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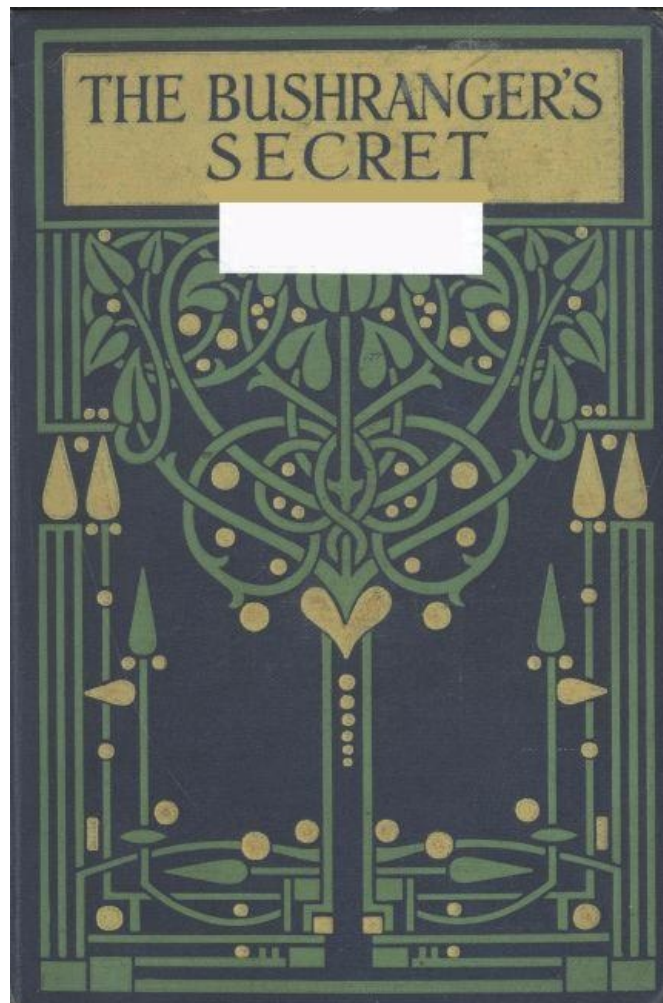
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## The Bushranger's Secret

BY

MRS. HENRY CLARKE

Author of "The Ravensworth Scholarship"  
"The Mystery of the Manor House" &c.

ILLUSTRATED BY W. S. STACEY

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# THE BUSHRANGER'S SECRET

## CHAPTER I.

### A FUGITIVE.

Two men were sitting together in a small outlying hut on one of the great grazing farms of South Australia. The hut was a comfortless place. The floor was of beaten earth. Two bunks for sleeping were fixed to the log wall. Above one of the bunks hung the framed photograph of a comely woman, with two bright-faced lads leaning against her. It was the only picture on the walls. A rough table stood opposite the window, and behind the table was a wooden bench. Above the bench there was a shelf, and a stand for guns.

The men were sitting on the bench. They had not long returned from a hard day's riding. The elder man was leaning back against the wall in a heavy sleep. The other, a slender, dark-eyed fellow, hardly more than a lad, was looking at him with a gloomy contemptuous irritation in his glance.

"Better asleep than awake, though," he muttered to himself, after a moment. "What can he talk about but cattle and horses?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and got up from his seat and stretched himself. The dog lying at the older man's feet, with its paw resting on one of them, raised its head sharply at Gray's movement, but did not attempt to get up even when Gray went to the door and opened it, letting the light of their lamp flow out in a steady stream.

All round the hut stretched the gray level grass-lands, rolling away in vast monotony to a far horizon. A wide sky arched over them, in which the stars were shining with a soft yet brilliant splendour. Gray glanced carelessly up at that glorious sky. He believed himself to be endowed with a keen sense of the beautiful. He prided himself on his distaste for ugly surroundings. When he had earned the fortune he had come to Australia to earn he meant to prove to the world how keen and true his artistic tastes were. But he glanced carelessly up at the shining stars. They had no message for him.

After standing in the doorway a moment he turned back into the hut, shutting the door behind him with a sudden bang that made Harding start up, rubbing his eyes.

"Why, I must have been asleep!" he said with a surprised air. He drew himself up to his full height, towering like a good-tempered giant over Gray's slight figure. "I'm tired out, and that's a fact," he added apologetically. "I think I'll turn in." Gray did not answer. He flung himself down on the bench and began to pare his finger-nails, looking at each finger critically as he finished it, and taking no notice of Harding. The elder man regarded him doubtfully.

"In a wax, old man?" he said in a deprecating voice. Gray flung him a vicious look over his

shoulder, and returned to his nails. Harding's face had a very tender expression in it as he advanced a step and put out his hand to touch the young man's shoulder.

"If it's anything I've done," he began in a shuffling, awkward, kindly tone—

Gray turned upon him with startling suddenness.

"Anything you've done?" he demanded, squaring his arms on the table, and fixing his dark glance on Harding. "You needn't flatter yourself that I care a rap for what you do or don't do. Turn in, and leave me to myself."

"Come, come, Gray, don't take a fellow like that. You're tired out; I can see you're just tired out."

"I *am* tired out," responded Gray grimly. "Tired of it all. Tired and sick of you along with the rest of it. A pretty life this is to live. A pretty companion you make, don't you?"

"Well, well, things may better soon," said the other soothingly. "I wish I was more book-learned for your sake, old fellow. But that's past wishing for, ain't it? And you'll have to make the best of me for a spell."

"Best or worst, I can't endure this life any longer," returned Gray impatiently. "I'll ride over to the station to-morrow and give it up; or end it quicker than that perhaps;" and he glanced up with a dark look at the loaded gun lying across the shelf.

Harding knew Gray well enough to be able to disregard that look, but he spoke very seriously.

"You'll not be such a foolish lad as to throw up your berth in a fit of temper. This won't last much longer. You will be called in to the station in a week or two and given a better post; and it's your duty to stick on here till you're called in, you see."

"Duty!" Gray flung the word at him like a missile.

Harding's mild eyes looked at him in gentle reproof.

"It's a fine thing to do, my lad. No man can do more if he lived in a king's palace. And a man who does his duty is greater than a king."

"That's all rubbish, talk like that," returned Gray sharply. "You just drop it, Harding."

He got up, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, and leant against the wall. His eyes went round the hut.

"A king's palace!" he said with a hard laugh. "Verily it needs strong imagination to think of such a place here. What a hole to live in! But I'll not stand it much longer."

Harding did not answer this time. He went up to his bunk and took from under the pillow his little shabbily bound Bible and sat down to read his evening chapter.

Gray watched him moodily; but in a moment his attention was drawn off by the strange behaviour of the dog, which, when Harding had sat down on his bunk, had crawled under it.

But it had come out again almost at once, and now stood in the middle of the hut, with its head bent and its ears upraised in the attitude of intent listening.

"What's the matter with the dog?" said Gray. "He hears somebody."

Harding looked up.

"Nobody ever comes this way; it's out of the track. Come here, Watch. You're dreaming, old fellow."

The dog turned its head and looked at its master, gave a slow wag of its tail to show that it heard his voice, and then with a dash it sprang at the door, barking fiercely.

Harding got up and flung back the door. His movement was so sudden, that a man who had crept up to the hut and was now leaning against the door had no time to recover himself, and staggered forward into the hut. Watch retreated, still growling fiercely, but restrained from attacking the stranger by a gesture of its master. Gray made a clutch at the gun above his head, but the next moment withdrew his hand. That pitiful, abject, trembling fugitive was not a man to take arms against.

The stranger staggered across the hut and crouched down against the opposite wall, breathing in short hurried pants. His face was painfully thin, and as white as death. From a long jagged wound, half hidden by his matted hair, blood was trickling in a dark slow stream. The clothes he wore were torn to tatters. You could see his skin through the rents.

He crouched back against the wall, hugging his arms against his breast, and looking from

Gray to Harding with a wild agonized entreaty in his eyes. It was the look of a hunted animal appealing for mercy rather than the look of a man asking help of fellow-men. He was evidently unable to speak. He tried to articulate something, but his baked, blistered lips refused their office.

"He's just done for," said Gray. Harding nodded, and going up to the pannikin of cold tea on the shelf took out some in a cup and held it to the stranger's lips. He drank it up greedily and then words came to him.

"Don't give me up," he cried out in a strange hoarse scream, and fell along the floor huddled up in a dreadful heap.

The two men looked at each other.

"It's plain enough to see what he is," said Gray with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "Shall we have to entertain the rest of the gang, do you think?"

"The police, more likely, lad. They're close on his track, I fancy."

He bent over the man and straightened him out. Gray did not attempt to help him; he stood looking down at the wretched fugitive with a cold unsympathizing curiosity in his handsome face as he said:

"He isn't dead, is he?"

As he spoke the man opened his eyes and gazed up at them. Wild gleaming dark eyes they were, looking all the darker for the haggard pallor of his face. He raised himself on his elbow and made a clutch at his breast. There was something hidden there, and he kept his hand closed upon it.

Harding put the cup with more tea to his lips again, and again he drank greedily. Then he tried to raise himself into a sitting posture, but sank back on the floor.

"I'll cheat the beaks after all," he said hoarsely. A grim smile flickered over his face. "I swore I'd never be caught."

He looked from one man to the other.

"They'll make no gallows-bird o' me," he added with a sort of hoarse chuckle. He still kept his hand clutched upon his breast. Gray noticed the action, and a vivid curiosity rose up in him to know what the man kept so jealously hidden there. He must have shown this in his face, for the man addressed him sharply.

"What are you starin' at, eh? Do you think I've got the Kohinoor hidden about me? Well, I ain't got it."

"I don't think anything about you, my man," replied Gray loftily. He turned to Harding. "What are we going to do with him?"

"Lend me a hand and we'll lift him on my bunk," said Harding.

"I'll lie here," broke from the man. "You just leave me alone." He pushed away the food Harding offered him. "I can't swallow. Just leave me alone."

Gray shrugged his shoulders and walked to the door. The man's eyes followed him with a suspicious glance.

"Thinks himself a fine gentleman, it's plain," he muttered. Then he beckoned to Harding. "Do you know Princes Street, Adelaide, mate?" he whispered.

Harding nodded.

"No. 5 Princes Street, top floor. You give two knocks. Write that down."

Harding took out his worn pocket-book and wrote it down. The man lay staring up at him, then with a sudden effort, as if his mind was at last made up, he dragged a tattered scrap of yellow paper from his breast and held it up to Harding.

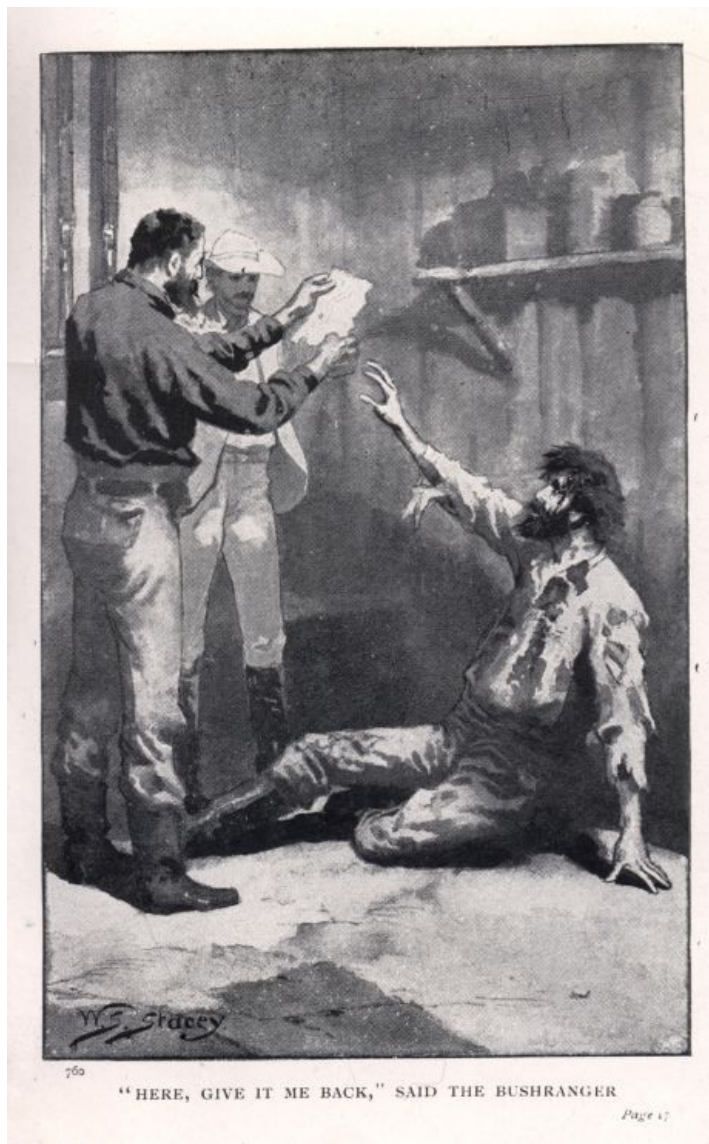
"Send it—*there*," and he feebly nodded at the pocket-book in Harding's hand.

Gray was still standing in the doorway, looking out over the level pastures. He half expected to hear the gallop of well-trained horses, the shout of authoritative voices; but all was still, the police had missed the track. He shut the door and came back into the hut.

"Make your mind easy, my friend," he said in a half-sneering tone. "It's all quiet outside."

The man gave him a dark look and raised himself towards Harding.

"Here, give it me back," he said, with a hasty snatch at it. "Your pal's no call to see it."



### **"HERE, GIVE IT ME BACK," SAID THE BUSHRANGER**

Harding had raised the paper towards the lamp-light, and was looking scrutinizingly at it. It seemed to be a rough map. There was a wavy line that evidently represented the course of a ravine or gully, and on each side were jagged marks that betokened rising ground. Right across the paper ran the words in large ill-formed characters:

*"Deadman's Gully."*

About the middle of the paper there was a sort of big blot, and underneath in smaller words was written:

*"Big gum. Dig five feet due south from hole."*

Gray came leisurely up to Harding's side.

"What is it?" he said, holding out his hand for the paper.

A scowl came over the face of the man on the ground. He flung himself upward and snatched the paper from Harding's hand with a violent oath. The effort was too much for him, and he fell back groaning and helpless. But he still kept the paper clutched in his right hand, and his eyes fixed themselves on Gray with something of the look of a trapped wild beast.

"Keep off, can't you!" he gasped out. "A pretty gentleman you are, pryin' and sneakin' like that."

Gray stood over him, looking down upon him with a cold cynical regard that seemed to madden the man.

"Better step back and leave him to me," whispered Harding.

Gray laughed.

"All right! but play fair, old fellow."

Harding's mild eyes looked their wonder at him, but Gray only laughed again and went back to the table, where he sat with his head propped on his hands watching the two.

Harding dragged his box out from under his bunk and sat down on it. The man lay still for a moment and then painfully raised himself into a sitting posture against the wall.

"Look here," he said. "Do you think I'm dyin'?"

"Yes," said Harding briefly.

"Before mornin'?"

"I don't believe you have many hours to live."

"Right, that's what I think myself. I've cheated the beaks, eh?"

Harding was silent. The man looked sharply at him.

"You've got that address written down?"

"Yes, but I can't send that paper."

"You can't send it?"

The words dropped slowly from the man's lips.

"Of course I can't," returned Harding. "You know that well enough."

"You won't send it," repeated the man again, with a dull rage in his voice. The paper was still clutched in his hand, and he looked at it and then up at Harding. "There's a fortin in it," he whispered under his breath. "Bill 'ull go shares. Here, you take it. You go to 5 Princes Street, top floor, and ask for Bill Clay. He'll go shares, and thankful."

Harding made no attempt to take the paper. He merely said:

"Tear it up if you like, but if you give it to me I shall hand it over to the police."

The man stared at him with a fierce incredulity in his gleaming dark eyes.

"There's a fortin in it," he repeated, as if the words must convince Harding of his foolishness—"a fortin, mate. And you can't miss the place. Bill, he knows Deadman's Gully."

He held out the paper, but Harding shook his head and said:

"You are wasting your words."

"You won't send it? Look here, just look here." He stopped to moisten his dry lips, and then went on:

"You've heard of Tom Dearing?"

Harding nodded. It was the name of a noted bushranger, whose last crime had been a daring robbery of the chief bank of Adelaide.

"Well, I'm Tom Dearing. Now you know."

Harding gazed silently at him. He could not get the right words to speak, but it did not need words to make Dearing understand the intense ardent desire to help him that was flooding Harding's soul. It affected the man strangely. He forgot the buried treasure for a moment. The paper fluttered out of his hand and fell on the floor as he cried:

"You're sorry for me; sorry for *me!*"

"I'm dead sorry for you, lad," said Harding with slow fervent utterance. "You've been spending your life in getting trash like that"—he waved his hand toward the paper. "And now you've got to die, and go before God. He'll be sorry for you too. If I'm sorry, a man like me, what must God's sorrow be for such a life as yours has been! Don't think about that hateful money, lad. Let it lie where you've laid it if you like."

Harding took the paper up and thrust it back into the man's fingers as he said:

"Tear it up. But you've got a chance to show you're ashamed for what you've done. Give the money back to those you stole it from. 'Tis all you can do now to make amends."

The man gazed irresolutely at him.

"You talk mighty fine, but what's to hinder you grabbin' the whole blessed lot?"

"Nothing."

That single word said everything. Dearing stared fixedly at Harding for a moment, and then thrust the paper into his hand.



"Here, take it," he said. "And if there's anything good you've got to say to me, let's hear it. I'll listen to you, old man. You act up to what you talk of."

## CHAPTER II.

### TEMPTED!

Dearing died next day just after sunrise. They buried him down by the creek, out of sight of the hut.

"So that's the end of Mr. Tom Dearing," said Gray, as they turned away and walked back towards the hut. "He didn't manage well, did he?"

Harding gave him one of his pained, wondering looks.

"Don't talk like that, dear lad," he said, "you don't mean it, you know."

Gray gave a laugh that had not much mirth in it

"What a fellow you are, Harding! You insist on everybody being as virtuous as yourself. But I mean exactly what I say. Why did Mr. Tom Dearing take to robbing his neighbour unless he could insure himself against being found out? It may be bad to be a rogue; it's unpardonable to be known for one."

"What difference does it make in the sin, lad?" said Harding, with a sorrowful look at him. "And it's the sin we've got to think of."

"Yes, I know that's your view," said Gray, with a scarcely concealed sneer. "But it's a sadly old-fashioned one, my dear fellow."

Harding was silent.

"It's only the fear of being found out that keeps men honest," Gray went on after a moment. "We're told, from our youth up, that 'Honesty is the best policy,' and most of us are sensible enough to believe it—and so we're honest."

"Don't you believe it, lad?" burst with emphasis from Harding; and not even Gray's flippant rejoinder, "Not believe that 'Honesty is the best policy?' you can't mean that?" was able to check his eagerness to speak. He stopped in the path and laid his hand on Gray's arm, more moved than Gray had ever seen him before.

"You wouldn't talk like that if you'd seen that poor fellow die, Gray," he said. "There's more difference between doing right and doing wrong than just that you get punished for wrong-doing if you're found out. Sin drags a man down, lad; it eats the manhood out of him. It makes a ruin of what's best in him."

The words fell on ears dull to their meaning. And Harding was quickly silent; speech was always a difficult thing to him. He had never spoken so earnestly to Gray before.

When they came back to the hut Harding took out the tattered sheet of yellow paper from his breast-pocket and placed it in the small desk upon the shelf.

"One of us must take that over to the station," he said. "The bank authorities will be glad enough to get it."

Gray had heard enough of the conversation between Harding and Dearing to know what the paper was about, though Harding had not mentioned it before.

He stood at the door, swinging his heavy stock-whip in his hand.

"I should like to have a look at it," he said carelessly.

"So you shall, lad. And I think you'd better go over with it. But we'll talk of that to-night."

"What made him hide the money, do you know?" he asked.

"He didn't say. The police were after him, I expect, and he hoped to be able to get back sometime and dig it up."

"I wonder if he had told any of his friends and acquaintances?" said Gray, looking up at the desk where Harding had put the map. "If so, I wouldn't give much for the bank's chance of getting the money."

"He hadn't told a soul," was Harding's answer. "He wanted me to send the map to some mate

of his, but he thought better of that afterwards."

"Better?" Gray lifted his dark eyebrows. "What does the bank want with the money? It's rich enough to stand the loss. It isn't as if he had robbed a poor man, you know. It's the best thing I've heard of him, his wanting to send that map to his mate."

"Stolen money does no good to anybody," said Harding rather shortly.

"It didn't do any good to him at any rate," said Gray. He moved from the door to let Harding pass. "I suppose we must start," he went on with a yawn. "Another day of this hateful stock-riding! and another day of it to-morrow, and the next day, and the next day! How am I going to stand it, I wonder?"

Harding had disappeared into the stable, and Gray said the last words to himself. There was a heavy frown on his handsome young face, bitter discontent in his dark eyes. When Harding brought his horse to him he scarcely thanked him, and he rode away by his side in sullen silence.

When they returned that night, Harding was too fagged out to talk of anything. He went off into a heavy sleep directly after supper, and Gray found it impossible to wake him sufficiently for rational conversation.

The desk in which he had placed the paper was not locked, and Gray took out the paper and sat down by the lamp to study it. It was very easy to understand. Anyone who knew Deadman's Gully could not fail to find the treasure, Gray thought to himself.

And his thoughts ran on something like this:

"Suppose I had found this map, not knowing whose it was, and had gone to dig in Deadman's Gully on the chance, what a wonderful and blessed change it would have made in my life? No more hateful stock-riding; no more dreary days spent with this dull-witted Harding; but a glad return to civilized England, and a rich cultured life in congenial society. If it only had happened so! Yet, even now—?"

But there Gray's thoughts took pause. The secret was not his alone. It was shared by Harding. Even if Harding would allow him to— But Harding would not, and there was an end of it.

They arranged at breakfast next morning that Gray should ride over to the station the day after and carry the paper with him. From the station it could be easily sent in to the inspector of police with the report of Dearing's death.

Gray got the paper down for another look at it.

"I believe I've heard you speak of Deadman's Gully, Harding."

"That's most likely, old man. I know the place well. I was stationed within a mile of it once. You know Rodwell's Peak?"

"Haven't the honour," said Gray flippantly. He got up and put the paper back in the desk. "Rodwell's Peak and Deadman's Gully! The Australian mind isn't gifted with imagination in regard to names."

"Deadman's Gully got its name rightly enough. It was the haunt of a gang of bushrangers. A track runs right by the mouth of it, and they buried the travellers there that they waylaid. That wasn't in my time, but I've heard old Jebb speak of it. He went with the police there once. A lonely dismal spot, he said, between high rocks, with a few trees in the middle."

"Our friend Dearing knew the spot well, it seems."

"Yes; but he didn't belong to that lot. He used it as a hiding-place, I fancy. He'd had a miserable life from what he told me."

Gray was putting on his boots, and apparently paying but little attention to Harding's remarks.

"I suppose you could find it, though?" he said carelessly.

"Easily enough. You've just got to follow the track till Rodwell's Peak is right in front of you. You've never been in the uplands, have you, Gray?" Harding broke off to say. "It's grand scenery. You ought to go there one day."

"Suppose we go there now."

Gray had finished putting on his boots, and was taking his whip down from the nail. He said it laughingly, looking back at Harding over his shoulder. Harding, who was washing the dishes at the table, returned his laughing look with a wondering glance.

"How could we? Who'd look after the stock?"

"Leave them to take care of themselves, the ugly brutes," went on Gray in the same laughing way. "Let us run up to Deadman's Gully and appropriate that coin, Harding. What do you say to that plan, eh?"

Harding laughed, but half-sadly.

"I believe you'd make a joke of anything, lad. But don't joke about that money. It don't seem right."

"It isn't a joke the bank would appreciate at any rate," returned Gray, with another laugh.

He did not continue the subject

"You get a talk with Mr. Morton, lad," said Harding to him, as they stood outside the hut, ready to start for their day's work. "He'll listen to you, I know. Tell him you're tired of the work here."

"What's the good of telling him that?" returned Gray, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I'm tired of work everywhere—tired and sick of this horrible country, and everything and everybody in it."

"Well, Morton might help you to a post in Adelaide," said Harding, who had been much troubled by Gray's constant despondency of late. "You'd have better company there. It's more like England, you know."

"What post could he get me in Adelaide?" returned Gray, with a bitter irony in his tone. "And do you think it would be any pleasure to me to sit in an office and see the carriages driving by? I had enough of that in England. No, I'd be off to the diamond fields if I'd the cash for the journey. Do you think Morton would lend me that?"

Harding shook his head sorrowfully.

"I wish I knew how I could help you, lad. I can't bear to see you like this. I wish Polly was here. She'd know how to talk to you better than I do."

Gray cast a scornful look at his companion's troubled face. It rankled in his heart that Harding should pity him.

"Are we going to stand talking here all day?" he said irritably. "Aren't you going to get the horses out?"

They rode off in different directions that morning.

Gray went on a long round. His ride took him to a distant part of the run, from which he could get a glimpse of the far-off mountains. The peak towering up in the blue air so far above its fellows was Rodwell's Peak. Gray remembered now that Harding had pointed it out to him when they had been together at this spot. He checked his horse and paused for some time gazing at the peak. Close under it was Deadman's Gully! Gray knew well enough how deceptive distance was in that clear air. He knew how far off those hills really were; but the sight of Rodwell's Peak seemed to bring the money close within his grasp, to give the convict's story a reality it had wanted before. It was with a darker face, and a heart overflowing with bitterness, that he left that spot and turned his horse's head homewards.

Harding was not at home when he returned. This was a new cause for vexation, for Gray had to light the fire and prepare the tea, a task he hated. It was with a muttered curse against Harding that he set about it, and he was ready with a very unpleasant greeting for him when he should at last appear.

Gray was very slow and awkward over his unaccustomed work; but tea was at last got ready. Gray finished his meal, and still Harding had not come.

It was getting dark now; the stars were coming out; the wide outlines of the pastures were growing indistinct. Gray went outside the hut and looked searchingly in the direction from which he expected Harding to come. But there were no signs of him.

Up to this point Gray had not even wondered at his lateness; he had only felt annoyed at it. But now a wild thrill went over him. Had something happened? Had Harding met with some accident?

Gray caught hold of the top rail of the fence to steady himself as the thought swept over him. It brought such a throbbing of wild hope with it that Gray recoiled at his own feelings, but the feelings remained. He could not crush them out. He knew—even while the knowledge horrified him—he knew that if Harding did not return, if some dark fate had overtaken him, that he would be glad—yes, glad! For then the secret would be his alone. Then there would be nothing to prevent him from taking possession of the buried treasure.

But it was early yet. He and Harding, Gray reflected, had often been out together as late; only, Harding had said so decidedly that he should be back long before dusk. What could be keeping him?

Gray left the hut and walked for some distance along the grassy plain, but he could see nothing, hear nothing. He "coo'eed" once or twice, but there was no answer. All was dark and still under the starry sky.

He went back, and sat down in the hut and waited. Once or twice he thought of taking his horse and riding out to search for Harding. But that would be of no use, he reflected. Harding had had a wide stretch of country to cover. It was a million chances to one that he could find him. So Gray sat still and waited.

Towards midnight he rose, drawn by a horrible sort of fascination, and took the paper from Harding's desk. He spread it out on the table, and sat down to study it. The more he looked at it the more easy it all seemed to be. It was such an absolutely safe thing. No one could possibly know the contents of that paper but himself and Harding. If Harding never came back he would be the sole owner of the secret.

Gray made his plans as he sat there with his eyes fixed on the faded, dirty sheet.

He would destroy the paper—he did not need to keep it now; he knew its contents too well. Then he would give up his work at the first opportunity, and after waiting a certain time would make his way to Deadman's Gully, get the money, and be off to England. Then he would begin to live his life in earnest.

Dazzling visions of that new life began to rise before Gray. Not a life of vulgar dissipation—Gray was not that sort of man; he loathed coarseness and riot—but a life of cultured ease, of refined luxury, rich in all the beautiful things that wealth could bring him.

A sudden noise without brought him back with a shock to present surroundings. He rose hurriedly and pushed the paper back in the desk. He thought Harding had returned. But it was only his own horse moving uneasily in the stable. It was missing its companion, and was restless and unhappy.

Gray soothed it as well as he could, and then went out once more to look across the plain. But dark and silent the land lay beneath the stars. No sound, no movement.

Gray went back into the hut and sat down again; but he did not touch the paper any more. The certainty that Harding would never return began to grow upon him, and he was frightened at himself. It was as if his half-formed wishes had brought about Harding's fate.

The hours passed, and at last the dawn came—a clear, beautiful dawn, with a fresh wind blowing over the grass and a rosy radiance flooding the sky.

Gray went out once more to look along the horizon. This time his search was not in vain. Almost at once he discerned a small moving object against the sky. It was moving slowly towards the hut. Gray knew at once what it was. It was the dog, and Harding must be close behind.

The dog came slowly on, moving with heavy, dragging steps, very unlike its usual joyous bounds; and it was quite alone. Gray could see no other moving thing along the plains. The dog had come back, but not its master.

Gray hurried forward to meet it. He saw the dog leap up when it caught sight of him, and make a dash forwards, but before it had gone a dozen steps it slackened its pace again and began to drag itself slowly forward as if utterly worn out.

It was a pitiable object to look at. Its beautiful coat was matted with blood and dust. One of its ears was almost torn away, and its body was covered with wounds. But it dragged itself onward, moaning now and then, until it got near Gray. Then it sank down on the grass and lay there, faintly wagging its tail, and fixing its eyes on Gray with a pathetic, supplicating glance.

It was plain to see that the dog had been attacked and sorely wounded. Gray surmised that one or more of the herd had turned savage, and in conflict with them Watch had got his wounds. He bent over the dog and unfastened its spiked collar.

"Poor old fellow, what—?"

He broke off suddenly. A scrap of paper fastened by a string to the collar caught his eye. Some words were scrawled on it:

*"Badly hurt. Watch will show—"*

There was an attempt at another word or two but they were illegible.

Gray read the paper and let it flutter from his fingers to the ground. The next moment he picked it up again, and crushed it between his fingers.

He had not made up his mind what to do; but the thought flashed through him as he saw the paper lying on the ground, that it might be necessary to destroy it, if—

If what? Gray hardly dared finish the thought, even in the secrecy of his own soul.

The dog followed his actions with a dumb pathetic glance, and then slowly struggled to its feet. It stood looking up at Gray, lifting one paw towards him with an indescribable air of supplication in its whole attitude. Then it turned, and began to move in the direction it had come from, looking round at every painful step to see if Gray would follow.

A rush of pitiful feeling swept over Gray. He ran back towards the hut with one thought uppermost in his mind, to get his horse and go with the dog. Everything else was forgotten. When he had run a short distance he looked round at Watch and whistled. The dog was lying on the grass regarding him, but it refused to come at his whistle.

Gray stood still, and began to argue with himself. It was absurd to start at once. Watch would die on the way. It would be far better to wait for some hours till the poor creature was rested. Harding, in all probability, was already dead. Still he would go—of course he would go; but not just yet. It would be the height of absurdity to start just now. He would fetch Watch some water and food where it lay, if he could not get the dog to go back to the hut.

He whistled again, but Watch made no response. It lay with its head between its paws, and its eyes still fixed on Gray.

"Stay there, then," muttered he impatiently, and went on towards the hut. The dog was still lying in the same place when he brought the food and water for it. It ate and drank greedily, and then rose and shook itself with a glad, eager movement, and ran a few steps forward. It was pitiful to see the change that went over the dog when on turning its head it saw that Gray was walking steadily back towards the hut. It lay down again, and gave a series of short barks and then a long pitiful howl when it found that Gray still went steadily on.

Gray did not turn round this time. He went into the hut, and sat down to think the matter over. What was the use of going with the dog at all? he began to say to himself. Would it not be better to go over to the station at once? or, better still, go later on in the day, so as to reach the station in the evening when the men would have come in from their work? Yet—was not every moment precious? If he went at once with the dog, might he not be in time?

He sat thus, swaying to and fro between different decisions, till a violent scratching at the door roused him. He got up and flung back the door. Watch stood there with drooping tail, and eyes full of dumb entreaty. Gray shut the door sharply on him. "Lie down, sir!" he exclaimed imperatively. The sight of the dog filled him with rage. Watch whined once or twice; but then came silence.

Gray sat down again at the table. "I will not go," he said to himself. And he put the thought of Harding from him, and tried to plan how he would carry out his scheme. But suddenly, before he was aware, a wave of remorseful shame came over him, and he sprang to his feet as one awaking from some hideous dream. He grasped his whip and hurried to the door; but,—

The dog was gone.

### **CHAPTER III.**

#### **AT WARRANDILLA.**

An hour after, Gray was riding swiftly across the plains on his way to the station. He was urging on his horse with voice and hand and spur, riding as if for dear life, yet even while he rode he was making up his mind to keep back from Mr. Morton all knowledge of Dearing's map. Of Dearing's death he was bound to tell him, but he would say nothing of the map. If Harding was found it would be so easy to say he had forgotten it in his anxiety; if Harding— Gray did not finish the sentence to himself, but he determined to keep back the map.

It was not much past noon when the plains began to give place to undulating ground, richer in vegetation, and with great clumps of dark-foliaged trees here and there; and it was soon after that that Gray caught his first glimpse of the river, and saw the roofs of the station gleaming in the sunlight.

Mr. Morton had spent the morning watching the men at work on the new cottages he was building near his own house for his head shepherds and stock-keepers. They were comfortable, roomy cottages, looking down on the river, with gardens before them, which Mr. Morton intended to be as well stocked and as pretty as his own.

"They will be finished in another week," he said to his wife. He had come back to the house across the garden, and found her sitting in the shady verandah. "And I have made up my mind, Minnie, who's to have the one we meant for Murray."

Mrs. Morton put down her needle-work, and looked eagerly at her husband. Murray had lately left them to start a run of his own, and Mr. Morton had been undecided who should take

his post.

"I shall give it to Harding," he said. "I'll ride over and tell him so to-morrow. You'll like having him on the station, won't you?"

"I am very glad indeed," said little Mrs. Morton with energy. "And how delighted he will be. He will be able to get everything ready before his wife and boys get here. They don't leave England till next week. He was telling me all about them when last he was over here."

"Oh, I knew he was a great favourite of yours, my dear," said her husband with a well-pleased look. "And if he isn't as sharp as some, he is as true as steel. I thought it all over this morning, and I believe he's my best man."

Mrs. Morton was called into the house at that moment, and her husband strolled into the garden to await his summons to the mid-day meal. He had not been there many moments when his quick ear caught the sound of rapid hoof-beats on the road below the house. A gate from the garden led into the road, and Mr. Morton hurried towards it. Gray had intended to ride up to the other side of the house, but when he saw Mr. Morton at the gate he checked his horse and flung himself off. There was no need for him to speak for Mr. Morton to know he brought bad news. His whole frame was trembling as he stood steadying himself by his horse; his lips were white as death.

"Something has happened to Harding, is that it?" exclaimed Mr. Morton when Gray had twice tried to make his voice audible and failed.

"I fear so," Gray gasped out. "He has not come back. He started yesterday morning for Big Creek, and he has not come back."

Gray had determined beforehand what to say, but he had not known it would be so difficult. His eyes fell before Mr. Morton's glance, as if that glance could read his soul. But Mr. Morton had never felt so warmly towards Gray as he did at that moment. He was a better fellow than he had thought him, he said to himself, to feel Harding's disappearance so keenly.

"Look here, my lad," he said kindly, "you go into the house and ask Mrs. Morton to give you something to eat. You're just tired out, you know, and won't be fit for anything till you've had a rest. Oh, you shall go with us," he added as he saw Gray's hesitating look. "But we can't start for another hour. I must send over to Billoora for a man or two. Don't be so downhearted about it, Gray. We shall find him, never fear."

But Mr. Morton's cheerful prophecy was not destined to be verified. The search for Harding was long and thorough—and fruitless. His horse was found lying dead, with an ugly wound in its neck from the horn of a bull; but Harding and his dog were gone.

Gray grew very worn and haggard in those weeks of waiting. His youth went from him. They attributed his changed looks at the station to his grief for Harding. It was enough to unhinge any man, they said—that mysterious loss of his mate. And in this explanation they were partly right. At first, Gray's remorse was almost more than he could bear. He was one of the most eager in the search-party. He rode day after day across those barren wastes of back-country, and spared no effort to find some sign of the missing man. But when the search was at last given up as hopeless, when those on the station began to take Harding's death for granted, and life began to flow on in the ordinary channel, then Gray's mind went back to the map he had destroyed, and the treasure hidden in Deadman's Gully.

He was thinking of it one afternoon as he was riding across to Billoora on an errand for Mr. Morton. It was a clear beautiful afternoon, and the air on the grassy uplands was fresh and bracing. Gray might have taken the river road, which was a mile or two nearer, but it would have led him past the cottages, and he could not bear to look at them—the remembrance that Harding was to have had one of them was too exquisitely painful. But on the uplands there was nothing to remind him of Harding—the richly-green rolling wooded pastures were altogether unlike the gray plains round the hut.

Gray gazed about him and thought of England. If he got that money he would go back there; his mind was fully made up on that point. And though he had not yet said so in so many words to himself, he knew he intended to get the money. Only the day before he had refused a new post offered to him by Mr. Morton, and said that he wished to leave the station in a week or two. And this afternoon, for the first time since Harding's disappearance, he allowed himself to dwell on the great and wonderful change the finding of the treasure would make in his life.

Absorbed in these thoughts he did not notice the approach of a man along the grassy track. The man was walking slowly and painfully, carrying a bundle over his shoulder. He was a small, wiry, narrow-shouldered man, with a thin peaked face, from which a pair of small eyes looked keenly out from under thick reddish eyebrows. He had caught sight of Gray long before Gray saw him, and after walking some distance towards him, he sat down on the bank and waited for him to come up. Gray checked his horse to speak.

"You look tired, my man."

Gray's tone of cool superiority was not resented by the wayfarer. He got up and came nearer.

"I've had a longish tramp," he said in a thin, not unpleasant voice. "I'm bound for Warrandilla, Mr. Morton's place. I've begun to fear as how I've missed my road."

"Oh, you're all right!" Gray returned indifferently; "the station is just over the rise there. You'll see it in a mile or so."

The man looked in the direction Gray pointed, and then turned his eyes again on Gray's face. Curious, shifty, cunning eyes they were—eyes that went well with the narrow, cruel mouth, and the sharply-pointed chin.

"Perhaps you're Mr. Morton yourself, sir," he said ingratiatingly. "You deserve to be, I'm sure."

"No such luck," said Gray with a laugh, not ill pleased at the man's suggestion. "But you'll find him at home if you go on. I've just left him."

Gray was about to ride on, when the man spoke again.

"I won't detain you a minute, sir, but perhaps you can tell me if I've got a chance of some work over there."

"It depends on what you can do, and who you are, you know," said Gray, with a brief comprehensive glance over the man's figure.

"You'd better not try to play any tricks with Morton if you want him to help you. That's a friendly bit of advice I'll give you."

"Thank you, sir; I'll remember it," was the humbly-spoken answer, though there was a sudden gleam in the pale blue eyes that Gray did not see. "I've heard along the road what a good employer he is. They were tellin' me at Billoora last night about the poor cove what was lost. I suppose there's no chance that he'll ever be found now, sir?"

Gray felt the colour going out of his cheeks at the sudden reference to Harding.

"I'm afraid not," he said hurriedly. "But I must go on. There's your road straight in front of you. You can't miss it."

The man had put his hand on the neck of the horse, and he still kept it there.

"I'm sorry I spoke, sir. I can see as how you're a friend of his, and I wish I'd held my tongue. But 'tis his mate I pities most. How's he bearin' it now, sir? They was tellin' me he's nigh broken-hearted."

Gray stared blankly at the man for a moment without answering. Then he recovered himself and said with some haughtiness, "I would rather not talk of it, my man. Just let my horse go, will you? I'm in a hurry."

The man stepped back instantly with a word of apology, and Gray rode on without looking back. If he had turned his head he would have seen his late companion gazing after him with a satirical smile on his crafty face.

"We'll have some more talk afore long, my fine gentleman," he was saying. "You didn't think, did you, that I knowed who you was? Them men at Billoora aren't half-bad at a description."

And with a laugh Mr. Lumley, as he chose to call himself at that particular moment, went on his way.

He was bent on staying at Warrandilla for a time, and would have tried his hand at any work offered to him, but as it turned out the work he could do best was just the work that was wanted, and he got regular employment at once. Mrs. Morton was devoted to her garden, and Lumley was really a clever gardener; so that, though she could not help agreeing with her husband's verdict about the man, she was eager to keep him.

Lumley made no secret of his past "misfortunes."

He had been shipped to the colony while it was still a convict station, and his record was by no means a good one since his first term had been worked out.

"But I have never had a good chance before, madam," he said to Mrs. Morton, trying to keep his shifty eyes fixed in a straightforward look upon her face. "I've never had a good kind friend like you before. Please God, I'll do well now."

And though Mrs. Morton distrusted his professions of reform, she found him a clever steady workman, and one most anxious to please. He became one of the most frequent attendants at the religious services which Mr. Morton held two or three times a week in the little chapel next his house.

If Mr. Morton had been a different sort of man the new gardener might have gone on to worse hypocrisy still, but there was something in his employer's strong keen face that kept him back from that.

As Lumley put it to himself, "Shammin' religion is no go with him."

It was about three weeks after Lumley's appearance at the station that Gray's time for departure came. Everyone was very kind to him; their kindness and sympathy cut him to the heart. They tried to comfort him by telling him that no one could have shown more energy in the search than he had, that nothing had been left undone, and that Harding himself would have been the last to wish that his friends should grieve too much. In some such strain Mr. Morton talked to him when he went to the house to bid him good-bye.

"You must cheer up, my lad," he said kindly. "You have done all you could. No man can do more."

Gray made no reply, nor did he raise his gloomy eyes to meet the pleasant kindly glance of his employer. Mr. Morton went on: "So you are thinking of going back to the old country, Gray. Well, there ought to be room there for a man like you; and I don't wonder at your wanting to get away from here after what's happened."

"I am not sailing for a month or so," said Gray. He spoke hurriedly, clearing his throat before he could articulate the words properly. "I think of taking a trip into the mountains. I don't feel equal to the voyage just now."

"Well, take care of yourself; and let us know how you get along." He took Gray's hand and pressed it warmly. "God bless you, my lad!"

Gray looked up into his face with such a strange, wild, miserable glance that Mr. Morton started. He put his hand on the young man's shoulder and looked earnestly at him.

"What is it, Gray? There is something troubling you. Can I help you?"

But Gray drew back.

"There is nothing," he said coldly.

"But there *is* something," Mr. Morton said to his wife that evening. "Can Gray be keeping back something about Harding, Minnie? I confess I am not altogether satisfied with the result of the search. Harding was not a man to get lost in the Bush; he knew the country too well. And yet —"

"You don't suspect Harding of pretending to be lost?" said his little wife with an amazed look.

"No, no; Harding was not a man to do that sort of thing. I never suspected anything till I saw Gray's face this afternoon. But there is some mystery; and Gray knows more than he has told. I feel sure of that."

"What shall you do?" asked Mrs. Morton, with a startled look on her pretty face.

"What can I do?"

"You don't think Gray—"

"Don't put it into words, Minnie. I have no right to think anything. But his face startled me. No man ever looked like that who hadn't got some great trouble weighing on him. And he wasn't so devoted to Harding as all that, you know. It surprised me to see how much he felt it."

"I always thought he patronized Harding; believed himself too good for him."

"Oh, I know you never liked Gray much," returned her husband, "Harding liked him though. He must have something in him."

To get back to his own quarters Gray had to cross the garden. It was looking its loveliest this afternoon. The turf was as green if not as smooth as the turf of an English lawn, and the glow of colour was more brilliant than any English garden could show. Gray loved flowers. But he passed through that beautiful garden without a glance right or left, with his eyes bent upon the ground.

Not far from the gate which he would have to pass through Lumley was busy cutting the grass with a hand-machine. He had been working in another part of the garden when Gray had gone up to the house, but had caught sight of him as he crossed to the verandah steps. Soon after he left the work he was about in order to cut the grass by the gate.

It was a curious trait in his vicious character that he really loved his gardening work. He had come to the station for a definite purpose, a purpose nearly fulfilled—he was leaving the place at dawn next morning—yet he was working busily still in the pleasant evening light, anxious to leave the grass in perfect order. Mrs. Morton never had such a good gardener again. He was not working too busily, however, to be unmindful of Gray's approach. He watched him with a crafty



sidelong look as he came swinging down the path, and when he was quite close to him he touched his cap as an English servant might have done in respectful greeting. He had saluted Gray in the same manner before, and Gray had been curiously pleased by it.

"Good evening, my man," he said loftily and would have passed on. But Lumley stepped out on the path. He had taken off his cap and he turned it round and round in his hands as he spoke.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," he said humbly, "But I was wantin' to speak to you. I took the liberty of callin' on you this afternoon, but you was out."

"What is it you want?" said Gray. "I am leaving the station to-morrow, you know."

"That's the very reason, sir." He looked up suddenly from under his bushy eyebrows. "I'm leavin' the station too. Perhaps you didn't know that, sir?"

"I hadn't heard it," said Gray indifferently. "Aren't you comfortable here, then?"

"It isn't what I've been used to, sir. I've been a gentleman's servant. Gentlemen as knows how to treat a servant. *Real* gentlemen." Then came again the sudden crafty look.

"That was in England, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, before my 'misfortunes' came upon me. I had many good places; and that's the sort of work which suits me best. I'm goin' to try to get a place again, sir."

"Indeed," said Gray, a little impatient at all this.

"And when I heard as you'd come into a fortune, sir, I says to myself, 'Mr. Gray'll be wanting a servant, and if he would take me on how blessed I should be!'"

Gray's face had turned an ashy white.

"What are you talking of?" he said sharply. He recovered himself with an effort, and added in a milder tone: "I expect I'm poorer than you are, Lumley. I've hardly enough to live on myself, let alone a servant."

"Indeed, sir! I'm very sorry, for if anybody would grace a fortune 'twould be you, sir."

He turned his cloth cap round and round in his hands as he added:

"Then you don't want a servant, sir?"

Gray laughed out.

"Most decidedly not, my man. But I must go on, I'm busy."

Lumley stood in his way and did not move.

"If I didn't want any wages, sir? I'd like to go along with you, if only for the journey down to Adelaide. I'd serve you faithfully, sir."

"It's utterly impossible—out of the question," exclaimed Gray with a wave of the hand. "Besides, I'm not going to Adelaide."

"Indeed, sir!"

It had been a slip of the tongue, which Gray repented at once.

"It's altogether out of the question, my good fellow," he said. "You must have been dreaming to think of it. Now, will you let me pass? I have a great deal to do."

Lumley stepped aside.

"I wish you humbly good-bye, sir, and good luck. There's riches in your face, sir; I see 'em as plain as can be. You'll think of me when the good times come."

Gray turned a quivering face upon him.

"What do you mean?" he gasped, and then he stopped and gave an unsteady smile. "I'll certainly think of you when my riches come, my man. It's an easy promise to make."

He waved his hand in hurried farewell and hastened along the path. Lumley stood looking after him with an evil glance.

"You will think of me, my fine gentleman, and no mistake."

And he chuckled harshly to himself.

## CHAPTER IV.

### IN QUEST OF TREASURE.

Gray's spirits rose when he had left the station behind him and found himself riding along the well-worn track towards the hills, that showed themselves in clear outline against the brightening morning sky.

With a good horse under him and the fresh wind blowing on his face, he found it easy to convince himself that it would not have made any difference if he had gone back with the dog. He found it easy to look forward instead of backward, to make resolutions about using the money well, instead of indulging in vain repentance for the past.

It was a clear beautiful morning. The country Gray was riding through was very unlike the level pastures he had lived on for months. It was undulating and richly wooded. Here and there a stream, full and strong in this joyous spring-time, flashed white in the dawn. Westwards rose the great hills, blue in the distance, the hills towards which Gray was riding. It was a country to make glad the heart of man, where he might richly enjoy the fruits of his labour.

It was not thickly settled as yet. Gray passed but few houses in that day's far ride, and it was long past dusk when he rode up to Mr. Macquoid's, who owned the run next to Mr. Morton's, and where Mr. Morton had advised him to stop that night.

Gray received a warm welcome. Tea was brought for him into the pleasant sitting-room, where Mr. Macquoid's wife and daughters were eager to hear Gray's account of Harding's disappearance. Mr. Macquoid had sent out a search-party on his own account, for he knew Harding well.

It irritated Gray savagely to find how warm and eager an interest they all took in the lost man. He could have spent such a delightful evening in that charming house, with those pretty girls. The piano was open, and Gray was fond of music and could sing well. It would have delighted him to prove to them his musical abilities. And the books in the low book-cases, the etchings and engravings on the walls, the periodicals and newspapers fresh from England, that lay heaped on the round table by the window, showed that the Macquoids had a keen cultured interest in literature and art. Gray could have talked to them of so many things, showed them so easily how wide his knowledge was, how correct his taste.

But they would talk of nothing but Harding. They seemed to think it was the only subject Gray could feel any interest in just then. He was thankful when the evening was over.

His next resting-place was a small station close under the shadow of the hills. Here only vague rumours of Harding's loss had come, and Gray found it easy to say nothing of his connection with the lost man.

A strange thing happened to him that night. He was put to sleep in a small room opening on the rough verandah that ran round the house. It was a hot still night, and the window was left open. Gray lay awake for the first part of the night. He was restless and excited and could not sleep. But towards morning he fell into a heavy dreamless slumber, from which he was roughly awakened by a sharp, sudden noise.

He started up in bed and looked round the room. A man was standing with his back to him in the act of picking up the chair he had just thrown over. In the dim starlight Gray could just see him as he bent over the chair. With a sharp exclamation Gray sprang out of bed and made a dash at him. But the man was too quick. He wriggled out of Gray's grasp as a snake might wriggle out of its captor's clutch, and keeping his head well down, that Gray might not see his face, he dashed out of the window and across the court-yard. Gray saw him disappear over the fence, and run swiftly down the hollow.

He struck a light and carefully examined the room. His purse was safe. Everything in his pocket was left intact.

Gray's story caused great excitement next morning. There had never been an attempt at robbery in the station before.

"It must have been a black fellow," Mr. Stuart said. But Gray was certain it was no black man. If it had not been absurd to think of such a thing, he would have said it was Lumley, the Mortons' gardener.

But he dismissed that idea as absurd and impossible.

His next day's ride took him into the heart of the hill-country. The track was far less clearly marked here, and often difficult to follow. It ran through deep lonely ravines walled in by precipitous heights of dark rock, and along the sides of mighty hills from which glimpses could be

got of still higher hills, towering up into the still blue sky. Some of the hills were darkly wooded, others were clothed in rich grass and flowering shrubs almost to the summits; others again, and these more numerous as Gray rode on, were bare of blade or leaf, heaped with dark scarred rocks, waterless, desolate.

Gray missed his road once or twice that day; and once he was unable to cross a furious torrent which had swept down the frail bridge laid across it, and was forced to make a long round.

There was a small cottage in these parts kept by M'Pherson, an old stock-keeper of Mr. Macquoid's. Gray had hoped to leave it far behind him in this day's journey, but he was only too glad to see it when he had at last regained the track just after sunset. He and his horse were both tired out.

The old man came to his cottage door as Gray clattered up the hilly path. He looked at Gray, and then beyond him.

"Ye're kindly welcome, lad. But hasna your mate come up wi' ye?"

Gray looked involuntarily behind him. The path stretched away lonely and desolate in the gathering darkness.

"What do you mean?" he asked; turning a pale face on M'Pherson. "I am quite alone."

"Weel, weel; there was a callant here no' sae lang syne, speering after ye. Aye, 'twas you he meant. A weel set-up, black-haired chap, he said, riding a roan horse wi' a white blaze in front."

Gray got off his horse and stood with his hand upon the bridle.

"I know no one about here. You must be mistaken," he said. But he said it falteringly, and a cold sweat broke out upon his brow. The idea had flashed upon him that it might be Harding who was tracking his footsteps.

"What was he like?" he asked, as carelessly as he could.

"A soft-spoken callant wi' reddish hair—a puir thin sort o' body wi' a ferrety face. Sae ye didna luke for him? Weel, weel, maybe it's no a maitter for greeting that ye havena come across him. I wadna hae gi'en muckle for his honesty. But ye wull be wanting a meal, lad, and your bonnie horse too. Yon's the stable. A gude man is gude to his beastie, and ye'll no be wanting me to assist."

He bustled into the house without waiting for Gray to speak. He would have waited long, for Gray was too startled to speak. He began to think it must be Lumley who was following him. He slowly led his horse to the stable and made it comfortable, and then went back to the house. He stopped at the door to look back into the dusk.

The house was built in a green hollow carved out of the side of a steep hill. The ground rose steeply behind the place, rising up into a jagged ridge against the sky. In front there was a small flat meadow immediately before the house; then the ground fell almost precipitously and then rose again, with only a narrow ravine between. The opposite hills were higher than the hill under which the cottage was built, and frowned above it in heavy overhanging masses of rock. As Gray looked up he could only distinguish the vague dark outlines of the gloomy hills. A thousand men might have been hidden in the hollows and he would have been none the wiser. He listened intently, but there was no sound of human life. The wind had fallen, and the rush of the stream at the bottom of the ravine was the only sound that struck his ear.

M'Pherson had a comfortable meal prepared for him, late as it was. But Gray could not eat. He was too excited and uneasy. He tried to get a clear description of the man who had asked for him, but M'Pherson could tell him little more. The man had come to the door about four in the afternoon. He explained that he was expecting to come up with a friend along that road, and wanted to know how far he was ahead.

"He seemed verra oneasy when I told him I'd set eyes on naebody the day lang. I tauld him ye must hae gone the ither road."

"I missed my way."

"Aye, 'twas that made ye sae late. And sae ye arena acquent wi' the man? 'Tis verra strange."

Yes, it was very strange. The more Gray thought of it the more alarming it seemed. And then quite suddenly an explanation came to him, which, while it did not remove the annoyance of the occurrence, robbed it of all its more alarming elements. The explanation was this:—

Lumley had evidently conceived an absurd dog-like affection for him. The fellow had not taken his refusal to have him as a servant as a final one, and was following him in the hope that he might still be taken on. He had not dared to come face to face with Gray. Perhaps when he had entered the room at Mr. Stuart's (for Gray was now convinced that it was Lumley he saw) he intended to make one more appeal, but Gray's sudden waking had startled him too much.

Gray's face cleared as he forced himself to accept this explanation as the true one. He stretched himself with the air of one who throws off a burden.

"I'll turn in," he said, yawning as he spoke. "But I'll have another look at my horse first."

"Aye, do, my lad. But ye needna feel oneasy about your horse. Sandy here"—and he looked down at the old sheep-dog at his knee—"wull hear ony step that comes near the house, be it e'er sae saft."

Gray shuddered as his glance fell on the dog. He was looking up at his master just as Watch used to look at Harding.

"Ye arena that fond o' dogs," said the old man quickly. He had noticed Gray's look. "But Sandy's nae common dog. I could tell you mony a tale o' his cleverness."

He patted the dog's head and looked across at Gray, who had resumed his seat and was staring fixedly into the fire. He had turned deadly pale. M'Pherson's shrewd kindly eyes dwelt on him for a moment. Gray was conscious of the look and roused himself with an effort.

"How far is it to Daintry's Corner?" he asked abruptly.

Daintry's Corner was close to Rodwell's Peak, and Gray was making that the apparent end of his journey.

"About a maitter o' twal mile or sae. Ye'll win it by mid-day the morn." He paused a moment and then added: "Ye look ower pale, my lad, for sic journeying amang the hills. Ye wad do weel to tak' a bit rest; and it's lang since I've set een on a braw lad like you. A day or twa's rest wi' me wad freshen you up."

Gray hastily declined the invitation, and then, feeling he had been too abrupt, he said:

"I am sailing for England in a month, and I want to get a good idea of your hill scenery. I've lived on the plains a great deal, and this is my first opportunity."

"Eh! I ken what the plains are. I lived nigh the allotted span o' life upon them—saxty years I lived there. I cam from Scotland a bairn o' seven, and I lived on the Macquoid estate till I cam up here."

"Whatever made you leave your home for this lonely spot?" Gray asked, glad to keep the old man talking about himself to prevent any more curious inquiries about his own doings.

"Ye wadna understand if ye werena born amang the hills, lad. The gudewife, she kent how I felt, and when the Lord took her hame the hills seemed to ca' more and more on me. It's no lonely here; there's voices everywhere. Did ye ever think, my lad, o' the way the Bible speaks of hills an' a' high places. 'The shadow o' a great rock in a weary land.' Yon's a grand passage; but the fu' meaning naebody can understand wha hasna kent the thirst and heat o' a waterless desert. Were ye ever lost in the Bush, lad?"

Gray stared across at him in angry bewilderment.

"Never," he said abruptly.

"Ye may be thankful; 'tis a terrible place. The skies like brass abune your head; the grund like parchment under your feet. I was a lost man amang those deserts once. Four days I wandered through dry and thirsty places. Eh, sirs, 'twas a terrible time! But the Lord brought me through; thanks be to His holy name!"

Gray did not speak. The old man's words had called up in clear vision those endless deserts of scorched sand, where the very herbage was hateful to look upon, and the blessed light became a consuming fire. Had Harding, faint with his wounds, wandered helplessly there till he fell to rise no more?

M'Pherson got up and reached down the great Bible that lay by itself on the shelf above his head.

"'Tis time for evening worship, my lad. I'll read ye a chapter."

He sat down and placed the Bible on the table, and put on his silver-rimmed spectacles. Gray leant back in his chair and folded his arms, and prepared himself to listen. The old man looked at his face, and then turned over the leaves of his Bible with a sigh.

"I'll read ye what has often been a comfort to me, my lad," he said.

But Gray's eyes had fallen on the sheepdog, and he had seen it drag itself up, with ears upraised and head pointed at the door, in the very attitude of Watch that night the fugitive Dearing had been outside the hut.

"Look at the dog!" he stammered out to M'Pherson. "He hears someone outside the house."

"That's verra onlikely," said M'Pherson with a calmness that was intensely irritating to Gray.

"He isn't much use as a dog if he makes that fuss for nothing," Gray returned.

"Weel, weel, we are baith getting auld thegither."

M'Pherson rose as he spoke and went to the door to open it.

"You are not going out?" Gray cried.

The old man turned a wondering face upon him.

"Wad ye keep the door barred on sic a nicht as this, if there's onybody outside i' the wind and rain? A braw laddie like you suld hae nae fears: ye suld leave that to the women, puir feeble folk."

Gray's face grew scarlet at the rebuke. He said no more, and M'Pherson opened the door and peered out into the dark, stormy night. He shouted once or twice, but there was no answer nor sound of footsteps. If the dog had heard footsteps they had now ceased; and only the voices of wind, and rain, and rushing torrent came up the glen.

## CHAPTER V.

### DEADMAN'S GULLY.

Gray reached Daintry's Corner before noon on the following day. For some miles before reaching his destination his road had lain through a deep narrow gorge, with gigantic walls on each side of almost perpendicular rock. Much of the rock was bare, and of a sullen, cheerless brown, but here and there trees sprang out of hollows and showed green against the rock, and dark-leaved climbing plants flung their long arms from crevice to crevice, and hung in gloomy wreaths along the broken ground.

The morning had come with sunshine and gentle breezes, but no sunshine reached this frowning ravine, and the air there was damp, and heavy, and close.

The ravine had run in an almost straight line for some miles, and Gray was beginning to weary for its end, when he suddenly checked his horse with a start of amazement and dismay. Some few hundred yards before him the ravine apparently came to a full stop. A great precipice rose up before him closing up the end of the gorge—a precipice far too steep for any track to run over it.

Gray began to think he had come to a cul de sac, and that he should be obliged to retrace his steps, but before doing so he determined to ride on to the foot of the precipice before him and examine the ground carefully.

A new surprise awaited him there. He found that the gorge took a sudden turn here, in fact, ran on at right angles to its former course, though considerably narrower and closed in by walls of rock higher and gloomier than ever.

The bottom of this new part of the gorge was not open and grassy, but studded thickly with enormous trees clad in dark heavy foliage. It was a gloomy spot to enter, and Gray hesitated; yet it was evident the track went this way. There was the mark of a horse's footprint just before him, freshly made too!

Gray's eyes fell on this as he was looking along the ground, and he sprang off his horse to more closely examine it. Some one had evidently passed here quite lately. As Gray looked he saw that the footsteps ceased a short way up the glen, and that when they ceased the ground was slightly broken away as if horse and rider had tried to climb the cliff. With a rush of sudden, unexplainable terror, Gray looked up the steep impassable wall of rock. Horse and rider had gone that way! But how?—and for what purpose? He listened intently, but no sound came to his ear that spoke of a living presence. An oppressive silence reigned on every side.

Gray was no coward, but the blood forsook his cheek and his knees trembled under him. Who was it that was haunting him thus? He dared not make any answer to himself. He dared not stay longer in that dark and silent spot. Taking his horse by the bridle he led him hastily onwards, picking his way with difficulty through the mighty tree-trunks and among the wave-worn boulders that lay between them. The trees grew so near together that it was impossible to see more than a yard or so ahead.

Gray was stumbling blindly on, with the belief growing in him that the gorge was impassable, and that he would be forced to go back past that spot in the cliffs which chilled him to think of; when suddenly the light grew brighter through the trees, a keen breeze blew upon his face; in a few steps, the trees ended, and the gorge ceased. Gray found himself standing on a rocky platform commanding a glorious view. There lay the hills, rising range after range before him,

bathed in the sunshine of early noon. It was a wonderful prospect—a sight to make one's heart leap up; and Gray stood entranced, drinking in all its beauty, forgetting himself and his errand.

But not for long. He had soon to consider his path; and, as he looked round him with that purpose in his mind, all the glory seemed to die out of the scene, and his pleasure in it passed away. For this must be Daintry's Corner, Gray concluded. He must be very near the end of his journey.

He looked keenly along the ranges of hills in front of him, but he could not see the towering battlements of Rodwell's Peak. That must lie behind him. M'Pherson had directed him to a small settlement some miles beyond Daintry's Corner. Gray could see the roofs of the houses over the slope of one of the lower hills to the right of him. He determined he would spend the night there if he could reach it in time, but his first business was to find Rodwell's Peak, and then to search for Deadman's Gully. Once the exact spot was reached, he hoped soon to find the treasure. Gray did not anticipate much difficulty in taking it away.

The robbery of the Bank at Adelaide by Dearing had made a great sensation at the time. He had carried off more than £30,000 in gold and notes; and he had managed to change much of the gold and all the notes for Bank of England notes, whose numbers were not known. The notes Gray could easily carry away and much of the gold. The remainder he had determined to leave behind him safely buried. It was better to lose a part than run the risk of discovery by weighting himself too much. A few hours would suffice for this, he thought, then he determined to go down to the settlement for the night, and make his way to Adelaide by another route. Nothing should prevail upon him to go back the same way: he had long ago decided that, and recent events had made his determination more fixed than ever.

But now to reach Rodwell's Peak! Gray carefully examined the ground, and made up his mind that his road lay along the rocky platform or terrace on which the gorge had ended, and which seemed to run along the hills through which the gorge had cleft its way. He made a rough calculation, and then decided to follow the terrace in its westerly direction. He called his horse, which had begun to graze on the short sweet grass that clothed the gentle slopes above the terrace, and set off on the road he had chosen.

If he had looked backwards down the gloomy ravine he had just left behind him, he might have seen a face looking cautiously out through the dark boughs of the trees—an evil sallow face with reddish slanting eyebrows. But Gray did not look back. He was too excited at the near fruition that awaited his hopes. All the fears that had assailed him, all the remorse that had been growing up in him disappeared as mists disappear before the morning sun. He mounted his horse and rode gaily along the broad even platform, whistling as he went. The platform or ledge continued for some time, sloping almost imperceptibly downwards till it ended in a wide, grassy, meadow-like valley, with a giant eucalyptus in the midst of it. Through the valley a stream went singing—every ripple making a line of silver in the sunshine.

Gray crossed the valley, stopping to let his horse drink at the stream, and to take a draught himself. The hills beyond the valley were strewn in places with great boulders, but it was easy to find a path, and Gray made good progress for a time. Then the way became rougher and more precipitous, but Gray pushed hurriedly on; for over the shoulder of the next hill rose the jagged crest of Rodwell's Peak. He knew the knife-like edge of the lower summit, the towering outlines of the peak itself. Now a well-defined track began to disclose itself running in easy curves down the hill and along the rocky bottom.

Gray rode more slowly, his heart beating wildly. This must be the track Harding had spoken of, leading from the settlements below. He kept a sharp look-out, but no sign of a gully disclosed itself, though Rodwell's Peak rose well in front.

The valley, at the bottom of which the track ran, had been wide at first, with sloping shelving sides, richly covered with foliage. But now it was narrowing fast; the sides were growing steeper and steeper, and the vegetation less abundant. Gray rode slowly, stopping every now and then to examine the rocks for an opening between them. It could not be far off. Looking down the valley the towering crest of Rodwell's Peak was all that could be seen. It rose at the mouth of the valley like a mighty sentinel guarding the fortress of the hills. But though Gray carefully examined the rocks on either side, he could find no trace of a gully running between them.

He rode on until he reached the point where the valley ended, and the land began to shelve upwards before him. He saw that the track ran across the shoulder of Rodwell's Peak, but he did not follow it. It was useless to do that. He felt certain that the opening into Deadman's Gully lay in the valley behind him.

He turned his horse and rode backwards. As he turned, a sharp sound caught his ears, and he checked his horse to listen. It ceased instantly, and though he stopped there for some moments listening intently it did not recur. The sound had been like the beat of a horse's hoofs against hard rock. But there was no sign of horse or rider to be seen. The valley was silent, save for the hoarse cry of a magpie among the trees and the rush of a stream in the distance.

Gray rode slowly back, but he did not pursue his search with any vigour; he had been too much startled by that sudden sound. He tried to reason himself into believing that it was a mere

hallucination of hearing, that the fall of a stone down the steep hill had been mistaken by him for the clatter of a horse's feet. But reason as he would the conviction remained strong within him that it was a horse he had heard, and he was looking more carefully, as he rode down the valley, for other signs of a horseman's presence, than for the opening into Deadman's Gully.

It was quite accidentally that, about half-way down the valley, he noticed a crevice in the rocks, on his left hand, thickly hung with creepers. It was more a crack in the rock than a crevice, so narrow was it, and only by looking some distance up could it be seen at all, for its lower portion was entirely hidden by a curtain of hanging foliage. But it was the only opening of any sort that Gray had discovered, and he determined to examine it more closely, though it seemed absurd to suppose that this could be the entrance he sought.

He rode up to the bottom of the fissure and dragged aside the heavy creepers. A wild thrill went through him as he discovered that the crack widened towards the ground into an opening just large enough for a man and horse to pass through. Gray could not see where the dark passage before him led, for after a few yards it took a sudden turn to the right, but he determined at once to make a thorough investigation.

He got off his horse and cut away with some difficulty enough of the curtaining foliage to allow an easy passage through. Then, with a long fearful look up and down the lonely valley, he entered the cleft. His entrance disturbed a vast number of bats, that flew shrieking out of the damp hollows of the rocks and whirled wildly round him. Their cries had an eerie sound well in keeping with the gloomy spot. But Gray pushed doggedly on, soothing his good horse with voice and hand, and becoming more and more convinced that he was on the right track.

After some distance the passage widened, and he began to see broad daylight ahead of him. A few yards more and he came out into a narrow valley heaped with rocks.

It was a gloomy, dreadful place, shut in by high, bare, precipitous cliffs. The passage by which Gray had just entered seemed to be the only mode of access: no human foot could scale those dark overhanging cliffs. There was but little vegetation. Some coarse grass grew in the hollows and on the ledges of the rocks, and a gray-leaved repulsive-looking bramble spread its gnarled branches thickly along the uneven bottom of the gully.

But Gray looked in vain for the mighty tree he had expected to see, towering up in the midst of the valley. There were no trees of any kind in the place. Yet Gray felt sure that he had reached the right spot, and a discovery he made after a brief survey supported his opinion. This was a ruined hut built under the shelter of a shelving piece of rock. It was a hut built of logs; the roof was partly off and the roughly made door was lying rotting on the ground. This deserted, ruinous hut only added a new touch of desolation to the dreary gully. Gray involuntarily shivered as he stood before it and his horse tugged restlessly at the bridle.

He fastened the horse securely to the door-post and stepped into the hut. The floor was of beaten earth. It was heaped up now with the *débris* of the fallen roof, but Gray could see where the rude hearth had been and where a half-smouldered log still lay. The walls were intact. They were strongly built of heavy logs fastened securely together. The hut might have been built for a miniature fortress, so strong were its walls.

Who had built the hut? Where had the logs come from that formed its walls? Gray carefully considered these questions. He remembered now that Harding had told him of some big trees that were in the gully when a gang of bushrangers, who had made the place their home, had been broken up. There were trees in the gully then. What had become of them?

Gray stepped hastily out and carefully examined the ground. It did not take him long to find the scarred trunks of a few trees hidden by the brambles. He cut away the brambles, and tried by measuring to decide which had been the largest tree. But he could not decide. The trunks were all about the same size. Either the trunk of the largest tree had been taken away altogether, or it had not been much larger than the trunks of the other trees.

Wearied out by his search, Gray returned to the hut. He sat down on one of the fallen rafters of the roof and considered what it was best to do next. He was beginning to feel hopeless. The direction had seemed so clear on Dearing's map. He had been so certain that he would easily find the treasure if he once could reach the gully. Yet here he was, apparently as far off as ever from the attainment of his hopes.

Some hours had now passed since Gray entered the gully. The afternoon was drawing to a close. There were only a few hours of daylight before him.

Gray had brought a little food with him, pressed upon him by the kindly old Scotsman. He took down his knapsack and ate the food. It was no matter of regret to him that he had only a sufficient store for one meal. Nothing would have induced him to spend the night in the gully. Even now, in the broad daylight, an unreasoning terror was taking hold of him. Every little sound, the movement of his horse, the cry of a bird as it flapped its way across the sky, the rustle of the long grass in the hollows of the cliffs, even his own footsteps as he moved to and fro, struck upon him with a sense of fear. He could have sworn once that he had heard a footstep that was not his own, a slow and wary footstep, among the brambles. So sure was he, that he sprang to the door

and looked out. There was nothing to be seen. And with a bitter laugh at his own fears he went back and sat down. But he made up his mind there and then that he would not stay much longer in the gully. He would not have spent the night there for all the wealth the world could offer him.

He had now to consider what was best to do in the short period of daylight that lay before him. It seemed a hopeless task to dig south of each of the trunks in the gully, yet what else was there to be done? It was best for him to set about it at once. He decided this, and yet he sat still. He could not make up his mind to go out into the gully again. The place was becoming a horror to him.

As he sat thus on the broken rafter, thinking miserably of the task before him, his eyes fixed themselves on the little window of the hut. It was the only window and was very small. It was, in fact, a hole drilled in one of the beams.

With that strange power the mind has, of carrying on two trains of thought at once, Gray found himself, in the midst of his weary thoughts about the hidden treasure, wondering why the window had been made so small and such an odd round shape. The explanation quickly occurred to him. The hut had been built by men who were in daily fear of capture. It had been built not so much as a shelter from the weather, for there were deep caves in the rocks that would have served that purpose, but as a means of defence. Safe inside the hut, with the door shut and that small window guarded by a good rifle, one man might have defied a score.

Gray guessed, and guessed truly, that Dearing had built the hut. The gang of bushrangers who had formerly used the gully for their lurking-place had lived in the caves. The gully was an unknown place then, and having once reached it all fear of detection was over. But when once the place was discovered, some means of defence within it was necessary, and Dearing had built this place.

Gray remembered Dearing's face as he staggered into the hut, the look of abject horrible fear upon it. What days and nights he must have spent in this gully, watching, waiting, no rest, never safe for a single moment!

"Poor wretch!" Gray murmured to himself. "What a life to live!" And his thoughts went back, by force of sudden contrast, to the life of another lonely man. He remembered how M'Pherson had answered, with a glad, deep peace in his old face, "It's no lonely here. There's voices everywhere."

Gray would not dwell on that. He rose, throwing back his head and straightening himself with a quick proud gesture. He told himself he had no part or lot with the fears of Dearing, any more than with that strange faith that kept M'Pherson glad in his lonely old age. There was no need for him, he said to himself, to have the fear of man before his eyes; and if he need not fear man, what was there to fear? Nothing. He repeated it to himself. Nothing. It was only women and uneducated men who believed in the supernatural.

Yet even as he said it his face turned an ashy white; the great sweat-drops broke out upon his brow, his knees trembled under him. He had heard again the sound of a cautious footstep and the rustle of the brambles as if some hand was moving them. He rushed to the door of the hut and looked round; but as before all was still and silent. He gave a loud shout, but no answer came, save the echo from the rocks. He waited there some moments, but he saw no sign of a human presence.

Yet he was now absolutely certain he had heard a footstep. The very hair began to rise on Gray's head, a freezing terror seized hold of him. A moment before he had feigned to disbelieve in the supernatural, but now, in an agony of mortal fear, he cried out to himself that it was no living man who was dogging him thus. A living man he could have faced, but not this mysterious visitant from the world beyond the grave.

In a calmer moment Gray might have reasoned with himself, but he did not stop to reason now. He felt he must escape from this horrible place at once, or madness would come upon him. His horse was still tied to the door-post, and was cropping the thin grass that grew up between the crevices in the rocky platform on which the hut was built. Gray hurriedly unfastened him and led him towards the entrance to the gully. He had gone a short distance when he remembered he had left his knapsack and pistol-case on the floor of the hut. All the money he had, a scanty store, was in the knapsack. He could not leave it behind.

Still holding the horse by the bridle he went hurriedly back. He flung the rein over the door-post and made one step into the hut. Then he fell back with a sharp and sudden exclamation. The hut was no longer empty. Leaning in an easy attitude against the window with a revolver in his hand stood Lumley, the ex-gardener of the Mortons.





### THE MEETING IN "DEADMAN'S GULLY"

There was a sardonic grin on his thin peaked face.

"So you have come back of your own accord, Mr. Gentleman Gray," he said. "I was just about to order you back."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE TREASURE FOUND.

Gray's first feeling was one of intense, overpowering relief. That dreadful terror which had beset him left him when he saw that it was indeed Lumley who had followed him. He spoke sharply:

"What do you mean by following me up like this, and skulking in the brambles? It was a dangerous game, mind you! I might have sent a shot into them just now, you know."

Lumley looked at him and laughed.

"You're a pretty fellow to go bushranging. When did you look at your pistols last, eh?"

Gray caught up his pistols and looked at them. The charges had been tampered with. They were useless.

Lumley stood regarding him with vicious amusement in his foxy eyes.

"You'd best have stuck at an honest trade, mate," he said. "You're no good at bushranging at all. It's been too easy to take you in. You needn't look at 'em any more, you know. I made 'em safe enough at Stuart's place."

Gray dropped the pistols on the ground.

"How dare you?" he began in a choked voice. Then he checked himself. "I'll trouble you to tell me what you mean," he said. "And—"

He made a dash to snatch the revolver from Lumley's hand, but Lumley was too quick for him. He jumped back and levelled the weapon full at Gray.

"Stand where you are or I'll fire," he said coolly. "Move a limb, and you'll have a bullet into you."

Gray stood still. A cold sweat broke out upon his brow. Lumley had dropped all disguise now. The evil soul of the man looked out from his face.

"That's better," he said. "Just stand there, will you?" He seated himself on some of the fallen *débris*, still keeping his revolver pointed at Gray.

"Now we'll have a comfortable little talk together, mate," he said. "You can sit down now if you like."

Gray looked round and carefully chose a seat. The pallid look of terror had gone from his face. He had recovered his calmness and his power of thought. He saw clearly enough that he was in Lumley's power. He guessed his reason for following him; and he had determined on his course of action. If Lumley chose to insist upon it, he would tell him Dearing's secret and leave him to get the money if he could; and he would go straight to the nearest station and inform against him. Not for all the money in the world, Gray declared to himself, would he put his reputation into this man's keeping.

"That's right, mate. Now we'll be comfortable," said Lumley, with a grin, "and we'll talk about the business that's brought me here. You know what it is well enough."

"Well, I can make a pretty good guess," Gray said, carefully selecting a cigar and proceeding to light it. "But you'll have to tell me plainly, you know, before going any further."

The change in Gray's manner was too striking to escape Lumley. He looked at him with a steady crafty look before answering.

"There ain't no money hid here, I s'pose? You're on a pleasure toor, ain't you? That pick in your knapsack is for ge'logical specimens, ain't it?"

Gray carefully flicked a little ash from the end of his cigar, and then looked up.

"You are quite wrong, Lumley. That pick is not meant for geological specimens at all. It's meant to be used for digging up a large sum of money hidden somewhere about here. Unfortunately I don't know where."

"You don't?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. Perhaps you know?"

Lumley glared at him like a wild beast.

"Was that why you were going away?"

Gray nodded.

"Tom Dearing didn't tell you where 'twas hid? Don't you try to deceive me, man. I'll not stand it. I'll have that swag if I've got to swing for it to-morrow. What made you go proddin' and pryin' round those old trunks for, eh? You tell me that."

"With all the pleasure in life, my man. But I should like to hear a few things from you first. How did you get to know of this money? I may not be far wrong in supposing you an accomplice of our good friend, lately deceased, Mr. Tom Dearing?"

"I'd wring your neck for tuppence," Lumley muttered savagely.

Gray looked up at him with a pleasant smile.

"What did you say?"

Gray was beginning to feel thoroughly satisfied with himself again. He felt himself very much more than a match for Mr. Lumley.

That individual made no reply to his last inquiry.

"So you want to know how I got on this job. I'll tell you quickly enough. Dearing made a dying speech and confession, didn't he?"

"Something of the kind."

"He'd do that for sure and certain. That was his way. He was always half-hearted, Tom was."

P'r'aps he didn't mention a pal of his, Bill Clay, eh?"

"I think he did, now I come to think of it. I suppose you are that gentleman. Is Clay your real name, or one of your many aliases?"

"You're right, mate. I'm Bill Clay, as you'll find out before you're done with me," said Lumley, with a savage look. "I wasn't in that business with the bank, but Tom told me he'd hidden the money; but he didn't tell me where he'd hid it, d'you see. *You've* got to tell me that, Mr. Gentleman Gray."

Gray leisurely took his cigar from his mouth and said:

"With pleasure, my man, if I knew it myself; but you see I don't."

Lumley gave him a savage frown.

"Think I'm going to believe that? Look here, I'm in a hurry, and you've just got to tell me all you know. If you don't, I'll—"

He lifted the revolver again with a significant gesture.

Gray did not speak for a moment. His hand might have trembled slightly as he stroked his moustache, but he showed no other sign of agitation. Lumley watched him narrowly.

"Ain't you goin' to tell me?" he said.

"Yes I am," said Gray; "on one condition."

"What's that?"

"Unload that pretty little weapon of yours, and hand it over to me. I don't trust you, you see, Mr. Lumley, alias Clay. You might find it convenient to leave this place all by yourself. Dead men tell no tales."

"Good for you they don't, ain't it?" Lumley answered darkly.

Gray looked sharply up.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I don't mean anything. But you're a pretty fellow, ain't you, to crow over me?"

The taunt was more than Gray could bear.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed again, with sharper emphasis as he leapt to his feet. "How dare you?"

Lumley laughed out—a rough, coarse, jeering laugh, which filled Gray with sickening, helpless rage.

"Don't you be afraid of me," he said; "a partner's always safe with me. I don't set up to be a virtuous cove like you, but a partner's always safe with me. We'll go shares, mate—share and share alike. That's a fair offer, ain't it?"

His manner was as coarse and offensive as he could make it. He seemed to find delight in the sort of torture he was inflicting on Gray.

Gray seated himself again and tried hard to recover his coolness. After all, he told himself, he had but to bear Lumley's insults for a time. He had but to wait till they reached a settlement for this hideous partnership to be over.

"It seems to me we are wasting good time, my man," he said, in the lofty tone that so nettled Lumley. "I don't pretend to understand your innuendoes, but let that pass. What you want is the money, isn't it?"

"What *I* want? You don't want it; no, of course not? You didn't come here to get it?"

Lumley laughed.

"I certainly came here to get it. There's a considerable reward offered for its recovery, as I daresay you know. I intended to claim that reward."

Lumley looked at him in silence for a moment, and then burst out into another laugh.

"You are a cove!" he said, when his mirth would let him speak. "So that's your game, is it? Bah!"

He spat on the ground in fierce derision, and then with a sudden change of manner he came close up to Gray.

"Stow all that nonsense, lad. Tell me what Dearing said, and be quick about it. We're goin' to be fond partners, share and share alike. Come, shell out this minute!"

Gray looked up at him; then he took out his note-book and rapidly reproduced the map he had destroyed, and handed it to Clay without a word. The light was fading, and he took it to the door to examine it. Gray's eyes followed him with a savage concentrated hate in them.

It was the man's coarse scorn of himself that was hardest to bear—harder even than the knowledge that he had lost the money he had sacrificed so much to gain. Gray had been accustomed to the admiration of his fellow-men. He had been liked and respected wherever he had been. It was horrible to him to be the object of this convict's coarse taunts and sneers. He, who had so prided himself on his clean name and unblemished record, had fallen low indeed. And he could not feel that the taunts were undeserved. Slowly and grudgingly, just for a moment, the curtain that hid his true self was lifted for Gray, and with a shudder he confessed that Lumley did him no wrong in claiming partnership with him.

His gloomy thoughts were broken into by a chuckle from Clay.

"I always said he was the 'cutest of us all," he declared in an admiring tone, as he came back to Gray. "Too soft for me. We lost a goodish pile once because he wouldn't use these little beauties," and he touched the revolver in his hand. "But that 'cute he was; up to every trick of the profession. You couldn't understand this, couldn't you?"

He did not wait for an answer, but went on in a quicker tone.

"Of course you couldn't; you'd have been searching here for a month of Sundays if I hadn't kindly come to help you. '*Big Gum Tree*.' Ha! ha! Tom was 'cute, to be sure."

Gray did not speak; he did not even look up.

"Don't be down on your luck, my lad," said Clay jocosely; "there's enough for both of us. It'll be more than the reward, any way," and he chuckled with a cruel sort of mirth. "You've got a handy little pick in that knapsack of yours; just fetch it, will you?"

"Get it yourself!"

Clay gave him a fierce threatening look.

"None of your airs and graces here, young man. You do what I tell you, or it'll be the worse for you."

He sat down on the block of wood opposite Gray, folded his arms and added:

"You're the junior partner, and you'll just wait on me, my fine fellow. You go and fetch me that pick to begin with."

Gray ground his teeth with helpless rage, but he got up and took the pick from his knapsack. It was a small slender tool, but very strong. Clay looked at it approvingly.

"Now, you dig up that hearth-stone, mate, and you'll see what you'll see."

"The hearth-stone?"

"You do what I tell you," returned Lumley with a nod. "You go and dig up that hearth-stone."

Gray flung down the pick.

"I won't do anything of the sort. I won't stand any more of this sort of treatment. You may shoot me if you like"—for Lumley had raised his revolver—"but do your bidding I won't."

Gray fully expected, even half-wished for, a shot from the revolver Lumley held up at him for a moment. But the convict changed his mind. He put the weapon in his pocket and got coolly up.

"Well, if you won't I must," he said, and went over to the hearth-stone that lay buried under a heap of earth and timber.

Gray sank down on the fallen rafter and buried his face in his hands. No man can look on death and bear an unchanged front, not even the bravest and the most prepared, and Gray was not of these. For a brief moment he had believed that death was close to him. It was to Lumley's interest to kill him now that he knew where the gold was, and there had been murder in his eyes as he had looked across at Gray. And Gray sat with his hands clasped over his eyes, in sick, horrible fear at the thought of himself lying cold and stiff, with eyes staring blindly up at the sky; his soul gone—where?

At the other end of the hut Clay was busy. He dashed away the heap of rubbish on the hearth-stone, and digging the pick into the loose earth round it, dragged it up without much difficulty. A cry of exultation broke from him as he did so. Embedded in the ground below the hearth-stone lay a small tin box, bound round and round with whipcord. To drag up the box, cut the already

decaying cord, and wrench open the cover was the work of a moment. Two or three wrappings of thick brown paper lay over the contents of the box. He tore these off, and clutched at what lay beneath.

"Come here, partner," he shouted; "what do you say to this, eh?"

Gray slowly rose and came towards him. How he had anticipated the moment when this money should lie before him! There it was, and he looked at it with a shudder.

Lumley emptied the contents of the box on the floor before him, and began eagerly to count over the notes and gold.

"A prime catch, eh?" he remarked, as he caught up a handful of sovereigns and let them fall back in a glittering heap. "We'll be able to cut a dash on this, partner. Look at this nugget! And the flimsy is all safe— Tom took care of that; there ain't one of the numbers known." And he held up the banknotes to Gray with a grin. "Better than the reward after all, my boy, even the half of it, though not *quite* so good as the whole lot. You thought you were going to grab it all, didn't you? You were a green un to think so. Why, I've followed you up from the moment I heard of Tom's death. I knew he'd leave some paper or other to tell where 'twas. Tom wasn't greedy, not he." He went on with the examination of the treasure while he spoke; counting the gold and notes, and putting the nuggets into a heap apart. Presently he looked up with his cunning smile at Gray's dark face.

"You don't ask me, partner, how I came to hit on the hearth-stone."

"How was it?" said Gray indifferently. The gold might have been withered leaves, the notes blank pieces of paper for all the interest he could feel in them.

"'Twas a good job for you I followed you," returned Lumley cheerfully. "You might have prodded round till doomsday. I knew what Tom meant by '*hole in Big Gum*,' d'you see. That big log there with the window was from the biggest gum of the whole lot we cut down. And the window was the hole. Ain't it plain as daylight now, eh?"

"Plain enough."

It was getting dusk outside, and Lumley got up and went to the door of the hut.

"We'd best be starting, partner," he said over his shoulder. "There's nothing out against me that I know of, but I'd rather not be seen by daylight with you just at present, as you'll understand."

Gray hardly heard the words. He picked up his knapsack from the floor.

"I'll start this minute. I suppose you have got a horse?"

Lumley came back to the money before he answered. He began to divide it into two heaps.

"Yes, I've got a horse, partner, a pretty good one too. We scared you pretty well just now, eh? down along the track. My horse can climb like a 'possum, and I didn't want you to see me then."

The man's manner had changed again. It was smoother and more refined. It was as if he had slipped on a mask, and Gray's loathing of him increased as he marked the sudden easy transition. His coarseness was almost better than this oily softness. It maddened Gray.

"You needn't divide that money," he broke out in a sudden impulse of miserable rage. "I'll have none of it. And if I leave this place alive I'll give you over to the police. You mark my words!"

Lumley looked up at him with a quiet smile.

"Two of us can play at that game, my fine fellow!" Then his manner changed quickly from softness to ferocity. "You young fool, you! Don't you know the police are after you? They may be outside this, for aught I know, this minute. Anyway, they're close upon your track."

Gray stepped fiercely towards him.

"You lie!" he gasped out.

"You'd better ride down to Ford's to-night and find out," returned Lumley in a sulky, indifferent tone; "you'll have a warm welcome!"

"It's false!" Gray almost shouted the words. "They have no reason."

Lumley looked up at him with a grin.

"That's a pretty statement for you to make, partner. Anyway, there's a warrant out against you. Not for this pretty stuff alone, mind you—suspicion of *murder*!"

His crafty, cruel eyes fixed themselves on Gray's pallid twitching face.

"Murder of your mate, partner. 'Twas a pity you had to do it, for it's a hanging matter; but he was an obstinate chap, I expect. Pious and all that."

"They believe I murdered Harding?" Gray gasped out.

"Don't take on, partner," returned Clay cheerfully; "murder will out, as they say. And the police haven't got you yet. You trust to me: I know a track that'll take us out safe enough. I daresay you feel queer, though. It's unpleasant to be tracked by the police. I'm used to it, but I don't like it. I expect you wouldn't have done it if you'd thought you'd have been found out; eh, partner?"

It overwhelmed Gray to find that he could be suspected of a cold-blooded treacherous murder.

"You think—you dare to think—" he broke out, and then his voice failed him.

Had he not, in very purpose and act, been the murderer of his mate? The words of angry defence faltered on his tongue. He stood self-convicted, seeing for the first time all the horror of his act—unable to say a word to clear himself of the charge Lumley brought against him.

## CHAPTER VII.

### DESERTED!

A vast sun-scorched plain stretching away in endless miles under a blazing sky. A waterless desert, where the horses sunk fetlock-deep in shifting sand, or were cruelly pricked by the thorny leafless shrub which was the only living plant to be seen. No trees; no flowers; no grass; no sparkle of water far or near. Such was the land Gray and Lumley were riding through, four days after leaving Deadman's Gully.

In dull despair Gray had submitted to Lumley's plan for escaping the police. It had never occurred to him to disbelieve Lumley's statement. There seemed no reason for the lie, and he remembered Mr. Morton's sudden keen glance at him the night he left the station. If it had leaked out that he had gone searching for Dearing's hidden treasure, they might well suspect him of ridding himself of Harding.

Gray's confidence in himself had altogether gone. Dull despair had taken possession of him. The past he could not bear to think of. The future made him shudder when he looked along the dreary years. What was there left for him to live for?

They had passed the hill-country on the second day, and were now crossing a portion of that arid region which lies to the north-west of the mountains. Clay had brought with him a stock of food sufficient for a week or more. There was no danger of starvation. It was water that failed them.

A consuming thirst came upon Gray as the sun rode higher and higher in the heavens. It was ten hours since he had tasted water, and his lips and throat were becoming baked and painful.

"You are sure you know the track?" he said to Lumley, checking his horse to look round him.

A light heat-mist was quivering over the plains. The air was intensely hot and dry.

Lumley stopped his horse too.

"Thought you were never goin' to speak again," he said jeeringly. "I know the track well enough. We shall see water in another twenty-four hours, take my word for it."

Gray marvelled within himself how it was possible to follow any track in such a place as this. They had been riding for miles and miles without seeing a tree or a hillock, or even a dry water-course. One mile was exactly like any other mile. But he said nothing more to his companion. Silence was a boon Gray craved almost as much as he longed for water. At first Lumley had thrust his talk upon him, and found pleasure in the misery he inflicted on Gray by his coarse jokes and cruel jeers. But he had grown more silent lately, and for the last hour or so had not spoken at all.

He was riding now a little in advance of Gray, looking round him with somewhat anxious eyes. He was looking for a group of cypress-trees. He felt sure they were riding in the right direction, but he had a strong reason for wishing to see them rise on the horizon before another halt. When once he saw them his course would be clear and easy. He would know his position exactly, and reach water in an hour or two.

Gray saw that his companion was looking for some landmark; but Lumley said nothing of the object of his search. He had never mentioned the cypress-trees to Gray. Gray had asked him once

how he would guide himself across the desert, and he had refused to answer.

"You'd like to make off by yourself, wouldn't you?" he had said with a jeering laugh; "stick a knife into me, and leave me for the flies to feed on? No, no, partner; we'll jog on together. You sha'n't serve me as you served your mate. Not if I know it."

Gray had given up asserting his innocence of Harding's actual murder. His words had not the slightest effect on Lumley. It was not that he pretended to believe in Gray's guilt Gray saw, and saw truly, that his companion actually believed that he had murdered Harding in cold blood and buried him in some secret place. Clay had only laughed at his declarations of innocence.

"What's there to make such a fuss about, partner? I never did see such a cove for making believe. But you can't take Bill Clay in, my lad. I can tell a rogue directly I set eyes on him. By fellow-feeling, you see."

The day grew hotter and hotter. The air that blew against their faces as they rode along was dry and scorching. It was like riding in a heated furnace. Suddenly Lumley gave a shout. He had seen on the horizon, through the quivering heat-mist, three cypresses pointing with black fingers to the sky. He knew as he looked that it was but an illusion, a mirage. But he knew, too, that the real cypresses, of which he saw the shadows, were in that direction, and not so very far off.

Gray saw the cypresses in the same moment.

"Trees!" he cried eagerly—for where trees grew water must be near.

"You're a pretty fellow to go bush-riding," grumbled Lumley. "They ain't trees—not real ones, so to speak. They're clouds."

And Gray saw for himself how misty the dark outlines were; and even as he looked he saw the mirage disappear. But he marked the point in the horizon at which the mirage had appeared, and was astonished to see Lumley suddenly turn his horse in a totally different direction.

"Surely it would be better to go that way. There must be water near."

"Go by yourself, then," snarled Lumley, over his shoulder; "and a good riddance too."

He rode sulkily on and Gray followed him. When they had gone a few miles Clay's horse gave a stumble, and Clay sprang off.

"He's dead beat," he said. "We'll rest here."

"But—" Gray began, and then he stopped. What was the use of speaking? He was forced to trust to Lumley's guidance.

They lay down on the baked scorched soil, hobbling their horses that they might not wander far. Gray flung himself on the sand, face downwards, careless of the hot sun that poured upon him. Lumley went a few paces off to a bed of polygonum, the gloomy leafless bramble of the wilderness. He scooped out a hollow in the sand below the bramble and lay down there in the tiny oasis of shadow he had thus obtained. Unseen of Gray he took a bottle he had secreted in his pocket and drank the few drops remaining in it, then corked it and put it back. Then he turned upon his side and slept.

He was sleeping still when Gray roused himself from the heavy stupor of despair that had come upon him and sat up. There lay the grim horrible wilderness all about him. A short distance off the horses were standing with drooping heads and panting sides. In the scanty shadow of the bramble Lumley lay asleep.

Gray got up and walked to Lumley's side, and stood looking down on the evil face as if his eyes were drawn there by some horrible fascination. The convict slept heavily, his face turned upwards to the sky. Gray saw that his lips were wet. He had water, then! Gray had suspected that he had, but he did not try to find out where it was hidden. He turned away with a shudder and flung himself down upon the ground again.

It was growing dusk when Lumley woke from that heavy sleep. He started up wildly and looked round him. For days he had kept awake fearing treachery from Gray if he let sleep overcome him. Now he had been sleeping for many hours. The sun had been blazing in a clear sky when he fell asleep; now the sky was covered with thick gray clouds, and night was close at hand. He looked round him and saw at once the two horses. A second glance showed him Gray lying with his face upon one arm not far from him. Lumley approached, and saw that he was asleep.

He bent over him to satisfy himself the sleep was not feigned, and then turned towards the horses. It was not difficult to catch them, and he had prepared to mount when an idea struck him. Taking a scrap from his pocket, the page on which Gray had reproduced Dearing's map for him, he scrawled a few words, putting the paper on his saddle to write. Then he softly approached Gray, and stuck the paper into the sand by a branch of bramble. When this was done he crept back again to the horses.

He remained looking at them reflectively for a moment. His own horse stood with drooping head and panting sides, evidently nearly done for, but Gray's horse had borne the long journey well. Lumley had already fastened the bag containing the money and the pistols to his own saddle, but now he shifted it to the other. Gray's horse turned an uneasy glance on him as he did so; and Lumley had a little difficulty in mounting it. But he got into the saddle at last, and taking the bridle of his own horse in his hand he rode away, giving a backward look now and then to the man he was deserting.

Night came, a thick starless night with clouds hanging low over the desert. A cool wind came with the clouds and blew on Gray, and he slept. He was worn out, and he slept hour after hour. The dawn was breaking when he at last awoke. His sleep had been so deep, so dreamless, that in it he had forgotten all that had happened. But memory came quickly back. He started up and looked round for Lumley and the horses.

All was still, with a stillness unknown save in desert lands. The silence was profound. In the gray dawn he could see the plains with perfect distinctness. He looked round him from horizon to horizon. There was no living thing in sight. He was alone.

He understood instantly what had happened. Lumley had deserted him. His first feeling was one of absolute relief. He had escaped from that hateful bondage. It was not for some moments that he realized the hopelessness of his position. Ignorant of the track, alone, on foot, without water or food, what hope was there for him of escaping from the desert? Gray knew how little hope there was. As he had deserted Harding, so he in turn had been deserted. As Harding had perished, so he too would perish. He looked his fate in the face with the calmness of despair.

Before he had fallen asleep he had made up his mind to give himself up to the police and meet the charge brought against him if once he escaped from the wilds. It seemed to him now as if God had refused him a chance of proving his repentance. He was to perish in the wilderness, an outcast from God and man.

He sank down on the ground again, and sat there with his elbows on his knees, his head propped on his hands, staring steadily before him. In the dawn the wide level spaces of the wilderness resembled the pastures that had surrounded their hut. Gray found himself remembering his life there with intense clearness. He saw Harding busy about the hut, ever cheerful, ever ready. He saw him among the cattle, strong of hand, alert of eye. He saw him riding home in the twilight, talking of his wife and his little lads; turning in his stirrups to give a word of cheer to Watch; or bearing Gray's grumbling talk with cheerful patience.

What depths of steadfast affection there were in the heart of that rough man! Once when Gray was ill he had tended him like a woman. He had sat beside him night after night in unwearying affection. Gray remembered how he had lifted him from bed to chair, as he might have lifted a child. He seemed to feel the pressure of his hand on his shoulder still as he stood over him, pressing him to eat some dainty he had prepared, to see his rugged kindly face bending over him. What would he not give for a sight of that kind face now, and a touch of that strong honest hand?

Gray's stony despair gave way; the hard, desperate look on his face softened. He burst into bitter tears. His frame shook with the strong, terrible crying of despairing grief.

But the tears did him good; they cleared his brain, and made it possible for him to think of what was best for him to do. He no longer felt inclined to give up without a struggle for life. He got up from the ground and looked round him with a new strength. It was then he saw the note Lumley had stuck into the sand beside him. He picked it up and read it. It was only a few scrawled words:

*"The police ain't after you at all, Mr. Gentleman Gray, so you can clear out of the Bush as soon as you like. I'll not split on you, and you won't on me, I guess.*

*"N.B. Dead men tell no tales."*

The words were perfectly clear in the pale morning light. Gray read them and then threw the paper away with a shudder. He felt no anger against Lumley, only a sick horror that made anger impossible. What Lumley had done was what he himself had done. He deserved his fate.

The knowledge that the police held no warrant against him, that the story was but a trick of Lumley's to get him into the Bush, affected him strangely little. He had made up his mind to tell the whole story if ever he got back to the haunts of men again. The confession he had to make would be a purely voluntary one now; that was his chief thought as he read Lumley's letter.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### LOST IN THE BUSH.



Gray lost no time in starting forwards. The choice of direction made by him was determined by remembering the cypresses of which they had seen the mirage. He believed that they had been a landmark to Clay, and that his turning in another direction was but a feint.

It was difficult for Gray to decide the exact direction. The sky was heavy with clouds, and no sun could be seen behind them. But he carefully calculated as well as he could whereabouts on the horizon the trees had appeared, and turned towards that point.

He knew enough of Bush stories to know the tendency of wanderers there to travel in a circle; and in this sterile waste, where every mile was like every other mile, Gray felt he might travel round and round and never know it. To prevent this he dug shallow holes with his knife here and there, and stuck boughs of the bramble in them, so that he might recognize the spot if he came to it again.

Towards noon the clouds gradually dispersed and the sun blazed down upon him. This bettered his position in one way, as he could now be sure of walking forward, but it increased the torment of thirst until it became almost unendurable agony. He struggled on till past noonday, but no dark cypresses lifted themselves on the sky-line. The desert stretched round him in its blank, dreadful loneliness. The blazing sun beat down upon him, making sight a torture. He could go no further. He flung himself down on the unsheltered burning sand and hid his eyes from the light.

Towards evening the clouds gathered again, and he rose and struggled on. He walked many miles that night, and towards dawn lay down and slept. The second day passed much as the first had done. The sky cleared again, and the fury of the sun beat down upon him. He struggled on for a time, and again gave up the struggle and lay down and waited for evening.

On the third day his agony of thirst had become unbearable. He knew that in a few more hours death must end his sufferings if he could not reach water. With grim determination he battled on that day through the flaming sunshine and gave himself no rest. Every moment he expected to see the cypresses rise on the horizon; and he was sweeping it with his glance when his eye fell on a white object fluttering on the wind from shrub to shrub. At first he could not discern what it was—his bloodshot weary eyes refused their office—but on approaching nearer he saw it was a piece of paper. It fluttered across his path. He picked it up with a horrible foreboding. It was Lumley's letter, written on the back of the map he had drawn in the hut.

It was just possible the wind had carried it onwards to cross his path. Gray made an effort to think that this was so. But a few staggering steps further on brought him to the shallow holes in which the brambles stood upright. He had come back to the place from which he had started! All hope died within him as he saw those hollows. He sank down on the sand to wait for death.

He was lying face downwards on the sand, with his arms flung out before him, when a low distant sound suddenly broke the stillness. He started up and looked wildly round. The twilight had fallen, and he could not distinguish objects clearly; but as he strained his gaze from side to side the sound came again to his ears—the sound of a horse galloping at full speed across the desert.

Gray could now distinguish from what direction the sound came, and he hurried forward, hope once more rising up in him. Was it Lumley come back to help him, repentant for his desertion? Or was it some lost traveller like himself, seeking a way out of these dreadful wilds? Or had Lumley sent a party to search for him from the nearest station, while going onwards himself to safety? Gray asked himself these questions as he hurried on through the gathering darkness. He still could hear the galloping hoofs, and for a time they seemed to come nearer and nearer. But suddenly he became aware that they were receding from him—the sound was becoming fainter and fainter, it was dying away in the distance.

Gray stopped. A cry of despair broke from him, and then, summoning all his strength, he raised a loud "Coo-ee!"

The shrill shout died away upon the air and left profound stillness behind it. Gray could no longer hear the faintest sound of the horse's hoofs. Either the rider had stopped to listen to his call or had gone on beyond hearing. Gray moistened his baked and blistered lips, and then again shouted. The shout again died away, leaving intense stillness behind it. But this time the stillness only lasted for a moment. There came a faint answering cry, far-off and indistinct, but unmistakably the cry of a human voice.

Gray once more hurried forward. The ground was growing rougher; it was broken up into hillocks, and his progress was less rapid. After a time he stopped and called again, and again heard the answering call. He was no longer alone in the wilderness; friendly help was near.

The moon rose as Gray hurried on, rose in full splendour, making the plain almost as light as day. Gray looked in vain for what he had hoped to see—the outline of horse and rider against the pale silvery glow of the sky. There was no horse anywhere to be seen; there was nothing to be seen but the low bushes and the bunches of dry grass, and the great circle of the desert against the horizon. But as Gray stared round him, refusing to believe the evidence of his own eyes, the shout came again—came with a mocking ring in it that made Gray's blood run suddenly cold. He

knew the voice now: it was Lumley's voice. But it was as cruel and mocking as ever. Gray's dream of help from him vanished like a breath as he heard it.

He stumbled on across the sand hillocks, and presently could discern a huddled figure on the ground, with its back propped up against a hillock. The moonlight was full on the haggard blistered face that looked up at Gray with twitching lips.

"Welcome, partner," were Lumley's first words. "You didn't expect to see me again, did you now?"

Gray made no answer. He was too far gone in despair to have even a flicker of curiosity as to how Lumley came to be lying there. But Lumley proceeded to enlighten him. He thrust forward his foot, from which he had cut away the boot, and Gray could see that it was discoloured and badly swollen.

"I owe that to your cursed horse," he said, in a sulky, vindictive tone. "Just as I'd hit upon the track again, too."

Gray cast a wide glance over the moonlit plains before he spoke. But no horse was visible.

"He flung you, I suppose?" he said, in a quiet, expressionless tone. "I could have warned you not to play any tricks with him. Where is your own horse?"

The absence of vindictiveness from Gray's manner puzzled Lumley. He stared up at him, wondering what it meant.

"Dead," he said sulkily after a moment. "I'd better have stuck to you after all, you see, mate. But I'd have sent after you the first chance I had. I meant to do that all along."

He had paused before adding the last sentence, and his manner had suddenly altered, had become smooth and conciliating.

Gray did not attempt to answer him. He moved away a few paces and flung himself down on the ground, and sat with his head propped on his hands, staring straight in front of him. Lumley watched him in silence. His face showed none of the dull despair that had settled on Gray's, but was alight with fierce excitement. And the glance he bent on Gray was a strange one. There was hate in it, and longing, and a torturing doubt.

"You're pretty bad, ain't you, partner?" he said at last. "Had a bad time since we parted, I daresay."

"Did you expect me to have a good time?" Gray answered without looking at him.

"Missed the track? Been wanderin' round and round? Just what happened to me, you see, though I thought I was dead sure of my way. But I got my right bearings again—if it hadn't been for that horse of yours—"

He was tearing up fiercely the scanty grass beside him as he spoke, and there broke out a sudden fury in his face. But he thrust back the oath that came to his lips, and spoke, after a pause, in the same conciliating tone.

"We've had bad luck, both on us, haven't we, partner? And my bad luck's been yours; for I'd have sent back for you. I only meant to frighten you a bit."

"What's the good of talking about it?" Gray said wearily. "It'll soon be over for both of us now. Another day must see the last of it."

He just turned his head to speak, and then went back to his old position, his eyes staring hopelessly across the silent waste. His apathy seemed to rouse Lumley to a sort of frenzy again. With an effort that forced a groan from him he dragged himself a pace forwards and plucked Gray by the sleeve.

"You'd not sit there long if you knew what I know, you fool," he burst out. "Didn't I tell you I found my bearings again? Didn't you hear me say it?"

His excitement communicated itself to Gray. He turned round with a wild questioning glance.

"Do you mean—For God's sake tell me the truth! Do you know where we are? Is that it?"

He had not sprung up, but life and energy had come back to him. His hands clenched, his shoulders straightened themselves. He had it in him, he felt, to make a good fight for life yet.

Lumley grew cool as he saw the hope leap into Gray's face. He let go his sleeve and sank back against the hillock.

"Suppose I do know," he said in the old mocking tone; "what then, partner?"

Gray stared at him without speaking, and Lumley repeated the question:

"What then, partner?"

Gray was silent. He had fixed his eyes on Lumley's face, as if his glance could drag out the truth from him. Lumley gave him back glance for glance. Then he suddenly bent down and drew a rough circle on the sand. Gray drew close, bending towards the circle with intent eyes.

"That's where we are, partner, d'ye see?" said Lumley, making a hole with his finger in the middle of the circle; "and here's the moon," making another mark. "You're follerin' me so far, eh?"

"Yes, go on," said Gray breathlessly.

Lumley gave him a quick look from under his bushy eyebrows, and then bent over the plan again.

"Do you remember them trees we saw just afore we parted?" he said, looking on the ground as he spoke. "'Twas the sight of them made me sure we was in the right road. I made tracks for them when we parted company."

He looked up furtively at Gray again.

"You got that bit of a note I wrote you, partner?"

Gray hardly heard the words.

"Never mind that. Go on, go on!" he hurried out with passionate eagerness.

He was sure now that Lumley knew in which direction the trees lay, knew where water was to be obtained.

Lumley looked into his face with a sardonic grin. He had grown cooler and cooler as Gray's excitement rose.

"What's the hurry, partner?" he said; "there's nobody as I knows on who's likely to interrupt us. Well, as I was sayin', I made straight for them trees, but somehow I missed the track. That cloudy weather put me out, you see; and 'twasn't till near sundown last night I got sight of them."

He stopped, gave a rapid glance round the horizon, and then bent over the sand again.

"They can't be far off then?" asked Gray, who had followed his glance with breathless impatience.

"Too far off for me anyways," Lumley answered, with a quick upward look at him. "I'd tried that afore I answered your call, partner. Did you think 'twas me, now, when you got an answer? I knew 'twas you in a minute."

"I don't know; I forget. What's the good of wasting time like this?" cried Gray, getting suddenly on his feet. "Tell me which way to go. I can do it now, but in another hour or two it will be too late. Which way? Be quick!"

"It can't be more than half a dozen miles or so," returned Lumley in a slow reflective tone that almost drove Gray out of his senses with impatience. "You make a bee-line for the trees, and then strike off to the left where the ridge is, and it's just over the ridge that there's water. Yards of it, partner, all shining and sparkling in the moonlight. Why, you could be close to it in an hour almost. And there's no mistake about it; it isn't no salt-pan, but fresh water fit for a king to drink. I've seen it afore me all the time I've been lyin' here. Can't you see it, partner?"

It was a maddening vision which Lumley's words had called up before Gray. A cool stretch of limpid, shining water—there it lay before him, close to him. He was kneeling down by it, plunging his fevered face into it, slaking the thirst that was burning his life away. And it meant life, that cool, delicious draught; it meant more than life—it meant opportunity for atonement, for undoing, as far as in him lay, the wrong he had done, for proving his repentance a real and lasting one.

Lumley was stooping over the sand, but his eyes were on Gray's face, and he saw all the eagerness in it. He saw it, and interpreted it according to his own nature. He broke into a harsh laugh, and with a sweep of one hand on the sand, he destroyed the rough chart he had made.

"You'd like to start this minute, wouldn't you, partner? and the crows might make their meal off me. I saw a flock of them nigh here yesterday; they're waiting for their feast. You wouldn't like to disappoint them, would you?"

Gray did not comprehend him in the least.

"Don't waste time like this," he said imploringly; "let me be off at once. I could be back to you by sunrise if I have good luck. And you have a bottle about you, haven't you? Let me have it. And who knows?—I may fall in with the horse."

Lumley laughed again.

"So you may, partner, so you may. 'Twas the smell of the water that drove him frantic, I believe. He made straight for it. And there's the swag upon him, and the pistols, and the grub. You'll be well set up if you come across the horse."

A sudden terror had come upon Gray as he listened to this speech of Lumley's, and looked down upon his sneering, evil face.

"You are playing with me!" he burst out, and the cold sweat stood out upon his brow as he said it. "You know nothing of the water!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### FACING DEATH

Lumley paused a moment before answering that last speech of Gray's. Then his tone was mild and smooth.

"What's the good of talking like that, mate? But just look there." He pointed to his foot again as he spoke. "Does it look as if 'twould carry me half a dozen miles? Or a mile? Or a couple of yards? And I've hurt my side as well. Broke a rib or two, maybe. I tried crawlin' a while ago, but I couldn't even manage that. I'm no better than a log—only fit for the crows, partner. What's the good of water to me when I can't get at it?"

His tone was so mild and reasonable that Gray felt no difficulty in answering him.

"But half a dozen miles is nothing to me. Give me that bottle. I'll be back before sunrise." He paused a moment, and then as he saw the expression in the other's face he added impetuously, "I swear it. Good heavens, Lumley, you don't think I would desert you? You don't think that?"

The fury that had once or twice swept away Lumley's coolness had come upon him again, and he no longer cared to restrain it. He lifted himself, shaking one clenched fist towards Gray.

"Do you think I'd trust you for a single minute, you smooth-tongued hypocrite!" he screamed. "You'd be glad enough to leave me lyin' here, wouldn't you? But you're not going to get the chance, Mr. Gentleman Gray. We'll stick together, like partners should. The crows sha'n't feast on me alone, I'll tell you that."

Gray made no attempt to answer him just then. When Lumley stopped speaking and sank back with a groan of pain on the sand, Gray turned and walked away a few paces, and stood trying to get some mastery over the trembling sick misery that seemed ready to overpower him. There was no anger in his heart against the man whose deep, laboured breaths he could still hear behind him. It was only natural, Gray said to himself, that he should believe him capable of deserting him. He had deserved to be thought willing to commit even such a baseness as that.

Yet if he could not convince Lumley that he was to be trusted, there was nothing but death for both of them. Gray had felt incapable of reasoning with his companion for the moment, incapable even of speech. He had felt ready to give up the struggle—to let it all end there. But as he stood fighting manfully with his weakness, strength came to him—power to will and act as a brave man should. The far-off moon-clear skyline, the stars faintly shining in the upper blue, the solemn moonlight, the rustle of the wind in the dry grasses, all seemed to have a message for him—to whisper hope, to lift him out of himself, to give him courage to make another fight for life.

He went back to Lumley, and sat down again where he had sat before.

"Listen to me a moment, Lumley," he said. "You say you know where water is?"

"Say I know? I *do* know, partner; you may lay your life to that," responded Lumley harshly.

He had been lying watching Gray, wondering what his next move would be. Gray's quiet manner was a surprise to him.

"Very well, you do know. Now, I will tell you what I am going to do. I shall wait a few moments for you to tell me where it lies—"

"You may wait a hundred years if you like," broke in Lumley with a savage look.

"And then I mean to set off to try and find it for myself," went on Gray, as if Lumley had not spoken. "You have told me too much if you did not mean to tell me more. I shall walk six miles in one direction, and if I do not get in sight of the trees, I shall walk back and try again. I must hit upon them at last, you know."

"You'd never do it," said Lumley scoffingly. "You're nigh beat already. You'd die in your tracks."

"You're wrong there," returned Gray, with a quiet confidence that had its due effect on his companion. "I shall not be walking aimlessly, you see, and in this moonlight there's no fear of going over the same ground again. I am convinced I shall reach the water in time enough for myself. It is you who will probably suffer for keeping back the information you possess."

"What d'ye mean by that?" broke from Lumley fiercely.

"Just this," said Gray, keeping his glance steadily fixed upon him: "if I could reach this water without delay I should be able to get back to you with a supply; but if I wear out my strength in getting there, I may not be able to get back to you in time. Surely you can see that?"

Lumley glared at him like a trapped beast.

"You're just the one to come back, ain't you?" he exclaimed. "A cove what murdered his own mate for a bit of flimsy. You're one to be trusted, ain't you?"

"You must believe that if you will," said Gray calmly. His voice faltered as he went on after a momentary pause. "I betrayed my mate—the truest, best mate man ever had; but I'll be true to you, Lumley, if you'll give me the chance. I am not the man I was."

The only answer Lumley vouchsafed to that was a harsh mocking laugh. Gray did not speak again, and they sat in silence for some moments, while Lumley dragged up his injured foot and rubbed it, keeping a furtive scrutiny on Gray's determined face. When he had first heard Gray's call and answered it, he had not made up his mind as to whether he should trust him or no, and through their first talk he had wavered to and fro—now feeling ready to risk the chance that Gray would come back to him, now savagely vowing within himself that they should both die, almost within sight of the water that would be life to them, rather than Gray should alone escape. At the last this savage mood had conquered, and he had felt it impossible to trust Gray with his precious secret.

But now he began to see clearly enough that he had outwitted himself. The trees were so near, and such a striking landmark, that Gray was certain to find them if he had strength enough to persevere for some hours in the search; and that he had strength enough, Lumley could not but believe as he looked at his quiet resolute face.

The silence continued for some moments. It was broken by Gray.

"I think I have given you time enough," he said, getting deliberately on his feet. "Now, which is it to be, Lumley? I shall start in another moment."

A fierce oath escaped Lumley's lips.

"I'll not be left to rot here," he snarled out. "I'll walk it somehow. Give me your arm, partner."

He made a clutch at it, and dragged himself slowly and painfully to his feet. The agony of movement turned Lumley's face to the clammy hue of death, but he would not give way to the pain. He essayed to walk forward, but after the first step Gray stood still.

"You can't do it, Lumley. It is madness to attempt it."

Lumley glared at him for a moment, and then suddenly yielded.

"You're right, partner; I'm beat. You've got the best of it this time. Now help me back again, and I'll tell you all I know."

Gray helped him back to the hillock, and put his foot in as comfortable a position as possible.

"I'll be back to you before many hours are over, Lumley. I'll make all the haste I can," he said, his tone softened by a sudden pity for the disabled man.

Lumley looked up at him with implacable eyes.

"I'll believe you when I see you, mate. But you've bested me all round, and I've got to trust you, you see."

He dragged out the flat bottle from his pocket, and held it up to Gray.

"Turn your back on the moon and walk straight on; and if I ever see you again you're a bigger fool than I take you for."

"I shall come back," Gray said briefly.

He pocketed the bottle, and turned sharply away in the direction Lumley had pointed out.

He was hardly conscious of fatigue as he pressed across the sandy waste. Even the torture of thirst had grown less since hope had come to him. He hurried on with strong, eager footsteps, expecting every moment to see the trees lift themselves against the sky. Once the terrible thought came to him that Lumley had been deceiving him all the time, and his story of the water

was a lie; but as he remembered Lumley's looks and words, and recalled the intensity of excitement in his face when he had left him, he knew that there was indeed water close at hand. Then, again, when he seemed to have been walking for a long time, and the horizon still lay before him bare and unbroken, he began to suspect that Lumley had wilfully misled him, and the water lay in another direction.

But it was almost immediately after this that his foot struck against a shrub, and looking down he saw he had come upon a banksia, a sign, as he was bushman enough to know, that better country was close ahead. The green leaves of the pretty little shrub were a welcome sight, and it was shortly after passing this that he saw the tops of the cypresses begin to show themselves against the sky-line, as the mast of a ship lifts first above the sea-line.

Gray pushed on with renewed energy, and it was not long before he was close to the gloomy trees. A cloud of birds, the crows Lumley had spoken of, rose from the trees as Gray approached, and flew screaming over his head. He listened to their harsh voices with a shudder, and hastily struck away to the left, where a low ridge crossed the plain and hid what lay beyond.

It took him some time to reach and breast the ridge, and his strength was nearly at an end when he at last gained the top and looked down on the shallow valley below. He could not see the shining stretch of water Lumley had spoken of, the valley was too thickly covered with shrubby undergrowth for that. But even in the moonlight Gray could see that this undergrowth was densely green, and that the trees that sprang above it were full of life and vigour.

And as he descended the ridge he came upon a faint track through the underwood—a native track, Gray felt sure, and one that led to the water. He hurried along it, piercing deeper and deeper into the dark recesses of the wood. But the darkness had no terrors for Gray. He felt the track under his feet, and pressed boldly onward, pushing away the interlacing boughs with his hands as he went. And presently there came a faint light through the trees ahead, and in a few more steps he came out into a little open space, and saw the reflection of the moonlight in a round, deeply-fringed pool close before him.

For the moment he saw nothing but the glimmering sheen of that water. He flung himself down with a cry, and plunged his face in it. It was stagnant, it was thick with mud and floating weeds, but it was fresh, and to Gray it was purest nectar. He had self-control enough left not to drink too much at once, but he lay by the side of the pool with hands and arms buried deep in it, utterly oblivious for the moment of everything but the mere physical delight the water brought to him.

How long he lay there he never knew. He could never recall that time except as a vague memory. He could remember breaking out of the wood and seeing the little moonlit pool before him, but after that it was all confused. What brought him back to clear consciousness was a movement somewhere on the other side of the pool, where the branches of a tree cast a flickering shadow on the grass. Gray started up, dizzy and trembling; but his first glance showed him what it was. His horse had found its way to the water before him, drawn by some sure and marvellous instinct, and now had drawn close again to the pool, gazing across at its master with mild recognizing eyes.

Gray cautiously approached it, fearing it might start away; but it showed no desire to escape. It arched its neck and whinnied joyfully when Gray came close. It was evidently delighted to feel its master's hand again. Gray stood by its side, patting it and speaking to it, finding strange delight in its joyful welcome. The wallet containing the money still hung at the saddle, with the rough bag in which Lumley had carried the food.

Gray, standing by the horse, took out some food and hurriedly ate it. He would not trust himself to sit down again; he felt that sleep might suddenly overcome him unawares. When he had eaten a few morsels—he found it too difficult to swallow to be able to eat much—he carefully filled the bottle he carried, and the larger bottle that was in the bag with the food, drank a deep draught himself and allowed his horse to drink, and then, holding the horse by the bridle, he began to pick his way along the path by which he had come.

The horse followed him quietly; it was only when they emerged from the wood and began to ascend the slope of the ridge that it showed the first signs of unwillingness. Gray had to encourage it by voice and hand before he could prevail upon it to take the upward path.

Gray was able to discern more clearly now how worn out the poor creature was by all it had gone through. He felt an impulse once to let it have its way, and let it remain in the valley, but he dismissed the impulse at once. The horse was too useful, too necessary to be dispensed with.

They reached the brow of the ridge, and there Gray rested for a while. He had not mounted the horse, he had determined to go on leading it for some time longer at least. He doubted if it had strength left to carry him. He stood beside the horse with the bridle in his hand, and looked down upon the vast plain stretching away from the foot of the ridge.

Up to that point Gray, since finding the horse, had acted instinctively, almost as an automaton might act. He was so worn out, so numb with privation and fatigue, that he had not gone in thought beyond the present moment. But now it was as if a cloud had lifted from his

brain; he saw the whole position in a glance. What had been his heart's dearest wish was fulfilled for him. All he had coveted, all he had betrayed his mate Harding to get, was at last within his grasp. He had but to turn his horse's head away from that silent, secret-keeping bush, and the gold was safely his.

Gray did not thrust the thought from him; he let his mind dwell upon it, he regarded it steadily; for his eyes had been opened to see in what the real happiness and worth of life consisted. Through suffering and humiliation he had learnt to measure things at their right value. In contact with a man who had deliberately chosen evil to be his good he had been taught what evil meant. The temptation that had once been too strong for him was no longer a temptation. He could see the full baseness of it now. Better death, better open confession and a dishonoured name, than life and honour bought by treachery and guile.

The trees stood up dark and funereal against the cloudless sky. His path lay beneath them, and on towards the moonlit east.

"Come, we must start, old fellow," Gray said to the reluctant horse, and he began to descend the slope of the ridge.

## CHAPTER X

### A GRIM SORT OF PICNIC.

The dawn was breaking when Gray approached the spot where Lumley lay. He had walked the whole distance, for his horse was evidently too dead-beat to carry him. He had had no difficulty in keeping to the right track. Indeed he had calculated so well, that when he first stopped and "coo-eed" to make sure he was going right, Lumley's answer had come from a point straight ahead, and no considerable distance off.

Lumley had seen him before that call. Though he had told himself again and again that Gray would never come back, that it was too much in his interest to leave him there to die, his eyes had anxiously watched the western horizon.

There had been something in Gray's look when he had spoken his last words that had impressed Lumley powerfully, and so it was not altogether a surprise to him when he at last could distinguish a dark, moving object against the sky. The surprise came later when he was able to discern that Gray was leading his horse with him.

A strange change came over Lumley's face when he realized that; his thin lips set themselves together, his brows contracted with a frown of anxious thought, his eyes grew like the stealthy, waiting eyes of a beast of prey which has not the strength to attack its victim in the open, but lurks in ambush and springs upon it unawares.

With that look on his face he watched Gray approaching him through the clear rosy light of the sunrise, but it was gone before Gray came near enough to see his face clearly. He made an effort at a smile of grateful welcome.

"So you haven't left me to the crows, partner?" he said, raising himself on his elbow as he spoke to grasp the bottle Gray held out to him. "I'm glad enough to see you, I can tell you that."

Gray nodded silently, and then went back to the horse and took the bags from the saddle. He brought them to the spot where Lumley was lying, and flung them down at his side. He saw that Lumley had done little more than wet his lips from the bottle, but that he had torn some strips from the lining of his coat, and was proceeding to pour water on them with a careful hand.

"You'd better let me do that for you," Gray said quietly. "And there is more water, Lumley; take another pull. I can fill the bottles again if they are empty before you can move."

He had knelt down as he spoke, and taken the wet rags from Lumley's hand to bind round his injured foot.

"The horse will have to carry me," said Lumley after watching Gray's bandaging for a moment. "You found him by the water, didn't you, partner?"

"Yes, close by it."

Lumley eyed the horse with a quick furtive glance, and then looked at Gray again.

"Did you tramp it all the way, partner? I'd have let the horse save my legs if I'd been you."

"He's dead beat," Gray said briefly. "He had enough to carry."

Lumley's eyes turned involuntarily to the bags at his side. He had avoided looking at them

since Gray had placed them by him.

"'Tis a mercy we've got the grub all right, ain't it, partner?" he said. "Though I'm blessed if I feel a bit peckish. 'Twas water I wanted."

He drank a little from the bottle and corked it again. Gray marvelled at the self-control he showed in taking so little.

"I'd finish that bottle right away if I were you, Lumley," he said. "It's only a few mouthfuls after all. I sha'n't want any more for a good time yet."

Lumley took another sip and then put the bottle away from him.

"'Tain't good to take too much at once, partner. And so you found it pretty easy, eh? Now, how far should you reckon it?"

"Perhaps eight or nine miles."

Gray had finished his bandaging, and had opened the bag containing the food. As he sat down on the ground near Lumley he pushed the wallet of money from him with his elbow, but Lumley did not give it a glance. Neither he nor Gray had yet referred to it.

"Here's the other bottle of water," Gray said, taking it out and sticking it in the sand. "And here's the damper." He took out some of the dry uninviting scraps and laid them close to Lumley. "There's nothing else," he added, looking into the bag.

Lumley gave a quick glance at the bag.

"Didn't I put the pistols there, mate? I haven't got 'em about me." He spoke carelessly.

"Oh, they're here," Gray returned. "But that's all the food left. Still, there's enough to last us for a day or two."

"A kind of grim sort of picnic, isn't it?" said Lumley with a grin, as he took up a bit of damper. He ate a few mouthfuls and then drew out the bottle for another sip. "Here's to you, partner," he said with an awkward nod at Gray, "and good luck to both on us."

Gray returned his nod, but made no answer in words. Lumley put back the bottle again, and watched him for a moment from beneath his heavy brows.

"You don't bear no malice, I hope, mate?" he said suddenly.

Gray raised his heavy eyes and looked at him inquiringly.

"I was pretty rough on you last night," went on Lumley in a persuasive, apologetic tone; "but I was drove up in a corner, you see. I'd served you so bad that I reckoned you'd be glad enough to pay me out. Though I'd have sent back for you from the nearest station, partner. I meant that all along."

Gray did not believe him, but he did not think it worth while to tell him so.

"We'll let bygones be bygones, Lumley," he said in a friendly tone. "We've both had a hard time of it, but it's nearly over now, I hope. And you'll be able to trust me for the future."

"So I shall, so I shall, partner," returned Lumley rapidly. "'Tisn't many as would have come back—not after they'd got the horse and everything. What a bit of luck 'twould have been for you if you'd come back and found me dead. Didn't you hope you would, now?"

"No," said Gray. He got slowly up and looked round for a hillock that would give him a little shelter from the sun. "I must get a sleep," he said. "I shall be fit for nothing till I've had that. I'm dizzy for want of it."

Lumley was staring up at him with sudden fierce suspicion in his glance. A new thought had struck him. Ever since he had seen Gray with the horse he had been wondering what had made him come back. Such refusal of good fortune seemed inexplicable to him.

"You didn't come across the police, did you?" he said. "You've not set a trap for me?"

But even as he said it he saw how unfounded his suspicion was, and the sudden fierceness left his face, giving way to the anxious, apologetic look it had worn all through his late talk with Gray.

"I haven't seen anyone," Gray said indifferently.

He moved away as he spoke, and Lumley watched him settle himself for a sleep a little distance off. Gray lay down with his back to him, under the scanty shade of a hillock, and drew his hat over his eyes.

Lumley watched him intently till he had satisfied himself that he had fallen into a deep sleep.



Then he made a quick clutch at the wallet of money, and drew it close to him. He hurriedly counted it over, giving furtive looks at Gray the while. Once Gray moved, and he crushed the notes he held back into the bag, and pushed the bag from him. But Gray did not move again, and after a pause he resumed his counting. When he had satisfied himself that the money was all there he replaced it in the wallet, which he put back into its original position.

He then, in the same cautious, hurried way, examined the pistols, and replaced them in the bag. He left them there for a moment, then took one out again, and thrust it into his pocket. But he changed his mind after a short consideration, took out the pistol from his pocket and replaced it in the bag. Then he poured some water on the rags Gray had bound round his foot, took a sparing sip from the bottle, and having corked it and pushed it back into the sand, turned himself round to get a sleep; and almost at once sleep, heavy and dreamless, came to him.

Many hours elapsed before either of the men awoke. It was Gray who came back to consciousness first. He was roused by the glare of the sun on his face, and sitting drowsily up he saw that it had travelled right across the sky while he slept, and was now declining towards the west. His next glance showed him the horse languidly cropping the dry grass some few paces off, and Lumley asleep with one arm flung up above his head.

But almost at once, before his eyes had travelled away from him, Lumley awoke. He raised himself quickly, looking round him with a wild suspicious stare and thrusting out a hand to clutch the bag of money at his side.

Gray got up and slowly approached him.

"How is your foot?" he asked.

"Bad," returned Lumley with a groan.

He said no more, and Gray sat down by him in silence. Lumley drew up his foot and began to wet the bandages again.

"The pain's worse than ever," he muttered, without looking at Gray.

"The water will do it good," replied Gray.

He drew the bag of food towards him as he spoke. "I believe I can eat something now," he said. "That sleep has done me any amount of good."

"How long have you been awake?" asked Lumley, with one of his quick glances.

"Not more than two minutes. I must have slept pretty nearly all day by the look of the sun."

"That's just what you've done, partner," returned Lumley, without saying he had done the same. He looked across at the horse. "What do you think of him?" he asked, with a nod towards it. "Doesn't look up to much in my opinion."

"I think the sooner we can start the better," answered Gray. "The poor old fellow can get nothing here. What do you think? Could you manage to mount him?"

Lumley shook his head in decided negative.

"Let's see what my foot's like to-morrow, partner. I couldn't stand on it to-day to save my life."

"The sooner we get off the better," Gray returned.

Lumley made no reply to this.

"You found the water just as I said, didn't you?" he asked presently. "'Tis years ago since I was in this part, but I was sure of it."

"I expect the place is a good deal overgrown since then," replied Gray. "You can't see any water from the ridge, but there's a track leading to it. I had no difficulty."

Lumley listened intently, but did not pursue the subject of the water.

"There's a station not so far off. We'll have to get on there and rest a bit," was his next remark.

"You know the way I suppose?" asked Gray.

"I know it well enough. You won't get lost again, I promise you."

He was slowly rubbing his leg as he spoke, with his face turned from Gray.

"Couldn't I find it by myself?" said Gray after a moment. "They'd send a wagon back for you."

Lumley gave a curious sort of chuckle.

"We'll see, partner, we'll see. We won't part company again unless we're forced to. And while I think about it, there's a little point we've got to settle." He stopped rubbing his leg, and turned his pale blue eyes full on Gray. "What about this?" He touched the wallet of money with his elbow. "Share and share alike, eh?"

Gray had been expecting a question of this sort. He returned Lumley's glance as steadily as he could.

"I shall tell the whole story to the first responsible person we meet, and hand the money over to him for safe keeping."

"Which story are you goin' to tell, if I may make so bold as to ask?" said Lumley with an ugly smile. "You've forgot, maybe, about the reward you meant to claim. You told me that was all you wanted when first we met, you know, mate."

"I told you a lie. I meant to steal the money just as much as you did," returned Gray quietly. He waited a moment, and then went nervously on. "I need not mention your name to the authorities, Lumley, but I wish you could come to see as I do. When a man's been face to face with death, as you and I have, he begins to learn the truth about himself."

Gray's voice faltered before he stopped speaking, and he did not say all he had wished to say. Lumley's cold mocking glance was too hard to bear.

"You're as good as a parson, ain't you, partner? But you've always took the virtuous line, ever since we've been together. Why, the first time I set eyes on you you preached to me; and now you're at it again! I never did see such a chap for sermons."

Gray's face grew scarlet.

"You can't think worse of me than I do of myself," he returned; "but I mean what I say about the money, Lumley,—I mean every word of that."

"Well, you're master, I s'pose," the other returned with an odd look that Gray remembered afterwards. "But no tricks, mind; no going in for the reward when my back's turned, mate; though, p'r'aps, you'll not get the chance."

"I think I've proved to you whether or not you can trust me now," said Gray, with just a touch of the old superiority in his tone.

Lumley gave a short laugh.

"Yes, you'd best stick to the virtuous line, partner. You're not cut out for any other; you're too soft-hearted and afraid. P'r'aps you thought my ghost would haunt you unless you came back—but I don't believe in ghosts, mate."

Gray made some answer, he hardly knew what, and presently he got up and moved away.

A shiver went over him once or twice as he stood talking to his horse, who had come up to him as he left Lumley. He had involuntarily recalled Lumley's mocking, incredulous look when he had tried to speak of the change his sufferings had wrought in him.

Next morning Lumley complained that his foot was worse than ever, and that it would be impossible for him to mount the horse that day. Gray did his best to persuade him at least to try, but with no effect. And Lumley positively declined to let Gray ride on to the station.

"I shall be able to start to-morrow," he declared; "and we can do all right till then."

There followed a day that Gray found very hard to bear. The moments seemed to lengthen themselves out into hours, the hours into weeks—the day seemed as if it would never end. It passed at last, and the night came—a lovely moonlight night like the last.

Gray had not slept during the day, and he hardly expected to sleep during the night; he felt too feverishly eager for the morning. But sometime after midnight he fell into a troubled, restless slumber. It was still bright moonlight when he awoke; the east showed no sign of dawn.

He woke suddenly with a strange sense of terror upon him. He started up, and looked suspiciously round. The horse was there, not far from the spot where he had last seen it, but Lumley was no longer lying against the hillock, and in his first hasty glance Gray failed to find him. But a rough laugh broke on his ear.

"Don't go off your head with fright, partner," called out Lumley, who was crouching on the ground close beside the horse. "I've just been tryin' my strength a bit. We can start at sunrise, if you like."

Gray walked slowly across to him.

"How did you manage to get here?" he said wonderingly.

Lumley had got hold of the bridle of the horse, but he let it go as Gray approached.

"Crawled on my hands and feet," he said. "And a pretty hard bit of work it's been."

Gray could see he was much exhausted. His face was deathly pale, and there were great drops of sweat upon it, brought there by the pain he had gone through. He had been trying to mount the horse by his unaided efforts, and had given up the attempt in despair just before Gray woke. But he did not tell Gray this, and Gray did not guess it.

"You should have waited till I could help you," Gray said after a moment. "I hardly understand how you can have got so far. Your foot must be much better."

He was still looking down on Lumley with a wondering look. He saw that he had fastened the wallet of money round his shoulders, and was half lying upon it with one arm tightly grasping it.

"P'r'aps you think I was tryin' to clear off?" said Lumley sulkily; "what would be the good of tryin' that. You know the way now, don't you? You'd be pretty soon on my tracks. And, besides, I'm not much better than a log; I can't do without you yet, partner."

Suspicion after suspicion flashed through Gray's mind, only to be dismissed at once.

It was impossible, he said to himself, that Lumley could be meditating foul play against the man who had saved his life. And, besides, it was as he said, he could not do without him.

Lumley read his thoughts correctly enough.

"You needn't stare at a cove like that," he said in the same sulky tone. "You were so mighty anxious to get off I thought I'd try what I could do. And we can start at sunrise, mate. You'll not have much longer to spend in company with me; you'll be glad of that, won't you? I'm not good enough for the likes of you."

"Couldn't we start before sunrise?" Gray said quietly; "it's almost as light as day now."

"It'll be dark as pitch in another hour when the moon goes down. And I want a rest," returned Lumley; "I'm not goin' to stir from here till sunrise for anybody, Mr. Gentleman Gray."

His sulky rage reassured Gray more than smooth language would have done, as Lumley perhaps had guessed.

"Very well, at sunrise, then," he said, and turned away to lie down again in his old place.

The moon went down, and, as Lumley had said, there followed an hour of darkness in which the stars shone forth with undimmed splendour.

Gray lay on the ground staring up at them. A little way off Lumley was stealthily watching him, wondering what his thoughts were. But Gray had forgotten Lumley—he was thinking of Harding.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A RUTHLESS VILLAIN.

It was just before sunrise that they started on their way; Lumley riding the horse, and Gray walking by the horse's side. It was with great difficulty that Gray had managed to get his companion on the horse. Lumley had made it more difficult than it need have been. He was anxious that Gray should believe his foot was much worse than it really was. The night before he had found himself quite capable of getting rapidly along on hands and feet, and even of standing for a moment, holding on by the horse.

"Goes like a lamb, don't he?" he said to Gray as they went across the plain. "No fear of his kicking up his heels again, is there?"

"Not much," said Gray with a pitiful look at the poor worn-out creature.

"Well, he won't run off with anything this time," said Lumley with a laugh; "I've taken care of that. But he'll go straight for the water again, that's what he'll do, and carry me with him."

Lumley spoke again after a moment

"You might go after that wagon when we get to water, partner. What do you think of that plan, eh?"

"I think it's the best plan."

"And you could take the money with you, couldn't you? I suppose you wouldn't leave it with me?"

"I had better take it," Gray answered heavily.

Lumley darted a suspicious glance at him.

"You're down in the mouth, ain't you, partner? You'd better be advised by me." He stopped the horse. "Come, mate, let's strike a bargain. Share and share alike. Half of it's a pretty pile for any cove. And who'd be the wiser or the worse for it? You go off to England and live like the gentleman you are. I'll not blow on you, and nobody else knows a word about it. Come, there's a fair offer; and I mean it, mind you."

Gray looked steadily up at him.

"It's no good, Lumley; nothing you could say would tempt me. You're wasting your words."

A sulky frown settled on Lumley's face. He jerked on the horse.

"Wastin' my words, am I? I won't waste any more of 'em. You can do as you like."

They went on in silence for some time. Gray broke it.

"There are the trees," he said.

Lumley gave a sudden start, and Gray saw his face change colour.

"I didn't expect 'em so soon," he said huskily. He stared at them with a gloomy troubled look, and then glanced at Gray, who was walking on a pace or two ahead with his head sunk on his breast. Lumley's hand stole to his pocket. There was a pistol there. He gripped it, then let it go and dragged his hand away.

"Look here, partner," he cried out hoarsely.

Gray turned round.

"You'll leave us the reward? The bank will pay it in a jiffy, and glad enough. You ain't goin' to be fool enough to lose us that?"

Gray's face set in stern determination.

"You are wasting your words, as I told you just now. What claim have we to the reward? They don't reward thieves for returning what they stole. I have told you what I mean to do. I shall do it."

Lumley's hand had gone back to his pocket, and lay hidden there. He did not speak again for some moments. They were full in sight of the trees now, and to the left the low ridge had become visible.

"We'd better strike off here, I think," said Gray. "It will be easier for the horse a little lower down."

They turned as he suggested.

"It's pretty close now, ain't it?" asked Lumley huskily.

"Just over the ridge. The track was plain enough, even by moonlight, We can't miss it."

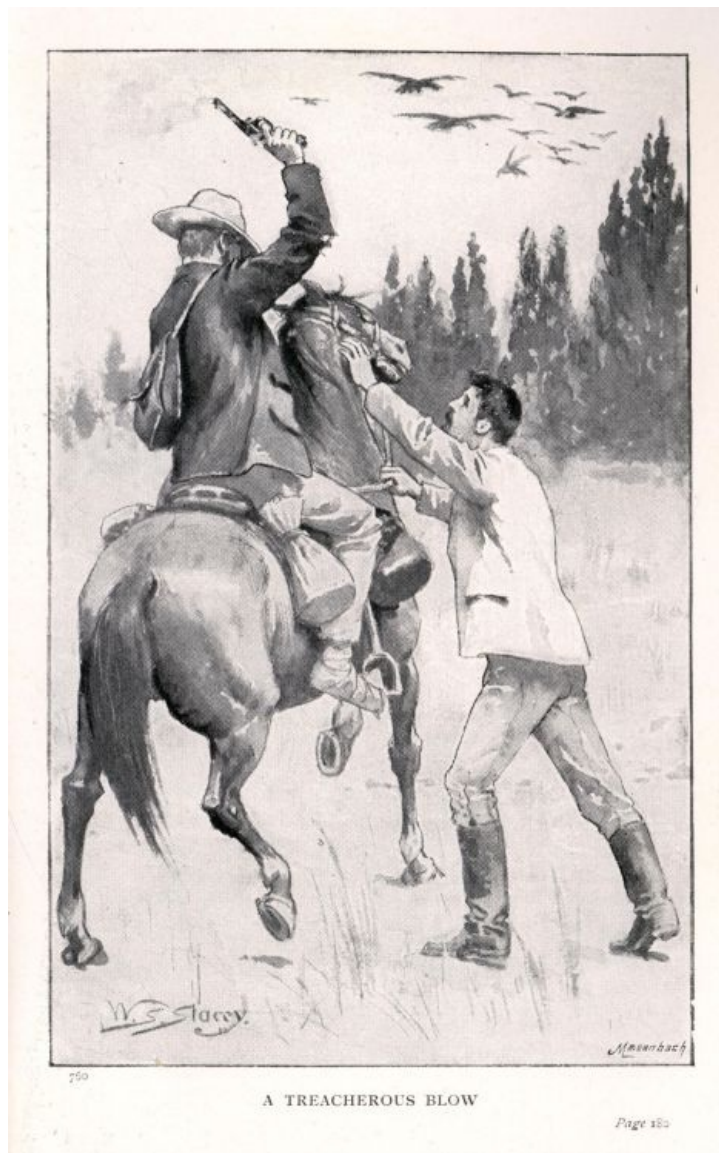
Lumley made no answer, but the moment after he came to a stand-still.

"What's the matter with the horse?" he exclaimed. "It's dead lame."

Gray turned round and looked at it

"A stone in the hoof, perhaps," he said, bending down to take a look.

The moment he stooped Lumley drew out his pistol and took aim at him. Gray's life was saved by the horse. As he bent down and lifted up the hoof it made a sudden, violent swerve away from him. It was at that moment Lumley pulled the trigger. The bullet whistled past Gray's head, and he sprang up, dazed and horrified, but quite unhurt, and made a clutch at Lumley's arm. But the arm was already lifted with the smoking pistol in it, and it descended with crushing force on Gray's upturned brow. Lumley had no need to repeat the blow. Gray fell back without a groan, and lay upon the earth as senseless and motionless as one already dead. For the moment Lumley thought he was dead.



### A TREACHEROUS BLOW

"He brought it on himself," he muttered, as he stared down at the still figure. And then added, "I'll make sure; it's safest."

He levelled his pistol again, but he did not fire. His arm fell by his side. He could not fire. An oath at his own weakness broke from his lips. He thrust from him the pity that had taken the strength from his arm, and raised the pistol again. He meant to fire this time. But his opportunity was gone. The horse had been straining at the reins ever since he had fired, and now with a sudden jerk it got its head free and bolted off at a wild gallop along the bottom of the ridge. Lumley clutched at the reins again, but the horse was beyond control, and he had the utmost difficulty in keeping his seat. He tried to turn the horse up the ridge, but the frantic animal rushed blindly on. It was mad with terror.

The blow had badly stunned Gray, and it was some time before he recovered consciousness. Even then he could not recall clearly what had happened or where he was, but lay looking up at the sky, trying vainly to get his confused thoughts clear.

After a few moments he raised himself slowly and languidly on his arm, and looked round him. The trees were close at hand. There were crows sitting on them watching him, and on the sand not far off him two or three more had stationed themselves. Quite near them there lay something that Gray recognized with a thrill. It was the pistol Lumley had dropped as the horse dashed away.

Gray could remember it all now. He lived over again that terrible moment when the bullet had sung past his ear, and he had leapt up to clutch Lumley's murderous arm. But where was Lumley?

Gray raised himself into a sitting posture as he asked himself that question, and looked up the ridge, half expecting to see Lumley just crossing it to the water below; but the ridge showed no signs of him or of the horse. Yet as Gray looked and listened he could plainly hear the sound of galloping hoofs, just as he had heard them two nights before.

He turned his head away from the ridge, and looked in the opposite direction. And then with a cry he staggered to his feet. The horse was coming rapidly towards him with Lumley clinging to it, his body thrown forwards, his arms clutching the horse's neck.

"Help me! Save me! Stop the horse!" broke in shrill cries from the lips of the terrified man as he was whirled past Gray.

Gray staggered forward and made a clutch at the hanging rein; but he might as well have tried to stop a whirlwind. The horse dashed past him along the ridge, in the path it had traversed before, and then, as before, swerved aside and rushed away into the Bush.

Gray sank back upon the ground, and covered his face with his hands. He could do nothing.

It was not long before he heard the sound of the returning hoofs. He struggled to his feet once more and looked.

The horse was coming back on its path, swaying wildly from side to side, with foaming mouth and staring eyeballs; and this time no terrified, white-faced suppliant was clinging to its back shrieking out to Gray for help. The horse was riderless!

Riderless! But what was that dark lifeless weight hanging by the stirrup, dragged across sand and bramble as the horse staggered on? A sickening, paralysing fear took possession of Gray as he saw and knew. He stood with his eyes fixed upon it unable to move.

The horse staggered on, but not far. It suddenly gave a dreadful cry and fell. There was a struggle, a moan, and then it lay still, as still as the dead body by its side.

Gray drew near, drew close. He looked down upon the face of the man who had deserted him, and attempted to murder him. Then with difficulty he dragged the body from under the horse and straightened it out. The wallet containing the money fell from the shoulders of the dead man as he did so, and opened, showing the gold and notes. Gray did not even look at them. He laid the body out in decent fashion, and covered the dreadful face.

Then he stumbled away across the sands, caring not whither he went, caring only to get away from the spot where the dead man lay. His eyes were burning and throbbing, there was a great singing in his ears. He sank down again. His limbs refused to carry him further. Then came a sudden silence, a great darkness, and he knew no more.

## CHAPTER XII.

### UNDER GREEN BOUGHS.

When Gray came to himself again he was lying on a bank of green herbage under the shadow of a mighty tree. The boughs kept up a pleasant murmuring. Bright-hued birds were flitting to and fro, now in the shadow, now in the sunshine. Through the waving boughs Gray could see a blue sky shining.

It was all so beautiful, so unlike the scene on which his eyes had closed, that he could not believe it to be real. It was a fevered dream, he said to himself; and presently he would awake and see the vast sun-baked plains stretching round him in their awful loneliness, and *that thing* lying not far off beside the horse.

But the dream lasted! He slept and woke again, and still the trees waved above him and the birds fluttered to and fro. He could even hear now the tinkling of bells not far off, such as oxen wear upon their heads. He lifted himself on his elbow, for he was too weak to rise, and looked round him. As he raised himself he saw a dog lying a few feet off, with its head between its paws, gazing at him with brown intelligent eyes. Gray fell back on the bank. The dog might have been Harding's dog. The sight of him brought back the past again. He remembered all he had done, and the wish rose in him that he had died like Lumley, that—

But the thought was never finished, for at that moment a hand was laid upon his shoulder, a cheery voice sounded in his ears. Gray dropped his hands and looked up with a wild glad cry. It was Harding's self who stood at his side!—thinner, paler, with white streaks in his brown hair that were new to Gray, but Harding's very self.

"Don't speak, don't try to speak, my lad," he said, sitting down by Gray and taking his hand. Gray held that rough brown hand tight, putting his other hand over it, and looking into Harding's face with eyes that could scarce believe the reality of the joy that had come to him. But memory came to cloud the rapture of that first moment.

"I am not fit to touch your hands, Harding," he said in a low voice. But he did not attempt to let go his grasp, and Harding stretched out his other hand and laid it on his shoulder.

"You mustn't talk, old fellow; you've been ill, you know. No, I won't hear anything just now," he added, as Gray attempted to speak; "I'm spokesman just now. Don't you want to know—" He made a sudden, awkward stop, and then continued lamely:

"I'm all right, you see. Got picked up by some friendly black fellows. I'd hurt my leg, you see, and couldn't walk. They carried me with them till I could tell them who I was. I had a touch of fever, and was out of my head for a time; but they nursed me well. I was off my head a while, you see, and they carried me along with 'em. We were crossing a bit of the bush when I got myself again. And I found—" Harding stopped and cast a hasty, commiserating glance at Gray. "Well, I found that map you'd drawn, and the letter on t'other side. It didn't take me long to put two and two together, you know."

Gray had turned from him and hidden his face. Harding stretched out his hand again and put it on his shoulder.

"Well, I got two of the trackers, clever fellows, and we hit upon your trail; and found you, you see."

"Did you—did you—" Gray could not finish.

"We buried him," Harding said shortly. "And I've got the money in the wagon. We sent over to Ford's for a wagon. You were close to water, lad, if you'd only known it."

"I knew it," said Gray; "we had water."

Harding looked inquiringly at him.

"It's a long story," said Gray. A shudder went over him, and he hurried on. "He got out of the track when he left me, and I found him. The horse had thrown him, and he had hurt his foot, but he knew where the water was and I got it. And I found the horse by the water."

Harding put his hand on his shoulder.

"Did he give you that blow, lad?"

Gray nodded, and Harding asked no more questions just then.

Gray remained silent for a moment, then he turned his face to Harding.

"I have got to tell you—"

"I won't hear, lad. You've said a lot in your fever, and I won't hear any more just now. I can see how it's all happened."

Watch was lying at his master's feet, and here he looked up with a short bark and a delighted wag of his tail. Harding pulled his ears. "I don't know how Watch managed to live through it all; but he did—old faithful fellow!" And then Harding's face turned scarlet.

He would have got up to move away, but Gray held his hand fast.

"The dog was faithful," he said in a low tone, "while I— No; you must let me speak, Harding."

"Not now, my lad; you are not fit for it."

"I got your letter."

Gray said the words firmly, almost roughly; then his voice faltered, and he went brokenly on:

"God has been merciful to me, a sinner. He sought me wandering, set me right; He showed me what I'd done when—when I thought it was too late." He stopped a moment, then his voice strengthened itself. "I had made up my mind to confess everything if ever I got back. I little thought I should be able to confess it to you. Do you understand me, Harding? I got that letter."

"My poor lad!"

It was all Harding could say.

"I did not deliberately say I would not go," went on Gray; "but it was just the same. I put it off, and put it off; and then Watch disappeared, and I was *glad*. You know why?"

Harding nodded sadly.

"It all seemed easy then. If I had been successful—I don't know—I hope even then I might have found myself out; but I was sent into the wilderness—I was brought face to face with the fruits of sin." Gray shuddered as he spoke. "I saw myself as I was, Harding."

"My poor lad!" said Harding again.

There was silence between them for a while; then Gray spoke again.

"I mean to live a different life, Harding. You will have to help me. The first thing is to tell Mr. Morton everything."

"Yes, lad, except one thing. I won't have that told. No, I insist on that, old fellow. Let's forget it. Promise me never to speak of it. I never shall. You didn't mean to do it, you know."

Gray shook his head.

"About the money," went on Harding quickly. "Well, you'd best tell Mr. Morton; and the bank can have it all right. And we'll go back to the run, Gray, until Polly and the lads come. Thank God, she had started before a letter could reach her. She will have been spared this time of suspense."

"Morton won't have me back," said Gray under his breath.

"Yes, he will. It's the best thing you can do, lad. If you go off by yourself—"

"If you will have me—if Morton will let me, it is what I most desire," said Gray brokenly.

"Then, that's all right," Harding said.

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