Paget a few minutes later. 'But I don't suppose it would have happened if the mater were at home,' he added; 'indeed, I sometimes think perhaps it was on account of some letter from her he went. I found out that the English mail had been delivered the day before he left. Only why go by a tub of a sailing-vessel, and from Port Pellew? It seems as if the boy had determined on something, and wanted to avoid all the bother and fuss of talking it over with people.'

'He wrote nothing to you in a letter, then, or anything of that sort?'

'Not a syllable. We didn't write to each other very often, you know. I had some idea of having an inquiry made, but uncle pooh-poohed the thought, as everything was so clear—his letter posted to the mine-manager, and his letters and cards left at the inn.' It was more the anxious, questioning look in Miss Paget's face that made Fitz-Gibbon go over these details than any real anxiety in his own mind. She was at first too startled to adopt the

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explanation supported by everything except direct proof. Afterwards it amazed her that she should in so short a time adopt the suggestion that, strange as Victor's abrupt departure was, yet it afforded no reasonable ground for anxiety. Of her own special reasons for lying awake at night, and getting up restlessly before dawn kindled the sky, of growing pale and losing her appetite, she was, of course, mute as the dead.

On the second day after hearing the news Miss Paget horrified herself by going into a fit of violent hysterics for the first time in her life. The servants' wonder, her father's shocked amazement, and his insistence in sending for his doctor and explaining that his daughter had sobbed and cried at the pitch of her voice as she had never done in childhood—all were details full of such keen annoyance that for a short time she could think of nothing else. She took herself to task severely for succumbing too easily to those fears that had been in the background from the first. Henceforth, amid the conflict of her thoughts, she

clung to the belief that Victor could not have gone as he did without some good reason altogether unconnected with her, and that no reason would have induced him to go without writing to her. His letter was lost, and until further tidings came she would *not* allow her fears and doubts to gain the upper hand.

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She bent herself resolutely to a disposal of her days that would leave no idle moments. She gave more of her time to household duties, trying to win back some of the old girlish sense of elation in the perfect order and completeness of the household of which she was mistress; going oftener into the great bright airy kitchen, with its tiled walls and floor of spotless purity, its gleaming utensils of plated ware and copper and agate, and its wide range, so perfectly adjusted that it would almost cook of itself. She supervised some repairs to the servants' rooms, with their pretty outlooks, and flowers growing at the windows. She went now and then, as in olden times, for a chat with them in their sitting-room, into which she had conveyed so many

artistic knick-knacks, till some of her older friends solemnly warned her against making her servants' lives so luxurious that they would be unfitted for their own sphere in life. Had she ever undertaken anything in which some danger was not found to lurk? But all other dangers, real or imaginary, sank into insignificance compared to this, of finding her whole life made waste and void, by centring all its vital interests on an unrequited attachment. It was with a sort of vague terror of this that she took up her old pursuits with increased zeal and method.

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She went more frequently to charity meetings, visited the destitute asylum and the hospitals and the suffering poor with steadfast regularity. And then all during the first week after she learned the inexplicable tidings of Victor's departure there was the succession of dinner-parties, which claimed so much attention.

The stir in the household created by such parties, the sound of beating and pounding, the fragrant essences and condiments that impregnated the atmosphere, the savour of roasts and joints, of sauces and dainty soups,

often affected her with a feeling that amounted to nausea. But she went through all the duties of a careful hostess with relentless exactitude. She tripped down the broad stairs, shimmering in delicate summery fabrics, to await her guests, and said the right things at the right moment as seriously as if the dearest aim of her being was compassed, when, on bidding her father goodnight, he said: 'Well, Helen, I think our little party went off very well.' And, as a matter of fact, she tried very hard to make herself realize that in the midst of so much that was maimed and spoiled in the world through sheer poverty, the rich, flexible, delicately adorned aspects of life had a distinct value of their own.

And thus somehow time wore on till nineteen days had passed from the one on which Miss Paget heard the news of Victor's departure. And now it was the second of January. She had for the first time evaded the annual sojourn with her father at Port Callunga—at least, for the first four weeks. It was possible for her to do this without incommoding him, because Professor Cod-

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rington bore him company, and the older and more experienced servants could be relied on to do everything for their material comfort. Their mental harmony must largely depend on their conclusions regarding the Cretic and tetrameter-iambic metres.

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Miss Paget felt that the seclusion of Port Callunga, with its beautiful monotony and the unbroken loneliness of seashore, would be more than she could bear, while she watched and waited for tidings, and counted the days till it would be possible to get a cablegram from Victor. The serious illness of one of the maids gave her sufficient excuse for staying at Lancaster House, and her father agreed to the arrangement with that docility which always characterized him when neither his pursuits nor his dinners were threatened by the vagaries of man or woman kind.

'But about Mrs. Tillotson, Helen?' he said, a few days before his departure. 'I would not like to say anything unkind; but without you to listen to her fears about her investments and her sons-in-law——'

'Of course Mrs. Tillotson stays with me,

papa. Why'—with a rising smile—'I am not quite sure that it would be proper for her to go with you and Professor Codrington and all those reckless metres.'

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Since she was left a widow six years previously, Mrs. Tillotson had spent part of most summers with the Pagets at the sea-side. But she, too, found reasons for being better contented to stay just then at Lancaster House, instead of going to Callunga. She had let her house furnished at an exorbitantly high rent to a newly-enriched Silver King, and she wanted to keep an eye on the premises. Then Jane was really very delicate, though George would not or could not see it, nor take any steps to go away for part of the summer. But she, at least, had her eyes open, and would try to do her duty, and her duty was not to be beyond reach if Jane should want her. . . . As for Matilda, she was so taken up with embroidering altar-cloths, and so devoured with grief at the spread of 'heresy,' that a mere mother hardly counted in her life at all. . . . But George was more like a ghost than ever, and if he really became one, no doubt Jane

would remember that her mother was still living. And then there were those Banjoe-wangie shares. She had implored Richard
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to put the last money that fell in from mortgages into something that would be quite, *quite* safe, and now, after paying such high dividends, these shares were steadily going down. That was so often the way with mines after they had been worked for a little time.

Mrs. Tillotson's first care each morning was to glance over the share-lists in the daily papers, and her spirits would rise and fall with the Banjoewangies in a way that Miss Paget would no doubt have found trying if she had not been partly oblivious of the matter. As long as her companion put in a sympathetic monosyllable now and then, Mrs. Tillotson gently pottered on in the manner of an insensitive, self-involved, garrulous woman, who takes no impression from any personality foreign to her own. Each day furnished her with events, visits, and conversations that kept her in a gentle simmer of indolent activity.

On the date mentioned, the two sat on a veranda overlooking a shadowy part of the

lawn, at two o'clock in the afternoon, when Lance Fitz-Gibbon came in through the side gate. On seeing him Miss Paget turned very pale.

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'You will be surprised at my errand,' he said, by way of preparing her, when she had stepped in with him to a morning room that opened on the veranda.

She murmured something by way of reply, and then he handed her a little note. The lines were wavering and uncertain, but not more so than her sight. When the letters ceased to dance before her eyes, she read these words:

'Dear Helen,

'Can you come to me at once? The journey has knocked me up so much that Lance insists on my resting.

'Yours,

'Victor.'

'He is at the house in which I lodge, less than half a mile away,' Fitz-Gibbon said, meeting her eyes as she looked up in hopeless bewilderment, after slowly reading this note the second time through.

To get a hat and pair of gloves and a sunshade, to excuse her absence to Mrs. Tillotson for an hour or so, and to find herself walking rapidly beside Fitz-Gibbon to his lodgings in Jeffrey Street, was the work of a few minutes. On the way he told her all he knew. Four days ago a telegram came to him from the Broombush Creek private hospital from Victor, saying he was well enough to travel. He had started for the diggings at once, and returned by the first north train that day. Victor insisted on travelling straight through, and wished to drive to Lancaster House direct from the railway-station, which Fitz-Gibbon had prevented his doing by promising that he would at once bring Miss Paget to him.

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They had reached the house before Miss Paget comprehended that the report of Victor's departure from Port Pellew was absolutely untrue—that he had been hurt, and lying in some place unknown to him for two weeks, according to the date of his admission to the hospital, whither he was taken by some person in a hawker's waggon. He had been unconscious for days in the

hospital, and for days, when he tried to explain where he had been and how he had been hurt, his talk was taken to be the delirium of fever. Indeed, he was not free from fever now. It would be better to postpone talking of the mysterious events, as far as possible, till he was stronger. They had telegraphed to the mine-manager, and were going to put the matter in the hands of the police.

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Miss Paget listened as if she were walking in a dream. But amidst all the confusion and inexplicable mystery, one thought rose up clear and beautiful as a star. His first anxiety was to see her. The weary, endless days of strained perplexity and harassing uncertainty had tried her more than she herself knew. Now it was as though a great load were suddenly taken off, but as if she were too weak and weary from the burden to feel greatly relieved. But soon she would be rested, and able to rejoice that her dismal apprehensions and mistrusts were over and past.

But even as she waited in the drawing-room, while Fitz-Gibbon went to tell Victor

that she had come, a feeling of exquisite happiness stole over her.

'O, God, I thank Thee!—it is more happiness than I have dared to hope for!' were the words that rose in her heart. . . . The next moment she was following Fitz-Gibbon into the room in which Victor was resting.

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CHAPTER X.

He was in a dressing-gown in a half-sitting position on a couch, awaiting her with a look of such eager expectancy on his face that Miss Paget's first feeling was one of quick joy.

'Helen, where is she?' were his first words.

'Who, dear Victor?'

'Doris.'

'Doris?'

'Yes.'

'I—I——'

'Oh, Helen, don't say you do not know!'

'But what can I say?'

'You know nothing of her; you have not seen her?'

'I never knew anyone of that name.'

'And I made so sure—oh, so sure——'

He pressed his hands against his temples, and lay back with half-closed eyes, with an expression of intense chagrin.

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'What did you make sure of, Victor?'

'That you had seen her, and then that Doris had written—that you knew where she was.'

'You have been very ill, dear.'

'Ill? I have been in hell—down low in the innermost circle!'

'And you are far from well yet, Victor.'

'Just five days ago, after what seemed long years of darkness and ceaseless struggle, I woke up. Everything was unreal. Then I got her letter. Oh, Helen, think of it! My poor darling believes that I do not love her as she thought.'

Miss Paget's hands were so tightly clenched that her nails made livid dents in the delicate flesh.

'But who, then, could have told Doris? Who else knew but our two selves?'

'Knew what, Victor? I am afraid your head is——'

'Yes, it is whirling in chaos. But I

have one thing to steady me—one thing to hold by. It is not all black confusion. Only the thought that she may be sailing away. . . . Oh, it is too intolerable!'

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Victor turned away with a movement of extreme impatience, and lay back looking weak and spent. His face was white and thin, his eyes looking unnaturally large and hollow. Miss Paget noticed that they glittered with excitement when he spoke, and that, until overcome with exhaustion, there was a vehemence of emotion in his face and voice she had never seen in them before. This, coupled with his strange conduct and inexplicable speech, gave her a quick thrill of fear. Was it the delirium of fever or of a more fixed and dangerous aberration?

'Dear Victor, what is it that distresses you? Is it any news of your mother, or——'

'No, no, no! It is Doris—my Doris! She has gone away. I must find her. She must know the truth . . . and perhaps she is sailing away to the other side of the world!'

No; never before had Miss Paget seen him touched with this absorbing intensity. But here a sudden chill fell on her—a doubt that his mysterious words did not spring from imaginary events or a disordered brain.

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'Doris! My Doris!' What could these words signify? The first dread that Victor's mind was temporarily unhinged gave place to the dread that it was not. Yet she tried to hope against hope—to lead him from the feverish thoughts that had taken hold of him. She spoke in the soothing tones in which one seeks to pacify an irritable child:

'All these days we have been thinking of you as on your way to England; but now you are safe here.'

'Good Heavens! what fantastical notions you have all got hold of!' he cried, pressing his hands once more against his temples. 'I made so sure you would know something about Doris. Not that you would have made her believe I did not love her. You would have understood it all. The last time I saw her was a few hours before I

was made insensible. . . . I was coming to you, Helen, to tell you all.'

Miss Paget drew her breath in suddenly. For a little it seemed as if she were spending her last breath in holding herself above billows breaking stormily round her head.

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Yet only a very short pause elapsed before she said in a calm, even voice:

'What were you coming to tell me, Victor?'

Again there was silence in the room for a short time. Victor had turned his head aside, and Miss Paget saw that his eyelashes were wet.

In that moment, had it been in her power, she would have restored to him without a moment's hesitation the lost love who had so entirely effaced her own claim that he seemed to have forgotten its existence. But as the first tumult of bitter disappointment subsided, the past returned to him in clearer proportions.

'You were wiser than I was, Helen, when I thought I loved you well enough to ask you to be my wife.'

'Tell me about it now, Victor . . . all

you were coming to tell me when these strange things happened,' she said, stroking his thin, hot fingers with her cool, firm hand.

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And by degrees she heard the story—the old simple, ever new and imperishable idyll of two young human hearts who found in each other the happiness and completion of their being.

'No one knew but our two selves. . . . I did not mean to speak till I had told you. . . . I would have come at once to you . . . only you were away. . . . But I was glad to remember that from the first you thought my affection was a boyish folly. . . .'

'Yes, I thought it was not likely to last,' she said with her invincible little smile—a smile which mentally she considered equalled Mdlle. Cardinale's most signal feat of balancing in the air.

'I am glad now that you did not really love me in that way.'

'Now, how clever it was of you to find that out,' she said, shifting one of the cushions to make his head more comfortable.

'I don't think I did quite find it out, Helen, till I was really in love myself,'

he answered slowly. He raised one of her hands to his lips, and added : ' I knew you would understand how it all happened.'

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The words hurt her horribly. But beyond speaking in a very low voice, she betrayed no emotion as she replied :

' Yes, I think I quite understand, Victor.'

The longer she was with him, the more she realized that his hurt, and the bitter disappointment which had come to him with the recovery of full consciousness, had for the time entirely changed him, making him self-engrossed, impatient, and profoundly melancholy. It was an effort of memory to recall his face as she had last seen it, beaming with health and boyish gaiety, with every thought tuned by that love of the bright side of life which seemed doubly his by temperament as well as youth.

But there was no effort of memory required to make her realize that nothing—nothing made any difference to the place he held in her heart. ' Oh, thank Heaven, no one knows—no one ever will know!' she said to herself, bending her head as it all rose before her, bringing a hot sudden flame

into her face. The steadfast, unalterable vehemence of her feelings, notwithstanding that the fears which had from the first beset her were now certainties, was the last drop in her cup of bitterness. . . . She recalled stories that had come to her knowledge, of women who had clung to men even when they had outraged every instinct of humanity. Love, which, according to the poets, should exalt and transfigure human beings, did it not in reality as often humiliate and disgrace them, and render them recklessly egoistic? But she had always known the poets were dealers in pretty fables and baseless lies.

'At least there are some depths of humiliation I shall be spared,' she thought bitterly, as she glanced at Victor's face. Sombre and changed it might be, but it would never bear traces of cruelty and deceit and shameless self-indulgence.

During the short silence in which these reflections passed through Miss Paget's mind, Victor had drawn a little letter from an inner pocket in his dressing-gown.

'It is all so awfully mixed up, Helen,'

he said, his voice weak from mental and physical weariness. 'You may be wondering why I made so sure you would know something about Doris. . . . Well, I will give you her precious little letter to read. I got it the last thing as I was leaving the hospital. The doctor had it for a day or two, I think. He said I had been drugged after being hurt, and must be kept perfectly calm. At first he would do nothing I told him, only try to keep me quiet. It was only when a telegram came from Lance, in answer to one I bribed the wardsman to send, that the doctor believed a word of what I said . . . "Delirium—all delirium," he kept on muttering, till one day I flung my boot at him ; and after that he said it was a case of acute madness.'

'Poor dear Victor ! Then may I look at this letter ?'

'Yes ; please read it to me slowly aloud, Helen.'

Miss Paget took the note and read :

'"My dear Victor,

'"To-morrow we are leaving——"'

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'You see, Helen, there is nothing to show whether it was the mine or Adelaide. I sent a telegram to Trevaskis on the journey down, and instead of giving me a date, he merely telegraphed that the Challoners had left some days ago to take ship for England.'

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'Then we can look up the shipping intelligence, and find out from that—or some of the agents,' said Miss Paget.

'Oh yes, yes! this very day. I knew you would help me. I seem to have lost all power of thought.'

Miss Paget resumed.

'"And I want to say good-bye, and to thank you for all your kindness: I will never forget it."'

Victor gave a great sigh that was almost a groan, and made an effort to get up.

'What now, Victor?' said Miss Paget, who was holding the letter on her lap, so that the tremulousness of her hand should not be noticed—an unnecessary precaution.

'What now?' he repeated. 'I want to go away. I want to find out where Doris is, and, if she has sailed, to take the next

ship. Why, there may be one starting now! My kindness to her. . . . Good God! as if I would not lay down my life to save her a pang! . . . And all this time she thinks. . . . Helen, why don't you go on? But I know I interrupted you. I won't say another word till you finish.'

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To lessen the temptations of breaking this promise, Miss Paget read to the end rapidly, not pausing if any word or sentence drew an impatient sigh or a low exclamation from her listener:

'"I think, dear Victor, I must have made a mistake as to some things you said—I mean, in the way you love me. I do not blame you, for I am sure there is some explanation I cannot guess, and I am afraid you were unhappy when you went away so that we shouldn't know where you were. Perhaps that is why you fell ill, and had to be nursed near the broken-down whim.

'"Mother and I lived so much alone, and were so very, very dear to each other. But even with maman there were a great many things she did not explain to me. . . . Once when we were returning from town we

travelled with Koroona—the girl I told you about—mother was so angel-kind to everyone, yet she would never take me to see Koroona at Noomooloo, and Koroona was never at our place till she came flying out of the woods that terrible evening. . . . Often, too, when mother was talking to Mrs. Murray or Mrs. Challoner, or even some of the poor splitters' wives, she would speak in a low voice and look at me; or other times I would come in from the garden, and they would speak of something else. One day, not very long before we parted, I asked mother why there were so many things she did not explain to me, and she said I was not old enough yet to understand. . . . And this is another of these many things. . . . But you must soon get well, and go to Helen and be happy."'

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Miss Paget drew a deep breath at the mention of her own name. Victor's face was very pale and set, but he offered no interruption.

'"I think I shall write one letter to you from France, to know how you are. This is a real letter—not like the little make-

believe one when you let me practise so that I might write to Raoul. . . . But that would be quite different, for I know you and love you so much better. I hope you will not think I am vexed or unhappy. I will tell you a secret: darling maman now seems quite near me all the time, as if she had in some way come in place of what made me so happy without her. . . . I am glad you got so many beautiful flowers for me, for flowers will always speak to me of you, and remind me of the great pleasure they gave to the sick children. Poor little dears! they were starved for beautiful things, and there is nothing in all the world more beautiful than flowers, except the swallows flying. . . . I am glad you are now in a place where you will be nursed well from the fever. I pray for you every day.

'"I am, dear Victor,

'"Your faithful friend,

'"DORIS."'

'"Go to Helen and be happy!" When I read that I made sure that in some way you had met Doris here,' said Victor, speak-

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ing in a dull tone. 'No one else, except, perhaps, Mrs. Tillotson, knows.'

'She does not know—no one knows from me,' replied Miss Paget, who, in the midst of a whirl of confused thoughts, discerned one thing clearly: this letter, in its girlish simplicity and uncomplaining renunciation, in some way inspired her with new hopes and confidence. Only, if she had really gone, would Victor at once follow, or would he wait till the delirium of fever left him sane and collected? She insisted on his taking a little wine before he tried to give her some idea of all that remained with him of the past strange days.

He drank almost a wineglassful, and as soon as he was strengthened by its reviving influence he became more excitable and unreasonable. Why was he being kept like this, inactive? Why was not Lance doing something? The first thing that should be done was to arrest Trevaskis.

'On what grounds?' asked Miss Paget.

'Not on grounds—on suspicion. Oh no, nothing could or would be done unless he were allowed to act, and he was tied—

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fastened down as of old. . . .' This was the light in which his feebleness appeared to him. He had in the journey spent more than his reserve of strength, and his brain was cruelly clouded by the long days in which, after his violent hurt, he had been kept insensible by doses of laudanum.

Miss Paget made him lie down again on the sofa. She bathed his head, and rubbed his temples softly with the palms of her hands. She allowed him to talk, for she felt it would be worse than useless to try to impose silence while he was in such strange perplexity. He told her that his brother as yet knew nothing of Doris ; he could not bear beginning to explain. Everything he said aroused only wonder and doubt. And then he told her how he had been falling asleep on the bunk in his office, when he heard someone unlocking the iron safe, and he sprang up to catch the thief. The keys had been left with him, and it was only Trevaskis who knew of them. . . . He was seized and struck on the head. After that, all he could remember was a cavernous place with dim lights coming and

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going, borne by men—one with his face almost covered with long gray hair, the other shorter in stature—and when he was alone a feeble light burning in a distant corner. They were gentle in attending to him, but one seldom spoke, and his own eyes seemed always heavy and dull with sleep. . . . Such memories could hardly hold a clue. They bore too much the impress of those fragmentary visions of fever which, once finding lodgment in the brain, perpetually recur.

And then the journey to the hospital! That, too, was like a dream fitfully remembered. He was borne out of the darkness; the light of the stars and the fresh wind were round him, and he thought Helen came to him. He even remembered calling on her by name to tell her. The horrible shadowy figures were gone, and later he felt sure that Doris was there. He could remember her bending over him, or near him. He seemed to have wakened up from time to time. He thought at first it was heaven, and then he knew it was much better, for they were both alive and on the earth.

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Then he woke up in the hospital, and no one even knew who had brought him there. At least, they did not know his name. An old hawker, the wardsman said, who had brought people to the other hospital from Colmar. But he had not been brought from the mine. He had been brought from someone working a claim. She had seen in Doris's letter that he had been near a place they both knew.

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'But, after all, everything is well, Victor,' said Miss Paget gently, gratefully noticing that the look of anguished perplexity was gradually leaving his face. 'Even if Doris has gone away, she is with her friends. She will be taken care of, and you will in a short time be strong and well again.'

She soothed him and talked to him till he dropped into a sound sleep. She heard footsteps coming to the door, and softly opened it in time to prevent anyone from knocking. It was Victor's brother, followed by the landlady with a tray, on which stood a little basin full of beef-tea. 'Half a pound of gravy beef, quickly boiled in a common saucepan,' thought Miss Paget,

giving the preparation a brief glance. She whispered that the patient had fallen asleep, and had better not be disturbed. Then she went into another sitting-room to speak to Victor's brother.

'You have succeeded in quieting him, Miss Paget,' he said, looking at her with a little smile. Then he showed her a telegram which he had a few moments before received from Trevaskis, announcing that he would be in town by the late train to-morrow.

'Poor old Victor has some dark thoughts about this man,' said Lance. 'But of course it is part of the fever. The doctor at the Broombush hospital said he was no more fit to travel than he was to fly. However, short of tying him, he could not be kept. But now, Miss Paget, do you think you could prevail on him to have a doctor and a nurse?'

'A doctor and nurse here? I am afraid the bare idea would irritate him. He is so anxious to go about.'

'But now that he has seen you? Don't think I am trying to force your confidence.

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But I thought, before Victor went to the wilds, that he had lost his heart to you. And certainly his intense anxiety only to come to you at once confirmed the impression. . . . I know that you would be likely to hesitate. No, don't tell me a word more than you wish.'

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'You are right in supposing that there has been a little more than mere friendship between me and your brother. But—now——'

'Then I will just say only one thing, Helen. Excuse the liberty, but I have known your name a long time, and like the sound of it much.'

Miss Paget, who was extremely pale, responded by a friendly little nod and smile. Despite her agitation, her eyes were shining with some emotion akin to happiness.

'There would not, I am certain, be the same risk in Victor's case that there would be with some young men. He is the soul of fidelity. I won't say any more—perhaps I should not say so much.'

'Thank you. We will put that aspect of the question quite aside just now. Victor

needs nursing and society. We have so much room, and quiet, and everything that is necessary, at Lancaster House. And I have just been considering that at my time of life, with Mrs. Tillotson in the background——'

Her voice failed her a little, but she kept up her smile bravely.

'Oh, that would indeed be good for the poor fellow! He is in such a state of intense irritation. I think strangers about him would make him wild, and, then, people would come who should not see him—like Uncle Stuart.'

'Oh, is he to be contraband?'

'Well, yes, as long as he comes looking so black, and saying he must have an explanation from Victor of all this sham mystery. Trevaskis, the manager, he said, is furious.'

'Furious! I think I should like to see him when he comes,' said Miss Paget thoughtfully.

'Well, I told uncle he could not possibly see Victor to-day. He'll very likely call the day after to-morrow with the manager, and you must just use your own discretion.

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I thankfully accept your offer—at any rate, for some days.'

After talking over various details as to Victor's removal, his brother went back to Lancaster House, to order the carriage to come for Miss Paget and her charge at five o'clock.

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CHAPTER XI.

Victor awoke calmer and more collected, but with a more settled purpose of losing no time in finding out whether the Challoners had already sailed, and, if not, whether they were in Adelaide.

'The first thing to do is to get a file of the daily papers—here is to-day's,' said Miss Paget. 'I'll see if the landlady can help us.'

Lance had gone to telephone to his bank, and the landlady went vaguely searching in various rooms till she had newspapers for six consecutive days. But when Miss Paget returned with these, there was no longer any need to consult them. Victor sat with that day's paper in his hand, with a stunned look on his face.

'They are gone—they are gone,' he said,

speaking like one hypnotized, and then in silence he pointed to the passenger-list of a French www.libtool.com.cn mail-boat that had sailed on the previous day: 'Mr. and Mrs. R. Challoner and two Misses Challoner.' 'Doris is put down as their daughter, and they are gone,' he repeated in the same tones. 'Oh, to think that I am only a day too late—one miserable little day—and all the days that I was lying tied and in darkness!'

The very cruelty of the blow seemed to take away all power of further emotion. Doris was gone—across the great salt dividing ocean—believing that he did not love her with all his heart and soul, and yet speaking no word of blame, acquitting him from all faults. There was nothing now to be done but suffer and wait till he was a little stronger.

'She is with her friends, you know, Victor. She is safe. It is not as if any harm would come to her,' said Miss Paget, more dismayed by his calm and settled misery than she had been by his irritable impatience.

'Yes, she is with her friends,' he answered

slowly; 'but I am not with her. And we were to have made this voyage together—
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with the great sea around us, full of motion and lustre. So unlike that other gray inland one she called always the Silent Sea!'

'The one thing that you must now set your heart on is to get well. You can then make plans and carry them out. I am going to take care of you.'

'To take care of me?' he repeated, as if the thought were too novel to be grasped all at once.

'Yes, to see that you have proper nourishment at proper times, that you rest when you ought, that you do not attempt things beyond your strength.'

'But then you'll have some doctor hanging round, who will try to give me remedies for everything except what ails me,' said Victor moodily.

But Miss Paget undertook to obviate all and every disagreeable contingency. Lance returned and put up some of Victor's clothes which he had not taken with him to the mine. Then he supported Victor to the carriage, which was waiting at the door.

'You are walking more firmly and looking better already,' he said, taking the silence which had fallen on his young brother as a sign of the contentment of a heart more at rest.

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'I am going to take him for a drive,' said Miss Paget, after giving her directions to the coachman, and arranging some cushions round Victor in the deep soft-seated carriage.

The day had been very warm, but a slight rapid shower had lightened the atmosphere. They drove in a westerly direction through quiet wide streets, where each house was fronted with flower-gardens still full of roses, great masses of petunias, and beds of heliotrope, bleached ashy pale by long days of summer. The slopes of the Adelaide hills, shadowy with vines and olives, with tall pomegranate-trees and groves of oranges and lemons, were lying in the warm sunshine, with white houses gleaming through the foliage like quiet, soft scenes in pictures, each with some individual feature of its own as the point of view was changed.

They passed through Walkerville, where so many of the houses are enclosed in roomy

gardens, and crossing by the Company's Bridge, they drove into the Botanic Park, skirting the Torrens bank, with its sloping terraces planted with fast-growing trees and drooping willows along the water's edge. Then they passed through the length of the exquisite avenue of plane-trees, one long unbroken arch of pure emerald flame. Victor, whose eyes had grown accustomed to the naked monotony of the great Salt-bush plains, found his spirits gradually reviving under the influence of these benign and tranquil aspects of Nature, breathing only of well-being and man's enjoyment of her gifts. The calls and laughter of children at play, the rumble of trams and vehicles in the distance, the roll of carriages near at hand, the clear, melodious whistle of the blackbirds who are here acclimatized, the rapid cries of shell parrots rifling the honey blossoms of the gum-trees, were all blended into a harmonious symphony of friendly, familiar life, carrying an assurance to the young man's heart that all must yet be well, though fate had of late dealt him so heavy a blow. The constant feeling of heavy

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apprehension that had been created by the narcotics with which his system had been poisoned grew lighter in the serene sunshine among these reassuring sights and sounds.

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The two were silent for the most part, and Miss Paget, glancing at Victor's face from time to time, saw something of their light coming back to his eyes. The thought arose, what happiness to be once more beside him, if only this girl had not crossed his path! And then she reflected how every joy that came in her way was marred by some gray spectre of what had been or might come to pass, and with that came the resolution that she would postpone her life no longer—that she would be glad in the light of the sun, and take with a grateful heart the gifts that came in her way. Yesterday her life was bitter with forebodings and uncertainty; she did not know whether Victor were dead or alive, or in what latitude he might be of the great, treacherous sea. To-day he was safe beside her; she would rest in that, be glad in it, let to-morrow bring what it might. She leant back with

half-closed eyes, and when Victor, stooping a little forward, leant against her arm, the touch mounted to her head like wine.
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He, looking at her for the first time without being engrossed with his own emotions, noticed that she was unusually pale. She had, perhaps, been suffering since they parted. It was not her way to say much of herself. She looked up and found his eyes fixed on her, full of their old kindness; her heart began to beat wildly.

'Are you well, Helen? I have been so full of my own troubles, you have hardly told me anything about yourself,' he said.

'Oh, you see, father and I belong to the happy people who have no history,' she answered lightly.

And then she went over in detail the record of their days since her last letter had reached him; that is, she told him everything, except those moments of poignant feeling which sum up more of actual life than months of outward events—except those wakeful nights in which the years that might await her, empty and shorn of all the happiness she coveted, swept by in a

ghostly procession. But who, to hear her laugh and talk, dwelling on every ludicrous little episode, would have guessed aught of this? Not Victor, certainly, who felt something of his accustomed buoyancy of spirits returning as he listened, and even laughed from time to time.

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As they ascended the rise on which Lancaster House is situated, they caught glimpses of the sea, its silver radiance softened by a pale-blue haze penetrated with sunshine. Did it look like this to Doris at that moment? Was she perhaps talking to Mrs. Lucy, and recalling some mysterious legend of China, or of the time when beasts spoke and Queen Bertha span?

'Oh, God bless her! God bless my little darling, and take care of her for ever and ever!' Victor's heart swelled and his eyes grew dim. What a wonderful thing was this new emotion that had taken such tyrannous possession of him—a companion before whose magic that of genii or fairy was a mere creature of weight or pence! A glimpse of the sea, the folded slope of a hill, the chance trill of a bird's song—all had

now a thrill and a meaning that far transcended their mere external beauty.

This came home to him still more forcibly next morning. During the night he slept well; before waking he dreamt of Doris most vividly. She seemed to be quite near him—so near that if he had stretched out his hand he could have touched her. But he was so enraptured by the smile with which she looked at him that he stood motionless, feasting his eyes on her face; so that when he woke his whole frame was suffused with that vague, delicious sense of well-being which comes with happiness—that supreme contentment in the present moment, without remembering the past or questioning the future.

The impression remained with him so strongly that he escaped soon after breakfast to muse over his thoughts alone. He walked very slowly at first, going up the little rise that to the west of the house commanded a view of the sea. He seemed to draw nearer to Doris as he looked. How she would love this sight of the great waters, as they lay limpid and shimmering in

the distance, enveloped in magical light, with faint shadows flitting now and then across the quivering blueness, pale and visionary as a world apart, which might somehow vanish from sight at any moment! It was like waking to life anew to look on the familiar sights of earth, while his nature was so profoundly stirred that it seemed as if he were endowed with new senses of perception. There was more colour in the sky, more melody in the songs of birds, more oxygen in the air, deeper and more tender associations bound him to the world, this beautiful morning, while every breath he drew gave him an added sense of vigour. And the stronger he felt, the clearer grew the light, as of a perfected memory, in which he recalled Doris sitting near him, in that strange night journey across the Silent Sea. He was buried in these recollections, when he saw Miss Paget approaching him.

'You are looking dreadfully independent this morning,' she said, taking his arm.

'Yes, Helen; I think to be near you makes me better,' he answered, suddenly

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touched with the thought of her unvarying goodness to him.

She thrilled all over at this speech. www.libtool.com.cn What if, after all, Doris were separated from him beyond recall? Thoughts arose which she dared not dwell on; hopes leapt to life she would not consciously entertain.

She had come to tell him that his cousin, Miss Drummond, and his brother's *fiancée*, Miss Mason, had called. Was he well enough to see them? If not, she would make his excuses: they would understand. But he almost laughed at the thought of not being strong enough to stand a little talk. Why, he was almost well enough to start for Jupiter—on foot, if need be.

He might pride himself on feeling so strong and well, but one at least of the young ladies had as much as she could do to keep her tears back at sight of him. This was his future sister-in-law, Florry Mason. She was at all times an affectionate, tender-hearted girl, and just then she was in that slightly *exaltée*, easily-touched mood which many girls experience on the eve of

marriage, and Victor had been always a great favourite with her. To see him so changed, with all the bloom gone out of his face, and his hands so white and bony! She tried hard to keep her voice steady and her eyes bright, but Victor noticed a huskiness in her utterance. Was she well, and wasn't it about time she took fright and put off the wedding?

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This was in allusion to an old joke. Florry had confided to him, when they were acting together, that she liked getting engaged immensely; but she was sure when the time came she would take fright, and put off the wedding.

His gaiety helped to restore her. She had so much to tell him. The wedding was to be in nine days, and to-morrow there was to be a wedding-dress bee at their house. Did he know what that was? All her dearest friends assembled to help to make her dress. Well, she had nine very intimate friends altogether, and besides these there would be one who was a great friend of her mother's—Miss North—who was quite a clever doctor. And wouldn't Victor come

out with Miss Paget to-morrow? Lance would turn up to keep him in countenance.

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'To sew a bit of your wedding-dress? I haven't got a thimble,' answered Victor. But this was too shabby an excuse, and before she went away Miss Mason had Victor's promise that he would come out to Broadmead, her mother was so very anxious to see him. 'And oh, you poor dear, dear Victor, to think you have been so dreadfully hurt and ill, and we none of us knew it!'

She cried a little, after all, but afterwards she felt so much better, and Victor, declaring that she had taken fright after all, shifted his chair so that no one saw her but himself. And then she went to Mrs. Tillotson, to include her in the invitation to the wedding-bee, and Miss Drummond had a little talk with Victor.

Her father wished to know whether he would be well enough to see him to-morrow morning, and the man from the mine—captain, didn't they call him?

'Yes, certainly, I want to see that man—Trevaskis, I mean,' he answered in an altered voice, while a curious change came over him.

A shiver passed through his frame, as if touched by a slight current of electricity. Suspicion, repulsion, and a longing for revenge, sentiments hitherto so foreign to his nature, brought a sombre shadow on his face. Miss Paget noticed the alteration, but she was not prepared for the hard, cold, steady look of hatred that settled in Victor's eyes as soon as he saw Trevaskis on the following forenoon. Mr. Drummond had first entered the morning-room in which his nephew sat writing. The elder man murmured something about an extraordinary affair, and an investigation, and wishing for light on the matter. Victor, without making any reply to these feebly-jointed statements, asked where Trevaskis was.

At this moment Miss Paget entered, followed by the manager. He was very well tailored, and had improved immensely in appearance since Victor last saw him.

'Well, Mr. Fitz-Gibbon, this is a strange meeting!' he began, with a little more effusion than was usual with him.

Victor ignored the manager's extended hand, and looked at him fixedly with a

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malignant expression that gave Miss Paget an unpleasant little shock of surprise.

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'A strange meeting! I wonder whether it is the strangest we have had?' he said, not speaking till she had left the room.

A curious scene followed. Trevaskis let himself go, partly because his fear and confusion were so great that he felt his safety lay in an assumption of violent anger. He called on Mr. Drummond, as chairman of the directors of the Colmar Mine, to witness the studied insult conveyed by the young man's manner and words. . . . He suspected that there was something fishy behind this suspicious sort of disappearance; but to begin to make insinuations against him—against him of all men—as if he could have a single reason under God's sky to wish Mr. Fitz-Gibbon any harm! At this point he choked a little, and his voice broke with emotion.

'Have you taken leave of your senses altogether, Victor?' said his uncle, turning on him with austere indignation.

Victor, from the first moment that con-

sciousness returned, had felt a strong suspicion that the attack on him in his office, and his subsequent disappearance, were in some way due to Trevaskis. The moment they met this suspicion turned into a conviction, and yet seemed more incredible than before. In spite of himself, he found Trevaskis' resolute and intrepid attitude throwing ridicule on his belief.

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'You can surely bring forward some grounds for such a serious charge against a man,' said Trevaskis in a calmer voice. 'Only mind you,' he added after a little pause, 'I can see well enough that you are not yet yourself. I know what it is to have the mind full of cranky ideas left by a sharp stroke of fever, and there's no doubt that there *has* been some foul play somewhere, which will soon very likely be traced up by the police. At any rate, they shall have all the help that I can afford them. But I should like to know what you can recollect of the place you were in.'

'I woke up from time to time in some dark underground place,' returned Victor slowly, his eyes fixed on Trevaskis' face.

'Underground? Have you any proof, or is your recollection quite clear on the point?'

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'I cannot say that anything is clear,' answered Victor sombrely. At this admission the manager looked at the chairman of directors with a significant little nod.

'Do you recollect seeing anyone attending you or speaking to you?' said Mr. Drummond.

'Yes, very well. There were two men, one of them I should imagine about Mr. Trevaskis' height and build, but with gray hair, a long gray beard, and sun-glasses. As far as I can remember, he never spoke. The other was a shorter man, and, if my memory does not deceive me, he resembled the other. Latterly I seldom saw the taller man.'

Victor looked hard at Trevaskis as he spoke, but the manager's expression of eager interest was perfectly exempt from any touch of consciousness.

'Two men, and in an underground place,' he repeated thoughtfully. As he spoke he took a note-book out of his breast-pocket, and wrote one or two short entries. Victor

watched him with a baffled, lowering expression.

'You telegraphed to me about Challoner,' said Trevaskis, as he closed his notebook.

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'I know! I know! They sailed the day before yesterday,' said Victor, turning away with a motion of passionate impatience. Could this really be the scoundrel who had spoilt some of the most glorious days of a lifetime? he asked himself, with an excess of impotent rage, as he thought of Doris sailing leagues and leagues further away from this, hour on hour, believing that he did not love her—that he had deceived her. The belief could hardly be laid to Trevaskis' account. This mystery within mystery made his brain reel with the old chaotic bewilderment which used to overtake him when he was drugged in his unknown hiding-place.

He felt so weak and shaken that he pushed open the window and leant out for a little fresh air. On hearing his statement as to Challoner's departure, a look of pleased surprise came into Trevaskis' face.

'Oh, you knew about the Challoners?' he said, and then, finding that Victor made
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no further remark, he turned to Mr. Drummond, saying: 'It seems Mr. Fitz-Gibbon has nothing more to say to us.'

On this Mr. Drummond cleared his throat.

'I need hardly tell you, Victor, that this affair has caused me great annoyance, and I must ask you for your own sake never to breathe to anyone a word of the most unjust, and I may say extraordinary, suspicions you first seemed to harbour. I cannot help thinking that your mind is still very unsettled.'

Victor looked at his uncle without replying. 'I wonder if he was very much discomposed by my disappearance?' was the thought that passed through his mind. As a matter of fact, the old gentleman had saved himself from insolvency by appropriating to his own use most of the ready money that was to come to Victor on his twenty-first birthday. But the young man was still oblivious of this, and his first feeling after his uncle parted from him was one of self-

reproach. 'It is horrible to get a blow on the head and be drugged for a hundred years; it fills one with suspicions,' he said to himself wearily. But it was not only the physical blow. It was one of those wounds of destiny that distil a subtle clairvoyance of evil into the moral nature. It was not only that the early swell of quick emotion unspoiled by any after-thoughts had deserted him, but already his confiding disposition was touched by invincible mistrust. This is a common element in the story of human lives. Youth under the action of time is like a palimpsest exposed to a biting acid, that brings strange legends to light.

'I have persuaded your uncle and Mr. Trevaskis to stay to luncheon, Victor. Will you join us?' said Miss Paget, coming in so softly that Victor did not hear her till she stood beside him.

'No, Helen, unless you promise to poison them both,' he answered, half laughing. But in reality he looked so pale and exhausted after this interview, that Miss Paget, in her capacity of nurse, decided he must have no more fatigue just then. He was

too evidently overwrought in mind and body.

After luncheon was over Miss Paget sat talking to Trevaskis at an open French window.

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'You don't know what it is to see all these beautiful trees and flowers after being in a place like Colmar,' he said, his eyes riveted on a tall hibiscus shrub, all aflame with wide-cupped flowers, of a delicate, bright pink hue, drooping one over the other in innumerable shoals.

'Would you like to look at our roses? We have still a great many left,' she said; and, taking a sunshade from a table in the veranda in passing, she walked beside him, pointing out those of the rosebushes whose buds and blooms were still untouched by the heat of summer. Standing near some tea-roses in the shadow of a tall, slender gum-tree, whose pale-pink myrtle blossoms were in possession of some pugnacious pairs of black and yellow honey-eaters, Miss Paget said suddenly: 'There is something I want to ask you, Mr. Trevaskis. Do you know why Mr. Fitz-Gibbon is so

anxious about the movements of the Challoners?'

At this unexpected and direct question Trevaskis' face flushed deeply. From the moment he entered the house his mind had been actively occupied with what he knew of the relations between Miss Paget and Victor. His observations, sharpened by what he had learned through having overlooked the contents of his desk, as well as the half-written letter, was keen to detect signs and glances which would otherwise have held no meaning for him. He had seen Miss Paget's eyes full of tell-tale tenderness as they rested on Victor's pale and agitated face. She loved him. Did she know that there was someone who had supplanted her? He judged that she did from the nature of her inquiry. And he knew that the tale which would best serve his purpose would be the one she would most joyfully, most readily believe. These considerations passed through his mind in a flash. There was a scarcely perceptible pause between the question and his answer.

'Yes, Miss Paget, I do; and I wish, for

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Mr. Fitz-Gibbon's own sake, that he would get rid of the ideas this fever seems to have put into his head.'

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'The fever?' stammered Miss Paget.

'Yes, the fever,' returned Trevaskis, in a slow, emphatic voice. 'I am not going to say what I think of this mystery of his being thrown down and hurt. I know he was far from well at the time. People have done strange things before now, that they knew nothing about afterwards.'

'You—you don't think that—that Mr. Fitz-Gibbon had an accident out alone when he was in a feverish state?'

'It is what I do think, Miss Paget; and I think, too, he must have wandered and fallen in with some prospectors who thought they would make a good thing of keeping him till they would somehow make money out of him. People who, perhaps, got some chum of theirs on his way to England to drop Mr. Fitz-Gibbon's card at the inn at Port Pellew, and an envelope addressed to me that was in his pocket, so that a hue-and-cry wouldn't be raised after him. . . They must have got funky over keeping

him, and then one night took him to the hospital. . . . However, it will be the business of the police to find out all about that if they can. . . . But what I wanted to say about this young lady—child she was, more than anything else—is, that it would be a thousand pities if Mr. FitzGibbon were to risk his health, or even to lose his time. . . . It is no use my telling him this. . . . The first question he would put to me would be: "How do you know this young lady does not care for me?" And *in honour*'—Trevaskis italicized the words with magnificent effect—'I could not tell him. It would be a breach of confidence, and I may say it was something of the nature of an accident that I came to know it. . . . But I think those who have any influence over him should prevent his going on any journeys till he is quite well . . . and when he is quite well it's very likely he won't want to go.'

'You think, then, that it was the fever——'

'Yes, and I think the fever is still on him. . . . I think there was very little—

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very little indeed—between himself and the young lady at all. . . . They just met now and then at Mrs. Challoner's, and—well, I can't go into all the reasons that make me think it, but it's my belief that it was mostly the fever put this into his head. . . . Why, I've known men to take an idea into their heads like that, and not get rid of it for months—for months, I say—and yet 'twas nothing but the fever.'

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'Nothing but the fever!' Oh, what a melody the words were in her ears, and how many little incidents took to themselves breath, and wings, and bore living testimony to the truth of this! If only Victor could be wooed back to perfect health, to wholeness of mind and body, before he took any rash step! 'Nothing but the fever.' The words penetrated her soul with a rapture that had in it something of exquisite pain. Happiness! She had hardly known it till this moment. But she refrained from thanking God, as she had fervently done when she first went to see Victor. The practice seemed to have in it something dangerous for her.

She wandered round in the shady avenues

for half an hour after the visitors had gone, too agitated, and too much engrossed in thoughts that left no room for others, to be able to meet Mrs. Tillotson's endless prattling. When she went in she found that Victor had fallen asleep, looking so pale and spent that she half relinquished the thought of going to the Masons'.

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But this brought Mrs. Tillotson's sky down with a run.

'Oh, my dear, not go to the wedding-bee? I haven't heard of such an arrangement before, but I am sure it must be quite exquisite. And an afternoon tea of that number—not more than fifteen or twenty altogether—is always so very, very enjoyable. It will do Victor good—the drive there, and the young people. My dear, you and I are very quiet, you know—and his sister-in-law to be, and all; it's like going to his own family.'

Victor, having awoke, joined the two, and Mrs. Tillotson instantly appealed to him.

Did he really think it would be too much for him? He begged leave to be left at home. Then Miss Paget suggested a compromise. They would go early. Victor

would see his friends before the other guests had come, and then she would drive him back, leaving Mrs. Tillotson at Broadmead if she wished. The carriage would return for her later. Mrs. Tillotson was not quite happy. It was so entirely an affair of the young people. If Helen and Victor came away—well, they would see.

What happened was that, when they got to Broadmead, Victor was so pale and dejected, and, in short, looked so much the invalid, that Mrs. Mason insisted upon his lying down in a cool, quiet room, where no sounds reached him but the faint tinkling of a fountain close to the window, and the cries of honey-birds rifling the pale honey-coloured blossoms of a tall young white gum hard by. She further insisted upon his taking some nourishment and drinking some dry champagne, and promising to go to sleep. In a little time she came tip-toe into the room, and found that he had kept his promise. And then nothing remained to be done but to see that the horses were taken out of Miss Paget's carriage, and that she resigned all thought of going away till the cool of the evening.

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CHAPTER XII.

Miss Florry Mason's wedding-dress bee formed a pretty and animated gathering. The nine or ten dearest friends were chiefly in white or delicately tinted dresses, and each was adorned with a profusion of blooms worn in bouquets, clusters, wandering sprays, or plastrons, according to the nature of the wearer's favourite flowers. There was a swelling ripple of talk and laughter as they settled down, and a little consternation on finding that the dressmaker had not prepared 'seams' enough. Some had swelling lengths of ivory satin, but all could not be employed on the skirt and jupon.

'A bit of piping will do for me,' said one.

'And the pocket for me,' said another.

'What is the use of putting a pocket in a wedding-dress?' asked one of the elder girls. 'It is only in your sanest and calmest moment you can remember where it is to be found.'

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At last all were provided with some portion of the satin, into which more or less stitches could be put, by amateur needles, without encroaching on the delicate question of fit or style.

'Now that we are all at work, I think the "sanest and calmest" of us should tell a story,' said the bride-elect.

'I wish I had been married for a few days, and then I would tell you girls a story that would make your flesh creep,' said a young sister of Florry's, who had but recently escaped from the school-room.

There was some laughter and expostulation, and the elder sister said a little severely, 'Now, Mab, don't begin to carry on!'

'I wonder you allow yourself such a common phrase, looking as you do so much like an exalted cherub,' retorted Mab. 'And as for "carrying on," nothing will make me believe that it is not rather

dreadful to go away from every friend you have in the world with a strange man.'

'Do you call Lance a strange man?' asked Florry indignantly.

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'Certainly; you just see him for a little time in the evening after he has spent the day in trying to look good—not always successfully. Besides, if it weren't rather gruesome, why should one's mother give the institution away so?'

'Oh, don't laugh, girls! it will only make her worse,' said Florry, in a vexed tone. But the girls were too much amused not to laugh, and one of them pursued the subject by asking how one's mother 'gave the institution away.'

'Why, for weeks before a girl marries, replied Mab very seriously, 'her mother never calls her anything but "poor dear!" and "poor darling!" and the last day of all it is "poor dear darling!" and tears.'

'You have been through it all, Mab.'

'Yes. Florry is the fourth girl married out of this house, and two brothers have followed the same broad path, and even they, I believe, breakfasted on coloured

soda-water the morning they were led to the altar, blushing, the poor dears! like tomatoes.'

'Really, Mab, I'll get mother to ask you to go into the schoolroom if you run on at such a rate,' said Florry.

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'I can call spirits from the vasty deep, and so can you, and so can any man, but will they come?' said Mab, in a declamatory, semi-mocking tone, very provocative of a breach of the peace.

Fortunately a diversion was caused just then by the entrance of Mdlle. Clemente, a young French lady whose father was a viticulturist near the Masons.

'Come here, dear, till I admire "*le dernier chic*" in millinery,' cried Mab, between whom and this young lady a warm friendship existed, unimpaired by the fact that neither was very fluent in the other's mother tongue.

'*Ma chérie, rien de plus simple et de moins compliqué. Ce qui manque en général un chapeau moderne c'est l'idéalité,*' said mademoiselle, taking her chapeau to bits like a Chinese puzzle, by pulling out a few pearl-headed pins.

Mab insisted on mademoiselle sitting by her, '*de causer chiffons*,' and gradually the
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'bee' fell into amicable pairs and groups, till a burning discussion arose regarding a recent tennis tournament, in which sides were vehemently taken regarding two champion players—A, an Englishman, and B, an Australian.

'A is so much more graceful; look at his splendid underhand strokes: he puts the pace on a ball entirely with his wrist.'

'But his volley is nothing to B when smashing, and the brilliant way B plays his strokes overhand, and takes his balls forehand.'

'Ah, but look at the splendid length A kept on his balls, hardly any falling inside the service line.'

'But then B's double play! Did you notice him in the semi-final? A cannot come near him in some things; for example, the underhand lift.'

'Do you compare the two? "For as sunlight unto moonlight, and as water unto wine——"'

'I think, Miss Paget, I must make you

mistress of the ceremonies,' said Mrs. Mason, advancing with a smile from the bay-window, in which she had been engrossed in talk with Mrs. Tillotson till the rising tide of too eager controversy attracted her attention.

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Miss Paget was laying a fold on a long slip of bridal satin, smiling from time to time at the girlish chatter going on around her, but on the whole too much engrossed with her own thoughts to have a very clear idea of what was being said.

'Oh, very well,' she answered; 'what does a mistress of the ceremonies do?'

'I think she sorts those who are of the wrong faith in *tennis* into packages not wanted on the voyage,' said a demurely grave voice.

'That is too burning a question. As I am in authority, I think I'll second Florry's original proposal, and call on the oldest and wisest of you for a story. I am the oldest, but I wouldn't like to say I am the wisest.'

'For my own part, I believe a girl is as wise as ever she will be at sixteen,' said Mab, holding up her chin defiantly.

'Oh, Mab, Mab, you don't really think

so !' said a girl with velvet-soft voice and eyes who sat near the *enfant terrible.*

'Then, if you think you are æons wiser than I am, *you* tell a story, Jessie,' responded Mab with a determined air.

Jessie laughed, and then held up a trailing breadth of the thick shining satin she was overcasting with minute stitches, looked at it admiringly, and said :

'Really, Florry, this is the loveliest satin——'

'Oh, you awfully mean thing !' said Mab impetuously. 'I would sooner be a stewed rabbit than try to get out of a contract like that !'

'Like what, Mab ?'

'Why, smothering the point in dispute by holding up ivory satin to a lot of girls——'

'But why is that such an infamous proceeding ?'

'Because no question of truth or justice has the slightest show, compared to the tail of a wedding-dress, especially if it is twenty-five and a demi bob a yard.'

'Oh, really, Mab !' began Florry in a

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pained voice. And then Jessie—being one of the fierily sympathetic kind who go through life responding to every call, and seeking above all things to save others from the pain which her own too sensitive nature exposed her to—interposed.

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'Yes, I suppose it is true. I did try to get out of the challenge. The thing is to show that at sixteen or thereabouts you had as much sense as at—well, say twenty-five.'

'Yes; if the theory functions, you can easily spot an incident,' said Mab with the calm certainty which belongs to her years, and a mixture of metaphors peculiarly her own province.

Thus goaded on, Jessie looked pensively thoughtful, diving into her past life for a 'case in point.'

'Well, it is hardly a story; it is about myself, and it makes me rather ridiculous,' she said, laughing a little.

'Of course—because you were not so wise then,' said Mab in an encouraging tone.

'It was when we were returning from England some years ago. Among the

passengers there was a Lord Guy Pearsall, fourth son of the Duke of Saltson.'

'And you were cringing enough to fall in love with him?' said someone, laughing mischievously in the shadow of the grand piano, near a folding-door that opened into a conservatory radiant with exotic flowers. 'A scion of the effete British aristocracy, and your father a fiery republican!'

'No, I did not,' answered Jessie, blushing a little. 'I admit I admired his filbert nails very much, for I know they often come into the world, but seldom last——'

There was general laughter at this.

'Well, we forgive you enthusing about filbert nails, which probably require generations of people living on others. But, confess now, he had other attractions?'

'Not in the way of being good-looking. He was quite a little man, not at all young, with rather a red face, and hardly any hair: none on his face, and hardly any on his head. He told father he had about three sous a day to live on. I suppose it was true, for we heard he often lost forty or fifty pounds a night at cards. However, we got very

friendly, as people do on ship-board. And really he had not a thread of affectation in him. He was going to a cattle-station in North Queensland, to live there, you know, not just on a visit. I said to him one day, how different he would find it from his previous life, for he had lived nearly always in big cities.'

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'Oh, Jessie, you were making it easy for him to ask you to share his solitude!' said the irrepressible Mab. But she was laughingly reprimanded by Miss Paget, and Jessie went on:

'Well, he said he thought he would rather like "roughing it," and then I don't quite know how it came in——'

'Oh, conversation is often very inconsequent in real life, especially on board a mail-boat,' said someone in a tone of judicial gravity.

'Well, I fancy it was to prove that he *had* roughed it a little, even in England, for he told me how, a short time before he left, he had been staying at a rectory in the country, and how he thought a *bourgeoisie* dinner at six o'clock was *so* nice and in-

teresting. How there was a whole leg of mutton—a *whole* leg on the table at once—
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and potatoes and things standing in dishes, and not removed till they were nearly all eaten; and how, when these were taken away, the maid brought in a pie—quite a large dish—and after that came the most curious part of the performance: the maid went round the table with a funny little brush, with a crooked ivory back to it, and swept the table—actually *swept* it, by Jove! with this odd-looking brush, before putting down the apples and walnuts, etc.'

'Oh, Jessie, what fun to hear him describing a crumb-brush! Didn't you laugh?'

'Yes—at the crumb-brush,' said Jessie, her cheeks reddening.

'I would have laughed outright, and told Lord Guy that it was only on Sundays we used a crooked brush with an *ivory* back,' said another.

'Well, I know I was a dreadful little snob, but it gave me a sort of humiliated feeling to hear our every-day dinners described as if they were the customs of some

newly-discovered savages. But I was only seventeen at the time, and if you think, Mab, I would be guilty of such silliness now. . . . And what followed was worse, for father asked him to dinner. Lord Guy stayed a fortnight at Government House, and I just felt I would die if our maid went round *sweeping* the table before him. So I implored mother to have dinner *à la russe.* You know that was not common here seven years ago——'

'My dear Florry,' said the mother of the bride-elect, entering the room at this juncture, 'Miss North has come; but she has a young lady with her, something of an invalid, and thinks she had better not stay, perhaps.'

'Ah, she must, if only for half an hour,' returned Florry eagerly.

She excused her absence for a few moments, warning the narrator of the crumb-brush story not to proceed till she returned. In a short time she came back and placed a large easy-chair opposite the open bay-window, explaining, as she did so, that Miss North and her young charge

would come in for a short time just to see them at work.

'She is the loveliest girl you ever saw,' she was saying when the stranger entered, leaning on Miss North's arm. She bowed with grave simplicity as she was led to the arm-chair, and as they looked at her with kindly, interested faces, each felt that her rare loveliness could not have been exaggerated. The deep radiant eyes, with their heavy sweeping lashes, the flower-soft oval face, the white wide brow framed with masses of deep amber hair, but, above all, the curiously spiritual expression of face—all made a picture which, once seen, could not but linger long in the memory. But why was the face of one so young and beautiful stamped with that strange look of remoteness alike from the turmoil, excitement, and careless gaiety of youth? It seemed as if the careless chatter around her could have as little part in her thoughts as if she already belonged to another world.

She looked out through the open window, and into the valley below the lawn, which was filled with the delicate downy foliage of

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olive-trees, whose gray-green leaves, in clustered masses, have something of the dimness of pale clouds rather than the verdure of living trees.

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'I do not know those trees, I think,' she said, turning to Miss Mason, who had drawn a chair to her side.

'Those down in the valley? They are olive-trees.'

'Yes, I remember reading about them a short time ago,' she said, mentally recalling the words: 'And He came out, and went as His custom was unto the Mount of Olives.'

It was on the day before her mother died she had read this passage. But the interval between that time and the present seemed now to be separated from her, not by months, but by a few hours.

There was some demand on Miss Mason which called her to another part of the room. Seeing Miss Paget near at hand, looking at Doris with fixed interest, she introduced the two, and asked Miss Paget to take her place beside the new-comer.

'Miss Paget, there is something I should

like to ask you,' said Doris, when they were left alone.

'Yes, dear; let me hear what it is.'

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'Is your name Helen ?'

'Yes.'

Doris was silent for a little, and then said softly :

'I am glad we have met.'

'Had you heard my name before ?'

'Yes ; you could hardly imagine where I heard it the first time.'

'I should like to know.'

'It was in the midst of the Silent Sea—the gray lonely plains where the gray salt-bush, bending before the wind, looks like noiseless waves.'

'And who spoke my name there ?'

'Victor.'

'Ah ! you heard him speak it ? Was he —did he know you were there ?'

'No. He was ill with fever.'

'Near the house in which you lived ?'

'No ; he had gone away. I do not quite understand. But the man who took care of him in a little hut said Victor did not wish people to know where he was for some reason.'

'Was that the one who took him to the hospital?'

'No; it was Kenneth—Kenneth Campbell, our old shepherd—who took him. I was with Kenneth, and sat near Victor to make his head easier. And then I heard him call on you, as the man who took care of him did before.'

'The man in the little hut?'

'Yes. Can you tell me how Victor is? I have been wishing to know so much before we go away.'

Miss Paget drew a long quivering breath. For a moment she thought her answer would be: 'He is here—you will see him;' but almost as if without volition her answer came:

'He is much better. He came from the hospital two days ago.'

'Oh, I am glad! And you have seen him?'

'Yes; he is staying at our house. I am taking care of him.'

'Dear Miss Paget, I know you will be so good and kind!' There was a scarcely perceptible tremor in the girl's voice.

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By way of answer, Miss Paget pressed Doris's hand. There was a mist before her eyes, and a faint, far-off tumult in her ears. It seemed as if her heart were torn by two contending impulses, and as if she waited helplessly to see which prevailed.

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'I am happy you are taking care of him, for I know he loves you,' said Doris, after a little pause.

A servant brought them some tea. Miss Paget looked round to see if perhaps Victor had come into the drawing-room. She saw Mrs. Mason leaving it with a small tray, and she divined that this was some tea for Victor in his own room. Should she hasten after Mrs. Mason, and tell her that Miss North's young charge was a friend whom Victor would be glad to see? Should she tell Doris that he was here? She did neither, and the moments passed.

'My dear, I think we must be going now,' said Miss North, coming to the bay-window in which the two sat.

When going away, Doris asked Miss Paget to come to see her on the morrow, and Miss Paget gladly consented. The

hour was fixed for five o'clock in the afternoon by Miss North. She was a lady of considerable talent, extremely hospitable to new ideas, and perhaps more willing still to impart them. She lingered to speak to Miss Paget while Florry Mason talked to Doris.

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'I am glad you are coming to see the dear child. I want her to get as well as possible before she leaves. She has a touch of intermittent fever, and you know the average doctor's old-fashioned way of putting people to bed! Now, I am certain that the sources of life are profoundly influenced by our will; and this girl, young and beautiful as she is, and in a way happy, would be perfectly content to die. She has lost her mother, in whom she was entirely wrapped up. She was brought up too much alone. It was partly, I believe, a fad of her father's. Now, my theory is, that girls should not be subjected to experiments. They may do no harm, and produce interesting variations, in the case of men and pigeons.'

Miss Paget watched Miss North's neat

littlebrougham drive away, and then heard a chorus of voices discuss the singular beauty and charm of her young patient.

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'But I like eyes with more "go" in them,' said Mab. 'Hers are just holy. One would not dare to speak to her of a "mash" or——'

'A what, Mab?' said her mother, in a wondering tone.

'A "mash," mother—a new kind of encyclopedia.'

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CHAPTER XIII.

‘I CANNOT tell Victor on the way home, because Mrs. Tillotson would overhear,’ thought Miss Paget. But underlying the thought was the question, “ Shall I tell him at all ?’

Broadmead was situated at the foot of the Adelaide hills, and, as is so often the case there in the summer time, a strong easterly gully breeze sprang up after sundown. The wind was full of unquiet voices in Miss Paget’s ears as they drove homeward. The first stars were beginning to swim into sight ; the daylight still lingered in the west in a wan, diffused light. Away in the distance beyond the town the sea lay dark and motionless, touched here and there with long lines of silvery light that

distinguished the sea waters from the darkening shore.

Victor lay back in the carriage lost in thought. He had slept for many hours. Now that he was calm and collected, he was trying afresh to find some clue to the network of problems by which he was surrounded. For the first time it occurred to him that his desk, containing all his private letters, would be at the manager's mercy. Then he recollected something about a letter to Helen. Had he addressed it?

'Helen, did you have any letter sent to you from the mine later than my telegram?' he said suddenly in an undertone, bending towards her.

'No, none,' she answered.

'I wonder if that is the clue?' he said half aloud. Was it Trevaskis who had told Mrs. Challoner of the relationship between himself and Miss Paget, and had Doris been thus misled? In the midst of the fury this conjecture aroused, Victor was overcome by a feeling of disgusted weariness. What was the use of spending himself in

angry thoughts when all the time Doris was away beyond recall? He would start by the very next boat. www.libtool.com.cn It did not matter whether he were well or not. To follow in the wake of the vessel that bore Doris away would do him more good than anything else in the world.

Miss Paget, on her part, was equally absorbed in her own reflections, while Mrs. Tillotson prattled gently on from one subject to another. Now she was describing the last grand ball-dress that Helen's eldest sister had worn a few days before the Pagets returned.

'Bleuté, I believe they call it, my dear—a sort of white damask spangled with gold—décolleté en cœur and down the back, on the shoulders white satin bows fringed with gold. I don't know what there is in shoulder-bows, though, that don't seem to accord well with years—well, of maturity.'

'Perhaps it is the associations of the nursery,' suggested Miss Paget.

Mrs. Tillotson, without pursuing the subject, went on to other dresses, in which sky-blue velvet, opening over a sky-blue

crêpe de chine, and old-rose brocade, with old-rose satin panels, etc., figured luxuriously.

'It is such a comfort, don't you think, that our papers have taken to describing dresses at the more fashionable parties. It really gives quite a tone to society. And yet sometimes one can't help thinking beauty when unadorned—how does it go? There was that young girl who came in with Miss North. I thought I ought to know her, somehow.'

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Miss Paget's heart seemed to leap into her throat, but she kept silent, and Mrs. Tillotson went on:

'There she was just in black and white, you know. I didn't catch her name. I think you spoke to her. I believe Victor has fallen asleep, poor boy!'

'No, I am wide awake,' answered the young man, sitting up, and, shaking himself free for a little from his engrossing thoughts, he talked at intervals all the rest of the way. His first care on reaching Lancaster House was to consult one of the daily papers, to see when the next mail-steamer sailed. There was a P. and O. going in six days.

He could land at Brindisi, and get across to Mentone within twenty-four hours. Why, www.libtool.com.cn he might be there within a day or two of the time the Challoners reached the place! In six days he would be sailing in the wake of the vessel that bore them away—very likely gaining on her—for it was the *Bendigo* that was going, and the *Bendigo* was well known to be swiftest of the mail-boats. Suppose the *Marly*, the boat by which the Challoners and Doris had gone, lost a few days on the way, why, at Aden, or Port Said, or Ismailia the *Bendigo* might actually catch her up!

He conjured the scene of meeting Doris on shore at one of these ports. He saw her eyes lifted to his with all their sweet radiance; he heard the thrill of gladness in her voice—the thrill with which it vibrated that night at Stonehouse when she said: 'You have come?'

'Yes, Doris, I have come. Oh, my darling! how could you for one moment believe that I had deceived you? . . . And she would not even blame me,' he reflected, coming back from Ismailia to the veranda

at Lancaster House, where he was pacing up and down.

Here the hot east wind was not so high as at the foot of the hills, and was, besides, modified by surrounding acres densely planted with trees, by many fountains falling in continuous cascades of water in soft cooling showers.

Yes, he would start in six days from this evening. A note to his tailor, an order on his banker, and all was ready. To others he would say nothing till the day before his departure. His uncle would want to detain him on business, Lance because of his wedding, the police because of the search that had been instituted to bring to light those who had assaulted and confined him; Helen would be anxious to keep him till he was stronger. But all these things were as packthreads exposed to flame in face of his motive for getting away. . . . Oh, to be on the face of the great deep, speeding hour by hour nearer to the moment in which he should see Doris once again!

The heavy weight that seemed at times to press upon his brain—the drooping

languor, the ennui, the vindictive, revengeful thoughts against Trevaskis—all these had fallen from him as he gave himself to thoughts of Doris and of his speedy journey. After all, how much better it was to think of those we love, than of those who call up feelings of revenge, and hatred, and all uncharitableness!

As this thought crossed Victor's mind, he stood opposite one of the open French windows of the drawing-room in which Helen and Mrs. Tillotson were sitting. The latter was drinking tea, and talking as usual without cessation.

'Poor dear Helen, how that old woman must bore her at times!' he thought, glancing at her. His gaze was arrested by the harassed expression and the extreme pallor of her face. He recollected how this had struck him the first day she drove out with him after his return to town. He reflected, too, how she was always ready to sacrifice herself for others. With this reflection he seemed suddenly to regain the point of view from which he had tried to write on the evening before he was to leave the mine.

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She had no warning of the news this letter was to have conveyed ; she had waited in ignorance and uncertainty till she had come to him the instant she had received his message—and then, he remembered it well, without even a word of greeting, he had asked her only concerning Doris. . . . Yes, he was ill and desperate, stupid with drugs and wild with disappointment, and he was misled into believing she must have known something of the origin of Doris's letter. All that had formed part of his point of view. But now he was trying to realize hers.

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In the effort a great wave of compunction, and a feeling akin to shame, swept over him. How good and generous she had been to him! He was glad that she had never really loved him; but how grateful he ought to be for her loyalty and friendship! He sat on a cane lounge by the open window waiting for her to look up. But she did not look up, she looked down ; she drew a book towards her, not to read, but to hide her tears. She was crying. He looked away instinctively, knowing she was unconscious of his observation.

Miss Paget murmured some excuse to Mrs. Tillotson, and escaped to her own room. She was in a state of miserable indecision as to her action. At times the thought was strong with her that Trevaskis' assertions were true—that Doris did not love Victor, and that his own thoughts respecting her were partly the result of fever. 'I am happy you are taking care of him, for I know he loves you !' The words still sounded in her ears. But also with the words rose before her the girl's sweet, candid look—her childlike trust and direct simplicity.

'Oh, what am I going to do—what am I going to do ?' she murmured to herself on reaching her room. If Doris were going to sail in a few days, should she allow her to go without making a sign to Victor, on the mere chance that, as he grew better and stronger, his love for Doris should prove to be partly the phantasm of fever ? But what of the girl herself ? Was there no lurking wistfulness in her voice and look—no tones or subtle inflections that told their own story ?

'It is wrong—it is wrong not to tell him, come what may !' she said, covering

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her face with her hands in an agony of uncertainty. Each beat of the pendulum seemed to be offering her the choice of free action. Yet each moment seemed also to bring her the consciousness that not her will nor her better aspirations would prevail, but this preponderant, irresistible passion, which had given a treacherously egoistic warp to all the impulses of her nature—this passion which said to her: 'Risk all, risk everything, but do not give him up. Hold on by the least chance; you cannot afford to think of others.'

'But I shall—I shall consider others—I must!' came the contending impulse. She threw open her window to get more air. She heard the sound of Victor's footsteps. He was near her. She would go to him at once, and tell him before she could change her mind. She went out, and the moment she drew near he turned to her, holding out his hands.

'Helen, I was just thinking of you! How dear and good you have been to me!'

He took her hand in his, and held it in the firm affectionate clasp of a younger brother.

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Then at the touch of his hand and the sound of his voice a sort of moral dislocation took place. Her purpose was reversed as completely as if a brief and inexplicable delirium of the brain had destroyed all sequence of thought. The hot air, heavily scented with orange-blossoms, blew in her face, making her feel faint and drowsy.

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She made an effort to speak, but, instead of uttering any words, she gave a long, low sigh.

'You are not well,' said Victor, in a troubled voice.

'No, my head feels rather heavy and confused. I think perhaps the sea air might do me good.'

'Oh yes, Helen, you ought to go. You are always thinking of others. You do not care enough for yourself.'

The words had a mocking ring to her. Nevertheless, she went on after a pause :

'I begin to think it would be nice to go to Port Callunga. It is so cool and quiet. But, Victor, I would not go unless you came—unless you let us take care of you till you are quite recovered.'

She sat on a lounge where her face was in shadow, but where she could see his face in the soft glow of the tall lamp in the drawing-room, whose wide square shade was draped with rose-tinted silk and lace.

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Victor reflected rapidly that it would be better not to tell Helen at that moment of his unalterable determination to sail by the *Bendigo*. After all, he could spend two or three days at Port Callunga, and she would see how quickly he got strong and well.

'We have plenty of room at Port Callunga for a small regiment, and we shall only be five in all,' pursued Miss Paget: 'my father and the Professor, you and Mrs. Tillotson, and myself.'

'I shall be glad to come, if you go soon—say the day after to-morrow.'

'Yes, why not? We can drive there by starlight. I could not well leave before.'

'Oh, that will be grand! Part of the road winds by the sea-shore, between tall rocks,' said Victor, with something of his old vivacity. 'The stars overhead, and a moon either waning or coming—I have lost all count of the moon; the immensity

of the hollow-sounding sea on one side, you taking care of me, and me seeing that you don't die in looking after me and Mrs. Tillotson.'

'Yes, Victor, what is it?' said Mrs. Tillotson, who had been listening to the sound of voices for some time, with a great longing to join the speakers.

'Oh, did you really overhear me?' said Victor, in a tone of contrition; 'and me abusing you like—your dearest friend. Well, it isn't my fault—it's history: "Listeners never hear any good of themselves."'

'Hark to the boy!' said Mrs. Tillotson, laughing, as she settled herself comfortably in the cane rocking-chair that Victor drew forward for her. 'You really are getting quite yourself again, Victor.'

'I am getting more than myself,' replied Victor, half in play and half in earnest, as the memory of the contradictory emotions which had in turn governed him in the course of the past day flitted across his mind. 'Besides my proper self that I have hitherto known, there's an older creature

coming along, who takes me by the ear from time to time, and tells me I have been an irreparable young "dolt."'

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'Is it about your disappearing like that, and as suddenly coming back?' asked Mrs. Tillotson eagerly.

She virtually felt an ache in every joint of her system for fuller information on these points. On that first day when Miss Paget, at a moment's notice, had been summoned away, and had returned late in the afternoon, with Victor looking incredibly changed, pale and anxious, without a trace of his old merry self, Mrs. Tillotson, instead of having any sort of a satisfactory explanation given to her, had been taken aside by Helen, and told in the most explicit terms that under no circumstances was the patient to be worried with questions or surmises. He had been dreadfully ill, and some people had been telling lies—that was all the sum of the information contributed by Helen.

But perhaps the patient himself, now that he seemed to be getting into his old proper spirits, might be more liberal in giving those details after which a kindly

heart naturally hankers. With this hope Mrs. Tillotson ventured for the first time on a direct question. But on being thus squarely summoned before an assize which he knew was bent chiefly on gathering news for vague and widely disseminated gossip, Victor speedily retreated into the safety of a general statement.

'Oh, as to my disappearance, we all have to wait to see what the police tell us,' he answered; and then, swayed by the one dominant purpose which had come to him within the last few hours—that of getting well as soon as possible, and in any case sailing for the Old World in the course of six days—he shortly afterwards availed himself of the privilege of an invalid by going to bed quite early.

Miss Paget was in the meantime trying to believe that for once in her life she had acted in a rational manner. Lance FitzGibbon's conjecture as to having noticed that Victor seemed to have lost his heart to her—then Trevaskis' words, and Doris's—and now Victor's own: she thought over all these, trying to reassure herself.

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The fever, and some chance meetings with this lovely child, in which he had perhaps said a little more than he meant seriously or permanently, had put those confused thoughts into his head. But how quickly he had fallen in with her suggestion of going to the seaside! how his spirits had risen at the prospect! how quickly he had disappeared as soon as Mrs. Tillotson came upon the scene! She could not dog them in this way once they had gained the shores of Port Callunga! When there, she and Victor could take long walks on the seashore—far beyond the chance of interruption.

'I know, my dear, it is very good of the Archdeacon—these "brotherhood of man" assemblies,' Mrs. Tillotson was saying. 'But, oh! how much more comfortable they would be if he could tell the poor people to take a bath—a good brown soap and flesh-brush bath, you know! We could supply them from the Blind Asylum at sixpence each, Helen dear. . . . But although I could easily suggest this to the dear, good Archdeacon, I suppose it would be rather difficult to speak to the people he invites, beforehand.'

'It would be rather a delicate social

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nuance,' said Miss Paget, smiling as she roused herself to some perception of what was being said. www.libtool.com.cn

'This is the sort of thing into which I used to try to throw all the ardour of my life,' she thought, as she sat in the solitude of her own room, and contrasted the intense vibrant emotion which now flooded her thoughts with the wintry pallor of the half-hearted work in which she had been endeavouring to forget her own immediate interests. . . . 'And yet,' she reflected, 'I may in the end find myself like one of those couriers of medical science who poison themselves in a clinical experiment.' Then she fell into a long reverie, recalling how from the first dawn of consciousness one of her most abiding thoughts had been that she was one of the failures of life—one born to endure the sensation of defeat perpetually renewed. She argued that this was one reason why she was so sceptical of happiness for herself; why she had expected from the first that Victor's affection would not last; why, now that proof upon proof came to her that this fear was misplaced, she was still beset with hesitation and mistrust.

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CHAPTER XIV.

Yet, notwithstanding the arguments and considerations with which she fortified herself, Miss Paget did not sleep much that night. Every now and then Doris's face would rise up before her, irradiated with a strange, spiritual light, the radiant eyes fixed lovingly on her face. She rose before it was dawn; then after sunrise she fell into a short, troubled sleep. From this she awoke with an insupportable sense of wrong-doing. She seemed to herself to have, by some strange impulse, contradicted all the traditions of her past life. And why? Why, indeed! No human being could be really worth that fatal moment in which passion, like a volcanic eruption, sweeps before it all the tenderer growth of which the soul is capable.

She bathed and dressed hastily, putting on a clinging robe of pale violet Cashmere, giving no thought to the make or hue of the robe she wore. In reality, she could have chosen no tint more calculated to throw her pale cheeks and anxious, unquiet eyes into strong relief. The day was unbearably close, with that dull, suffocating kind of sultriness which comes in an Australian summer as the climax of a stretch of burning days and hot nights. She wandered out on the lawn. A quarter of an hour before the breakfast-gong sounded she was joined by Victor.

'Oh, Helen, you must be ill!' he said, in a tone of alarm. 'Why not go to the seaside this afternoon?' he went on. 'The heat is intolerable; at least, for those who are ill. You see, I am all but off the sick list. Let me take care of you now, Helen, and be obedient as I have been to you.'

'What is your prescription?' she said, with a faint smile.

'First, that you are not to be worried in the slightest degree for anything or anybody. I'll take Mrs. Tillotson off your

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hands, and we'll set off for Port Callunga after breakfast.'

She longed infinitely to adopt this plan, but she could not. As she noted the marked improvement in Victor's appearance, her hopes revived.

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'I cannot very well go this afternoon. I met a very charming young girl at the Masons' yesterday—one who is staying at Lindaraxa, and I promised to call and see her. Wouldn't you like to see the house once more you so often dreamt about?'

'Oh, don't speak about dreams! Last night, for the first time since I was knocked on the head, I slept without seeing demons and monsters. But, if you'll allow me, I'll drive with you to town. I have some matters of business to attend to before we go to the seaside. I have your gracious permission, have I not?' he added smilingly, as Helen received his communication with doubtful looks.

'Yes, if you don't attempt to walk much. Drop me at Lindaraxa and then go on in the carriage, and call for me when you are ready.'

Miss Paget reached the house a little after four. Miss North was out, and Doris was just then asleep. www.libtool.com.cn Mrs. North, a kindly, mouse-like little woman, who was in a chronic state of half-panic as to the results of her daughter's brilliancy, confided her fears to Miss Paget in a rather mixed fashion. She felt sure Miss Lindsay was slightly worse, though she did not say so, and Rachel was always so hopeful as long as people kept out of bed. If only she would send for a doctor.

'But your daughter is a doctor herself,' interposed Miss Paget.

'Oh yes, my dear. But she has so many ideas, and that is always rather risky. Now, the first day I saw Miss Lindsay, when the dear child reached town—I can't think of her as anything but a child; I was staying with her mother at Ouranie when she was born. We came out on the same ship from England, and my husband died on the voyage. Everyone said Australia would be so good for his lungs, and no doubt it would, only he never reached the country. And as for the Lindsays, they

were like a providence to us, only more so in a way, for Providence doesn't seem to mind much www.libtool.com.cn at times about us. Well, as I was saying, the dear child is asleep just now. Rachel has a great idea—you had better keep moving about and be chatty if you are ill, because, as I think she says, of the force of the will, and all that; but if you are getting thinner all the time——'

'Then, do you think Miss Lindsay is worse?'

'I hardly know what to think, dear. If only Rachel would come back. . . . She seems to be praying so much to-day, and that is always sad, as it were, for a young person.'

'Does your daughter go to church to pray then?'

'Oh, my dear, Rachel never prays; she has got far beyond that. . . . She is quite up to the cleverest doctors in many things,' answered Mrs. North, evidently quite scandalized at the inference which her own words had naturally conveyed. 'I mean Miss Lindsay. I have sent a messenger for Mrs. Challoner. . . . I hope Rachel won't

think it foolish of me . . . but I feel very nervous.'

'But when I saw her yesterday——'

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'Yes, just so, my dear. It was when they came in yesterday I thought Doris looking more unusual than before, so to speak. But Rachel would have it her plan was answering beautifully—I mean, keeping her about and seeing people, and all that, instead of laying up and having things made for her. "Mother, the greatest happiness of your life is having slops made for people," Rachel says to me sometimes, laughing, and perhaps it is true in a way.'

At the end of half an hour Mrs. North went to see whether Doris was awake and prepared to see her visitor. Ten minutes later Miss Paget was ushered into her room.

'I am so glad you have come,' she said, rising and holding Miss Paget's hands in her own.

Almost at the same moment they both noticed one pacing up and down in the garden opposite the window. It was Victor, who, having transacted his business in town, had called in returning for Miss Paget as

had been arranged. Instead of waiting in the carriage, he had, after a few minutes, wandered into the garden. He had that afternoon secured his passage by the *Bendigo*. The near prospect of setting sail made him restless, and the mere act of walking with the tide of returning vigour in his veins was a luxury. He was engrossed with thoughts of his journey, and did not once notice that the path which he was pacing traversed that portion of Lindaraxa which he had so often seen in his dreams.

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But Miss Paget recollected this well, and she turned to Doris with a question on her lips. The girl, with her face transfigured, her hands clasped, had sunk on a low chair near the half-open window. She was partly hidden by the curtains. At last she met Miss Paget's fixed look with a little smile.

'He is waiting for you, is he not?' she asked, her lips trembling a little.

'Yes,' answered Miss Paget, in a very low voice.

There was silence for a few moments, during which the trilling of a canary in the

little conservatory adjacent to the room seemed to rise and swell into strange volumes of sound. The extreme pallor of the young girl's face, the look of deep, wistful pain in her eyes, the tightening clasp of her hands, all were apparent to Miss Paget.

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'Dear, dear Victor! God bless you, and take care of you for ever,' murmured Doris in a low voice. Her lashes were wet as she looked up, but her smile had something of its old radiance. 'I think I understand why he does not wish to see me again,' she said slowly.

'But he does—he does!' It seemed to Miss Paget as if she had surely uttered the words aloud. But her lips had hardly moved. She no longer asked herself what she should do. She stood like a spectator watching a drama whose issue is still quite uncertain.

'But would you like to see him?' she forced herself to say after a long pause.

Victor was slowly passing the window, going towards the gate. Doris looked at him fixedly till he was out of sight. Then, turning to Miss Paget, she said slowly:

'Do you know if he got a letter I wrote to him after——'

'Yes, yes. It reached him shortly before he left the hospital. I think he was glad to get it,' added Miss Paget.

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'Then I think I would sooner do as he thinks best,' answered Doris.

'Ah, then you do not wish to see him? I am afraid I may be fatiguing you.'

'Oh no, you are not, indeed. You are very good to come—and will you come again, perhaps?'

'Yes, to-morrow morning. In the afternoon we are going to the sea-side.'

'And do you think it would be wrong——'

She did not finish the question. Victor was strolling back. He was repeating some lines half aloud, a glad smile on his face.

Miss Paget, white to the lips, stood regarding Doris as she sat bending forward, her hands rigidly clasped, her whole soul in her eyes. Victor repassed the window, and after that Doris turned to Miss Paget.

'I am glad to see him . . . but I think it would be perhaps . . . not quite right. I think he knows best.'

The moral torpor which had fallen on Miss Paget seemed to affect her also physically. It was with difficulty she spoke or moved. Suddenly this inertness left her. She was roused by an insane fear lest Miss North should return and ask Victor to come into the house. She now hastily bade Doris good-bye, and exchanged a few words with Mrs. North as she left the house. She had of set purpose spoken that morning of her visit to Lindaraxa, and suggested that Victor should accompany her. The impulse was similar to that which leads some people to decide upon a certain course of action by tossing a coin. . . . Victor had come to the house, and Doris had seen him, but had refrained from making any effort to speak to him. It seemed as if fate had willed that they should not meet. Doris would soon sail away, and live among new scenes and companions. She would forget with all the happy elasticity of youth. Even now she could not be said to be unhappy. And as for Victor, was it not after all quite apparent that fever and not an absorbing passion had been at work with

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him? The stronger he grew the less he seemed to be haunted by melancholy regrets.

During the drive home, which Miss Paget lengthened by going round by way of the Botanic Park, both were apparently in high spirits. Victor was anxious to impress Miss Paget with the belief that he was nearly if not quite recovered, so that when, on getting to Callunga, he showed her his ticket as a passenger by the *Bendigo*, she should not be anxious on his account. She on her part was striving with all her might to drive away all thoughts and recollections of Doris; and at first her mind was obedient to her wishes.

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All through dinner she laughed and talked incessantly, although the atmosphere was heavier than ever, and even ice seemed to acquire something of a sultry taste. But dinner was barely over when she found herself struggling with a horrible, an all but irresistible, inclination to sob aloud. She made her escape on some pretext from the drawing-room, where Mrs. Tillotson and Victor were engaged in some languid game with lettered bits of pasteboard. The twi-

light was closing in, and the hot north-east wind was higher than ever. Some change was approaching; the sky was covered with heavy clouds; in the west a long lurid line of sweltering crimson hung low in the horizon. Miss Paget wandered out among the trees for a few minutes. Then, going into her own room, she threw herself down on the bed and broke into hard, dry sobs, that convulsed her frame without bringing her any sense of relief.

'Oh, how could I—how could I?' she moaned to herself, in a hoarse, broken voice. The look on Doris's face, the pleading wistfulness of her eyes, were before her vividly, sweeping away the laboured impositions with which she strove to appease her wounded conscience.

There was a flash of lightning, followed by a long roll of thunder. A thunderstorm of great violence raged for more than a quarter of an hour. She stood looking out all the time, a feverish colour mounting into her cheeks, her temples throbbing vehemently. During that interval her resolution was taken. She

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would not go to the seaside to-morrow, and after she had seen Doris once more she would tell Victor, and then let things take their course. After all, if life became unbearable, there were a hundred paths that led out of it. With the thought a strange calm fell on her. She did not again return to the drawing-room; she sent an excuse by a servant to Mrs. Tillotson and Victor. The thunderstorm had given her a nervous headache, and she thought she would be better if she slept; but she did not sleep. She sat down and wrote a short note, and sent one of the servants across to the family chemist for a bottle of chloral. A good deal of this medicine had been used in the case of the maid who had been ill, but always under the doctor's prescription. The chemist, however, sent the required amount on reading Miss Paget's note, merely taking the precaution of writing a memorandum to ask that the phial should not be entrusted to the charge of the servants.

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'It is evident,' thought Miss Paget on reading this, 'that one of the chief advantages of belonging to the classes is that

one may get a dose of poison at will.' 'Poison!' She repeated the word, and turned the www.libtool.com.cn bottle over curiously. Often during the days in which she had waited in suspense as to Victor's movements, the thought had come to her how little necessary she was to anyone's happiness. To-night she sat going over the thought of her own death step by step.

She saw the scene of her funeral: the hideous black-plumed carriages going slowly to the graveyard, then returning at a cheerful trot; the mourners talking to each other complacently, with the relief of a disagreeable duty over. Her father would be so much put out by the interruption to the usual routine of his days, that he would dine that evening with one of his married daughters, without being sure beforehand that he should not be offended by the sight and smell of mock-turtle soup. They would all put black on, and utter her name with a becoming sigh for a few weeks, and then they would begin to reckon what extra luxuries they could indulge in, with the addition her money would make to their

incomes. Ah, how odious, malicious, and brutal, human life was at bottom! Even the greatest www.dibtoel.com.cn catastrophe that overtook human beings was but the counterpart of the ruin that sometimes comes to an ant-heap. . . . When a dray-wheel passes over it, the ants who have not been crushed rush about distractedly; but in a short time they are thieving the grubs of other insects, and carrying the booty down into their holes as usual.

And Victor—how would her death affect him? Oh, he would be happy, as long as Doris was spared to him! Miss Paget had been too willing to blind herself to the truth, but now she swept aside the meshes of imposition which her own hopes, and the words spoken by Trevaskis and Doris, had woven. It was only a misunderstanding — a deception practised perhaps by Trevaskis himself on Doris, that had led her to the conclusion as to Victor's love for 'Helen.' Yes, Doris had heard him repeat that name during his unconsciousness. But this was only owing to the anxiety which possessed him to come

and tell her that he no longer loved her, or rather, that he perceived he had never done so. . . . She knew so well. . . . Had she not every right to know? What happiness had all the years of her life hitherto brought to her, that she should expect bliss in any form now—now that she was no longer young, and had never been beautiful? Why did she expect more success? Love and devotion, like every other good, were purchased. Yes, purchased by some definite charm.

Miss Paget slept till long after sunrise. A cold, raw wind had succeeded the excessive heat of the past few days. Mrs. Tillotson was loud in her exclamations as to Miss Paget's ailing looks.

'My dear, you are certainly getting the influenza!' she cried.

Helen caught at the idea. The complaint was just then spreading in the province. She lay on a couch most of the day. She tried to make herself believe that the impulse which had carried her away on the previous evening was spent; but all the time she was conscious of a deep under-

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current, whose swell would bear her she knew not whither.

'There is no question of our going to the seaside by starlight this evening, Helen,' said Victor, coming into the drawing-room within an hour of sunset. Up to that time Miss Paget had remained in her own room.

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'No. I fear I am going to be ill,' she answered slowly; 'but before I am laid up——'

A servant brought in two notes on a little silver tray. Neither was of much importance, but as she glanced over one of them Miss Paget decided on her line of action. Half an hour later she was at Lindaraxa, and in Doris's room. Mrs. Challoner was with her, and Shung-Loo came noiselessly into the room to draw the curtains and light the candles. Mrs. Challoner looked extremely anxious. On coming into Doris's room early that morning she had found her very lightly clad, sleeping by the open window, with the cold west wind blowing over her. The change from the late sultry weather had been more than usually severe, and though

Doris complained of no pain, her voice was seriously affected. Miss North was apprehensive that she had caught cold, and had, before going out on her professional round, regulated the temperature of the room, and left Mrs. Challoner in charge.

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But Doris, though conscious now and then of a heavy sensation in her head and chest, had been wrapped round with such happy dreams that her thoughts were constantly wandering from things around her. All day, at intervals, she had spoken to Mrs. Lucy and Shung-Loo as if they were back at Ouranie again and her mother quite near her. Now Mrs. Challoner awaited Miss North's return with some anxiety.

'I will leave you two alone for a short time,' she said, divining by Miss Paget's manner that she wished for this.

'I am afraid, dear, you are not well,' said Miss Paget, holding the girl's hands in her own. The feverish brilliancy of Doris's eyes and the flush in her cheeks filled her with strangely conflicting emotions. She had come fully determined to tell how she had deceived both Doris and Victor. But she

hesitated. 'Your name is Doris, is it not?' she said. And then in rapid confused phrases she told how she had been under some strange mistake. . . . And now she was quite sure Victor wished to see her—did not know that Doris was really here.

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'Didn't he know yesterday?' asked Doris, her lips trembling a little.

'No; and I want you to do me a favour, a great favour.'

'Oh yes, only tell me. You are so good and kind. I shall be happy to do something for you.'

At these words Miss Paget lost all self-control. Deadly pale, with the tears streaming down her face, her hands tightly clenched, she knelt at Doris's feet.

'Oh, Doris, Doris, let me tell you,' she cried in a choking voice. 'I deceived you yesterday, and hid the truth from Victor, and now I cannot bear that he should know. But I must tell you.'

She told her tale, with bent head, not sparing herself, but she said something of that hunger for love, that void in the life of the affections which from her

earliest recollections had been with her like a chronic heartache.

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'If only my mother had lived even for a few years, so that I might remember her arms around me, her lips pressed upon mine, I think all might have been different,' she said at the close.

And then she found Doris's arms around her neck, and the girl's flower-soft face wet with tears pressed against her cheek.

'Dear, dear Helen, how terrible never to know your mother! No one else can ever make up for that. But, dearie, do not be miserable any longer. In the end all will be well. Tell Victor I should like to see him once. He need not know any more than you wish to tell him.'

The tender sensibilities and delicate imaginative perceptions which formed so strong a feature of Doris's nature seemed at this juncture to enable her to divine what she could not clearly understand.

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CHAPTER XV.

As Miss Paget drove back, she found herself from time to time blinded by tears, but when she reached the house the thought of her interview with Victor steadied her nerves.

She bathed her face and put on a warmer dress, and then went into the library. She stood as the housemaid turned up the gas, looking round the room with the half-belated air of one who is trying to realize the aspect of a partly forgotten scene. As the maid was leaving the room, Miss Paget asked her to see whether Mr. Fitz-Gibbon was in the drawing-room. She returned to say that only Mrs. Tillotson was there. She had been dozing, and woke up to ask if Miss Paget had returned.

'Tell her, Jane, that I will come into the drawing-room in ten minutes; and if Mr. Fitz-Gibbon is in his room, tell him I wish to see him in the library.'
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A few minutes later he came in. Miss Paget rose as he entered.

'I have some news for you, Victor.'

'Some news? Letters? Anything about Doris? But no——'

'Yes, about Doris.'

'Oh, Helen, is it from King George's Sound? But letters could not come yet.'

'No, it isn't letters. When you saw the names of the passengers that day——'

'Good God! Helen, how pale you are! Has anything happened to the ship? Tell me in one word.'

'No, no. Doris was not on that ship at all.'

'Not on that ship at all! Why then—she has not gone?'

'No, she is at Miss North's.'

'At Lindaraxa? She is there this moment? Oh, I must go! I must go at once. Did you know before? Don't try to keep me back, Helen.'

All inquiry and emotion were lost in the one overwhelming desire to see Doris.

'She has not been well. It is too late. She expects you in the morning,' said Miss Paget, almost in a whisper. The fiery impatience, the rapture that transfigured the young man's face, were not so unbearable for her as the thought: 'And it was for this I rent the child's heart—only yesterday!'

'Not well! But then I can see the light in her window. Helen, don't try to persuade me. I couldn't rest all night. I promise you I won't make myself ill. Ill! How could I be ill, and Doris still on this side of the world?'

'But let me tell you—there is something I want to explain,' said Miss Paget. 'You will perhaps think it strange, that it was only to-day I went to her to ask if she were Doris. She was introduced to me as Miss Lindsay.'

'Introduced to you where?'

'At Mrs. Mason's . . . when we went there.'

'And I was under the same roof! Oh, good heavens!'

'Yes, and yesterday——'

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'It was Doris you went to see? And I waited outside, and she was in there all the time, and you did not know? Oh, Helen, I must go, if only to hang round the place for a few minutes. . . . I shall take a cab there and back.'

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It was impossible to detain him. It was eleven o'clock before he returned. He was pale and agitated, but he had seen the light in Doris's window, and he had talked for an hour with Mrs. Challoner. It had been a strange meeting, both thinking the other was in distant latitudes on the sea. Doris had told her nothing, so after all he must have only dreamt that Doris had been beside him on the way to the hospital. It was strange, too, how the impression strengthened as he grew stronger. But all was now well. He repeated the words with a short impatient sigh. Then he told Helen how he had fallen into the error about the Challoners' departure. It was Challoner's brother Richard who had sailed with his two daughters. Mr. Robert Challoner was still too ill to travel. He was recruiting at the seaside, and Mrs.

Challoner had left him only yesterday. Doris had not been well, but he would see her to-morrow—to-morrow morning at nine.

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'At nine to-morrow morning,' he repeated, walking up and down the room, too excited and preoccupied to rest. 'Just think, Helen, if we had gone to the sea-side still in ignorance; and then four days later I should have been on the water. It would have been like that terrible little tragedy of "Evangeline." I never could bear to read that poem.'

'You were going—so soon?'

'Yes. I knew you would think it was dangerous, but you see how well I am. I did not wish you to be uneasy, but here is my ticket, which I bought yesterday.' She looked at it with a strange expression in her eyes. 'What do I not owe you, dear Helen? Think of it—to get to Mentone, and find Doris was in Adelaide when I left! . . . It would be too unbearable. . . . I often wonder how Longfellow could bear to write that poem. It was too cruel. To find each other at last when one was dying and both were getting old.'

'But there are some cruel things in life, you know,' said Miss Paget in a low, colourless voice.

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'Ah, but, Helen, think of the beautiful, happy things, the idylls lovely and tender, as if they were let down to earth straight from the inner courts of heaven. . . . How strange you shouldn't have known at once it was Doris. There is no one else in the least like her. And you made friends with each other as soon as you met? Tell me, Helen, did you think she was really ill to-day?'

'A little feverish, perhaps.'

'Feverish! After I parted from Mrs. Challoner I had the strongest impulse to go back again, and implore her to tell me exactly what she thought. But——'

'If you don't take care, Victor, you will be ill yourself to-morrow——'

'And not be able to go in the morning? Oh, how absurd!' He broke into a low, glad laugh at the thought, and began to hum the words:

'"My dust would hear her and beat,
Had I lain for a century dead,
Would start and tremble under her feet
And blossom in purple and red."'

'You repeat the lines as if you believed them ; to me there is something absolutely revolting in such hyperbole. "Had I lain for a century dead"—as if we did not all know what happened to us long before we were a century dead!'

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Something cold and strained in her voice struck him. But he answered in a light tone :

'Well, but is this a time to talk of being dead a century or a thousand years? . . . Helen, I have so often thought I should like you and Doris to be friends. And now you are, without any help from me.'

He would have talked to her of Doris all night. But as the clock chimed twelve he obeyed her injunctions to try and get to sleep. It was some time before his glad restlessness would allow him to close his eyes, but at last he fell into the deep dreamless slumber of happy exhaustion.

It was a strangely beautiful world into which he woke next morning. All the sudden harshness of the atmosphere had died away. The mellow warmth of summer, tempered by a cooling wind, lay over all the

land. The delicate primrose of the dawn still lingered in the east. The softly-folded hills below this divine glow, their valleys and curves touched with the tremulous vapour of early morning, had something of a dream-like indistinctness. But the sleeping town in the foreground was sharply distinct in the clear air.

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'She is there, and I shall see her in less than four hours,' Victor said, looking across towards North Terrace from the brow of the little wooded knoll that rose to the south of the house.

The first sunrays were catching the wide expanse of the sea westward. Above it, as if in a faint reflection of the east, a wide band of pale rose-lilac encircled the horizon. As the sun rose higher, this space of exquisite colour was beaten into transparent flakes of gold, till they were lost in the blue air, like a legend of visionary beauty. All was surpassingly lovely. It seemed as if the magic of earth and air and sea was for the first time fully revealed to him. He looked on the most familiar scenes with the keen enjoyment with which one catches the first

aspects of a new country before any of the old links of habit have dulled the incisiveness of outline. The tall snowy groups of Christmas lilies, the deeply accented forms of the Nipa palms round a fountain, the wide leaves and lotus buds of eastern lilies on the water's surface, the rose bushes loaded with cataracts of roses, the deep bruckmansia bells, the great beds of heliotrope, all poured their poignant exhalations on the air, till the colour, the fragrance, and the almost incredible thought of soon seeing Doris, overcame him with an intoxication of happiness that bordered upon pain.

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But would the time never pass? At breakfast he heard Mrs. Tillotson as if from a great distance urging him to eat. He heard her bewailing the abandonment of the seaside plan. 'For I am sure, Helen dear, you are not well. But if it's influenza you are getting, let me advise you beforehand not to take antipyrine.'

Victor looked at Miss Paget, but he could hardly discern whether she was pale or flushed.

'You ought to walk among the trees and

flowers, Helen, and hear the birds sing,' he said to her, as they rose from the table.

'Their songs are for you, not me,' she said, with her unconquerable little smile.

But the next moment she was in her own room, lying prone on her bed, beyond the relief of words or tears. It was not one emotion—it was all the long-hoarded bitterness of a lifetime that seemed to be distilled into a cup which she must drain to the very dregs. Her loveless childhood, her spoilt youth, the sordid shifts of poverty which had burnt themselves into her memory at the most susceptible period of life: day by day and hour by hour she lived them all over again in one of those swift moments of recollection, in which the past is seen and felt rather than recalled. Why had she been always the puppet of a destiny, relentless in denying her one complete and unmutilated joy—one day, nay, one whole hour of vivid happiness?

And now—now to crown all, what had come to her? Through the long years in which she had been starved of affection and the tender graces of life she had never lost

sight of the wish to help others—to be to few or many a stay in the hour of need. She seemed to see a long defile of the old, the maimed, the morally paralyzed, to whom she had given alms.

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But how poor and meagre and profitless it had all been! A few score of poor people were a little better housed, a little better fed, in cleaner apparel for a few days or weeks, than they would have been without her aid. But always she had asked herself in the end, what did it signify? Now, for the first time, she seemed to see clearly what had been at the root of her dissatisfaction. She had longed to give moral help—longed to stand between poor driven human creatures and the malice of their destiny—to shelter them from the storms that were driving them to shipwreck. And now? It was not only the cruel deception she had practised on the previous day. But at this moment, revolt and despair, and some dark tinge of hatred for those whose lives were crowned with a happiness denied to her, were surging up in her heart. What subtle thrill of hope had

come to her when she observed yesterday the greater hold that the fever seemed to have taken on Doris?

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'Oh, no, no! not that—not that!' she said to herself, half aloud, in a choked voice. Then she opened the drawer of her mirror, and took out the bottle of chloral, and held it in her hand as if weighing it.

A fever, a lingering tumour, the mistake of a railway pointsman, the bite of a dog, the most trivial accident, the most malignant disease, these might at any moment end existence. Then why not an overdose of chloral? It would be a far more kindly and judicious accident than those that nature so often and so ruthlessly employed. And there would be no scandal to lacerate the feelings of those who had never loved her.

'The deceased lady, who was widely known for her social gifts and her unfailing benevolence, had been suffering for some time from insomnia,' etc., etc. She knew so well the decorous sort of newspaper paragraph in which the event would be recorded. 'I am not sure, but I am afraid that she took a great deal of antipyrine after all,' she

imagined Mrs. Tillotson saying, with a lugubrious shake of the head. And as this crossed her mind she began to laugh. There www.libtool.com.cn was a tap at her door, and she put away the bottle of chloral before calling out 'Come in.' Mrs. Tillotson opened the door, saying:

'Victor is going to town, and do you know, dear, I'm not quite sure he should go alone. He seems to me a little light-headed —smiling and singing so much—quite different.'

'Yes, but it is the sort of light-headedness that seldom lasts,' returned Miss Paget, hardly defining to herself the special significance she attached to the words.

But when she met Victor in the hall, hat in hand, ready to set out to see his Doris, with all the radiance of youth and happiness unclouded by a single fear in his face, she was conscious for a moment of a strange pang of apprehension as to what might await him.

He proposed walking across the Park Lands. But now that the last moments of waiting had come, he could not bear the delay. It could not matter if he got to Lindaraxa a little earlier. He hailed the

first cab he saw, and was at the gate in twelve minutes, having repeatedly urged the cabman to faster speed. A carriage was waiting near the gate, and half way between it and the house Victor met a rosy-visaged old gentleman, whom he would have passed with a bow, had he not been held fast by the arm.

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'This is a nice thing, young gentleman, to try and pass me with a lift of the hat—the venerable doctor who ushered you into the world, how many years ago?'

'Not more than half a century, doctor,' said Victor, half distracted by the delay. He speedily got away, after giving more or less incoherent answers as to his reported journey to England. The hall-door stood open, and before he could ring, Mrs. Challoner, who had seen him coming, came out to him.

'I know I am a little early; but perhaps Doris is ready to see me?' he said, his voice shaken by the passionate throbbing of his heart.

'Oh yes, she has been talking of you, Victor; come in here for a moment.'

She showed him into the drawing-room, and hastily left the room. His overpowering happiness www.libtool.com.cn made him deaf and blind, or he would have seen that Mrs. Challoner's eyes were red and dim, and her voice unsteady. She had on the previous evening heard Victor's little story with the strongest interest and sympathy. She could not then bear to dash his joy by expressing any of the fears that oppressed her as to the unfavourable development of Doris's illness. But now concealment would be impossible. Doris was threatened with congestion of the lungs. She had been delirious through the night, and the old medical friend whom Miss North had called in for consultation took a very gloomy view of the case. On going into the symptoms he declared that she had been taken about when she should be in bed, and that the insidious inroads the fever had made on her constitution were all against her rallying-power.

But Miss North still kept up her courage. She knew her old friend was of the rigidly old-fashioned order, who go in

for the heroic remedies of bed and blisters on the shallowest pretext — one of the people, in short, to whom new ideas and theories figure hazily as a kind of moral lymph, to be used under quarantine regulations for the gradual vaccination of respectable society ; unfit for a family practitioner at first hand. Even at this moment, as Miss North came out of Doris's room, she was smiling half abstractedly at the neatness of this comparison. She resolved to note it down for future use. When she saw Mrs. Challoner with overflowing eyes, she lost her patience a little.

'Really, Mrs. Challoner, you and mother and Doctor Mellersh get upon one's nerves a little, with your long faces. . . . The child is looking quite radiant just now ; who is this Victor she keeps on talking to now and then ?'

'Oh, Miss North, I come to ask you to break the news to him. He is waiting to see Doris—looking so happy and confident —it breaks my heart.'

'My dear lady, the human heart is in reality a tremendously strong muscle,

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though people speak so glibly of breaking it, like egg-shell china,' said Miss North www.libtool.com.cn with kindly gravity. And then, always on the alert as she was to seize any new possibility, she explained that she should say nothing to Victor beyond telling him that Doris was rather feverish, and must not talk much. But he might sit in her room at intervals. . . . His happiness and confidence, and Doris's pleasure in seeing him, would all help to swell those odic forces that are the real fund of life.

Surely no other ten minutes in the course of all the ages were so long as those that elapsed between Victor's entering the house and his being taken by Miss North into Doris's room. He followed his guide closely, a blinding mist around him, the surging as of great billows in his ears.

'Oh. Victor dear, I am so glad you have come. . . .'

The words came to him low and broken, and Doris held out both hands to him with a strangely beautiful smile. He knelt down by her side and covered them with kisses. Then the mist slowly cleared away. They

were alone. Doris was beside him, softly calling him by name. But for a little time he could make no reply. www.libtool.com.cn And then, as he grew calmer, and held her hands and looked into her face, his joy, which was almost unbearable in its intensity, received the first little check. Doris was supported by pillows in a deep armchair, in one of the white cashmere robes in which he had so often seen her in the early mornings at Stonehouse. Her eyes were strangely brilliant, but her face was no longer flushed; and, oh, what was it—what was it that smote him, as if a hand fumbling awkwardly had suddenly touched his heart? A look of evanescence . . . a smile remote from all earthly interests. . . .

'Darling—you—have been ill. . . . You are—ill now,' he said in a broken voice, with an odd pause between the words.

'But, Victor, don't be sorry. I cannot tell you how beautiful it is. Always at night, and sometimes in the day, I hear mamma's voice as in the dear old times. And now you have come there is nothing more to wish for.'

'Except that you should be well and strong, my own dear one. . . . Oh, Doris, how did you come to think that there should ever be room in my heart for any-one but you? Your letter—your dear little cruel letter . . . see, I have carried it next my heart . . . but now I want you to take it back—to tell me that you under-stand.'

Poor child, she whose ways and thoughts and associations had been so far removed from those of ordinary life—how could she grasp those complex and conflicting interests? But as she looked into Victor's face, as she listened to the sound of his voice, telling her with eager rapidity his reasons for wishing to start for town, and the mystery which still hung over those days during which he lay in helpless dark-ness, she knew that she had been in error in some of her thoughts.

'Did you not like my letter, then, Victor?' she said, taking it from him and turning it over.

'Yes, dearest, because, though you were under a strange delusion, you still somehow

trusted me. . . . After all, I will not give up this letter till I have many more in its place. To-morrow, when you are better, you shall write at the end, "I know you love only me."'

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'Would you like it better if I wrote that? Then let me write it now.'

She took a pencil and traced the words at the bottom of the letter. Her small, quaintly-formal writing was a little uneven, but it sufficed. Before the time expired when Victor should leave, Doris had told him of the strange way in which she thought she saw him in the iron passage, and of her journey with him to Broombush Creek.

'It was so strange and lonely part of the way—oh, so dark and strange over that gray, gray Silent Sea! And then it was silent no longer . . . it was full of loud, shrill calls . . . the voices of the wind . . . calling, calling, as if they, too, were lonely and sorry, and they could find no home, and no answer.'

'Oh, my Doris, and I was there, and could do nothing for you!'

'But don't be too sorry, Victor dear.

. . . I hear it in your voice. . . . And you know after a little time it was all beautiful again. Mother came to me . . . mother, with her face as glad and beautiful as the day she went away.'

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Her breathing became a little hurried, and her cheeks flushed. She lay back silent for some little time. The high, clear, musical whistle of a blackbird came in through the half-open window. And then she spoke again, her voice a little huskier and more hurried.

'I am glad you are at Ouranie, Victor. . . . You see, it is full of flowers . . . if you open the window a little more. . . .'

The sunshine was now beyond the prescribed temperature of the room. He rose and opened the window wide, drawing back the curtains; and lo! there were the shrubs and blossoms he had so often seen in his fragmentary dream. The air was embalmed with orange-blossoms. Great rose-bushes were still heavy with blooms; the sprays of an Ophir rose-bush lay half across the path in torrents of flaming, wide-opened roses. The gladioli, white, scarlet, and crimson, stood in clustering masses waist-high;

Banksia roses in pink and honey-pale masses were lying in swathes close to the window. One touch that now came back to him as part of his dream he missed—a magnolia tree with a few wide-opened chalices ; but looking a little to the left of the orange-grove, he saw it—a few late blooms with their great petals still folded, like the wings of a dove that has come with a message from afar. Then, seeing that his dream was so literally reproduced, something of vague cold dread seized him.

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It was not until the next day, however, that he felt any real apprehension of the great calamity that was to fall on him. In the morning he was told that Doris was worse. During the afternoon he was allowed to see her for a short time. She was then half-unconscious, but on seeing him she smiled, and held out her hands. A little afterwards she seemed to be talking to her mother.

'Say it again, maman darling,' she murmured ; and then she repeated the words slowly, as if saying them after some one : '"*Dors, dors, doux oiseau de la prairie . . . Dieu t'éveillera dans son bon temps !*"'

Victor endeavoured to control his grief, in order to save her pain. It was in the deepening twilight she last spoke to him.
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Consciousness had then partly returned, and she knew by the sound of his voice that the billows of grief were around him.

'Do not be so sorry, dear Victor,' she said softly.

'Oh, Doris, Doris!' was all that he could say in reply.

'When maman was going away, she put her hands on my head, and said, "God bless and keep my darling." Let me say the same to you, Victor.'

He knelt beside her, and she placed her hands on his head, and said in a tremulous voice:

'God bless and keep my darling!'

Before the sun had set on the next day she had awakened from the brief dream which comprised the span of her serene and guileless life.

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CHAPTER XVI.

After the first strange days were over, Victor found his thoughts constantly turning on schemes of unmasking Trevaskis. The inquiry which had been undertaken by the police, aided by the manager's eager suggestions, had, of course, come to nothing. It now seemed that there was no certainty at all as to the departure by any of the sailing ships of the young man who had presumably personated Victor.

At last he resolved to prosecute a search on his own account. Day and night he was pursued by the thought that Doris's untimely death and his own irretrievable bereavement were largely due to the chain of circumstances woven by the action of the man who, for his own purposes, had first

rendered him insensible and then kept him so long drugged.

'I could not get him hanged for it. www.libtool.com.cn Perhaps the worst villains always die in their beds with troops of admiring friends round them ; but I could get him disgraced —branded—branded for life as a thief and a cheat and an impostor,' he would think over and over again in a dull, mechanical round, till at times he was almost beside himself with the thirst for vengeance. He often reasoned with himself that Doris's memory—her last loving words, and the pressure of her beloved hands as she uttered them, should serve as a benediction to keep this passion at bay.

But nevertheless it returned on him again and again. About the end of January he went to look for Kenneth Campbell. He had been reported dead by the special policeman who had undertaken the investigation, but he resolved to search for himself. His mother would be soon on her way out to Australia. He resolved to occupy the time till she arrived in hunting up every possible clue. After that he had no plans.

His uncle had from time to time put off carrying out the instructions of the will under which Victor was heir to the late Mr. Shaw Drummond—but his income on coming of age, irrespective of the property in Mr. Stuart Drummond's hands, was more than enough for his wants, so that he granted the delay without a second thought.

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He got on Kenneth Campbell's track at Nilpeena, where he had stayed two days after leaving Colmar. Seventy miles further on towards town he was met by the news of his death. But after fully testing the evidence he became convinced that it was a case of mistaken identity—that it was a man of the same name who had died in the Burra hospital, not the old ex-shepherd. At last he found someone who knew where the brother lived with whom Kenneth had farmed for a short time. This was in the Wimmera District in Victoria.

It was a long, uninteresting journey, and the results very uncertain. But he was now possessed by that dogged obstinacy which in one who has the two strains of Scottish and Celtic origin is sometimes

driven to the verge of a mania. He had not yet picked up a single clue that did not end in a 'possum track up a gum-tree.' He had sometimes thought of setting off himself to meet the wool-ship that was bound for Plymouth, and engaging a detective to meet the other at Cape Town. But he was now convinced that no one had really taken the journey, and that the whole ruse had been managed by Trevaskis with the same adroitness with which he had compassed the rest.

When he reached Thomas Campbell's little farm he found Kenneth—now a confirmed invalid—so wrapped in the study of Persian theosophy, that he could hardly make him carry his thoughts back to the journey he had taken with a sick man from near the broken-down whim. He received the news of Doris's death without any surprise. But though he said it was ground for rejoicing when those who were beloved of Heaven were called to their real home, some tears slowly coursed down his cheeks. When he heard that Shung-Loo had departed for China he lifted his eyes, and clasped his hands in fervent supplication that

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the seed of knowledge which he had tried to sow in his heart might blossom and bear
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fruit abundantly.

'But I believe there is not a nation under the sun without true worshippers. To-day I read the life of a Persian saint who sat seven years long in a hermitage with stopt ears, day and night calling upon Allah, till wall and door at last to him were one. Ay, the cup of spiritual knowledge is not put into the hand of man in the midst of vanities.'

Victor was very patient with Kenneth, because of those tears he had shed ; but in the end all he could extract from him was that the man who had cared for him in the little weather-board hut was strong-looking and thick-set, and that he spoke as the Cornish miners do who have grown to manhood before they leave England.

'Did he remind you of anyone?' asked Victor.

Kenneth deliberated. 'Yes, he did. As soon as I saw him he reminded me of the captain at the Colmar Mine—Trevaskis.'

Victor gave a low exclamation. He had,

in the course of the inquiries he had made, learned that Trevaskis had a brother, who
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stayed for some days at the mine on two occasions. Three days after his interview with Kenneth he had engaged the services of a private detective, who had the reputation of being the cleverest in South Australia, to ascertain where Daniel Trevaskis had been employed during the two weeks from December 9th to December 23rd last year.

It is now pretty well established that the cleverest detectives in Australia are the most easily recognised members of the communities in which they reside. In this case the detective returned to town in a few days, reporting that he had been blocked in his inquiries by being everywhere publicly denounced as a spy by the miners, and threatened with the most unpleasant consequences if he did not at once clear out. Dan Trevaskis had been off and on at a claim near the broken-down whim, but he had left it, and made frequent journeys to places at a distance from the mine. Now he was staying with his brother, preparatory to going to England in a short time.

On hearing this, Victor at once started for the mine. He would at least see this man for himself. He stayed at the inn till he saw Trevaskis coming to dinner. Seeing that he was alone, he did not meet him, but went out through the bar-door as Trevaskis entered by the main entrance. Victor walked up towards the mine, keeping a sharp look-out on the men he saw about. Presently he noticed a little in advance of him one who had been a fellow-passenger by the mail-coach from Nilpeena. He had not then taken much notice of him. As a matter of fact, he was often so sunk in thoughts of Doris during these solitary wanderings as to be quite oblivious of his surroundings.

Now he was struck by something secretive, furtive, and sinister in the man's appearance. He was extremely thin, closely-shaven, and wore a loose alpaca overcoat, with a rather bulgy look about the breast. He carried a small bag, and kept glancing rapidly from side to side, and walking faster and faster as he drew nearer the Colmar Mine. He did not go to the mine or the

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offices, however, but struck off in an easterly direction towards the enclosure round the cave room.www.libtool.com.cn

But before the stranger reached this, Victor's attention was drawn by the figure of a man who disappeared into the engine-room as he drew near it. He instantly followed him. Roby met him with an outstretched hand; but Victor, merely grasping it in passing, said:

'Isn't this Mr. Daniel Trevaskis?'

'Sure 'nough 'tis,' answered Roby, looking after him with amazement.

Dan heard the answer and the question, and quickened his footsteps, going out by a side-door of the engine-room, and into the purser's office, the door of which was open.

Victor, too excited to remember the nearest way, lost a little time. As soon as Dan got inside he rushed from one store-room to the other. When he gained the manager's office he tried to lock the door, but the key was missing. The door leading into the iron passage was half ajar, however, and rushing through this, he closed and bolted it behind him.

Without a moment's pause, Victor rushed back and got a large mallet out of one of the store-rooms. With a few strokes he splintered the door, and then he laughed aloud—a laugh not pleasant to hear.

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'Now you are in the snare!' he cried out.

He hurried through the passage. As soon as he entered the cave room he knew that this was the place in which he had been lying for thirteen days. This was the accursed place, and this man who had fled into it had been his gaoler.

He peered around in the darkness. The light from the panes of glass in the enclosure of the entrance to the cave room did not penetrate beyond a third part of the cavity; the rest was in impenetrable gloom.

'You are in there, Daniel Trevaskis . . . and you may as well come out!' cried Victor.

There was no answer.

'You hound! This is where you and that infamous blackguard, your brother, drugged me and kept me.' He was beside himself with rage as he thought of all that had followed upon this. 'If you wait here

till the Day of Judgment you won't escape me again !'

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After waiting for twenty minutes, Victor began to consider that it would be better to get a light, and call on some of the men for assistance, or, at any rate, to bear witness to what should happen. The one thing he was determined on was not to let this man escape him till he should get him under police surveillance, and take out a warrant against him.

'He cannot get out; he must come back along the passage,' he reflected. At that moment he thought he heard a curious sound of tapping on one side of the iron wall round the entrance to the cave room. He went back as far as the first little window, and then he saw Trevaskis coming, his face drawn and gray.

'Who has been smashing in doors here?' he said in a choked voice.

'I have. . . . I am on your trail now, you lying scoundrel! You coward, to come and attack a sleeping man.'

'I never did, as sure as God is in heaven!'

'How do you dare to mention His name with such a falsehood? You stole into the office, you flung me down when I was half asleep, and then you drugged me—you and your brother. But I have him—I have him now like a rat in a hole.'

Twice Trevaskis attempted to speak, but his throat seemed to be full of ashes.

'You have no proof—not one!' he gasped at last. 'You go on the paltry fact that my brother came in here when he saw you. Let me tell you he has been drinking hard, and has had a touch of the "horrors."'

'Gord a'mighty! what it is to be born a liar. You don't get into no scrape without bein' able for to crawl out somehow,' said poor Dan with a groan, in his hiding-place.

It was not bodily fear that had made him flee, but the conviction which he had all along that he would never, face to face with Victor, be able to deny that he had been with him during his imprisonment in the cave room—that and the terror of exposure for his boy. He had been well paid by Trevaskis for his assistance, and now that

the gold had all been safely disposed of, Dan was to start next week by a mail-boat, so as to meet Dick when he landed in England.

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The sound which Victor had heard ten minutes earlier had been going on all this time. It was the sound made by a chisel being inserted under a sheet of iron, to force the nails back that held it in its place. Now the sheet was bodily removed, a man came quickly through the opening, and went hurrying through the entrance of the cave room. Victor at once advanced from the passage, fearing his quarry should escape him. The first glance showed him that the man, who was on his knees lighting a small lamp, was his fellow-passenger from Nilpeena. As soon as the lamp was lit, leaving it on the ground, he began groping on all fours, feeling the ground, and turning the loose earth over with long lean fingers. Then he cried, with a voice that had the vibrations of the cry of a wounded animal:

'Ah, my God, my God! it is all gone! All stolen—all stolen; gone for ever!'

Victor then knew that this was Webster, and he stood watching him in the semi-

darkness with a sort of fascinated horror. Trevaskis also crept nearer to look and listen, half fearful that this strange apparition—the gaunt-looking man who had effected an entrance through the wall, who had come provided with a lamp, who crouched on the ground burrowing in the earth, whose voice had a shrill, savage ring—was somehow in collusion with Fitz-Gibbon.

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The man rose and carried the lamp further into the cave room. His hand shook so that the light flickered like an aspen leaf. When he reached the narrow portion running northward, he knelt down and burrowed in the loose earth, groping on his knees, his breath coming in laboured gasps.

'No, no, no! not an ounce—not an ounce!' he shrieked, in an insane voice that had lost all balance of modulation. Then he moaned and sobbed in a horrible way.

Presently, from a dim recess beyond him, Dan crept out shaken and unnerved. Could this be Fitz-Gibbon, who had suddenly gone mad, or was it an emissary of the Evil One

come to destroy him with terror because of the part he had played in this hateful underground place? In any case Dan could no longer remain where he was, for this man, with his awful cries and carrying a light, was steadily drawing nearer to him. He glided stealthily from his hiding-place, keeping in the shadow, and hoping to avoid notice. But in the obscurity he stumbled over some of the litter with which the floor was encumbered.

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Webster instantly started up with a maniacal cry, drawing some weapon from under his coat.

'Leave this man to me,' said Victor, making a quick motion forward.

He was too late; it was a five-chambered revolver, loaded and cocked, that Webster had drawn. Dan was shot through the heart, and fell without a sound. The next moment Victor felt a sharp, stinging pain in his head. He knew no more till he became conscious weeks later, to find that he had been nursed back from the brink of the grave by Miss Paget. As soon as the news of the catastrophe at the Colmar Mine—Dan

murdered, Victor dangerously wounded, and Webster killed by his own hand—reached town, Miss Paget came without a moment's delay, accompanied by one of the best surgeons in Adelaide. For many days the young man hovered between life and death ; but, with a devotion and endurance extraordinary even in a woman, Helen stood sentinel between him and the roar of greedy Acheron. For days and nights in succession she scarcely quitted his bedside. Later, she had the assistance of a trained nurse.

In the earlier stages of Victor's convalescence his mother reached Adelaide, and at once came to him at the new Colmar Inn —the one for which Scroogs had obtained a license while it was still a curious medley of tents and weather-board cribs Now it had a frontage of stone-rooms, and in the best of one of these the patient was lying on a couch under a window looking eastwards, towards that great flat space, interspersed with naked patches of reddish earth, broken up here and there into gaping fissures.

Victor lay looking out on the scene with the languid, unseeing gaze of one who has,

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without much heart in the affair, battled his way back to a fresh hold on life. Presently his notice www.libtool.com.cn was attracted by a half-stifled sigh, and looking round, he saw that his mother, who had been reading, had let the book close on her lap, and was looking at him with dimmed eyes. Mrs. Fitz-Gibbon was a very handsome, well-preserved woman, who at forty-eight might pass for being ten years younger.

'Well, mother, you look very solemn,' he said, with a feeble smile.

'Oh—dear Victor—I am so thankful!'

There was a suspicious break in her voice.

'Is it usual to weep, mater, when one is thankful?'

'You naughty boy, you begin to be saucy already.'

'Already? How many hundred fowls have I devoured within the last two weeks?'

There was a little pause, and then the mother spoke again.

'Of course there were other thoughts as well as gratitude. When I look at you . . . and compare you with the boy from whom I parted less than a year ago——'

'Handsome as an Apollo' were the words that rose to the mother's lips; but though she had been exceedingly vain of her son's good looks from his childhood upwards, she was of Puritan descent, and she checked herself.

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'Isn't it strange,' she went on, after a little pause and in a different tone of voice, 'that you should ever have come to a place like this at all, and that, having come once, you should have been nearly assassinated, and having come again, you should have been nearly murdered?'

'And yet, mother,' said Victor after a little silence, 'I would not for all the world have missed coming here.'

He meant this to be the prelude to telling his mother about Doris; but even the memory of strong emotion invaded his brain with an irresistible languor. He sighed heavily, and turned away from the window so that he should not see that great level, naked plain—the Silent Sea—in which the supreme joy of life had come to him—and eluded him.

'I believe Helen would scold me if she

heard me broaching such topics at all,' said Mrs. Fitz-Gibbon presently. She had never possessed that finer tact which leads people to perceive without making perception a matter of comment, and to understand those half shades which so often convey more than stronger colours. She reflected a little as to the cause of her son's continued silence, and then said, 'I must ask your forgiveness for one thing, Victor—that letter I wrote when I knew less than nothing of dear Helen.'

'What was it you said, mother?'

Mrs. Fitz-Gibbon laughed softly before she replied:

'How like you are to your dear father in some things! That was exactly his way of making it pleasant for one who had been disagreeable. He would pretend to forget all about the affair!'

At this moment Miss Paget came in with a great boxful of flowers that had come from Lancaster House. At sight of them the vision of those other flowers, that used to come to this arid wilderness in all their delicate beauty for Doris, rose before Victor with strange distinctness. She brought him

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a plume of white lilac—one of those late blossoms that bud and come into bloom after the almanack says they are over. Its faint yet poignant fragrance seemed to sum up for him all the unspeakable longing and regret of which a lifetime is capable.

'Was it worth all the pains you have taken to keep me in life, Helen?' he asked as she stooped to arrange his pillow.

'That means you ought to have a bowl of chicken-broth,' she answered, laughing. Then, in a lower tone, 'There is nothing else in life worth so much for me.'

Four months later they were married. The paper which announced the marriage contained an enthusiastic description of a testimonial presented to William Trevaskis, J.P., on the occasion of his retirement from managing the Colmar Mine. The Chairman of Directors, in making the presentation, said that Mr. Trevaskis was a man who had long ago made his mark in mining. The indefatigable industry, the downright John Bull honesty which had characterized his management of the Colmar Mine, were beyond all praise. While deeply

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regretting his loss as a manager, they all—directors and shareholders alike—were gratified to know that the trained sagacity with which Mr. Trevaskis had dealt in Broken Hill mining shares now enabled him to resume the position in society of which his unmerited misfortunes had previously deprived him. Mr. Trevaskis was about to enter Parliament once more, and his friends were confident that he would make his mark in politics as he had in mining. The tea and coffee service (of sterling Broken Hill silver, artistically relieved with Colmar gold) was a slight mark of the esteem in which he would be always held by those who knew him best (cheers).

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THE END.

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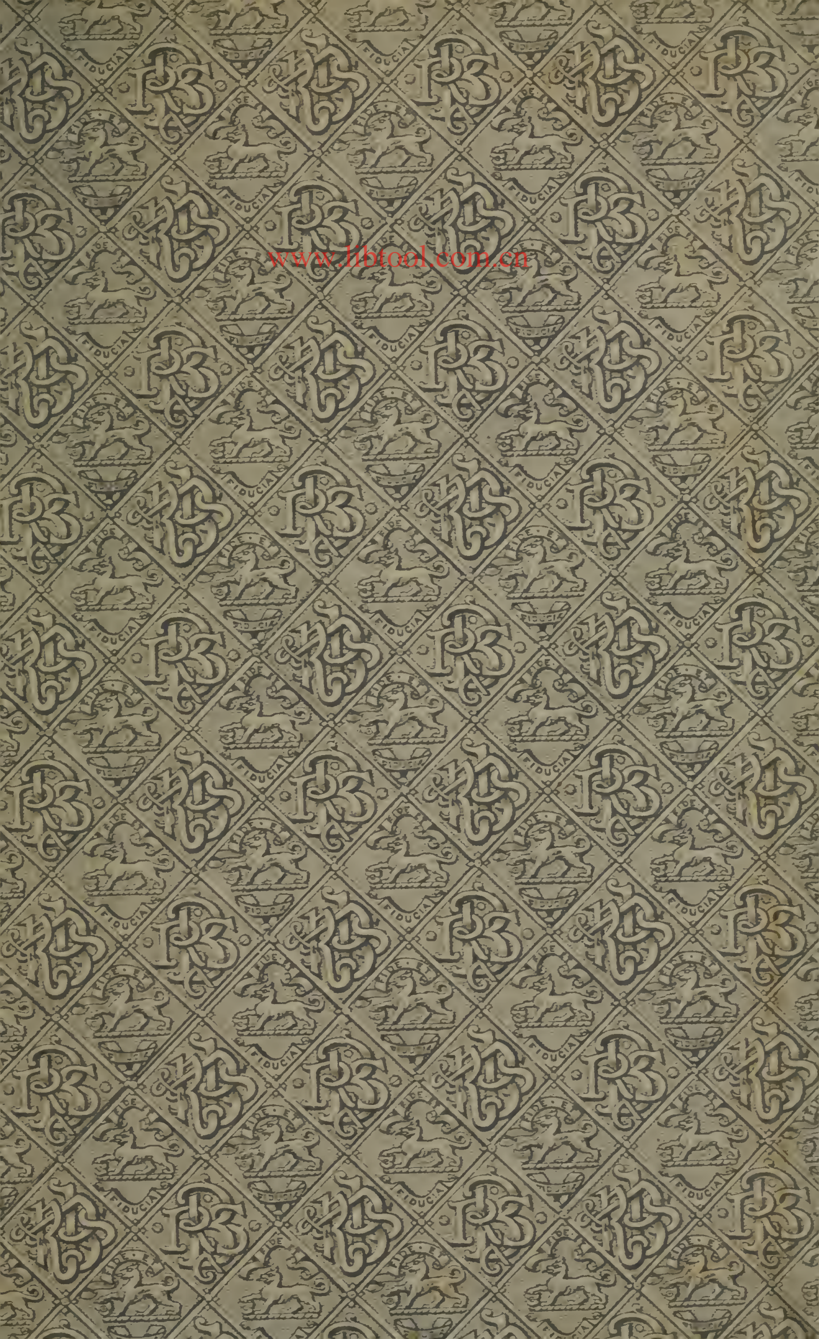

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