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*Title:* Ivan Greet's Masterpiece: Claude Tyack's Ordeal

*Date of first publication:* 1893

*Author:* Grant Allen

*Date first posted:* June 17, 2013

*Date last updated:* June 17, 2013

Faded Page ebook #20130629

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***CLAUDE TYACK'S ORDEAL.***

## I.

CLAUDE TYACK was the tallest and handsomest man of my time at Harvard. And when I saw him walking one day with Elsie Marple through the college avenue, I felt really and truly jealous about Elsie.

Those were the dear old days before the war, and Professor Marple then taught Greek to freshmen and sophomores in Cambridge lecture-halls. Elsie was still the belle of Cambridge, and I was Elsie's favoured admirer. But that afternoon, when I met Elsie a little later, alone, by the old Law School, near the Agassiz Museum, I was half angry with her for talking to Tyack. She blushed as I came up, and I put the wrong interpretation on her blushes. "Elsie," I said, for I called her even then by her Christian name, "that fellow Claude's been here walking with you!"

She looked me full in the face with her big brown eyes, and answered softly, "He has, Walter, and I'm very sorry for him."

"Sorry for him!" I cried, somewhat hot in the face. "Why sorry? What's he been doing or saying that you should be sorry for?"

I spoke roughly, I suppose. I was young, and I was angry. Elsie turned her big brown eyes upon me once more and said only, "I'm *very* sorry for him. Poor, poor fellow! I'm very sorry."

"Elsie," I answered, "you've no right to speak so about any other fellow. Tyack's been making love to you. I'm sure of that. Why did you let him? You're mine now, and I claim the whole of you."

To my great surprise, Elsie suddenly burst into tears, and walked away without answering me anything. I was hot and uncomfortable, but I let her go. I didn't even try in any way to stop her or ask her why she should cry so strangely. I only knew, like a foolish boy as I was, that my heart was full of wrath and resentment against Tyack.

That evening I met him again in the dining-hall—the old hall on the college square that preceded the big memorial building we of the Harvard brigade set up long afterwards in honour of the Boys who fell in the great struggle.

I looked at him angrily and spoke angrily. After hall we went out together into the cool air. Tyack was flushed and still angrier than I. "You want to triumph over me," he said in a fierce way, as we reached the door. "That is mean and ungenerous. You might do better. In your place I would have more magnanimity."

I didn't know what on earth he meant, but my hot French blood boiled up at once—the Ponsards came over with the first Huguenot refugees in the *Evangile* to New England—and I answered hastily, "No man calls me mean for nothing. Blow follows word with men of my sort, Tyack. Insult me again, and you know what you'll get for it."

"You are a fool and a coward," he cried through his clenched teeth. "No gentleman would so treat a conquered rival. Isn't it enough that you have beaten me and crushed me? Need you dance upon me and kick my corpse afterwards?"

I don't know what I answered back. I failed to understand him still, but I saw he was furious, and I only felt the angrier for that; but I struck him in the face, and I told him if he wished it to be open war, war it should be with no quarter.

I could hardly believe my eyes when he drew himself up to his full height and without uttering a word stalked haughtily off, his face purple with suppressed wrath, and his lips quivering, but self-controlled and outwardly calm in his gait and movement. I thought he must be going to challenge me—in those days duelling was not yet utterly dead even in the North—and I waited for his note with some eagerness; but no challenge ever came. I never saw Claude Tyack again till I met him in the Second Connecticut regiment, just before the battle of Chattawauga.

Late that night I went round to the Marples', trembling with excitement, and after our easy American fashion asked at the door to see Miss Elsie. Elsie came down to me alone in the dining-room; her eyes were still a little swollen with crying, but she looked even lovelier and gentler than ever. I asked her what had passed between her and Tyack, and she told me in simple words a story that, angry as I was, sent a thrill of regret and remorse through my inmost being. Tyack had come up to her that afternoon in the elm avenue, she said, and after gently leading up to it by half-hints, whose meaning she never perceived till afterwards, had surprised her at last by asking her outright to be his wife and make him happy for

ever and ever. Elsie was so breathless at this unexpected declaration that she had not even presence of mind to tell him at once of our virtual engagement; and Tyack seeing her hesitate and temporize, went on begging her in the profoundest terms of love and affection, till her woman's heart was touched with pity. "He said he could never know another happy moment," she whispered, "unless I would have him, Walter; and as he said it I knew by his eyes he really meant it."

"And what did you answer?" I asked, in an agony of doubt, my heart misgiving me for my anger that evening.

"I said to him, 'Oh, Mr. Tyack, I know you mean it, and if it weren't that I love Walter Ponsard with all my soul, I think out of very pity I should have to marry you.'"

"You said that," I cried, the devil within me getting the better of me for a moment.

"Yes, Walter, I said that. And Mr. Tyack gave a sort of low, suppressed, sobbing cry, like a man whose heart is thrust through, I should think, and pressed his two hands hard upon his bosom and staggered away as if I had shot him."

"Elsie," I said, taking her white hand in mine in a fit of remorse, "I understand it all now. I hope to Heaven we haven't, between us, sent that man Tyack to blow his brains out, or jump into the river."

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When I got back to my rooms at a little past midnight I found a note lying on my table. I took it up and read it eagerly. This is what it said—

"WALTER PONSARD,

"You have treated me brutally. No honourable man would act as you have done. Yet, for her sake, I refrain from returning the blow you gave me. But whenever my own turn comes, without hurting her, trust me, you will find you have provoked a dangerous enemy.

"CLAUDE TYACK."

I breathed freer. Then he would not kill himself. I didn't mind his threat of vengeance, but I should have been sorry to bear the guilt of his blood upon me.

Next morning, Tyack had gone from Cambridge, and nobody knew where he had betaken himself.

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## II.

Before Chattawauga, I was passing through camp, in my uniform as a sergeant in the Harvard battalion of the Third Massachusetts, when I saw an orderly coming from Holditch's regiment, with a note for the general from Colonel Holditch. He wore the grey stuff, with blue facing, of the Second Connecticut. We recognized each other at the first glance. It was Claude Tyack.

Everybody in the North volunteered in those days, and some of us who volunteered rose fast to be field officers, while others of us, equally well born and bred, remained in the ranks for months together. Tyack and I were among the residuum. He glanced at me curtly and passed on. I somehow felt, I don't know why, that the hour of his revenge could not be far distant.

I sat down in my tent that night and wrote to Elsie. It was Elsie who had wished me to volunteer. I wrote to her whenever an occasion offered. A mail was going that evening from the field. I told her all about the expected battle, but I said never a word about poor Tyack.

Just as we were turning in for the night, a United States mail was distributed to the detachment. I opened my letter from Elsie with trembling fingers. She wrote, as ever, full of fears and hopes. A little postscript ended the letter. "I hear," she said, "that poor Claude Tyack is with you in Burnside's division. I shall never cease to be sorry for him. If possible, try and make your quarrel up before the battle. I couldn't bear to think he might be killed, and you unforgiven."

I sat long with the letter in my hand. A battle is a very serious thing. If Tyack had been there in the tent that evening I think I should have taken Elsie's advice and made it all up with him. And then things would have been very different.

As I sat there musing, with the letter still in my fingers, the drum beat suddenly, and we heard the signal for forming battalion. It was the night surprise: Whelock and Bonséjour were upon us suddenly.

Everybody knows what Chattawauga was like. We fought hard, but the circumstances were against the Harvard battalion. Though Burnside held his own in the centre, to be sure, the right wing had a bad time of it; and seventy-two of us Harvard Boys were taken prisoners. I am not writing a history of the war—I leave that to *Harper's* and the *Century*—so I shall only say, without attempting to explain it, that we were marched off at once to Bonséjour's rear, and sent by train next day to Richmond. There we remained for five months, close prisoners, without one word from home, and, what to me was ten thousand times worse, without possibility of communicating with Elsie. Elsie, no doubt, would think I was dead. That thought alone was a perpetual torture to me. Would Tyack take advantage of my absence? Elsie was mine: I knew I could trust her.

At the end of five months the other men were released on parole. They offered me the same terms, but I refused to accept them. It seemed to me a question of principle. I had pledged my word already to fight to the death for my country, and I couldn't forswear myself by making terms with rebels. We of the old New England stock took a serious view of the war and its meaning: we didn't look upon it as a vast national armed picnic party. Even for Elsie's sake, I would not consent to purchase a useless freedom by what I regarded as a public treachery. I could not have loved Elsie so much, "loved I not honour more," as the poet of our common country phrases it.

I was left the only prisoner in the old barracks in Clay Street, Richmond, and of course I was accordingly but little guarded. A few weeks later an opportunity occurred for me to get away. A wounded soldier from the front, straggling in by himself from the entrenchments, fainted opposite the Clay Street Barracks, and was hastily brought in and put to bed there, the hospital accommodation in the city being already more than overcrowded. In the dusk of evening I conveyed his clothes to my own room, and next day I put them on, a tattered and bloodstained Confederate uniform. Then, having shaved off my beard with a piece of hoop-iron, well sharpened against a hone, I passed out boldly before the very eyes of the lounging sentry, and made my way across the streets of the half-beleaguered city. I waited till nightfall in the rotunda of the Exchange Hotel in Franklin Street, where men sat and smoked and discussed the news; and when the lamps began to be lighted around the State Capitol, I slunk off along the riverside, so as to avoid being hailed and challenged by the sentries, who held all the approaches from the direction of Washington.

In those days, I need hardly say, strong lines of earthworks were drawn around Richmond city on the north, east, and

west, where Lee was defending it; and it was only along the river southward that any road was left fairly open into the country. I went by the river bank, therefore, onward and onward, till the city lights faded slowly one by one into the darkness behind me. I passed a few soldiers here and there on the road, but my Confederate uniform sufficiently protected me from any unfavourable notice. If any of them hailed me with a "Hullo, stranger! where are you off this time of evening?" my answer was easy, "Straight from the front. Sick leave. Just discharged from hospital in Lee's division." Southern chivalry nodded and passed on without further parley. I was going, in fact, in the wrong direction for many questions to be asked me in passing. Everybody from the South was hurrying up to the front: a wounded soldier, straggling homeward, attracted then but little attention.

I walked on and on, always along the bank of the dark river, till I had almost reached the point where the Appomatox falls into the James. I wanted to reach the Northern lines, and to get to them I must somehow cross the river. It was pitch dark now, a moonless night in early December, and even in Virginia the water at that season was almost ice-cold in the tidal estuary. But I knew I must swim it, sooner or later, and the sooner I tried it the better were my chances. I had eaten nothing since leaving the barracks, and I should probably get nothing to eat until I reached Burnside's army. To-night, therefore, I was comparatively strong: the longer I delayed, the weaker would my muscles grow with hunger. To lie out all night on the ground in the cold is not the best way of preparing one's self for swimming a mile's width of chilly river. Besides, I was almost certain to be observed in the daytime, and shot like a dog, by the one side as a spy, or by the other as a deserter. My only chance lay in trying it by night, so I plunged in boldly just as I found myself.

I shall never forget that awful swim in the dead of night across the tidal water of the James River. The stars were shining dimly overhead through the valley mist, and by the aid of the Great Bear (for I did not know the pole-star then) I swam roughly in what I took to be a general north-eastward direction towards the shore opposite. In a hundred yards or so the southern bank became quite invisible, and I could not hope to see the northern until I had come within about the same distance of it. All the rest of the way I swam by the aid of the stars alone, so far as guidance or compass went, and this compelled me to keep my eyes straining pretty steadily upward, and to hold my head in a most difficult and unnatural position on the surface of the water. The ice-cold stream chilled my frozen limbs, and the gloom and the silence overawed and appalled me.

I don't know how long I took swimming across; time in such circumstances cannot be measured by mere minutes. I only know it seemed to me then a whole eternity. Stroke after stroke, I swam mechanically on, each movement of my thighs coming harder and harder. My trousers impeded my movement terribly; and though I had thrown off my coat on the further bank, to leave the arms free, the boots which I had tied around my neck made swimming more difficult, and weighted my head from observing my star-guides. Still I went on and on in a dogged fashion, my limbs moving as if by clockwork. I must have been nearly three-quarters of the way across when I became aware of a new terror unexpectedly confronting me. My eyes had been fixed steadily upon the stars, so I had not noticed it before; and the noiseless working of the little screw had escaped my ears even in that ghastly silence. But, casting a hasty glance down the river sideways, I noticed all at once, with a thrill of horror, that a small steam-launch, making up-stream, was almost upon me. I knew immediately what she must be—the launch of the *Rapahannock*, Confederate ironclad, on her way up from Chesapeake Bay to the quays at Richmond.

I must live it out, to get back to Elsie. That was the one thought that made up my whole being, as I lay there motionless, floating on the still water, numbed with cold, and half dead with my exertions.

I dared not move lest the launch should see, by the dancing reflection of her light on the rippled waves I made, there was something astir ahead, and should give me chase and capture me as a deserter. I floated like a log on the silent surface, and waited with upturned face and closed eyes for the launch to pass by me—or run over me.

As I floated I heard her screw draw nearer and nearer. I wondered whether I lay direct in her course. If so, no help for it; she must run me down. It was safer so than to swim away and attract attention.

I turned my eyes sideways and opened them cautiously as the noise came close. By heavens, yes! She was heading straight for me!

At Harvard I had always been a good diver. I dived now, noiselessly and imperceptibly; it would almost be truer to say, I let myself go under without conscious movement. The water closed above my face at once. I seemed to feel something

glide above me. I was dimly aware of the recoil from the screw. I shut my eyes once more, and held my breath in my full chest. Next instant I was whirled by the after-current back to the surface in the wake of the screw, and saw the white stars still shining above me.

“Something black on the water,” shouted a voice behind. “Otter, I take it; or might be a nigger, contraband bound North. Whichever it is, I’ll have a cock-shot at it, captain, anyway.”

I dived again at the word, half dead with cold and fear; and even as I dived felt rather than heard the thud and hiss of a rifle bullet ricocheting on the water, just at the very point where my head had rested an instant earlier.

“Otter!” the voice said again as I reached the surface, numbed and breathless, more dead than alive, and afraid to let anything but my mouth and ears rise above the black level of the water. And the steam-launch moved steadily on her way without waiting to take any further notice of me.

The danger was past once more for the moment, but I was too exhausted to swim any further, deadened in my limbs with cold as I was, and cramped with my exertions. I could only float face upward on my back, and soon became almost senseless from exposure. Every now and again, indeed, consciousness seemed to return fitfully for a moment, and I struck out in blind energy with my legs, I knew not in what direction; but for the most part I merely floated like a log down-stream, allowing myself to be carried resistlessly before the sluggish current.

As day broke I revived a little. I must then have been at least three hours in the ice-cold water. I saw land within a hundred yards of me. With one despairing final effort, I know not how, I struck out with my legs like galvanized limbs, and made for it—for land and Elsie.

Would Federal pickets be guarding the shore? That was now my next anxiety. If so, my doom was sealed. They would challenge me at once, and, as I could not give the countersign, would shoot me down without a thought or a question as a spy from Richmond.

Fortunately the shore was here unguarded; below Mitchell’s redoubt, indeed, attack from southward was always held impossible. I dragged myself on land, over the muddy tidal flat, and found myself in the midst of that terrible, desolate, swampy region known as the Wilderness, the scene of the chief early conflicts in the struggle for disruption, and of the battle-fields where Lee and Stonewall Jackson stood at bay like wounded tigers.

When I came to realize my actual plight I began to feel what a fool I had been to run away from Richmond. I sat there on the bank, frozen and wet, dripping from head to foot, my soaked boots hanging useless round my neck, my blood chilled, my limbs shivering, my heart almost dead, and yet with a terrible sense of fever in my cold lips, and a fierce throbbing in my aching head. I had no food, and no chance of getting any. Around me stretched that broken marshy country, alternating between pine barrens and swampy bottoms. Scouts and pickets held the chief points everywhere: to show myself before them in my wet and ragged Confederate uniform would be to draw fire at a moment’s notice. What to do I had no conception: I merely sat there, my head in my hands, and waited, and waited, and waited still, till the sun was high up in the blank-blue heavens.

I won’t describe the eight days of speechless agony that followed in the Wilderness. I wandered up and down through scrub and pine-woods, not daring at first to show myself openly; and then, when hunger and fatigue at last conquered my fear, not knowing where to look for the Federal outposts. Night after night I lay upon the bare ground, in the highest and driest part of the wild pine-barrens, and saw the cold stars shining above, and heard the whip-poor-will scream shrill overhead in the thick darkness. It was an awful time: I dare not trust myself even now to recall it too vividly. If it had not been for the wild persimmon trees, indeed, I might have starved in that terrible week. But luckily the persimmons were very plentiful; and though a man can’t live on them for ever with absolute comfort, they will serve to keep body and soul together somehow for a longer time than any other wild berry or fruit I know of.

At last, on the eighth morning, as I lay asleep on the ground, wearied and feverish, I felt myself rudely shaken by a rough hand, and, opening my eyes with a start, saw to my joy the Northern uniform on the three men who stood around me.

“Spy!” the sergeant said briefly. “Tie his hands, O’Grady. Lift him up. March him before you.”

I told them at once I was a soldier in the Harvard battalion, escaped from Richmond; but of course they didn't and couldn't believe me. My Confederate uniform told too false a story. However, I was far too weak to march, and the men carried me, one of them going on to get me food and brandy; for, spy or no spy, one thing was clear past all doubting, that I was so faint and ill with hunger and exposure that to make me walk would have been sheer cruelty.

"Take him to head-quarters," my captor or my rescuer said, in a short voice, as soon as I had eaten and drunk greedily the bread and meat and brandy the first man had brought up for me.

They carried me to head-quarters and brought me up before three officers. The officers questioned me closely and incredulously. They would hear nothing of my being a Federal prisoner. The uniform alone was enough to condemn me. "Take him away and search him," they said peremptorily. The sergeant took me to a tent and searched me; and found nothing.

I knew then what would happen next. They would try me by a rude rough-and-ready court-martial, and hang me for a spy that very morning.

As I marched out from the sergeant's tent again, absolutely despondent with fatigue and fever, an officer in a major's uniform strolled casually towards us. Promotion was often quick in those days. The major, I saw at a glance, was Claude Tyack.

He stopped and gazed at me sternly for a moment. Not a muscle of his face stirred or quivered. "Sergeant," he said, in a cold unconcerned tone, eyeing me from head to foot, "who's your prisoner?"

"One of Lee's spies," the sergeant answered carelessly. "Took him this morning out on the Wilderness. Fourth we've taken this week, anyhow. The Rebs are getting kinder desperate, I reckon."

I looked Claude Tyack back in the face. He knew me perfectly, but never for one instant quailed or faltered. "What will you do with him? Shoot him?" he inquired.

"String him up," the sergeant replied, with a quiet grin.

I stood still and said nothing.

They took me back and held a short informal drum-head court-martial. It all occupied five minutes. A man's life counts for so little in war time. I was half dead already, and never listened to it. The bitterness of death was past for me long ago. I stood bolt upright, my arms folded desperately in front, and faced Claude Tyack without ever flinching. Claude Tyack, who only looked on as a mere spectator, faced me in return, mute and white, in solemn expectation.

"Do you admit you are a spy?" the presiding officer asked me.

"No," I replied, "I am a Federal prisoner from Richmond, late sergeant in the Massachusetts contingent."

"Can you get any one to identify you?"

"In Burnside's division—yes; hundreds."

The presiding officer smiled grimly. "Burnside's division is a long way off now," he said calmly. "It moved a month ago. We can't bring men all the way from Kentucky, you know, to look at you."

I bowed my head. It mattered little. I was too wearied out to fight for life any longer. I only thought of Elsie's misery.

Then I became aware that Claude Tyack had joined the ring a little closer, and was looking at me with fixed and rigid attention.

"Nobody nearer?" the officer asked.

I kept my eyes riveted on Tyack's. I could not appeal to him; not even for Elsie. He would not help me. I never knew till



that moment I was a thought-reader; but in Tyack's face I read it all—all he was thinking as it passed through his mind: read it, and felt certain I read it correctly.

If he allowed me to be shot then and there, he would not only wipe out old scores, but would also in time marry Elsie.

I saw those very words passing rapidly through his angry mind—"If it weren't that I love Walter Ponsard with all my soul, I think, Mr. Tyack, for very pity I should have to marry you."

She would have to marry him! He would go back, certain of my death; he would tell her all, save this one episode; he would plead hard, as he had pleaded before; and then, for pity, Elsie would marry him!

Our eyes met still; I returned his stare: tall and pale he stood confronting me: he gloated over my misfortune: we spoke never a word to one another; and yet, we two men knew perfectly in our own hearts each what the other was thinking.

There was a deadly pause. The presiding officer waited patiently. The words seemed to stick in my throat. I moistened my lips with my tongue, and wetted my larynx by swallowing. Then I said slowly, "Nobody nearer."

The presiding officer waited again. Clearly he was loth himself to condemn a man so weak and ill as I was. At last he cleared his throat nervously, and turned to the court with an inquiring gesture.

Then Claude Tyack took three paces forward and stood before him. The man seemed taller and paler than ever. Great drops of sweat gathered on his brow. His lips and nostrils quivered with emotion. A frightful struggle was going on within him. The demon of revenge—just revenge, if revenge is ever just—for an undeserved insult—I recognized that—fought for mastery in his soul with right and mercy. "I need not identify him," he cried aloud, clasping his two hands one over the other, and talking as in a dream. "I am not called to give evidence. He has never asked me!"

"I will never ask you," I replied, with dogged despair. "You have found me, oh my enemy! I have wronged you bitterly. I know it, and regret it. I will ask your forgiveness, but never your mercy."

Claude Tyack held up his hands, like a child, to his face. He was a rugged man now, though still young and handsome; but the tears rolled slowly, very slowly, one after another, down his bronzed cheeks. "You shall have my mercy," he answered at last, with a groan, "because you do not ask it; but never, never, never, my forgiveness. For Elsie's sake, I cannot let her lover be shot for a traitor."

The presiding officer caught at it all as if by instinct. "You know this man, Major Tyack?" he asked quietly.

"I know him, Colonel Sibthorpe."

"Who is he?"

The words came as if from the depths of the grave. "Walter Ponsard, sergeant of the Harvard battalion Third Massachusetts infantry, Burnside's division. He was missing seven months ago, after Chattawauga."

"The name and description he gave himself. That is quite sufficient. The prisoner is discharged. Sergeant Ponsard, you shall be taken care of. Tyack, a word with you."

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### III.

When I next was conscious, I found myself lying in hospital at Washington. Elsie, in a nurse's dress, was leaning over my bed. She kissed me on the forehead. "How about Tyack?" I asked eagerly.

"Hush, hush!" she whispered, soothing my cheek with her hand. "You mustn't talk, darling. The fever has been terrible. We never thought your life would be spared for me."

"But Tyack!" I cried, "I *must* hear of him! He hasn't shot himself? His face was so terrible! I could never live if I thought I had killed him."

"He is there," Elsie whispered, pointing with her hand to the adjoining bed. "Wounded the very next day in the fight at Fredericksburg. I have nursed you both. Hush, now, hush, darling!"

I said no more, but cried silently. I was glad his blood was not on my head. If he died now, he died for his country, in the only just war ever waged on this world of ours. He had had his ordeal, and passed through it like a man and a soldier.

Late that night I heard a noise and bustle at my bedside. Somebody was talking low and earnestly. I turned round on my side and listened. Elsie was standing by Tyack's bed, and holding his hand tenderly in hers. I knew why, and was not surprised at her.

"Elsie, Elsie," he said in a tremulous tone, "press me tighter. It will not be long now. I feel it creeping over me. Is Ponsard conscious?"

I sat up in my bed with delirious strength, in spite of Elsie, and cried aloud in a clear voice, "Tyack, I hear you."

"Ponsard," he said, turning his eyes and, without moving his neck, looking across at me, "I said once I would never forgive you. I am sorry I said so. If there is anything to forgive, I forgive it freely.... Before I die, give me your hand, Walter!"

He had never called me Walter before. The hot tears rose fast in my eyes. Feeble and ill as I was, I sprang from my bed. Elsie clasped my left hand tight and flung the coarse coverlet loosely around me. I sat on the edge of Tyack's bed, and grasped his hand hard in my other. Elsie laid hers over both. She kissed me tenderly with her trembling lips; then she bent down and kissed the dying man too on his white forehead. His hand relaxed; his lips quivered: "Elsie, good-bye!" he said slowly; and all was over.

Elsie flung her arms wildly around my neck. "He saved your life, my darling," she cried. "Walter, I hoped I might have saved his for him."

"It is better so, Elsie," I answered, with an effort; and then I fell back fainting beside him.

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#### Transcriber's Note

This text has been preserved as in the original, including archaic and inconsistent spelling, punctuation and grammar, except that obvious printer's errors have been silently corrected.

[The end of *Claude Tyack's Ordeal* by Grant Allen]