

HER RANSOM



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HER RANSOM

OR

PAID FOR

BY

CHARLES GARVICE

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HER RANSOM.

CHAPTER I.

Neville Lynne leaned on his pick and, wiping the perspiration from his face, gazed in a ruminative, not to say melancholy, fashion across the plain.

It was not a particularly pleasant view; in fact, it was as hideous as can well be imagined, and would have given a scene in our own English Black country points, and beaten it easily. For it was an Australian gold field; an arid, dusty plain which would have been ugly at any time, but was rendered simply appalling by the dirt, confusion, squalor and poverty of a digger's camp.

The sun had been glaring down upon this cheerful prospect during the whole of what had seemed an endless day, and was now sinking in a bed of fire, to stoke up for the next day's scorching. There were a few trees in the valley, but not a parched leaf of them moved. A bird or two flew listlessly across the waste, but dropped with heavy wings on to the scorching rocks or the cracking tent poles; if they had dropped into the tents themselves no man would have molested them, for every man was too tired, too dead beat and utterly exhausted, even to knock down a bird.

A group of horses, whose bones stood out under their skins like the lines of a Gothic cathedral, stood sleepily in what remained of the river, and the only sounds that broke the natural stillness of this aggravating, soul-crushing heat, were the click of a pick in some claim, the listless bark of a dog, and now and again a feeble shout from Sandy Macgregor's grog tent, where some men were drowning care, and poisoning themselves with the liquid which Mr. Macgregor, with a facetiousness which was beyond all praise, called "whisky."

Lorn Hope Camp was very much down on its luck. There was gold in the ravine everybody believed, or said he did, but for some weeks past no man had succeeded in finding it, and but for the heat what remained of Lorn Hope Camp would have up sticks and departed for some other Hope less Forlorn; but the heat had burned up the energy, melted the purpose, sapped the

perseverance of nearly all, and the men of Lorn Hope Camp still clung on, digging occasionally, sleeping often, quarreling at times, and drinking whisky always.

Neville Lynne's "claim" was at the end of the ravine, half a mile or more from the camp at which he gazed. A rough hut of planks and canvas stood at a little distance, and in this Neville and his partner, and an old woman—so old that the "boys" had christened her Mrs. Meth, as short for Methuselah—had lived. "Had," for the evening before, Neville's partner, disgusted by the run of bad luck, had cleared out and departed.

Why Neville Lynne had not gone, too, he could not have told. His belief in the presence of this hidden gold was certainly no stronger than that of the other diggers, and as certainly he had not grown to love the hideous, sandy, dusty, sun stricken plain; but something, some feeling he could not have defined if his life had depended upon his doing so, had made him reluctant to leave the Lorn Hope, and there he stood, penniless, solitary, and most utterly bored, on the edge of his barren claim, with the last rays of the sun spitefully smiting him on the head, and the flies buzzing round his ears.

There were two reasons why Neville Lynne's claim was at a distance from the camp. The first was because he believed in the upper part of the ravine; the second, because he was different from the rest of the men who composed Lorn Hope.

To put it shortly, the young fellow—he was very young, younger than he looked, a mere lad just under twenty—was a gentleman, and the rest of the camp were—not.

Now, the one gentleman in a society of blacklegs, lags, roughs and ruffians is always regarded by them with a certain amount of envy, malice and all uncharitableness. It is very painful and disadvantageous to be the only honest and well-bred man in a party, whether it is a picnic party or a party of gold diggers, and it was very much to the relief of the majority that Neville Lynne pitched his tent a mile and a half from the main body.

And yet, though they regarded him with a groundless dislike, and a not altogether groundless envy, they respected him. There was not a reckless, desperate, dare-devil among them who possessed more pluck than the Young 'un, as he was called. He was, in their expressive language, "all grit," and they knew that he was as ready with his revolver and his fists as any of them, and though slow at beginning a fight, was slower still at leaving off.

On his first joining the camp Bully Swanger—a regular desperado—had "gone for him" with the altogether unlooked for result of laying the bully on his back for rather more than a fortnight, and since then the Young 'un had

been severally let alone. There were some, the best of the crew, who would have been friendly with the lad who had so effectively shown that he could hold his own, but oil and vinegar will not mix easily, and though Neville Lynne was civil and courteous to all, he was not “sociable.”

Even with his partner, the least dishonest man in the camp, Neville had been reserved and reticent, and the man had worked with him, slept in the hut beside him, shared his meals and hopes and disappointments, without learning his real name or anything about him.

There were two or three women in the camp, mostly old and battered, who eyed the young lad curiously and admiringly, but not even the youngest and least ill-looking of them had ever received more than a smile or a civil “Good-morning” from him.

“The Young ’un’s as full of pride as Mac’s whisky is of fusel oil,” remarked the wit of the camp, “that’s what’s the matter with him. Shouldn’t be surprised if he was a young dook in disguise. Some of these days he’ll skip around with a coronet on his head and then flop up to Heaven. That is, if some of the boys don’t get too much of his pride and bore a hole through him.”

But though many, doubtless, would have liked to have perforated the Young ’un, no one had yet attempted it; the reflection that he was a very quick hand at the perforating process himself deterred the desperadoes.

The sun sank at last and Neville, as if he had been waiting for its disappearance, dropped into the hole and resumed work. But there was not much heart in his strokes, and he seized the appearance of a solitary figure coming slowly across the plain toward him as an excuse for stopping again, and once more leaning upon his pick, waited and gazed.

The man came up with a lagging gait, and threw himself down on the edge of the hole. He was inexpensively attired in a pair of trousers made out of meal sacks, a shirt frayed and torn, and rather blacker than a tinker’s boots which no self-respecting tramp in England or America would have deigned to pick up, and a chimney-pot hat so battered and napless and brimless as to convey the idea that the man who would wear it could only have insanity as an excuse for doing so.

He was the doctor of Lorn Hope—there is always a doctor, a barrister, not unfrequently a baronet, and occasionally a clergyman in a diggers’ camp—and he, too, like Neville, was nameless, answering always to the abbreviated cognomen of “Doc.”

“Well, Young ’un,” he said, mopping his face, seamed and hollowed by a long and uninterrupted course of camp whisky. “Still hangin’ on?”

“Still hanging on, doc,” said Neville, with as cheerful a nod as could be

expected under the circumstances.

The doctor stared at the handsome, sun-browned face, with its short, crisp hair looking almost yellow against the darkened sky, and the clear blue eyes that met his squarely, and then let his own blinking, undecided ones drop into the pit.

“Seems as if there weren’t any more luck for this yere camp, don’t it?”

“Yes, it seems so,” assented Neville, listlessly, and he took out his pipe.

The doctor’s eyes glistened.

“Ain’t got any ’baca to spare, I suppose?” he remarked.

“Oh, yes,” said Neville, and he tossed his pouch.

The doctor caught it with eager, shaking hands, crammed a blackened old briar as full as it could hold, hid another pipeful in the palm of his hand with charming dexterity, and tossed the pouch—with just half a pipeful remaining—back to its owner.

“Partner’s cleared out, ain’t he?”

Neville nodded as he lit his pipe.

“Tired out at last, eh? Ah, well, I’m not surprised. Why on earth the rest of the boys don’t up sticks and cut it, I can’t make out. Appears to me Lorn Hope is clean played out. Why don’t you go, Young ’un?”

Neville Lynne leaned against the side of the pit and looked absently across the plain.

“I don’t know,” he replied at last. “I suppose I shall presently.”

“That’s what most of ’em says,” remarked the doctor, squatting on his haunches and puffing away with profound and sleepy satisfaction in the eleemosynary tobacco. “Seems to me there won’t be many of us left to go if we don’t look sharp about it. Two more waiting for the undertaker this morning—sunstroke; and there’s three lying low besides. Guess we’d better wait and bury ’em all together; it’s a saving of time, though time don’t appear to be money in this yere camp now.”

The doctor was not an American—no one knew exactly what country could rightly claim the honor of his birth—but he had been in the Californian goldfields, and had caught the tone of that country and half a dozen others as well.

“Sickness always follows other ill-luck,” said Neville.

“Not much sickness about you, Young ’un,” remarked the doctor, eyeing the slim but well-knit frame approvingly.

“No, I’m all right enough,” assented Neville, “I trouble the baker more

than your profession, doc.”

“Kind of a teetotaler, ain’t you?” said the doctor. “Don’t see you often up at the poison shop.”

Neville smiled absently.

“No, but I’m not a teetotaler,” he said.

The doctor smoked on in silence for a minute or so, then, without any movement, remarked:

“Well, I must be going. And so you mean to stick on here, then?”

“For the present, yes,” said Neville.

“It ain’t no good. There’s nothing at the bottom of that, Young ’un.”

“I don’t think there is,” assented Neville, looking down at the hole. “I shall stick to it for—say two days longer, and then——”

The doctor nodded.

“Well, here’s luck to you,” and he raised an imaginary glass, “I must be going.”

He half rose, then sank down again.

“There now! Hang it all, if I haven’t clean gone and forgotten what I’d come for,” and he smote his leg feebly, causing a great cloud of dust to rise. “You ain’t got a drop of brandy—real brandy, cognac, you know—not old Mac’s!—have you, Young ’un?”

Neville hesitated and glanced at him.

“Oh, it ain’t for me, don’t you mistake!” said the doctor as promptly as the heat and his jelly-fish condition would permit. “Mac’s poison is good enough for me; I want it for the stranger.”

“The what?” asked Neville.

“What, ain’t you heard?” rejoined the doctor, stretching himself.

“I’ve not been down to the camp for the last three days.”

“No? You ain’t very sociable, Young ’un. Well, last night, or yesterday evening, the Scuffler”—the gentleman so-called was one of the idle vagabonds of the camp, who was always ready for a fight or a drink, but showed a marked disinclination for anything in the shape of work—“the Scuffler comes down to my diggin’s and says he’d got company as wanted me, wanted me bad. I thought at first the Scuffler had been on one of his sprees, and was a bit wandering, but he took his oath that he hadn’t had more than half a pint of whisky the whole blessed day, and I went along with him. And it was gospel truth, for there was a new chum lying there a-handing in his checks as fast as he could. Scuffler said he’d found him and the girl——”

“What girl?” asked Neville.

“Didn’t I say as there was a child?” said the doctor. “Well, there was, a bit of a girl, like a young colt. And——Where am I now? Oh, ah, yes, the Scuffler found the old gent—for he’s a real gent, Young ’un, or I’ve forgotten in this God-forsaken hole how to tell a gentleman—lying in the road, and Scuffler, doing the good Samaritan, helped him into his shanty, and not having any oil or a penny to bless himself with, does the next best thing he could, and went for me.”

“Who is he?” asked Neville, not callously, but with that lack of keen interest which becomes natural to a man who has spent many months in a digger’s camp, especially when that camp happens to be one like the Lorn Hope, in which sickness and death are always present or very near.

The doctor carefully stopped his pipe, using his begrimed finger as the stopper, and shook his head.

“Not knowing, can’t say. Visitors to the Lorn Hope don’t, as a rule, bring letters of recommendation with ’em, or call around dropping visiting cards, and the stranger ain’t no exception. But he’s a gent, I’ll swear, and it occurred to me that you, being also a gent, might feel inclined to part with a drop of the real old stuff, that is, if you’d got it.”

“There is no resisting such a compliment as that, doc,” said Neville. “I think there is a little cognac left; if so, you are welcome to it.”

He put his strong hand on one side of the pit, and leaping lightly to the top, went toward the hut. The doctor followed him, and stood leaning against the apology for a door while Neville unlocked a strong box and, after some rummaging about, found a bottle containing a small quantity of brandy.

“There you are,” he said, tossing it to the doctor, who caught it as dexterously as he had caught the tobacco pouch. “Is there anything else I can do, doc?”

“No, not as I knows on, and I’m thinking no one else can do anything.” Then hiding the bottle under his tattered shirt he patted it meaningly.

“Don’t you be afraid; I’m square, Young ’un, and I’ve been telling you gospel truth. Every drop the stranger don’t drink I’ll hand back,” and confirming the assertion with an emphatic digger oath, he shuffled off.

It took him some time, notwithstanding the distance was so short, to reach the camp, and passing right through it he stopped at a shanty rather more ruinous and tumbledown than the rest, and after a knock by way of announcement, pushed aside the tattered canvas that served as a door and entered.

A man was lying upon three upturned empty boxes covered with sacks, and as the doctor had said, he was dying. The doctor had called him old, but though the man's hair was gray, almost white, and his face thin and wasted, he was this side of fifty. There was that unmistakable look of refinement about the face which denotes the gentleman; the hands clutching the ragged blanket were thin and small and well shaped. Beside him knelt a young girl, a thin slip of a child with great gray eyes and a wealth of dark hair that half swept over her pale little face. She was not crying, but there was a world of mute anguish in the big gray eyes as she turned them from the dying man's face to the whisky-sodden one of the doctor.

"Hullo, here we are again!" remarked that gentleman with a ghastly attempt at cheerfulness. "And how are we getting on now? Is there such a thing as a glass about? Ah, no, the Scuffler don't go in for such luxuries." He held the bottle to the man's lips, and a few drops passed them. "That's better. Now, missie, just raise your father—he is your father, or grandfather, which?"

"Father," said the girl.

As if her voice were more effectual than the spirit in rousing him, the dying man raised his head, and looked from one to the other. Then he made a motion which the doctor accepted as a sign of dismissal.

"Want to be alone a bit, eh?" he said. "All right. You give me a call if you want me. I'll go and take a hand at beggar-my-neighbor with the Scuffler. Just call out 'doc,' missie, and I'm with you in a crick."

The dying man waited until the canvas curtain had flapped to upon the doctor's back, then he signed to the girl to come nearer. She laid her head upon the pillow, a sack stuffed with grass, and wound her arm round his neck.

"I'm going to leave you, Syl," he said, feebly. "My poor child! My poor, poor child! It is hard! But God's will be done. Don't cry, Syl. It's I who should cry—for—for when I think of you all alone in the world, without even me to help you and protect you——" He drew a long sigh, and the tears filled his eyes. "But, listen, Syl. I am going to give you something. It is something very precious, and I—I want you to guard it as if it were your very life. Don't lose it, or let any one take it from you. Hide it next your heart and—and when you are eighteen open it, and——"

His voice failed him. He touched his breast and signed to her to take something from his pocket, and she put in her trembling hand and drew out a small flat package. It was covered with parchment stained and creased, but securely sealed at each end.

"Take it," he whispered. "Put it in the bosom of your dress, and—and keep it there. Some day——"

His voice faltered and broke, and his head fell back, but he seemed to indicate by a gesture that she was not to call out, and she remained silent, holding him against her sob-shaken little breast.

While she waited with her anguished eyes fixed upon him a man's head appeared in the space between two of the boards which formed the side of the hut.

It was a long, unpleasant-looking countenance, rendered all the more unprepossessing by a slight cast in the left eye. It was not only ugly, but a mean and villainous-looking face, and the expression of eagerness and craft in the eyes as they glared watchfully at the dying man and the girl would have provided a very nice model for a painter who wished to paint, say, Judas just before the Act of Treachery. And it would have been a very low type of Judas at that.

“Are—are you there still, Syl?” asked the dying man. “Have you hidden the packet? Remember! Hide it, keep it, guard it! It is the secret of your life, Syl—the secret of your life! How—how old are you, Syl?”

Her lips formed “Fifteen.”

“Three years, then!” he murmured. “Ah, my dear, my dear, if I could only stay with you! All alone in the world! All alone, and such a child! But God's will——” He stopped, his face working, his eyes fixed on her with pitying love and tenderness. “Good-by, Syl, good——”

The doctor came in with a hand of greasy cards in his claws at her cry, and the uncouth dust-stained figure of the Scuffler stood at the hut door.

“All over, doc?” he asked.

The doctor nodded with a gravity which would not have discredited his flourishing professional days.

“All over, Scuffler,” he said. “Fetch one of the women; the child's fainted.”

The Scuffler turned, and in turning nearly stumbled over a third person; it was the owner of the face which had been thrust between the boards.

“Hullo, Lavarick,” he said. “Is that you? Out o' the way.”

“What's on, Scuffler?” asked the individual addressed. “I've only just come up. Anybody bad?”

“Yes, bad and worse!” retorted the Scuffler, with a chuckle of surprise at his own wit.

“Dear me,” said Lavarick. “I'll go in and see if I can be of any assistance.” And softly rubbing his hands together, he entered the hut.

CHAPTER II.

Two days passed—four days—and Neville Lynne was still at his claim. He had not been down to the camp, no one had come up to him since the doctor had paid him the visit. He had heard nothing of the death and burial of the man, the stranger; and, solitary and alone but for the old woman, Mrs. Meth, he toiled on at his barren claim. Sometimes when the heat and the flies and the dust seemed worse than usual, he pitched the pick and the spade as far as he could, and flung himself on his back and lay with his hands over his eyes not asleep, but thinking.

Thinking, no doubt, of his home far away in England; of the relatives and friends he might never see again; of the dear old home in the soft luscious green fields in Devonshire, he used to think it rather a sloppy place, and had been wont to declare that it always rained there. What would he give for a Devonshire downpour now! A young man, a gentleman, dressed in rags, who has had a crust of dry—very dry—bread for breakfast, and is rather uncertain as to whether it will run to quite such an extensive feed for dinner—a young man so utterly and completely down on his luck as Neville Lynne, has plenty to think of.

The old hag came up shuffling—nearly everybody shuffled in Lorn Camp, it was found to be less exhausting than walking in the proper Christian manner—and shook an empty meal bag at him.

“This yere bag’s empty, Young ’un,” she said, not complainingly, but as if she were stating a matter of fact.

“So it is; so am I; so are you,” said Neville quietly; “and so is the claim!”

But he got up and fetched his pick and spade, and dropped into the hole again.

This was soon after noon on the fourth day after the doctor’s visit. He had grown to hate the sight of the hole, the tools, the very sand and pebbles which he painfully cast up to the surface, and after digging for an hour he looked up and laughed.

“Yes,” he said. “It’s played out, as the doc said, and I’m off. But where?” He looked absently round the plain. “To some other camp, I suppose. No use going back to England without money; better stop here where it isn’t wicked to wear old clothes and go barefoot. Poverty’s a crime in England, and I should be punished. Besides,” he wiped the sweat from his brow and his handsome face clouded, “I couldn’t face them; couldn’t face Jordan’s sneer. No! not England!”

Then he sighed. The old woman came down to the hole again, and shook the meal bag.

“This yere’s as empty as a drum!” she croaked.

Neville got out of the pit slowly, and walked to the hut, unlocked the box, and took out a silver pencil case, value probably two and ninepence.

“My last piece of plate, Meth,” he said with a short laugh. “Take it down to the camp and swop it for meal. Somebody who can’t write may take a fancy to it.”

The old woman clutched at it with her grimy claw—every hand in Lorn Hope was more or less grimy; generally more—and shuffled off toward the camp.

Neville went slowly back to his claim and took up the pick.

“Yes,” he said, “the doc was right; Lorn Hope is played out. I ought to have cut it with my partner. Now, look here, I’ll take just six strokes, and then—good-by and be blowed to you!”

He raised the pick above his head, and struck to the right of him. Once, twice, thrice, four, five times. A cloud of red dust, a heap of stones—as usual. He held the pick poised, a grim smile on his sun-browed lips.

“The sixth and very last, so help me Heaven!”

Down came the pick, up went the dust, down rattled the stones. He scarcely looked at the heap, but let the pick fall, and turned to leap from the hole. As he did so the corner of his eye, the corner only, caught the sweet, the precious, the dear, dull glitter, which is the grandest light earth holds for a digger’s eyes. He swung round, dropped on his knees, and clawing at the heap with his hands dragged out—a nugget.

The sudden turn of the wheel of fortune stunned him for a moment. It was so unexpected, so unlooked for, that he could not believe in it.

He took it up and weighed it in both hands. In nine months you learn something of the value of a nugget. Neville thought there must be over a thousand pounds in the one he held in his hot, trembling hands.

He turned it over as a miser turns over his title deeds, a bibliomaniac his rare first edition, a numismatist his precious coin; he held it close to his eyes, stroked it, even smelled it.

Over a thousand pounds! He sank down in the pit, leaning against the side, and, still with his eyes fixed on it, thought of what he would do with it.

It was not a fortune. By no means. But a thousand pounds, remember, is a large sum to fall into the hands of a youngster of nineteen, especially when a

few minutes before his only valuable was a silver pencil case—which he had parted with for meal!

With a thousand pounds he could go back to England, if not rich, as riches are counted, yet, at any rate, not a beggar. Jordan—no one—would laugh or sneer at him. A thousand pounds! He could buy land, a small farm in Devonshire, and rear cattle. He could——At any rate, he could get out of this beastly, sun-smitten, plague-stricken, blackguard-haunted Lorn Hope!

The thought recalled him to himself, sent the fire through his veins, endued him with energy, strength, hope, spirit.

He leaped—not climbed—out of the pit with the precious nugget hidden under his tattered shirt, and ran toward the hut, and began turning out the contents of his box, flinging the things to right and left in a senseless kind of fashion. What he was trying to do was to look out some more decent apparel.

The old woman darkened the doorway.

“This yere’s all I can get,” she croaked, holding up the bag, in the bottom of which was some meal. “ ’Tain’t much, ’tain’t half enough, but there don’t seem no run on pencil cases.”

Neville turned his glowing face up to her wrinkled, weasened one.

“All right, Meth!” he said, with a laugh in his voice. “It’s all right! I’ve struck it!” And he held up the nugget. “Hush!” for the old woman had uttered a suppressed screech. “Struck it just now, five minutes, half an hour——” He didn’t know how long he had been sitting in the pit staring at the nugget. “Just after you had gone. Grand, ain’t it!”

“Lord’s sakes!” mumbled the old woman. “To think of it! And I’d ’er bet my bottom dollar that there warn’t a spark of yellow in the whole claim.”

“That’s just it! That’s just the way of it,” said Neville, rapidly. “It always comes when you don’t expect it, when you’re not looking for it. That’s the charm of this confounded gold digging business. But it’s come; that’s the main thing.”

“Let’s wet it!” said Mrs. Meth.

Neville raked inside the box.

“Sorry. Gave the doc the last drop of liquor I had. Never mind, Meth. You shall have enough to swim in to-morrow. Let me see. This is the sixteenth, isn’t it? Yes. The day the bank agent comes down. I’ll take it down to the camp and swap it for notes, and then——”

He drew a long breath.

“And then you’re off,” said Mrs. Meth, stirring up the fire with one hand and turning out the meal on to a board with the other.

"Then I'm off, as you say," he assented. "No more Lorn Hope for me, thank you."

"There might be more where that came from," she croaked, pointing a skinny finger at the yellow nugget lying beside him, within reach of his hand.

He shook his head.

"No; it's just a pocket, Meth. I know the look of it. And if there were— Well, I don't think it would keep me! I'm sick of it—just sick of it. I want to go back. I'm homesick—do you understand, Meth?"

Old Meth, rapidly making the meal into cakes, nodded.

"That's it," he said. "Home-sick. Got the English fever on me, Meth. You don't know what that means. Lucky for you, perhaps. What's the time?" He sprang up and screening his eyes with his hand, looked at the sinking sun. "The bank agent will be down at the camp, I should think. I'm off."

"You'd best stop and get a cup of tea and some 'ut to eat," said the old woman. "You go rushing down there with that there nugget on an empty stomach, and they'll get the best of you, Young 'un."

He laughed, and pushed the short curly hair from his forehead.

"You speak the words of wisdom and of truth, old Meth," he said. "I'll stay for tea. And, look here, I mean the square thing by you. You've stood by me through a long run of bad luck."

"That's nothing," she said, lifting the boiling kettle from the fire.

"But it is, and I'll stand by you, Meth. You shall have—let me see—you shall have fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds!"

She opened her lips and showed her toothless gums.

"Yes!" he said. "And if my partner were here he should have half of it—the nugget, I mean. But he chucked it up."

"All the better for you," said the old woman with a grin.

Neville nodded.

"Yes, and yet I wish he'd hung on. It's strange that I should have stayed."

"You believed in your luck, Young 'un," she croaked. "Nothing like sticking to your luck. Here's your tea; and here's a cake."

He drank the awful mixture of currant bush and iron filings and ate some of the hot meal cake. Your gold digger knows not indigestion.

"Fifty pounds," he said as he set the tin mug down on the top of the box. "That will give you a fresh start, eh, Meth?"

She laughed and crooned.

He washed himself, thrust on a light peajacket, and with the precious nugget hidden beneath it, left the hut.

A new moon was rising placidly above the mountain range, its faintly-defined crescent shining feebly against the light from the west in which the sun had sunk surrounded by golden fire.

Neville didn't stop to admire or even notice the moon; but with the nugget pressed close to his heart, walked rapidly toward the camp.

He passed his claim, glancing at it as a man glances at a much-loved mistress, picked his way past many a similar hole, threaded the tents and shanties which formed the outposts of the camp, and presently neared the centre—Sandy Macgregor's grog tent.

It was a larger tent than the rest, and Neville as he approached it saw the lights of the candles and benzoline lamps shining through it. He also heard the buzz and murmur of voices. They floated through the evening air, still thick and heavy with the remnant of the day's heat.

He trod lightly, springily, drawing strength and energy from the nugget pressed against his breast. He knew that the bank agent, if he had arrived, would be found here, and in imagination he already held and counted the precious notes which he would receive in exchange for his nugget.

He paused as he reached the tent and drawing the lump of virgin gold from its hiding place, to take a last look at it! A thousand pounds! Away flew his thoughts. England: dear, sweet, green, smiling England; a farm, lowing cattle, green fields! Home! Oh! you discontented ones who dwell at home in the dear old land, and grumble at the weather and the this, that and the other, if you only knew how the wanderer longs for home, home!

The flap of the tent door was thrown back; he drew near and looked in.

Sandy was standing at the bar, behind a counter of rough deal. The place was full, but the men were not sitting and sprawling around, playing cards or quarreling, but standing in a crowd, with all their faces turned toward the end of the tent.

Something unusual and out of the ordinary was going on.

Neville drew nearer and looked farther in.

He saw, at the end of the big tent a man standing on an upturned barrel. He was the spokesman of Lorn Hope, a ne'er-do-well with the gift of the gab, a man named Lockit, and was evidently holding forth.

He stood, ragged and with unkempt hair and long neglected beard, a tin can in one hand, the other held up to invoke silence.

Neville, curious but impatient, listened.

And this is what he heard:

“Now, pards,” the orator was saying, “this yere’s the case in a nutshell: A stranger comes to this yere camp, comes here from no one knows where or how, sick and sorry, and this yere stranger, after receivin’ every attention from our mutual friend the doc——”

“Three cheers for the doc!” cried a voice thick with Macgregor’s whisky; followed by, “Shut up! Turn it off!”

“After receivin’ every attention from the doc,” continued the orator, “this yere stranger hands in his checks. It ain’t an unusual perceedin’ in Lorn Hope by no means——”

“A custom more honored in the breach than the observance,” called out the doctor. “That’s Shakespeare, boys.”

“Right you are, doc, and you ought to know,” was the shouted response.

“Order!” said the speaker on the barrel. “This yere stranger cuts his cable, and upon my mortal soul, it’s the best thing he could do.”

“Hear, hear!”

“There’s no luck in Lorn Hope for the residents, leave alone a stranger, boys.”

“Hear, hear!” with increased emphasis.

“The stranger goes,” continued the orator, “but he leaves something more than his blessing behind. Boys, he leaves a child, a girl. And now, gentlemen, the question for this free and independent assemblage of Lorn Hope citizens is to decide what shall be done with that child.”

“Hear, hear! That’s the question,” hiccupped a miner close to the entrance, against which Neville stood and watched and listened.

“Nothing’s known o’ this yere stranger,” resumed Lockit. “He don’t leave no will and he don’t express no wish, and it’s left to the—the”——he sought for a big and appropriate word, and found it at last——“for the collective wisdom of Lorn Hope to decide. Here’s the doc. He was with the stranger in his last moments, and he’s offered to take the child; but”——the speaker paused——“it ’pears to me that the doc has as much as he can do to look after himself.”

“Hear, hear, hear!” from all parts of the audience.

“Just so. Well, this yere child is a kid at present, but she’ll grow up to be useful presently, and if any one wants a promising young ’un, as can be taught to cook and look after things, now’s his chance.”

A hubbub of voices arose, almost drowning the speaker’s last words, and

in the midst of the noise Neville made his entrance without attracting any attention.

He looked round the tent. It was filled with the Lorn Hope population—man, boy, woman. His bright young eye fell ultimately upon a group standing just beneath the orator.

There were three or four women, and in their midst a young girl with gray eyes and dark hair. She looked half dazed with fear, and clung to one of the women with one hand, while the other held back the thick wealth of hair from her puzzled and frightened eyes.

The face, the eyes, smote Neville like a blow.

He saw the bank agent sitting on a plank and watching the proceedings with a smile of indolent amusement, but even as he looked at the agent he forgot him; the girl's pale frightened face fascinated, absorbed him.

"Here's this young girl," resumed the orator, "agoing beggin', as you may say. Now, who——"

"I'll take her! I'll take her!" rose from different parts of the crowd.

"Too many of you!" retorted the speaker, tossing off a draught of Macgregor's whisky and chucking the empty tin to the proprietor of the saloon. "One at a time. You can't all of you have the young orphan. What's to be done!"

"Put her up for sale," cried a voice. "The highest bidder has her."

The orator paused a moment, and seemed to consider the proposal, then he nodded.

"Right you are," he said; "that's fair and square. Here's a useful lot—a young girl that'll learn to wash and cook before you can say Jack Robinson; a sunbeam for any man's home, let him be whomsoever he may. Who bids for the orphan?"

The girl looked round at the hot sunburned faces, and, her breath coming fast and thick, clung still tighter to the woman nearest to her, and the woman tried to soothe her.

The bank agent, smoking a big cigar, looked on with a smile. He was accustomed to the rough humor of a digger's camp, but it had been reserved for Lorn Hope to afford a new excitement. The scene reminded him of the "good" old slave times in the States.

"Now, then!" shouted the auctioneer. "Here's the rules and regulations. The orphan to be disposed of to the highest bidder."

"What are you going to do with the money?" demanded a voice.

Lockit considered a moment.

“We’ll hand it to the doctor as the beginning of a fund for the Great Lorn Hope Hospital.”

“A jail ’ud be more useful,” commented some one, sarcastically.

“Or a cemetery and lunatic asylum combined,” yelled another.

“As you please, pards,” said Lockit. “We can decide what we’ll do with the money after we’ve got it. Jail, cemetery, hospital——”

“Or drinks round,” put in a voice.

“Whatever you like. Now, then, the first bid. Mind, the money’s no use without a comfortable home and a good character; understand that. This yere orphan is the ward of Lorn Hope Camp. Now, then, first bid!”

The men looked round at each other and laughed half shyly, no one liking to make the first offer.

“What! I’m to start the running, eh?” said the auctioneer. “All right.” He took out some buttons and odds and ends from his pocket, and pretended to count over a large quantity of coin. “Well, to start you, here’s a shilling.”

Somebody half in jest shouted:

“One and sixpence.”

The ball was started and ran merrily. By sixpences and shillings and an occasional half-crown the bidding was run up to three pounds. Three men only were bidding, and presently with a laugh one dropped out, leaving the contest to the two.

Just as Lockit was, in burlesque imitation of an auctioneer, exhorting these two, Neville felt some one push past him, and saw that it was Lavarick.

He had come into the tent in his usual stealthy fashion, and stood, his eyes fixed—the left, with the cast, on the girl, the other on the men.

Neville disliked the man, suspected him of being the worst scoundrel in the camp, and instinctively put his hand over that part of his coat which covered his nugget.

Lavarick was not a digger, had never had a claim or taken a pick in hand, and seeing that he did no work of any kind, nor kept a store, and that he had never been caught actually stealing, some slight curiosity was felt by the camp as to how he lived. But it was only slight. Persons living in glass houses are not only careful not to throw stones, but shut their eyes when they pass one. Some said that Lavarick did a little gold dealing now and then, and that he made a little with the cards. He wore what had once been a suit of black broadcloth, and the wit of the camp declared that Lavarick had “done” six

months in England by making off with the money he was collecting at the door of a dissenting chapel. He looked something like a broken clerk, and had been not unfrequently called the Undertaker. He edged and glided among the crowd until he had reached the end of the table, and with his left eye still on the girl, listened to Lockit and the two men with an intent expression of suppressed eagerness and excitement, and when Lockit shouted: "Three pounds nine—going, going! Ned, you've got a handy parlor maid in the future, cheap as dirt. Going, going!" Lavarick held up a dirty paw, and with a sickly smile of assumed indifference, said:

"Three pounds ten!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Lockit, "here's another. Bravo, Undertaker! But ain't you rather premature? It's a live orphan we're disposing of."

The roar that followed drowned a faint cry of terror that escaped the girl's quivering lips; but Neville heard it, and his face grew pale and his eyes flashed.

He pushed aside the men in front of him and stepped forward.

"Four pounds!" he said, quietly, but his voice was clear and distinct enough, though low, to be heard by all; and there was a ring in it that caused the laughter to stop suddenly and drew every eye upon him.

The child, after that one glance at Lavarick, had turned and hidden her face against the breast of the woman to whom she was clinging; but she moved her head and looked over her shoulder at Neville, and he caught the look of anguished entreaty in the big gray eyes.

"And here's another!" cried Lockit. "And the Young 'un, too! Cupid versus the Undertaker and Long Ned! And four pounds! Four pounds! No more shillings, gentlemen. We'll have pounds now. I see that hospital, doc, in my mind's eye, I do."

Lavarick looked at Neville with an ugly sneer. He knew that the lad had had a run of bad luck, that his partner had left the claim in disgust, and he smiled contemptuously.

"Well, five pounds," he said.

"Six."

Seven, eight, ten, twenty, forty. An intense silence prevailed as the bidding rose. The two men stood, divided by the rickety table, looking at each other; Lavarick with the same sickly smile on his face, and the suppressed eagerness about his ill-shaped mouth, Neville with his lips set square and his blue eyes stern and determined.

The burlesque had died out of Lockit's manner, and a grim seriousness had taken its place. Every man in the crowd recognized that a change had come

over the spirit of the dream, and that what had begun as a piece of fun had developed into terrible earnest.

“One hundred!” said Lavarick.

The crowd exchanged glances of amazement, and waited breathlessly.

“Has he got the money? And where did he get it?” ran round.

“One hundred and fifty!” said Neville.

“He’s got the money, or he wouldn’t bid. He’s straight enough, the Young ’un is; but where did he get it?”

“Two hundred!” dropped from Lavarick’s lips.

Quick as thought, Neville retorted with:

“Two hundred and fifty.”

Lavarick raised his eyes and looked at Neville with a cunning suspicion.

“Is it a game of bluff?” he said. “Is the Young ’un just a-drawing me out for the fun of the thing?”

An angry murmur rose.

“I should recommend any gentleman inclined to play that game to drop it,” remarked Lockit grimly. “We are serious now. This is business; eh, boys?”

A shout of assent arose.

“Oh, I’m right,” said Lavarick. “I’ve got what I bid. I’m not bluffing, I’m not.”

Neville did not condescend to assert his solvency.

“Is the bid against me?” he asked, looking up at the auctioneer. “If not, I claim——”

“Three hundred!” broke in Lavarick.

“Four!” was the sharp response from Neville.

The crowd drew a long breath.

“We shall want that lunatic asylum, anyhow,” remarked the wit dryly, but no one laughed at the sally.

“Five!” snarled Lavarick.

Neville bid six.

The crowd pressed close up to the two men, the excitement became feverish.

Lavarick, his face pale and distorted, paused a moment, then said “Seven.”

A roar went up, but as it died away Neville’s voice was heard with the “Eight.”

He, too, was pale. He had weighed his nugget. There was not a thousand pounds in it; say nine hundred and sixty, after deducting the agent's charges. It was just possible that Lavarick possessed more—he was a “dark horse”—and would overbid him. He could see the girl's eyes fixed on him as if she had not power to withdraw them, and they seemed to be burning his heart, and sending fire instead of blood through his veins. He would save her, if it cost him every ounce, every pennyweight, of his precious nugget.

Lavarick stood, his hands writhing at his sides, his eyes looking first at Neville and then at the child.

“Eight hundred and fifty!” dropped slowly from his lips.

The crowd waited; the auctioneer stood with upheld hand.

“Going at eight hundred and fifty,” he said, grimly. “Going, going!”

“Nine hundred!” said Neville.

A shout arose.

Lockit commanded silence. A dense stillness fell instantly, and all eyes were fixed on Lavarick.

He turned red, then white; his lips opened as if he were about to speak, then with a sinister smile, he turned aside.

“Going! gone!” cried Lockit.

The tent shook with the roar that rose in a deafening volley, and rose again as Neville grimly unbuttoned his coat and dropped the nugget on the table.

The crowd pressed forward with a renewed shout—this time of amazement and delight in the dramatic finale.

“Bravo, Young 'un! Bravo!” they yelled, and a dozen grimy hands were thrust forward toward him.

“Tell us, Young 'un, is it your pile, or is there more behind?” “When did you get it?” “What's its weight?”

These and a score of similar questions were yelled at him.

Neville held up his hand for silence.

“There's no more. It's my pile,” he said as quietly as usual. “There's nearly a thousand pounds there.”

He laid one hand on the nugget and beckoned to the bank agent with the other.

“I leave it in your charge, Mr. Smith,” he said. “Pay for my bid and hand me the rest to-morrow.”

The agent nodded.

The crowd closed round the nugget, staring at it.

Neville turned to the group of women, and held out his hand to the child.

“Will you come with me?” he said.

The great eyes stared at him for a moment vacantly, and with no sign of sense or comprehension, then something in his pitying blue eyes seemed to awaken the intelligence which the prolonged terror had numbed and almost slain, and she leaned toward him.

He took her hand. It was cold as ice, and quivering like a leaf in the wind, but she staggered, and he took her up in his arms bodily and strode toward the opening of the tent.

As he did so Lavarick glided out sideways with a hand thrust in his breast pocket.

Neville slung the child quickly but gently over his left shoulder leaving his right hand free, and quietly drew out his revolver.

“Go back and stop there,” he said.

Lavarick, with an affectation of surprise, drew out the remnant of a pocket handkerchief, as if he had only intended blowing his nose, but he shrank back, and Neville passed him, and with the child still over his shoulder and the revolver still in his hand, went out into the open air.

CHAPTER III.

The night air cooled Neville Lynne's excitement somewhat, and as he made his way over the rough, uneven ground toward his hut, walking as quickly as he could, he began to realize what he had done. He had spent his whole fortune, barring a few pounds, in buying the young girl lying across his shoulder, and he asked himself the question which many a man has asked upon finding himself the purchaser of some “lot” at a sale, “What on earth shall I do with it?”

Nine hundred pounds! His all! He laughed grimly, and yet if it had to be done again he would have done it. Standing opposite that cadaverous, evil-looking face of Lavarick's, with the child's wonderful gray eyes burning their way into his own heart, he had felt that he would have bid the clothes off his back before Lavarick should have had her.

She lay quite motionless and inert against his heart, and Neville deemed it best to say nothing to her. He could feel her heart beating against his, and her

breath coming still in frightened little pants against his neck, and once when a digger stumbled past them, her hands clutched Neville's shirt spasmodically.

The inspired idiot who invented the copybook headings says that the Truly Courageous are always Humane, and young Neville Lynne, with the pluck of a bulldog, possessed the tender heart of a woman.

They reached the hut, and at the sound of his footsteps Mrs. Meth appeared at the doorway, holding the tallow candle above her head and peering at them.

"Is that you, Young 'un? Lawk's sakes alive, what yer got there? A sack o' meal?" Then, as she saw what it was, she uttered a screech and nearly dropped the candle. "Why, it's a girl! Is she dead?"

"No, no!" said Neville, cheerfully. "She's worth half a dozen dead ones, aren't you, little one? She's only tired and frightened. Now, Meth, pull yourself together," he went on, as he carried the girl into the hut, "and let us have some supper."

"But where's that yere nugget?" demanded Meth, her eyes still on the child.

"That's all right, Meth," he replied, as cheerfully as before. "You'll get your share to-morrow. Now, then, little one," and he attempted to loosen the hands from his neck, but she clung close with a little shiver, and he drew a box forward with his feet and sat down, saying: "All right. We'll wait a bit. Plenty of time. Now, Meth, hurry up with that cake and some milk—or tea, or whatever you've got."

The old woman saw that he didn't want to be questioned, and began to get some tea.

Neville sat patiently, now and again patting the thin little arm, or stroking the thick, dark hair; then when the tea was ready he spoke to her.

"How are we now, eh, little one? Not frightened still, eh? You're all safe now, you know. Come! Drink a little tea and you'll feel better and more plucky. You're all safe now, you know. You're—you're at home!"

The girl seemed to listen to the musical voice with all her heart as well as her ears, then raised her head, glanced at him with her solemn eyes, and slid down to the floor.

"I do not want any tea, thank you," she said in a low voice, which, however, startled Neville as much as if it had been a trumpet tone. It was the voice, not of a digger's child, but of a little lady.

He held her protectingly, encouragingly for a moment, as she crouched beside him and leaned against him.

"No?" he said. "But you'll take some to please me, won't you—by the

way, what is your name? Never mind, I won't bother you with questions to-night," he added considerately.

She raised the wonderful gray eyes and looked at him.

"My name is Sylvia—Sylvia Bond," she said.

Neville nodded with his pleasant smile.

"That's awfully pretty," he said. "Well, Sylvia, you're not frightened now?"

"No, not now," she replied, glancing round the dimly-lit hut and drawing a long breath, "not now."

"That's all right," he said, "and you'll have some tea and get a good night's rest, won't you? A good long sleep is what you want, Sylvia."

She sank down in front of the fire, her eyes fixed on the blaze, her small hand loosely clasped in the lap of her tattered frock, and Neville got up, placed the box so that she could lean against it, and signed to Meth to give her some food, putting his finger on his lips to indicate that she was not to bother her with questions. Then he turned to leave them alone, but at the sound of his movements the girl turned quickly and half rose.

He went back and laid his hand on her head.

"All right, Sylvia," he said, reassuringly. "I am only going outside to smoke a pipe. When you have had your tea you tumble into bed. Don't be afraid. I shall be just outside, you know."

She sank back, but as she did so she put up her hand to his and drew it down to her lips.

Neville blushed like a girl, and got outside and lit his pipe.

He walked up and down for the best part of an hour, thinking over and realizing—for at the first blush the whole thing seemed like a ridiculous dream—what he had done; then he went into the hut, knocking first.

Mrs. Meth was sitting before the fire. She jerked her head toward the inner compartment of the hut, which formed her sleeping-room.

"Asleep?" said Neville.

"Like a blessed top," replied Mrs. Meth. "Be it true that she tells me, that you giv' that yere nugget for her, Young 'un?"

Neville nodded.

"Yes, but we won't say any more about that, Meth. Your money's all right, you know."

"Not say—! If I was to die for it I'd be bound to say you was a darned young fool, Young 'un," she croaked.

“Yes, I know,” he assented, cheerfully. “Did she say anything else? By the way, I told you not to worry her, you old idiot!”

“No more I did! She let out about the nugget of her own accord. She’s English, ain’t she, and a swell? Leastways, I judge so by her talk. She slings it jest like yourself, Young ’un, and you’re a swell, you are, you know.”

“Yes, she’s English, I think,” said Neville, ignoring the reference to himself.

“And what are you going to do with her? Keep her? Why, there ain’t enough for we two! Unless that yere claim turns out a payin’ one.”

“Never mind,” said Neville. “We shall manage, I dare say. Is she comfortable? Poor little thing!” he added, more to himself than to Meth. “I wonder who she is, and how she came here?”

“Don’t appear as if she knows,” said Meth. “Says her father wasn’t a digger; seems as if they was just on the hunt after anything that turned up.” After a pause, and in a husky, cautious voice: “She’ve got something strung round her neck, a small parcel. Seems as if she set mighty store by it, too. Wouldn’t let me so much as touch it. Reckon it’s valuable, eh, Young ’un?”

Neville looked up.

“Leave it alone, Meth, whatever it is,” he said, sternly. “And, as I told you before, don’t ask her any questions.”

“Oh, all right,” assented the old woman, sullenly.

Neville got up after another pause, and taking the candle entered the inner room and looked at the child. She was sleeping the sleep of exhaustion, but even in her death-like sleep it seemed as if she were conscious of the packet lying on her bosom, for her hands were clasped over it as if to protect and shield it.

Neville looked down at her, all the tenderness and pity in his heart showing in his blue eyes.

“She’s right down pretty, ain’t she?” whispered old Meth in his ear. “Never see such ’air in all my born days. Like a—a waterfall, ain’t it? And soft as silk. And them black lashes! Don’t often see them kind o’ brows with that colored eyes. Reckon she’s a born lady, too. But born ladies eat as much as other folks, Young ’un, and——”

He motioned her to silence, and closing the door, buttoned up his peajacket.

“I’m going to sleep outside to-night, Meth,” he said.

He stretched himself on the threshold, his revolver in his hand, but it was dawn before he fell asleep. His brain was too full of his new purchase.

Did he dream and sigh over the loss of that little farm in green and smiling England, the farm he had “swapped” for the orphan of Lorn Hope?

CHAPTER IV.

Neville rose the next morning, had a wash in the river, and resumed work in the hole which yesterday he had said “Good-by” to as he thought forever.

When he went in to see if any breakfast happened to be about he found Sylvia making the coffee, and old mother Meth “tidying up,” but looking over her shoulder now and again at the slim, girlish figure in a kind of wonderment.

Sylvia glanced round at him with her large expressive eyes as he entered, but she said nothing, and proceeded to lay the breakfast of cold pork, meal cakes and coffee on the table of rough deals supported by trestles.

Neville saw that she had been crying, but she had dried her eyes, and was now simply gravely shy.

“Why, you’re quite a little housekeeper, Sylvia,” he said. “What splendid coffee!”

His sally was not very successful. She looked at him intently, her lips moved as if she were about to respond, but no sound came, and he ate his breakfast and got back to his claim as quickly as possible.

After he had been at work half an hour he saw Lockit approaching.

The two men exchanged nods.

“Get that nugget out o’ this, Young ’un?” said Lockit.

“Yes,” replied Neville, cleaning his spade.

“A rare slice of luck, Young ’un! And you went and planked it down for that girl! Well, I admire your pluck, I do. But, pard, that fellow Lavarick has been at me this morning—you know what we’re going to do with the money—the nine hundred?” he broke off.

Neville shook his head.

“No. It doesn’t matter to me.”

“Well, we’ve reckoned to divide it square and fair, share and share alike all round.”

“All right,” said Neville, indifferently.

“But, Young ’un, Lavarick has made the boys an offer.”

Neville leaned on his pick, and looked up at the man attentively.

“He’s offered a thou—goodness only knows where the nigger got the money!—but he’s offered it for the girl. Seems to take an interest in her, somehow. Says if you’ll take his money he’ll send her to England to school, and—and——Dashed if I ain’t forgot the word. Oh, adopt; adopt her, that’s it. What do you say? Strikes me you’d better jump at it. Reckon you were just playin’ it off high with that nugget last night and ’ud be glad to see it back; eh, Young ’un? Better take the Undertaker’s offer.”

Neville’s face reddened—that is to say, his tan grew duskiest and his blue eyes darker.

“Give my compliments to Mr. Lavarick,” he said, “and tell him I decline his offer. I bought the girl, and she’s mine, and—wait a minute, Lockit,” for with a shrug of the shoulders the man was departing, “you can add that I’m practicing revolver shooting, just for amusement and to pass the time, and that I consider it would be dangerous for any one to be loitering about the hut, especially after dark. Lavarick will understand.”

“He’d be no end of a fool if he didn’t, Young ’un,” retorted Lockit, with a grin. “I’ll tell him. And I’ll give the bank agent your share of your own nugget. Here’s luck to you, Young ’un!” and he sauntered away.

As he did so Neville chanced to glance toward the hut. Sylvia was standing in the doorway, and must have heard every word.

When he came in to dinner he found her alone, Mrs. Meth having gone to the camp, ostensibly for supplies, but really to hear full particulars of last evening’s proceedings.

The girl sat with her head resting on her small hands. They were clean, though brown as berries, and she sat thus and watched him while he ate in silence for a time. Then she said suddenly, and in the clear musical voice which had startled Neville the night before:

“Why didn’t you give me up to that man?”

Neville looked up, but his eyes fell before her intent gray ones and he colored.

“Why? Do you think I’m such a changeable person, Sylvia? You don’t want to go, do you?”

He was sorry that he had asked the question almost before he had uttered it, for her face grew pale to whiteness and the gray eyes distended.

“There, there,” he said, soothingly; “don’t you be afraid. I’ve got you, and I mean to keep you. Aren’t you going to eat some dinner?”

She shook her head.

“Not yet,” she said, gravely. “I can’t eat—yet; I will presently, in a little

while.” She was silent for a moment or two, still looking at him from between her arms, then she said: “Was that true that you said last night? Was it all the money you had—the money you bought me with?”

Neville winced.

“Look here, little one,” he replied; “don’t let us say any more about it, and don’t you think any more about it. Why”—cheerfully, and as if he had hit upon a bright idea—“you’d have given as much for me, wouldn’t you?” and he laughed.

She regarded him in silence for a moment, then she drew a long breath.

“Yes!” she said, and got up as she spoke and went to the fire, standing with her back to him.

Neville said nothing more, but went back to his pit, filled up the rest of the dinner hour with his pipe, and then fell to work again.

At tea time Sylvia came to the pit with a can of tea and some cakes.

She set them down and stood beside them, looking down at him.

He nodded cheerfully, wiped his face and took up the can.

She sat down presently and watched him in profound silence for a time, then she said:

“What is your name?”

Now, Neville had not uttered his name since he had entered the camp, and he hesitated now.

“What would you say to Jack?” he asked, with a smile.

“Jack? Yes, I like it,” she replied, after consideration.

“All right,” he said; “call me Jack. What’s in a name?”

“A rose by any other name would smell as sweet!” she finished, gravely.

Neville looked up.

“Hallo! That’s Shakespeare, little one!”

She nodded.

“My word!” he said; “you’re young to spout Shakespeare! Who taught you _____”

He stopped, but too late.

Her lips quivered and her eyes filled, but she kept back the tears bravely as she answered:

“My father. He taught me a great deal. He——” She dashed the tears from her eyes. “Shall I get you some more tea?”

“No, no,” he said, hastily.

In her courage and self-restraint the child seemed years beyond her age, and man-like, boy-like, he felt shy and awkward. It was as if he had captured—nay, bought—a beautiful bird, and did not know what to make of it, or how to treat it, lest he should ruffle its feathers, or fright or hurt it.

“No, no,” he said; “if I want any more I’ll get it. It’s too hot for you to run about. Look here, Sylvia, you’re not to trouble yourself, you know. Old Mother Meth will see to all that’s wanted.”

She shook her head.

“And when you have given so much for me! You bought me. I belong to you; I must do all I can.”

Neville tilted his cap on to the back of his head, and hoisted himself on to the edge of the pit beside her.

“Put all that nonsense out of your head, little one,” he said. “If you want to do anything, why”—another brilliant idea visited him—“why, be my sister! I’ve never had a sister, and always longed for one, and—why, there you are, you know,” and he nodded at her.

“Your sister!” She thought it over for a moment, her solemn eyes resting on his handsome face. “Very well.”

“That’s all right,” he said, with immense satisfaction. “I’m brother Jack, eh? and you’re sister Syl? Do you object to Syl?”

“You can call me what you like. You bought—I mean yes, Syl will do. I’d like you to call me it. Father always called me——” She stopped again and turned her head away, and he saw the muscles of her delicate neck working as she battled with her tears. “Yes, call me Syl, and—Jack”—with a momentary hesitation—“do you work all day like this?”

“I do, indeed, and darned monotonous I find it. That is, I did find it; but it won’t seem so bad now I’ve got a sister to bring me my tea and talk to me.”

“And haven’t you any brothers?” she asked, after a pause, during which she had not for a second removed her eyes from his face.

Neville’s face darkened.

“I’ve got one,” he replied.

“And is he a digger?” she asked.

Neville kicked the heap of stones at the bottom of the pit.

“No, Syl. He’s a gentleman, in London.”

She turned this over in her mind for a moment or two, then she asked:

“And why aren’t you a gentleman in London, Jack?”

He colored and laughed.

“Oh, why—well, because I’m the second son. I’m afraid you won’t understand, Syl. You see, the first son has all the tin, and the other poor devils have to turn out and earn their grub. That’s my case.”

“Then you’re here at the diggings because you were poor?”

“For that and several other reasons, yes.”

“And yet you gave—how much was it?—nine hundred pounds for me last night!” she said, in a low, far-away voice, but with her gray eyes fixed on his face.

“We’ve agreed we’d cut that topic, you know, Syl,” he said. “We’ll forget it, eh? Suppose you and I pretend that we’ve been brother and sister all along, but that we’ve only just come across one another. How’s that? Do you think I shall answer as a brother?”

She took up the strong brown hand in her small pair and turned it over, then nodded at him, and without a word laid it down on the edge of the pit again, and getting up walked back to the hut.

CHAPTER V.

On the night Neville Lynne bought Sylvia Bond the House of Commons in London was unusually full. An important debate was in progress, and that evening Mr. Gladstone had spoken with even more than his wonted eloquence, and all about the House—in the galleries, in the lobbies, and even outside, where a big crowd hung about and waited—there was the peculiar atmosphere of excitement which only political events can produce.

Not only had the great orator spoken, but speeches had been delivered by several of the other stars in the political firmament, and perhaps no one of them had attracted more attention than that of Sir Jordan Lynne.

Two gentlemen had witnessed the proceedings from the front of the Strangers’ Galleries, and one of them, who had scarcely removed his eyes from Sir Jordan’s tall, thin figure while he had been speaking, looked at his companion with a thoughtful smile.

“That man’s going to make his mark,” he said to his friend.

“Who—Jordan Lynne? Yes. I suppose so. Clever speech, wasn’t it? Do you know him at all?”

“Well, I was at Rugby with him,” said the last speaker. “But I can’t say I knew him. I doubt very much whether any one knows him.”

The second man nodded.

“I know what you mean. No, Lynne’s a dark horse.”

“How long has he been Sir Jordan?” asked the other. “I’ve been away such a deuce of a time that I’ve lost touch of events, you know.”

“How long? Oh, about eighteen months more or less. Yes, his father, old Sir Greville, died about seventeen or eighteen months ago, and this Jordan, the eldest son came into the baronetcy—and the money. Strange history, old Greville’s.”

“Tell me,” said his friend, as arm in arm they went down the stairs and sauntered on the terrace in front of the House. “I’ve heard something about him, but forgot exactly what.”

“Well, it’s soon told. Old Greville was an eccentric. A man with a mania, you know. Seems that when he was a young man he fell in love with a girl. She was below him in position, but Greville was mad about her, and notwithstanding that she was engaged to another young fellow, Greville brought pressure to bear—monetary pressure, I expect—induced or ordered her to break off with her lover, and promise to marry him, Lynne.”

“Nice man!”

“Yes. But it didn’t come off after all; for the day before the marriage the girl bolted with her own true love, and left Greville in the hole.”

“That’s distinctly good,” said the listener.

“Not so bad. Greville Lynne was awfully cut up, most men are under the circs, but most men get over it in time, and if they don’t exactly forget the girl who jilted them, forgive her. Old Greville didn’t. He set himself deliberately to work to hunt down his successful rival; swore a big oath that he’d ruin him, and—did it.”

“How do you mean?” inquired the friend.

“Well, I don’t know all the details, but I’ve heard people who were in the know say that Greville stuck to the other fellow’s trail like a bloodhound, and while professing to be his friend plotted and schemed to effect his ruin. It took years to accomplish, of course, but it was accomplished at last, and Sir Greville had the satisfaction of seeing his rival a broken man and an outcast.”

“And this is the nineteenth century, I believe?”

“Exactly,” assented the speaker. “And it’s only in the nineteenth century that you can do that sort of thing. In the old days you went out after dark and stuck your enemy under the fifth rib. Now you bet with him on the stock exchange, run horses against him on the turf, slander him, rob him of his reputation, and ultimately get a good deal more revenge out of him than if you

left him with a hole in him as in the good old days. The man Sir Greville had sworn to ruin—and did—disappeared. The wife, I believe, died of grief and anxiety.”

“Any children?”

“Don’t know. I fancy there was one, but I’m not sure.”

“Poor woman! What a fiend Sir Jordan’s father must have been.”

“Yes, I think he was. According to poetical justice, he ought to have been punished in some way. But he wasn’t—at least, in this world. He flourished like the bay tree. Everything he touched turned to gold.”

“Did he ever marry? Oh, of course. *I beg your pardon.*”

“Yes, he married twice. This man Jordan is the son of the first wife, and there’s another boy called—called Neville, the son of the second.”

“What’s become of him?”

The speaker shook his head.

“Can’t say. It’s rumored that he’s abroad somewhere. He was at one time Sir Greville’s favorite son, but our friend Jordan soon altered that. I’m told that he hates the half brother like poison, and that he never rested until he had brought a quarrel about between Neville and his father, and got the youngster turned out.”

“A worthy son of a worthy father!”

“Yes. Jordan played his cards very well. The estate was a small one, not nearly large enough to support the baronetcy properly, and of course old Greville could have left his money—it was an enormous pile!—where he chose; to his second boy, Neville, for instance. But when the will was read it was found that Jordan had got the whole of it, estate, money, all, and that Neville was left without a penny. I should think Jordan is one of our richest men, and as you say, a man who will make his mark. May be Prime Minister some day.”

“Hush, here he is!” warned the other, and the two men drew aside into the shadow as Sir Jordan Lynne passed.

He was walking by himself, his hands clasped behind his back, his head bowed slightly.

He was not a bit like Neville. He was thin and narrow chested, with a long face and a pointed chin. His mouth—he was clean shaven—was straight and hard; the lips stuck close as if their owner were always on guard. Very few persons knew the color of his eyes, for Sir Jordan had an unpleasant trick of keeping them veiled under unusually thick and white lids. It was not a prepossessing face by any means, and yet no one could glance at it without

recognizing that it was the face of a clever and intellectual man, a man with a large quantity of brain power and a strong will to use it.

A word must be said about his hands. They were large and bony, but singularly white, so that when he raised them while he was speaking you felt attracted by them, and watched them instead of the face, which was, perhaps, to the speaker's advantage.

He was in evening dress that night—for he was going on to a reception when the House rose—but he always wore dark-colored clothes.

A man's voice is supposed to be the index to his character; Sir Jordan's was soft and slow—excepting when he was addressing a large audience, and even then it was never loud or vehement, and always beautifully under his control.

Since his father's death, Sir Jordan had “come very much to the front” in other than political ways. He was extremely liberal. “Sir Jordan Lynne, Bart, M.P.,” figured prominently in all the charity lists. He was always ready to address a missionary meeting, and was one of the most respectable and religious men in the House, a stanch defender of Church and State, a stern moralist, and neither drank nor smoked.

Such a man is sure to come to the front, and Sir Jordan as he paced up and down the terrace ought to have been a very happy individual. The cheers which had been called forth by his clever, fluent speech were still ringing in his ears; he knew that he was being talked about, that as he paced up and down men were looking at him with interest and curiosity—and yet no man came up and linked an arm in his, or smote him on the back and called him “Old fellow.”

“A strange face,” said one of the two men who had been watching him. “Keen and intellectual, and all that, and yet there's something about it I don't like. The man looks—yes,” as Sir Jordan with his head bent passed them again, “looks as if he weren't at ease; as if he'd got something unpleasant on his mind.”

“Dessay. P'raps he's thinking of that unfortunate young beggar of a brother of his.”

“Remorse?” said the other. “Hem——” At that moment Big Ben struck the hour, and Sir Jordan started and raised his head—“Remorse? No, by George! it looks like—yes, fear,” concluded the observer.

They went on their way, and Sir Jordan returned to the House. He sat on his seat with his arms folded, his head bent down, apparently listening intently, until the House rose; then he went out and, calling a cab, drove to Lady Marlow's reception.

As the cab rattled through the gates one of those small groups which collect outside the House on important occasions saw and recognized him, and raised a cheer for "Sir Jordan," and he leaned forward and lifted his hat and smiled with his thin lips; then he sank back again and closed his eyes.

It was past midnight, the sitting had been an exciting one, and he was fully justified in feeling tired and snatching a nap; but it seemed as if he could not rest, for presently he sighed, and leaning both arms on the front of the cab looked from side to side from under his drooping lids. Looked, not with the aimless interest of an ordinary observer, but with the sharp intentness of a man who is watching for something or some one.

And yet for whom could the wealthy and powerful Sir Jordan Lynne, baronet, be looking in the London streets after midnight?

CHAPTER VI.

The cab pulled up at Lady Marlow's, and Sir Jordan Lynne, smoothing the watchful, anxious lines from his face, and with a soft and pleasant smile about his thin lips, ascended the staircase.

Lady Marlow's evenings were always crowded, for she was a very popular little personage. She was the wife of a viscount, rich, almost young and extremely good natured. Young girls just out adored her, and their mammas courted her, for it was said that for the last three seasons the best matches had been made under Lady Marlow's auspices, and that the best chance a girl had was to have Lady Marlow for a friend.

She was a little woman, with a pleasant countenance, a pair of bright eyes which saw half way through a brick wall, and a tongue sometimes appallingly frank and candid. She stood just inside the drawing-room, receiving her guests, and she gave Sir Jordan her hand and a smile, as she had given them to a hundred other persons that evening, and she did it without yawning or even looking tired, though her feet ached, her head ached, she ached all over.

A great deal of pity is expended, and deservedly, on the hardworked poor, the dock laborers, the factory hands, railway servants, and cabmen; but no one has, as yet, thought of getting up a strike among the terribly-hardworked members of fashionable society.

Come to think of it, Lady Marlow had worked as hard as any woman in London that day. She had got up early to read and answer her letters, notwithstanding that she had not gone to bed until three o'clock that morning;

she had spent the forenoon at the opening of a fancy bazaar, had made six calls in the afternoon, had sat at the head of the table during a wearisome dinner party, and now, just at the time when happier people were in bed and asleep, she was standing between the hot room and the draughty stairs, shaking hands and smiling like a mandarin, with a host of people, most of whom she scarcely knew, and did not care if she never saw again.

And yet there were girls, sweet innocent, ignorant girls, just launched on the side of society, who actually envied Lady Marlow, and whose only ambition was to marry a viscount and do likewise!

Lady Marlow nodded and smiled at Sir Jordan, and fixed him for a moment with her bright, sharp eyes.

“Very good of you to come,” she said, as she made ready to receive the next guest. “You have had an exciting night, I hear, and your fame is going the round of the room.”

Sir Jordan bowed and smiled with polite gratitude for the pleasant little speech, and made his way into the crowd.

His entrance was noticed, and men nodded and beautiful women smiled at him as he passed them, and many a girl’s heart gave a little bound of ambitious longing, for Sir Jordan was a millionaire, the coming man of the day, and his wife would be a great lady and a power.

Stopping now and again to exchange a nod with one and another, Sir Jordan made the circuit of the crowded room, and was returning to the door to take his departure, when a young girl entered. He stopped, drew back a little, and waited.

She was a very pretty girl, tall, fair, with dark brown eyes, bright and brimming with merriment one moment, soft and melting the next. Her name was Audrey Hope; she was eighteen, just out, an heiress, and as the irreverent said, Lady Marlow’s “last and best lot;” for she was an orphan and under the care of Lord and Lady Marlow, who were her guardians.

Before she had got many yards she was surrounded not only by men, but by women for Audrey was popular with both sexes, and there were some who would have loved her just as dearly if she had been penniless, instead of the owner of money in the funds, a plantation in Jamaica and a good estate in Devonshire.

She was beautifully dressed, and yet with a simplicity which spoke of anything but wealth, and her eyes were bright with the pleasure of seeing so many friends round her; for she had been staying on the continent for some months, and this was her first party since her return.

She was chattering away about Homburg, Mont Blanc and Rome and the

rest of it to the admiring court when Sir Jordan came up with his bland smile and his serenely composed face, and she stopped suddenly, the brightness fled from her eyes, and she became for the moment suddenly grave, and one would have been inclined to say almost sad. But it was only for a moment; the next she seemed to have recovered from the temporary restraint and held out her hand to him, with a nod.

“How do you do, Sir Jordan?” she said as he bent over her hand. “I did not expect to see you here, I thought you would be too busy.”

“The House rose earlier than we expected,” he said. “Have you enjoyed your trip?”

The others fell back to allow the two to talk, for Sir John and beautiful Audrey Hope were old friends—or ought to have been, for the estate which Audrey had inherited adjoined the Lynne property, and the Lynnes and the Hopes had been neighbors for generations.

“Oh, yes,” she said, and she began to tell him of her travels, but, somehow, some of the brightness had gone out of her voice, and she looked down at the ground rather than at his face.

Sir Jordan offered her his arm after a minute or two, and she accepted it, and allowed him to lead her out of the crowd to a seat in a recess, thereby causing vast discontent and envy in many a manly breast.

“That fellow, Jordan, seems to have it all his own way,” muttered a young guardsman to a chum. “Richest beggar in the room and all that, he might leave the Hope alone and give us poor devils a chance.”

But Sir Jordan was perfectly indifferent to the murmurs and complaints of the envious, and sat beside the rich and lovely Miss Hope with his usual self-possession and sang-froid.

He talked about the weather, and the persons who passed them, a great deal about her life on the continent, and a little, a very little, about himself. Sir Jordan was one of those clever persons who do not talk about themselves.

But all the while Audrey seemed to be listening absent-mindedly, and quite suddenly she said:

“Have you heard anything of—of Neville, Sir Jordan?” and as she put the question her eyes drooped and the rich color came into her face, making it look lovelier than ever.

Sir Jordan shook his head and sighed.

“I’m sorry to say that I have not lately,” he replied, in a sad and regretful tone, just the tone an affectionate, long-suffering man who had been sorely tried by a scapegrace brother should use.

The color died slowly away from Audrey Hope's cheeks, and she stifled a sigh, a genuine one.

"When did you hear last?" she said, "and what? You know we were such old friends, your brother and I, Sir Jordan. We used to play together when we were little children, and even after he came home from Eton, and—and—I can never think of the Grange"—this was the name of the great country house which belonged to this lucky young woman—"without thinking of Neville."

Her eyes grew meditative and wistful, as if she were seeing, with her mind's eye, a vision of the old orchard behind the house in which she and young dare-devil Neville Lynne used to play. Even then he was always getting into scrapes, and it was she who not unfrequently got him out of them, begged him off punishment, or out of her own pocket money paid, on the sly, for some damage he had done.

"It is very natural that you should remember him," murmured Sir Jordan sympathetically. "It would not be like your kind heart to forget an old playmate. Poor Neville!" and he sighed again.

She glanced at him with barely concealed alarm.

"Why do you say that?" she asked. "Was it bad news you heard last?"

"I'm sorry to say that it was," he replied, gravely, and with a regretfully sad and sympathetic voice. "Poor Neville had been disgracing himself, as usual——"

The blood flew to her face again.

"Disgracing himself—Neville!" she interrupted. "I don't believe it—I mean——"

She stopped and bit her lips as if ashamed of the vehemence she had been hurried into.

Sir Jordan saw that he had gone rather too far.

"Perhaps the term was too strong," he said. "We will say that he had got into one of his usual scrapes, and he had left the place suddenly just before I got tidings of him; but for that I should have found him."

"Where was that?" asked Audrey.

"In America," replied Sir Jordan, without a moment's hesitation.

She sighed as she thought that "America" was rather a vague address.

"I suppose he doesn't know of his father's death?" she said, after a moment or two.

"No, I think not," said Jordan.

"Or—or—that——"

She hesitated.

“Or that my father did not mention him in his will,” said Jordan. “No, and I particularly wish that he should not hear of it excepting through me, because _____”

He paused.

Audrey looked at him quickly.

“Because—? Oh, do you mean that you are going to—to——”

“How well you understand me!” he murmured modestly. “Yes, I want to find poor Neville, and let him know that half I have is his. I shall not know a moment’s peace or happiness until I have found him.”

Audrey Hope’s lips quivered and those beautiful brown eyes of hers grew soft and tender.

“That is very, very good and generous of you, Sir Jordan!” she said in a low voice. “But it is only what one might expect you to do, after all. You could not—no one could—be at ease and contented while his brother was penniless.”

“No, no, of course not,” assented Sir Jordan promptly, but with his eyes hidden behind the thick white lids. “I have advertised, am advertising constantly for him, and am in hopes that I shall hear tidings of him soon.”

“Oh, I hope so,” said Audrey, fervently. “It is dreadful to think that a person one—one liked so much, is wandering about the world perhaps in poverty, and——”

She stopped again.

“Yes, yes,” murmured Sir John sympathetically, “and directly I hear I will send you word.”

“Do, please!” she exclaimed.

“I suppose you will be going down to the Grange presently?” he said, changing the subject.

“Yes,” she replied. “Lord and Lady Marlow are coming down with me to spend Christmas.”

“I shall be at Lynne, too; I shall go down directly the House rises,” he said. “So that we shall be near neighbors, shall we not?” glancing sideways at her.

“Yes,” she assented, but without a particle of warmth, or more than the expression of pleasure which ordinary politeness demanded, and Sir Jordan’s lips tightened. She had been warm and sympathetic enough while they had been talking about his scoundrel of a half brother, Neville; but now she seemed as if she had lost all interest in their conversation. “I must go to poor Lady Marlow,” she said. “She is tired out, I know, and——”

At his moment a gentleman approached them, a tall, dark-haired young man, with a handsome face and rather grave and serious eyes.

“Oh, Lord Lorrimore!” she exclaimed. “Have you seen Lady Marlow lately?”

“I have just been sent in search of you by her,” he replied.

And he held out his arm, nodding rather coldly to Sir Jordan.

Audrey Hope took the proffered arm, and the two walked away.

“What had that man got to talk to you about?” asked Lord Lorrimore, looking down at her with his dark, serious eyes.

“Oh, only——But what right have you to ask such a question?” she retorted, with an affectation of resentment.

“The right that the fact of my loving you gives me, Miss Hope——”

She made as if to draw her arm away, but he held it firmly.

“I thought you promised that you would not talk to me in that way again?” she said, reproachfully.

“I did,” he assented; “but when you ask me a direct question I am compelled to give you a direct and truthful answer.”

“That’s nothing to do with it; that’s no reason at all,” she retorted, with true feminine logic. “But how you do hate poor Sir John.”

“I do hate ‘poor’ Sir Jordan very much,” he said, grimly; “but I hate still more to see you talking to him.”

“And pray what business is it of yours whom I talk with?” she said, pouting. “There—I’ve given you another opportunity; but I won’t listen to you! Lord Lorrimore, if I were a man I should be ashamed to go on—on—pestering a poor helpless girl after she had told me that she didn’t—care for me.”

“I beg your pardon,” he said, still unruffled. “I haven’t pestered you. Telling you that I love you isn’t pestering you; it isn’t even news to you——”

“No, indeed! Or very stale news,” she retorted.

“Exactly. Therefore it can’t very much affect you. As to your not loving me, I’m quite aware you don’t; but that is not to say that you never will.”

“And you mean to—to——”

“Just so. I mean to go on trying to win your love till I’m dead, or you are engaged, or married,” he said, quite coolly.

She looked up into his handsome, serious face and laughed.

“Then the best thing—in fact, the only thing—I can do is to get married!”

“If you marry the right man, yes,” he assented. “But, you see, I consider myself the right man——”

“And—and perhaps Sir Jordan considers himself the right man, or—or any one else,” she said, mischievously.

He looked down at her.

“No,” he said as if he were considering the man quite impartially and judicially. “No, I don’t think you would be so foolish as to marry Sir Jordan.”

“Oh, indeed! And why not? He is young and rich, and will be famous. Is so already, isn’t he?”

“He is young, yes, and rich, and famous,” said Lord Lorrimore; “but I don’t think you would marry a man for being that—or those.”

“That’s pretty grammar,” she remarked.

“I dare say; but it’s good sense. You won’t marry a man you don’t love. You promised me that——”

“Oh, if you are going to rake up all the things I promised,” she retorted, with a laugh. “But there, don’t you think we’ve quarreled enough for one night, Lord Lorrimore?”

“We have not quarreled,” he said, gravely. “You couldn’t quarrel with me if you tried.”

“And I do try, goodness knows!” she exclaimed, “but that’s the worst of it! If you would only consent to be offended, I should get rid of you, but you won’t, will you? Wouldn’t you try, just to please me?” And she looked up into his face coaxingly. “If you’d only believe, what is true, that I’m the most disagreeable and undesirable of girls; that I’m really not worth thinking about, then, oh, then we should be such good friends! Won’t you try, Lord Lorrimore?”

“I think not,” he said. “It would be a waste of time, and it’s wicked to waste time, so the parsons say. You’re just the best and sweetest and most beautiful woman in my eyes, that ever lived or will live, and nothing will persuade me that you are anything else, and so——”

“And so here’s Lady Marlow, and you may go,” interrupted Audrey, half saucily, half sadly, for she was touched by her lover’s persistent doglike devotion.

“All right,” he said, not a whit offended. “Good-night. Good-night, Lady Marlow.”

Lady Marlow laughed as she gave him her hand.

“She’s a tiresome, wicked girl, isn’t she, Lord Lorrimore?” she said.

She knew the whole state of the case between the two.

He smiled for about the first time, held Audrey's hand for a moment, and then took himself off.

"Poor Lord Lorrimore!" said Lady Marlow.

"Oh, don't pity him! Pity me!" exclaimed Audrey with a pout. "How would you like to be bothered by a man who won't take 'no'?"

"If I were in your place, my dear, I should like it very much," replied that frank lady. "Especially if the man were Lord Lorrimore."

CHAPTER VII.

Sir Jordan remained for some few minutes where Lord Lorrimore and Audrey had left him, apparently regarding the crowd with a pleasant and amiably interested attention, but in reality scarcely conscious of their presence, so intent was he on his thoughts.

When asked whether he thought he should win a certain battle Napoleon replied:

"Yes, because I intend doing so."

Jordan Lynne intended marrying Audrey Hope. Not because he loved her, for though he admired her—and he would have been as insensible as a block of wood if he had not—he certainly did not love her.

There was only one individual in the world Sir Jordan loved, and that was Jordan Lynne, and he loved him with such an intense and absorbing love as to leave no room for caring for any one else.

Audrey was not only the most beautiful girl he knew, but one of the richest, and it was because she was rich, and the Grange estate ran parallel with Lynne, that he had decided to marry her.

The fact that he was over thirty, and Audrey only nineteen did not frighten him in the least. Nor did the other undeniable fact that Audrey repelled his skilful advances discourage him. Years ago, when a tall, gawky youth, he had looked at Audrey and Neville playing together, he had made up his mind that she should be his, Jordan's, wife, and not Neville's, and it was that determination which, joined with other reasons, had prompted him to raise a quarrel between Neville and his father and cause the latter's disinheritance.

Neville had disappeared as completely as if he were dead, but Jordan did not seem to make much progress with Audrey. Whenever he got into

conversation with her, it was of Neville she wanted to talk, and insisted upon talking, as she had done this evening, and though her persistence in refusing to forget the scapegrace made Jordan hate his brother worse than ever, he never allowed any signs of his fraternal feelings to reveal themselves.

Now, seeing that he was possessed of immense wealth, it was rather surprising that he should be so desirous of acquiring more by marrying Audrey Hope, the heiress; but Jordan had his own reasons for being particularly anxious in the matter, and that evening, notwithstanding Audrey's absence and preoccupation of mind, when they were talking of anything else but Neville, Jordan, instead of being discouraged, was more determined than ever to have his way.

He knew that Lord Lorrimore loved her, and though she had refused him, loved her still, and hoped yet to win her; but Jordan did not care for that; ever so many men loved her, and wanted to marry her, and there is safety in numbers.

So he sat for half an hour, nursing one leg and talking to one and another of the many who were eager to be seen in converse with Sir Jordan Lynne in the pleasantest manner, but watching Audrey covertly all the while; then he made his way to Lady Marlow, said good-night, and went down the stairs.

It was a beautiful night, or rather early morning, and Jordan stood and looked at the stars for a moment or two, and decided to walk home. He had not very far to go, for his rooms were in Audley street, and Lady Marlow's house was in Grosvenor square, and it was scarcely worth taking a cab for so short a distance.

Most men would have lit a cigar, but Jordan did not smoke, and, as has been said, had no small vices, and so, with his hands folded behind him, he walked slowly along looking at the pavement instead of the sky, and his head bent as usual in deep thought.

So deep indeed that he did not hear light footsteps behind him, or know that he was followed until he felt a hand touch his arm.

He started and turned, then fell back a step, staring at the pale face of the woman who had stopped him.

It was a sad as well as a pale face, with hollow eyes that spoke of pain and misery, and lips that had grown wan and tremulous with sorrow and trouble, and yet, alas! it was the face of a woman who was still young and had once, and not long since, been beautiful.

She was poorly dressed, but decently, and the worn black shawl was held by one thin hand as if to partly conceal her face.

"Jordan!" she said, in a low, sad voice.

Sir Jordan Lynne drew his arm away, and looked at her under his lowered lids with the expression which the one who has injured always bears toward the one upon whom the injury has been inflicted.

“Rachel! What are you doing here—how did you come?” he asked, his voice growing harsher with each word; and he looked about him as if he feared they should be seen.

“You ask me that!” she replied, her dark eyes fixed on his face. “How did I come? By foot! I have walked all those weary miles, but you do not care how I came. Why have you made it necessary for me to come! Why——”

She stopped, and put her hand to her throat as if the agitation caused by the sight of him were overpowering her.

Sir Jordan glanced up and down the street apprehensively, and smothered an oath between his thin lips.

“This—this is absurd and—and childish of you, Rachel,” he said at last. “You got my letter?”

“Yes, I got your letter,” she said, in the same low, despairing voice. “Truly the cruellest letter a man ever wrote to the woman he once loved! Jordan, have you—have you forgotten all that you promised me—your solemn promise? It is not so long ago—not so long! You cannot mean what you said in that letter. You cannot have the heart—even you—to treat me so cruelly!”

Jordan fidgeted with his feet, and, keeping an eye on the street, turned up the collar of his coat and pulled his hat over his brows.

“My good Rachel,” he said, “you—you can’t expect me at this time of night and in the open street, to stand here talking with you. We shall be seen, and—and——”

“You did not mind being seen with me two years ago, Jordan,” she said, with sad reproach.

“Didn’t I?” thought Jordan, but he said aloud: “That was very different; circumstances have altered, and—and——” He saw some of the people coming from Lady Marlow’s walking up the street, and turned upon her with smothered anger. “Follow me toward the park,” and he walked away with his head bent even lower than usual.

The woman followed him with the weary gait which speaks of mental as well as physical weariness and Jordan, stopping in the darkest corner he could find, turned and confronted her.

“Now, Rachel,” he said, with something approaching his ordinary smoothness, “tell me what this extraordinary proceeding means.”

“Is it so extraordinary, Jordan? Did you think that I should receive that

letter and do nothing; that I should submit to be treated like—like a dog—ah! worse: a toy you had got tired of?”

“Hush, hush!” he said, for her sad voice had grown louder, and a policeman paused in his heavy tramp and looked at them. “For Heaven’s sake, my good girl, don’t make a scene! It can do no possible good; quite the reverse, in fact, and—confound it! you have attracted attention already. Here, take my arm. We must walk on, I suppose.”

She declined his arm with a gesture, and walked beside him, her trembling hand holding her shawl together.

“Now tell me all about it, and what—what you hope to effect by dogging me in this way,” he said with barely concealed impatience; “and for goodness’ sake speak quietly, and don’t give way to heroics. I thought I had explained everything in the letter.”

“That cruel letter!” she exclaimed, her voice trembling. “How could you write it, Jordan, knowing, remembering all that we were to each other, and so short a time ago?”

“What is the use of harping on the past?” he said, with a sudden burst of irritation, which he subdued by a palpable effort. “The past, my dear Rachel, and the present are very different things. When you and I—er—er—amused ourselves by playing at lovers two years ago down at that infernally stupid watering place, I was only Jordan Lynne, the son of a man who might disinherit me any moment, and you——”

“And I,” she said, in a voice hoarse with suppressed emotion, “what was I, Jordan? An innocent, ignorant girl, who believed in and trusted the man who told her that he loved her. Yes, trusted, Jordan.”

Sir Jordan bit his lip.

“All that, as I say, was two years ago, and—and, in short, the dreams you and I indulged in cannot be realized. Great Heaven!—” It was seldom Sir Jordan permitted himself to use strong language, and his doing so on this occasion showed how much upset he was by this inconvenient interview—“Great Heaven! you—you didn’t suppose that I was going to marry you, after—after——”

“After you became a rich man with a title,” she finished with a catch in her voice, her dark eyes fixed on his face, which looked mean and sneaking at that moment, and quite unlike the intellectual countenance which shone in the House of Commons. “Yes, Jordan, that is what I thought; what you led me to think when you promised me, with oaths that would have deceived any girl. Jordan”—she caught his arm—“you will not be so unjust, so cruel, so heartless as to desert me now!” and she stood still, panting and searching his pale,

downcast face for one faint sign of relenting.

He shook her hand off his arm.

“Desert you? Certainly not,” he said. “I am not capable of such—such conduct. As I told you in my letter—in which I am sure I endeavored to be explicit enough, and which I think you must have understood——”

“Ah, yes,” she said, with a heavy sigh. “It was easy to understand.”

“Very well, then,” he resumed. “I pointed out to you plainly that it was not possible that your——Well, under the circumstances, really unreasonable wishes could be realized. I have no intention of marrying. But, as I said, I am anxious—*anxious*, my dear Rachel,” his voice grew softer and smoother, and very like the voice in which he addressed a charity meeting, “that your future should be provided for. I mentioned a certain sum of money which I deemed sufficient, amply sufficient to maintain you—in—er—comfort—and I expressed a hope, which you will allow me to repeat, that some day and before very long, I trust, you may meet with some honest, respectable man who will make you a devoted and affectionate wife. One moment, please,” he continued, smoothly, for she had opened her quivering lips as if about to interrupt him. “I think if you will consider the whole case from a—er—rational point of view, you will admit that I have done all that lies in my power to—to—atone for the—er—folly of the past. I certainly expected that you would have received my offer in the spirit which dictated it, and—er—would have accepted it with, if not gratitude—for I am aware, my dear Rachel, that we must not look for gratitude in this world—at least with satisfaction. It appears, however, that my not unreasonable expectations were doomed to disappointment, and instead of acquiescing in the—er—decrees of Providence, and falling in with my view of our mutual obligations, you have thought fit to follow me to London, and here in the public streets—my dear Rachel, I did not deem you capable of it!—to force yourself upon me and—er—make a scene.”

He had finished at last, and stood looking at her steadily from under his lids, an expression of mock indignation and long suffering on his pale face. But he could not meet her eyes; eyes which had grown darker with the sombre light of an injured woman’s anguish and scorn.

“Come,” he said, “let us part friends, my dear Rachel. We will not exchange any more harsh words. You will see the wisdom of the step I have taken to—to—end our little friendship, and I am sure you know me better——”

“Know you! Yes, I know you now!” came pantingly from her writhing lips. “I know you now! Oh!”—she raised her clinched hands and let them fall again heavily—“oh, that I should ever have been deceived by you! How—my

God!—how could I ever have believed in you for one single moment? Why couldn't I see that you were a devil and a monster instead of a man? But I was alone in the world, and innocent—no father, mother, friend, to warn or guard me, and——”

She broke down and leaned against the park railings, covering her face with her hands, and shaking with sobs that brought no relief.

Jordan gnawed at his under lip and looked round watchfully.

“Come, come, my dear Rachel,” he said, soothingly. “Permit me to say that you take too black a view of—of the case. Now let us be more cheerful. Your future, as I have pointed out, is provided for. The money I have offered you ——”

She turned on him so suddenly that the amiable Sir Jordan started back from her blazing eyes and upheld hand.

“Money! Do you dare to think I would touch it—that I would accept one penny? No, not if I were starving! You offer me money! Jordan Lynne, you don't know what you are doing! You are driving a broken-hearted woman desperate! Desperate! Do you hear? Do you hear? Do you know what that means? Do you?” She drew nearer to him and glared into his shrinking eyes. “You—you coward!” She drew a long breath. “With all my misery, in this the hour of my humiliation, the bitterest pang of all is the thought—the thought that burns, burns into my heart—that I once trusted you; yes, and loved you! And you offer me money! The woman who should be your wife, but whom you have betrayed and deserted! Look at me, Jordan; look well at me. You remember what I was. I've heard from your own lips often enough—those lying lips!—that I was pretty, beautiful. Look at me now; look at your handiwork.” She drew the shawl from her white face, distorted by passionate despair and indignation. “Do you think money can restore me to what I was—give me back all I have lost, all you have robbed me of? No, not all the riches of the world! There is only one thing you could do for me, now that with a sneer you have told me that you will not, never did mean to make me your wife: you can kill me! You shrink from that!”—for Jordan, biting at his lip, had shrunk. “Is it worse to kill the body or the soul? What is there left for me but to die?” Her voice broke into a wail, a moan that might have touched the heart of a satyr, then suddenly grew fierce and hard and determined. “But, no, I will not—I will not die! I will live, Jordan Lynne; live for the hour in which God shall strike the balance between you and me. The hour will come!”—she struck her breast—“it will come, sneer as you may.” Jordan was not sneering, he was far too uncomfortable to manage a sneer. “And when it comes, I will show you as much mercy and pity as you have this night shown me.”

She looked at him full in the eyes, her face distorted by the conflicting emotions—despair, resentment and humiliation—which tortured her; then, dragging the shawl round her, turned and left him. Before she had gone many yards he saw her stagger and fall against the railings, by which she supported herself by one hand.

Sir Jordan Lynne did not go to her assistance, but waited until she had recovered and moved on again; then he, too, turned on his way home.

He was very much annoyed; very much upset indeed. He had actually offered this foolish young creature, who really had no—no claim upon him, fifty pounds a year, and she had treated him thus!

It was quite an agitated face upon which the policeman who had been watching the interview from the corner, turned his lantern. He recognized Sir Jordan and saluted him, and Sir Jordan smoothed the harassed lines from his face and acknowledged the salute graciously.

“Hope that young woman hasn’t been annoying you, sir,” said the constable.

“No, no,” replied Jordan. “She is a pensioner, the daughter of a servant in our family, and I am sorry to say she has fallen into evil ways. I have just been saying a few words in season, constable, but I am afraid——” and he shook his head and sighed. “If—if you should meet with her loitering about near my place, perhaps it will be as well to point out to her that the police have instructions to protect persons from annoyance. You understand me, I have no doubt.”

The policeman’s hand, with Jordan’s half sovereign in the palm, went to his helmet.

“I understand, sir,” he said. “I’ll give her a word of warning if I see her loitering about.”

“Thank you. Good-night, constable,” murmured the good and moral baronet, and with a glance behind him to ascertain if Rachel was in sight or not, he opened his door with a latchkey and passed in to the repose which so estimable a gentleman deserved.

It was on this same night, the night Jordan had turned a deaf ear to the prayer of the girl he had ruined, that Neville, his half brother, “the scapegrace of the family,” as Jordan called him, had spent every penny he possessed in the purchase and rescue of the orphan of Lorn Hope Camp.

CHAPTER VIII.

Before a month had passed Sylvia showed signs of marked improvement. She still looked rather like a colt, but like a colt that it well fed and cared for; whereas when Neville—or Jack, as he had re-christened himself—had bought her she was like a colt that had been left to the mercy of the cold winds and bitter weather on some bleak moor.

Her face had lost the wan, sorrow-stricken expression which had gone so straight to the heart of Neville that ever-memorable night on which he had first seen her, and though at times she was quiet and thoughtful, and the gray eyes, dark with melancholy, showed that she was thinking of her dead father, it was evident that time, the consoler, was passing his healing hand over that wound and soothing its aching.

Meth, who had at first merely tolerated the girl's presence, and scarcely looked at her without mumbling "nine hundred pounds!" got used to her and, in a way, fond of her; at any rate, she was good enough to permit Sylvia to do most of the work of the hut, and would have extended her kindness to the length of allowing Sylvia to do it all; but Neville interfered and informed Meth that he had not bought a domestic servant, but a "sister."

As Sylvia grew stronger she became happier. Those wondrous gray eyes of hers grew bright with a light that seemed to illuminate the hut, especially at night, when the solitary candle shone on them as she sat at needlework; the said needlework consisting of repairs to "Jack's" clothes, which sadly needed them.

Her voice, too, altered, and though it was still low pitched and refined, there was a ring in it which reminded Neville of bells heard at a distance, of an Æolian harp, and sundry other kinds of music. But if her voice was like music, her laugh was music itself. It is true that she laughed but seldom, but when she did Neville found himself obliged to laugh too or die, and he caught himself setting traps for that laugh, and rejoicing when he succeeded in catching it.

It was a strange life for a young girl. Besides her "brother" Jack and Meth, she saw no one excepting at a distance, for the miners, taking the hint which Neville had given Lockit, carefully avoided the neighborhood of the Young 'un's claim and left him alone more severely than ever.

But Sylvia did not appear to find it dull, and seemed perfectly content. Neville had found two or three books at the bottom of his trunk. A volume of Tennyson, Macaulay's England, "Wild Sports in the West," and "The Farrier's Vade Mecum," and Sylvia devoured these of an evening, when she felt disinclined for needlework, and sometimes brought one down to the edge of the claim and read there; very often, however, letting the book lie disregarded

in her lap, while her eyes dwelt on the handsome face and stalwart form of "her brother," as he picked and dug and toiled in the dusty hole.

Indeed, her eyes were seldom off him when he was within her sight, and she followed him about unobtrusively whenever she could, and seemed quite contented if he would allow her just to keep him company, and did not mind his long fits of silence.

Neville was not a great talker, but often when Sylvia thought that he was unaware of or had forgotten her presence, he was thinking of her. Half unconsciously he liked to have her near him, and if she remained away from the claim longer than usual he found himself looking out for her.

For the rest he treated her as a young man of nearly twenty always treats a girl of fifteen. She was a mere child in his eyes, a child to be petted and humored and "taken care of," but sometimes he found himself startled and bothered by some trick of speech or turn of thought in the child which savored very strongly of the full-grown woman; and at such times—when for instance, she would quote Tennyson, as she had quoted Shakespeare, and let fall some bit of worldly wisdom from her soft lips—he would straighten his back and wipe the perspiration from his brow, and stare at her meditatively, and the question would rise in his mind uneasily:

"What on earth shall I do with her when she grows up?"

But he always put it aside with the reflection that she was only a child, and that she wouldn't "grow up" for years yet, and so end with laughing at her precocity.

As to the light in which Sylvia regarded him—who can describe or even divine it? This much may, however, be said; that she regarded him as her brother, and in the recesses of her girlish mind thought him the best, the handsomest, the bravest, and altogether the noblest specimen of man.

Besides, he was something more than her brother. She never forgot for a moment, though since his injunction she had never again referred to it, that he had "bought" her, and she regarded him as her owner and master. She considered that she owed him not only sisterly love, but implicit obedience. Neville had only to express a wish for her to set about gratifying it; indeed, very often Neville found that she had supplied his desires before he had given them voice. If he had told her to climb up the rugged hill that overlooked the valley and throw herself from the highest precipice, she would have done it.

She was his by right of purchase, and something more, and this conviction, which in her mind was as strong as a religion, brought no pain with it, but, rather, a vague kind of pleasure and satisfaction.

During the month things had been looking up in Lorn Hope Camp, and,

though no one had found a nugget as big as Neville's, the men had had better luck, and some of them declared that the "orphan," as they called Sylvia, had brought the luck back again to Lorn Hope, and that they were all going to be rich.

Neville's claim only just paid for his labor—at very low wages—but he still stuck to it, and with more contentment than he would have imagined possible.

Working by one's self, with no one to share hopes and fears, was a different thing from working with Sylvia's sympathy always turned on, and the dust and the heat, though they were really quite as bad as before, did not seem half so unendurable and aggravating with Sylvia sitting by the edge of the pit, just out of the dust, and in the shade of an awning he had rigged up for her.

She was never tired of sitting there, and sometimes, after a long silence, Neville thinking she had fallen asleep, would turn and look at her, and meet her gray eyes fixed upon him, as if she found him more worthy of her attention than the book.

One day, in the midst of one of these silences, she began to sing.

At first she sang in a low, subdued voice, then, as if she had forgotten his presence, her voice grew fuller, but not less sweet, and she sang like a nightingale.

Neville was startled, but he was careful to keep his back to her, and not frighten the bird that had suddenly filled the hot silence with such delicious melody.

He waited until she had finished, then he said as carelessly as he could, as he scraped the dust from his spade:

"Bravo, Syl! You don't pipe badly. Thought it was a thrush at first—an English thrush, you know——"

"I know," she said, with an utter absence of self-consciousness, without even a blush. "I remember." Her eyes grew absent and thoughtful. "Yes, I remember. It must be a long time ago——"

"When you were in England?" said Neville.

She nodded.

"Yes. It was in the country I heard the birds sing." She pressed her lips together and knit her brows till they made a straight line over her eyes. "Yes, it was in the country, and—I can remember, now I try, that I was riding a little pony, and—and——" She put her hand to her forehead and sighed. "It's all gone now! Wait a minute," and she knitted her brows.

"Never mind," said Neville.

“No,” she said, contentedly. “It doesn’t matter, does it? And do you like to hear me sing, Jack?”

“I do indeed, very much,” he replied. “What was it you were singing? I seem to have a recollection of it.”

“‘Bid me discourse,’ ” she answered, promptly. “It was”—she hesitated a moment, but only for a moment—“it was one of my father’s favorites. He taught it to me, and some more of Bishop’s.”

“Let’s have another of the Bishop’s, then,” said Neville.

“Not the Bishop’s; it’s a man’s name. Did you never hear of him, Jack?”

“Never,” said Neville, placidly.

She pondered for a moment or two over this confession of ignorance.

“You don’t seem to know much, Jack,” she remarked; not in a tone of censure, but by way of recording a simple fact.

“You’re right, Syl,” he assented, cheerfully. “What I don’t know would make the biggest book you ever saw. My ignorance is—is sublime. If I hadn’t been such a complete duffer I shouldn’t be here grave-digging.”

“Where would you have been, Jack?” she inquired, leaning her head on her little brown paw, and looking at him with her great gray eyes.

“In the army,” he said, shoveling up the dust. “I had my chance, but—but I threw it away. I might have had another, for the governor was as fond of me as I was of him, but for——”

He stopped suddenly; he had been speaking more to himself than to her.

“Poor Jack,” came a soft murmur like sweet music.

Neville looked up.

“Oh, I don’t deserve any pity, Syl,” and he laughed. “I only get my deserts; many a better fellow than me——”

“Than I——” said Sylvia.

“Eh? Oh, ah, yes. I’m not much on grammar. That’s one of the reasons I’m here.”

“Then it’s a lucky thing for me you are not,” she said, naively.

Neville laughed.

“That’s one way of looking at it,” he said. “Now sing something else, Syl.”

She sang to him again. This time an old French ballad.

Neville leaned against the sides of the pit, and listened with all his ears. He was passionately fond of music.

“Hallo!” he said. “What’s that, French? Who taught you that—but, of

course; I beg your pardon, Syl.”

“Yes,” she said, in a low voice. “He taught me that—everything. He said knowledge is power—to the person who knows how to use it. And yet he was so poor,” she mused, thoughtfully.

She was already beginning to discover that there is no greater fool than the maxim maker.

“You don’t remember your mother, Syl?” asked Neville, as it occurred to him that he might learn something of her people. He would have to find them some day and restore her.

She shook her head.

“No, she died soon after I was born. Papa seldom spoke of her; it always made him sad and unhappy. And yet I know that they were so happy—once, for he told me that they lived in a beautiful house in the country, and that the sun always shone; he meant that they were always happy.”

“Yes, he couldn’t have meant that the sun really always shone—that is, if it was in England,” said Neville, concisely.

“Yes, it was in England. Then trouble came.”

“What trouble?”

She shook her head thoughtfully.

“I don’t know. Papa lost all his money. It was not his fault. He had an enemy——”

Neville stared at her solemn face.

“A what!”

“An enemy,” she repeated. “A man who hated him, and wanted to ruin him. I think he must have ruined him. Then mamma died. I think she died of grief.”

She paused, and Neville turned his head away. If there had been any tears in her eyes they had gone when he looked round again.

“Well?” he said.

He had not learned much that was of any use to him as yet.

“Then papa left England, and we traveled about. We lived in France, and papa taught a school. That’s as far back as I can remember clearly, and we were very happy, we two. We used to take long walks along the river bank, and papa would tell me the name of every flower and teach me things. Then one day he came home very sad and tired looking, and said that we must leave. His enemy had been to the school and told lies about him, and the people had believed the enemy because he was rich and powerful, and papa was poor and

unknown.”

Neville’s blue eyes expanded.

“Why, it’s just like a novel, Syl!” he said, gravely.

She nodded.

“Is it? Then we took to wandering again, and sometimes papa got work teaching or in a bank or an office, but sooner or later the enemy would come, and we had to leave.”

“He was a nice kind of man; the enemy, as you call him. What was his name, Syl?”

She shook her head.

“I don’t know. Papa never told me.”

“I’m sorry for that,” said Neville, grimly.

“Why, Jack?”

“Because I should make it my business when I got out of this hole to find that individual and try and square accounts.”

“What could you do, Jack?” she asked, dubiously.

“Well, I could give him the soundest thrashing—but I suppose he would be too old, confound him!”

“Yes,” she said, softly. “But I thank you all the same, Jack.”

And she stretched out the brown paw and laid it on his hot, strong arm.

Neville endured the caress, permitted it, just as a young fellow of twenty suffers his sisters to kiss him.

“Well?” he said. “Is that all?”

“That’s all, I think. Except that poor papa lost heart at last, and we crossed the ocean—oh, how bad I was!—and came here to Australia. But he couldn’t dig, he wasn’t strong enough, and he was different from the rough men—and—and—then——” She stopped and looked down at the pit. “I hope you’ll find another nugget, Jack!”

“So do I,” he said, resuming work.

“I think there’s bound to be one there. Meth says that where there’s one there’s sure to be another. Jack!”

“Well?”

“Did you give Meth all that money she said you did?”

“Yes,” he replied, shortly. “But Meth shouldn’t tell tales out of school.”

Her gray eyes grew soft and melting as they dwelt on him.

“Jack, I think you are the best, the most generous——”

“Hullo!” he interrupted, with a laugh. “Stop that, Syl. Don’t knock me down with compliments of that kind, especially when I’m busy.”

He stooped and sifted the sand, and put two or three tiny lumps of gold on the edge. “That’s something like, Syl!”

She took them up in her hand, and her eyes sparkled.

“Oh, Jack, if you could only find another nugget.”

“Yes!” he said. “And I want it worse than I did.”

“Do you?” she said, turning over the yellow morsels. “Why? Ah, you haven’t much money left after paying for me——”

“Now, then!”

“And giving so much to Meth. But what will you do with it, Jack, when you find it?”

And she drew herself full length toward the edge of the pit, very much as an Indian does, but with the added grace of a young girl, and looked down into it eagerly.

“What shall I do with it?” said Neville, cheerfully. “Well, I shall send you home to England, and put you at a good school—a first-rate one, you know, where you will be with young ladies like yourself. And then——Take care! There, you’ve dropped those lumps into the pit.”

She had let the gold fall from her hand, and had shrunk back under the awning, her face turned away from him.

“That’s what I shall do,” continued Neville, picking up the gold carefully, and ignorant of her sudden change of posture and manner. “The sooner you are out of this hole the better. It’s not the proper place for a young lady. You ought to be in England, in the care of nice people; and that’s where I mean to send you with the first nugget that turns up. And then perhaps, if the luck holds out, I may come, too, and see how you are getting on. But there, by that time, I expect you’ll be ashamed of a rough digger who says ‘me’ for ‘I,’ and—no, I don’t mean that. You’re not that sort, are you, Syl?”

He looked up and saw that she had turned her back to him and that her head was drooping over her bosom.

But with the blindness of his sex and age he had not the least idea of what was the matter with her.

“Getting hot and tired, Syl?” he said. “Better go indoors. But just wait five minutes longer. I fancy I’ve come upon a streak and you are as keen on it as I am, I know, and ought to be keener after what I’ve told you.”

She was keen enough, as a rule, and was wont to watch every spadeful of the dust he threw up; but now she seemed quite indifferent, and would not turn her head.

“There’s gold there,” said Neville, cheerfully. “I’d stake my life on it, and you may see dear old England sooner than you think, Syl. Lord, though, how I shall miss you! That comes of my never having a sister, you see. I shan’t have anybody to come and talk and sing to me when you’ve gone! Just pitch me that ‘cradle,’ will you?”

She pushed it with her tiny foot, still keeping her face away from him.

“Look here!” he cried. “What did I say? Here’s some more of it! Look at this, Syl!”

But to his amazement, she kept her head away from him, rose slowly, and tossing the thick dark hair from her face, walked majestically toward the hut.

CHAPTER IX.

Neville looked at her with all a man’s beautiful stupidity.

“Now I wonder what I said to offend her!” he mused. “What rum things girls are. Any one would have thought that she’d have been delighted at the thought of getting out of this beastly place and going back to England. Well, there’s no understanding women, even when they’re kids. I remember little Audrey Hope used to be just like that; take the huff in a moment. Little Audrey! By George! I suppose she has grown into a woman by this time. What fun we used to have!”

He leaned upon his spade and looked vacantly across the plain. He had forgotten the little maiden who had stalked off to the hut, and was back in England, a boy again, romping with Audrey Hope, of the Grange.

With a sigh, he roused himself and resumed work. At dinner time it was Meth, and not Sylvia, who appeared.

“Hallo!” he said “where’s Sylvia?”

Meth shook her head.

“’Pears to me that young gal o’ yours, Young ’un, is getting proud. ‘You take his dinner, Meth,’ says she, as bold as brass. ‘I shan’t!’ I told yer all along as you was pamperin’ her too much, Young ’un. There she sits with her hands in her lap, starin’ at nuthin’, just like—just like an Injin himage.”

“All right,” said Neville, hoisting himself up on to the bank and beginning

to munch his dinner. "You let her alone, Meth. I won't have her interfered with."

"Hinterfere! Who's hinterfering with her? Seems to me I'm on account now, and 'ud better take my hook."

"Oh, no," said Neville, who thoroughly understood old Meth. "You've got to stick by us, Meth, because you've got to take care of Sylvia."

"Seems to me, Young 'un," retorted Meth, darkly, "that it's you as wants takin' care of more than her."

Neville fell to work again directly after dinner. The claim "paid" well that day, and in an unusually buoyant frame of mind he shouldered his tools and wended home.

Sylvia was seated very much as Meth had described her, and when Neville spread out the results of his day's work on the plank table she would scarcely deign to look at it; but swept it into a heap disdainfully, and plumped down his supper in front of him.

"Why, you might be an empress the way you treat the root of all evil, Syl," he said, with a short laugh. "I tell you, it's a jolly good day; but come and have your supper."

"I don't want any supper," she said, and walked to the door of the hut.

"What did I tell you?" said Meth. "That's the way she's been behavin' all the arternoon. It's pride, and a full stomach; that's what it is."

"Shut up, and leave her alone," said Neville, good-temperedly. "You don't understand young girls, Meth. Leave 'em alone, that's the best thing to do."

He ate his supper, but with only half the usual relish, and with many a glance toward the door of the hut, and was filling his pipe when he heard a cry.

He dropped the pipe and leaped to the door.

Sylvia was not there, and was nowhere to be seen.

He ran out blindly, calling for her as he ran. It was dark, as dark as it can be at that time of the year and night in Australia, and he blundered on straight before him, still calling her name.

Suddenly he heard, to the right of him, the cry repeated. It was her voice.

He tore along, his revolver in his hand, and stumbled upon a horse.

Beside the horse stood Lavarick, struggling with Sylvia.

Neville hurled himself upon the man like a thunderbolt, and struck him twice with the stock end of the revolver.

Lavarick released Sylvia and turned upon Neville. Something glittered dully in the darkness, and Neville felt a sharp, stinging pain in his shoulder.

The next instant Lavarick was under his feet, and the knife was jerked twenty yards away.

A mad rage possessed Neville, and his hands tightened on Lavarick's throat, and that gentleman was within an appreciable distance of his end, when Neville felt a hand upon his arm, and a trembling voice said in his ear:

"No, no! Don't, Jack, don't! He's not worth it."

Neville loosened his hold, and Lavarick struggled to his feet, his long claw-like hands fumbling at his throat, his eyes almost starting from their sockets, glaring in a frenzy of terror at his assailant.

Neville gave him a shake which threatened to loosen every tooth in his head.

"Lavarick," he said, in a voice terrible in its unnatural calmness, "I shall have to kill you!"

Sylvia, trembling in every limb, drew near with a faint cry, but Neville waved her back. His face was white, his lips set, and the blue eyes seemed to shoot flame.

A strong man's rage is a terrible sight, but it is also glorious, and no one can measure the depth of admiration and adoration which filled the heart of the young girl to overflowing as she looked at her brother and protector, transformed by his righteous anger into a demi-god.

"I shall have to kill you, Lavarick!" he repeated.

Lavarick put up both hands.

"Give me time! Let me speak!" he gasped, hoarsely. "I—I'll give you all the money——"

Neville flung him down and knocked his head on the hard ground two or three times.

"You hound!" he said with each knock. "You viper! You're not fit to crawl about among honest men! You'll give me——There!" He flung him away. "Get up, and keep out of my reach. Wait; stay there. Sylvia, you go home, while I—talk to this gentleman."

She hesitated a moment, then turned and left them, glancing back fearfully again and again.

"Now," said Neville, between his clinched teeth, "you owe your life, my friend, to her; you know that."

Lavarick, feeling his throat and half choking, made a terrified gesture of assent.

"Very well, then. But take my second and last warning; the last—do you

hear I give you till to-morrow morning; six o'clock. If, when I come down to the camp at that time, I find you still there, I shall shoot you on sight, like a dog. Wait," for Lavarick, with an evil glance with his shew eye, was preparing to shuffle off. The horse had returned to the camp long since. "I don't think you'll risk your skin again, and yet you have done so. What is your object, Lavarick?"

The man looked at him silently, then dropped his eyes to the ground.

"A man of my years don't like to be outbid by a Young 'un like you," he said, "and the 'boys' have worried me a good bit about it. I didn't mean her any harm. I wanted to get the best of you, that's all."

Neville, ignorant that Lavarick had played the spy while Sylvia's father was dying, did not know whether to accept this reason for Lavarick's attempt at kidnapping or not.

"Very good," he said. "You'll get the very worst of me next time, my friend. Now be off. Remember! The 'boys' will want another Undertaker to-morrow if I find you still in camp. Go!"

Lavarick immediately availed himself of the permission, and Neville, after listening until his footsteps had died away, returned slowly to the hut.

Lavarick's persistence puzzled him. He knew that the man was a coward, and that it must have been a strong inducement to urge him to make the attempt which Neville had foiled. Perhaps the "boys" had goaded him on, in the hope that Neville would dispose of him. Lavarick was no favorite, and could well have been spared.

Sylvia was waiting at the door of the hut for him.

"Has—has he gone?" she asked, in a low voice that trembled, but very slightly.

"Very much gone," said Neville.

"Jack, you don't mean——"

"No, no," he said, laughing shortly; "though he deserved it, and would have got it, but for you. What I meant was that he's gone for good. Lorn Hope Camp will be deprived of one of its ornaments. Don't be frightened, Syl; we've seen the last of him."

She turned her face to him. It was rather pale, but her eyes met his steadily for a moment.

"I am not frightened," she said. "I was till you came up; then"—she paused, and her face lit up—"I knew I was safe."

The infinite trust and reliance expressed by her voice would have touched an older man; but Neville scarcely noticed it.

“Did you ever see Lavarick before, Syl? I mean before you came to the camp?” he asked, thoughtfully, taking off his coat.

She shook her head.

“No, Jack; no. Ah——”

She broke off with something between a gasp and a scream, and shrank back, pointing to his sleeve. It was saturated with blood.

“What’s the matter? Oh, yes; I suppose the fellow scratched me.”

She was at his side the next instant, and with trembling hands was baring his arm, her face now deadly white.

“Now, then, don’t make a fuss,” he said. “It’s nothing. I didn’t feel it till just now.”

“Oh, Jack, Jack!” she murmured.

She flew for a basin of water and a towel, and forced him into a chair, and, with a series of shudders, bathed the wound.

It was not much more than a scratch, and Neville, reaching for his pipe, submitted with a tolerant resignation.

“Look sharp and get it over before old Meth comes back, or she’ll cackle for an hour and drive me silly.”

Sylvia said nothing; she could not have spoken; and Neville, there being no looking glass before him, could not see her face, or the tears that slowly gathered in her eyes, and, mingling with the water, fell upon his bare arm.

“There, that’ll do; thanks,” he said. “You’d make a first-rate hospital nurse, Syl. Here’s old Meth coming. Give me my coat and that blanket. I shall just roll myself up behind the door to-night; not that Mr. Lavarick is likely to pay us a visit, but because you’ll sleep all the sounder if you know I’m on the watch. Now you get off to bed; you look upset and tired. Good-night, Syl.”

“Good-night, Jack,” she said in a very low voice.

But long after Mrs. Meth had made the night musical with her snores, the inner door opened slowly and noiselessly, and Sylvia, still dressed, stole out.

Neville was lying fast asleep, rolled up in his blanket, his face resting on his arm, his revolver in his hand.

She crept up to him noiselessly as a shadow, and stood looking down at him; then she knelt on one knee beside him, and with a touch as light as that of a leaf falling on a lawn in autumn, smoothed the hair from his brow, her lips murmuring his name.

Light as the touch was, it caused Neville to stir slightly, and in an instant she had fled back to her own sanctum.

Before breakfast next morning Neville walked down to the camp. Early as it was, Macgregor's store was pretty full, and Neville's appearance with his revolver conspicuously displayed in his belt caused a sudden pause in the apparently excited conversation.

"Good-morning," said Neville. "Any of you seen Lavarick this morning?"

The question was greeted by a volley of oaths.

"Lavarick!" exclaimed Lockit. "You want Lavarick, do you, Young 'un?"

"I do, rather," said Neville.

"Well"—and here followed a string of expressive and emphatic adjectives—"you ain't alone in that desire. We all want him badly. We're just pining for him. Young 'un, the Undertaker has cut his lucky. Left last night without saying good-by—and with the two best horses in the camp."

Neville looked neither surprised nor disappointed.

"Gone, has he?" he said. "And now perhaps you'll be so good as to tell me which of you sent him fooling up to my place last night."

The question was received with an evidently genuine surprise.

Lockit looked around.

"Came up to your place last night, did he?" he said. "Well, darn my skin if I thought the Undertaker had pluck enough for that. That's one up for him. But if he did he went of his own accord. None of us sent him, eh, boys?"

There was a general and emphatic assent.

"I suppose you meant to go for some of us, eh, Young 'un?" said Lockit. "Well, I'll give you credit for plenty of cheek. Nothing ain't too heavy for you to take in hand, and you'd turn Lorn Hope into a medium-sized cemetery, wouldn't you?"

Neville smiled.

"Well, I admire you," said Lockit; "and I don't bear you no ill will. Here, stop a minute. We've sent two or three of the boys to show Lavarick the way back; they'll be here presently. Drink?"

Neville accepted to show that he was satisfied of their noncomplicity in Lavarick's attempt, and while he was standing talking the clatter of hoofs announced the return of the search party.

There was an immediate rush for the door and a howl of disappointment arose when it was seen that Lavarick was not there.

"No good," said one of the horsemen. "He's got clean off. That sorrel he's took 'ud give any of these half a mile and beat 'em, and he had a matter of five or six hours' start."

“And here’s the Young ’un wants him so badly that he’s nigh heart-broken, ain’t you?” said Lockett.

“Never mind,” said Neville. “If he should come back I should like to see him.”

A derisive laugh greeted the words.

“Oh, don’t you trouble,” said Lockett, sarcastically. “The very moment Mr. Lavarick returns he’s going to perform on a tight rope—with nothing underneath him, and we’ll send you a card of invitation for the performance.”

Neville walked away very thoughtful. Lavarick’s conduct puzzled him. But he set his mind at rest with the reflection that the man was not likely to trouble him or Sylvia again; and he laughed cheerfully as he gave Sylvia an account of the scene at Macgregor’s.

“Your bogie’s gone forever, Syl,” he said. “Lord, how hungry I am!” and he sat himself down to his coffee and cakes with a sigh of content.

It was fortunate for him that he could not see into the future, for if he could have done so Neville’s breakfast would have been spoiled!

CHAPTER X.

The hint that the unfortunate Rachel “had fallen into evil ways,” came from the thin and pale lips of Sir Jordan Lynne, with the cold-bloodedness displayed by a surgeon as he calmly pursues his work over the dissecting table. And the remark fell upon the ears of the policeman without causing the least emotion in that functionary; for policemen are accustomed to the sight of girls who have strayed from the path of virtue.

While outwardly calm, Sir Jordan was much disturbed by his unexpected interview with Rachel, and for several days thereafter did not leave his rooms in South Audley street without pausing at the door and looking carefully up and down the thoroughfare. But although the woman with the worn and sorrowful face may have haunted his dreams, she did not again trouble him with her bodily presence.

The autumn session of Parliament was over, and soon there was an exodus from London, which to many persons seemed extraordinarily dull after the adjournment. The Marlows had already accompanied Audrey Hope to the Grange, which was separated from Lynne Court by the high road, both estates running parallel for a considerable distance.

There were several guests at the Grange, about half a dozen of each sex. Among the fair ones was Miss Lilian Lawson, a bright and attractive young lady, who ranked among the men as a professional beauty. Lord Lorrimore was of course a conspicuous guest, but as he had eyes and ears only for Audrey, the efforts of Miss Lawson to charm him with her smiles and other blandishments were unavailing.

Audrey and the Marlows had been at the Grange three days before Sir Jordan accepted the invitation of his neighbors to visit them. Something had occurred to disturb him on the very evening of his arrival at Lynne Court. Long after midnight, when the servants had retired, that calm and dignified gentleman, having put on a pair of list slippers had stealthily made his way, like a burglar, to the room wherein his father had died. The room was just as it had been on that sad occasion, except that the bed was made. Not an article of furniture was disturbed.

He examined the contents of a bureau, but without finding what he was seeking. Then he drew that cumbersome article of furniture from the wall, and peered behind it. The candle he held flickered with his movements, and cast ghostly shadows around the room. His search was all in vain. Then he turned to a trunk, cautiously opened it, and rummaged therein for a few moments. Whatever it was for which he was searching it evaded him.

He had just arisen from the trunk, after closing it and was brushing the dust from his clothes, when something struck against the shutters of one of the windows.

For once his calmness deserted him. He started, his limbs trembled, and drops of sweat stood out on his marble-like forehead.

In a few moments, failing to hear a repetition of the sound, he wreathed his thin lips into a ghostly smile and muttered:

“Pshaw! It’s only a bat or an owl!”

The experience of that night had so worried him that he feared to show himself to Audrey until he had recovered his mental equilibrium. On the third day thereafter he called on his neighbors, and was kindly welcomed by Audrey and the Marlows.

His presence at the Grange was not appreciated by Lord Lorrimore, because the latter saw in him a rival who would not be likely to spare any effort to win the favor of Audrey. Unpleasant retorts were frequently exchanged between Sir Jordan and Lord Lorrimore, and on one occasion they were on the verge of a serious quarrel, which, fortunately, was interrupted by the timely appearance of Audrey.

The men had gone on a rabbit hunt, and the ladies were to assemble in the

neighborhood of the burrows, to partake of a lunch. Sir Jordan challenged Lorrimore to a short horseback race, the prize to be a rose worn on the bosom of Audrey. Sir Jordan, having the superior horse, won the race and claimed the reward. It was gracefully bestowed upon him by Audrey, who had that morning received the rose from her most devoted attendant, Lord Lorrimore. The fact that this flower had been won by his rival was an unendurable aggravation, and might have led to serious consequences had not Audrey temporarily calmed the hot-headed young man.

A short time afterward Lorrimore challenged Sir Jordan to a test of marksmanship the prize to be the same flower. He cut a small hole in a card, tacked it on a tree, and the agreement was that he who made the best shot should possess the rose. Jordan fired and grazed the top of the card. Lord Lorrimore sent his bullet directly through the hole in the centre.

Jordan took the rose slowly from his coat, and extended it to his rival.

Lorrimore accepted it, raised his hat slightly, and without a word stalked off, and in a few moments found Audrey, as if she had been waiting for him.

She raised her eyes and glanced at him with an offended air, which he affected not to notice as he held out his hand with the rose in it.

“Let me restore you your property, Miss Hope?” he said in a calm tone.

Audrey took the rose, dropped it on the ground, and set her foot on it, then turned her flashing eyes upon him.

“How could you be guilty of such—such folly? To quarrel over a worthless flower!”

“You forget you wore it!” he said in a low voice. “We were not quarreling.”

“You were!” she said, her lips trembling, her eyes moistened by his grave retort. “I saw your faces! Oh, what fools men are! To—to quarrel about a trifle.”

“The woman I love is more than a trifle to me,” he broke in again in his deep voice.

She opened her eyes and swept him a courtesy.

“Oh! Then you were shooting for me, like two ploughboys at a fair?”

“Like two men in deadly earnest. At least, one was!”

“In-deed! And did you think I should be gratified, pleased by such folly? What a vain idiot you must consider me, Lord Lorrimore. My vanity is of a rarer kind than to be gratified in such a way.”

“Show me some other, some higher way!” he said, quickly. “You know

there is nothing I would not do to prove my love and win yours!”

She made an impatient gesture.

“Do you think I could rest easy while that man wore the rose I had given you? Had you flung it into the sea——”

“You would have dived for it,” she broke in, with a laugh which was meant to be sarcastic, but which quavered a little.

“Yes,” he said, gravely. “I will do anything, go anywhere, to prove my love—though I think you cannot doubt it, Audrey.”

She let his use of her Christian name pass unnoticed.

“I have a great mind to send you to—to——” she said, with a laugh of annoyance.

“Send me where you please,” he said.

As he spoke an idea flashed into Audrey’s mind.

“You would go anywhere for me!” she said. “Suppose I asked you to go in search of a lost friend! A friend whose absence and silence trouble me. Would you go? Wait! It is not only for him or myself I ask, but for your sake. Lord Lorrimore, you are wasting your time.” The color rose to her face, then left it pale. “Oh, when will men learn that we silly, useless women are not worth so much trouble!”

“Never mind me,” he said. “Go on. Who is this friend you want me to find?”

He watched her closely.

“Neville Lynne,” she said, meeting his gaze steadily.

He did not start, but still watched her.

“Sir Jordan’s half brother. He does not know where he is?”

“N-o.”

“Or says so! And you——” His lips trembled and he grew pale. “Why do you want this Neville?”

“He is a friend—an old playmate. We were children together, and now he is wandering perhaps friendless and penniless!”

“I will go,” he said.

Then his face changed, and his eyes grew dark.

“And when I come back, having failed or succeeded you will be——”

She did not understand him for a moment, then the blood rushed to her face.

“Audrey Hope still!” she said in a low voice.

His face cleared.

“I may be away some time—a year—two.”

“Two years!” she said, promptly. “I—I will wait. It is a promise!”

He held out his hand.

“Give me your hand!” he said, solemnly.

She stretched it out slowly. He took it and grasped it so tightly that the rings cut her fingers. Then he bent and kissed it, and, without a word, turned away.

She—woman-like—was frightened at what she had done; she did not regret the promise to remain single, but the sending him on a wild-goose chase.

“Lord Lorrimore!” she called out, faintly, so faintly that he did not hear her.

Then she leaned against the tree, and did what every woman knows she would do—burst into tears.

Lord Lorrimore did not appear at dinner that day. Instead, Lady Marlow received a note from him stating that he had been suddenly called to London.

Then Lord Marlow looked around and asked:

“Where’s Audrey?”

She had left the room and gone upstairs, but she entered as he spoke, and came forward with a smile, but looking rather pale. And no wonder, for on her dressing table, where her maid at Lord Lorrimore’s request—and a sovereign—had placed it, she had found this note:

“I have gone. You will keep your part of the compact, I know, and I—well, I will bring your friend to you, if he is alive! Tell no one—especially Sir Jordan Lynne! Lorrimore.”

CHAPTER XI.

The next few days after his departure from the Grange Lord Lorrimore was a very busy man. He put his business affairs entirely in the hands of his lawyer, attended personally to some matters which required his immediate attention, and ten days later was in New York.

Here he made inquiries regarding the young man of whom he was in quest, but could gain no satisfactory information regarding the whereabouts of

Neville Lynne.

A month was passed in the American metropolis, and then Lorrimore set out for San Francisco. The search in California was diligently pursued, but without finding a trace of the wanderer. In a Ballarat paper, which Lorrimore found in the reading-room of the Palace Hotel, San Francisco, he saw an account of an exciting incident in a mining town in Wildfall, Australia, wherein an athletic young English miner of refined manners and mysterious deportment had enacted a heroic part against some ruffians. The description answered that of Neville, and with the hope of at least finding a clue to his abiding place, Lorrimore took the next steamer for Australia. In due time he reached Ballarat, and found little difficulty in making his way thence to Wildfall.

Wildfall, he discovered, was in a state of great excitement. An adjacent mining town, Lorn Hope Camp, had suddenly become inoculated with a religious fever, through the advent there of the Rev. Mr. Brown and his pretty, blue-eyed daughter Mary. The good people of Lorn Hope attentively listened to the preachings of Mr. Brown, and were so deeply impressed by his pious fervor that they had banished all the ne'er-do-wells and blacklegs from the settlement. They had then organized as a gang of rangers, with the purpose of despoiling travelers, and had found hiding places in a lonely district between Wildfall and Lorn Hope, which settlements were about twenty miles apart.

Already frequent attacks had occurred within short distances of Wildfall, and several travelers had been plundered by the road agents. Consequently, when Lorrimore arrived at Wildfall, he soon became acquainted with the condition of affairs in that vicinity.

A body of vigilantes was organized in Wildfall to pursue the rangers, and Lorrimore joined it. He had learned of the peril of attempting to reach Lorn Hope Camp, where he expected to find some tidings of Neville, unless he were protected by an armed guard; hence his eagerness to join the vigilantes.

Thus was the condition of affairs at Wildfall, and it was in direct contrast with that at the camp of Lorn Hope, where unusual serenity reigned. Neville had struck a golden treasure in a lovely valley, a few miles from his hut, and was secretly working the streams which flowed between lofty hills. The creek beds gave forth gold in large quantities, and every night, after his day's labor, he conveyed his auriferous dust and nuggets to his hut, and he and Sylvia rejoiced in the thought that soon they would have enough to warrant their departure for merrie England.

To prevent discovery of his good luck by the miners of Lorn Hope, Neville only occasionally worked his new claim—seldom going to the distant valley

oftener than on alternate days. In the meantime he cultivated the acquaintance of the Rev. Mr. Brown and his charming daughter, and in the latter found much to interest and delight him.

His interest in Mary Brown presently became painfully apparent to Sylvia Bond and caused deep distress to that sensitive girl. On one occasion, indeed, when Neville had brought from the valley a little bouquet of flowers which he had plucked in the valley, especially for the minister's daughter, Sylvia wept secretly at the disturbing reflection that "her Jack," as she mentally called him, could be so cruel as to slight her by bestowing floral favors on any other young lady.

These flowers were of a different variety from any that grew in the immediate vicinity of Lorn Hope Camp. When they were seen by Lockit adorning the corsage of Mary Brown, and he learned from that young lady that they had been presented by Neville, he suspected that Neville's frequent absences from the camp were not entirely due to his desire to gather rare floral tributes.

Lockit secretly followed Neville to the valley, saw him at work in the beds of the creeks, gathering shining gold, and in less than a week after this discovery the valley echoed to the music of picks and shovels wielded by scores of miners.

Oh! exasperating thought! Neville's secret had been betrayed by the flowers he had bestowed upon the minister's daughter.

It was not long after that when Neville determined to shake the dust of Lorn Hope Camp from his feet, and start for England, taking Sylvia with him. This determination pleased Sylvia, for she welcomed any change which would remove "her Jack" from the fascinations of the minister's daughter.

Preparations for travel were immediately made, and Neville and Sylvia started for Wildfall, where he intended to exchange his gold for notes or letters of credit. They resolved to walk the twenty miles, wisely thinking that if they rode, their horses' footsteps would certainly arouse the attention of the rangers, should any be in the neighborhood of the route that led to Wildfall.

Night overtook them ere they were two-thirds of the distance, but a bright moon rendered their way clear.

Suddenly as they were passing through a thicket, Neville's keen ears caught the sound of a breaking twig; in a moment more both of the travelers heard the noise of horses' hoofs.

He motioned to her to crouch down, and knelt beside her.

"They may pass," he whispered close to her ear; "but get your revolver ready!"

The color fled from her face, but not with fear.

“Jack,” she said in a still voice, “I—have—left—it—behind.”

He nodded coolly, and pressed her hand to comfort and encourage her.

The sounds came nearer and the voices grew plainer.

“They’re here somewhere,” they heard one say. “It isn’t possible for them to slip us.”

“No,” came the response, and at the sound of the voice uttering the single word Neville’s heart leaped fiercely, and Sylvia shuddered. The second voice that had spoken was Lavarick’s! Lavarick’s! “No! We’ve got ’em, I think. Mind! Do what you like with the man—shoot the young hound if you fancy it—but I won’t have the girl hurt. I want her safe and sound!”

Neville put his hand over Sylvia’s lips, but he need not have been afraid. Her heart was cold with terror—not for herself, but for him—but she would have died rather than utter a sound. They crouched motionless, almost breathless, and waited.

CHAPTER XII.

Five, ten minutes passed, and still Neville and Sylvia crouched motionless in the gloom of the thicket. No sound of the horsemen was heard, and they hoped that they had gone. Still, they deemed it best to remain under cover rather than risk peril by traveling in the moonlight’s glare.

Neville collected a mass of dead leaves, which plentifully strewed the ground, and made of them a rude bed for his companion. He had to use persuasion to induce her to rest on this primitive couch, but at length she assented, and in a few minutes was in deep slumber. He took off his jacket and laid it gently upon her.

Silently he watched the fair sleeper, and incoherent murmurs presently escaped her. Evidently she was in the land of dreams.

He bent down and heard his name breathed by her parted lips.

“Jack! Jack!”

Then she smiled.

Neville was touched.

“Poor little Syl!” he murmured. “Dreaming of me! Well, who else has she to dream of? I’m the only one she’s got in the world. Lord, I wish we were out

of this! I was wrong to risk it! I ought to have waited for a party or an escort. What would all the gold in the world be worth if anything happened to her?"

His question was answered the moment it was uttered. For in that moment he heard a crackling of the bushes behind him and turning received a crushing blow on the head.

He fired, but in the moment of blindness caused by the blow, and in an instant felt himself seized and his arms forced behind his back.

Then in the next flash of time he saw a dozen men surrounding them—saw Sylvia, awakened by the report of the revolver, spring to her feet to be seized by one of the ruffians.

"Jack!"

The cry rose in the silence of the night, and went like a knife to Neville's heart. He tugged and tore at the cords which bound him like a madman.

And at his futile efforts there rose a mocking laugh. At a little distance was Lavarick on horseback.

"Hold the girl tight!" he said. "Don't hurt her!" for Sylvia was fighting with the man who held her as a wild cat fights, as a tigress about to be torn from her cubs fights, with teeth and hands, and the man who held her had difficulty to keep her in his grasp. "Don't hurt her, but silence that young hound."

One of the ruffians struck Neville across the forehead and his head fell forward.

An awful cry rose from Sylvia's pale lips.

"No! no!" she shrieked. "Don't—don't kill him! I will go! I will go quietly, sir!"

And she let her hands fall to her side, her eyes fixed on Neville.

"You'd better!" snarled Lavarick. "Now, boys, search him. The stuff's on him somewhere. Look sharp!"

A couple of men tore Neville's shirt open and cutting the strings of the bag which held his gold, held it up with a chuckle.

"Here you are, guv'nor!"

"Right!" said Lavarick. "Now bring the girl here. Keep quiet, young lady, or I'll——"

And he pointed his revolver at the unconscious Neville.

Sylvia stretched out her hand to Lavarick imploringly.

"No! No! I will!—I will—I will go where you like! Only—only—don't hurt him! Oh, Jack, Jack! Let me—oh, let me take him with me! You won't

leave him there to—to die!”

And her voice rose to a shriek, and she managed to throw herself on her knees beside the horse.

Lavarick looked down at her distorted face with a fiendish malice.

“Oh, you’re humble enough, now, young lady!” he said with a smile.

“Yes—yes!” she moaned. “Remember, I—I pleaded for you!”

“Because I wasn’t worth killing! Oh, I don’t forget!” he retorted, with an angry twist of his cast eye.

Sylvia shuddered; she read the pitiless face all too distinctly; but still she pleaded.

“Take him with you!” she moaned. “I—I will promise that he shall give you the gold——”

Lavarick laughed and pointed to the two men near Neville. They were gloating over the open bag.

“You young idiot! We’ve got your gold already!”

“He shall give you more, I—I——Oh, have pity, have mercy. I never harmed you, nor he! He spared your life—spare his!”

Lavarick frowned down at her.

“Enough of this tomfoolery,” he said, savagely. “Hand her up here!”

The man who still held her lifted her in his arms, and flung her across Lavarick’s saddle.

She did not resist; Lavarick’s revolver was still pointed at Neville.

“Now,” he said, “just quiet that infernal young scamp for good, and come on. Be alive.”

One of the men with the bag glanced at Neville.

“He’s quiet enough,” he growled, sullenly.

A wail rose from Sylvia’s white lips.

“Come on, then!” said Lavarick. “We’ve got the money and the girl.”

All but the two men near Neville had already mounted, and of these two one sprang on to his horse. The other was about to follow, when suddenly, with a superhuman effort—that effort which despair and madness alone can make—Neville broke the badly made rope which bound him.

He had recovered consciousness some few minutes before, but had been incapable of movement.

As the rope strained and cracked he flung himself forward on his revolver which lay at his feet. The two men told off to guard and search him had been

too engrossed by the plunder to notice the weapon.

He clutched the revolver, and stepped back to wait the attack of the remaining guard, and before the ruffian could utter a cry of warning Neville's bullet had penetrated his heart and he leaped in the air and fell dead.

Neville staggered over the dead body, and saw Lavarick, with Sylvia on the saddle in front of him. He had pulled up at the sound of the shot.

With an oath, he struck his horse and swung it round toward Neville. Then he stopped; the moonlight glittered on the barrel of Neville's revolver, aimed directly at him.

"Shoot him, some of you!" cried Lavarick.

As he spoke Sylvia snatched the revolver out of his hand, and pulled the trigger. She must have killed Lavarick, for the revolver touched against his chest, but unfortunately the barrel had turned to an empty chamber, and before she could fire again, Lavarick had recovered the weapon.

He snarled like a hyena.

"Shoot him!" he yelled again, ducking his head.

At that moment one of the gang uttered a warning cry, and Lavarick's horse, already startled, turned round and sped away.

Neville staggered into range, and knelt on one knee to take better aim. Then he hesitated, and groaned. If he should miss Lavarick and hit Sylvia. The dread paralyzed him.

She read his fear in her face.

"Shoot, Jack, shoot!" rose from her white lips.

He fired instantly, but his fear had spoiled his aim. The bullet whizzed past Lavarick's head.

With a laugh of triumph and exultation Lavarick turned and fired.

The bullet struck Neville in the leg. He did not fall, but staggered against a tree, and there, unable to move, stood holding out his hand with a look on his face, with a cry on his lips of concentrated agony which no words can describe.

Then in that moment, as he saw her borne away from him, he learned how dear she was to him.

"Sylvia! Sylvia!" rang through the woods, and her answering cry came back, "Jack! Jack!"

Then he fell forward on his face, and all was silent.

CHAPTER XIII.

As we have previously stated, Lord Lorrimore had joined a body of vigilantes. He was out with them one night in quest of the villainous rangers, and after a long search they resolved to encamp for the night. Guards were placed, and the others sought rest, among the latter being Lorrimore. After he had been about an hour asleep, he was aroused by the sound of pistol shots. He was on his feet in a moment, and almost at the same instant the rest of the vigilantes were awakened and on the alert. Lord Lorrimore, startled from a dream of Audrey, looked round confusedly; it was difficult to realize where he was.

"It's them scoundrels," said the captain of the vigilantes. "If luck's with us we've got 'em this time. Quiet's the word!"

And he sprang into his saddle.

"Steady, boys!" he said in a low voice. "Let no man fire till he gets the word from me."

They rode forward quickly but cautiously. The sound of firing had ceased, but suddenly there rose from the dense stillness of the wood a piercing, heartbroken shriek.

The blood started to Lord Lorrimore's face.

"Great Heaven!" he said. "That's a woman's voice."

"You're right, sir, it is," assented the captain.

"For God's sake, let us ride on!" exclaimed Lord Lorrimore.

The captain held up his hand.

"No hurry, sir," he said, with the coolness of a man accustomed to such scenes. "What I want to do is to take them by surprise. I've laid myself out to haul these fellows into Wildfall alive. They shall have a fair trial, and as much justice as they can hold."

Lorrimore held his chafing horse in hand with difficulty.

The captain pulled up presently, and bending down till his head was below his horse's neck, listened intently. Then he waved his hand to right and left.

"Spread yourselves out," he said, "and go for 'em. They're on ahead."

As if they were racers who had been waiting for the word "go," the excited men charged forward.

Utterly regardless of the overhanging branches and the thick undergrowth, Lorrimore urged his horse on at full speed; though, indeed, the animal with a horse's quick instinct, was aware that it was chasing something, and needed no urging. Presently they heard the sound of horses in front of them and

Lorrimore's heart gave a bound as he saw one of the rangers tearing through a glade.

The captain also saw him, and putting his hand to his mouth shouted:

“Stop, or I'll fire!”

The ranger dug spurs into his horse, and the captain firing, the man threw up his hands and fell backward.

“Number one,” said the captain grimly. “We'll show 'em we mean business, anyhow.”

As he spoke a bullet whizzed past Lorrimore's ear.

“Lie low, sir,” said the captain. “The whole gang's here and the fun's begun.”

A volley of bullets corroborated his assertion, and one of the vigilantes fell from his saddle.

Lord Lorrimore's blood was up; he could see before him, in the space between the trees, the ranger riding for dear life. Between him and them stretched a natural fosse, and in cooler moments Lorrimore never would have dreamed of taking it, but now without hesitation he let his horse have its head, and the gallant beast rose and cleared the hollow like a bird on the wing. As he did so some one dashed in front of him, but not so swiftly that Lorrimore did not see that the man had something lying across the saddle. In a moment he realized that the something was a woman, and he would have fired if he had dared to run the risk of shooting her instead of the man. There was nothing for it but to give chase and overhaul him.

Lavarick was mounted on the best horse belonging to the gang and the animal was fresh, whereas that ridden by Lorrimore was rather jaded. But Lorrimore had not ridden steeplechases without learning that it is not always the best horse that wins. He pulled up for an instant, took the line Lavarick was going, saw that he was striking for the plain, and, making a slight detour, emerged from the wood at the same time as Lavarick, but of course at a different point.

It was now an open race. Lavarick looked round, scanned the horse and rider pursuing him, and drawing his revolver, leveled it at Lorrimore, but hampered by his lifeless burden, and the pace at which he was going, he could not take accurate aim, and no harm was done.

It would be very difficult to tell what it cost Lorrimore to refrain from sending a bullet into the scoundrel's back, but the Englishman's repugnance to shooting a man from behind held his hand, and he contented himself with riding as rapidly as possible.

A hideous din of firing and yelling sounded behind him, but Lorrimore scarcely heard it; it was this man with the helpless woman in his grasp whom he wanted and meant to have.

The plain was not of very great extent, and Lorrimore saw a dark line of trees which formed the entrance to a wood similar to that which they had just left. It was to this Lavarick was making, and if he could only gain it he would be able to put in practice a favorite dodge. He intended to dismount, turn his horse loose, and hide himself and Sylvia in the undergrowth, counting upon Lord Lorrimore following the riderless horse.

He knew that he was better mounted, and an evil smile twisted his ugly mouth, but the smile disappeared as he heard the thud, thud of the pursuer's horse more distinctly. Lorrimore was gaining on him.

They drew nearer the dark outline of the wood. Lorrimore, though he guessed nothing of Lavarick's intended subterfuge, felt somehow that he must stop the man before he left the plain.

By this time Lorrimore was almost enjoying himself, and he would have been at the height of enjoyment—for a man hunt is of all things the most exciting—but that the sight of the helpless figure lying across Lavarick's saddle sobered him with anxiety.

He was gaining still, though slightly, and wild exultation rose within him as he saw that the double burden was beginning to tell upon the ranger's horse. Lavarick knew that his horse was failing, and he ground his teeth and swore as he savagely dug his spurs into the animal's reeking sides.

The horse made a spurt, but it was only a spurt, and Lavarick knew that he must be overtaken before he could reach the wood. He looked down at Sylvia, and back at the pursuer. That he should be hung within, say, twenty-four hours of his capture he knew was as certain as that the moon was shining above him. A string of curses flowed from his lips, and with one hand he tried to open Sylvia's dress at the throat, but she was lying face downward, and without stopping the horse it was impossible to move her.

Lorrimore was drawing nearer and nearer, Lavarick could almost feel the rope round his throat. Suddenly, with an oath which expressed his disappointment and impotent rage, he pulled up and dropped Sylvia from the saddle. The horse, relieved of part of its burden, dashed forward with renewed energy.

Lord Lorrimore's heart stood still as he saw the girl fall and in an instant was set up within his breast the problem. Which should he do? Follow the ranger, or stay with his victim? Only for an instant did he hesitate. He pulled up, fired a shot at the flying man, then leaped from his horse and bent over

Sylvia. The moon shone full upon her white, upturned face, and he was startled to find that what he had taken for a woman was but a young girl. He raised her head upon his knee and tried to pour some brandy from his flask through her clinched teeth.

The sight of her youth and beauty, and the terror which, though she was still unconscious, was depicted on the lovely face, touched him to the heart.

What should he do? He called loudly for help, but in his headlong race he had crossed the plain and left the wood from which they had started far behind, and his cry met with no response.

He took her in his arms, and carried her to his horse. The animal, as if aware that his presence was needed, had stood panting and reeking where Lorrimore had left him.

Lorrimore placed Sylvia in the saddle, and supporting her so that her head rested on his shoulder, he led the horse slowly and carefully back toward the wood.

As he approached it the captain and a couple of men rode out. They set up a shout of congratulation as they saw Lorrimore, and the captain, pointing to Sylvia, waved his hat.

“Well, sir!” he said, “that was the neatest thing in races I’ve ever seen. I’m glad, right down glad, that you’ve got the woman, but I’d a’ been gladder still if you’d dropped that darned skunk as well. He was the captain of the gang. Why, bless my heart! It’s only a girl! Tut, tut; she ain’t dead, sir, is she?”

“No, no,” said Lorrimore, “I think not, I trust not. Has any one some water?”

He lifted Sylvia from the horse and supported her on his knee. A man produced a water flask, and Lorrimore bathed her forehead and tried again to get some brandy through her teeth. He may have succeeded, for he fancied that he felt her heart flutter beneath his hand.

“We must get her to the camp as soon as possible,” he said.

“Yes, sir,” said the captain. “A doctor’s what she wants. The poor girl is just dead with fright. Look alive, my men, and let’s have a litter.”

Three or four men quickly cut down some branches and deftly formed a litter which would not have disgraced an ambulance society.

Lorrimore laid her gently upon this, and covered her with his and the captain’s coats, and walked beside her, holding her hand, as four men carried her into the wood, for he felt instinctively that should she awake, a touch of a friendly hand might help to reassure her.

He had forgotten all about the fight so engrossed was he by Sylvia, but he

looked up suddenly and said to the captain:

“The prisoners have gone on, I suppose?”

“What prisoners?” said the captain, dryly.

“The rangers, the men you have taken,” said Lorrimore.

“There ain’t no prisoners, sir,” replied the captain. “I reckon there was eleven of ’em in the gang; two got off, including the gentleman you was after. The rest of ’em lie there,” and he pointed to a line of bodies, round which the rest of the vigilantes were standing.

“Great Heaven!” exclaimed Lorrimore, under his breath.

“You’re disappointed, sir,” said the captain, “and so am I, and so will the boys in the camp be. We’ve looked forward to a high old time, with the trial, and the execution, and the rest of it. We’ve got a chap made judge already. But there was no help for it; we should have lost the lot if we’d tried to take ’em alive. I’m sorry.”

Lorrimore shuddered.

“Let us go on,” he said. “If the poor girl should come to in this spot with those men lying there——”

The captain understood and nodded.

“Go on toward the camp with her, boys,” he said. “I’ll ride on and send a cart to meet you, sir. The rest of the boys will stop here until the burying party comes.”

Lorrimore still walked beside the litter, holding Sylvia’s hand, and suddenly he felt it move in his. He called to the men to stop, and bent over her eagerly. She sighed painfully and opened her eyes.

For a moment or two they gazed up at Lorrimore’s anxious face with vacant terror, then rose from her lips a faint cry:

“Jack! my brother, my brother!”

That word was the cause of the terrible confusion which brought so much trouble in the near aftertime.

Holding up his hand for silence, Lorrimore raised her head.

“Your brother?” he said. “Where is he?”

She motioned faintly toward the wood.

“You mean that you left him there?” said Lord Lorrimore.

“Yes,” she breathed with pitiful eagerness and anxiety. “Take me to him! Bring him to me.”

Lorrimore beckoned two of the men who stood looking on in respectful

silence.

“Go back and search,” he said. “We will wait here.” A pressure of the weak little hand thanked him, as she dropped back exhausted by the few words she had spoken.

The two men went back and commenced their search. They had no difficulty in tracking their way through the bent and crushed undergrowth to the spot where Sylvia and Neville had been surprised and attacked, and there, lying dead, they found the man Neville had shot. He was a young fellow of about Neville’s age, and not unlike him. Indeed, all diggers, given similarity of age, are somewhat alike in appearance. While he had been examining the bag, he had put on Neville’s peajacket. It was stained by dust and clay, and the two vigilantes at once recognized it as a genuine digger’s jacket. They looked no further, though poor Neville at that very moment lay hidden in the thick bush but a few yards from them.

“This is him,” said one of the men, “this is her brother.”

“And dead as a herrin’, poor devil,” said the other. “I’m sorry for that poor girl! Let’s take the coat, she’ll know if it’s his or not, and that’ll settle the matter.”

They hurried back to where Lorrimore and the litter were waiting.

Thinking Sylvia still unconscious, one of the men held up the coat.

“We’ve found him, sir,” he said. “Dead! Here’s his coat.”

Lorrimore put his hand up to stop them, but it was too late. Sylvia had heard the awful words, and recognized the coat. A shudder shook her, and a faint cry rose from her white lips, then the hand became still as death in Lorrimore’s.

“By Heaven!” he said. “You’ve killed her!”

CHAPTER XIV.

Sylvia was not dead, but the hand of death hovered so near that Lord Lorrimore could scarcely tell whether she lived or not.

They placed her gently in the cart the captain had sent to meet them, and Lorrimore rode with her, supporting her head upon his knee.

In the excitement caused by the news of the encounter with the rangers her arrival at the camp was scarcely noticed. Fortunately the doctor was a married man, and she was carried direct to his tent, where she received every attention.

“It’s a case of collapse,” he said. “Prolonged terror, followed by the shock caused by the news of her brother’s death, has simply stunned her. Poor girl! Oh, yes, she’ll recover; but she will want careful nursing, and she shall have it.”

He was as good as his word, and his wife, a warm-hearted American, devoted herself to the stricken girl as if she had been her daughter.

Lorrimore haunted the tent. In his anxiety for Sylvia he almost forgot his mission, and when it did flash across him, that hunting rangers and rescuing damsels in distress was hardly searching for Neville Lynne, he consoled himself with the reflection that when Sylvia recovered he could ask her if such a man as he was looking for was in Lorn Hope Camp.

On the second day he learned from the doctor that Sylvia’s condition had improved. She was not yet, however, fully conscious; her mind was only clear at intervals, and would wander off into shadowland as if loth to come back to real life.

“She thinks of nothing but her brother,” said Mrs. Langley, the doctor’s wife. “It’s pitiable to hear the poor girl call upon his name, and in a voice that brings the tears to your eyes. They must have been very fond of each other.”

Lord Lorrimore wandered about the camp, watching the diggers, who went on with their work as if the shooting of nine men were a most ordinary occurrence, and occasionally taking his gun and getting a bird or two; but three or four times a day he was at the doctor’s tent, making inquiries.

A week passed in this way, and one morning the doctor’s wife informed him that she thought Sylvia was well enough to see him.

Lorrimore entered the tent and found Sylvia lying in an extemporized armchair made out of empty boxes, and his tender heart was touched by her altered appearance.

Neville himself would scarcely have recognized in the thin, wan face with its black-ringed, mournful eyes, the bright and happy girl who had walked so happily through the woods with him but seven days ago.

She held out her hand—it was white now, alas! instead of brown, and looked woefully thin and long—and he took it and sat down beside her.

“I am glad to see you are better,” he said, scarcely knowing what tone to adopt, for though she looked so young, her sorrow had given her an expression which was almost that of a mature woman. “You have been very ill, I am afraid.”

“Yes,” she said, apathetically; “I suppose I have.”

“But you are better now, and will soon get strong,” he said, with the

awkwardness a man always displays on such occasions.

Sylvia had learned of the part played by Lorrimore in her rescue, and she gratefully thanked him for his inestimable service on her behalf. She then pathetically told her own story in a way that deeply affected the young nobleman, and her constant references to "dear Jack," brought a mist of moisture to his eyes. He asked her if she wished to return to Lorn Hope Camp, but she promptly declined, saying that she could not endure existence in a place which would constantly remind her of her faithful Jack.

Lorrimore never for a moment dreamed that she was lamenting the death of the very man of whom he was in quest.

It was agreed, after a conversation with Dr. Langley, that as the young nobleman was determined to aid Sylvia in every way in his power, it would be best to remove her from the scenes where she had experienced so much misfortune.

In the doctor's family was a sweet-faced young woman, pale, sad and reserved, whom he had brought with him from England as companion and attendant to Mrs. Langley. This young woman, Mercy Fairfax, had served as nurse to Sylvia during the first days of her illness, and no one could have been more kind and attentive to the invalid. Consequently she had won the highest esteem of Sylvia.

The subject of Sylvia's removal to other scenes was suggested to the latter, and she was in no way averse to the project.

Lorrimore, too, was eager to get away, and pursue his search in other quarters, for he had been informed by Sylvia that her beloved Jack was the only refined gentleman in Lorn Hope Camp, all the others, in her estimation, being rude, and therefore undesirable acquaintances.

If this were true, reasoned Lorrimore, and he had no reason to doubt the statement, it would be useless for him to visit Lorn Hope, with the expectation of finding Neville Lynne. Therefore, it would be a waste of time for Lorrimore to remain longer in that neighborhood.

The matter of an early flitting was lengthily discussed by the nobleman and the bereaved girl, and the former eloquently pointed out the advantages of a change of scene. While the two were thus engaged, the doctor and his wife came in, and Lorrimore turned to greet them.

"Miss Sylvia and I have just been coming to a decision as to her future. How soon do you think we can start, doctor?"

Mrs. Langley stooped and kissed Sylvia.

"My dear, I shall miss you very much," she whispered. "But it is better for

you to go.”

“In a day or two,” replied the doctor.

“I shall want someone, some woman, to accompany her,” said Lorrimore, walking toward the door of the tent with the doctor.

“I’ve thought of that, and we’ll find some one. What you want is a steady, sober person—neither too old nor too young—who will not only be a watchdog but a companion for her.”

“Exactly,” said Lorrimore. “But I’m afraid you’ll discover it rather difficult to find such a person in a digger’s camp.”

“Yes,” said the doctor, thoughtfully.

As he spoke his glance fell upon the figure of Mercy Fairfax, standing outside the tent with some needlework in her hand. He put his hand upon Lord Lorrimore’s arm.

“By Jove!” he said. “There’s the very woman, if she will go!”

Lorrimore looked at the pale, sad face curiously.

“Who is she?” he asked. “I noticed her when I entered the tent just now.”

“She came out as a companion to my wife,” replied the doctor. “As to who she is—Well, I’m afraid I can’t give you anything like full information. I met her first at one of the London hospitals. She was a nurse, and a remarkably good one, too. She attracted my attention by the peculiar—what shall I call it?—quietude of her manner. Look at her now.”

Lorrimore did look, and understood what it was the doctor found so difficult to explain.

“A woman with a history,” he said in a low voice.

“Just so. But what that history is no one knows, and I have never asked. Beyond hearing that she is a widow, I have learned nothing about her. But this I can say,” he went on, earnestly, “that I believe few better women exist. She was patience and kindness and devotion themselves in the hospital, and since she has been with us our respect for her has increased daily. My wife will give her the best of characters. If you are content to let her past history remain a blank, and will take her on our credentials, our experience of her, why I’ll answer for it you will get just the woman you want!”

While he had been speaking Mercy had withdrawn to a little distance.

“I’ll take her,” said Lorrimore. “Her face and manner impress me favorably. Speak to her, doctor.”

She turned and came toward them as the doctor called her, and stood with downcast eyes and placidly sad face.

“Mercy,” said the doctor, “Lord Lorrimore and I have been talking about you.”

She raised her eyes.

“I know it, sir. I heard nearly all you said, until I moved away.”

“Well, then,” said the doctor, “what is your answer? Will you go with Sylvia and take care of her? You know we shall be sorry enough to lose you, but——”

Her lips twitched for a moment, then she looked from one to the other.

“Yes, I will go,” she said in her subdued voice.

And so another link in the chain of coincidence was forged and clasped!

Two days after the fight with the rangers, Lockit and the Scuffler, happening to be strolling in the direction of the woods, came upon a man lying full length under a big tree.

“Hallo!” exclaimed Lockit. “One of our fellows has been on a tear. Why, dash my wig! if it ain’t the Young ’un. Fancy the Young ’un going on a spree! I thought he looked rather upset and bowled over when he came upon us in the valley and found we’d tapped his secret. And he’s been on a drunk,” he added, looking down at the prone figure with an expression half admiring and half envious.

But the Scuffler, whose experience in such cases was both varied and extensive, looked grave and shook his head.

“ ’Pears to me,” he said as he bent over poor Neville and turned him face upward, “ ’Pears to me that this ain’t no spree at all. By Josh, if the Young ’un ain’t dead, he’s pretty near it!”

Carefully they conveyed him to his own hut, and the doctor of Lorn Hope Camp attended him, and in about ten days brought him round. His first coherent questions were of Sylvia.

He learned of her rescue from Lavarick by a young Englishman, her careful nursing at Wildfall, under the ministrations of Dr. Langley and his wife, and her heart-rending agony on being informed that her “dear Jack” was dead; for she had been shown the jacket worn by the dead ranger, and even now treasured the contents of the pockets of that garment which had given plausibility to such an appalling blunder.

Yet the news of Sylvia’s safety cheered Neville; but he was overcome with pain and anxiety when the tidings came to him that, believing him dead, Sylvia had been persuaded to seek recuperation by travel, under the guidance of the young nobleman, who had induced Mercy Fairfax to accompany her as

chaperone.

“Alone! my God, I am all alone!” Neville exclaimed when the full meaning of Sylvia’s departure dawned upon him. “God pity me, I have lost her!” he moaned.

When his strength was well-nigh restored he attempted to banish his sad reflections by work, and again began his search for gold. But he could not labor with his old energy, and his reward was insignificant. Then he wandered here and there, in the neighborhood of the valley where he had once been fortunate. Thus a month passed, and then he disappeared from Lorn Hope Camp.

His disappearance caused considerable speculation among the visitors at Macgregor’s saloon.

Where had he—a penniless man—gone?

CHAPTER XV.

Two years and five months have elapsed since the memorable day when Audrey Hope and Lord Lorrimore parted. She had promised him to remain single for two years, and during all that time she had not heard from him. Five months ago, the period expressed in her promise had expired, and now she was free—free to bestow her hand on any deserving man whom she could love.

She had many suitors, the most persistent of whom was Sir Jordan Lynne, whose political advancement had been so rapid that now it was popular gossip that he was not unlikely to be selected for the premiership. In fact, he had aspirations in that direction himself, and already his ambitious eye, peering into the not distant future, saw himself in the chief position in the State, holding the reins of government in his firm grasp, shaping the events of a vast empire.

This ambitious man on a certain eventful evening was sufficiently confidential with Audrey Hope to confide to her his aspirations, thinking thus to dispel the indifference with which she had heretofore received his pleadings for that love which was the great longing of his heart. It was at a grand party at the Marlow’s mansion in Grosvenor Square. The representatives of royalty were there, and Sir Jordan had led Audrey from the ballroom to a screened balcony, to escape for a time from the warm atmosphere of the house.

In ardent words, with passionate fervor, he proclaimed his devotion, but she gave no encouragement to him, politely changed the subject of

conversation and impressed him with the belief that nature had implanted in her breast a heart of marble.

He feared that her affections were bestowed elsewhere—that the very man he detested, Lord Lorrimore, was the man whose image found warm lodgment in her bosom. She had not expressed, at least in his hearing, her preference for Lord Lorrimore; but his suspicions warned him that that impetuous young nobleman was a rival to be dreaded.

With the intention of crushing that young man, and exhibiting him in a detestable light before Audrey, he had supplied himself with a clipping from the *Paris Figaro* descriptive of a liaison between Lord Lorrimore and a beautiful opera singer whose theatrical name was the Silver Star.

Sir Jordan preceded the presentation of this clipping by keen innuendoes founded on Parisian gossip regarding the admiration of Lord Lorrimore for the operatic beauty, and then showed the newspaper extract to her.

She read it carefully with distressful earnestness, which she strove to conceal from Sir Jordan; then, thinking of the knight-errant whom she had dispatched on an important mission, she mentally said:

“So much for modern chivalry! And I thought him a most devoted knight—a man to be trusted!”

Had Sir Jordan at that moment renewed his suit it is very probable that he would have been successful; but his repulse about half an hour before had temporarily embittered him against her, and his present object was to wound the woman who, he thought, had been captivated by Lorrimore.

Later in the evening, as Sir Jordan was on the portico of the mansion awaiting the announcement of the arrival of his carriage, a stalwart young man, shabbily-dressed, stood near the entrance, among a dozen other wayfarers who had paused there. The vehicle presently drove up, and a footman shouted:

“Sir Jordan Lynne’s carriage!”

The shabbily-dressed young man started, looked up and saw the nobleman, with majestic stride, bowing to the right and left as cheers greeted the well-known statesman.

He entered the vehicle, and admiring shouts reached his ears as he was driven off.

The young man in tattered garb raised his cap from his brow, wiped the moisture from his forehead, and an involuntary sigh escaped him.

He was Neville Lynne, half brother to Sir Jordan, recently arrived from Australia—the Young ’un of Lorn Hope Camp.

That night, in his lonely garret room, in one of the least attractive localities of London, Neville Lynne threw himself on an humble couch, and dreamed of many things—of his half brother, of Audrey Hope, of Sylvia Bond, and of Lorn Hope Camp.

It was two days later when desiring to visit the village of Lynne, he set out for the home of his youth, and walked the entire distance, his purse being scant. He merely wished to behold once more the scenes of his happy boyhood days. In his shabby garb he was not likely to be recognized, and he had no desire to be recognized in his present tattered habiliments.

Keeping in the outskirts of the village until dusk, he then strolled on until he arrived at the railing encircling Lynne Park. Bounding over with the agility of a trained athlete, he advanced until he was close to the house. He thought of the days long past, of his father and of Audrey Hope.

He was in deep reflection when suddenly he found both his elbows grasped from behind.

With a sudden twist of his leg he entangled the lower limbs of his assailant, and in a moment the latter found himself whirled to the ground, where he lay panting and astounded.

Presently the man arose, gazed in wonder for a moment at his young adversary, and then exclaimed:

“Why, good Heaven! may I be jiggered if it isn’t Master Neville!”

The speaker was Neville’s old friend, Inspector Trale, who, from a rear view, had mistaken the young man for Jim Banks, a disreputable character, of whom he had for a long time been on the watch.

A hurried explanation of the doings of Jim Banks followed, and the mention of this personage revived some recollections of Neville concerning him.

“Jim Banks?” said the young man; “I certainly recall that name.”

“Oh, yes, you must have known him,” said Trale. “He lived with his daughter in a little cottage on the Stoneleigh road. He was a tough customer, a regular bad ’un.”

“I think I remember something of her. What became of the girl?”

“She went off while her father was in prison; went wrong, I’m afraid. But she was a pretty, lady-like girl.”

Some further conversation followed, what it is unnecessary to detail, and then Trale informed Neville that he could very likely secure lodgings at the cottage of Mrs. Parsons, who for years had been a servant at Lynne Court.

“I’ll think of your suggestion,” answered Neville; “but, first, I would like

you to come to the inn at Stoneleigh and have some supper with me, and we can talk over old times.”

Neville was anxious to show his old friend that he was not quite the penniless tramp he appeared. Trale assented, and presently they were jogging along side by side, on their way to Stoneleigh.

CHAPTER XVI.

Sylvia had fallen into good hands. Lorrimore and Mercy Fairfax vied with each other in their attention to the sick and bereaved girl, and Mercy’s careful nursing and the constant change of air and scene soon brought the color back to the pale cheeks and the wonted strength to her lithe, graceful form.

But the improvement ended there.

She was physically whole, but the spirit had received a wound which seemed to defy even time and change.

She took no interest in anything, and though Lorrimore and Mercy were unremitting in their efforts to rouse her and woo her to forgetfulness of her loss, they did not succeed.

“She seems to be living in dreamland, poor girl,” said Mercy, and that very nearly described Sylvia’s condition.

She would sit for hours in one place, and in almost the same attitude, her head resting on her hand, her large eyes fixed on vacancy, apparently dead to all that was going on around her.

They passed through the most beautiful scenery, sojourned in great cities, in which they lived, surrounded by luxury, and what was novelty to Sylvia, but it was all disregarded by her. She was living an inner life, feeding upon the memory of the past, and while her body moved through this weary wonderful world of ours, her soul was back at Lorn Hope Camp, which Jack’s presence had made a paradise for her.

And yet she was grateful for the kindness and unwearying devotion of her two guardians.

“You are too kind to me, you and Lord Lorrimore,” she said one day to Mercy, who had been even more than usually attentive to the sorrow-stricken girl. “I think if Lord Lorrimore would scold me and try and speak roughly, and you would stop treating me as if I were the most precious thing on earth, it would do me good,” she said, with a touch of her old naivete, and Mercy had

smiled and shaken her head.

“I’ll ask Lord Lorrimore to do so,” she said, “but I’m afraid he won’t.”

“No,” said Sylvia. “I think he is the kindest and gentlest man in the world, excepting——”

She stopped. Jack wasn’t in the world now, alas, alas!

Mercy had grown very fond of Sylvia, and it would seem as if the womanly tenderness so long pent up in her bosom had found a vent, and had lavished itself upon the young girl so strangely committed to her care. Lorrimore, too, grew attached to Sylvia, and under other circumstances his attachment would have developed into a warmer phase; but Lorrimore had only one heart, and it had left him forever. If Sylvia had been ten times more lively and bewitching than she was—and she was beautiful and fascinating enough—Lorrimore would have been safe.

There was only one woman in the world for him, and that was Audrey Hope, who had sent him on an errand which apparently became more of a wild-goose chase each day.

But notwithstanding the charge he had undertaken, Lorrimore did not neglect his mission, and all their journeying had the one object, the finding of Neville Lynne. They passed through Australia to New Zealand, Lorrimore pursuing his search with unremitting ardor, but without success, and at last they crossed to Europe. It was late in autumn when they landed on the Continent, and Sylvia’s continued lethargy caused Mercy and him some anxiety.

“I don’t think she ought to winter in England,” Mercy said, as they talked over their plans. “An English winter is very enjoyable for those who can stand it, but Sylvia is just in that state when all sorts of troubles from cold and bad weather may set in.”

Lord Lorrimore nodded.

“Very well,” he said, “you had better go to Italy, I will see you there safe and settled comfortably; but I must leave you there, at any rate for a time, but I will look you up now and again.”

Sylvia raised no objection to the proposal; she would have consented to go to Siberia, the coast of New Guinea, anywhere, with the same indifference, and they made for Florence.

Lorrimore saw them comfortably settled in one of the best of the boarding houses, and left them to continue his search; he meant going through all the big Continental cities.

Sylvia parted from him with tears in her eyes, and broken sentences of

gratitude, but immediately afterward she sank into the old lethargy and indifference.

Mercy used to drive her about the delightful old city, and the exquisite scenery around it, and Sylvia would look upon it all with about as much interest in her dreamy eyes as if she were asleep.

Mercy was almost in despair, but as patient as ever, and as tender and gentle.

One day her devotion met with some reward. Sylvia had complained of the wind—there is an east wind in Florence which is almost as chilly and penetrating as that of England—and Mercy had taken her into one of the churches.

Service was going on, and the two women knelt reverently with the rest of the congregation. Suddenly Mercy felt the girl kneeling beside her tremble, and heard her sigh; one of the choristers was singing an exquisite solo, and sending forth a music which seemed to float like a strain from the heavenly choir through the grand old church.

Mercy said nothing, but Sylvia, as they drove home, murmured, “How beautiful! oh, how beautiful!” and that evening, as Mercy was dressing for dinner in the room adjoining Sylvia’s, she heard a voice singing the solo. She was so startled by the beauty and sweetness of the voice that she did not at first realize that it was Sylvia’s, and when she did so she dropped the brush from her hand and opened the door between the two rooms.

“My, dear, was that you singing?” she exclaimed.

Sylvia looked over her shoulder, from the glass before which she was standing, with faint surprise.

“Was I singing?” she said. “I was only trying to hum the hymn we heard in the church this afternoon; but I didn’t think you could hear me.”

Mercy stared at her with unbounded surprise.

“My dear child,” she said, putting her arms round her neck and kissing her, “you sing like an angel! Why have you never sung before. Lord Lorrimore would have been so pleased and delighted.”

“Would he?” said Sylvia. “I would have sung to him if I had thought of it, but I haven’t sung since——”

She turned her head away.

Mercy prudently said no more at the moment, and left her, but a few nights afterward she persuaded her to sing a simple ballad in the drawing-room, little dreaming of the consequences that would ensue.

There were some very rich people staying at the house, English and Italian;

and among the latter was an old professor of the Conservatoire. He was a very silent old man, who used to sit reading his Italian newspaper, and apparently too much absorbed in it to take any notice of his fellow boarders, but that night when Sylvia began to sing he lowered his paper, then dropped it altogether, and starting to his feet with an exclamation of amazement and delight, trotted across the room to the piano, by which Sylvia was standing.

“My dear young lady,” he said, in broken English, “where did you get that voice?”

To such an unanswerable question Sylvia could only smile, and the old man hastened to explain.

“Soh! I do not mean where did you get the voice itself—that comes from Heaven, we know—but who taught you to sing like that?”

“My father,” said Sylvia, as she had answered Jack.

“Soh! Then, my dear, your father was a musician, and what is better, a first-rate tutor. Let me hear you sing again!”

Sylvia complied, and the old professor stood and listened with bent head and profound and critical attention.

Then he patted her arm approvingly, and even enthusiastically.

“My dear young lady,” he said, earnestly and almost solemnly, “you have a voice which is phenomenal. And you did not know it. No one has told you! It is like a diamond buried in the sand! Bah! You must sing! You have a grand future before you. Ah, but yes! Such a future as makes me dizzy to think of. But you must be careful; there is still much to learn. See, if you will, I—I myself will teach you. Come to me to-morrow, at the Conservatoire, at eleven,” and taking for granted that she could not dream of refusing such an offer, he trotted off to his nightly cigarette and game of dominoes at the cafe.

“You will go, dear?” said Mercy, when they had gone up to their own rooms.

Sylvia thought a moment or two.

“Did he mean that I could earn money?” she said in a low voice.

“I suppose so; yes, of course,” said Mercy. “But that is of no consequence. It is of your happiness I am thinking, dear. If you can only find some amusement and interest in the occupation——”

“To earn money,” repeated Sylvia, as if she had not heard her; then she put both her hands on Mercy’s shoulder and looked into her eyes.

“Do you think all this time that I have not felt—with all my gratitude for your love and Lord Lorrimore’s great kindness—that I am a dependent, that I have been living on charity—yes, charity? At times, Mercy, dear, the thought

has nearly driven me mad.”

“That’s nonsense,” Mercy began, her eyes filling, but Sylvia went on.

“Often I have asked myself what I should do to earn my own bread; often I have asked myself what—what Jack would have said if he could have known that I was living on other people’s alms, and I have felt hot with shame and misery. It is that as much as anything else which has crushed me, Mercy, and now this old man says that I can earn money. Will I go? Why, I would walk a thousand miles with such a hope before me. Yes, we will go, Mercy, dear, and I will work—well, you shall see.”

The course of lessons commenced, and the professor’s enthusiasm, instead of decreasing, increased as his pupil progressed.

When Lord Lorrimore came on a flying visit, he found that the apathetic girl he had left had become transformed into a keen student, with a hopeful, loving light in the eyes that had, so short a time since, been vacant and lifeless. He was delighted, but still more astounded when the professor gravely proposed that Sylvia should make her appearance at a matinee.

“Not that she will stop there, my lord,” he said, earnestly. “She is fitted for higher work, for she will act as well as sing, mark me, and it is the opera and not the concert platform to which she is making.”

Lord Lorrimore was at first opposed to the idea, but a few words from Sylvia, and a long look at her changed face, reconciled him to it.

“What will your people say if ever we find them, Sylvia?” he said.

“You will never find them,” she replied, “and if you did they would say I have done right.”

The day of the matinee came, and she appeared, not trembling and nervous as are most debutantes, but calm and serene, with the true artist’s confidence.

Lord Lorrimore was spellbound while the sweet fresh voice rang through the hall, a storm of applause awarded the singer, and at the close the professor, trembling with agitation and delight, brought forward a stout, elderly gentleman with a wig, whom he introduced as the manager of the Vienna opera, and who, in bland voice and complimentary language, offered Sylvia an engagement.

She asked for one day in which to consider the proposal—and accepted it.

“You will stay with me, Mercy? You will always stay with me?” she said when she told her.

And Mercy had drawn the girl to her heart and kissed her.

“Yes, I will stay with you, my dear; in fact, I’m afraid I couldn’t go even if you sent me away.”

A month afterward, while the Vienna theatre, crammed to its fullest to hear the new singer, Signorina Stella, whose youth and beauty had been the topic of conversation throughout the gay city, rang with the enthusiastic plaudits, Signorina Stella herself sat in her dressing-room, still in her costume, her face covered with her hands, her whole frame shaking with sobs, the tears trickling between her fingers.

“My dear, my dear!” murmured Mercy. “Why do you cry? You are overwrought. Listen to the cheers, Sylvia. Think of the success, the great, overwhelming success, and don’t cry.”

But the sobs did not cease, and Mercy, bending over her heard her murmur brokenly:

“Jack! Jack! Oh, if Jack were only here.”

The successful Signorina Stella, whose fame the electric wires were already flashing through Europe, was still as faithful to the man who had paid her ransom as Sylvia, the orphan of Lorn Hope, had been!

CHAPTER XVII.

Lord Byron remarked that he woke one morning and found himself famous; and Sylvia might with truth have said the same.

Sylvia’s was a genuine success. The musical critics were, for once, unanimous in praising her voice and the way she managed it and the dramatic critics declared that she would in time be as fine an actress as she was a singer.

Vienna raved about her—about her beauty, her youth, and her romantic history; and all sorts of absurd rumors went the round of the newspapers. Some hinted that she was the daughter of an English nobleman; others that she was a Russian princess, who had run away from her home because her parents declined to allow her to follow the bent of her genius, and by others it was declared that she was Lord Lorrimore’s betrothed wife, and that she would, notwithstanding her great success recently, wed the English nobleman and retire from the stage forever.

Meanwhile the theatre on the three nights in the week on which she played was full to overflowing. Her appearance was greeted with cheers, and wreaths and bouquets, in accordance with the delightfully absurd custom, were thrown at her feet.

Sometimes a note was concealed among the flowers, and not seldom a

costly article of jewelry. These Sylvia handed—the first unopened—to Mercy, who duly returned them the next morning to the senders.

All this would have turned the heads of nineteen girls out of twenty; but Sylvia took her triumph not only modestly, but with a sense of solemn responsibility. She had worked hard before she made her appearance; she worked harder still now that the public expected so much from her, and nearly the whole day was spent in studying the music and acting of the parts assigned to her, and she seemed to live entirely for and in her work.

Lord Lorrimore looked on at all this in an amazement which he found it impossible to get rid of, and night after night he would stand at the back of his box and gaze at the lovely young creature on the stage as she held the huge audience spellbound, and ask himself whether he wasn't dreaming, and whether this brilliant, dazzling creature could be the girl he had seen in the grasp of Lavarick the ranger!

To that past—divided from the present by so short a space of time—neither he nor Sylvia ever reverted; but that she was constantly thinking of and dwelling upon it both he and Mercy knew, as they sometimes watched Sylvia sitting in pensive silence, her beautiful eyes clouded by sorrowful thought.

Poor Lorrimore was in rather a peculiar frame of mind. The two years in which he had set himself to find Neville had expired, and he might have gone back to Audrey with a clear conscience; but his love made him proud, and he felt that it would be almost mean to go back, so to speak, empty handed.

By this time he hated the very name of Neville Lynne, and yet he felt as if compelled to make one more effort to find him.

He resolved that he would spend just one more month in the search, and then, successful or unsuccessful, would go to Audrey and say, in the latter case:

“I have done my best to restore your friend to you and have failed. I will not hold you to your implied promise, you are free; but I love you still, and if you can return me a thousandth part of that love, be my wife!”

He went next morning to Sylvia's hotel to wish her good-by, and found her and Mercy consulting over an open letter.

Sylvia handed it to him with a smile.

“I am glad you have come,” she said. “Here is an offer from the manager of the London Opera. Shall I accept it or not?”

Lorrimore emitted a low whistle as he read the terms.

“Certainly. It is a grand offer. At this rate, you will be a millionairess, my dear Sylvia,” he said. “I wonder what you will do with your money?” and he

smiled.

Sylvia smiled, then she sighed, and looked away. If Jack had been alive there would have been no need for that question.

“Give it to Jack,” would have been her answer.

“Sylvia finds a way of getting rid of a great deal of it easily enough,” said Mercy. “I sometimes think that all the poor in Paris——”

Sylvia laid her fingers on Mercy’s lips.

“No tales out of school!” she exclaimed, laughing. “But, indeed, I often ask myself the same question. And here is some more, and a very large sum. Shall I go?” she asked, as meekly as a ward addressing her guardian.

“Yes, I suppose so,” Lorrimore replied, with a faint sigh. How he wished he could go to London, and be near Audrey! “I suppose so. It is a very good offer, and you were bound to go to London sooner or later. They will be delighted with you there, Sylvia.”

“Do you think so?” she said, modestly. “Sometimes I’m afraid when I think of it, and yet——” She paused a moment, then went on softly, “I shall be glad to see England again. It is like home, though I left it when I was such a little girl that I scarcely remember it.”

“You and your brother left it together?” said Lorrimore, gently.

He had always avoided mentioning “her brother,” and he spoke now very hesitatingly and softly.

Sylvia colored and turned pale.

“Some day I will tell you all about it, Lord Lorrimore,” she said, in a low voice. “I—not now, not now!” and her voice began to tremble, so that Lorrimore quickly changed the subject.

He spoke of the mission on which he had been engaged for the past two years and more, and mentioned his disinclination to return to the lady who had intrusted him with the strange quest. From his manner Sylvia conjectured that he loved this unnamed lady, and her intimation to that effect brought forth a prompt acknowledgment from Lorrimore.

Sylvia advised him to return to his innamorata, admit his failure, and trust to Heaven for his reward, for such devotion must eventually win a good woman’s love.

For a few moments Lorrimore was silent; then he said:

“It will be best for you and Miss Mercy to hasten to London. In a week or two I will join you there. I have just heard of a last chance; there are several gangs of men, mostly Englishmen, employed on this new Swiss railway. I will

run over and search for my man there, and then——Well, then I shall be able to go to her and say that I have left no stone unturned.”

Then he walked out of the room as if he could not bear to hear or say more.

But before he started on this his last search he arranged Sylvia's and Mercy's journey to England with his usual care and foresight. Sylvia had her own maid, and a courier, and the orphan of Lorn Hope might have traveled with the state of an empress if she had been so minded.

Mercy had decided that they would be quieter in lodgings than in a hotel, and the courier had engaged some comfortable rooms in Bury street, St. James.

Here she was waited upon by the great London manager, who was rather startled to find the famous prima donna so young and so quiet, and so sad looking.

For the first two or three days she and Mercy amused themselves in the intervals between practice and rehearsal in going about the great city, which Mercy seemed to know quite well. They saw most of the famous sights, but Sylvia enjoyed the park, with its throng of beautifully dressed men and women, and was quite unconscious that as she and Mercy drove round the ring, in the modest hired brougham, that all eyes were bent upon her own beautiful face. One afternoon, on their way home, they passed down Park lane and South Audley street, and Sylvia, who had turned to Mercy to make some remark, was surprised to see that she had turned deathly white, and was trembling.

“Oh, what is the matter, Mercy?” she asked, anxiously.

“Nothing, nothing,” said Mercy, evidently struggling for composure. “It was only something——”

She stopped as if she did not wish to say any more, and Sylvia, looking round anxiously, could see nothing to alarm her companion. A thin, tall gentleman, with a pale, thoughtful face, had just passed them, but he had not glanced at their carriage, and there was no one else at that moment near.

Sylvia stole her hand into Mercy's still trembling one.

“Are you——better now, dear Mercy?” she asked.

Mercy smiled at her in her sad, resigned way.

“Yes, Sylvia; don't be alarmed. I shall not be taken that way again,” and she set her lips firmly.

The night of Sylvia's first appearance arrived, and she admitted to Mercy that she was rather nervous.

“I don't know why,” she said, with a little tremulous sigh, as Mercy arranged the simple dress in which Marguerite first appears; “but to-night I feel

as if——Don't laugh, Mercy; but there, you never laugh! Perhaps it would be better for me if you did! But I feel as if something were going to happen."

"Something will happen; a very great success," said Mercy. "The manager tells me that the house is crammed, and that it is what he calls in capital humor."

Sylvia sighed.

"Yes," she said. "Every one is so kind and indulgent. I am not afraid of them," and she moved her hand toward the stage. "It is not—I can scarcely tell what it is. But do not mind me. I shall forget all about it directly I go on and begin to sing."

The manager himself came to the dressing-room when her "call" time came, and amidst a breathless silence she moved in sight of the audience. A curious murmur of satisfaction and admiration rose, which swelled into a burst of delighted applause at the end of her first solo.

Mercy was waiting for her at the wings, and took her down to the dressing-room, and noticed that Sylvia was, though outwardly calm, still a little agitated.

"How beautifully you sang to-night dear!" she said, kissing her. "I wish you could have heard the delighted remarks of the people at the wings. I think it will be the greatest success you have yet had."

Sylvia nodded.

"And yet I trembled so that——Did you see any of the people in the house, Mercy?"

Before she could reply the manager knocked at the door in a flutter of excitement to tell her that the house was calling for her to come on before the curtain.

But Sylvia refused.

"Oh, no no," she said, panting a little. "Not yet, I must rest. Oh, please not yet; let them wait till the opera is finished they may not want me then!"

The word and wish of a prima donna are law, and the manager retired disappointed, and yet marveling at the young lady's modest humility. It was something startlingly novel in his experience.

Sylvia repeated her question.

"Did you notice any one, Mercy?"

"No, dear," replied Mercy. "I had only eyes for you—as usual. Who was it you wished me to see?"

"No one I know," said Sylvia. "There is a lady sitting in the second box on

the second tier, on the right-hand side. She is the most beautiful creature I have ever seen.”

“There are a great many beautiful women in the house to-night,” said Mercy.

“I dare say, but I have only seen this one distinctly. She is with another lady, rather older than herself—her mother, I suppose. I could scarcely take my eyes off the younger one; it is such a sweet face! And do you know, Mercy, dear, that I seemed to be singing and playing at her, and for her alone. She watched me as closely as I watched her, and at first, I mean when I first came on and raised my eyes to the box, I fancied that she started and looked coldly and angrily at me.”

“Oh, but that’s impossible, Sylvia,” said Mercy. “It’s not like you to be so fanciful.”

Sylvia laughed softly.

“No, I deserve that credit, I think. But—well, I suppose I am fanciful to-night.”

“Was there no one else in the box,” asked Mercy.

“One or two gentlemen, I think,” said Sylvia, indifferently. “But they were at the back in the shadow, and I could not see them. I wish you would find out who she is, Mercy. Not that I should know her name, even if I heard it, for I know no one—no one—here in England!”

When they went up for the great jewel scene Mercy managed, a moment or two before Sylvia went on, to address a question to the famous Mephistopheles who had been singing the praises of Signorina Stella to an excited and enthusiastic circle of fellow actors.

“Will you tell me the names of those ladies in that second box, please,” she said.

He swept her a bow, and looked across the house.

“Oh, yes!” he said. “One is Lady Marlow, the Viscountess Marlow; the other is the charming Miss Audrey Hope.”

Mercy started, thanked him, and whispered to Sylvia:

“Her name is Audrey Hope!”

Sylvia only had just time to nod, then glided on the stage.

And as she did so she raised her eyes directly to the sweet face which had so attracted her, and felt certain that Audrey’s eyes met hers with a certain kind of significance, with something more than the curiosity, and perhaps admiration, with which one of a large audience regards a player.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Directly after he had seen the announcement of the appearance of Signorina Stella, Sir Jordan booked a box. The report he had read to Audrey might be true or false; but, true or false, Lord Lorrimore was in some way connected with the new and famous opera singer who had taken the world by storm, and Jordan knew that Lord Lorrimore could not be far off. There was no time to lose. He would like Audrey to see her rival and decide matters before Lorrimore could arrive on the scene.

On the morning of Sylvia's advertised appearance he called at Grosvenor square. He had not seen Audrey since the night of the ball, and he was careful to greet her as if nothing had been said which could cause any embarrassment.

He chatted pleasantly in his very best style, and did not mention the object of his visit, until Lady Marlow came into the room, and then as if he had suddenly remembered it, he said:

"Oh, by the way, Lady Marlow, of course you are going to the opera to-night to see the new marvel—Signorina Stella? What high-flown names they assume, do they not?"

"Well, I meant going," said Lady Marlow, "but we haven't a box this season, and when I sent down to the office this morning for a seat they sent back word that there wasn't one in the house!"

"How fortunate!" murmured Jordan. "I got a box a week ago, intending to go, but I'm afraid I shall not be able to do so. Pray take it, Lady Marlow."

"Oh, but——" began Lady Marlow.

"Please do, and if I can look in for half an hour I will do so."

Lady Marlow glanced at Audrey inquiringly. Audrey had colored and winced at the sound of the signorina's name, but she said calmly enough:

"I should very much like to go."

Lord Jordan took his leave at once, but an exultant smile played about his thin lips.

If this singing girl, whose name was linked with Lord Lorrimore's, was as beautiful as was said, Audrey, piqued and jealous, would be in a condition of mind that would induce her to listen to him to-night.

At the opera that evening the success of Signorina Stella was assured from the very moment she was welcomed by the crowded house. She sang

gracefully, artistically, divinely, and of all who beheld her no one was more charmed than Audrey Hope. Yet she could not resist a feeling of jealousy when she thought of Sir Jordan's hints—that for admiration of this operatic beauty, Lorrimore had forgotten her, Audrey.

The curtain arose for the last act, and as Sylvia came on, Audrey leaned forward in an attitude of complete attention, and the eyes of the two women met and seemed to linger on each other with an exchange of admiration and even sympathy, which was singular when one comes to think of it.

Sylvia, as she had said to Mercy, played and sang to the beautiful girl in the box above her, and, inspired by the rapt attention and admiration in Audrey's eyes, she surpassed herself in the last act, and brought down the curtain to a storm of cheering which was prolonged until the manager brought her on again.

Audrey had leaned forward so far that her arms were resting on the velvet edge of the box, and as Sylvia passed just beneath her, in front of the curtain, Audrey raised her bouquet and dropped it at Sylvia's feet. The vast audience recognized the spontaneity of the action and applauded enthusiastically.

Sylvia was startled for a moment, then as the manager picked up the bouquet and handed it to her, she raised it to her lips, and her eyes to Audrey's face.

Jordan took Audrey's cloak from the back of the chair, and held it for her, and as he did so he saw that the hands she put up to take it were trembling.

"How generous you are!" he murmured; "most women would have hated her, but you——"

Audrey hung her head, her eyes still fixed on the stage where Sylvia had just been standing.

"I—I do not hate her," she said, more to herself than to him, and there was a faint tone of wonder in her voice.

"Nor despise him?" he whispered. "No, you are too noble; but I—well, I will not speak of my contempt for the man whose constancy is so poor a thing! Audrey, I at least am constant. Though you send me away from you, my heart will remain with you, and forever. Have you no pity in that gentle heart of yours for me? Audrey, dare I hope? Will you not say one word and make me the happiest man in all the world?"

As he spoke his hand glided toward hers, and took it softly and hesitatingly.

She was in a quiver of excitement and emotion; her heart was throbbing with the pain of looking on at the triumph of the beautiful girl who had won

Lorrimore from her; she was, in short, just in that condition when a woman turns for consolation to the nearest and most persistent of her lovers, and—she let her hand remain in his!

When Sir Jordan bade her adieu that evening the light of triumph still glowed in his eyes; then they took a keener and calculating expression, and, calling a cab, he told the man to drive him to the office of a well-known society paper.

“There must be no chance of drawing back, my timid Audrey!” he muttered. “I knew I should win; but luck has favored me. Whether there is anything in this rumor of an engagement between the young opera singer and my Lord Lorrimore, it has served my turn. No, there must be no drawing back!” He drew a long breath. “I am safe now! With the Hope estates and money I can defy even—the world!”

In less than an hour the paragraph announcing the engagement of the Right Hon. Sir Jordan Lynne, Bart., M.P., and Miss Audrey Hope was in type.

There was the usual excitement behind the scenes when a great and extraordinary success has been scored, and Sylvia stood the centre of a congratulatory crowd, and received all the kind speeches with her sweet modest smile.

She held the bouquet Audrey had dropped to her, and she sat in her dressing-room while Mercy changed her stage costume for the plain unobtrusive attire of unprofessional life, with the bouquet still lying before her, and her eyes fixed on it dreamily.

At length they were ready to depart, and they made their way to the stage entrance where the brougham was waiting. The manager and two or three of the principal actors were waiting to assist the great prima donna to the carriage, and they stood with uplifted hats as the brougham drove off.

The streets were still crowded, and before the carriage had passed the grand entrance it pulled up.

“There must have been a tremendous crush,” said Mercy. “The people have not all gone yet.”

Sylvia leaned forward to look out, but fell back again with a cry of terror.

“Ah! Look!” she exclaimed.

Mercy, whose heart had leaped into her mouth at the wail of fear, looked out, but the brougham had moved on, and was going along rapidly.

“What is it? What did you see?” she asked.

Sylvia was lying back with her hand pressed against her heart, her breath coming painfully, her face white with terror.

“Didn’t you see?” she panted at last.

“No! I saw nothing!” replied Mercy. “Tell me what it was, dear! Come, Sylvia, this is unlike you! Be calm, dearest!”

“Yes, yes!” she breathed. “Don’t be frightened! You did not see him?”

“See whom? I saw no one I knew; there was a crowd. Who was it, Sylvia?”

A shudder shook her.

“Lavarick!” she whispered.

Mercy started with surprise.

“Oh, no, dear,” she said, soothingly, “That man here in London! It is impossible; it was your fancy!”

“No, no, it was not fancy,” Sylvia replied, a tremor in her tones. “I am sure it was Lavarick!”

CHAPTER XIX.

Mercy would not leave Sylvia that night, but slept beside her, holding the girl in a loving embrace, and trying to soothe and reassure her. At times Sylvia shook and trembled, and at others she cried quietly, for the sight of Lavarick had not only terrified her, but recalled Jack’s death, so that she was tortured by fear and sorrow at the same time.

“My dear, dear child!” Mercy whispered, lovingly. “Even supposing you were not mistaken, and I think you must have been——”

“No, no,” said Sylvia, with a shudder; “I was not mistaken. I remember him too well. You have never seen him, or you would understand how impossible it would be to be mistaken. It was Lavarick!”

“Well, dear, granting you were right and that it was he, why should you be so terrified? We are not in the wilds of Australia now, but in London, surrounded by friends and police. Why, one has only to raise one’s voice to collect a crowd. Lavarick cannot harm you now.”

“I know, I know,” said Sylvia; “and yet the very thought of him fills me with terror and foreboding. I know that he hates me; why, I cannot even guess. It was because of me that he—he hated Jack, and caused his death. Oh, my dear, dear Jack! It has all come back to me to-night, Mercy, and I can see Jack as he fell forward——”

A burst of sobs stopped her utterance.

Mercy pressed her close to her heart.

“My poor, poor child! What shall I do? What can I say to comfort you? Shall I speak to any one in the morning, go to the police, and tell them to watch him?”

“No, no!” replied Sylvia. “Do not interfere with him. Perhaps he did not see me. And yet I felt his evil eye glaring at mine as I looked out. No, let him alone Mercy. He—he may not have seen me, and—and perhaps he will go away, leave London. What is he doing here? Something bad and evil, I am sure.”

“Such a man is not likely to stay in any one place for long,” said Mercy. “He is an outcast and a vagabond, and they always wander and roam about restlessly. To-morrow, or the next day, he may be off for the other end of the world. Yes; I think with you that it is best to leave him alone,” she concluded, as she reflected that, with every desire to punish Lavarick, it would be very difficult to do so, and impossible, indeed, without bringing up that past, the very memory of which tortured poor Sylvia.

Lavarick was unlikely to have become a reformed character, and would most certainly commit some crime which would bring him into the hands of the police without any action on Sylvia’s part.

It was fortunate that the next day was an “off” one for Signorina Stella, for Sylvia was so unnerved that she seemed quite incapable of singing, and lay on the couch with her eyes closed; but Mercy knew by the restless movement of her hands that she was dwelling on the past.

In the course of the morning the manager sent to inquire and to inform the signorina that every seat in the house was booked for the following night. There also arrived several letters from “gentlemen,” containing pressing invitations to “a little dinner,” at the Star and Garter and similar places. These Mercy, who conducted all Sylvia’s correspondence, placed in the fire.

The next day Sylvia was better, but she still looked pale and thoughtful, and it was not until the moment came for her to go on the stage that the artist triumphed over the woman, and she shook off the sense of dread that oppressed her, and recovered her spirits and self-possession.

She received a tremendous reception, notwithstanding which she was conscious of a vague sense of disappointment, for she had glanced around the boxes, and had seen that the beautiful girl whose face had so affected her on the first night, was not present.

“She is not here to-night,” she said to Mercy.

“She? Who, dear?”

“That lovely girl I fell in love with,” she said. “I wish she were here, but I suppose it is too much to expect her to come every night I sing.”

“It does seem a little too much, certainly,” assented Mercy. “What an impressionable girl you are, Sylvia.”

“I know. But it is true that I feel as if I shall not play half so well to-night because she is absent.”

However at the end of the second act she came off radiant.

“She is here, Mercy!” she exclaimed. “I saw her come in, and I feel as glad as if she were my sister; and I am sure I sang better from that moment. She looks sadder to-night,” she added, thoughtfully, “and that makes her lovelier in my eyes. Audrey Hope! What a sweet name it is! Just like herself. How good of her to come again so soon!”

“My dear child, there are dozens of men and women who have come again,” said Mercy.

“I dare say; but this is the only one I care about,” remarked Sylvia.

Audrey had had some little trouble in persuading Lady Marlow to come to the opera that night, and her ladyship was rather surprised at Audrey’s persistence.

“My dear, there is Lady Crownbrilliant’s ball, and the Parkes’ reception,” she remonstrated; “and Jordan said that he would meet us there, you know,” she added, as if that were of supreme importance now.

But Audrey had clung to her intention of going to the opera.

“Jordan can come there just as well as to the Parkes’,” she said, coolly, and without the blush with which a newly-engaged girl usually mentions her betrothed’s name.

Lady Marlow gave in, as a matter of course, and Audrey sat in rapt attention while Sylvia was on the stage, but seemed lost in dreamland when she was off.

At the close of the opera she leaned forward as she had done on the first night, and though she did not drop her bouquet, her eyes met Sylvia’s with an intent regard which Sylvia noticed and returned.

Mercy noticed that after she had put on Sylvia’s outdoor dress Sylvia drew a thick veil over her face; but Mercy said nothing, though she knew why the veil was worn.

They went to the stage door, but their brougham was not there. There was more than the usual crush of carriages, in consequence of the authorities having blocked one of the adjacent roads for repairs, and Sylvia and Mercy were about to return to the narrow hall of the stage entrance when a crowd of

foot passengers swept them away from the door.

Sylvia caught Mercy's arm, and tried to stem the tide or draw aside, but they were borne on by the stream, and Sylvia found herself near to, and almost touching, a carriage which had been brought to a standstill opposite them.

She uttered a little cry, half laughingly, and Mercy, as she held her tightly, said:

"You caused the crush, so we mustn't complain; take care of the wheel."

At the same moment a hand was stretched out through the carriage window and touched Sylvia.

She shrank with a feeling of alarm, though the touch had been as soft as eiderdown, and turning her head saw Audrey Hope's eyes bent on her.

"Are you hurt?" asked Audrey, anxiously in her sweet, frank voice.

Acting on the impulse of the moment, Sylvia raised her veil and smiled a reassuring negative.

Audrey started and changed color, then an eager light came into her eyes.

"Signorina Stella!" she said, quickly.

Sylvia smiled again.

"Do not be alarmed on my account," she said. "I am not hurt. I have lost my carriage."

Audrey glanced at Lady Marlow, who had looked on in astonishment, and was wondering what Audrey was going to do. She had not to wonder long, for Audrey opened the carriage door.

"Come in here, please," she said in her prompt, frank fashion. "Please come in; you may be hurt."

Sylvia hesitated, the color mounting to her face; but Audrey took her hand, and almost before they knew it Sylvia and Mercy were inside.

Lady Marlow recovered herself by an effort.

"How fortunate we were near, signorina," she said in her pleasant way. "Are you sure you are not hurt?"

"Not in the least!" said Sylvia. "But—but it is very kind of you to take compassion on us, and I am afraid we are crowding you."

"No, no," said Audrey. "The carriage is a large one; there is plenty of room." Then blushing as it had suddenly occurred to her that the great singer must think this carrying of her off bodily a strange proceeding, she said: "You are not offended? I mean at my snatching you up like this, signorina."

"No," said Sylvia, softly, and with a smile. "It is just what I should have expected Miss Hope to do if she saw a fellow creature in difficulties."

“You know my name?” said Audrey, quickly.

Sylvia nodded.

“Yes; I asked it the night before last.”

“You noticed, you saw me?” said Audrey. “I thought the actors on the stage could rarely recognize the people in the front of the theatre.”

“They cannot always,” replied Sylvia; “but I recognized you. And I wanted to thank you for your beautiful flowers. They are fresh still, and I shall always keep them—always!”

The soft, clear voice, tender with gratitude, thrilled through Audrey. She was not naturally an excitable girl, but she felt strangely moved by this sudden and unexpected proximity of the woman in whom she was so intensely interested.

“And I wanted to tell you how much your voice”—she might with equal truth have said “your face”—“affected me.”

“Thank you,” murmured Sylvia, gently, and her hand stole toward Audrey’s.

Audrey’s closed on it, and pressed it, and the two girls looked into each other’s eyes in a long silence.

Meanwhile, Lady Marlow had been speaking to Mercy.

“Your friend the signorina is very young to be so famous,” she said, not with the intolerable air of condescension which some—alas! most—great ladies think it proper and fitting to assume when they address their inferiors of the artistic world, but with kindly interest.

“She is very young,” said Mercy.

“And very beautiful,” added Lady Marlow under her breath, looking at Sylvia’s face in the light of the street lamps.

“Yes,” said Mercy, calmly; “and as good and lovable as she is beautiful.”

“I am sure of that,” assented Lady Marlow. “My ward, Miss Hope, is quite fascinated by her, but I suppose that is common enough,” and she smiled. “Are you her sister?” and she looked curiously at Mercy’s face, with its air of resignation and subdued sadness.

“No,” replied Mercy, “only her companion and friend, I hope.”

Lady Marlow nodded.

“I see that you are very much attached to her,” she said.

“No one could know her without loving her,” said Mercy, her voice thrilling.

Lady Marlow looked across at Sylvia with increased interest. The two girls were talking eagerly in low tones.

“My ward and the signorina have struck up an acquaintance already,” she said.

The carriage had gone on by this time, and its movement recalled Sylvia to the situation.

“Where are we going?” she said, with a smile.

“To your house, if you will tell me where that is,” replied Audrey, promptly.

“We are living at 29 Bury street,” said Sylvia as promptly, “but I cannot let you go out of your way.”

“As it happens it is all in our way,” said Audrey. “We live in Grosvenor square.”

She pulled the check string and gave Sylvia’s directions to the footman, when she said in a low voice:

“Will you—will you think I am taking advantage if I ask you to let me come and see you, signorina?”

“Will you?” said Sylvia, eagerly. “When will you come? To-morrow?”

“Yes,” said Audrey. “I will come to-morrow at twelve o’clock. You are sure you don’t mind? I know that famous persons have so many friends——”

Sylvia interrupted her with a soft laugh.

“Then I am not famous!” she said. “Beside this one,” and she touched Mercy and smiled at her, “who is a very dear one, I have only one or two in the world.”

Audrey thought of Lord Lorrimore, and a pang shot through her heart; she had almost forgotten him in the excitement of this strangely brought about meeting with the girl he loved.

“I will come to-morrow then,” she said, as the carriage drew up at 29 Bury street, and her hand nestled warmly in Sylvia’s on parting.

“Well!” exclaimed Lady Marlow laughingly. “For eccentricity commend me to the future Lady Lynne.”

Audrey started, and the smile which had lingered on her face fled at this reminder.

“I wonder, by the way, what Jordan will say when he hears that we have made the acquaintance of the famous Signorina Stella. I didn’t think of that!” and she looked rather grave.

“Don’t think of it now,” said Audrey, coldly. “What does it matter—I

mean, why should he care? How beautiful she is! And how sweet! I like her better off the stage than on, and I quite forgot while I talked to her that she was an opera singer.”

“So did I—almost,” said Lady Marlow. “But I’m afraid we must not allow ourselves to forget it. I have no doubt that the signorina is an excellent young lady, and everything that is nice and—and—but there, we are not like to meet her again.”

“I am going to call on her to-morrow,” said Audrey, quietly, and in that peculiar tone which Lord Marlow called her obstinate one.

Lady Marlow sank back with a little gesture of resignation.

“I wash my hands of you now, my dear,” she said, “and leave you to Jordan.”

They found Jordan waiting for them when they reached home.

He looked flushed and almost juvenile as he came forward to meet them, but Audrey gave him her hand so coldly that he did not dare to draw her toward him and kiss her, as he had intended doing. Not yet had he gone further than touching her hand with his lips. But he schooled himself to patience; they had only been betrothed two days, he told himself, and he could wait.

“Whom do you think we met to-night, Jordan?” said Lady Marlow, and half fearful she told him of the rescue of Signorina Stella.

His thick eyelids drooped over his eyes and concealed any surprise or other emotion he may have felt.

“Indeed!” he said, with a smile. “And you are going to call on her to-morrow. How romantic! I wish I could go with you.”

Audrey’s face fell and she looked down.

“But I am obliged to go down to Lynne to-morrow on business.”

Audrey’s face cleared.

“I shall not be away for more than one night,” he added, tenderly, and in a lower voice he whispered. “Ah, if I could feel that you would miss me one-tenth as much as I shall miss you, dearest!”

But though he had taken the news of Audrey’s meeting with Signorina Stella with seeming indifference, he was disturbed by it; and his face grew anxious and brooding as he walked home.

“If there is no truth in the rumor of this girl’s engagement to Lorrimore, Audrey will learn it to-morrow, and then——! But she cannot draw back now! It is too late! Yes, I will go down to Lynne, and begin the preparations for its new mistress. The marriage must take place soon. There must be no delay!”

CHAPTER XX.

Sylvia talked of nothing else that night but Audrey Hope. She even forgot Lavarick, and she was too absorbed in her subject to notice that Mercy listened almost in silence, and that when she did make some response it was uttered in a tone even more subdued than usual.

With a punctuality unusual, Audrey appeared at 29 Bury street at twelve o'clock the next day.

There was no one in the room into which she was shown, but presently the door opened, and a slim, girlish figure dressed in a black merino came forward with extended hand. Audrey started, for in the plainly made but exquisitely fitting black dress the famous singer looked younger and more girlish than in the fur-lined opera cloak which had enveloped her on the preceding night.

The two girls were a little shy for a moment or two; then, as if she were determined that there should be no barrier between them, Audrey began to ask Sylvia questions about her profession.

"You seem—you are so young," she said, with her irresistible smile, "that it is difficult to realize that you are really the lady who bewitches us all so completely."

"Yes, isn't it a pity that I'm not older?" said Sylvia, naively; "but I'm getting better of that fault every day."

Audrey laughed.

"And you are so self-possessed and calm! I suppose that is because you have been playing for a long time?"

"No," said Sylvia, shaking her head. "Only for a very little time."

Audrey stared.

"Really! It seems impossible."

Sylvia smiled.

"If any one had told me two years ago that I should become an opera singer I should have laughed at them, for I was then running about in Australia——"

She stopped, and the smile gave place to an expression of pain.

Audrey put her hand timidly on Sylvia's arm.

"You have had trouble?" she murmured, with gentle sympathy.

Sylvia kept back the tears bravely.

“Yes; I was left quite alone and friendless but for two good people. One is the lady you saw last night; her name is Mercy Fairfax, and she has been a sister—a mother—to me. The other”—her face brightened—“is one of the best and most generous men in the world. He is a nobleman——”

Audrey’s hand drew back slowly, and her lips closed tightly.

“But for him,” continued Sylvia, “well, I should not be alive now!”

“I think I know his name,” said Audrey, keeping her voice as steady as she could, and asking herself, even as she spoke, why she did not hate this girl who had won Lord Lorrimore’s love from her!

“Yes!” said Sylvia, innocently, and without a blush, which surprised Audrey. “He is everything that is kind and good, really a nobleman.”

“Is—is he here in London?” asked Audrey, looking down.

Sylvia shook her head.

“No, but he is coming soon. I wish he were here, and I tried hard to persuade him to come!”

“I dare say,” murmured Audrey, managing a faint smile with difficulty.

“Yes,” said Sylvia, quite calmly, and still without the blush which Audrey expected. “But he is engaged on a—I don’t know quite what to call it,” and her brows came down. “He has been traveling about for years on what he says is a wild-goose chase.”

Audrey’s face crimsoned.

“Oh, surely not now!” she murmured.

“Yes, now,” said Sylvia. “He is—I wonder whether he would mind my telling you?” and she looked at Audrey thoughtfully.

“I—I think not,” said Audrey.

“No, I don’t think so, especially as I do not know the name of the lady.”

“Lady—what lady?” faltered Audrey.

“The lady who sent him on this wild-goose chase,” replied Sylvia. “She asked him to go in search of a friend she had lost, and Lord Lorrimore—that is his name——”

“I know,” murmured Audrey.

“Promised to search for two years. He has been searching for longer than that, and without success. But though the time has expired, he does not like to go back and tell her, because—oh, I grow impatient and almost angry when I think of it! He is so high minded—like the knights of old, you know, while she——Well, don’t you think she must be thoughtless and cruel to take advantage of his generosity and unselfishness?”

Audrey's head drooped and her lips quivered.

"I—I don't know! Yes, ah, yes, she was thoughtless, and—and cruel, if you think so. But—but perhaps—" she was going to say, "she has been punished," but stopped herself and said, instead, "but you—you are very proud of him, signorina?"

"Indeed I am!" assented Sylvia, with a frankness which startled Audrey. "I think there is no one like him. I—I have never known any one so good and kind and self-denying, except—one other."

Her voice faltered and died away almost inaudibly.

"But Lord Lorrimore will be coming back directly, and then I hope he will meet with his reward," and she smiled.

A terrible struggle went on in poor Audrey's bosom for a long, long minute, then she conquered the desire to rush out of the room, never to see this beautiful rival of hers again, and putting out her hand she murmured:

"Yes! I am sure he will! Ah! I don't wonder at his loving you!"

Sylvia recoiled and opened her lovely eyes on her.

"Loving me! Me!" she exclaimed. Then she burst out laughing. "Oh, how could you think that! Lord Lorrimore in love with me! Why, he worships the ground this lady stands on! He thinks of her night and day! Oh, you do not know him or you would understand how impossible it is for him to change! What go all round the world, an exile, a wanderer, just to gratify the whim of the woman he loved, and then forget her for—me!"

Audrey turned white to the lips, and her hands, tightly clasped in her lap, trembled.

"I—I thought—I heard—" she faltered.

Sylvia laughed.

"Ah, you do not know the nonsense they write in the papers about us," she said. "They have told all sorts of fabulous stories about me, and I suppose they have about Lord Lorrimore, I never read the papers. Mercy and he would never let me. They said that the rubbish the newspaper correspondents wrote would do me harm. You see what care they have taken of me. Poor Lord Lorrimore, I must tell him when he comes back of your mistake. He will laugh——"

"No, no!" interrupted Audrey, and she attempted to rise, but sank back.

Then Sylvia saw that her visitor was pale and trembling.

"Oh, what is the matter? You are ill!" she said, bending over her.

"No, no!" said Audrey, breathing hard. "I am only a little faint. The room is warm, I think, and——"

Sylvia flew to the window and opened it, and brought her a glass of water.

“Let me send for Mercy!” she said. “She is the best nurse in——”

Audrey put up a trembling hand to stop her.

“Please, no!” she said. “I am better now!”

Then the tears welled into her eyes, and she hung her head for a moment or two in silence.

“It is the heat!” said Sylvia, in that delicious tone of sympathy which women sometimes—only sometimes—feel toward each other. “And you have walked, have you not? I am so sorry!”

And she gently took off Audrey’s hat, and smoothed the beautiful hair from her forehead.

Audrey put her arm round Sylvia’s neck and drew her face down and kissed her.

Sylvia blushed with pleasure, then, shyly, for she was not given to kissing, returned it.

“I came meaning to ask you to be my friend,” said Audrey, still rather faintly; “but there is no need to ask, is there, signorina?”

“No!” responded Sylvia. “But you must not call me by that grand name. My name is Sylvia—Sylvia Bond. You must call me Sylvia.”

“Yes!” said Audrey. “And you——” She laughed and took both Sylvia’s hands. “We are like two schoolgirls swearing an eternal friendship, are we not? You will call me Audrey?”

Sylvia laughed and nodded.

“How strange it is! We have only known each other five minutes, and yet we seem to be old friends!”

“Yes,” said Audrey. “We must see as much as we can of each other. How proud I shall be when I am looking at you on the stage and all the people are applauding, to think that you are my friend.”

As they sat side by side, Sylvia related some of the incidents of her professional career and became confidential regarding her future intentions. Audrey tore herself away at last, and Sylvia went down to the door with her, and saw her walk away. Audrey turned into the Park, and sinking into a seat clasped her hands tightly. She was alone now, and could attempt to realize what had befallen her.

“What have I done? What have I done?” broke from her white lips. “So faithful, so true, while I——Oh, what will he think, what will he say?”

She looked round wildly, as one looks round for some means of escape

from some great peril and finds none.

She knew Jordan too well to hope that he would release her, and, indeed, how could she, without cruel injustice to him, ask him to let her go.

“Too late, too late!” she murmured, echoing Jordan’s words, but with how different a meaning!

CHAPTER XXI.

Sir Jordan Lynne was a happy man. He had won one of the most charming beauties of England. He was en route to Lynne, and all the way he was planning out the future. He would refurnish the old house, redecorate it throughout; one of the best firms should have *carte blanche* in respect to the furniture.

Audrey was fond of horses; the stables should be rebuilt, and—and that wing which had been shut up for so long, in which was the room in which his father had died, should be pulled down.

He put this last, but, in truth, it was the first thing he thought of and resolved upon doing. Yes, that room should disappear, be wiped out, forgotten.

On his arrival at Lynne his novel cheerfulness surprised Frome, the solemn butler. After he had eaten dinner, he busied himself writing letters, and thus two or three hours were passed alone in his library.

Then there came to him a strange desire to visit the shadow-haunted chamber in which his father had died.

“It will be as well, perhaps, to—to look round before the wing is pulled down,” he muttered, trying to persuade himself that he was acting of his own free will. When his valet had left him in his own room, and with the rest of the servants had gone to bed, Jordan took an unlighted candle and matches, and stealthily made his way to the closed chambers.

As he turned the carefully oiled key in the thick door he cursed the weakness which prevented him from resisting the impulse, but he knew that the strange longing which was urging him would not be denied, and he did not even struggle.

He closed the door noiselessly behind him, lighting the candle, raised it and looked round.

Everything was as he had seen it, and left it, on his last visit, and with a shudder, as his eyes fell upon the huge funereal bed, he put the candle on the

table and commenced his search, with the air and the manner which characterized him on the last occasion, but he seemed to take more pains, and display more patience, for not content with dragging out the bureau, he, as if suddenly struck by an idea, tore up the edge of the thick carpet, and examined the boards beneath.

He was covered with dust, his hands were grimed, but so engrossed was he that he did not notice it; so absorbed, indeed, that he did not know that the candle had burned down to the socket until he heard it splutter.

He got up from his knees and hurried across the room, and stood for a moment asking himself whether he should relinquish his search, or go and get another candle.

The candle flickered down, and as its light waned he saw that the moonlight was shining through a chink of the shutter.

He extinguished the candle, and, feeling his way to the window, carefully and cautiously unbarred the shutter, and opened it just wide enough to allow the moonlight to stream in and fall upon the floor which he had been examining. It was impossible that he could be overlooked, and this plan was safer and easier than going to and from his bedroom for another candle.

He went back to the carpet, and knelt down and felt along the surface of the boards with his thick white—now dirty—hands. Suddenly he heard a slight noise behind him, and his heart leaped heavily; but he remembered the fright he had suffered on his last visit by the bat against the window, and he would not look round, but remained with his head bent over his task.

But the noise was repeated; became more distinct, and setting his teeth hard he turned his head and looked over his shoulder.

Then with a suppressed cry, he sprang to his feet and stood recoiling, white with terror, for a hand was sliding slowly and cunningly round the edge of the shutter!

Jordan's blood ran cold in his veins. He would have rushed from the room, but terror rendered him incapable of motion; he could only stand and watch the hand as it slid along the shutter like the hand of a ghost, and wait. Neville would have sprung at it and seized its owner, but the great statesman was very different from his "vagabond" brother, and his nerves, already tried severely by the ghostly stillness of the room and its associations, were completely wrecked by this fearful apparition.

The hand pushed back the shutter, and a man sprang into the room, drew the shutter close, and at the same moment turned the light of a bull's-eye lantern full upon Jordan's white, distorted face.

Jordan could see nothing behind the fierce stream of light, and stood

panting and trembling, longing to spring, and yet too terror stricken to move.

The awful silence was broken at last.

“Given you a start, eh, Sir Jordan?” said a dry, harsh voice behind the light. “Didn’t expect to see me, I imagine?”

Jordan started, and put his trembling hand to his lips.

“Banks! You!” he exclaimed, huskily.

The man chuckled at the baronet’s confusion, and set the lantern on the table. As he did so the light fell upon his face.

It was the face of Lavarick, with its thin lips twisted into a sneer of insolent contempt, as he looked sideways at the shrinking Jordan.

He wore a broad-brimmed hat which nearly hid his unprepossessing countenance, and was dressed in the style of a mechanic. He sat on the small table, and folded his arms as if he desired to enjoy the sight of Sir Jordan’s discomfiture at leisure.

Jordan had recovered himself a little by this time, and assumed an indignant and haughty air.

“What do you mean by forcing your way into the house?” he said, still rather huskily.

Lavarick smiled insolently.

“Thought I’d give you a pleasant little surprise, Sir Jordan,” he said. “Besides, it’s too late to disturb the servants. Don’t know that I should have dropped in this evening, but I happened to be passing, and saw the light up in the room here, and I felt rather curious to see what was going on in the room that Sir Jordan keeps shut up so closely. It was rather awkward getting up, but I learned to climb when I was a boy, and the ivy is pretty thick, and here I am. And what were you doing, Sir Jordan? Cleaning the furniture, eh?”

Jordan had been thinking rapidly while the man had been talking, and he moved toward the bell as he replied:

“I give you two minutes to go back by the way you came. If you remain at the end of that time I will call the servants and hand you over to the police.”

Lavarick laughed.

“Bravo, Sir Jordan! Not a bad bit of bluff that. But don’t you waste your time waiting the two minutes; ring up the slaveys at once, they’d be interested in the little chat you and I are going to have.”

Jordan’s hand dropped from the bell, which indicated weakness on his part. It is always unwise to threaten unless you can perform.

“Say what you have to say quickly and go,” he said, biting his lip. “Of

course you have come to extort money.”

“Right, the first time,” retorted Lavarick. “And of course you don’t mean to give it; quite right, don’t you be bullied,” and he laughed with impudent mockery.

Jordan’s face was an ugly sight at that moment; he actually moved a step or two toward Lavarick, but Lavarick did not appear alarmed; he took a revolver from his pocket, and in a careless way tapped the edge of the table with it.

“No good trying that on with me, Sir Jordan,” he said, quietly. “You’re a younger and a stronger man than I am, and so I brought this little plaything to make us a little more equal; not that I shall want to use it, because you are a sensible man, I know, Sir Jordan, and will listen to argument.”

Jordan stood looking down for a moment, then he raised his eyes and scanned the man’s face watchfully.

“You think you possess some knowledge concerning me which will enable you to levy blackmail on me, and do so with insolent impunity. You are mistaken, my man. Only fools commit such a blunder. You know nothing that can give you any power over me. While, on the other hand, I know you to be an escaped convict, and have only to secure you and hand you over to the police to get rid of you.”

“Then why don’t you do it?” retorted Lavarick, coolly, and apparently not at all offended. “Bluff, Sir Jordan, bluff. But I don’t blame you. It’s rather hard for a gentleman to find himself driven into a corner, and he naturally don’t like it. But you treat me well, Sir Jordan, and I’ll act fair by you. I don’t mean you any harm, and won’t do any if you’ll act straight.”

“You can do me no harm,” said Jordan, haughtily. “If I consent to tolerate your presence and listen to you it is because I am curious to hear what you have to say, and your reason for running the risk you have done.”

“Just so,” said Lavarick, dryly. “You said just now that I’d come to levy blackmail on you.”

Jordan sneered.

“That is your only excuse, my man, for risking capture.”

“Well, perhaps I have. I’m hard up, Sir Jordan, and I want money. But that’s not my only reason. I’ve come to do you a service.”

Jordan’s sneer was intensified.

“Of course you don’t believe it. It don’t seem possible that such as I am can be of any service to the great Sir Jordan Lynne, but it’s true, all the same.”

“Go on,” said Jordan, coldly. “Don’t exhaust my patience.”

“Oh, you’ll be ready, presently, to listen long enough,” said Lavarick, confidently. “Now then, Sir Jordan, you remember the last time I was here—in this room?”

Jordan kept his countenance but Lavarick saw him wince.

“I remember,” he said. “You attempted to break into the house, to commit a burglary, I have no doubt.”

“Nothing of the kind,” interrupted Lavarick, coolly. “I was running away from the police; they’d pressed me rather hard, and it occurred to me that if I could get into the house and hide, the simple-headed idiots would never think of looking for me here, and I could get away when the night was darker. I knew that I could get into this room by the steps and ran up them, intending to come in by the window here.”

“All this doesn’t interest me,” said Jordan, impatiently, but keeping a watchful eye on the face of the speaker.

“Oh, but it will presently,” said Lavarick, as dryly as before. “I’m not wasting time, Sir Jordan. Well, I crept up to the window, and heard voices. They were yours and your father’s, Sir Greville’s. The shutters weren’t closed, and I managed to look in through a chink in the curtains. The old gentleman was dying, and you were standing beside him. He was talking, and you were listening, and I could see by your face that what he was saying wasn’t particularly pleasant for you to hear. You looked ugly, Sir Jordan,” and he smiled.

Jordan bit his lip, but remained silent and watchful.

“I managed to get the window open a little way, and putting my ear to it, found I could hear every word. What was it I heard, Sir Jordan?”

Jordan’s lips twitched.

“You could have heard very little,” he said. “My father’s voice was weak _____”

“So it was,” assented Lavarick, “but my ears are sharp. Law, bless you, a man’s hearing gets ’cute when he’s spent months listening to the step of the warder outside his cell. I can hear a mouse scampering across the floor, I can hear the tick of a watch in a man’s pocket under a couple of thick coats. I can almost hear your heart beating now, Sir Jordan,” and he grinned. “I heard every word the old man said, and this is pretty nearly the sense of it. He was telling you about his will——”

Jordan started slightly and shifted his position so that the light should not fall upon him, but Lavarick, with a turn of the lantern, brought Jordan into focus again, and watched his face as closely as Jordan watched his.

“The old gentleman was terribly cut up about things he had done during his life, and he was going over them and fretting about them, and the only thing that consoled him was the fact that he had tried to put some of the things straight in this will of his——”

Jordan opened his lips, but stopped himself before a word had been said.

“For one thing there was the trouble about Mr. Neville, your half brother. He used to be the favorite son, but the old gentleman had quarreled with him and cast him adrift, and now he was a-dying it made him feel queer. I heard him say that you’d been mostly the cause of the row——Hold on, Sir Jordan. I’m not going to utter a word that isn’t true; what ’ud be the use? You and I are alone and there wouldn’t be any sense in our giving each the lie. I tell you I heard every word!”

“Go on,” said Jordan, huskily.

“The old gentleman reminded you of the way in which you’d kept the quarrel a-boiling, and begged you to find Neville and tell him how sorry his father was that they’d ever quarreled——”

“I have tried every means of finding my brother,” said Jordan.

“All right,” assented Lavarick. “I don’t say you haven’t. Let me get on. There was one other thing that laid heavier on Sir Greville’s mind than his treatment of Mr. Neville, and that was the way he’d hounded a certain party to death.”

Jordan started.

“I’m using the old man’s own words,” said Lavarick. “Hounded ’em to ruin and death was what he said. And this party was the lady who’d promised to marry him and then ran away with another man. It was like a novel to hear the old gentleman, wasn’t it, Sir Jordan? A regular case of remorse and penitence, eh? He behaved something awful in the way of cruel to this unfortunate couple, ruined ’em, and drove ’em out of the country with their little girl——”

Jordan sank into a chair, Lavarick deftly following him with the light from the lantern.

“But some people are satisfied with being sorry for what they’ve done and stop there. Sir Greville didn’t; he’d tried to make—what do you call it?—atonement, and he was telling you about it. I knelt outside the window there and listened.”

Jordan leaned his head on his hand so that it partially concealed his face; it was working with agitation he could not suppress.

“The old man was telling you about his will and what he’d done. There

were two wills, one in which he'd left all to you——”

“The only will,” said Jordan, as if the exclamation had escaped him involuntarily.

Lavarick smiled.

“Oh, no, there were two. This first one was at the lawyers,” so the old gentleman said. “The other he'd made himself, and being the latest, it was the will.”

Jordan shifted his feet restlessly.

“And what was in this last and real will?” Lavarick continued, leaning forward and dropping his voice to a whisper.

Jordan smiled an evil smile.

“No such will ever existed, excepting as a concoction of an escaped convict,” he said.

Lavarick nodded coolly.

“Didn't it? We'll see presently. I'll tell you what was in it, as I heard the old man tell you. First, he'd left you a third of the property——”

Jordan rose, but sank back with a smile of contempt.

“Then there was another third for Mr. Neville, and lastly there was the last third for the daughter of the couple Sir Greville had hounded to ruin and death, and not only that, but all the pictures and the jewels, another fortune, as I happen to know, Sir Jordan——”

Jordan rose and leaned against the mantelshelf, Lavarick causing the light to fall on him as before, and sneered down at Lavarick.

“And on this feeble story, this tissue of lies, you hope to levy blackmail, on me, do you!” he said, contemptuously.

Lavarick regarded him with cool gravity.

“Hold on a little longer, Sir Jordan,” he said, quietly. “You may ride the high horse when I've done—if you can!” he added, significantly. “I saw your face as the old man was telling you about this last will, and it was enough to give a nervous man the shivers. You looked—well, worse than you look now, Sir Jordan!—as if you could have killed the old man as he lay there. It wasn't pleasant to find yourself put off with a third of what you'd expected to get all to yourself. And you'd plotted and schemed so hard to cut your brother out of it; and now here was he to come in for as much as yourself, and a girl—a girl you didn't know anything about—to have her share—and the largest, too! It was a cutting up of the property that made you feel mad—and you looked it, I can tell you. I give you my word that I was getting ready to jump in, for I

thought that you meant mischief as you looked down at the old man——”

Jordan’s eye shot swiftly round the room, and he shuddered.

The man’s words had called up a grim picture of the events of that night. He could almost see his father lying on the bed, and panting out the eager, broken words.

“But you kept yourself in hand, you did, Sir Jordan; you were always a cool hand,” said Lavarick. “And you said, said you, ‘Everything shall be as you wish, father. I am quite satisfied. I will carry out the will, the last one, as faithfully as I can. Where is it, father?’ says you in a soft voice. The old man raised his hand and pointed to the bureau—that one there——” And Lavarick nodded to the piece of furniture. “‘In that second drawer,’ said Sir Greville. ‘Take my keys, they’re under the pillow.’ You took the keys and opened the drawer, and got the will.”

Jordan put up his hand to his forehead stealthily, and wiped off the big drops of sweat which had gathered there.

“I saw it in your hand,” continued Lavarick, in a low voice. “I know it was the will because you said, ‘Is this it, father?’ and the old gentleman nodded. ‘Keep faith with me, Jordan,’ he said. ‘I shan’t rest quiet in my grave if those I’ve injured are not righted.’ And you smiled, and came up to the bed”——Lavarick’s voice grew lower, and he pointed to the bed——“and you smiled right down at him, and right before his eyes you held the will to the candle——”

Jordan started forward as if he meant to silence the speaker with a blow, then fell back and laughed hoarsely.

“Hold on,” said Lavarick. “Just at that moment there came a knock at the door. You were flurried—which was only natural—and you rushed to the door, shoving the will inside your waistcoat, as you thought——”

Jordan’s lips writhed. Lavarick, as if warming to his work, went on with suppressed excitement, and yet carefully and guardedly as if no minute detail of the terrible scene should be lost.

“It was the nurse. You went outside to her for a minute or two, kept her out, sent her for something, I suppose, and, locking the door, went back to the bed. The old man raised himself on his elbow, tried to speak, pointed at you, then screamed out and went off——dead.”

He stopped to take breath.

“In came the nurse and the doctor, and the rest of them, and there was a confusion as usual. You were terribly cut up, quite the affectionate son—oh, very loving and heartbroken, and all that. Quite touching it was! And you got ’em out of the room that you might be alone. And the very first thing you did

when you were alone was to put your hand in your waistcoat and find that the will—wasn't there!"

Jordan drew a long breath, and he folded his arms and looked at Lavarick defiantly.

"It made you queer for a moment," resumed Lavarick. "You could have taken your oath that you'd stuck it inside your bosom, you know. But it wasn't there. Then you began to hunt about. I suppose you'd lost your head—it was enough to upset anybody—for you looked in all sorts of corners, as if you might have thrust it away anywhere, as if the old man might have got out of bed and hidden it while you were outside. You were out of the room quite long enough for him to have done so, if he'd had the strength, and there's things that will make even a dying man desperate, and give him strength to do what no one 'ud think he was capable of doing. That's how you put it, I dare say, for you hunted everywhere. But you couldn't find it. It was as clean gone as if you'd burned it."

He stopped as if expecting Jordan to speak, but Jordan remained silent, his brow knit, his eyes challenging Lavarick's crooked ones.

"Just then—after you'd been searching for about a quarter of an hour—I heard footsteps outside. I knew they'd nab me if I stayed where I was, or if I went down. I'd got to come into the room, and—I came." He laughed grimly. "I thought you'd have had a fit when you saw me open the window and slip inside. You looked worse than you looked when I came in just now, and that's saying a good deal. Of course you'd have given me up, but I had this little friend here," and he tapped the table with his revolver—"and that kept you quiet for a minute till I'd explained that I'd heard you and the old man, and that if you offered to give me up I'd split on you."

Jordan bit his lip, but remained silent.

"You were always a cool one, and you pulled yourself together after a minute or two. It didn't take long to persuade you that the best thing you could do was to hide me in the cupboard there, get me a suit of your own clothes, and, give me money enough to clear out of the country with. 'Once he's out of the way,' thought you, 'he won't dare to come back.' And you were right, Sir Jordan—up to a point. I left the house next morning quite free and open like; they took me for one of the undertaker's men, I expect; there was all sorts of people coming and going, and I looked such a perfect gentleman, such a respectable card in your togs, that even if that idiot Trale, had seen me he wouldn't have known me." And he laughed with keen enjoyment. "I got clear off, and never intended to come back, but"—he paused, and his face darkened—"well, I got homesick for one thing, and——"

“You thought you could blackmail me,” said Jordan. “You are a fool. I have listened patiently to your farrago of nonsense and absurdity, listened far more patiently than a judge or jury would do. Yes, you are a fool. Who do you think would believe this cock-and-bull story of a second will? A story told by an escaped convict!” he laughed contemptuously. “No such will ever existed excepting in your fertile imagination; the whole story is a concoction worthy of a scoundrel who committed a clever forgery and escaped from prison, a well-known criminal whom it is my duty to hand over to the police——”

Lavarick eyed him sideways with an evil leer.

“I’m a fool, am I?” he said. “I dare say; but I’m not half such a fool as you, who forget that the will was witnessed, and that one of the witnesses, old Mrs. Parsons, is alive and kicking——”

Jordan started, and the color which had been creeping back into his face deserted it again, but he forced a sneer.

“Very well,” he said. “We’ll admit the will, if you like; but you have lied in your version of what occurred, lied as a convict naturally would to serve his purpose and make his story complete. It was my father who changed his mind and repented of the will, who burned it. I saw him do it, and so did you! He burned it in the candle a few minutes before he died!”

Lavarick smacked his leg with his hand.

“’Pon my soul and body, that’s a clever stroke of yours, Sir Jordan,” he exclaimed, as if with genuine admiration. “It’s smart, right down smart. I couldn’t have hit upon a neater idea myself. But”——he leaned forward and glared cunningly with his evil eyes at Jordan——“it won’t work. The old man didn’t burn the will, because——it’s still in existence!”

Jordan clinched his hands, and kept his lips steady.

“That is a lie,” he said. “If it is in existence, where is it? Who has got it?”

Lavarick’s face answered him before he, Lavarick, could snarl out:

“I’ve got it!”

CHAPTER XXII.

The Right Hon. Sir Jordan Lynne, Bart., M.P., let an oath slip through his white lips.

“You have got it?” he stammered.

Lavarick smiled, and nodded and swung his foot to and fro with easy sang

froid.

“Yes, Sir Jordan, I’ve got it. When you’d gone outside to speak to the nurse I slipped in, picked up the will from the floor where you’d dropped it, and slipped out of the window again. You thought I hadn’t been in before when you saw me. And yet, it seems singular that a clever gentleman like you shouldn’t have guessed what had become of it, don’t it?”

Sir Jordan stood with downcast eyes trying to realize what had happened to him. This scoundrel, this escaped convict, a man whose daring equalled his cunning, had him, Sir Jordan, in his power. At a word, he could produce the will and ruin Sir Jordan; for the loss of two-thirds of the property, large as it was, would mean comparative ruin to a man in Jordan’s position. A cabinet minister who means to be Premier wants all the money he can get. It is of no use for a politician to be clever unless he possesses the golden charm with which to buy opportunities for the display of his cleverness. Rich as he was, with all Sir Greville’s money, Jordan could not afford to lose a penny, least of all the largest portion of his wealth.

Besides, the scandal! How his enemies—and what a host of them he had!—would leap upon this story of the lost will with yells of delight, and send it flying round the world! Good-by to greatness then for the Right Hon. Jordan! His candle would be snuffed out once and for all. He would be ruined in person and reputation, and Neville, the half brother whom he had always hated, and this unknown girl, would thrive and flourish at his expense!

The thought, the vision called up by his reflections made him turn hot one moment and cold the next. At any cost, he must buy off this man and keep the money. But he would try a little defiance first.

He forced a smile at last—it had been rather long in coming—and looked up.

“For the sake of argument,” he said, and he knew his voice sounded thick and labored, “we will admit that you stole the will; but I scarcely see of what use it can be to you.”

“You don’t, eh?” remarked Lavarick, with a sinister grin.

“No,” said Jordan, “in the first place you can scarcely reproduce it; you cannot account for its possession without laying yourself open to the charge of stealing it: to say nothing of running the risk—or, rather, meeting the certainty—of recapture.”

Lavarick smiled.

“That’s my lookout.”

“You have been convicted of forgery once, let me remind you,” continued

Jordan, “and would find it hard to prove this will, which, of course, I should declare to be false.”

“Of course. But you forget Mrs. Parsons, who witnessed it.”

Jordan’s eyes dropped.

“I forget nothing, my man,” he said, coolly. “But let us suppose that you can persuade a jury that this precious document is genuine—and I should fight it to the last penny, and I am in possession; I have nine points of the law on my side—I cannot see how that will help you to what you want—money. You say my half brother Neville is benefited. He may be dead; I think it is not unlikely.”

“He may,” said Lavarick.

“And if he were alive, why should you denounce and ruin me for his sake? You do not know him.”

“Never saw him,” said Lavarick.

“Good. The only other person to be considered, then, is this girl, of whom I know nothing, nor you, I imagine. She may be dead; may have died even before the will was made.”

Lavarick leaned forward with his hands resting on the table, and smiled triumphantly into Jordan’s eyes.

“She’s alive,” he said, slowly and emphatically.

Jordan winced and kept his eyes down.

“You say so,” he said. “You must prove it.”

“And I can,” retorted Lavarick. “Sir Jordan, I don’t go much on Providence; I’m not a saint like you, who speechify at Exeter Hall; but if ever I was inclined to be a reformed character, the way this thing has worked itself out would go far to convince me that there’s something more than chance and luck in the world. Here am I, quite on the chance, as you’d say, outside the window the night you were going to destroy the will. And here am I, years afterward, outside a tent in which this girl’s father was dying. Oh, I knew him long ago, and I knew him again directly I heard his voice. Yes, there was the girl as was left a third of Sir Greville’s money, the daughter of the people he a hounded to death, and there was I, happening on her on the other side of the world, and me with the will in my possession that would make a rich woman of her. Isn’t that wonderful?”

Jordan listened intently.

“This is a strange story,” he said, with a forced sneer.

“It is,” retorted Lavarick, coolly. “And although you think it’s a lie, it’s the

truth. That's where Providence comes in. I tell you"—he spoke slowly and emphatically—"that I was almost tempted to stop in England and run the risk of being sent back to quod, that I might find this girl; but I couldn't screw myself up to the point, and I crossed the herring pond, and there at the other end of the world I came upon her. I should have missed her, perhaps forever, if I'd stopped here. See? You think I'm lying?"

Jordan sneered.

"Well, suppose that you are telling the truth," he said, "and that you found the girl to whom my father left this money. But you said—I imagine it slipped out unawares—that her father is dead."

"That's so," assented Lavarick.

Jordan smiled.

"You will find it difficult to prove her identity, my friend," he said.

"Shall I?" retorted Lavarick, with a sinister smile. "I think not. While she's alive she can prove her identity anywhere, at any time. You want to know how? You sneer and snigger as if I was telling you something a child wouldn't believe. I'll tell you how. Just before her father died—mind, I was there; I'm telling what I saw—he gave her the papers that would prove who she was. He told her to hide them till she was eighteen. He knew Sir Greville had sworn to ruin him and his, and he was afraid that the old man would hound the girl as he had done her father and mother. So she was to hide the papers. I saw her put them in her bosom——"

He stopped, for Jordan had looked up with a keen glitter in his eyes.

"You've got those papers?" he said, in a low, eager voice.

Lavarick's face fell for the first time, and he looked—well, quite ashamed and crestfallen as he struck the table and swore.

"I've said I'd act on the square with you, and I will. No, I've not got 'em. I've risked my life for 'em, not once or twice only, and each time I've been balked. But," he uttered an awful oath, "I will have them yet!"

Jordan watched him closely. Lavarick's tone and manner convinced Jordan that he was speaking the truth—if not the whole of it.

Lavarick drew his hand across his mouth.

"Phew! this is dry work, and I've warmed myself up talking and thinking of all I've gone through. Let's have something to drink."

Jordan showed no resentment at the insolently-rough command rather than request, but nodded almost pleasantly.

"You shall have some wine," he said.

“Curse your wine! Bring some brandy,” said Lavarick, curtly.

“Certainly,” said Jordan, and went softly out of the room.

Lavarick followed him to the door and looked round the handsome corridor, with its costly carpets and hangings, pictures, and statuary.

“Ah,” he muttered. “I’ll have a place as good as this myself presently.”

Jordan came back, carrying a salver with a liquor bottle and a water carafe and glasses, and a candle, and putting them on the table, waved his hand.

“Help yourself!” he said, as he lit the candle.

Lavarick poured out a liberal quantity of brandy and a very small quantity of water and raised it to his lips, but suddenly arrested the glass half way, and with a start looked suspiciously at Jordan, who stood silently regarding him.

“Here!” said Lavarick, sharply; “drink yourself!”

Jordan shook his head.

“I do not drink,” he said.

Lavarick sprang off the table and seized him by the throat.

“You mean-livered hound!” he snarled. “You would, eh? I’ll choke you first!”

Jordan struggled desperately, and succeeded in exclaiming:

“What are you doing? What is the matter?”

“Matter!” hissed Lavarick. “You’ve drugged the liquor.”

Jordan gasped a denial, his voice half choked; but Lavarick held the glass to his lips.

“Drink!” he said. “Drink, or I’ll——” and he caught up the revolver.

Jordan took the glass in his shaking hand.

“You fool!” he said, trembling with rage at the indignity he had suffered. “Do you think I’d stoop to work with such tools as you use?”

“Never mind what I think!” retorted Lavarick, sulkily. “Drink and drink a good draught. I’d trust you, Sir Jordan Lynne, just as far as I could see you; no farther. You’ve had time to doctor the stuff, and if you haven’t done it, you’ve no cause to refuse to drink it.”

Jordan, with a gesture of contempt, gulped a draught of the strong mixture and set the glass down.

“Enough!” he said. “My patience is exhausted. I’d rather give up anything than spend another quarter of an hour breathing the same air with you. The will—you have come to sell it; name your price. I will buy it here and now, or never.”

Lavarick, still with smoldering rage, replenished his glass and glared at him.

“You won’t, won’t you?” he sneered, “We’ll see! And you think I’m such a fool as to trust myself in your company with the thing about me? Not me, Sir Jordan! I know you too well. I saw you smiling down at the old man as he lay a-dying there, and mocking him to his face, and I know the kind of gentleman I’ve got to deal with. I’d rather trust a tiger than you, Sir Jordan, for all your snaky smile and smooth voice.”

Jordan, writhing with impotent rage, beat the devil’s tattoo with his foot.

“Don’t try me too far,” he said, threateningly. “I’m more than half inclined to bid you do your worst.”

Lavarick sneered.

“How nice it would read in the papers, wouldn’t it? The great Sir Jordan Lynne and his father’s will. I’m not sure that it isn’t a case for a judge and jury and quod. You’d look well in the prison regimentals, Sir Jordan, and you wouldn’t be so ready to talk of convicts, eh? But I’m as ready for business as you are. Here’s my terms: I’ll part with the will to you—as you’re an old friend—for five-and-twenty thousand pounds.”

Jordan laughed bitterly and mockingly.

“I expected some such preposterous attempt at blackmail,” he said. “I refuse! Do your worst! I defy you! And I regret that I have not done what I should have done the moment you forced your way in—handed you over to the police.”

“Right,” said Lavarick, cheerfully, as he got off the table and began to button up his coat. “That’s my offer, and I don’t budge from it.” He swore. “I’ll give you till to-morrow night to think it over. I’ve got some business to do in the place that will amuse me till then. Don’t trouble to come down to the front door, Sir Jordan,” he added, with a grin. “Oh, I’m not afraid that you’ll give the alarm, and I’m not afraid of my money. You’ll come to terms to-morrow, Sir Jordan,” and with an insolent nod he got through the window and slowly disappeared, his crooked eyes dwelling on Jordan’s face till they vanished below the window sill.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Right Hon. Sir Jordan Lynne, Bart., M.P., sank into a chair as the evil

face of Lavarick, alias Jim Banks, disappeared below the window sill and covered his eyes with his hands.

What he had feared for so long, ever since that awful night when the old man had died, had come to pass at last.

For years he had expected Banks, the man who had witnessed the death-bed scene, to turn up and levy blackmail upon him, and the man had turned up. And matters were even worse than Jordan's imagination and dread had painted them, for Banks not only knew of the existence of the will—which would have been awkward enough for Jordan—but actually had it in his possession!

If he had only kept away a few weeks longer, until Jordan had secured Audrey and her large fortune, he might have set the ruffian at defiance, laughed his story to scorn, and declared the will a forgery. There would have been a scandal, of course, but Jordan would have got Audrey safe and secure, and could afford to play a bold game.

But now—just on the eve, so to speak, of the marriage which was to put the coping stone to the edifice of fortune which he had built up with so much care and toil and cunning cleverness—he dared not defy the man. And yet to give up so large a sum, so big a lump of the money he had pouched! He shuddered, actually shuddered, as he thought of it.

What was to be done? There were two persons whom he had cheated, Neville and this girl, the daughter of the woman Sir Greville had wanted to marry. Neville might be dead; if so, he, Jordan, would be his heir: that was all right. But this girl? Banks had stated that he knew her whereabouts, and that he could produce her, and that she could prove her claim. Give up a third of the Lynne money, and all the famous jewels to an unknown girl—oh, impossible!

He did not show himself to any one but his valet the next day; he was too ill and unnerved. An intended visit to London he deferred, and he wrote an apologetic note to Audrey, stating that he was detained in Lynne by some business which regarded the welfare of his tenants.

At dusk the valet lit the candles and brought a cup of beef tea which Jordan had ordered, and Jordan was making an attempt to dispose of it when the man reappeared and announced that a gentleman wished to see him.

Jordan nodded, as he bent over his letters.

“Ah, yes, the—er—messenger from London,” he said. “Let him come up, please.”

The valet ushered in an elderly, white-haired man, dressed neatly in the dark-colored clothes favored by clerks and lawyers, and wearing a gray beard and a pair of spectacles, who bowed respectfully to Sir Jordan as he motioned him to take a chair.

Both waited until the valet had had time to get out of hearing, then Lavarick rose and gently opening the door, listened for a moment.

“Lock it,” said Jordan, in a constrained voice; but Lavarick shook his head.

“No, no, the flunkey will be coming upon some business or other, perhaps, and would wonder why the door was locked. This is better,” and he set a chair against it; “he can’t come in now without giving us warning. That’s a trick worth two of locking it. Well, Sir Jordan?” and he nodded coolly at him. “What’s the verdict, eh? Is it to be peace, or war to the knife? I don’t care much which it is—I can make terms with the other side, you know, better terms than I’ll get out of you, p’raps——”

“Do not let us waste time in that kind of argument,” interrupted Jordan. “The quicker this—this interview is over the better. You ignore danger, but you cannot be insensible to the peril you run in being seen here——”

“Not a bit of it,” retorted Lavarick, airily. “I’d defy even Trale to see through this get up. Good, ain’t it?” and he chuckled and stroked the gray beard.

Jordan eyed him repellently.

“It is good until it is penetrated,” he said, curtly.

“That’s so,” assented Lavarick, cheerfully. “I thought it best to come to the front door this time. Some one might have heard us talking in the room there”—he jerked his finger over his shoulder—“and, thinking it was burglars, raise a row. And now what’s it to be, Sir Jordan? You’ve had time to think it over, and like a sensible man you’ve made up your mind to come to terms, eh?”

Jordan leaned back in his chair, his eyes downcast.

“I have decided on my course of action in the matter,” he said slowly. “I will give you the money you ask——”

Lavarick snapped his fingers triumphantly and chuckled.

“Thought you would,” he said, nodding. “You’re a sensible man, Sir Jordan. Another man might have played bluff a little longer——”

“On one condition,” said Jordan, haughtily. “And that is that you place the will in my hands, and a declaration that you saw my—Sir Greville burn it on the night of his death.”

Lavarick stared and frowned.

“What’s the meaning of that now?” he asked. “What’s your drift, eh?”

Jordan looked up at him with an evil smile.

“For a cunning scoundrel, Banks, you are singularly obtuse,” he said, with

a sneer. “You forget, too, a little incident in your past career. I refer to your conviction for forgery——”

Lavarick, still eyeing him suspiciously, swore impatiently.

“What’s that to do with it?”

“Merely this,” retorted Jordan almost sweetly, “that I think it highly probable that in exchange for my money you would give me a forged copy of the will, and retain the genuine one for another occasion.”

A gleam of real admiration lit up Lavarick’s face.

“’Pon my soul, you’re cute,” he exclaimed under his breath. “That’s what you’d have done, isn’t it?”

Jordan smiled and cast down his eyes.

“And I never thought of it!” muttered Lavarick with honest shame and remorse. “I never thought of it, so help me! Sir Jordan, you’re a clever man, and I admire you! And to prove it I say—done with you.”

And he held out his claw-like hand.

Jordan looked at it as if he would rather handle a snake than touch it.

“Good,” he said. “That is my one condition. Give me that, and I am content. You may leave the country or——”

“Wait here till you’ve hit upon a plan for getting me safely lagged and sent back to jail,” finished Lavarick, with a grin. “No, thank you. Once I touch the coin I’m off; I did want to stay in the old country a little longer——”

He stopped, and his face darkened with an evil scowl.

Jordan watched him.

“Whether you go or stay is your business,” he said, coldly. “I have only to arrange for the—the exchange——”

Lavarick nodded.

“I’ve thought of that,” he said. “Bring the money—I’ll take it in notes. Oh, I’m not afraid you’ll stop them. You couldn’t without causing an inquiry, you know. Bring the notes to Lynne Burrows on Friday night at ten o’clock. I’ll meet you by the clump of trees.”

“Why not bring it here?” asked Jordan, thoughtfully.

Lavarick smiled and shook his head.

“No, thank you, Sir Jordan. I wouldn’t trust myself with that precious document in my possession, under your roof. You’re so clever, you see! Think of your hitting upon the idea of my forging a duplicate! No, no. We’re safe, both of us, in the Burrows.”

Jordan pondered a moment or two.

“Why Friday?” he said, sharply. “The will is not in your possession?”

“Do you mean do I carry it about with me? No, I certainly do not; I’m not such a fool, in fact. You don’t carry the Lynne diamonds in your coat pocket, do you? Well, this will’s worth almost as much to me as they are to you. I’ve got it hid away snug and safe, and I’ll produce it on Friday, as I say. I’m not afraid you’ll go back on me. You can bring Trale if you like. But you know better. What we both of us want is to settle this little affair between ourselves quietly and comfortably.”

“Very well,” said Jordan. “I have no more to say,” he added, after a pause, and he glanced significantly at the door and laid his hand on the bell.

Lavarick took up the highly-respectable hat which formed part of his disguise, then as if by a sudden impulse stretched out his hand and motioned to Sir Jordan not to ring the bell.

“Half a moment,” he said, hesitatingly, and looking down at the thick Turkey carpet with a strange and curious expression on his face. “We’ve arranged one little matter, Sir Jordan; but—but there’s another matter I wanted to speak to you about.”

“What is it?” said Jordan, impatiently, and rising as he spoke, as if the man’s company grew more intolerable each moment.

Lavarick gnawed at his lip and evidently made an effort to speak indifferently.

“It’s just this,” he said, and his voice was thicker and huskier even than usual; “you might remember, Sir Jordan, that I”—he paused—“that I’ve got a daughter?”

Jordan was standing in front of his chair, and, as Lavarick spoke, he seemed to grow suddenly stiff and rigid; then he turned to the letters on the small table beside him, so that his back was toward Lavarick, as he replied:

“Yes, I remember.”

“Well”—Lavarick paused again, and seemed as if he found it difficult to proceed—“she—she was my only child. She was like her mother.” He glanced at Sir Jordan as if he expected him to sneer, and meant to resent the sneer if it came; but Jordan looked steadily at the carpet. “Her—her mother was a good woman, a—a better wife than I deserved, and it was a good job she died before—I was very fond of my little girl, Sir Jordan. You laugh, I dare say, and you think that such as I am haven’t any right to feelings.”

“I was not laughing,” said Jordan, quietly, and without raising his eyes. “Go on.”

“Well,” resumed Lavarick, huskily, “my girl was all the world to me, and—and if anything would have kept me straight, she would; but I’m one of those who can’t go straight. I suppose there’s something in the blood that drives a man to the devil whether he will or won’t. I’m a bad lot, I know; but I was fond and proud of my girl, and the worst part of the business when I was sent off was the thought that I was leaving her all alone, and without any one to look after her.”

He paused and cleared his throat.

“It was the dreadful longing to see her that drove me to breaking out of quod. I thought if I could only get away and take her to some place on the other side of the herring pond, she and me could make a fresh start. Well, I got out,” he continued, with a touch of pride in his tone, “and I risked everything to come down here and see her. I knew I was running into danger, just putting my head into the lion’s mouth, as you’d say; but I risked it. And when I got down here I found”—he stopped and turned his head away—“I found that my girl Rachel had gone.”

Jordan still gazed at his boots, outwardly calm and indifferent, but his heart was beating nineteen to the dozen, and his brain was hard at work.

“She was gone. That was bad enough, but there was worse behind. My girl had fallen into bad hands. Some villain had—had played her false, and she’d gone off with him.”

His harsh voice trembled, and Jordan, glancing up, saw that he was shaking as if with ague.

“That’s all I could hear. It nearly drove me mad. I couldn’t make inquiries; I daren’t stop and try and find her. I had to bolt, as you know. But I swore I’d come back and find out who it was that ruined her, and—Well, I’ve come back! But I’m as far off as ever. No one of those I’ve ventured to speak to—and it’s precious few, of course—know anything more than that she went off with some one, and that she’s not been seen in Stoneleigh since.”

He dashed his hand across his eyes with an oath at the emotion which he could not conceal, and looked out of the window.

“It occurred to me,” he went on, after a pause during which Jordan remained silent and watchful, “that you might have heard—something; that you might know who it was that led her astray. You see, you’re a magistrate and the local swell, and—things generally come to the ears of a man in your place. I want to find her.” He stammered hoarsely. “I don’t care what she’s done, she’s my girl, my Rachel still, and I want her. But I want the man that ruined her worse! I’ve sworn—look here, Sir Jordan, most good men like yourself, for instance,” and he laughed grimly, “say their prayers at night. I’m

not 'good' anyway, and, instead, I've sworn an oath every night before I've laid down that I'd have my revenge on the man that robbed me of my girl! And if he's alive and I can find him, I'll keep that oath!"

He raised his clinched hand as he spoke, and swore fearfully.

"That's all I wanted to ask you," he said. "Just answer it, and I'm off. Just tell me anything you may have heard—anything might give me a clue. Why, look here"—and he struck the small table so that the letters danced again—"I'd rather lose the money I'm to get from you than give up my hope of revenge upon the villain that ruined my little girl!"

It was at that moment that an inspiration visited Jordan. It came as a flash, as most inspirations do, and its suddenness sent the blood to his pale face.

"You will get into trouble, my good Banks," he said, gravely. "You had better forget your daughter, and put yourself beyond the reach of the police."

Lavarick laughed, a gruesome kind of laugh.

"You think so? Well, look here; if the man I want was standing with a policeman on each side of him, I'd fly at his throat, and as I choked him I'd say, 'I'm Jim Banks, the father of the girl you ruined!' and I'd kill him and be hanged for it afterward."

Jordan turned pale, and his eyes hid themselves under their thick lids.

"I—I scarcely know whether I should be justified in telling you," he began, hesitatingly.

Lavarick turned upon him eagerly.

"You know something!" he exclaimed. "What is it? Tell me!"

Jordan bit his lip softly as if still considering, then he said slowly:

"I cannot refuse a father's appeal."

Lavarick swore impatiently.

"Curse that," he said, hoarsely. "Out with what you know."

Jordan rose and looked down at the carpet pensively.

"You say that your daughter's name was Rachel?" he said.

"Rachel!" assented Lavarick, huskily. "What is it? What do you know?"

Jordan sighed.

"Heaven knows whether I am acting wisely in—in telling you what I know," he said, "and if I do so it is in the hope that I may aid you to recover your daughter—not that you may wreak your vengeance upon her betrayer. I think I saw her but once or twice as I passed through the town. I should not remember her if I were to meet her again——"

“Go on!” broke in Lavarick, impatiently.

“You must let me tell you in my own way,” said Jordan, rebukingly. “Did you know my half brother, Neville?” he asked as if with painful reluctance.

Lavarick started.

“No,” he said. “He was at college, I suppose, when I was at home here. I never saw him. What—why——”

“Wait,” said Jordan, almost gently. “Wait here for a moment.”

He went out and returned after a minute or so with a letter in his hand.

Lavarick, who had been pacing up and down with the gait and, indeed, the expression of a tiger thirsting for blood, stopped and glared at him.

“What’s that?” he asked.

Jordan held the letter firmly.

“I do not know, as I said, whether I am acting wisely in showing you this; I am not convinced that it—er—brings home the guilt of your daughter’s betrayal to the person who received this letter, but I cannot withhold my sympathy from, or refuse to help, a father in the search for his lost child.”

Lavarick eyed him with savage incredulity and suspicion.

“Stow all that!” he said, hoarsely. “What is it?”

“I will tell you,” said Jordan, gravely. “You taunted me that night with being the cause of the quarrel between my father and my half brother Neville. It was an ignorant and unjust accusation. The cause of the quarrel between Sir Greville and Neville, who was his favorite son, was—your daughter.”

Lavarick started back, gasping.

“What!” he said, almost inaudibly, his eyes fixed on Jordan’s face.

Jordan shook his head gravely.

“What I tell you is true,” he said. “It came to my father’s ears that Neville was—well, well—being seen too frequently with your daughter Rachel, and my father taxed Neville with his intended perfidy, and bade him give up his designs upon a young and innocent girl. But I am ashamed to say that my half brother Neville was as wilful and obstinate as he was vicious. He persisted in his evil courses; a stormy scene ensued between my father and him and then Neville disappeared. I fear—I greatly fear that he persuaded your unhappy daughter to accompany him.”

Lavarick stood white and trembling.

“Is this one of your lies?” he got out at last. “Is this a dodge of yours to come over me?”

Jordan shook his head.

“You do right to distrust me, Banks,” he said, “but I am telling you the truth. Why should I concoct this story? My brother Neville is doubtless dead, and beyond the reach of your vengeance; indeed, if I did not think so, I should not have told you, for I bear him no ill will.”

Lavarick’s trembling lips twisted into a sneer.

“You hate him,” he said, hoarsely. “But that’s nothing to do with me. Give me proofs. What’s that in your hand?”

“The proof you ask for,” said Jordan, and then, as if reluctantly he handed Lavarick the paper.

It was an old letter, which had apparently been partly burned. The date and the commencement were destroyed, but the body and the signature remained.

Lavarick seized it and examined it, then he glared up at Jordan.

“It’s—it’s her handwriting!” he said, hoarsely. “It’s her name—Rachel’s!” and he dashed his hand on the signature.

“You recognize it?” said Jordan, gravely, almost pityingly. “It is a heart-rending letter; the appeal of a helpless girl to the man who has ruined and deserted her.”

“Where—where did you get it from?” demanded Lavarick, wiping his eyes as if the sight of the familiar handwriting had blinded them.

“I found it in my brother’s room when I was cleaning it out after my father’s death,” said Jordan, quietly. “It was lying among some burned papers. Will you return it to me, please?”

Lavarick folded it and thrust it in his pocket, his eyes fixed on Jordan’s face with an awful look.

“Return it? No! I’ll return it to him! I’ll return it to him when I’m killing him! Oh, my God!” and he seized his head with both hands and held it as if he were going to have a fit. “My girl, my poor girl! Dead—you say he’s dead! He’s not! He’s alive, and I’ll find him! I’ll——” He stopped as if he were choking, and tore at his collar and necktie. “Give me some water.”

He seized a carafe from a side table and gulped down a glassful, then stood breathing hard and staring vacantly at Jordan.

Jordan stood, rather paler than usual, but with his eyes fixed on the carpet.

“For your own sake,” he said, “I trust you will not commit any rash deed. For your own sake——”

Lavarick stopped him with a gesture at once defiant and savage.

“Leave that to me!” he said, brokenly; then he laughed, a horrible laugh. “If you’d only told me this, given me this letter last night, I’d have let you off

the money.”

Poor Jordan started, and a gleam of regret crossed his face.

Lavarick laughed again.

“But I’ll have the money and my revenge, too. Curse you both; curse everybody by the name of Lynne! It’s you and the likes of you that drive us to the devil! My girl—my pretty, innocent girl——” He broke down again, but recovered himself as if he had a suspicion that Jordan, for all his grave face, was enjoying the sight of his misery. “I’m going,” he said, breathing hard. “Friday, remember! I’ll have the money! It will help me to find him! Your brother won’t trouble you after I’ve done with him, Sir Jordan!”

He went to the door, but his hand shook so that he could not turn the handle.

“Open it!” he said, roughly.

Jordan obeyed, and accompanied him downstairs and to the hall door.

“You will take care of the papers, Mr. Smith,” he said, blandly, for the benefit of the footman in the hall.

But Lavarick, as if he had forgotten his assumed character and part, strode down the steps and along the drive with bent head and white, distorted face, his hand clutching the pocket in which he had thrust the letter.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A wise maxim maker has asserted that there can be no love between two women when both are young and pretty. As is usual with maxim makers, he was wrong, and Sylvia and Audrey proved him so.

They were drawn toward each other by a mutual sympathy which acted with equal force. Sylvia had gone through the furnace of sorrow through which Audrey seemed now to be passing. But though Sylvia saw that something was troubling her newly-made friend, she did not ask for Audrey’s confidence, and Audrey did not give it. But notwithstanding this, the two girls had fallen in love with each other with that quiet fervency which evidences something warmer, deeper, and more lasting than a transient fancy.

The day after their meeting in Sylvia’s room, Audrey drove round to Bury street, and carried Sylvia off to Grosvenor square.

Lady Marlow at first received her with a mixture of kindness and reserve, but before an hour had passed, Sylvia had made her way, unconsciously and

without any effort on her part, into her little ladyship's heart, and the viscount, happening to come in to lunch, was as promptly captured and enslaved.

The two girls went out for a drive together, and Audrey promised on their return to call at Sylvia's abiding place on the following afternoon, take tea with her, and afterward accompany her to the theatre.

Audrey came the next afternoon, and the two girls sat and talked over their tea, as women who are fast and loving friends delight to talk. Audrey was resplendent in her evening dress, and Sylvia was laughingly admiring her, and holding up a hand mirror that Audrey might survey herself when the maid servant entered.

Sylvia, thinking she had come to remove the tea service, paid her no attention; when Audrey, who was trying to put aside the mirror, suddenly uttered a cry and half rose.

Sylvia turned her head to see what was the matter, and saw a tall figure standing in the doorway.

She dropped the glass and ran forward with both hands out-stretched, exclaiming:

“Lord Lorrimore!”

He took her hands and held them so tightly that he hurt her. But his eyes did not meet hers, they were fixed on the pale and downcast face of Audrey Hope.

“Audrey! Miss Hope, you here!” exclaimed Lorrimore, his dark face flushing, his eyes lighting up with a sudden joy and gladness.

Sylvia looked from one to the other, but not a glimmering of the truth dawned upon her.

“Yes! No wonder you are surprised. Audrey—Miss Hope is an old friend of yours, Lord Lorrimore; so she is of mine, aren't you, Audrey?” and she smiled at her.

But Audrey seemed unable to speak for a moment or two, and she gave her hand in silence to Lorrimore, whose heart rose at the sight of her embarrassment. It was the first time she had ever shown any emotion at the sight of him, and it made him hopeful.

He sat down between the two on the large couch, and Sylvia plied him with questions.

“Why did you not write and tell us you were coming?” she asked, chidingly. “And why have you been away so long?”

“I didn't write because I did not know until yesterday that I was coming to England,” he said, scarcely knowing what he said, all his thoughts scattered by

the fact that the woman he loved was sitting within reach of his hand.

He stole a glance at her, and his faithful heart throbbed with love and admiration. She was more beautiful than ever, he thought. He longed to hear her speak, that he might once more in reality listen to the voice which he had heard so often in his dreams.

He had not seen her for nearly three years, and yet, as she sat there arrayed in her splendor, and her lovely face downcast, the long lashes sweeping her cheeks, it seemed to him that it was but yesterday that he had stood beside her in Lynne Burrows, and started on the quest for Neville Lynne.

“I—I hope Lady Marlow is quite well?” he said.

Audrey found her voice at last.

“Yes, thank you,” she said, and without raising her eyes; but the voice thrilled through him as of old, and he turned his eyes with a dazed, far-away look in them, to Sylvia.

Audrey took advantage of his averted gaze to steal a glance at him. He was tanned by travel in all weathers, but he looked not a day older, and, if anything, he was handsomer than ever. A sigh stole from between her lips, and her head drooped. She knew that he loved her still. A woman knows whether a man’s heart is still hers after a long absence the first moment she sees him after his return. A look’s enough. What had she lost—thrown away?”

“You seem in capital spirits, Sylvia,” he said, with a smile, “and no wonder. I have read of your triumphs, and understand that all London is at your feet. I quite expected to find you the personification of vanity, and I hope you won’t disappoint me.”

“I won’t,” said Sylvia, laughing. “I am almost too vain to live. Yes, I have been very fortunate, and they all praise me far too much. But this is my greatest piece of fortune,” and she leaned in front of him and took Audrey’s hand.

Lorrimore looked questioningly from one to the other.

“I’ve got the best and dearest friend a woman ever had!” Sylvia went on. “We are like two sisters, only more so, aren’t we, Audrey?”

Audrey smiled and pressed her hand.

“I suppose you are surprised and startled to see such a warm friendship between the great Miss Hope and a poor opera singer, my lord?” and she looked up at his dark face with a mischievous mock gravity.

Lorrimore smiled.

“I am rather surprised,” he said. “I know how proud you are; but I am very glad. How did you——”

“Oh, it’s too long a story to tell,” said Sylvia. “Suffice it that we detected an electric bond of sympathy between us, and that we came together by mutual attraction, and that—here we are. And now, if you will promise not to be too elated, we will remark how glad we are to see you, and express a hope that you have abandoned the role of Wandering Jew forever.”

Audrey’s and Lorrimore’s faces flushed, but Audrey’s grew pale again.

“You are looking absurdly well,” Sylvia ran on; “but you must tell us your adventures. Never mind Miss Hope; she need not listen unless she likes.”

Lorrimore stole a glance at the downcast face.

“There’s not much to tell,” he said, hesitatingly, as he wondered what Sylvia would say if she knew how closely Audrey was connected with his “adventures.” “I have just come back from Switzerland——”

The servant knocked at the door and entered.

“Miss Mercy’s love, madam, and it is time to dress.”

Sylvia nodded and smiled.

“You see Mercy is still my guardian angel,” she said. “She watches over me almost every hour of the day. I am sorry she is not here to see you; but she is not well, and I have made her rest. I must run away and put my cloak on. You will come to the opera to-night, Lord Lorrimore?”

He looked down at his suit of gray tweed.

“Oh, you can go in the pit as you are not dressed,” said Sylvia, and she laughed.

Audrey rose with her.

“I—I will come with you and help you dress, Sylvia,” she said.

Lorrimore’s face fell, and he put out his hand impulsively.

“One moment, Miss Hope,” he said with repressed agitation.

“Oh, pray stop and keep him amused for a few minutes, or he will be off to the other end of the world, perhaps, before I can get down,” said Sylvia, as she ran from the room.

Audrey sank back in her seat, and Lorrimore rose and took a turn across the room; then he returned and sat down beside her again.

“Audrey,” he said, and his voice trembled, “though I came back to see you, and only you, this meeting is so sudden and unexpected that I can scarcely believe that it is really you sitting so near me. I am afraid that I startled you, that—Audrey, you are not sorry to see me?” he broke off, for her face had grown paler and more constrained, as if she disliked being alone with him, as he thought.

"I—I am very glad to see you, Lord Lorrimore," she said, but there was no gladness in her voice, he noticed, and his heart fell.

"I am afraid you will not be very glad when I tell you that I have come back unsuccessful, and without any good news for you," he said, regretfully, and as humbly as if it were all his fault that he had not brought the missing Neville in his pocket. "I have not found your lost friend. I have not even been able to hear of him. They say the world is very small." He smiled. "Any way, it is large enough to hide Neville Lynne. I think there is scarcely a likely place that I have left unexplored; but he seems to have disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him."

"It is very strange," said Audrey in a low voice, but almost coldly.

Lorrimore was rather astonished by her apathy. The least a man who has been scouring the habitable globe for nearly three years to please a lady has a right to expect is that the lady should display some interest in the result of his wearisome mission, but Audrey did not appear to feel anything of the kind.

Lorrimore, if he had not been so passionately in love with her, might have felt hurt at the absence of even thanks; but whatever Audrey said or did or thought seemed just right and perfect in his eyes, and he went on:

"I dare say you wondered why I didn't write to you?"

Audrey's lips quivered, but no sound came.

"Heaven knows, I wanted to write to you often enough; but I thought that—that you would think I was bidding for your sympathy, and—and so I kept silent. You see, I hoped to bring your friend back to you. But I haven't, and—and, Audrey, I have no right to go on; no right to tell you of what lies so near my heart."

She did not forbid him to continue, and of course he went on, his voice trembling with eagerness.

"When I started, Audrey, you—no, you didn't say a word; but I thought, I hoped, that if I were successful, that—that you might perhaps feel I had done my poor best to prove my love for you. Not that it wanted any proving, for I think, Audrey, that you have always known that. I have loved you, and that you might, I mean——"

He broke down, stammering like a schoolboy, and leaning forward, took her hand and held it, though it struggled feebly in his grasp.

"Audrey, is there any hope for me? I don't want to trade on this search business; it was nothing, after all, except the being parted from you so long." At this piece of masculine simplicity the tears began to gather in Audrey's eyes. "I don't want to take advantage of it in any way. I'd go all through it

again to please you, even if you told me that there was no hope for me. I love you, dear Audrey, more devotedly—ten thousand times better than ever, if that were possible. You see, I have spent the last three years thinking of you. In frost or heat, in city or wilderness, your dear presence has seemed to be with me. Sometimes I have dreamed—and when did I not dream of you?—that you were actually near me; that I could feel your hand in mine, and hear your voice—actually hear your voice. Then, when I woke up and found it was only a dream—Well, then I felt bad, and wanted to come posting home.”

A tear rolled down Audrey’s cheek, and fell upon her tightly-clasped hand, but she did not speak, though she knew that she ought to stop him. But there is no music under heaven—not the thrill of the nightingale, the clear note of the thrush, the curlew’s song on some moonlit river—so sweet to a woman’s ear as the voice of the man she loves pleading for that love; and Audrey could not bid it cease.

“Sometimes,” he went on, “I have tortured myself fancying that you had forgotten me, or that some other and better man had won your love, and that I should come back and find you were his wife. My heart leaped when I heard Sylvia call you by the name I have whispered to myself in the silent night, and I knew that you were still Audrey Hope.”

A tremor seized Audrey and she tried to stop him, but she could not speak.

“It was Sylvia who told me that I ought to come back to the woman I loved, and tell her that I loved her, and that I ought to ask her to—to try and love me in return. Did I do right, Audrey? Is there any hope for me, or ought I to have stayed away and ceased to trouble you?”

Her hands untwined, and he seized the opportunity to take the one nearest to him. It was burning hot.

“Tell me, Audrey,” he said in a low voice. “Whatever the verdict is, I will try and bear it. If—if what I want cannot be, I will go away and trouble you no more. Audrey, will you be my wife?”

She turned her face from him that he might not see the awful longing in it, the longing to throw her arms round his neck, hide herself in his strong arms, and give him love for love. Perhaps, with a lover’s intuition, he read her heart, for he put out his arms toward her; but with a low cry that was half sob, half moan, she shrank from him and “No, no!” broke from her trembling lips.

Lorrimore’s arms fell to his side, and his face paled.

“It is ‘no’!” he said, almost inaudibly. “That is your answer, Audrey?”

His head drooped, and he put his hand up to stroke his mustache to hide the tremor of his lips.

“Well, I—I must bear it. I—I am sorry that I have troubled you, Audrey. I might have known why you shrank from me when I came in just now——”

“No, no,” she said.

He shook his head sadly.

“Yes, you did. I saw it, but—Well, I went on hoping. It is hard for a man to give up the hope that he has been nursing for years, the hope that has been keeping him alive when everything seemed against him.”

He was silent for a moment, gnawing his mustache, then he glanced at her and saw the tears rolling down her face—the face which he had loved to picture as bright and happy—and his heart smote him. He called himself a brute to worry this radiant, beautiful creature who was born to wear a smile, and go through the world as sorrowless as some tropical bird.

“Don’t cry, Audrey,” he said, gently. “It does not matter. I shall get over it! Better fellows than I am have had to bear this kind of thing, and I am not going to make you miserable by hanging about you with a handkerchief to my eyes. I will accept my dismissal at last. I—I think I’ll take myself off now. Tell Sylvia—I’ve got to hear how you and she became such friends, by the way—tell her I’ll come and hear her sing some other night, and—and good-by, Audrey. I hope you’ll be happy whoever you marry.”

He stopped abruptly, for something in Audrey’s face told him, swiftly as a lightning flash, that there was some one already.

He stood looking down at her, his eyes fixed upon her as if he feared to put the question that yet must be put.

“There is some one, isn’t there, Audrey?” he said in a low voice.

She did not answer, at least in words, but her head sank lower, and her face grew hot as if with shame.

“Who is it?” he asked, in a voice he tried to keep steady.

Audrey tried to lift her eyes to his, but it was as if a heavy weight hung on her lids.

“I—I am engaged to—to Jordan Lynne,” came in a whisper at last.

Lorrimore started, and a terrible change came over his face. His Spanish blood, what little there was of it, would have glowed if she had mentioned any other name, and his heart would have winced; but the name of Jordan Lynne set his blood on fire. That man to be her husband! Jordan the husband of his beautiful Audrey! The woman whom so many good men and true loved perhaps almost as well as he loved her! The thought nearly drove him mad. He knew—felt—that the man was a villain, just as Neville and several others felt it. And this smooth, subtle Sir Jordan was to wed his Audrey. He could not speak; his

handsome face grew black, his eyes glowered down upon her as she shrank in all the splendor of her evening dress, and his tall form seemed to dilate and tower over her like that of some indignant and outraged god's.

"Jordan Lynne!" he said. "Jordan Lynne! It is not possible."

He waited as if he expected her to tell him that he had misunderstood her; then he drew a long breath and looked round for his hat, caught it up, and all unconsciously crushing it in his hands, said:

"I take that back. I can't wish you happiness, it would be useless. Jordan Lynne! You are going to marry him!" and dashed from the room.

Sylvia was just coming in, and he ran against her and sent her slight form spinning against the wall; then he seized her by the arm, and instead of apologizing, cried in a low but terrible voice:

"Good-by, Sylvia; I'm going."

"Going! Where?" gasped Sylvia, thinking he had taken leave of his senses, and not knowing whether to laugh or be frightened at his darkly furious face.

"Where!" he said, hoarsely. "To the devil! Good-by. For God's sake, save her, if you can," and wringing Sylvia's hand he dashed down the stairs.

Sylvia stood staring after him for a moment, then she went into the room and found Audrey lying upon the couch with her face buried in the cushion.

"Oh, what has happened!" she exclaimed. "What have you said or done to him? I never saw him like that before!"

"I've only bro—bro—ken his heart," wailed Audrey.

"Only!" said Sylvia. "How have you done that?"

"Oh, can't you guess? It was for me that—that Lord Lorrimore has been wandering all over the earth."

"I thought it was for a man called Neville Lynne," said Sylvia, without any intention of being witty.

She was a little confused and bewildered.

"So it was," said Audrey; but it was I who sent him."

"Oh!" exclaimed Sylvia, flushing, as she recalled all the hard things she had said of the unknown lady whom Lord Lorrimore loved, little thinking that she was Audrey. "Oh, dear, then it was you? I—I'm sorry I said what I did the other day, Audrey."

"You need not be; I deserved it all, and more," said Audrey, with a sob. "It was cruel and heartless, but I did it all in a moment, almost without meaning it, and before I could stop him or take it back he had gone. Men are so—quick and—and sudden, especially this one."

“Yes,” said Sylvia, in a low voice; “and it is well for us women sometimes that they are.” And she thought of the way in which Lord Lorrimore had saved her from Lavarick. “But why are you so unhappy, dear? Is it because he has not found Neville Lynne?”

Audrey shook her head without raising it from the cushion.

“No, it is not that. I don’t care what has become of him now—I don’t mean that——”

“I think I know what you mean. But still I don’t see why you should cry. Lord Lorrimore has come back——”

Audrey raised her head with a kind of despair.

“It would have been better if he had never come back,” she said. “I—I am engaged to Sir Jordan Lynne——”

Sylvia started.

“Oh, poor Lord Lorrimore!” she murmured, the tears gathering in her eyes. “Lynne? Is he——”

“Neville’s half brother,” said Audrey.

“How strange! But, Audrey, dear,” and she bent over her, and smoothed her hair, “you must not be so wretched. You can’t help loving one man instead of the other. It is not your fault——”

Audrey shuddered at the word “love.”

“Yes, it is,” she said. “It is all my fault. I have been cruel and heartless, as you said, and now I am punished.”

The servant came in to announce that the brougham was at the door.

“I must go, dear,” said Sylvia. “You won’t come, will you?”

“Yes, I will,” replied Audrey, drying her eyes. “I can cry at the back of the box just as well as anywhere else. Don’t speak to me as we go. Oh, I wonder if there was ever any one so wretched as I am to-night.”

“Yes, I think so,” said Sylvia, inaudibly, as she thought of the moment when she saw Jack fall, and that other, when they brought her his coat and told her that he was dead.

As they drove on in silence she remembered the passionate words Lord Lorrimore had spoken as he rushed away just now. He had asked her to “save” Audrey if she could; but what was she to save her from? Surely not from Sir Jordan Lynne, whom Audrey must be going to marry of her own free will and choice? A vague uneasiness fell upon her mind, and she would have liked to question Audrey, but she could not bring herself to inflict additional pain on the unhappy girl.

CHAPTER XXV.

Old Mrs. Parsons wept tears of joy when she was at last made to understand that the tall young man with the bronzed face was her "Master Neville," and welcomed him with a mixture of affection and respect that made poor Neville's heavy heart throb.

"Why, lor', Master Neville!" she exclaimed after the first outburst. "It do seem as if it was only the other day when you and Miss Audrey used to steal up to the lodge window and shout out just for the fun of seeing me jump in my chair."

"You used to jump first-rate, Mrs. Parsons," said Neville, with a smile. "And you used to be very angry for the first five minutes, then——Well, just to punish us you always made us come in and eat some of those wonderful cakes of yours."

The old lady nodded, and laughed with pleased recollection.

"What a Turk you was, Master Neville! And Miss Audrey was a'most as bad. A regular tomboy you made of her. Lor', how pleased she will be to see you! The last time she was here she did nothing but talk of you and wonder where you was. Bless her heart, she's got to be the most beautiful young lady that ever was! She little thinks that you are here, just like the old times!"

Neville sighed.

"I suppose you've heard that she's going to marry Sir Jordan," she went on, as she bustled in and out of the tiny bedroom she was preparing for him.

Neville nodded gravely; for of course he had heard of the engagement. Trale told him of it.

"Took us all by surprise, it did, Sir Jordan being so much older than Miss Audrey not that he looks his age. I suppose you've seen him, Master Neville?"

"No," said Neville, and his tone caused Mrs. Parsons to stop with a pillow case in her hand and look at him.

"Oh, dear, dear me; yes, I remember," she said. "Well, it isn't every one as can get on with Sir Jordan. He's a very great man now, Mr. Neville, and we don't see much of him. The last time he passed I went out and gave him a curtesy, but I don't think he remembered me, as was very natural," she added, as if desirous of explaining that she was not complaining. "He wasn't my boy, as you were, you know. Lor', how glad I am to see you! Now, if Miss Audrey was here we should be all complete, so to say. And you haven't seen her yet,

Master Neville?"

"Not yet, Mrs. Parsons," he said. "And I don't want to see any one, or be seen, just at present. You must let me be your nephew come home from sea, or something of that kind, for a little while."

The old lady nodded after a moment's pondering.

"Whatever you say is to be shall be, Master Neville," she said, with the implicit obedience of an old servant. "I did have a nephew as went off to sea, but I'm afraid he's drowned. Oh, don't you be afraid, Master Neville; I can keep my lips shut, as Mr. Trale knows."

The tiny bedroom up under the thatched roof was as clean as a new pin and as sweet as lavender, and Neville slept soundly for the first time for many a night.

In the morning he looked round the cottage and found a patch of what ought to have been garden, but was at present a weedy wilderness, and he amused himself during the day, much to the grief and horror of Mrs. Parsons, by digging it up and putting it into something like order, and in the evening, with his soft wideawake well over his brows, wandered about the place, every spot of which was rich in associations of his boyish days.

He spent an hour or two with Trale at the inn, talking over old times, and this was the programme that followed day after day for nearly a week.

If any one had asked him why he was dreaming away his time at Lynne, he could not have told them, and every day he reminded himself that he must be off—somewhere.

His small stock of money was disappearing, if slowly still surely, and he must go out into the world and get some more—somehow.

"After all," he said to himself, with a sigh, "I have seen the old place; it's very unlikely that once I've left it again I shall ever see it more. Why should I stay and make myself known to—to Jordan and Audrey? I should only become an object of charity and pity. No, I'll be off. There must be work for a man with strong arms and a will to use them, somewhere or other."

It was on Friday evening that he communed with himself after this fashion, and he was sauntering along the lane which led past the Grange to the Burrows.

He stopped and looked through the gate at the corner of the house, which he could just see, and thought of Audrey, and then of Sylvia!

These were two women for whom he would willingly have laid down his life—especially now, when it seemed of very little use to him!—and he should in all probability never see them again.

“Dear little Syl,” he murmured, “I wonder where she is, and if she is happy. I wonder, too, whether she has forgotten me. They say that if you love a person ever so much, you forget them when they’re dead. I hope she hasn’t quite forgotten me. I should like her to give a thought now and then to the old days at Lorn Hope. How happy we were out there in the wilds with old Meth and the “claim,” and how pretty she used to look sitting there with that wonderful hair of hers falling into her eyes, as she sang like a nightingale, while I worked! Yes, we were very happy. I didn’t know how I loved her then, not till we were parted, never to meet again.”

Something rose in his throat, and a mist gathered before his eyes as he went on.

“Perhaps we shall meet; who knows? And she’ll be among her titled friends and—and will never guess that the seedy-looking individual who’ll be sure to shamble out of her way is her old friend Jack, her brother, with whom she was so happy, long, long ago. All the better if she doesn’t. I’m a failure, a right-down failure, and it’s only fit and proper that I should be sponged out. One more night and then good-bye to Lynne. I’ll work my way back to Australia, and have another try at it; though God knows I haven’t the heart or desire for the gold now. All the heart died out of me when I lost Syl!”

By the time he had arrived at this cheerful conclusion he had reached the edge of the Burrows.

It was dusk, nearly dark, and the moon, what was left of it, had not risen yet. But the darkness and stillness of the night suited his humor and instead of turning back to the supper which Mrs. Parsons was preparing for him with her loving old hands, he passed on to the Burrows.

As he did so he heard a brisk step behind him, and Trale’s voice.

“Out for a stroll, Mr. Neville?” he said, cheerily.

Neville nodded.

“I am just going a little way, Trale,” he said, trying to respond as cheerfully.

“I wish I could go with you,” said Trale wistfully, “but I’m due at the station. I suppose you’ve heard that Sir Jordan is down at the Court, sir?”

“No,” said Neville, with a little start, “I have not heard it. When——”

“Well, it’s not generally known,” said Trale. “He came down rather unexpectedly, and he’s been ill and confined to the house. I don’t know whether—whether you’d like to see him.”

Neville shook his head.

“No, Trale,” he answered. “I don’t think I will.”

“Come down to see about some alterations in the Court, to brighten it up for his marriage with Miss Audrey,” said Trale.

Neville’s face grew grim in the darkness.

“I heard it’s to be pretty soon. Well, I must be going. Nothing I can do for you, Mr. Neville?”

Neville shook his head, and held out his hand. “No, and thank you for all you have done, Trale,” he said. “I am off to-morrow.”

“Oh, I hope not, sir!” exclaimed Trale.

“Yes, I’m off,” repeated Neville, grimly. “I’ve seen the old place, and—well, I’ve found two friends at any rate,” and he grasped the man’s hand tightly. “Keep my visit a secret, Trale. Perhaps I’ll come back some day, when”—he smiled bravely—“I’ve made my fortune.”

“You needn’t wait till then, sir, for one man to be glad to see you,” said Trale, and as if ashamed of the emotion trembling in his voice, he hurried off.

Neville walked on with his hands thrust into his pockets, and his head bent thoughtfully, and reached the clump of trees. He threw himself down at the foot of one of them, and leaning his back against the thick trunk, got out his pipe, and looked round musingly.

“If Syl and I had come back to England together, this is one of the places I’d have brought her to,” he said to himself, “and we’d have picnicked here as we used to picnic out in the valley. She’d have been glad to come and see the places I’m fond of, I know. Dear little Syl—Hallo!” he raised his hand and knocked something off and laughed. “I’d clean forgotten the ants!” he said, and got up and brushed his clothes with his hands.

The moon was just showing above the dark hill line, and he felt loth to go; it seemed so very unlikely that he should ever see Lynne Burrows again!

He glanced up at the tree. It was an old oak with a gnarled trunk, seamed with great hollows, and stretching spacious branches out toward its fellows.

“It’s a long time since I climbed you, old chap,” he said, addressing the tree affectionately.

The last time he had done so he had dragged Audrey after him, and they had sat upon the very branch he was now looking at.

It looked inviting, and after a moment’s hesitation he knocked out the contents of his pipe, and climbed up and made himself comfortable.

He refilled his pipe, but could not find his matchbox, and thinking that he had dropped it out of his pocket when he scrambled to his feet off the ants’ nest, he was going to descend when he heard a footstep.

Some one was coming toward him. He could not see who it was for the leaves and branches before him, but he thought it must be Trale, and was going to call out, when it occurred to him that he had better wait and make sure, and he remained quiet.

Whoever it was, he was coming straight for the clump, and Neville caught himself wondering what business a man could have in Lynne Burrows at that time of night.

“Some poor devil of a tramp hunting up a night’s lodging, I suppose,” he muttered. “I shall frighten him out of his life,” and he put his hand on the branch to swing himself down, when a figure dimly seen in the dusky darkness entered the circle of trees, and stopped about a dozen yards from that on which Neville was perched.

Curious to see if his surmise was right, Neville remained where he was and watched, feeling in his pockets as he did so, to find a copper for the tramp.

The newcomer stood still for a moment as if to accustom his eyes to the gloom of the shadow-casting trees, then he went round them, one by one, stepped outside the ring, and seemed, to Neville, to be looking about cautiously.

“A tramp!” he said. “I’ll wait and see what he will do. If he takes to Mother Earth for a bed, the ants will make it lively for him. I don’t wish him any harm, but I should rather enjoy seeing him jump up.”

The man came back to where he had first stood, struck a match and lit a small piece of candle.

This rather startled Neville.

“Tramps don’t usually care much about a light to go to bed by,” he thought, and he looked down at the man curiously.

He had not much of the appearance of the common tramp, but was, indeed, rather well dressed in a plain suit of black, and looked to Neville, who had seen many and diverse types of mankind, like a respectable clerk, say a solicitor’s. He was an elderly man with a gray beard that gave him rather a venerable look, and Neville was puzzling at the problem why a respectable clerk of his time of life should think fit to come to Lynne Burrows and light a candle, when the man gave him another surprise by unbuttoning his frock coat and taking from under it a small hand trowel.

Neville could scarcely refrain from laughter. If this had been Australia, and, say, a digger’s camp, a performance of this kind would not have been astonishing, for all sorts of curious things occur in such places; but this was England, Lynne Burrows, and—and what on earth could a man of this kind want at this hour of night with a piece of candle and a hand spade!

Then it flashed upon him. This individual was one of those harmless lunatics who amuse themselves by moth and insect hunting. That was it! The man was a naturalist in search of some rare specimen of the flying or crawling tribe, and was going to dig or scratch for it.

To plump down upon him, or even speak, would in all probability give the poor old fellow a fit, Neville thought, and he decided to remain where he was until the man had finished his search and gone.

The man stuck the candle on the ground by the simple method of pouring some grease from it and standing the candle in it; then, with his back to Neville, paced slowly from the tree, counting as he went.

He made the measurement twice, as if to be certain of his accuracy, then went down on his knees and began to dig quickly.

Every now and then he paused and looked round and listened, and once as he did so a bird, wakened by the noise and the light, flew out of the trees; the man extinguished the candle in an instant, as if frightened, and Neville could hear him breathing hard as he waited and listened.

Then he relit the candle and fell to digging again.

Neville wondered what it could be the man was in search of, and ransacked his brain trying to think of some insect or animal that hid itself under the solid earth, but did not succeed.

Suddenly the man uttered a low, suppressed cry of satisfaction, as if he had found what he had been looking for.

Consumed by curiosity, Neville stretched himself along the branch, and leaned over at the imminent risk of tumbling down, and saw what the curious animal was!

CHAPTER XXVII.

What Neville saw as he leaned down from the branch was a round tin canister, such as cocoa or coffee is packed in, lying at the bottom of the hole which the old man had dug.

The man took up the box, forced open the lid, and drew out—not a bag of gold, or a string of jewels—but a roll of paper. This he placed carefully in his breast pocket; then, flinging the empty can into the hole, he filled in the dirt, stamped it down, and strewed some of the dead leaves and twigs over the spot.

Then he sat down, lit a pipe, and smoked meditatively. After a few minutes

he, with a shake of the head, drew the paper from his pocket and looked around.

As his eyes approached Neville's hiding place Neville quietly and cautiously drew himself up to a higher branch and so escaped detection.

The man went up to the tree, and carefully placed the paper inside one of the hollows, thrusting in his hand to see how deep the hole went.

The paper was thus well within Neville's reach if he stretched out an arm.

The old gentleman then returned to his seat at the foot of another tree, and smoked with patience and contentment.

Neville was far too curious and interested now to discover himself, and making himself as comfortable as possible, he, too, waited and watched.

Presently the man took his pipe out of his mouth and listened with his head on one side, then he knelt and laid his ear to the ground.

This action startled Neville as much as anything the man had done; for it reminded him of his digger days, and the way in which the scouts of a party listened for the approach of footsteps. How did it happen that a respectable elderly clerk should know a trick of the backwoods?

The man got up, resumed his seat, and relit his pipe with an evident air of satisfaction, and a few minutes afterward Neville heard some one approaching.

Now, Neville was the last man in the world to play the part of eavesdropper, and he was about to speak to the man and descend when a tall figure entered the thicket, and Neville recognized with amazement his brother Jordan!

Jordan had got on a dress inverness, with the collar turned up, but Neville knew him in a moment.

Could it be possible that his brother, the Right Hon. Sir Jordan Lynne, had come to Lynne Burrows to meet this man with the piece of candle and the tin canister? It seemed incredible.

The whole business wore a grotesque and unreal air which almost made Neville doubt the evidence of his own senses. That his brother desired to escape observation and recognition was evident from the way in which he looked round him—very much as the elderly man had looked—before he entered the circle of trees, and the fashion in which he kept the high collar of his dress cape coat round his face.

It was like the scene out of a melodrama, Neville thought, as he stared down at his brother's pale face and tall, thin form.

Jordan made his way toward the other man, who remained seated, puffing his pipe, eyeing Jordan coolly, and Jordan, in a tone of impatience and hauteur,

said:

“You are here. Let us get this business over quickly, please.”

The man looked up at him with an easy, insolent grin.

“What are you afraid of, Sir Jordan?” he retorted. “We’re quiet enough here.”

At the sound of his voice Neville’s heart leaped, and the blood rushed to his head. Was he mad or dreaming, or was that Lavarick’s voice?

He shook and trembled so violently under the emotion aroused by the man’s voice that he almost fell from the branch, and he had to set his teeth firmly to keep himself from crying out.

Lavarick here, and in collusion with Jordan! Surely he, Neville, must be dreaming! His heart beat so fast and furiously that it made a singing in his ears so that he could scarcely hear the voices of the two men below him, near as they were.

“I am here, very reluctantly,” said Jordan, haughtily. “And I am desirous of completing this business and returning as soon as possible.”

“Right,” said Lavarick, curtly. “Did any one see you on the way, do you think, Sir Jordan?”

“I think not,” replied Jordan. “But some person, some tramp, may come upon us at any moment, and——”

“You’d rather not be seen holding confab with a stranger at this time of night, eh?” said Lavarick, as coolly as before. “Well, I dare say you’re right. It would look singular, wouldn’t it, if you were seen? People would begin to ask themselves queer questions. But, there, you’d have some explanation cut and dried for ’em, wouldn’t you? You can’t put the Right Hon. Sir Jordan Lynne in a hole easily,” and he laughed.

If Neville had entertained any doubt as to the identity of the man it would have been dispelled by the laugh.

It was the laugh he had heard in the tent on the night he had ransomed Sylvia, the laugh that had rung in his ears as he saw her borne away across Lavarick’s saddle. And the sound of it now filled him with almost irresistible desire to spring upon the scoundrel and knock the life out of him. But he restrained himself with an awful effort that caused him to break into a fit of perspiration. That there was some villainy hatching between these two was evident, and if he could only learn its nature he might be able to thwart them.

“It is your nature to be insolent,” said Jordan. “When you have finished you will be good enough to proceed to the matter which brings me here. As I said, I came reluctantly, and it will not require much provocation to induce me

to leave you.”

Lavarick rose and emptied his pipe.

“You’ve got the notes?” he said.

“I have the notes,” replied Jordan, coldly.

Lavarick held out his claw-like hand.

“Pass them over, then,” he said, curtly.

Jordan sneered.

“Excuse me,” he said. “I brought them for an exchange, not a gift.”

Lavarick swore.

“We don’t trust each other much,” he said, sarcastically.

Jordan remained silent.

“What’s to prevent me from knocking you on the head and helping myself to the notes?” asked Lavarick, with engaging frankness.

“A regard for your own safety,” replied Jordan, calmly. “Before I left the court I told my servant that I was going for a walk on the Burrows, and that if I did not return in an hour he was to drive here for me. If you murdered me—as I have no doubt you would like to do——”

“Well, I should!” assented Lavarick, with cold-blooded candor.

“You could not conceal the evidences of your crime and escape in time.” He looked at his watch as he spoke. “As it is, the time is passing rapidly, and my man will be here soon.”

“You refuse to give me the notes first?” said Lavarick.

“Absolutely!” retorted Jordan.

Lavarick laughed.

“I thought you would. And I refuse to hand you the will before I get the notes. I wouldn’t trust it in your hands—until I’d got the ‘ready’—for a moment! What do you propose, Sir Jordan?”

And he refilled his pipe, and lit it with insolent leisureliness.

Jordan thought a moment, then he said:

“I will place the notes on the ground beside me here; put the—the will on the ground beside you, together with the paper for which I stipulated——Have you brought it?”

Lavarick drew a paper from his pocket, and, advancing, held it, very tightly, near the candle, so that Jordan could read it.

“That’s what you want, eh?”

“It will do,” said Jordan. “Now go back twenty paces, and lay it and the will on the ground. I will do the same with the notes, and we can cross and make the exchange.”

Lavarick looked at him admiringly.

“A good dodge,” he said, nodding. “You’re wasted over here in this stupid old England, Sir Jordan. You ought to come out with me across the herring pond, where these tricks would come in handy and profitable.”

Jordan vouchsafed no acknowledgment of this genuine compliment.

“One moment,” he said. “The other evening you spoke of—the girl.”

Lavarick puffed at his pipe and nodded, keeping his skew eyes watchfully on Jordan’s face.

“Well?”

“You said that you knew where to find her.”

“I don’t remember that I did,” interrupted Lavarick, “but if I did I spoke the truth. I do know where to find her, and I can put my hand upon her in a few hours.”

“And that—she had means of proving her identity. You stated that distinctly.”

“I did,” assented Lavarick. “Well?”

Jordan drew a little nearer, and looked round as if he feared that the very trees might have ears.

“I should like to see these proofs,” he said.

Lavarick laughed with sinister enjoyment.

“How prettily you said that!” And he grinned. “Of course you would! Like to see them! I should think so! And once you’d seen them, got ’em in your hands, you’d take devilish good care that no one else ever saw them.”

Jordan bit his lip.

“You boasted that you could obtain these so-called proofs,” he said, ignoring Lavarick’s taunt. “If that be so”—he paused—“I should not think it fair for you to run any risk on my behalf——”

“You may take your solemn oath that I never shall run any risk on your behalf,” remarked Lavarick, bluntly.

“Just so,” assented Jordan, impassively. “I am therefore about to make you an offer.”

“An offer?” repeated Lavarick, suspiciously. “What is it?”

“Simply this; that I am prepared to—to compensate you for any trouble or

expense you may incur in—in—obtaining the proofs of which you speak.”

“Oh, I see!” said Lavarick. “You want me to steal ’em, and sell them to you. Well, what’s your price?”

Jordan did not wince at the brutal frankness.

“It is only right that I should remind you that they are of no value to me,” he said.

“Then what do you want them for?” demanded Lavarick.

“That is my business solely,” he replied.

“You’re afraid that there may be another will, eh?” said Lavarick. “Well, there may be. But, as you say, it’s no business of mine. What will you give, eh?”

“I will give you five hundred pounds——”

Lavarick interrupted him with a coarse laugh of disdain.

“I dare say! Do you know how I should have to get those proofs?”

Jordan did not answer.

“I’ll tell you,” said Lavarick. “I should have to perhaps—But, no; I think I’d better not tell you. Anyhow, the price isn’t good enough. What, risk——” he put his hand to his neck in a hideous pantomime, representing a man being hanged, “Not much, Sir Jordan. No. If I get the things I’ll bring ’em to you and will make a bargain. But I’ve got another job in hand first, and I’m going to do that before I touch anything else. I’m going to find the man who ruined my girl.” He stopped, and drew a long breath. “But that isn’t your business, you’d say, and it isn’t. It’s only mine, and by ——” he swore an awful oath—“I’ll make it his! I’ll find him, wherever he is, and——”

Jordan coughed, as if the subject had no attraction for him, and Lavarick, understanding the cough, broke off and said:

“Now, then; I’m no more fond of this place than you are, Sir Jordan. Put the notes where you say, and I’ll do the same with the will.”

As he spoke he drew out his revolver.

“Don’t be afraid,” he said, with a grin. “I think I should feel more comfortable and easy in my mind with my little friend in my hand.”

Jordan shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and unbuttoning his cape took a pocketbook from it.

“The notes! The notes! No empty pocketbook for me!” said Lavarick, as he stood watching.

Jordan took some banknotes from the book and fluttered them in the feeble candle light, then laid them down on the ground, and set the toe of his boot on

them.

At this moment, while Lavarick with his back to the tree, was watching Jordan's motions intently, Neville stretched down and took the paper from the hole in the trunk in which Lavarick had placed it.

"The notes are here," said Jordan, haughtily, and he tapped them with his foot.

"Right," rejoined Lavarick, and he turned to the tree eagerly, and put his hand in the hole.

As he did so, Neville saw him start, and heard him utter an impatient oath; then Lavarick thrust his hand in farther down to the bottom of the hollow and fumbled about searchingly.

Then he swore aloud and glanced over his shoulder at Jordan auspiciously.

"What is the matter?" said Jordan, coldly.

"Matter! Why——" here followed a string of oaths. "The—the thing was here! I put it here just before you came up."

A sneer which curled Jordan's lip stung Lavarick to fury, and he passed his hands up and down the trunk of the tree to feel if there was another opening into which he could have put the will.

"You have not got it?" said Jordan.

"Got it! Yes, I've got it!" retorted Lavarick savagely. "I'll put my hand on it in a moment. Curse it all! I only stuck it in here just before you came. I thought it safe. You might have made a rush for me, you know," and he grinned. "So I thought I'd put it in a hiding place till we'd settled how to exchange."

Jordan smiled contemptuously.

"There is no will!" he said, with suppressed triumph.

"There is! By all that's living, there's a will, and it was here a minute—five minutes ago," broke out Lavarick, hoarsely. "Here, give me the candle!" and, forgetful of his undertaking, he advanced toward it.

Jordan drew out his pretty revolver and pointed it.

"Come a step nearer and I fire," said he. "You are a liar and a fool! You have lost the will. I defy you! Put your hands up above your head, or as surely as there is a Heaven above us I will shoot you. Don't hesitate. My plan is ready. I shall say you stopped and tried to rob me. Up with your hands or I fire!"

Lavarick crouched, ready for the spring, read determination in Jordan's pale face, and dared not touch his own revolver.

“Wait!” he croaked, huskily.

“Not a moment. One, two——”

Lavarick threw up his hands.

“Now go!” said Jordan, sternly. “Turn and go without looking round. I shall cover you while you are in range, and fire the instant you turn.”

“Right,” said Lavarick, his lips working. “You have beat me this time, Sir Jordan—you’ve got that will! You watched me and stole behind me and got it out of the tree!”

Jordan smiled grimly.

“Yes, that’s it! You’ve got me! I’m beat, this time; but”—he ground his teeth—“I’ll be even with you, if I swing for it!”

“Go!” said Jordan, with an exasperating laugh. “I give you two hours to escape. At the end of that time I shall give information to the police.”

He had gone a step too far.

With a howl of fury—a howl that reminded Neville of the wolves he had heard prowling hungrily round the camp—Lavarick made a dash for him.

At that moment, as Neville leaned excitedly forward to witness the conclusion of the contest, and to join in it if necessary the candle was extinguished. Whether it had been overturned and trodden on by one of the two gentle villains, Neville did not see; but it was certainly out, and the scene was plunged into instant darkness.

He heard the sharp snap of the revolver, and saw the flash which for a moment lit up the darkness; heard a snarling growl, as if of pain and rage, and then being unable to hold himself in leash any longer, he leaped to the ground, and, colliding against a figure, seized it in his strong grip.

Whichever man it was, turned upon him with a furious energy, and Neville knew that it was a struggle to the death.

He set his teeth hard, and locked the man with one arm while he felt for his throat with the other.

But his opponent seemed to understand his object, and gripping him tightly, bore all his weight upon him, and so they wrestled to and fro, linked in a hideous embrace.

Neither spoke; each seemed to tacitly acknowledge that while life lasted the fight must hold.

Neville was surprised by the strength which was put out to meet his, but he attributed it to the frenzy of the rage and despair which must be burning in both Jordan’s and Lavarick’s breasts. For a moment he did not know which of

the villains he had got hold of; but presently he felt a beard touch his cheek, and his heart throbbed, as he was convinced it was Lavarick.

“Now,” he thought, with a joy that no words can express, “now is the hour of reckoning.”

He thought of Sylvia—of the last time he had seen the wretch with Sylvia in his grasp—and in his veins ran the hot, fierce desire to crush the life out of the scoundrel.

To and fro they swayed, the grip of each growing more intense, more intolerable each moment. At last, just when Neville, with an awful sense of disappointment and balked vengeance, was feeling faint, he managed to get his leg under his opponent’s, and with a crash the latter came to the ground, Neville falling on top of, and still gripping, him.

“You—scoundrel!” he panted. “At last! Move an inch, and I’ll kill you where you lie!” and his hands tightened upon the prostrate man’s throat.

Then—oh, irony of Fate!—came a choking voice in response gurgling out: “Mr.—Mr. Neville! Good God! Is it you? Don’t you know me—Trale!”

CHAPTER XXVII.

Neville staggered back, with a cry of astonishment and incredulity. It was too dark to see the face of the man he had been wrestling with, but there could be no mistaking his voice.

How on earth had Lavarick become exchanged for the inspector?

“Give me your hand, please, Mr. Neville,” gasped Trale. “You’ve pretty nearly done for me, sir,” and, assisted by Neville, he struggled stiffly to his feet; and after a moment or two spent in rubbing his aching sides, struck a light.

The two men stared at each other in the feeble glimmer as if they were each looking at a ghost.

“It is Mr. Neville!” exclaimed Trale, as if he could scarcely yet realize the fact. “How did you come here, and——Oh, Lord, where’s the candle?” he broke off.

He groped about and found what remained of the candle, and raised it above his head, looking round like a man in a dream.

Neville leaned against a tree, panting—he himself was not far from “done”—and eyeing Trale with palpable disgust.

“They’re gone! Clean gone!” exclaimed Trale.

“Gone!” panted Neville, “of course they have! What—what on earth were you doing here? And how did you come to mistake me——”

Trale interrupted him ruefully.

“Come to that, sir, how did you mistake me?”

“How could I do otherwise?” said Neville. “You weren’t here when the candle went out.”

“Oh, yes, I was, sir,” said Trale. “I’ve been here for the last quarter of an hour or twenty minutes.”

“What!” ejaculated Neville.

“Fact, Mr. Neville,” said Trale, feeling his throat and chafing his numbed arms. “I was coming back here from the station, when I caught sight of a stranger making his way down the lane—an elderly man with a beard. There was something about him—I can’t tell you what—that I didn’t like, and I thought I’d just see where he was going.”

“Yes, yes,” said Neville, quickly, and impatiently.

“I fancied he might be going to the bank or the lawyer’s—he looked like a clerk, but he didn’t, and when I saw him turn off to the Burrows it made me more curious than before. I followed him along the other side of the hedge, and managed to keep him within view without being seen when he got on to the Burrows. In the open I had to get down on my hands and knees, and half crawl after him, for he’d have seen me if he’d looked round. However, I kept him in sight until he’d entered the thicket here; then I skirted round and got in at the back of him and lay hidden among the bracken there,” and he pointed to a spot immediately behind where Lavarick had sat.

“You heard——”

“Everything,” said Trale, grimly. “It was I that put out the candle.”

Neville started.

“I see!” he said. “I wish to Heaven you had known that I was here! Together we should have managed to capture him. Now he has got off with the notes.”

Trale shook his head, and putting his hand in his pocket, drew out a creased and crumpled bundle of paper, and held it up.

“I think not, sir! Look here!”

“The notes!” exclaimed Neville.

Trale nodded.

“Yes, I sprang for ’em the moment I’d put the candle out, Mr. Neville. If it

hadn't been for that I should have had my man."

Neville groaned.

"I'd rather have that scoundrel than the money, Trale!" he said.

"So would I, sir, almost. For I've been wanting him badly for a long time past."

"You wanting him?" queried Neville.

"Yes," said Trale, "I've wanted Jim Banks as badly as ever I wanted my dinner."

"Jim Banks?" repeated Neville, confusedly. "Whom are you talking about?"

"The scoundrel that's just made off, the man who was here just now," said Trale, staring in his turn. "He was Jim Banks, the forger, who escaped from Dartmoor."

Neville sank down at the foot of the tree, and put his hand to his head; it was aching from the fearful struggle he had had with Trale.

"Jim Banks," he said. "I remember. Great heavens! is it possible? Why, I know this man, Trale, and wanted him on my own account as badly—ah, more badly than you do or could ever do."

"You!" exclaimed Trale.

"Yes," said Neville, fiercely. "That villain has caused me more agony than you can imagine! I came across him out in Australia, and—but why do we waste time talking here? He must not escape," and he sprang up.

Trale put a hand on his arm.

"Half a moment, sir," he said. "He's not going to escape! Not this time! What I want to know is, where's the will they were talking about?"

Neville did not seem to hear him.

"I saw the man put it in the hole of the tree, with my own eyes," went on Trale, "and I can't make out——"

Neville drew the will from his pocket, just as Trale had produced the notes.

"Here it is," he said, impatiently. "I was up in the tree and, within reach of it——"

Trale uttered a cry of delighted satisfaction.

"That's where you were, was it, sir? No wonder I didn't see you! No wonder when you dropped down as if from the skies that I took you for one of the others! And you've got the will! And I've got the notes! Hurrah! Mr. Neville, this is the best night's work I've ever done! Take care of that will, Mr. Neville! There's more in this business than you or I understand yet, but if I'm

not mistaken——”

“Come on!” said Neville, impatiently. “This man—Jim Banks, as you call him! I must and will capture him.”

“Come on!” echoed Trale; then he stopped and caught Neville’s arm.

“Mr. Neville!” he said, under his breath, and in a tone of reluctance and disappointment.

“Well?”

“It’s—it’s not only him, sir, but—but—there’s Sir Jordan, your brother.”

Neville stopped dead short. He had been so much engrossed by his burning desire to seize Lavarick, so much absorbed in the remembrance of the harm the man had attempted to do Sylvia, that Neville had forgotten his brother and his part in the mysterious business under the trees.

“Jordan!” he muttered, and his head drooped.

“Yes, Mr. Neville!” said Trale in a low voice. “We mustn’t forget him! I shouldn’t like to do him an injury—because he’s your brother—and—and——” the poor fellow almost groaned under his disappointment. “I’m afraid we must collar this infernal Jim Banks without showing up Sir Jordan.”

Neville leaned against the tree, and wiped away the perspiration that had started to his brow.

“By Heaven, I—I had forgotten that for the moment!” he murmured. “Jordan, my brother, mixed up, hand and glove, with a scoundrel, a convict! What does it mean, Trale!”

Trale tapped Neville’s breast, against which the will was lying.

“That will explain, Mr. Neville, if I’m not mistaken,” he said, gravely. “That’s the key to the whole business, depend upon it.”

Neville nodded doubtfully.

“It’s all a mystery to me, Trale,” he said.

“It won’t be long so,” said Trale. “Let us get to Stoneleigh as quick as possible. I’ll set some of my sharpest men on the trail, and meanwhile you and I can talk things over and decide what to do.”

“I will go to Jordan at once!” said Neville, shutting his teeth. “I’ll force the truth out of him.”

Trale shook his head.

“Begging your pardon, sir,” he said, “but that’s just what neither you nor any other man can do. There’s no forcing Sir Jordan, he’s too clever. No, we shall have to go another way to work than that.”

Neville, sore at heart at the thought of the relationship between him and the

smooth-faced villain who had sunk so low as to become an accomplice of such a man as Lavarick, alias Jim Banks, strode on in silence.

Half running, they reached Stoneleigh quickly, and Trale at once dispatched three of his best men in search of Lavarick, with orders not to arrest him, but to keep him in sight, and report to Trale; then he took Neville into his private room, and turning up the gas, said:

“Now, Mr. Neville, we must see that will.”

Neville flung it on the table.

“Read it,” he said, and he paced up and down the room.

Trale opened it and uttered an exclamation.

“It’s what I thought, Mr. Neville! It’s your father’s, Sir Greville’s will!”

Neville stopped short, and his face flushed.

“Yes, sir, it’s his will, and the last, you may depend upon it; and——” He paused and read eagerly for a minute, then slapped his hand upon the table and cried out delightedly, “Mr. Neville, Mr. Neville! It’s all right.”

“All right!” repeated Neville. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that the old gentleman has done the proper and just thing!” said Trale, excitedly. “Don’t you remember, Mr. Neville, what I said the other night, outside the Court? I said that everybody was surprised that Sir Greville had not mentioned you, his favorite son, but had left you without a penny?”

“I remember,” said Neville.

“Well, sir,” hurried on Trale, “we did the old gentleman an injustice! He hadn’t forgotten you; and he did what was right. I congratulate you with all my heart! This,” and he waved the will above his head, “this makes you a rich man, Mr. Neville.”

Neville started.

“Yes,” said Trale, breathlessly, and evidently as much delighted as if he himself had come into a fortune. “Yes, a third of the money is left to you.”

“A third!” said Neville, incredulously, for he knew how large a sum that third must represent. “And—and Sir Jordan?”

“Oh, he’s all right,” replied Trale, dryly and grudgingly; “there’s a third for him, and,” he whistled softly, “and the rest, with all the jewels, goes to the young lady, the daughter of Sir Greville’s first sweetheart; the lady Sir Greville bore such a grudge against, begging your pardon, sir.”

Neville took the will and read it, but it is doubtful if in his confused state, he would have understood it without Trale’s explanation.

“It’s all plain now, Mr. Neville,” said Trale, gravely, “we can see now why

Sir Jordan was willing to give that pot of money for the will. It just deprives him of two-thirds of his wealth!”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Jordan fled from the wood and sped across the plain at a rate which would have astonished his fellow members of the Cabinet.

The demon of fear had taken complete possession of him, and his only desire was to put as great a space between him and the ruffian who, he knew, thirsted for his blood.

He ran without stopping until he had left the Burrows behind him, and reached the lane leading to the Court; then he stopped for sheer lack of breath and strength, and only then became conscious of a stinging, burning pain in his left arm.

He put his right hand to the spot, and withdrew it wet with blood. Then he remembered hearing the sound of a revolver, and feeling a sharp pang of pain at the moment the candle went out. Banks must have fired at and wounded him.

He listened, but could hear no sounds of pursuit, and after a moment to recover his breath he sped on to the Court again, and letting himself in, stole up to his room.

The first thing he did was to examine his wound. It was not a serious one, the bullet having just scored the fleshy part of the arm below the elbow, but it was extremely painful, and Jordan gnashed his teeth and cursed and swore as he washed the wound and bandaged it with some lotion.

Then he undressed himself with difficulty—he did not dare to summon his valet—and sinking into a chair tried to review the situation.

For the first moment or two it seemed to him that he was utterly and irretrievably ruined and that the best thing he could do would be to leave the country. At the thought he broke out into another fit of cursing.

He, the Right Honorable Sir Jordan Lynne, Bart., a Cabinet Minister, the man people were regarding as, at any rate, a likely Premier, obliged to run away and hide himself! The thought was unendurable.

Then presently he began to take a more hopeful view of the situation, and the fact that he had lost the banknotes rather helped him to this view than otherwise.

Of course Jim Banks had the notes! He must have seized them a moment after he had fired, and having them he would be satisfied, and not likely to trouble Jordan, at any rate for a time.

So large a sum as Jim Banks had secured would keep him quiet perhaps for years.

As to the will, the ruffian had either lost or destroyed it, that was evident, and he, Jordan, need not feel any anxiety on that score.

His spirits began to rise. After all, the business had turned out better than it had seemed to have done at first sight. The will had disappeared; Jim Banks had, with the possession of the notes, every reason for absenting himself for a lengthy period, and he, Jordan, could go on his way in comparative peace.

One conviction, however, stood out clear in his mind, and that was that his marriage with Audrey must take place at once. There must be no delay; he must become master of the Grange and Audrey's wealth as soon as possible.

With that at his back, he thought he could even venture to defy Jim Banks when next he turned up.

Notwithstanding that he had arrived at this most cheerful and hopeful state of mind, he did not venture to go to bed, in case the ruffian should follow him to the Court, and he sat up in his chair listening for any sound that might announce Jim Bank's presence.

But the night passed silently, and at eight o'clock Jordan, whose acute brain had been hard at work scheming a mode of defense against all contingencies, got up, disarranged the bed to give it the appearance of having been slept in, took his revolver, and deliberately fired it out of the window.

In a few minutes he heard hurried footsteps in the corridor, and a knock sounded at the door.

"Come in," said Jordan, in an agitated voice, and the valet, with a pale face and alarmed manner, entered.

"I—I beg your pardon, Sir Jordan," he said, with suppressed excitement, "but we heard a pistol fired just now, and——"

Jordan was standing at the dressing table, holding the bandage round his arm.

"It's all right, don't be alarmed," he said, turning with quite a pleasant smile, though he seemed to wince as if in pain; "it was I who fired."

"You, Sir Jordan!" said the man, advancing with astonishment and staring at Jordan's bandaged arm.

"Yes," said Jordan. "I was turning out this drawer in search of some medicine and took up the revolver. Very carelessly, I am afraid, for it went off,

and the bullet struck me in the arm. I am rightly punished for keeping a loaded firearm; it is a ridiculous and reprehensible practice, which I have always condemned. Let this be a warning to you, Greene!”

“Oh, dear!” said the alarmed valet. “I’ll send for the doctor, Sir Jordan, at once.”

Jordan stopped him.

“No, no,” he said. “It is a mere flesh wound, and does not require surgical assistance. Besides—well,” and he smiled, “when we have committed a folly we do not desire that it should be made more public than we can avoid. You can tell the household the simple facts, but please ask them to be good enough not to gossip about it. I do not wish to see it running through all the London papers.”

“Yes, Sir Jordan,” said the man, to whom this statement and explanation seemed quite reasonable and natural. “Let me bandage it. Dear, dear; the arm’s quite discolored already, Sir Jordan.”

Jordan nodded blandly, thinking how quickly a practiced surgeon would have seen that the wound had been caused hours ago.

“Yes, but you see for yourself that it is nothing serious. Dip the bandage in the lotion, please, and—that is right, thank you. And you may get me a cup of tea. I think I will rest a little this morning. Bring me the letters, please, and remember—I do not wish the—er—accident gossiped about.”

“Yes, Sir Jordan. We were all in a tremendous fright, and Frome thought it was burglars, for he declared he’d heard some one unlock a door after we had gone to bed last night.”

It was the outer door by which Jordan had entered stealthily on his return from the Burrows.

“Frome was not mistaken,” he said. “I went down to the library for a paper in the middle of the night. You had better tell him so.”

The man went down to the hall, where the servants were crowding together and talking in hurried whispers, and gave his master’s account of the accident.

“And a plucky one he is,” he concluded. “Took it all as coolly as if he’d been in half a dozen battles. I wouldn’t have given him credit for so much nerve, that I wouldn’t! It only shows how mistaken you can be in reckoning up a person, don’t it?”

Frome nodded, but looked rather perplexed and dissatisfied.

“It wasn’t the library door I heard unlocked,” he said; “for as I passed it the last thing last night I noticed that the door was open.”

“Or you fancied you did, Mr. Frome,” said the valet, with dignity; he was

quite impressed by his master's courage and pluck.

"Perhaps I did and perhaps I didn't," retorted Frome, with much stateliness, as he walked off to the servants' hall, followed by the rest of the crowd.

When the valet took up the tea and the letters Sir Jordan was in bed, and perfectly serene as if nothing had happened, and thanked the man with bland civility.

"Oh, one moment!" he said, as Greene, after attending to his master's wants, was leaving the room. "If—er—the gentleman who came the other day, the old gentleman with the beard, you remember?"

"Yes, Sir Jordan."

"If he should come, let him come up. I rather expect him with some important papers from London."

When the valet had left the room Jordan turned over his pile of letters impatiently, and then flung them aside. There was none from Audrey; she had not written him a line.

"Curse her," he muttered; "she treats me as if I were dirt. She can't write a short note of a few words to the man she is going to marry, can't she? By Heaven! my lady, I'll break that proud spirit of yours presently! I will teach you to estimate Jordan Lynne a little more highly than you appear to do. Wait awhile, my lady; wait!"

He was so disappointed and mortified by her silence that he half resolved that he would go up to London at once; but he knew that he dared not go while there was a chance of Jim Banks turning up again.

"I'll give him one day," he thought. "If he does not come to-day I shall know that he is off with the notes. It's a large sum to lose," and he groaned, "but it's well spent if it rids me of the scoundrel. He'll leave the country soon, that's one comfort, and perhaps Providence will dispose of him once and for all. Such vermin are sure to come to a sudden end; some drunken quarrel will finish him."

The valet entered.

"Mr. Trale, Sir Jordan," he said. "I told him that you were unwell; but he said, it was important business, and that if you could see him——"

Jordan kept his countenance, though his heart leaped with the fear which lurks always ready to spring, within your villain's heart. Trale, the inspector, wanting to see him! What could it mean? Could it be possible that Jim Banks had been captured?

"Certainly," he said, blandly. "Let Mr. Trale come up."

“Up here, Sir Jordan?” said the valet, surprised.

“Yes, certainly. It may be important business. We must not neglect our public duties while we are able to perform them.”

The valet showed Trale up, and the inspector’s sharp eyes ran over Sir Jordan’s face and round the room, as he said in his grave, official manner:

“Beg your pardon for this intrusion, Sir Jordan, and I’m very sorry to trouble you, but you being the nearest magistrate, and, in fact, the only one in the district just at present——”

Sir Jordan sat up in his dressing-gown and a faint quiver passed over his pale face, but he kept his eyelids down and his lips impassively closed.

“Don’t apologize, Trale,” he said, graciously. “What is it? Sit down,” and he waved his hand to a chair. In doing so the dressing-gown fell away from his wounded arm, and Trale, with a well-feigned start, exclaimed with respectful concern:

“Have you had an accident, Sir Jordan? I’m sorry——”

“Yes, an accident,” assented Jordan, smoothly. “I picked up a revolver which had been lying in one of my drawers, and the thing went off and the bullet grazed my arm. It is a mere nothing. You were saying——”

“Dear, dear me!” said Trale, compassionately. “Has the surgeon seen it, Sir Jordan? Sometimes these flesh wounds——”

Jordan interrupted him, still smoothly, but with a flash of his eyes under his thick lids.

“It is a mere scratch, thank you, Trale, and the surgeon would only laugh at me for troubling him on such slight occasion. What is it you want?”

“Well, Sir Jordan, my men made an arrest last night.”

He paused, and he saw the face he was watching with covert intentness grow a shade paler.

“An arrest?” said Jordan, with the polite and official interest due from a magistrate—no more.

“Yes, Sir Jordan, and as the man had some of your property in his possession, I thought it my duty to come to you at once and take your instructions.”

Jordan’s face turned livid, and he turned it away and picked up a letter and glanced at it.

Trale watched him with the keen, but hidden, enjoyment of a born detective.

“Property of mine?” said Sir Jordan after a pause, and he forced a smile.

“Yes, Sir Jordan. We’ve been on the lookout for this man for some time past.”

“Yes?” said Jordan, scarcely hearing his own voice.

All was over, then. Banks was caught and no doubt had made a clean breast of it in accounting for his possession of the banknotes. But Jordan was a man who would die hard.

“So you have caught Jim Banks at last!” he said, with a congratulatory smile.

Trale put on an expression of surprise.

“Jim Banks, Sir Jordan? Oh, no. I wish we had, confound him!”

Jordan drew a long breath of relief, and his heart leaped with a sensation of reprieve.

“Not—not Banks?” he said, raising his brows, but still keeping his eyes under the concealing lids. “I thought from your tone that you had got that notorious scoundrel.”

“No, Sir Jordan. It’s curious you should have thought of him, sir. You haven’t heard anything of him, Sir Jordan?”

He had come to give Sir Jordan a chance; not for his own sake, but for Neville’s. If Sir Jordan would make a clean breast of it and right his brother, Trale had, very reluctantly, and after a terrible struggle with his sense of duty, decided to help Neville in “hushing up” Sir Jordan’s villainy. For Neville had thought this the better plan, in order to avoid a public scandal which would exhibit his half brother in an unenviable plight.

Trale waited anxiously for a reply to his last question.

Sir Jordan met his grave regard with a bland indifference.

“I? How on earth should I hear anything of a man of that kind, my good Trale?” he said.

Trale’s eyes fell, and his lips grew tighter.

“Just so, sir,” he said. “It isn’t likely, as you say. But about this property. You know what it is that you’ve lost, Sir Jordan, of course? What we found on this man?”

Jordan was in a terrible fix. Had Banks passed the notes to a confederate who had been caught?

“I—er——” he began, then he shook his head. “I have lost nothing that I am aware of, Trale,” he said, rather huskily.

Trale regarded him in silence for a moment.

“Perhaps you’ll give it another thought, Sir Jordan,” he said in a low voice.

Jordan raised his lids and shot a keen glance at the grave face.

“I don’t understand you, Trale,” he said. “Why do you not tell me what this property is?”

“I’d rather it came from you, Sir Jordan,” said Trale. “You see, it’s a question for you—if you’ll prosecute or not. Sometimes gentlemen would rather get their property back, and let the thief go scot free. It isn’t for me——” He stopped, then went on with extreme gravity. “Sir Jordan, I’ll advise you, if I may venture to do so without a liberty, to keep this matter quiet. I’m sure Mr. Neville——”

He stopped again, and watched the effect of the name.

“Neville?” said Jordan. “My—my brother Neville. What were you going to say about him—what has he to do with it?”

“I was only thinking of what he’d wish done in the matter,” said Trale, lowering his voice. “I suppose you haven’t heard of him, Sir Jordan?”

Jordan knit his brows. That Trale had some object in wandering off in this peculiar way in hinting and insinuating, he suspected.

“No,” he said. “I have—er—had him searched for——”

“Yes, sir. Perhaps if you were to put an advertisement in the papers, saying that something to his advantage had turned up he might think Sir Greville had left him a fortune——”

He paused and eyed Jordan attentively.

Jordan’s hand, under the bedclothes, closed spasmodically.

“As Sir Greville left him nothing, I should be sorry to deceive him, Trale,” he said, slowly. “And now about this—this man and property?” and he raised his eyes and met Trale’s gaze defiantly.

Trale breathed hard for a moment. He had given Sir Jordan the chance he, Trale, had decided to give him, and Sir Jordan had declined to avail himself of it. Now it was to be war to the knife.

His manner changed to respectful officialism.

“The man we caught had been robbing the Court fowls, Sir Jordan, and was found with some of the prize birds in his possession,” he said almost briskly. “He is the son of one of the gardeners, and I didn’t know whether you wouldn’t be inclined to let him off for his father’s sake.”

Jordan eyed Trale keenly.

“Thank you,” he said. “I quite appreciate your feeling in the matter, but you must remember that as a magistrate, Trale, I have a duty to perform to society. This fellow must be made an example of. Yes, certainly, I shall

prosecute, and his father will be discharged from my service.”

“Very good, Sir Jordan,” said Trale, with straightened lips. “There’s nothing more, Sir Jordan?” and he looked at him steadily.

“Thank you, no,” said Jordan. “Be good enough to ring that bell for my man. Good-morning, Trale. I am much obliged to you for coming and laying the case before me so promptly, and I am sorry that my sense of duty will not permit me to overlook this theft.”

“Good-morning, Sir Jordan,” said Trale, respectfully, and he went downstairs. “Well,” he muttered, “for Mr. Neville’s and the old name’s sake, I’ve given you a chance, Sir Jordan! You’ll wish you’d taken it before long. You’re a cool hand, too,” and he shook his head with an air of admiration. “But you don’t best Mr. Neville, if I can help it.”

Jordan lay back, his brows knit, his lips working, as he went over every word that had passed.

Was there any hidden meaning in the fellow’s rigmorole, or had he, Sir Jordan, been unreasonably suspicious.

“Pooh, there’s nothing in it. Banks has got off with the notes, the will’s destroyed, and I am safe.”

He repeated this assurance with still greater confidence and comfort later on in the day, when the evening drew on, and no Banks had appeared, and with something like a light heart he sent a telegram to Audrey, saying that he should return to London next day.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Audrey did not cry at the back of the box as she told Sylvia she should, but sat in front as usual, and smiled acknowledgments of the bows of her friends and acquaintances in the other boxes and stalls.

So fashionable and well known a lady as Miss Audrey Hope cannot wear her heart upon her sleeve for daws to peck at, and so she sat, looking, if a little pale and a wee bit tired, as lovely as usual, and no one in front of the footlights guessed how her heart ached, and how she wished that she had never said the fatal “Yes” to Jordan Lynne, or that Lord Lorrimore had come back a few weeks earlier, or—or that she had never been born.

She had received a letter from Jordan, urging an early marriage, but to this she sent no reply, and her silence, as we have seen, had considerably irritated

that personage.

Thus matters stood, Audrey in deep distress, fearing a visit from Sir Jordan, and constantly upbraiding herself for her haste in entering into an engagement with him.

Three days elapsed, and on the evening of the fourth she called on Sylvia.

“Did you think I was dead, or what?” said Audrey, as the two girls embraced, and Sylvia, with her arm still round her, led her into the sitting-room.

“I didn’t know,” said Sylvia, and she scanned her face anxiously.

There was a hectic flush on Audrey’s cheeks, and a wistful, restless look in her dark eyes which she averted from Sylvia’s loving scrutiny; but she smiled and even laughed.

“I—I have been busy,” she said, evasively. “How is Mercy?”

“Rather better,” said Sylvia. “She seems stronger to-day and more cheerful. If she had not been I should have insisted upon sending for the doctor; but she is really better.”

“I’m glad of that,” said Audrey, “for my sake as well as hers. Sylvia, you do not sing after to-night, for a week?”

“No,” said Sylvia, wondering what was coming, “not for five nights. Isn’t it splendid to have so long a holiday?”

“Yes,” said Audrey, adding quickly, almost peremptorily, “and I want you to spend it with me. Not here in London, but in the country.”

“In the country! How delightful! Where are you going?”

“To my house, the Grange, at Lynne,” replied Audrey.

“To your house!”

“Yes,” went on Audrey, speaking hurriedly, “I—they say at home that I want a change, a little rest, you know. I’m tired of going out night after night, and so—so I said I would go down to the Grange. They—Lord and Lady Marlow—wanted me to go to the seaside, but I hate the seaside. It is quiet I want, if I want anything, and a spell of quiet won’t do you any harm, Signorina Stella. We must go to-morrow,” she went on. “Lord Marlow has telegraphed down to the servants to have things ready for us, and he will come down with us, if not to stay. Say you will come, Sylvia! I want to show you the old house in which I was born, and which I love so dearly! We can wander about the lanes, and—and—there will be nobody to plague us.”

“Sir Jordan—will he not be there?” said Sylvia.

Audrey’s face flushed. In her pocket was the telegram announcing Jordan’s

return to London on the morrow. She had shown it to no one, not even to Lady Marlow, or perhaps her ladyship would not have given her consent to this sudden rush off to the Grange.

“Sir—Sir Jordan will not be there,” she said, looking away. “He will have to be in town and—and—busy; but don’t let us talk of him, or any one else but ourselves. We won’t mention him—or any one connected with—with London while we are down there. We’ll just be two schoolgirls out for a holiday, shall we, Sylvia?”

“We will! Let us swear it!” responded Sylvia, gayly, and lifting Audrey’s hand heavenward in the approved theatrical fashion. “Oh, but I forgot Mercy! I don’t know whether she will come, and I could not leave her, Audrey.”

Mercy entered at that moment, and, bowing to Miss Hope, was about to retreat when Audrey stopped her.

“Don’t you think Sylvia would be all the better for a breath of pure country air, Mercy?” she said.

Mercy looked from one to the other.

“Yes,” she said.

“And I am sure you would,” said Audrey, gently. “So that settles it. We three are going to my house in the country, Mercy.”

“And to-morrow!” cried Sylvia.

Mercy’s eyes dropped.

“You must let me stay at home and take care of the house, please,” she said in a low voice.

“Nonsense!” said Sylvia. “Now, don’t be contrary, Mercy dear! It is you who want the change as badly as any of us. Think of five days in the country, and what a long time it is since we have seen it! Now, Mercy——”

Mercy shook her head.

“It is very kind of Miss Hope,” she faltered; “but I would rather——”

“You would rather I stayed cooped up in this wretched London, in this lovely weather, too,” said Sylvia. “For I will not go without you.”

“And I will not go without Sylvia,” put in Audrey, resolutely.

Mercy stood, a troubled expression on her pale face, which was usually so impassive.

“Must I go?” she said, in so low a voice that they could scarcely hear her.

“Yes, you must!” said Sylvia. “I know exactly how you feel——”

Mercy started slightly, and her eyes sought Sylvia’s face for a moment with a half frightened glance.

“You feel as if you would rather do anything than move from your own rooms, and that just proves how badly you want a change. There, we are two to one. And, as you know, one of the two is the most wilful and obstinate of beings, so that you are bound to give in.”

Mercy did not smile, but looked straight before her.

“If I must go,” she said, as if the words cost her an effort.

Sylvia clapped her hands and sprang up and kissed her.

“Hurrah! Go and get ready, you martyr. Once you have begun to walk you will feel more resigned to your cruel fate!”

Mercy did not respond to this loving banter, but silently left the room. But when she had reached her own she did not commence to pack immediately; instead, she threw herself on her knees beside the bed and hid her face in her hands. Then after a while she rose, and with a white face and tightly-set lips began to make preparations for the journey.

Her face wore this constrained look of resolute repression when the party started the next morning. It was a lovely day, and Sylvia felt unusually bright-hearted and gay, and delighted the viscount, who had at first been rather inclined to grumble at having to leave his beloved rubber at whist at his favorite club.

“’Pon my word,” he said, “I feel like a schoolmistress taking her favorite pupils out for a holiday! Signorina, have you brought your skipping rope and hoop?”

And when they had left hot and stifling London some miles behind them Audrey seemed to throw off the lassitude and weariness which had oppressed her, and the three talked and laughed happily, while Mercy, with her eyes closed, if she were not actually asleep, sat silent in her corner.

The Grange carriage was waiting for them at the station, and Audrey grew still brighter as she pointed out the familiar places to Sylvia, who leaned forward at the window eager to be interested in everything and every spot connected with Audrey.

Presently they came in sight of one of the Court lodges, and Sylvia naturally asked:

“What place is that, Audrey?”

And she did not notice the sudden clouding of her friend’s face as she replied:

“Lynne Court. We shall soon be home now, Sylvia,” she added, quickly, as if to avoid any further question respecting the place they were passing, and as the carriage entered the avenue and the Grange came in sight, she said: “And

here we are.”

An exclamation of delight and admiration broke from Sylvia.

“How lovely! Oh, dear,” and she laughed with mock awe, “I had no idea until now that you were such a great lady! I wonder how it must feel to be the mistress of all this!”

And she laughed.

Audrey laughed, too, but the laugh died away into a sigh.

The carriage drew up at the door, at which a row of servants in livery stood waiting with a real welcome for their mistress, and Audrey, catching something of Sylvia’s eagerness, took her hand and said:

“Come and let me show you your rooms. Yes, that’s the hall—but I will show you everything——”

“But not until after dinner, I devoutly hope!” exclaimed the viscount, who had enjoyed his journey down immensely. “No keeping the dinner waiting, young ladies, or I’ll take you back to school. Oh, by the way, I didn’t telegraph to Jordan, Audrey, but I suppose you did, and that he will come over from the Court to dinner, eh?”

“He is in London,” said Audrey, her manner growing cold instantly.

“Eh? How’s that?” demanded the viscount; but Audrey had run off with Sylvia, and did not appear to have heard the question.

Sylvia looked round the dainty rooms which, although the notice of their coming had been so short, seemed to have been prepared for her for weeks, and appeared to contain every conceivable luxury the most exacting of ladies could desire; looked round with a sigh of admiration which grew into an exclamation of delight as she ran to the window.

“Oh, how can you ever leave this paradise for that awful London!” she exclaimed. “This makes me long for our little cottage in the country more keenly than ever; doesn’t it you, Mercy?”

Mercy smiled sadly as she bent over the portmanteau which a maid was helping her to unpack.

“Audrey! You must show me everything, mind! All the places you used to play in when you were a girl, all the things and the animals you love. I shall want to see them all, that I may persuade myself that I have known you for a few years instead of for a few weeks. Dinner! What a shame it is that one must spend time in eating and drinking when there is so much to do and only five days to do it in.”

Audrey’s dressing-room adjoined that given to Sylvia, and the two girls talked through the open door as they changed their clothes, and as they had

insisted upon Mercy's going at once to her own room to rest, Audrey was constantly running in to Sylvia with offers of help, offers which Sylvia refused laughingly.

"My dear Audrey, I have not been the mistress of a moated grange and accustomed to lady's maids and dames of honor. I can dress myself. Why, one time I scarcely had anything to dress in!" she added, brightly.

The dinner gong sounded, and the voice of the viscount came up the great stairs, shouting blithely but warningly, "Now, you girls!" and they went down. As they passed along the corridor, Sylvia, who wanted to look everywhere at once, glanced through an open door into a large room in which she caught sight of a huge rocking horse, a doll's house and smaller toys.

"That was my playroom," said Audrey. "Oh, how happy I was then!"

"I must have a ride on that horse," said Sylvia, determinedly.

Audrey smiled.

"I have gone many a hunt on him, and been thrown off scores of times when Neville rocked him too fast, by accident—on purpose. We used to play together in that room; there is scarcely a place I shall show you in which he and I have not spent, oh, such happy hours. Poor Neville!"

And she sighed.

But Sylvia would not permit any sighing, for that night, at any rate, and the dinner with these two lovely girls was, so the viscount declared often afterward, one of the happiest he had ever eaten.

He was so happy that he did not even regret the absence of the Right Hon. Sir Jordan, and Audrey herself did not seem to miss her lover.

After dinner the girls went into the great drawing-room, the splendor of which would have struck Sylvia with amazed delight, if she had not been so accustomed to splendor on the stage, and the viscount joined them after a very short interval.

"Is there any clause in your agreements, signorina, forbidding you to play the nightingale for your friends' delight?" he said.

"If there were I would break it and pay forfeit!" responded Sylvia, and she drew Audrey to the piano; and in a moment or two the exquisite voice was filling the room and floating through the open windows.

"What a lovely creature, and what a voice!" exclaimed the viscount to himself.

He did not see that Audrey's eyes were filled with tears.

A little while before this Trale rushed into Mrs. Parsons, nearly starting

that good lady out of life, and causing Neville to spring from his chair with an exclamation. He had placed himself in Trale's hands, and, following his directions, was still at the cottage, though consumed with an almost intolerable desire to be doing something.

"What is it now?" he demanded, eagerly. "Have you got the scoundrel?"

"No! But it's all right!" said Trale, drawing Neville outside. "And Sir Jordan's gone now——"

"Gone!" echoed Neville, fiercely.

"It's all right, I say. He's only gone to London, and a man I can trust is in the same train with him, and won't lose sight of him. It's not that I've come to tell you, though. Miss Audrey's here!"

"Miss Audrey here!"

And Neville's face flushed.

"Yes, at the Grange. She came down this evening with Lord Marlow and a lady friend."

"Audrey here!" murmured Neville. "And engaged to that—that villain! And she knows nothing. I must go to her. She must be told——"

And he took a step or two in the direction of the Grange.

Trale caught him by the arm.

"Don't do anything rash, Mr. Neville," he said. "It isn't the time yet. You leave it to me."

"But I must see her—man, I must see her!" he broke out, passionately. "I won't speak to her—she shall not see me—but I must see her. Little Audrey! my dear little Audrey."

Trale saw that it was of no use to argue with him.

"All right, sir," he said. "I can understand; and it's only natural. Come along, then. We'll manage to get a sight of her. But, Mr. Neville, you won't spoil the whole thing by doing anything rash?"

But Neville had got his hat, and was already striding off to the Grange.

The two men reached the house, and in the dusk made their way to the ornamental gardens, and cautiously crept up to the terrace. Here, however, Trale seized Neville's arm.

"No farther, sir, please!" he said. "The windows are open; some one might come out at any moment. You'll be seen, and all my plans would be spoiled."

Neville shook him off, but stopped irresolutely.

"Perhaps—perhaps she may come out on the terrace!" he said, and he stood and gazed longingly at the lighted windows.

At that moment there rose a woman's voice singing the "Ah, che la morte," with a power and sweetness that startled and thrilled even the practical Trale.

"Phew! But that's fine, Mr. Neville," he whispered.

He got no further, for suddenly Neville uttered a cry, a terrible cry of intense amazement.

"My God!" he gasped, clutching Trale, and shaking in every limb. "Whose voice is that?"

CHAPTER XXX.

Well might Trale stare at Neville with surprise and alarm.

The great strong man was trembling like a leaf; the perspiration stood in big drops upon his forehead.

"Good Lord, Mr. Neville, what is it?" demanded Trale.

Neville looked at him vacantly.

"That voice! Don't you hear?" he said.

"Yes, beautiful, isn't it?" said Trale. "That's the great opera singer all London's mad about."

"What? No! That is Sylvia's voice! I should know it among a thousand. It is hers; let me go!" for Trale had got hold of him, half fearful that he had taken leave of his senses.

"No, no, Mr. Neville, you're mistaken; indeed you are!" he said. "The lady who's singing is the great opera singer, that all London's mad about. Her name's Signorina Stella."

"It is not!" said poor Neville, fiercely. "It is—it is a lady—oh!" and he put his hand to his head "Am I dreaming? Sylvia here! So near! Hold on, Trale; I'm not mad, as you think. I tell you that the lady you hear is an old friend. We've been parted, and——"

He could not go on, for the voice still floating out to them confused him with a commingling of exquisite pain and joy.

"Steady, Mr. Neville; I'm sure you're mistaken," said Trale soothingly. "I had the whole particulars of the party from one of the servants. It is the opera singer, indeed; indeed it is. If you know her——"

"I know nothing of her," broke in Neville, with agitation. "I only know the lady who is singing in there," and he pointed to the drawing-room. "I've heard

her voice too often not to know it. It's the dearest, sweetest voice in all the world to me. Let me go, Trale!"

Then he stopped of his own accord—for Trale could not have held him—and groaned.

"My God! I forget!" he said. "I can't go yet. She thinks I'm dead; the shock would kill her."

At this Trale was convinced that he had to do with a madman.

"Thinks you dead, Mr. Neville!" he said, soothingly.

"Yes," said Neville, sinking on to a seat and resting his head on his hands. "I can't tell you all, Trale, but I can tell you this much: that I love her, have loved her dearly, with all my heart, and that we were parted out there in Australia. She thought me dead, saw me killed, as she thought, poor girl, and I thought it best for her to think so. I see now what a heartless fool I was in doing so! But it's not too late!" and he half rose, to sink down again irresolutely. "Some one must break the truth to her, the news that I am alive. You must do it, Trale."

Trale looked anything but comfortable.

"I go in there, sir!" he said. "Lord, I couldn't. The viscount would be mad."

"You must do it gently, Trale," Neville went on, as if he had not heard him. "She has the kindest heart, and—and the shock——Listen! There! Oh, I little thought I should hear her so soon, that I should be so near her," and he looked wistfully, hungrily, toward the windows.

Trale stood beside him, sympathetic, but terribly perplexed.

"Won't you wait until to-morrow? Write to her, Mr. Neville," he suggested, feebly.

Neville laughed grimly.

"Wait till to-morrow! No! Not another hour! What! After all these months of miserable and wretched longing for her! Ha! ha!"

Trale became frightened.

"They'll hear you, sir. 'Pon my mind, they'll hear you, and there'll be a pretty how d'ye do! I wish I had a drop of brandy or something, just to pull you together. You look—well, you look——"

"Out of my mind," said Neville. "So I am, but it's with joy, Trale, joy. What is to be done?"

"Come home with me, and—and have a pipe, Mr. Neville," suggested Trale, as one speaks to a child or a sick man in delirium. "You can't do any good sitting here. If—if it's the lady you think, you can go to the Grange in the

morning, and—oh, for goodness' sake, come home, sir!"

"No," said Neville, "I'll stay here. I couldn't go if I wanted to, and I don't. I must see her somehow or other. There, I beg your pardon, Trale. I know you think I'm mad, and that the whole thing's a delusion; but I'm not, and it's all true. I tell you that lady is the woman I love, and from whom I've been parted, and whom I must and will see within an hour."

"Hush! hush! for goodness' sake, Mr. Neville!" pleaded Trale. "We shall be heard directly, and there'll be a deuce of a row. There are servants all about, and——" He stopped, and ducked his head. "There! Just what I expected! Here's one coming now. Come into the shrubbery, sir, come on," and he dragged at him.

Neville allowed him to half lead, half pull him into the shrubbery, but it was too late.

Footsteps were heard coming nearer and presently a tall figure strode up to them, and a voice sternly demanded:

"Who's there?"

Trale pressed Neville's arm to keep him silent.

The newcomer repeated the question, and advanced upon their hiding place.

"It's all up," said Trale, with a groan. "We must face the music," and he stepped out.

"It's all right," he said, still thinking the man was one of the Grange servants. "It's me, Trale, Inspector Trale, and——"

"Trale!" said the voice. "What are you doing here? Don't you know me?"

Trale peered at him.

"God bless my soul! It isn't Lord Lorrimore, is it?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Lorrimore, coloring a little. "I was going to call at the Grange. I'm—I'm just starting for Africa, and wanted to say good-by to Miss Hope, and——But what you are doing here? Is there anything wrong?"

"No, no," said Trale; "nothing wrong, my lord."

"Who is that with you, one of your men?" asked Lorrimore, nodding toward Neville, who stood still looking at the Grange and listening to the voice, and utterly and completely regardless of his companions.

"That," stammered Trale. "No, oh, no, not one of my men; that is—oh, or, what's the use of trying to keep it dark? No, my lord; this gentleman is Mr. Neville Lynne."

If Trale had said, "The Great Mogul," Lord Lorrimore could not have

seemed more startled.

“Mr. Who?” he exclaimed.

“Mr. Neville Lynne,” repeated Trale. “Here, Mr. Neville here is Lord Lorrimore, a friend of Miss Hope’s,” and he pulled at Neville.

Neville advanced, and nodded impatiently. Then he started and stared, for Lord Lorrimore, as if some exquisite joke had been perpetrated, flung himself down on the bench and laughed grimly.

“Neville Lynne!” he exclaimed, looking up at him.

“That is my name,” said Neville, staring at him. “I have not the pleasure of knowing——”

“By Heaven! that’s not my fault!” exclaimed Lorrimore with sardonic irony, “seeing that I’ve spent months and tramped thousands of miles in trying to make your acquaintance, Mr. Lynne!”

Neville put his hand to his head.

“I—I don’t understand,” he stammered. “There is some mistake—delusion.”

“There is no delusion in the fact that I have been scouring a greater portion of the habitable globe in search of you,” retorted Lorrimore, grimly. “How do you do?” and he held out his hand.

Neville took it mechanically, and sank on to the seat beside Lorrimore.

“Perhaps you’ll explain, my lord,” he said in a bewildered fashion.

“Nothing easier,” said Lorrimore. “I only wish it had been as easy to find you. I—I am a friend of Miss Hope’s”—his handsome face clouded darkly as he spoke her name—“and—and at her request I left England three years ago to find another friend of hers—yourself.”

“She—Audrey—sent you to find me! God bless her!” said Neville, his voice shaking.

“Amen!” said Lorrimore, fervently.

“She thought of her old playfellow! Yes, that was like her! God bless her!”

“Amen again!” said Lorrimore.

“But—but why did she send you? How came you to go?” asked Neville, not unnaturally.

Lorrimore glanced at Trale, who had discreetly withdrawn out of hearing.

“Because—because I had the misfortune to love Miss Hope,” said Lorrimore, grimly.

“You loved——Ah! And she—Jordan!”

“Exactly,” said Lorrimore, laconically. “When I came back I found her engaged to marry your brother, Mr. Lynne. Mind, I make no complaint. She was not engaged to me; had given me no distinct promise. But—but as I have the misfortune to love her still, it is not altogether to be wondered at, that I should be anxious to get away from the sight of your brother’s happiness. I am going to Africa. It is a charming country, and presents all kinds of novelty to the jaded traveler, and——But I think it would be more interesting if we talked of yourself, Mr. Lynne, and first, if you will not deem me impertinently inquisitive, I should like to ask—where—the—devil—you have been these last three years? Down a coal mine, up in a balloon, at the bottom of the sea in a diving bell, or where?”

Neville looked at him.

“I have been for the greater part of the time gold digging in Australia,” he said, “in a place called Lorn Hope——”

Lorrimore swung round upon him.

“I beg your pardon! Where?”

“In a place called Lorn Hope,” repeated Neville.

Lorrimore stared at him.

“You didn’t bear your own name?” he said. “Lorn Hope! Why, I was there—or near it. There was no Neville Lynne living there then.”

“I didn’t use my own name,” said Neville. “I was called the Young ’un, or Jack.”

Lorrimore started up, then sank down.

“The Young ’un?” he said in a still voice. “Jack! Why—why, you’re dead!”

“I know, I know,” said Neville, putting his hand to his brow. “Excuse me, Lord Lorrimore, but this talk brings back an unhappy time to me. But that’s all passed now, I hope, and——”

He glanced at the window.

“Wait one moment, Mr. Lynne,” said Lorrimore. “You speak of an unhappy time. You are, you say, the Young ’un of Lorn Hope Camp; then—then you must know that a young lady, Signorina Stella—I mean Sylvia Bond—thinks you dead; actually, thinks it at this moment!”

Neville stared at him.

“You know her! Can it be possible that—that you are the gentleman who saved her from Lavarick!”

“That was his name, I believe; the bushranger; yes,” said Lorrimore.

Neville held out his hand and grasped Lorrimore's, his face flushing, his eyes glowing.

"I should like to try and thank you," he said.

"The young lady was so dear to you?" said Lorrimore.

"Dear to me!" echoed Neville, then he laughed, a strange laugh. "She is, and always has been, dearer than life!"

"And yet you allowed her to think you were dead!" said Lorrimore, gravely.

Neville looked rather troubled and uncertain.

"It was best," he said. "I did it for the best. When those scoundrels seized her and left me for dead, they robbed me of every penny I possessed. Luck was dead against me. I heard she had fallen into the hands of a kind-hearted lady and a nobleman who would take care of her, and I—I'm a proud man, Lord Lorrimore, and I could not be a burden to her," and he hung his head.

"Y-es," said Lorrimore. "You are proud, I see. But did it never occur to you that the young lady might suffer somewhat at the loss of her brother, as we thought you?"

Neville started.

"No," he said. "Poor Sylvia, did she—did she grieve much?"

Lorrimore laughed grimly.

"Great Heaven, he asks me that?" he remarked, ironically. "Did she grieve? Why, my good friend, she nearly died; we had to fight death inch by inch, hour by hour, for days; and as to grieving, why—but I think I'd better stop. A proud man's bad enough, but a conceited one is worse, and I should make you conceited!"

Neville held his face in his hands.

"My dear, dear darling!" he murmured. "And she's in there?" he exclaimed, dropping his hand to Lorrimore's arm. "In there! Think of it, my lord! And I shall see her directly."

Lorrimore sighed.

"Yes," he said, hanging his head. "You are a happy man! So is the woman I love in there, and I shall probably see her directly; but it will be for the last time—the last time!" and with a sigh he rose.

Neville, biting his lips, looked at him.

"I—I wouldn't give up all hope, Lord Lorrimore," he said.

Lorrimore faced round and started, then shook his head.

"There can be no hope for me, Mr. Lynne," he said. "Miss Audrey is

engaged to your brother.”

Neville groaned.

“Look here!” he said, in his abrupt, back wood fashion. “Don’t you go off to Africa yet. You can’t tell what may turn up. Look at my case! Here am I sneaking in this garden to get a glimpse of an old friend, Audrey, and I hear the voice”—his own broke—“of the girl I love, the girl I’ve been parted from forever, as I thought. Take courage by my luck.”

“Yes! But your girl is not engaged to another man—at least, I don’t think so, I don’t know!”

“What!” gasped Neville, at the mere idea of a doubt. “Sylvia engaged!”

“You see!” said Lorrimore, with a sad smile. “You can understand how I feel! Hopeless!”

“No, I can’t!” said Neville his hands clinched at his side, his broad chest heaving. “If I found Sylvia, my little Sylvia, engaged, I’d——”

“Fling the other man out of the window,” said Lorrimore, with a laugh and a sigh. “Yes, that’s all very well for the backwoods of Australia, but——” he shrugged his shoulders, “well, Mr. Lynne, though nothing would give me greater delight than to fling Sir Jordan out of the window—I beg your pardon! I forgot that he is your brother!” he broke off apologetically.

Neville shook his head and groaned:

“Would to God I could forget it, too!” he said.

Before Lorrimore could ask for an explanation of this singularly unfraternal sentiment, Trale came up.

“There’s Miss Audrey come out on the terrace, Mr. Neville!” he said. “Now—now, I was thinking if his lordship wouldn’t mind going and breaking your being here to her, you might go and see her. But you won’t say anything about—about—you know what!” he implored.

Lorrimore assented at once.

“Wait here, Mr. Lynne, until I call,” he said, and he went toward the terrace.

Sylvia had sung twice, and had then run up to see Mercy.

“I’ll smoke my cigar on the terrace,” said the viscount, “if you’ll come, Audrey. The signorina will join us when she comes down, I hope—that is, if she is not afraid of the night air.”

“I’m afraid of nothing!” responded Sylvia, with a laugh, as she left the room.

“Lovely night, isn’t it?” said the viscount, as he lit his cigar.

Audrey did not reply, but leaned her head on her hand and gazed into vacancy dreamily.

“How strange it is that your young friend does not get married. If I were unattached——” and he laughed.

“It is very fortunate for you that her ladyship is not here to hear you,” said Audrey with a smile; then she sighed. “Sylvia is very young, much younger than she looks—and why should she get married? Why should it be considered necessary that a woman should marry?” she asked, with barely-concealed bitterness and irritation.

“Please ask me another,” remarked the viscount. “Most women think it the great aim and end of their life to enslave some wretched, unhappy man for——Hullo! who’s this coming across the lawn? By Jove! it’s Lorrimore! Now look out for squalls, young lady!” and he whistled softly.

“Lord Lorrimore!” said Audrey, and she blushed and looked over her shoulder as if she meant to beat a retreat.

“No, you don’t!” said the viscount. “No running away, Miss Audrey! Hallo, Lorrimore, where did you come from? How are you?”

Lorrimore came up the steps and shook hands with them, his eyes just glancing at the viscount, and fixing themselves sadly and wistfully on Audrey’s downcast face.

“I came down this afternoon,” he said, rather tamely. “The fact is, I’m off to Africa.”

“To where?” exclaimed the viscount.

“Africa. And I thought I should like to say good-bye to Miss Hope before I went, as I shall be away some time.”

Poor Audrey’s heart beat heavily, and her bosom heaved.

“Good heavens! what a man you are for rushing about!” said the viscount, reproachfully. “You don’t seem as if you could stop more than five minutes in any one place. Africa, too! What’s the use of spending your time among savages? Besides, if you’re so fond of ’em, you might as well stay at home; we’ve got plenty of ’em here. Have a cigar? Have some wine—I hope you’ve dined?”

Lorrimore said falsely that yes, he had dined, and accepted the cigar.

“We’ve got your friend, the famous Signorina Stella, in the house,” said the viscount. “She’ll be delighted to see you, I dare say, and I’ll set her on to dissuading you from this absurd African idea; eh, Audrey?”

“Sylvia will be very sorry,” she said, almost inaudibly.

"I'll go and see about some wine," said Lord Marlow.

The two left alone were silent for a moment or two, Audrey's heart beating too fast to allow of her speaking at first, and Lorrimore wondering how on earth he should break the news of Neville's proximity. At last he said:

"I'm afraid I have made my visit at an unconventionally late hour, Miss Hope, but I meant starting to-morrow."

"You meant," she said, keeping her voice steady by an effort.

"Yes, I may be a day or two later now. The fact is——"

Then, like most men engaged in "breaking" news, he blurted it out, "Audrey, I have heard of Neville Lynne."

She started, but did not look overcome with joy. She was too much engaged thinking of another man—the Earl of Lorrimore, to wit—to be very much moved, even by the return of her old friend.

"Neville!"

"Yes! He—well, the fact is, that he is here——"

"Here! Where! Oh!" and she looked round.

"Yes," said Lorrimore. "I met him to-night, by the most singular chance, and I have only just left him."

"Left him? Where? Oh, why did you not bring him with you?" said Audrey.

"Well," replied Lorrimore, "I should if Sylvia had not been here."

"Sylvia! What has Sylvia to do with him or he with her?" demanded Audrey.

Lorrimore was a bad hand at telling a story, and he looked round helplessly.

"The long and the short of it is," he said, "that they know each other, that they are old friends."

"Sylvia and Neville Lynne!"

"Yes."

And in as few words as possible he told her the story, or as much as he knew of it, Audrey's eyes growing larger and larger as she listened and gazed at him.

"All the while the poor girl was lying at Wildfall, as near death as she could be, and thinking him dead, he was at Lorn Hope Camp, within a few miles of her. It's the most exasperating, aggravating business that the mind of man can conceive," he said, grimly. "Actually within a few miles of him and not to know it."

“I—I am so sorry,” faltered Audrey. “If I had known the terrible trouble you would have, I—I never, no, never, would have asked you——”

“Oh, I wasn’t thinking of myself, not at all,” he said, simply, “but of poor Sylvia. And now the question is, how am I going to bring him to her without scaring her out of her senses? She thinks him dead; dead, don’t you see?”

“I see,” said Audrey, slowly and thoughtfully. “Yes, I see!” And she indeed saw more than Lorrimore had put to her. She understood now, why Sylvia was not married, why she received men’s homage and admiration with such coldness and reserve. “Oh, the poor girl!” she muttered, “and to think it is Neville Lynne. Oh, I am so glad! So glad!” and in her joy at her prospects of her friend’s happiness, she turned to him with tears glistening in her eyes, and looking so lovely that poor Lorrimore’s head swam.

“Yes, I’m glad he’s turned up, and—and I wish I’d found him,” and he turned his head away.

Audrey’s eyes fell.

“But now we’ve got to break the news to her,” he said. “You see what a splendid hand I am at that kind of thing, and I’m afraid you will have to do it.”

“Yes,” said Audrey, softly. “I will do it. Where is he?”

“Out there in the shrubbery,” he said. “Waiting for me to call him. Shall I do so?”

“No, no, not yet. He must not come yet, in case she should come out suddenly and see him, without being prepared—ah, here she is!” she broke off, as Sylvia’s voice was heard singing as she came. “Here’s Lord Lorrimore, Sylvia,” said Audrey, trembling a little.

Sylvia uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

“Oh, I am so glad!” and her soft little palm clung round his. “And how unexpected—isn’t it, Audrey?”

“Yes,” said Audrey. “Lord Lorrimore has come on—on business, business of yours.”

“Of mine?” said Sylvia, smiling. “Has anything gone wrong at the opera? Has the manager refused to give me another engagement? What is it? Why do you all look so grave? You can’t bring me very bad news, Lord Lorrimore, for—for I have had all my bad news, you see; and all those I love, Audrey, and Mercy, and you—if I may say so—are here near me, and safe. What is it?”

“It’s—it’s good news,” stammered Lorrimore, but Audrey motioned him to keep silent.

“Yes, dear,” she said, stealing her arm round her, “it is good news. Lord

Lorrimore has come to-night with a strange, a wonderful story, so strange and wonderful as to seem unreal and impossible. Do you think you could bear to hear it, Sylvia?" Her voice grew lower, tenderer. "Sometimes great joy is as hard to endure as great sorrow; sometimes to find that those we have lost, lost forever, as we thought, are still liv——"

She stopped, terrified by the look that came into Sylvia's face; it was a look as of one who hopes, yet dares not believe.

"What—what—is it?" she panted, looking from one to the other, her face growing whiter each moment.

"Such wonderful things happen—truth is stranger than fiction," stammered Lorrimore, getting near her in case she should faint and fall. "We've read stories of people who've—who've—been supposed to be killed on—on the field of battle—you know, and, and turned up again, safe and sound after all ——"

Sylvia started, her eyes closed for a moment, and they thought she would fall; she swayed slightly, but she caught Audrey's arm.

"It—is—Jack!" she breathed. "You—you have heard that—that he is not dead! Not dead! Oh, God, don't keep me in suspense!" she pleaded. And she wrung her hands and looked from one to the other with an expression in her eyes that made Lorrimore turn his head away. "Don't keep me—not a moment!—I can bear it! I dreamed that he was alive—ask Mercy—she will tell you that I did! Oh, Jack, Jack!"

"My dear," blurted out Lorrimore, "that—that jacket we brought you was his, right enough, but another man wore it; and—and you see——"

"Jack!" breathed from her parted lips.

"Call him," whispered Audrey, down whose cheeks the tears were running.

Lorrimore sprang to the steps and shouted "Neville."

A stalwart figure came running across the lawn, and in another moment Sylvia was lying in his arms, weeping, laughing, murmuring his name brokenly, her small, trembling hands patting his broad shoulders that she might convince herself that he was flesh and blood; her Jack, and not a ghost.

Lorrimore led Audrey away.

"I wish to Heaven I were half as happy as those two!" he murmured.

CHAPTER XXXI.

At last Sylvia drew herself out of Neville's arms, and the two stood and gazed at each other. Then Neville started and crimsoned. He had not actually seen her yet; in that first rush they had scarcely looked at each other. And now—Well, he had been picturing to himself the Sylvia he remembered, the slim girl with girlish form and face and ways, and tricks of speech. That was the Sylvia he had left and he had expected to see. And, instead, here before him was a lovely, an exquisitely lovely woman, superbly dressed, her shoulders and arms gleaming like marble. Could this princess be his wild lass o' the woods, his little Syl?

Her beauty, grace, and air of distinction awed him into amazed silence; manlike, he felt shy, frightened by her; even while he tingled and glowed with passionate love.

She did not notice the sudden change in his manner, and she drew him by both his hands, which she held in her warm, soft grasp, into the room.

"Come to the light and let me see you, Jack!" she said, and her voice startled him almost as much as her altered appearance had done. It was fuller, softer, and yet, ah, as sweet as of old! "Come to the light and let me see you plainly, Jack. Let me see if I had forgotten what you were like! Oh, oh!" And she began to laugh and cry, that strange commingling by which a woman relieves a heart overful of joy. "How could you be so cruel! No, no! Not a word of reproach, Jack! Not now nor ever! But if you could know what I suffered!"

And she shuddered.

"I did it all for the best," he faltered.

"Yes, yes. You thought that I was in better hands? See how I read your thoughts, Jack! But how could I have been better cared for than you cared for me? Oh, how happy we were! Have you forgotten it? No, ah, no, you haven't! I remember everything, everything, Jack! The slightest, weeiest talk we ever had out in that wild, silent place. Let me look at you! How brown you are, and—yes—I think you are bigger, or is it because the men here are smaller? Oh, Jack, to have you with me once more—once more!" And she covered her face with her hands. "Now tell me everything that has happened. Did you stay long at the camp, and"—she laughed—"did you find a lot of gold, Jack?"

He shook his head and smiled.

"No, my luck left me with you, Syl," he said.

"Syl!" she murmured. "No one has called me that but you, Jack! My dear, dear brother."

Neville's face flushed; the title jarred upon him; he forgot that it was he who had first invented it.

“My luck left me, Syl,” he said, “and I left Lorn Hope as poor as I entered it!”

“Oh!” she said, with sweetest, most loving sympathy. “Tell me—go on, Jack!”

And she drew him on to a sofa beside her.

He gave an account of his adventures since their parting, excepting those connected with the finding of the will, and Sylvia listened with eager intentness.

“Poor Jack!” she murmured, smoothing his hand. “But who cares? You are here—here, actually sitting beside me. Oh, do you think I shall wake up presently and find it all a dream?”

And she looked up at him piteously.

“I was just asking myself the same question!” responded Neville. “It’s—it’s difficult enough to believe that this gorgeous and queenly lady is—is Syl!”

She got up and dropped him a courtesy.

“Wasn’t I a—a wild cat, a tomboy, Jack!” and she laughed.

“You were the dearest——” He stopped. “But is it true that you are——”

“The famous Signorina Stella, sir!” she said, laughing. “Do you remember how I used to sing to you sitting by the claim, Jack; and how you used to praise my voice? I’ve made some use of it since. You shall hear me sing some day, if you are very good, sir, and promise never, never to leave me, but always to be a stay-at-home brother.”

Again Neville’s face fell.

“I’d promise anything to-night,” he said.

“But how did you happen to come down here?” she asked after a moment. “Did you hear I was here? How did you discover me?”

As she asked the question the door opened, and the viscount came in, followed by a footman with some wine.

“Here you are, Lorri——Hullo! What! What the deuce! Why! No! Yes! It is Neville Lynne!” he broke off and exclaimed.

Neville rose. Sylvia looked round. She could only see Jack—Jack the Young ’un!

“Why, my dear boy!” ejaculated the viscount “This is a surprise. Where on earth did you spring from? By Jove, you’ve changed. I shouldn’t have known you but for your eyes! Tut, tut! Where’s Audrey? She’ll be glad enough to see you, I’ll warrant! Well, I never? My dear fellow, we all thought you were—ahem—dead! Neville Lynne back?” And he kept clapping Neville’s broad

back and laughing. "Gad, I wish her ladyship were here! You were a favorite of hers, boy. Boy? Why, you have grown into a giant, and—Hullo!" he broke off, suddenly, remembering that he had come upon the two sitting close together on the sofa. "Do you know the Signorina Stella, Neville? Do you know him, signorina? I suppose you do, though?"

And he looked from one to the other, perplexed and bewildered.

Sylvia rose. She was pale now, very pale.

"I—I thought I did; yes," she said in a low voice. "But—but you called him—what was it you called him? Neville Lynne?"

"I did. It's his name, my dear!" said the viscount, staring. "What else should I call him?"

Sylvia looked from one to the other, her breath coming quickly. Jack, her Jack, Neville Lynne! How could it be?

Lorrimore and Audrey entering the room found them thus, and Audrey went up quickly to the viscount, and put her arm round his shoulders.

"Neville is an old friend of Sylvia's, dear," she said, giving him a little hug. "Don't you see?"

"No, hang me if I do!" he bluntly retorted. "She doesn't know his name _____"

"A fellow doesn't always call himself by the right name out in the gold fields," said Neville.

"Eh? And you met there? Well, bless my soul! You must tell us all about it, Neville. But the first thing to do is to drink your health, eh? Where's the wine? Audrey, my dear." He looked from face to face. "There's more in this than I can fathom," he grunted.

Audrey laughed.

"We'll explain it all directly, dear," she said. "At present we are all too happy in Sylvia's happiness to be able to say anything connectedly." She went to Sylvia, and kissed her. "Yes, dear," she murmured, "I am happy in your happiness. I think I know how you feel! To have lost him—to think him dead—and to have him come back to you. Ah!"

And she drew a long breath.

Sylvia allowed herself to be kissed, but seemed dazed, and gazed at Neville, who, though he was talking to the viscount and Lord Lorrimore, kept glancing at her as if he could not keep his eyes from her face.

"It's the strangest story," he said. "And I don't quite know whether I am awake, or asleep and dreaming. To think that Lord Lorrimore, here, should

have been hunting for me all these years, and that he should once have been within a few miles——”

“A few yards!” said Lorrimore.

“Yes, yards! And not known it!”

“I’ll wire to her ladyship!” said the viscount. “I won’t tell her that you have come back; we’ll surprise her, eh? And, ah, by Jove, I was forgetting some one else! Jordan! Have you seen him yet?”

Neville’s face clouded. Lorrimore’s darkened.

“No,” said Neville, quietly, “not yet.”

“Not yet! By gad, he’ll be surprised. He’s been advertising, looking for you everywhere——”

A footman opened the door.

“Sir Jordan Lynne,” he announced.

CHAPTER XXXII.

“Sir Jordan Lynne!” The announcement and the entrance of that estimable gentleman were like the explosion of a bombshell to at least three out of four of the party. Audrey started and turned pale, Lorrimore frowned darkly, and Neville sprang to his feet.

Jordan’s presence was owing to one of those chances which make or mar men’s fortunes. He had started that morning for London, resolved upon persuading, forcing, Audrey to marry him at once. He was thinking of her intently as he gazed vacantly out of the carriage window, and, lo and behold! as his train pulled up at Sudbury Junction, half way to town, he saw her face at the carriage window of a train standing at the down platform. At first he thought that it was an optical delusion, then he caught sight of Lord Marlow, and instantly jumped at the right conclusion: Audrey was going to the Grange to avoid him! He sprang out of the train and yelled for a porter, but as he did so his own and the other train started, and he was left standing upon the platform while Audrey was carried away from him.

To the amazement of the officials, who, of course, knew the right honorable gentleman, Sir Jordan swore and stamped his feet. When was the next train back to Lynne? There was no other until the usual afternoon one, he was informed.

He spent four of the longest hours in his life at the station, and then flung

himself into the down train, and was carried to Lynne. He only waited at the Court long enough to ascertain that Miss Hope and her party had indeed arrived at the Grange; then he had himself driven there, employing himself on the way in smoothing his face into something like its usual amiable serenity.

For a moment, as the footman opened the drawing-room door and announced him, and he saw Neville and Lord Lorrimore, he stopped short, and the color left his face, his lips. He had expected to see only Audrey and the signorina. Then with a tremendous effort he pulled himself together, and came forward with a sweet smile of surprise and joy.

“Is it possible? Neville! My—my dear Neville!” he murmured, holding out his hand. “This is indeed a surprise! When did you return? To find you here, too!”

Neville stood stalwart and grim, and allowed his brother to get hold of his hand; but drew it away again instantly.

“How do you do, Lord Lorrimore?” Lorrimore nodded, and Jordan went on, taking Audrey’s hand. “I had no idea, not the least, that this joyful surprise awaited me! How well he is looking, isn’t he?”

And he gazed over her shoulder at Neville’s stern face with fraternal affection.

The viscount found his voice at last; none of the others had opened their lips.

“How—how did you come here, Jordan?” he asked, blankly. “We understood you had gone to London.”

“So I had,” said Jordan, blandly, and looking round with a smile as if he were sure that they must all be delighted to see him. “I started this morning, but at Sudbury I remembered suddenly that I had forgotten an important document, without which my presence in London was, so to speak, useless. I left it in my dispatch box, the key of which I had in my pocket. I assure you that I was terribly annoyed at having to turn back——” his voice dropped, and he bent over Audrey, “for I had looked forward to seeing you in London, dearest. But”—to the rest—“how wonderfully these accidents turn out! If I had not forgotten that paper I should have been in London, and missed seeing you all to-night, my dear Neville especially!”

“My dear Neville” had sunk into his chair again, and was gazing grimly at the carpet. He was tormented by the desire to exclaim, “Audrey, don’t let that man touch your hand, don’t let him come near you; he’s a scoundrel!” But he restrained himself. As a matter of fact, at such moments it is your honest man who is confused, not the smooth and plausible villain; he is master of the situation.

“And so you have come back, Neville!” said Jordan, taking a seat next him, and little guessing that Neville had hard work to keep his hands off him. “What a time you have been away! And where have you been? I suppose you have been telling our dear friends the story of your adventures! I long to hear it. Signorina——” and he bowed to Sylvia, who stood just behind Neville with downcast face, for her eyes, quickened by love, saw that Neville was fighting hard to suppress his indignation about something or other, and knew that he was not at all glad to see this bland and courteous brother of his—“Signorina, my brother and I have been parted for years, I am afraid to say how many! But to me it has seemed a lifetime. And I hope to you, too, Neville! Dear me, how glad everybody will be! We—we must have a fete to welcome the wanderer home. Will you help me kill the fatted calf, Audrey?”

Audrey murmured something inaudibly, and Lord Marlow cut in again.

“You’d better get rid of that ulster, Jordan, and—and have something to eat.”

“Thank you, Marlow,” responded Jordan, “but I must not stay. I have work to do; and I dined very comfortably at Sudbury.”

Neville rose; he could endure it no longer.

“I’m—going,” he said, grimly, and as if he had some impediment in his throat.

“We will go together,” said Jordan. “You must come to the Court, of course, Neville. I must not lose sight of my long-lost brother now that he has turned up again.”

And he smiled round sweetly.

“No,” said Neville. “I am staying——”

“Here,” put in the viscount (adding in a whisper to Lorrimore, “Those two will fight like cats once they get outside! I can see mischief in Neville’s eye!) You stop with us, of course, Neville.”

Sylvia put out her hand and touched him imploringly with the tips of her fingers.

Neville seemed to have almost forgotten her, but he turned with a smile, like a flash of sunshine, creeping through the darkness of his face.

“No, thanks,” he said. “I have rooms at the cottage. But I’ll walk as far as the Court with—with Jordan.”

“And farther! Nonsense, my dear Neville. Why, of course the Court is your home!” exclaimed Jordan, affectionately. “Leave him to me,” and he nodded and smiled. Then he crossed over to where Audrey stood, apart from the rest, nervously turning over the leaves of a book. “How could you leave London

without writing to me, dearest?" he murmured. "You got my letter?"

"Yes," Audrey said, without looking up.

"And—and you will not refuse my request, Audrey? Indeed, indeed, I cannot be happy until you are mine, mine irrevocably."

She managed to repress the shudder that ran through her.

"And now, Neville, dear old Neville, your old friend, has come to us—that is another reason why we should not wait! He shall be my best man, Audrey _____"

She raised her head, and looked at him eagerly.

"You—you will do what you said?" she murmured, hurriedly. "He has come back poor and——"

"Rest assured that I will treat him as one brother should treat another!" he replied in a low voice, and taking her hand and pressing it. "Neville is proud, as you see, but I shall overcome that by my affection. What! do you think I would allow him to want for money while I have a penny to share with him?"

Audrey's eyes filled with tears.

"If you will do that——"

He seized upon the consent to their speedy marriage her faltering words implied, and raised her hand to his lips.

"Dearest!" he murmured.

Lord Lorrimore had been watching them under his dark brows, and, as Jordan kissed her hand, he stalked forward to the viscount.

"I will say good-by, Marlow," he said, huskily. "I am off to-morrow——"

"No!" whispered Neville, agitatedly, in his ear. "Not yet! Wait!"

The poor viscount was getting bewildered.

"Look here," he said. "You'd all better come to lunch to-morrow; by that time we shall have got over the surprise of Neville's return, and be able to realize it. As it is to-night, I feel as if I were standing on my head."

Lorrimore, without declining or accepting, glanced at Audrey, and walked out.

"You will go?" murmured Sylvia to Neville, who stood looking at Jordan.

He turned and took her hand.

"Yes, I must go," he said. "I must talk to my—my brother; but I will come to-morrow."

He looked hard at her, as if he should like to—well, to kiss her hand as Jordan had kissed Audrey's, but he let it drop without doing so, and walked to

the door.

“Neville’s going,” said Jordan, pleasantly, his face flushed with triumph. “Till to-morrow, dearest!” he whispered, and followed Neville out on to the terrace.

The viscount stared at the two girls, and indulged in a prolonged whistle.

“Good heavens!” he exclaimed. “What a gathering of the clans! What a ‘happy family’ kind of meeting! I thought we were coming down here for a few days’ rest and quiet, and instead of that, here’s no end of excitement. Neville back, Lorrimore going to Africa, and he and Jordan meeting here—’pon my word, it’s scarcely fair, young people, that I should have to bear this kind of thing alone and unaided! Ah,” and he shook his head, “we wanted her ladyship badly, Audrey! There was I, scarcely knowing what to say, or how to keep the peace and expecting that I should have to step in between one party and the other and take the blows. Now, if her ladyship had been here, you would have seen to what a height she can rise. It’s just the kind of opportunity she glories in. She wouldn’t have let Neville and Jordan go off together to murder each other—Oh, I beg your pardon, my dear!” he broke off, for Sylvia had clasped her hands and uttered a low cry, and her face had become white. “I beg both your pardons!” he mumbled on. “Of course, it’s all nonsense, and they’re all right. But, upon my word, Neville looked so black—and Lorrimore, if anything, looked blacker—that I was expecting a row every moment. But to think of Neville’s coming back, and you and he being old friends. You must tell us all about it, everything——”

“But not to-night, papa,” said Audrey, gently, and she drew Sylvia’s arm through hers and led her away.

Sylvia sank on the bed in her own room, and as Audrey knelt close beside her, she told the story of Lorn Hope Camp, with many falterings, and with quiet tears, and sudden swift blushes and pallors.

“It’s—amazing!” exclaimed Audrey. “Oh, I can understand what you felt when you saw him just now. But—but why did you call each other brother and sister?”

“Because we were!” said Sylvia, piteously. “Why, he was a brother to me—what brother could have done more? Think of it.”

“Yes, yes,” assented Audrey. “But you aren’t brother and sister now,” she murmured.

Sylvia’s face grew hot, then pale.

“I—I was such a mite,” she said, hurriedly. “And he was so big! Just now—just now—I thought I was up to his shoulder! Yes, I must have grown—altered.”

Audrey laughed softly.

“Yes, and he thought so. He gazed as if he could not believe his eyes. He must have thought it was a vision.” And she drew her head back in bird-like fashion, and looked at the lovely face admiringly. “Oh, how wonderful it all is! Thank Heaven he has found you! He won’t go away again! He can’t leave his—sister!”

Sylvia’s face grew scarlet, and she covered it with her hands as she remembered how, on the terrace, she had flown into his arms. Had she kissed him? She did not know. It was likely.

Audrey put up her hand and stroked the soft wealth of dark hair lovingly.

“Ah, how happy you must be to-night, dear!” she whispered.

“Yes. No. I don’t know,” faltered Sylvia.

Then she rose with a start.

“I must go and tell Mercy!” she said. “Wait here for me, Audrey. I—I want to talk—I want you to tell me what I am to do. Oh, I don’t know what to do!”

And with a little piteous sigh, that was like that of a heart trembling on the verge of a great happiness or a great disappointment, she left the room.

Mercy was awake, and started up as Sylvia entered.

“What is it?” she asked, almost in a tone of alarm.

“It is news, great news, Mercy dear!” said Sylvia. “Jack—I mean—well, he is not—not dead. He has come back. Don’t speak, dear; let me tell you in my own way.”

Mercy listened in silence, but holding both Sylvia’s hands, her large, sad eyes fixed sympathetically on her face, until Sylvia came to the scene in the drawing-room.

“And he is not ‘Jack’ at all, but—oh, Mercy, his name is Neville Lynne, and he is Sir Jordan’s brother!”

Mercy dropped Sylvia’s hands, and uttered a faint cry.

“His brother!” she breathed, with white lips, and a startled, horrified expression in her eyes.

“Yes!” said Sylvia. “He is Mr. Neville Lynne, of Lynne Court. No wonder you are surprised. It all came upon me like a flash of lightning; I am dazed by it still. But how cold you are, dear!” she broke off, for Mercy’s hand, which she had taken, was like ice.

Mercy sank back on the pillow, and turning her face away, was silent for so long that Sylvia bent over her anxiously.

“How thoughtless of me, dear!” she said. “I ought to have waited until the

morning, not come to you with all this excitement when you are tired out with the journey!”

“No, no!” said Mercy, in a slow voice. “You were right to tell me at once—at once. Sylvia, I must go back to London to-morrow. I must go by the first train.”

“Go back to London! Leave me, just now!” exclaimed Sylvia, aghast.

“Yes, yes, I must, I must!” said Mercy, almost fiercely. “Leave me now, dear. I am glad, glad at your happiness. You know that—but, yes, I am tired. Go now, Sylvia!”

Her voice was so imploring that Sylvia kissed her and returned to Audrey.

“Mercy is ill, very ill, I am afraid,” she said, gravely. “I think she scarcely understood—oh, it was thoughtless of me to disturb her to-night! Audrey, I must send for a doctor to-morrow.”

“Certainly we will,” assented Audrey. “Poor Mercy! We will both nurse her back to health. But you’ll be ill, too, my dear, if you don’t go to bed and get some sleep. You are quite feverish. See, I have almost undressed”—she had put on her dressing-robe during Sylvia’s absence—“and you must let me help you. But I will. How lovely this hair of yours is! I have never seen it down before. And what a length!”

Sylvia hung her head so that the hair covered her face.

“It used to make him angry,” she said, in a whisper. “He said that it got in his eyes, and into the puddings,” and she laughed softly.

Audrey laughed.

“That was like a—brother!” she said, archly. “I wonder whether it would make him angry now, or if he would complain even if it did get into his eyes!”

“Don’t!” breathed Sylvia, almost inaudibly.

“Why, what have I said!” exclaimed Audrey, with mock innocence. “How pretty you look when you blush, and—why, what’s this, Sylvia?” she broke off to inquire.

She had been unfastening Sylvia’s dress while she had been bantering her, and had caught sight of a faded ribbon attached to a small flat package which nestled under Sylvia’s bodice.

Sylvia put her hand up to it.

“I don’t know,” she said, with sudden gravity.

“Don’t know!” echoed Audrey.

Sylvia shook her head.

“My father gave it to me the night he died,” she said. “It is the story of my

birth, Audrey.”

“And you do not know!”

“No,” said Sylvia. “I was not to open it for three years,” and in a low voice she told Audrey how the package had been given to her, and the injunction that accompanied it.

Audrey listened open-eyed.

“And when do the three years expire?” she said, in almost awe-stricken tones.

Sylvia thought for a second, then she started slightly.

“To-morrow,” she said, almost solemnly.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Jordan followed Neville out. He was conscious that he had carried off the meeting well, very well; but with this consciousness was mingled no little apprehension. Neville had received his fraternal advances so coldly, to put it mildly, that Jordan knew he should have to be careful how he dealt with him; and he looked at the stalwart figure in front of him, and shuddered as he swore under his breath. He knew Neville’s temper of old, and that if he should be suddenly enraged he could turn and crush Jordan like a nut.

“Curse him!” he muttered. “I thought he was dead. I wish to Heaven he were!” Then aloud he said: “What a big fellow you have become, Neville! I am delighted to see you in such splendid health. Ah, you wanderers have the advantage of us stay-at-homes! Give me your arm, my dear fellow.”

But Neville strode on, ignoring the affectionate request, and Jordan had to walk quickly to keep up with him.

“You have been gaining health and strength while some of us have been wasting ours in sitting up past midnight in the House of Commons. How familiar the whole place must seem to you,” he ran on, smoothly, and ignoring his brother’s silence. “We have often thought of you, Neville; I may say that you have seldom been out of our thoughts, and when I say ‘our,’ I especially allude to dear Audrey. She will be your sister before long. I am sure that will be welcome news to you. And now tell me just this—I must hear the whole account of your life since we parted, when we get home—but tell me this: Has Fortune smiled on you? Have you come back with your pockets full of gold? I hope so, I hope so, fervently.”

Neville forced himself to speak calmly.

“No. My pockets are empty,” he said.

“Tut, tut, I am sorry!” murmured Jordan, sympathetically, a smile of satisfaction playing for a moment on his thin lips, “I had hoped that you had returned with wealth as well as health. But I am glad to see you, rich or poor, my dear Neville, and—and perhaps not so sorry for your ill-luck as I should be, for it will give me the opportunity of proving my affection.”

“Oh!” said Neville, grimly.

“Yes,” went on Jordan, blandly, “I am afraid from your manner, my boy, that your mind is recurring, going back, to our parting. Pray do not allow it to do so. If there was any ill-will between us, time and absence has softened and dispelled it; and in its place, I trust—for my part, I am sure—there is the best and truest of good will.”

Neville looked straight in front of him.

“And so Fortune has proved unkind?” continued Jordan.

“Very,” curtly.

“Well, well. I can understand your disappointment. But it is not given to all of us to succeed; and on those of us whom Fortune favors is bestowed the privilege of helping those near and dear to us. You must let me help you.”

Neville stopped short, and looked at him in the semi-darkness.

“You offer to help me?” he said.

“Certainly, my boy; what more natural? Do you think I am lost to all sense of kinship; that I forget we are brothers.”

“Half brothers, please,” said Neville, grimly.

“Just so, and I cannot forget that our father did you—yes, I will say so candidly—a wrong. You know that he—er—did not mention you in his will?”

Neville’s face flushed. Oh, why had he promised Trale to keep quiet, and leave the working out of affairs to that astute inspector! Why couldn’t he seize this smooth, oily gentleman by the shoulder and shake him!

“Yes,” said Jordan, sadly, “I did my best to induce our father to be reconciled to you, to leave you, at any rate, a competency, but he was immovable. He would scarcely permit me to mention your name. But we will not speak of that; it can only sadden both of us! Tell me your plans, Neville?”

“My plans?” growled the young man.

“Yes,” said Jordan, blandly. “Do you intend to remain in England? Ah! I am afraid not. I have always noticed that when a man has taken to wandering he cannot settle down; once a globe-trotter always a globe-trotter, and I

suppose you are already thinking of starting off for somewhere?"

Neville was silent.

"Silence gives assent! I feared that it would be the case! Well, well! After all, a roaming life has its charms. But you must let me help you. I think I may say without immodesty that I have some interest, you know—or perhaps you don't know that I am in the Cabinet?"

For the life of him he could not keep a tone of proud superiority out of his smooth voice.

"Oh, yes," said Neville, grimly. "I know. I saw you one night coming out of Audrey's house—or the Marlow's—to your carriage, and heard the crowd shout for the great Sir Jordan Lynne."

"In-deed. Really, now! And you did not come forward and make yourself known! I am afraid you are proud! Beware of pride——"

Neville stopped, restrained himself, and strode on.

"Well, yes, I have some influence," resumed Jordan, little guessing how narrow a squeak he had had of being shaken, "and I must use it. I must get something for you, some place abroad. A consulate, or something of that kind. And—er—meanwhile you must come and live at the Court."

Neville growled.

"No? Restless and anxious to be on the move already?" said Jordan, pleasantly. "Well, well! I am sorry. You must let me make you an allowance—no refusal! You must, indeed——" he stopped short and started.

His quick ears had heard a footstep behind them. He looked round and saw a man's figure crouching stealthily under the shadow of the hedge, and his heart leaped as he recognized Jim Banks.

They were in the avenue now; the lights of the village glimmered in the distance. He glanced over his shoulder stealthily, and was silent for a moment or two, then he went on:

"Yes, you must not allow your pride to come between us. You must not forget that I am your brother."

"Half brother," said Neville again, grimly.

Jordan laughed softly.

"Sons of the same father!" he said. "I cannot forget it, if you would. I shall esteem it a favor if you will accept——" he paused. "Shall we say two hundred a year?"

Neville stopped again and looked at him. This man who had robbed him of five or six thousand a year, generously offered him two hundred! He laughed,

actually laughed; a laugh that made Jordan shrink away from him.

“Not enough, Neville? I was afraid of offering you more; your pride, you see! Let us say four! And if you have made up your mind to leave England, we must say five; money does not go so far abroad as it does here. Yes, five! Come! I will get you a berth in some pleasant place in the colonies, and allow you five hundred a year. I beg you will not wound me by refusing!”

They had reached the lane leading to the Court, and crossed over to the lodge.

Neville stopped short.

“You will come in, you will stay at the Court?” said Jordan, with feigned eagerness.

“No!” said Neville. “You say my father left me nothing?”

Jordan shook his head.

“I am sorry, very, very sorry, to say he did not,” he replied.

As he spoke he glanced round; the dimly-seen figure had crept closer.

“And you offer me four—five hundred a year?” said Neville, restraining himself with an effort.

“And I hope, I earnestly hope, you will accept it!” said Jordan. Neville drew a long breath.

“I’ll tell you to-morrow,” he said, grimly. “Good-night,” and he strode off.

Jordan put his hand on the lodge gate, and as he did so felt a hand on his arm.

The shadow that had been following them, stood beside him. It was Jim Banks. He wore a rough workman’s suit, and a fur cap almost entirely concealed his face.

“Who—who was that?” he asked, hoarsely, looking after Neville.

“That gentleman?” said Jordan, quickly, his breath coming and going in sharp pants. “That is my brother, Neville Lynne.”

Lavarick started.

“Him!” he said, hoarsely. “He’s Neville Lynne!”

“Yes,” said Jordan, bending down till his lips almost touched Lavarick’s ears. “That is Neville Lynne.” His breath came fast and hot. “It’s—it’s a quarter of a mile to the village—a lonely road. I—I hope you won’t do anything rash, Banks. But remember your poor daughter!”

With an oath Lavarick left him, and still crouching close to the hedge, followed the unconscious Neville. Jordan stood and watched, his face white, every limb trembling.

He saw Neville striding along, and Jim Banks following like a shadow. He saw Banks gain on him, and crouch as if ready for a spring, something gleaming in his hand.

“Kill him! Curse him! Kill him!” broke from Jordan’s white lips; and at that moment, though he could not have heard the injunction, Lavarick rose as if to spring.

But as he did so, Sir Jordan saw another figure emerge from the darkness and join Neville. It was Trale.

Lavarick saw it, too, and he stopped and slunk back into the hedge.

Jordan waited a moment, watching Neville and Trale walk off together, then with a bitter sense of disappointment he turned in at the lodge gate.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Neville tossed and rolled through the night, but, strange to say, it was not the thought of Jordan’s villainy which kept him from the sleep which knits up the raveled sleeve of care. It was Sylvia.

“Her brother!” he thought. “That’s all I am to her. Just her brother, nothing more! She wouldn’t have flown to me, and made so much of me, if—if she’d cared for me in any other way. And why should she care for me in the way I want? A lovely, radiant creature like her—she looked like a young princess!—and famous, too! No doubt there are dozens of men in love with her, belted earls, and swells of that kind. And perhaps there’s one she cares for!” At the thought he clutched his short hair and groaned, and called himself, for the twentieth time that night, a fool ever to have lost sight of her. “I’ve lost her now!” he sighed. “And serve me jolly well right, too!”

Nor did Lorrimore at the inn have a particularly good night, and as he lay awake thinking of Audrey, he called himself a fool for staying on at the whispered suggestion of Neville.

Perhaps of the three Jordan slept best, though his dreams were disturbed by that spectre of fear which will haunt the guilty, be they never so bold.

In the morning Trale came round to Mrs. Parsons’, and found Neville pacing up and down restlessly in front of the cottage.

“Mr. Neville!” he said in an excited whisper, “I’ve found him!”

“Found him? Who?” said Neville, starting. He was too much engaged thinking of “her” to have any room for any reflections about a “him.”

“Why, Jim Banks!” said Trale, looking round cautiously.

Neville’s eyes flashed, and his interest awoke.

“When—how?”

“Last night,” said Trale. “One of my men came upon him at an inn outside the village, where he was drinking heavily, and sent me word. He is keeping him in sight. We’ll give him just rope enough, we’ll just see what he means to do.”

“And lose him!” said Neville, grimly.

“Not this time, sir,” responded Trale, confidently. “I’ve told my man to knock him on the head and handcuff him, if necessary. No, don’t you be afraid, Mr. Neville; I’ve got him this time. If you can only manage to keep civil to Sir Jordan for a little while longer.”

“It is a large order, but I’ll try,” said Neville, doubtfully.

“Do, sir, do!” pressed Trale. “I’m hoping to catch ’em both so tight that they can’t shuffle out of it. I’m off now, Mr. Neville. Don’t be surprised to see me at any moment.”

Neville walked down to the inn to spend the time, but he was told that Lord Lorrimore had gone out; and after hanging about, still thinking of Sylvia, he made his way to the Grange. As he entered the avenue he saw Lord Lorrimore in front of him, and soon overtook him.

Lorrimore looked grave and anxious.

“Mr. Lynne,” he said, almost at once, “last night, when I stated my intention of leaving England immediately, you said ‘don’t.’ Will you tell me your reason? Excuse the abruptness of the question, but—well, you see how it is with me.”

“Yes, I do,” said Neville; “and that’s why I said ‘don’t,’ Lord Lorrimore, I want you to believe that I’ve good reasons for asking you to stay awhile, but that I can’t give them.”

“It is something in connection with—Miss Hope!”

“It is,” assented Neville. “Look here, Lord Lorrimore; any one can see that Audrey is not happy, that—that, in short, her engagement to my—to Jordan is not making her happy, and that—well, don’t you think it is possible that it may be broken off?”

Lorrimore’s face lighted up with the hope that rose in his heart.

“You think it may?” he said.

“No, I don’t think; I’m certain,” said Neville, gravely.

Lorrimore nodded.

“I will not ask you another question, Mr. Lynne. I will wait. I will only say this: that if—if I thought Au—Miss Hope would be happy with him, I would resign her without another effort. But—well, I don’t like Sir Jordan, and I mistrust him. Now, if it were you to whom she was engaged——”

“Thank you,” said Neville, with a short laugh. “But I want to marry some one else.”

“So I see,” said Lorrimore; “and I wish you luck!”

They had reached the terrace by this time, and found the viscount there.

“Come on!” he said. “Lunch is ready, and Jordan has been here this half-hour. How did you and he get on together last night, Neville?” he said aside to Neville.

Neville shook his head.

“Jordan and I can never be friends, sir,” he said, gravely.

“Dear, dear! Well, I hope you’ll be civil to one another to-day?”

“Oh, yes,” said Neville.

Jordan was in the drawing-room, talking to Audrey, and nodded to the two men pleasantly, but with a covert scrutiny. He was not looking any paler than usual, and seemed in the best of spirits.

“Where’s the signorina?” asked the viscount. “The second bell has rung.”

“She is upstairs with Mercy,” said Audrey, “but will be down directly. You have heard of Sylvia’s friend, Neville?” she said to him.

“Scarcely yet,” he replied. “I have yet to hear a great deal.”

As they went in to lunch the viscount informed them that he had wired to Lady Marlow.

“She’ll be down by the evening train,” he said, rubbing his hands. “I didn’t tell her you were here, Neville.”

“Lady Marlow will be as glad as any of us,” said Jordan, with a brotherly smile.

Sylvia entered at this point. She swept a glance of her lovely eyes round the group, let it rest for a moment on Neville, then, with a bow and a smile that included them all, went to her seat beside the viscount.

“And how is Mercy this morning, my dear?” asked the viscount. “Will you have some chicken? Neville, pass the signorina some chicken, will you?”

Neville carved a wing, his hand trembling. Why had she not stopped and spoken to him as she passed to her place? Had he offended her? Oh, it was perfectly plain that his “little Syl”—“little” no longer—did not care for him.

“She is no better,” said Sylvia, in a low voice; “and yet I have had such

hard work to persuade her to keep in bed. She wants to go to London.”

“If there is anything I can do,” murmured Jordan, always ready with his sympathy and help.

Sylvia shook her head.

“I have sent for a doctor,” she said.

“Such a nice woman!” said the viscount, regretfully. “You haven’t seen her, have you, Jordan?”

“No,” said Jordan; “I have not yet had that pleasure. But I have heard of her from Audrey and the signorina, and hope that I am soon to see her restored to health. She must be a good woman to have secured the inestimable treasure of the signorina’s friendship,” and he bowed to Sylvia.

The lunch proceeded. It was a strange meal, and all of them had the air of persons sitting over a volcano and pretending that they did not know it.

Audrey and Sylvia spoke in low tones, Lorrimore and Neville were almost silent, and the viscount wore an air of forced gayety which was as transparent as glass. Jordan alone seemed to be perfectly at his ease, and “made” the conversation with bland complacency.

“I was saying last night that we ought to have a fete,” he remarked. “We can’t let so joyful an occasion as Neville’s return pass as if it were of no account. What do you say to a big garden party, with tents on the lawn and a luncheon and dancing for the tenantry, and, in fact, everybody?” and he smiled round upon them all.

Neville growled.

“The very thing,” said the viscount. “That’s a capital idea, Jordan, eh, Audrey?”

“Yes,” faltered Audrey.

“Then it shall be done,” said Jordan, nodding brightly. “Neville is so modest that he would like to avoid the fatted calf, but he must not be allowed to do so. Let me see; shall we say this day week——”

He stopped suddenly, and the rest, looking to see what had occasioned the break in the smooth voice, saw him staring at the French window opposite which he sat, his face suddenly grown white to the lips, his eyes fixed with what looked like terror.

“Eh? What’s the matter?” demanded the viscount.

Jordan rose.

“Excuse me,” he said, hurriedly, and he took two or three steps to the window.

But before he could reach it it was burst open, and a man appeared on the threshold.

Sylvia uttered a cry of terror, and turned to the viscount as if for protection. “Lavarick!” broke from Neville’s lips, and he sprang to his feet.

It was Lavarick—desperate, half mad with drink and fury. His clothes were torn, his face livid, his eyes bloodshot.

He stood holding the door and staring straight at Neville with a look of hate which made his ugly face perfectly devilish.

Jordan ran to him and seized his arm.

“Are you mad?” he hissed; but Lavarick flung him off.

“Let me be!” he shouted, hoarsely. “The game’s up! They’re close on me! I’m lagged. But I’ll have my revenge on him before I’m taken,” and he pointed at Neville. “You see that man—all of you—you see him! He’s a scoundrel!”

He made as if to spring at him, but Lorrimore had been watching, and had seized his arms and twisted them behind his back.

Lavarick struggled with the strength of a madman for a moment or two, then he suddenly desisted, and, gasping for breath, nodded his head toward Neville, who stood regarding him with fierce anger.

“That man ain’t fit to sit here among such as you. He’s a scoundrel!”

“Neville, do you know this man?” exclaimed the viscount, enraged and indignant.

“Know him!” said Neville.

“Yes, he knows me, and I know him,” broke in Lavarick. “Ask him what he’s done with my gel, my poor gel he ruined and deserted! Ask him what he’s done with her! Curse him! Curse him!” and he made a futile effort to free himself. “Look at the fine gentleman, he hasn’t a word to say. Where’s my Rachel, you villain?”

It was quite true. Neville had not a word to say, for amazement had stricken him dumb.

“The man’s mad!” he said at last.

“Mad, am I?” yelled Lavarick, hoarsely. “No, I am not mad. Answer, you villain! Where is she? You don’t know, you don’t care. Oh, if I’d only had another day! Where’s my gel, my Rachel?”

The viscount looked from one to the other.

“What is the man raving about? Audrey, signorina, leave the room.”

They neither of them moved.

“Is—is there anything in what the fellow says, Neville?” he asked, gravely. Neville shook his head.

“He is mad,” he said. “I know him; there is not a greater scoundrel unhung; but I know nothing of his daughter. His name is Lavarick, a bushranger. Lord Lorrimore, here, knows him.”

“You lie! You ruined her!” shrieked Lavarick. “It’s true!” he said, hoarsely, turning his bloodshot eyes to the others. “If you don’t believe me, ask Sir Jordan, his own brother. Ask him!” He swung his head round to Jordan fiercely. “Tell them. You know it’s true.”

Jordan hung his head and sighed.

“Believe me, Neville,” he murmured; “it will be better to own that you have erred.”

Neville looked at him.

“What!” he said, in an ominous voice.

“You see,” said Lavarick. “His own brother told me that it was him. He’s a liar, too, and I wouldn’t have believed him, but he proved it. Here, you,” and he nodded to one of the footmen who had crowded in, “feel in my breast pocket; there’s a letter.”

The viscount signed permission, and one of the servants took the half-burned letter from Lavarick’s pocket.

“There, read it. Show it to him; show it round. Ask him if he knows it. It’s—it’s my gel’s, my Rachel’s writing,” and he groaned.

The viscount took the letter and extended it to Neville, who accepted it, but after a glance at it gave it back.

“I never saw it before,” he said.

“You lie!” yelled Lavarick. “His own brother, Sir Jordan, here, found it among his papers.”

“Is this true, Jordan?” demanded the viscount, gravely.

Jordan shook his head and sighed.

“I regret to say that it is true,” he replied. “I found the letter, as this man states. I know no more, but I know Neville too well not to feel sure that he will make reparation.”

Neville would have sprung upon him then, but something stopped him.

It was Sylvia, who had thrown herself on his breast, and who, with white face and flashing eyes, confronted the rest.

“It is false! false!” she cried, panting. “He did not do it. He could not,” and her arms wound round his neck.

Neville bent his head, a glow of heavenly joy thrilling through him, and quelling his rage and indignation.

“God bless you, my darling!” he murmured. “My Syl!”

Then he raised his head and looked around.

“That letter I have never seen till now,” he said. “I never saw his daughter _____”

“Let me get at him!” broke in Lavarick, struggling. “He’s killed my gel, my Rachel. Sir Jordan knows it. Speak out once more, Sir Jordan,” he said, hoarsely.

Jordan looked round.

“I am afraid it is too true,” he said “My brother was young, the temptation was great, and he fell; but I had hoped that he had made reparation——”

“It is false! false!” panted Sylvia.

“Yes,” said a voice in the doorway; “it is false.”

At the sound of the voice, full of anguish yet strangely ill and resigned, Lavarick uttered a cry and stood motionless, gazing before him.

Some one came slowly through the crowd of servants, and stood apart from them. It was Mercy.

Jordan shrank back.

“Rachel!” broke from his white lips.

“Rachel!” echoed from Lavarick, in tones that would have moved a heart of stone to pity even for such as he. “Rachel, my gel!”

Mercy looked at him with her sunken eyes, and then turned them on Jordan. She said not a word, but if she had raised voice and hand and denounced him, the spectators could not have been more convinced of his guilt.

He leaned against the wall, trembling, shaking, his face ashen gray with fear, and his lips still formed her name.

Lavarick stood for a moment speechless, then he turned with an awful cry to the shrinking wretch, and would have broken from even Lorrimore’s strong arms had not Trale and a couple of policemen at that moment rushed in breathlessly from the terrace.

In an instant the handcuffs were on, and Lavarick was helpless in the grasp of the constables.

A scene of confusion followed, in which Jordan glided to the window; but Trale had slipped before it, and closed and barred his retreat.

Then Sylvia, who had flown to Mercy's side, uttered a cry. Mercy had slid from her grasp, and had fallen lifeless to the ground.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Trale stood between Jordan and the window.

"Do you dare to stop me, fellow?" demanded Jordan.

"One moment, Sir Jordan," said Trale. Then he waited until Sylvia and Audrey had gone out with the servants carrying Mercy. "Will you kindly close the door, Mr. Neville?" he said.

Neville shut the door.

"I've ventured to stop you, Sir Jordan," said Trale, "as I have something of importance to communicate to Lord Marlow, and I should like do it in your presence."

He drew the will out of his pocket, and placed it on the table in front of the viscount. At sight of it Lavarick uttered a low cry.

"The will!" he said.

Jordan looked from one to the other, his white face set defiantly.

"What is this?" demanded the viscount.

"Sir Greville's lost will, my lord," replied Trale, gravely, and with evident enjoyment. "The last will, my lord. Sir Jordan knows its contents. If you'll glance through it, you'll see that it leaves the property very differently from how it goes now. There is a third to Mr. Neville, and a third to the daughter of the lady Sir Greville wanted to marry."

The viscount looked at the will.

"Read it, you, Lorrimore," he said. "How did you come by this, Trale? It's a serious matter."

"Yes, my lord," assented Trale. "It was found by Mr. Neville, in the trunk of a tree, where Jim Banks had hidden it while he was bargaining with Sir Jordan for it."

Lavarick nodded, his bloodshot eyes fixed on Jordan.

"That's so," he said. "I stole it on the night the old man died; that scoundrel would have burned it if I hadn't. He knew of it all the time. He'd have bought it of me. I met him on the Burrows on Friday, the sixteenth, and put it in the tree; he got behind unbeknown to me and stole it; how Trale got it I don't

know.”

Jordan laughed.

“A clumsy invention, Lord Marlow,” he said, contemptuously. “This man is in league with our clever friend Trale, or has deceived him—the latter, I think. I have never met this man on the Burrows, or elsewhere; the thing is a forgery, I have no doubt. Why, the fellow has been already convicted of forgery!”

Banks gnashed his teeth.

“If you’ll only let me loose for a minute, only a minute!” he said to the policemen who held him. “I won’t attempt to escape!”

“Sir Jordan’s memory is at fault,” said Trale, laconically. “He was at the Burrows on Friday night, the sixteenth, for I was there and saw him, and not only I, but Mr. Neville.”

“Neville!” exclaimed Jordan, unwittingly.

“Yes, Sir Jordan; up in the tree, just above where Jim Banks placed the will,” said Trale, politely. “Mr. Neville and I heard every word that passed. You were to give Banks twenty-five thousand pounds!”

The viscount uttered a note of astonishment.

“Come, Trale,” he said. “This is impossible!”

Jordan laughed.

“That is the word!” he said. “It is impossible and ridiculous. Why should I buy a forgery?”

Trale took out a paper parcel, carefully sealed, and laid it on the table as he had laid the will.

“If you’ll open that, my lord.”

The viscount opened it, and there lay the notes.

“I picked them up when the candle went out, Sir Jordan,” he said, almost as blandly as Sir Jordan himself could have spoken.

Jordan drew a long breath, and looked round with a sinister expression on his white, drawn face. The game was up, and he knew it. He shot a glance of malignant hatred at Lorrimore and Neville.

“This is a conspiracy!” he said, between his teeth.

“You’re right, Sir Jordan. That’s just what it is,” cut in Trale, quite cheerfully. “You and Banks here have conspired to conceal a will, and defraud Sir Neville and a lady unknown, and it’s my duty to ask his lordship for a warrant for your apprehension.”

The sweat broke out on Jordan’s forehead.

“Enough of this!” he said.

“I repeat, it is a conspiracy, and I will punish all that have had a hand in it. As to that—that forgery, I shall fight it to the last penny I possess.”

“No use,” said Trale, as cheerfully as before. “I showed the will to Mrs. Parsons this morning, and she recognizes it. She didn’t know what it was when she signed it, but she identifies it. You’ll see a couple of blots over her signature, my lord. She made ’em, and remembers making ’em. Knew them and the signature in a moment. It’s no use, Sir Jordan; there isn’t an inch of ground left for you to stand upon. You’ve cut it all away, yourself!”

Jordan’s head dropped. He seemed to shrink in size and stature as he realized the truth of Trale’s assertion.

“I will trouble you for my property, Lord Marlow,” he said, advancing to the table and reaching for the notes; but Trale snatched them up, and whipped them behind him.

“Beg pardon, Sir Jordan,” he said. “You denied that they were your property just now; they’re mine at present, until you’ve proved your right to them, and when you’ve done that you’ll complete my case against you up to the hilt. I’m going to pay these notes into his lordship’s account at the bank, and you can get ’em by proving ’em to be yours; if you can.”

“Very well,” said Jordan, hoarsely. “I thank you all for showing your hands so plainly. I admit nothing. I denounce that—that thing as a forgery. I shall indict you for a conspiracy, and if there is a justice to be had, I will see you punished.”

“Bravo!” said Trale, under his breath. “He’s game to the last.”

Jordan moved to the door, and Trale stepped aside and opened it, but Jordan paused a moment and looked at Lorrimore.

“I have to thank you for a greater part of this—this insult and outrage, Lord Lorrimore!” he said.

Lorrimore shook his head almost sadly.

“I’m afraid not Sir Jordan. I’m sorry to say that, though I felt certain you were a villain, I have had no hand in unmasking you. I deeply regret it, but it’s the truth!” responded Lorrimore, grimly.

“As to that pauper and scum of the earth——” said Jordan, glaring at Neville.

“Not pauper, Sir Jordan,” interrupted Trale—Neville had stood unmoved—“not pauper. A third of the property, you know! That’s better than the five hundred a year you offered him last night.”

With something between a snarl and a groan, Jordan passed out.

As he did so, Lavarick laughed an awful laugh, full of malignant satisfaction.

“Take me away,” he said, hoarsely, and as if he were worn out with the excitement of the scene. “You can take them off if you like. I wouldn’t make a run for it if you was to offer me those notes. For he’d beat you yet, if I was out of the way! Yes, he’d beat you; but he won’t while I’m alive and here to smash him! I can tell all! I will tell you all. But take me away now, unless—unless——” He stopped and groaned. “Oh, my poor gel, my Rachel.”

Trale knew his man. He stepped up to him and unlocked the handcuffs.

“If his lordship will let you, you shall see her, Banks,” he said, solemnly. Lord Marlow nodded, and Trale put his hand on Lavarick’s shoulder. “Come up with me,” he said. “If she’s able to see you, I’ll give you ten minutes with her,” and he led Lavarick from the room.

The two, father and daughter, were alone for their ten minutes, then Lavarick came down, his head sunk on his breast, his gait so feeble and uncertain, that Trale had to give him his arm to the fly that was waiting in the avenue to take him to prison.

The three men looked at each other; then Neville, borne down by the weight of shame, sank into a chair and rested his head on his hands.

“And he is my brother!” he groaned.

The viscount went and laid both his hands on Neville’s shoulders.

“No!” he said. “Only half brother, my dear boy! Only half your blood runs in his veins, and that’s the half that shows his pluck. He has pluck, confound him! Cheer up, Neville! A third—why, that’s five or six thousand a year! I give you joy, my boy.”

“And I!” said Lorrimore, taking Neville’s hand. “Cheer up, Neville, if you’ll let me call you so! There are brighter days in store for you!”

“My great goodness, what an escape for—Audrey!” ejaculated the viscount.

Lorrimore started.

“She—she must not know,” he said, quietly.

“No, no!” said Neville. “The shameful story must be hushed up in some way. He may keep my money. I’d rather lose every penny of it than have the old name disgraced and dishonored. The thought of it sickens me.”

“That poor girl, too, Mercy!” said the viscount. “What a villain Jordan—I beg your pardon. Oh, for Heaven’s sake, let’s try and forget him for half an

hour. Lorrimore, open that bottle of champagne, will you? Upon my word, I'm not equal to it. There, my boy, take a glass," and he forced one into Neville's hand affectionately. "After all, we can manage to keep it quiet, I dare say. I'll see my lawyer—and—and get hold of Trale. But there's Jordan—what is he going to do, I wonder? 'Pon my word, I'm curious to see what his next move will be. Lord, I wish her ladyship were here; her head's worth two and a half of mine, or that of any one of us."

They were not long left in doubt as to Jordan's next move, for an hour later, while they were pacing up and down the terrace, a groom was seen galloping up the drive.

He pulled up his sweating horse, and handed a note to Neville.

"From Sir Jordan, sir," he said, touching his hat. "And he'll wait at the Court for an hour for the answer."

"Wait," said Neville, as he opened the letter.

He read it, and turned furiously to the other two.

"This is his next move!" he said, bitterly. "He offers me two thousand a year 'to compromise the matter,' as he puts it. If I do not accept, he will fight to the last. And he reminds me that I have no money, and that possession is nine points of the law."

"Yes! He has plenty of pluck!" remarked the viscount.

Neville tore the note in pieces and flung the fragments into the air.

"Tell your master what you saw me do. That's my answer," he said to the groom, and the man rode off full pelt back to the Court.

"Right!" said the viscount, approvingly. "Just what I should have expected of you, Neville. You haven't any money, perhaps, but your friends have!"

"And Neville must let me count myself as one!" said Lorrimore, significantly. "If it's fighting Sir Jordan wants, he shall have plenty of it."

At this moment the doctor came toward them.

He looked grave as the viscount inquired after Mercy.

"She is very ill, my lord," he said. "Has been weak and ailing for some time, and this is a complete collapse. I'll do my best, however, and while there's life——"

"For Heaven's sake, don't say that!" said Lord Marlow, with a shudder; "that phrase is the medical death sentence! Anyway, we'll do our best; she shall have the most careful nursing."

The doctor looked down. Why is it doctors rarely look one in the face?

"Well," he said, hesitatingly, "I think it will be better to move the patient as

soon as possible. She wishes it herself, particularly wishes it. There are associations connected with the place, I understand?"

The viscount nodded.

"Yes, I should advise her removal as soon as she is strong enough to bear it. I shall look in later in the day, my lord, and be able to give a more positive opinion."

Lorrimore and the viscount walked a little way with the doctor, but Neville remained on the terrace; it was because he thought it possible that a certain young lady might snatch a minute from the sick room?

He heard a light step behind, and swung around; but it was Audrey, not Sylvia.

He held out both hands and took hers. She had been crying, but there was a look of relief in her eyes.

"My poor Audrey!" he said. "But, no, I will not mock you with pity. You are to be congratulated on an escape!"

"Hush, Neville dear," she said. "Not one word more. We—we will not speak of what has happened. I came to tell you that Sylvia cannot leave Mercy. The poor girl seems to cling to her. Everybody loves Sylvia."

"I know one person who does!" said Neville, ruefully.

Audrey smiled up at him.

"You don't deserve that she should love you, sir," she said; then she started at the sound of Lorrimore's voice.

"Oh, is he here?" she said, trembling a little.

"Yes," said Neville. "You don't want to see him?"

"No, no!" she responded drawing him into the room. "Send him away, Neville. I should die of shame if—if I saw him now, so soon after."

After Jordan's exposure she meant, and Neville understood.

"However, you came to——" he began, but she interrupted him piteously.

"Ah, Neville, you don't know him! How masterful he is, and how useless it seemed to resist him. Besides, I—heard that—Lorrimore was engaged."

"I think I can understand how you were trapped, Audrey," said Neville, gravely. "But you are free now. And Lorrimore—what a good fellow he is, and how he loves you! You will reward him for his long devotion and faithfulness, Audrey?"

Her face crimsoned.

"Hadn't—hadn't we better wait till he asks me?" she retorted, and ran from him.

Neville went outside and found Lorrimore alone on the terrace; he turned quickly.

“Didn’t I hear Miss Hope’s voice?” he asked.

“Yes!” said Neville, in his blunt fashion. “Look here, Lorrimore, if I were you I’d go to——”

“To Africa?” said Lorrimore, biting his lip.

“Africa be—blessed! No. To London, anywhere, just for a few weeks, days. Don’t you know how it is with her? Man, you can’t expect her to rush into your arms the very moment she is free.”

“No, I can’t,” admitted Lorrimore, “but I’d like her to, all the same. But of course I’ll go. I’ll go up to London. And—and for Heaven’s sake send me a wire to the Athenian Club the very first moment you can!”

“I will,” said Neville, grasping his hand.

“And tell her——No. Yes, why should I not tell her what she knows already? Tell her that I love her better than ever, and that the moment she will let me I will come to her. That’s all. Make my excuses. Good-by,” and with just a glance at the house—he did not see Audrey, who was watching them from behind a muslin curtain—he ran down the steps.

“I suppose I’d better go, too,” mused Neville, as he looked after him. But still he hung about, and presently his patience met with its reward. He was lying back in a reclining chair in the smoking-room when he heard the door open, and thinking it was the viscount, he said, without looking around: “I think I’d better clear out, Marlow; there’s no chance of seeing her, I’m afraid. That’s what I’m waiting for.”

“If you’ll tell me who ‘her’ is, I’ll see,” said a voice behind him, that caused him to spring to his feet, upsetting the chair.

Sylvia stood with her hand on the door, her eyes downcast, her face flushed.

“I—I thought I should find Lord Marlow here,” she said, as if she were going to run away.

But he took the door out of her hand and closed it.

“Sylvia, I want to speak to you.”

“Yes?” softly and demurely, without raising her eyes.

“I want to tell you that—that I love you,” he blurted out.

“Yes?” still more softly, though her bosom was heaving.

Neville looked at her ruefully.

“And—oh, Syl, don’t you love me?”

“Of—of course I do. One—one ought to love one’s—brother.”

His face reddened.

“Brother! I don’t want you to love me like that. I don’t love you as if you were a sister. I want you to be my wife. There!”

“Your wife?” she said, almost inaudibly, her eyes still downcast.

“My wife,” he repeated. “I’ve loved you like that ever since I’ve lost you. Ah, you can’t tell how I’ve loved and longed for you; and—and if I can’t have you for my wife—well, I shall be the most miserable man in the world. Oh, why don’t you speak?” he cried, impetuously.

“I was thinking,” she said, still softly, still keeping him from her at arms’ length, as it were, by her manner. “Things have changed. You aren’t Jack any longer, but Mr. Neville Lynne, and a rich man——”

“What difference does that make?” he broke in.

“A great deal! You are an English country gentleman, and ought not to marry an opera singer, Mr.—Mr. Lynne.”

Neville stared at her.

“Is that your answer?” he said. “You know it’s only an excuse! And this morning——Oh, Syl, I thought you loved me! Why did you stand up for me if you didn’t?” he said, with such disappointment and reproach in his voice and eyes that Syl could not withstand him any longer.

“So I do! So I did!” she exclaimed, and she cried as he took her in his arms. “You know I love you! It is you who were blind not—not to see it long ago. I have always loved you! Ah, you didn’t know, you didn’t guess, Jack, dear. Jack, my Jack!”

He kissed her brow and eyes and lips passionately, as the light broke in upon him.

“Oh, what a blind idiot I was!” he said, remorsefully, and with mingled self-reproach and pity. “I—I thought that you only cared for me as sisters do——”

“Sister! I hate the word!” she cried, with a stamp of her foot. “I shall hate it for the rest of my days!”

“All right,” he said, enfolding her still more tightly. “Wife’s better, isn’t it? My wife! Oh, Syl, Syl! I’m like the viscount, and don’t know whether I am standing on my head or my heels; but this I do know, that I have won the sweetest, loveliest girl in all the world,” and he raised her face and looked into her upturned eyes with all the love that had been stored up for so many weary months.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Lady Marlow arrived by the evening train, and the instant she had reached her own boudoir sent for Audrey and Sylvia.

“Now, my dears,” she said, looking up from the chair on which she had seated herself, without waiting to take her outdoor things off, “I’ll trouble you to tell me what all this means. The viscount has been endeavoring to do so all the way from the station, but has got so mixed up that I can make nothing of it. Sylvia, I think you had better tell me,” and she held out her hand to her. “Is it true that Neville Lynne has come back, and that you are to be his wife?”

“Yes,” faltered Sylvia, who had sunk down beside the chair.

“And pray where is he?”

“He has gone back to his rooms,” she said, in a low voice.

“Please ring the bell,” said her ladyship. “My love to Mr. Lynne, and he will please come to the Grange at once,” she said to the lady’s-maid; “and tell the coachman to take the dog-cart for Mr. Lynne’s luggage. Now, then,” to Sylvia, “and it’s true, I suppose, that a will has been found, and that he is left a third of the fortune?”

“Yes,” said Sylvia, more composedly.

“And that Jordan——”

She stopped, and held out her arms to Audrey, and Sylvia stole from the room and left them alone together.

Perhaps Lady Marlow found that Audrey was not in need of much consolation. As Neville had said, she was to be congratulated.

When Neville arrived he found them all in the drawing-room, ready for dinner, and he went straight up to Lady Marlow and took the hands she extended to him.

“May I, viscount?” he asked, looking around with a flush on his handsome face.

“Oh, certainly,” replied the viscount, and Neville bent down and kissed her.

Lady Marlow laughed, the tears in her eyes.

“You haven’t improved in your manners, sir,” she said. “You were always a bad, bold boy. And so you have come back, and are going to marry our friend the signorina.”

“Yes,” said Neville, looking at Sylvia. “Has she told you all?”

“Oh, yes, and a great deal more than you know,” said her ladyship, dryly. “I think you are a very lucky man, Neville.”

“So do I,” he assented. “How well you look, Lady Marlow! I declare you are younger——”

“Thank you. Is that the style of compliment that obtains in the gold-diggings?” Still, she looked pleased with him. “But you shall sit next me at dinner, and talk to me all the time. The signorina will have quite enough of your conversation for the rest of her life.”

“I dare say,” said Neville, happily. “But I ought to say that I haven’t a dress coat. You were kind enough to send for the luggage; but there wasn’t any.”

The viscount laughed.

“It’s a good joke!” he said. “I shall have to lend you some things of mine—they’ll come down as far as your ankles and elbows, I dare say.”

They went in to dinner, and the charitable-minded will not deem them selfish if they forgot poor Mercy upstairs, and were happy. You see, they had not been happy for so long!

Neville and Lady Marlow did nearly all the talking, Sylvia listening with a smile and many blushes as Neville gave an account of their joint “brother and sister” establishment at Lorn Hope; and Audrey sat silent and thoughtful, but without that scared, hunted, expression on her face which had haunted it for the last few weeks. She was free, free!

By mutual consent the two gentlemen accompanied the ladies to the drawing-room, and they were still talking over the wonderful past and the more wonderful present, when a footman approached the viscount noiselessly and said:

“Mr. Trale would be much obliged if you’d see him, my lord.”

“I think not,” said the viscount, promptly. “I’ve had enough of Trale and all his works for one day. To-morrow, James. I’ve gone to bed, please.”

The footman turned again with a message for Neville: Would he please see Mr. Trale?

Her ladyship looked round.

“Why shouldn’t we all see him?” she said. “Unless there are any more secrets.”

“No, no,” said Neville. “Let him come in, Lady Marlow.”

Trale was shown in, and looked rather nonplussed for the moment at the

size of his audience; but only for a moment.

“Sorry to disturb you, my lady,” he said, turning to her quite naturally and as a matter of course; “but Jim Banks——”

“That’s Lavarick,” explained Neville, in a low voice.

Lady Marlow nodded.

“I know. Go on.”

“Well, my lady, he’s made a clean breast of it, and—and a part of his confession is so—so astonishing, and concerns”—he looked at Neville and then at Sylvia—“Mr. Neville, that I thought it my duty——”

“To bewilder and badger us without delay,” finished the viscount, good-temperedly.

“Yes, my lord,” said Trale, gravely. “You are aware that the third of the Lynne money is left to the daughter of the lady Sir Greville was to marry?”

“Yes, yes?” said her ladyship. “I know who she is, or, rather, who her mother was. Her name was Chester.”

“Quite right, my lady.”

“She and her husband left England——”

She stopped and looked at Neville. She had been going to say, “driven from England by Sir Greville,” but stopped in time.

“Right, my lady,” said Trale, approvingly.

“And this daughter of hers must be found as quickly as possible. It will be difficult. Mr. Neville knows how difficult it is to find a missing person,” and she nodded at Neville.

Trale shook his head eagerly.

“If Jim Banks’ story is true, and I think it is, there won’t be any difficulty in this case, my lady.” He paused, and looked at Sylvia and hesitated. “Banks’ statement is this: That when he’d stolen the will, the night Sir Greville died, he thought he could make most money out of it by finding the young girl and the people belonging to her. He’d seen her father once, and he set off tracing him. He learned that Mrs. Chester was dead, and that the young girl and her father had gone to Australia.”

“Australia!” murmured Neville, looking at Sylvia, who sat with her hands clasped and her head bowed.

“Yes, sir; and Jim Banks, who is as determined a man as you’d find in a day’s walk, followed on the chance of getting at him. And he did discover him—found him at the point of death.”

The tears were running down Sylvia’s cheeks, and Neville, though he had

not yet got the clue, went to her and put his arm round her.

“At the point of death. In fact, he saw him die, and what’s more, saw him give a packet to his little girl, telling her that it was the story of her birth. The girl was known by the name of——” He stopped. “Shall—shall I go on?”

Her ladyship nodded.

“Go on.”

Sylvia got up, put Neville’s arm from her gently, and left the room.

“Yea,” said Trale, as if relieved; “the young lady’s name was—Sylvia Bond. They were her two given names, and——”

Neville uttered a cry of amazement.

“Sylvia!” he said. “Do you mean——”

“Yes, Mr. Neville,” responded Trale, gravely. “The young lady—the signorina, who has just left the room—is Mr. Chester’s daughter, and the heiress under the will.”

An excited colloquy followed.

“Then—then Sylvia owns one-third of the money!” exclaimed the viscount.

Trale shook his head.

“Wait a bit, my lord, if you’ll pardon me,” he said, gravely. “Jim Banks’ statement may be true; as I said, I think it is. But—but—well, I’m no lawyer, my lord, but I’m afraid it would be difficult to prove her claim unless that packet contained all the papers, certificates, and so on, and unless that packet’s in existence. And I’m afraid that’s too much to hope for, seeing the strange adventures the young lady has gone through. Lavarick tried to steal it, as Mr. Neville knows, and what he tried to do some one else may have succeeded in doing; or it may have got lost. I don’t want Mr. Neville or the young lady to be buoyed up with a hope that can’t be fulfilled.”

“Quite right, Trale, quite right!” said the viscount, ruefully. “As you say, this packet——”

The door opened as he was speaking, and Sylvia, with Audrey, who had gone after her, entered.

They came up to the table, and Sylvia, very pale, laid the packet in front of the viscount.

He took it with an ejaculation.

“It’s—it’s——But it’s sealed, my dear. I’m to open it? Here, Neville, you open it.”

Neville did so, and they gathered round him. He took up one of several

papers, and read solemnly:

“I, Julian Chester, declare these certificates—being the marriage certificate of myself and wife, and the birth and baptismal certificates of my daughter, Sylvia Bond Chester—to be genuine, and I charge such person or persons into whose hands they may fall to preserve them. I have nothing to leave my beloved child, whom I consign to the care of her Heavenly Father, in humble trust and confidence that He will protect and succor her.

“(Signed)

Julian Chester.”

Sylvia hid her face on Neville’s breast.

Trale was the first to speak, and his honest face was glowing with satisfaction and delight.

“It’s all right!” he exclaimed, using his favorite formula. “It’s all right, Mr. Neville! Every one of them can be verified—and her claim proved! I’m lawyer enough to know that! Take care of ’em, my lord! Lock them up! Hurrah—oh, I beg your ladyship’s pardon,” and in the very act of swinging his hat, he stopped, covered with confusion.

“Don’t apologize, Trale!” exclaimed the viscount. “We all say hurrah! You’re a good fellow, Trale! You’ve—you’ve managed this business splendidly, and—yes, you’re far too good a man for a hole and corner place like this! Why—” and for the first time in his life the viscount swore before ladies, “you ought to be chief commissioner! You come with me to the library and have a glass of wine! And you come, too, Neville, when—when you can get away. Prove her claim! We’ll do it if—as Jordan says—we spend every penny we’ve got!”

CHAPTER LAST.

Indeed, the viscount was a great deal more keen about Sylvia’s fortune than Sylvia herself.

“You don’t know how rich I am, sir!” she said to Neville, as they wandered through the lanes the next morning, and he showed all his boyhood’s playing grounds, as he had promised himself that he would, little dreaming how soon the delight of doing so would become possible to him. “Do you know, Ja—Neville, what I earn in the course of an operatic season? Do you realise——” and she drew herself on tiptoe and looked at him with all the dignity she could

put into her expression—and she was a good actress, as we know, “do you realize that the young person who stands before you is Signorina Stella, the celebrated prima donna, and that she can afford to lose five thousand a year _____”

Neville caught her as she stood on tiptoe and lifted her up in his strong arms until her waist was on a level with his face.

“Put me down, sir! How dare you!” she cried, blushing furiously. “Do you imagine that because a certain wild girl called Sylvia allowed you to carry her about—the tomboy!—that you can take such liberties with the Signorina Stella! Oh, put me down—dearest!—some one will see us! Seriously, Neville,” as he let her feet touch the ground again lightly, “we can do without this money——”

“I think not,” said Neville, in his old style, that instantly recalled to Sylvia the hut in Lorn Hope, and Meth, and the claim. “The signorina will have to make her bow to the public——”

“But, Jack! Ah, how proud you are! You—you worked for me one time _____”

“And I’m perfectly willing to work for you now and forever,” he said. “What I object to is the mere idea of your working for me. Besides,” his face darkened, “there is such a thing as justice, though I believe it’s rather out of fashion to think so, and justice you shall have.”

There was no more to be said; in fact, they had something else to talk about, these two.

But the viscount was not to be dissuaded from fighting; indeed, he was eager to begin. And when they all, excepting Mercy, returned to London, he went straight to a lawyer’s, and instructed him to fire the first shot in the form of the usual letter.

They, Audrey, Neville, and the Marlows, went to the opera on the night of their return to hear Sylvia sing; and her ladyship anticipated much enjoyment in watching Neville’s delight. But she was doomed to disappointment. He started when Sylvia came on; his face flushed when she began to sing; but presently it grew pale, and his brows knit, and as the storm of applause broke out after her first important song, he got up from the chair, and leaned against the back of the box. Then he bent forward to Lady Marlow.

“I—I can’t stand it any longer,” he growled. “It—it seems as if she belonged to all of them, and not to me. I must go!”

And out he went.

Lady Marlow found him in the smoking-room when they came home,

sitting with a huge cigar, and looking so unutterably jealous and wretched that, though she had meant to bully him, her heart melted.

“You jealous boy!” she said.

“I know—I know!” he assented, reddening. “But I can’t help it. All the time she was singing I was thinking of how she used to sit on the edge of the claim and sing to me—alone, you understand—alone; and the sight of that crowded house sitting there as if they’d paid to hear her—and they had paid—drove me silly! Lady Marlow, she must leave the stage——”

“She’s her own mistress, sir.”

“But she is going to be my wife——”

“Well, then,” she retorted, “then you’ll be her master, and in your present frame of mind the sooner——”

She stopped. But she had said enough.

He sprang up.

“Do you think——Would she marry me at once? How dare I ask her? I haven’t a penny——”

The door opened, and Sylvia entered. She had caught his last words only. She stopped short and looked at him. She was in evening dress, radiant, lovely, all that a man desires in woman.

“Who says he has not a penny?” she said.

“I—I,” the poor fellow stammered, “I may never get this confounded money. I—am a pauper, anyhow, at present.”

She glided up to him, and put both her hands on his shoulders, and forced his eyes to meet hers full of love and adoration.

“You forget!” she said. “Ah, Jack, you forget that you spent all when you bought me that night in Lorn Hope Camp!”

They were married. How trite, how hackneyed is the sentence! And yet how much it means to a man and woman who loved as these two loved! They were married in Lynne Church, quite quietly, “as a sensible man ought to be, without any fuss!” as the viscount, who gave the bride away, declared. And one would be inclined to say that they were the happiest couple in Lynne, but that Audrey was present as bridesmaid, and Lorrimore as best man. Neville had sent him the wire the moment Sylvia had named the day.

“Be my best man,” he said. “She,” meaning Audrey, “can’t refuse to see you on our wedding day, and—well, weddings are as catching as measles!”

As the happy pair were starting from the Grange on their wedding trip, and Sylvia had at last drawn her head into the carriage, from the window of which

she had been craning to catch the last glimpse of the group on the steps, she turned to Neville, who was busy digging the rice out of his mustache and waistcoat, and with eyes over-brimming with happiness and laughter, said softly:

“Aren’t you sorry I’m not Miss Mary Brown, Jack?”

“Mary Brown?”

She clapped her hands.

“Oh, you heartless man! You have forgotten her!”

Then, as he laughed and colored, she nestled up to him, and told him how she had suffered from the green-eyed monster.

“No!”

“Yes! And you never saw it. Ah, Jack, you were blind! They say that love is always all on one side,” she added, with a little quiver of the lips. “Is it? Or do you love me a little, Jack? Are you glad that you bought me with that nugget, or do you think it was not such a bad bargain after all?”

And though he said not a word she was satisfied with his answer.

They had left Mercy at the Grange at her own desire; and Sylvia had left her better than could have been expected, and with the understanding that Mercy, as soon as she was strong enough, should follow her to Bury street. But she did not do so. Instead of herself there came a letter which Sylvia has shown to no one, not even to her husband, for in it, while telling her of her whereabouts, and her plans for the future, Mercy had enjoined her to silence.

“Let me pass out of your life, dear,” she had written. “Even the sight of your dear face would only rouse the old pain and anguish. Do not even attempt to see me, for I think that I could not bear to see you; judge, then, how little able I am to meet any one who knows me and my history.”

Sylvia understood, and obeyed the injunction. But she thought of her, even during that happy morn in which the newly-married bride is supposed to think of no one but her husband.

They spent three months in wandering—almost hand in hand, certainly heart to heart—about the Continent, then returned to London, where their friends eagerly awaited them; and, as Audrey said, a second honeymoon began.

“You’ve come in time for all the best plays in the theatre,” she said. “And mamma is going to have a dance——”

“And we are just going to serve a writ on the Right Hon. Sir Jordan!” put in the viscount. “I suppose you have been so wrapped up in your two sweet

selves that you have forgotten all about your lawsuit.”

Neville colored.

“ ’Pon my word, that’s about the truth!” he said.

“Ah, well, I haven’t!” said the viscount. “I’ve been hard at work. It’s going to be a tough fight, I can tell you. Jordan is game to the backbone! Did you read his speech in the House last night?”

“No,” grunted Neville. “I read one once, and one will do for me.”

“It was splendid. It was, indeed!” said the viscount. “He’s a wonderful man; it’s a pity he’s such a vil—I—I mean——”

Neville turned away.

“I’m not sure he won’t beat us yet,” went on Lord Marlow. “My man—I mean the lawyer—says that, anyhow, Jordan can keep us at it for months, perhaps years. You see, he’s everything, the estates, the money, his great name, at his back! Who’d believe such things of him as we shall charge him with? They sound incredible! And he shows not an inch of white feather; a regular ovation in the House last night, they tell me, and Jordan calm and composed as—as Pitt himself! A wonderful man! If it wasn’t that we’ve got Trale on our side—and, by the way, I’ve managed to get our friend promoted. His fortune’s made.”

“I’m glad of that!” said Neville, heartily.

“Yes! The good fellow’s delighted with his rise; but he’s just as keen about this case as ever. He’s in London ‘working it up,’ as he calls it: almost lives at the lawyer’s. You’ll be sure to see him to-morrow.”

But they saw him that evening.

They were just going in to dinner, “the house party,” as her ladyship called it, for Lorrimore was there, when he was announced.

He came in looking rather pale, and evidently agitated, and the viscount at once jumped to the conclusion that something had gone wrong with “the case.”

“What is it, Trale?” he said.

Neville shook his hand.

“How do you do, Trale?” he said. “What’s happened? How are you?”

And he shook the honest hand in his frank, genial manner.

Trale opened his lips twice before a sound would come, then he stammered:

“There’s—there’s been an accident.”

“An accident!”

“Yes. He was leaving the House to go to dinner, and—and a cab coming across the bridge knocked him down and—and—the wheel went over his head——”

“Whose head?” demanded the viscount.

“Sir Jordan’s,” said Trale.

“Jordan’s!” Neville started. “Where—where is he? I must go!”

“At St. Thomas’ Hospital,” said Trale. “I—I saw him fall. I was going to make a last appeal to him. To tell him that he couldn’t win——”

His voice faltered.

“Go, Neville!” murmured Sylvia, gently.

“Yes, yes. My hat,” said Neville.

Trale put his hand on his arm.

“There’s—there’s no hurry, Sir Neville; he was dead when I left.”

A thrill ran through the listeners at that ‘Sir’.

“Dead!” exclaimed Sylvia.

Neville stood speechless.

“Yes, my lady,” said Trale to Sylvia. “It was hopeless. He was conscious at the last, and knew those around him, but he only said one word. I’ve got a cab at the door, Sir Neville——”

They were driven to the great hospital of which London has a right to be proud, and conducted to the silent room of death.

Neville stood beside the bed, and looked down at the still face from which the surgeon had drawn the covering.

Dead! It seemed impossible.

“A terrible loss, Sir Neville!” whispered the celebrated surgeon. “England will mourn one of her most brilliant statesmen. He would have been premier if he had lived. That was certain. It is terrible to think of.”

Yes, here lay the Right Hon. Sir Jordan Lynne, Bart., M.P.; the smooth voice silenced, the acute brain stopped, the ambitious spirit quenched—by a hansom cab!

“I—I was told he was conscious—that he spoke,” Neville faltered, scarcely knowing what he said.

“Yes, he spoke just before the end,” said the surgeon. “He spoke to the nurse. She was here a moment ago.”

He beckoned, and a woman in a nurse’s uniform came forward, and stood with folded hands and bent head.

“Sir Neville would like to hear what his brother said, nurse,” said the surgeon.

She looked up.

“ ‘Rachel; forgive!’ ” she said.

Neville started.

“Mercy!” he said. “You——”

She looked at him, her sad face white and set, then with a slight shake of her head she moved away.

Oh, irony of fate! The great and powerful Sir Jordan had come, crushed, helpless, to die in the arms of the woman he had betrayed!

[THE END.]

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Extensive corrections for misspelled words and typesetting spelling errors have been made. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Extensive corrections for missing punctuation and for inconsistent or missing quotes have also been made.

[The end of *Her Ransom, or Paid For* by Charles Garvice]