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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WHITE VIRGIN ***

George Manville Fenn

"The White Virgin"

Chapter One.

By a Thread.

It was a long, thin, white finger, one which had felt the throbbing of hundreds and thousands of pulses, and Doctor Praed, after viciously flicking at a fly which tried persistently to settle upon his ivory-white, shiny, bald head, hooked that finger into Clive Reed's button-hole, just below the white rosebud Janet had given him a little earlier in the evening.

"Mind the flower."

"All right, puppy. Come here. I want to talk to you."

"About Janet?"

"Pish! mawkish youth. Great ugly fellow like you thinking of nothing else but Janet. Wait till you've been her slave as I have for eighteen years."

"Pleasant slavery, Doctor," said the young man, smiling, as he allowed himself to be led out on to the verandah just over the gas-lamp which helped to light up Great Guildford Street, W.C.

"Is it, sir? You don't know what a jealous little she-tartar she is."

"I warn you I shall tell her every word you say, Doctor. But it's of no good. I shall not back out. Look at her dear face now."

Reed caught the little Doctor by the shoulder, and pointed to where his daughter sat with the light of one of the shaded lamps falling upon her pretty, animated face, as she laughed at something a sharp-looking, handsome young man was saying—an anecdote of some kind which amused the rest of the group in old Grantham Reed's drawing-room.

"Oh yes, she's pretty enough," said the Doctor testily. "I wish she weren't. Don't let that brother of yours be quite so civil to her, boy. I don't like Jessop."

"Nor me?" said the young man, smiling.

"Of course I don't, sir. Hang it all! how can a man like the young scoundrel who robs him of his child's love?"

"No, sir," said Clive Reed gravely; "only evokes a new love that had lain latent, and offers him the love and respect of a son as well."

Doctor Praed caught the young man's hand in his and gave it a firm pressure. Then he cleared his throat before he spoke again, but his voice sounded husky as he said—

"God bless you, my dear boy."

And then he stopped, and stood gazing through the window at the pleasant little party, as two neatly-dressed maids entered and began to remove the tea-things, one taking out the great plated urn, while the other collected the cups and saucers.

"The old man hasn't bad taste in maids," he said, with his voice still a little shaky, and as if he wanted to steady it

before going on with something he wished to say. "Why don't he have men?"

"He will not. He prefers to have maids about."

"Then he ought to have ugly ones," continued the Doctor, who keenly watched the movements of the slight, pretty, fair girl who was collecting the cups, and who exchanged glances with Jessop Reed as she took the cup and saucer he handed her. "A man who has two ugly scoundrels of sons has no business to keep damsels like that."

"This ugly scoundrel is always out and busy over mining matters; that ugly scoundrel is living away at chambers, money-making at the Stock Exchange," said Clive, smiling.

"Humph! Mining and undermining. Well, young men like to look at pretty girls."

"Of course, Doctor," said Clive. "I do. I'm looking now at the prettiest, sweetest—"

"Don't be a young fool," cried the Doctor testily. "I can describe Janet better than you can. Now, look here, boy; I've got two things to say to you. First of all, about this 'White Virgin'."

"Yours?" said Clive, still glancing at Janet, over whom his brother was now bending, as the maid who carried the tray made the cups dash as she opened the door, and then hurried out as if to avoid a scolding.

"No, young idiot; yours—your father's," said the Doctor, rather sharply. "Hang that organ!"

"Yes, they are a nuisance," said the younger man, as one of the popular tunes was struck up just inside the square.

"Well, what about the mine, sir?"

"Only this, my lad: I've got a few thousands put aside; you know that."

"Yes, sir; I supposed you had."

"Oh, you knew," said the Doctor suspiciously.

"Yes; I think I heard something of the kind."

"Humph!"

"There, Doctor, don't take up that tone. Give me Janet, and leave your money to a hospital."

"No; hang me if I do! I haven't patience with them, sir. The way in which hospitals are imposed upon is disgraceful. People who ought to be able to pay for medical and surgical advice go and sponge upon hospitals in a way that—Oh, hang it, that's not what I wanted to say. Look here, Clive, if this new mine—"

"No, sir: very old mine."

"Well, very old mine—is a good thing, I should like to have a few thousands in it. Now, then, would it be safe? Stop, confound you! If you deceive me, you shan't have Janet."

"If ever I'm ill, I shall go to another doctor," said Clive quietly.

"Yes, you'd better, sir! He'd poison you."

"Well, he wouldn't insult me, Doctor."

"Bah! nonsense; I was joking, my dear boy. Come, tell me. Here, feel the pulse of my purse, and tell me what to do."

"I will," said the younger man. "Wait, sir. I don't know enough about it yet to give a fair opinion. At present everything looks wonderfully easy. It's a very ancient mine. It was worked by the Romans, and whatever was done was in the most primitive way, leaving lodes and veins untouched, and which are extending possibly to an immense depth, rich, and probably containing a very large percentage of silver."

"Well, come, that's good enough for anything."

"Yes, but I am not sure yet, Doctor. I'm not going to give you advice that might result in your losing heavily, and then upbraiding me for years to come."

"No, dear boy. You would only be losing your own money; for, of course, it will be Janet's and yours."

"Bother the money!" said the young man shortly. "Look here, Doctor; as a mining engineer, I should advise every one but those who want to do a bit of gambling, and are ready to take losses philosophically, to have nothing to do with mines. If, however, I can help you with this, I will tell you all I know as fast as I learn it."

"That'll do, boy. Now about the other matter. You know I make use of my eyes a good deal."

"Yes," said the young man anxiously.

"Then, to put it rather brutally and plainly, boy, I don't like the look of the old dad."

"Doctor Praed!" cried the young man in a voice full of agony, as he turned and gazed anxiously into the drawing-room, where Grantham Reed, one of the best known floaters of mining projects in the City, sat back in his chair,

holding Janet Praed's hand, and patting it gently, as he evidently listened to something his elder son was relating. "Why, what nonsense! I never saw him look better in my life."

"Perhaps not—you didn't," said the Doctor drily.

"I beg your pardon. But has he complained?"

"No; he has nothing to complain of, poor fellow; but all the same, we doctors see things sometimes which tell us sad tales. Look here, Clive, my boy. I speak to you like a son, because you are going to be my son. I can't talk to your brother, though he is the elder, and ought to stand first. I don't like Jessop."

"Jess is a very good fellow when you know him as I do," said Clive coldly.

"I'm very glad to hear it, boy," said the Doctor. "But look here; your father's in a very bad way, and he ought to be told."

"But are you sure, sir?" said Clive, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes, I am sure," said the Doctor. "I have been watching him for the past six months in doubt. Now I know. Will you tell him, or shall I?"

"Tell him!" faltered Clive.

"Yes; a man in his position must have so much to do about his money affairs—winding up matters, while his mind is still strong and clear."

"But he is well and happy," said Clive. "How could I go to him and say—"

"Here, where's that Doctor?" came from within, in a strong voice. "Oh, there you are! It's going on for ten, and I must have one rubber before you start."

Five minutes later four people were seated at a card-table, one of whom was Clive Reed, whose hands were cold and damp, as he felt as if he were playing for his father's life in some great game of chance, while in the farther drawing-room Janet Praed was singing a ballad in a low, sweet voice, and Clive's sharp-looking, keen-eyed brother was turning over the music leaves and passing compliments, at which his sister-in-law elect uttered from time to time in the intervals of the song a half-pained, half-contemptuous laugh.

Chapter Two.

Arch-Plotters.

"Hullo, my noble! what brings you here?"

Jessop Reed took off his glossy, fashionable hat, laid a gold-headed malacca cane across it as he placed it upon the table, and then shot his cuffs out of the sleeves of his City garments, cut in the newest style, and apparently fresh that day. Tie, collar, sleeve-links, pin, chain, tightly-cut trousers, spats, and patent shoes betokened the dandy of the Stock Exchange, and the cigar-case he took out was evidently the last new thing of its kind.

"Cigar?" he said, opening and offering it to the dark, sallow, youngish man seated at an office table, for he had not risen when his visitor to the office in New Inn entered.

"Eh? Well, I don't mind. Yours are always so good."

He selected one, declined a patent cutter, preferring to use a very keen penknife which lay on the table, but he accepted the match which his visitor extracted from the interior of a little Japanese owl, and deftly lit by rubbing it along his leg. The next minute the two men sat smoking and gazing in each other's eyes.

"Well, my brilliant, my jasper and sardine stone, what brings you through grimy Wych Street to these shades?"

"You're pretty chippy this morning, Wrigley. Been doing somebody?"

"No, my boy; hadn't a chance. Have you come to be done?"

"Yes; gently. Short bill on moderate terms."

"What! You don't mean to say that you, my hero on 'Change, who are turning over money, as it were, with a pitchfork, are coming to me?"

"I am, though, so no humbug."

"'Pon my word! A fellow with a dad like a Rothschild and a brother that—here, why don't you ask the noble Clive?"

"Hang Clive!" snapped out Jessop.

"Certainly, my dear fellow, if you wish it," said John Wrigley. "Hang Clive! Will that do?"

"I don't care about worrying the old man, and there's a little thing on in Argentines this morning. I want a hundred at

once.”

“In paper?”

“Look here, Wrigley, if you won’t let me have the stuff, say so, and I’ll go to some one else.”

“And pay twice as much as I shall charge, my dear boy. Don’t be so peppery. Most happy to oblige you, and without consulting my friend in the City, who will have to sell out at a loss, eh? A hundred, eh?”

“Yes, neat.”

“All right!”

A slip of blue stamped paper was taken out of a drawer, filled up, passed over for signature, and as Jessop now took up a pen he uttered a loud growl.

“Hundred and twenty in four months! Sixty per cent. Bah! what a blood-sucker you are!”

“Yes, aren’t I?” said the other cheerily. “Don’t take my interest first, though, and give you a cheque for eighty, eh?”

He took the bill, glanced at it, and thrust it in a plain morocco case, which he replaced in a drawer, took out a cheque-book, quickly wrote a cheque, signed it, and looked up.

“Cross it?” he said.

“Yes. I shall pay it in. Thanks!”

“There you see the value of a good reputation, my dear Reed; but you oughtn’t to be paying for money through the nose like that.”

“No,” said the visitor, with a snarl, “I oughtn’t to be, but I do. If the dear brother wants any amount, there it is; but if I want it—cold shoulder.”

“So it is, my dear fellow; some are favourites for a time, some are not: Let me see. He’s engaged to the rich doctor’s daughter, isn’t he?”

“Oh yes, bless me,” said Jessop. “All the fat and gravy of life come to him.”

The young lawyer threw one leg over the other and clasped his hands about his knee.

“Ah! yes,” he said seriously, “the distribution of money and honour in this world is very unequal. Clive is on that mine, isn’t he?”

“Oh, yes; consulting engineer and referee scientific, and all the confounded cant of it. As for a good thing—well, I’m told not to grumble, and to be content with my commission and all the shares I can get taken up.”

“Does seem hard,” said Wrigley. “Only for a year or two, eh? And then a sale and a burst up?”

“Don’t you make any mistake about that, old man,” said Jessop sulkily. “It’s a big thing.”

“Then why wasn’t it taken up before?”

“Because people are fools. They’ve been so awfully humbugged, too, over mines. This is a very old mine that the governor has been trying to get hold of on the quiet for years, but he couldn’t work it till old Lord Belvers died. It has never been worked by machinery, and, as you may say, has only been skinned. There are mints of money in it, my boy, and so I tell you.”

Wrigley smiled.

“What is your commission on all the shares you place?”

“Precious little. Eh? Oh, I see; you think I want to plant a few. Not likely. If you wanted a hundred, I couldn’t get them for you.”

“No, they never are to be had.”

“Chaff away. I don’t care. You know it’s a good thing, or else our governor wouldn’t have put his name to it and set so much money as he has.”

“To come up and bear a good crop, eh? There, I won’t chaff about it, Jessop, boy. I know it’s a good thing, and you ought to make a rare swag out of it.”

“So that you could too, eh?”

“Of course; so that we could both make a good thing out of it. One is not above making a few thou’s, I can tell you. Lead, isn’t it?”

“Yes, solid lead. None of your confounded flashy gold-mines.”

“But they sound well with the public, Jessop. Gold—gold—gold. The public is not a Bassanio, to choose the lead

casket.”

“It was a trump ace, though, my boy.”

“So it was. But you are only to get a little commission out of sales over this, eh?”

“That’s all; and it isn’t worth the candle, for there’ll be no more to sell. The shares are going up tremendously.”

“So I hear—so I hear,” said Wrigley thoughtfully; “and you are left out in the cold, and have to come borrowing. Jessop, old man, over business matters you and I are business men, and there is, as the saying goes, no friendship in business.”

“Not a bit,” said Jessop, with an oath.

“But we are old friends, and we have seen a little life together.”

“Ah! we have,” said Jessop, nodding his head.

“And, as the world goes, I think we have a little kind of pleasant feeling one for the other.”

“Humph! I suppose so,” said Jessop, watching the other narrowly with the keen eye of a man who deals in hard cash, and knows the value of a sixteenth per cent, in a large transaction. “Well, what’s up?”

“I was thinking, my dear fellow,” said the young lawyer, in a low voice, “how much pleasanter the world would be for you and me if we were rich. But no, no, no. You would not care to fight against your father and brother.”

“Perhaps before long there will only be my brother to fight against,” said Jessop meaningly.

The lawyer looked at him keenly.

“You should not say that without a good reason, Jessop.”

“No, I should not.”

“Well, I don’t ask for your confidence, so let it slide. It was tempting; but there is your brother.”

“Curse my brother!” cried Jessop savagely. “Is he always to stand in my light?”

“That rests with you.”

“Look here, what do you mean?”

“Do you wish me to state what I mean?”

“Yes,” said Jessop excitedly.

“Then I meant this. Your father is very rich, and knows how to protect his interests.”

“Trust him for that.”

“Your brother is well provided for, and can make his way.”

“Oh, hang him, yes. Fortune’s favourite, and no mistake.”

“Then what would you say if—But one moment. You tell me, as man to man, to whom the business would be vital, that the ‘White Virgin’ mine is really a big thing?”

“I tell you, as man to man, that it will be a tremendously big thing.”

“Good!” said the lawyer slowly, and in a low voice. “Then what would you say if I put you in the way of making a few hundred thousand pounds?”

“And yourself too?”

“Of course.”

“Then never mind what I should say. Can you do it?”

“Yes. You and I are about the only two men who could work that affair rightly; and as the whole business is to others a speculation, if they lose—well, they have gambled, and must take their chance.”

“Of course. But—speak out.”

“No, not out, Jessop; we must not so much as whisper. I have that affair under my thumb, and there is a fortune in it for us—the stockbroker and the lawyer. Shall we make a contract of it, hand in hand?”

“Tell me one thing first—it sounds impossible. What would you do?”

“Simply this,” said Wrigley, with a smile. “I tell you because you will not go back, neither could I. There’s my hand on it.”

Jessop eagerly grasped the extended hand.

"It means being loss to thousands—fortune to two."

"Us two?" said Jessop hoarsely.

"Exactly! It is in a nutshell, my boy. All is fair in love, in war, and money-making, eh? Here is my plan."

Chapter Three.

Another.

"Come, I say, my dear, what's the good of being so stand-offish. It's very nice and pretty, and makes a man fonder of you, and that's why you do it, I know! I say! I didn't know that the pretty Derbyshire lasses in this out-of-the-way place were as coy and full of their little games as our London girls." Out-of-the-way place indeed! Dinah Gurdon knew that well enough, as, with her teeth set fast and her eyes dilated, she hurried along that afternoon over the mountain-side. The path was an old track, which had been made hundreds of years before, so that ponies could drag the little trucks up and down, and in and out, but always lower and lower to the smelting-house down in the dale, a mere crack in the limestone far below, whose perpendicular jagged walls were draped with ivy, and at whose foot rushed along the clear crystal trout-river, which brought a stranger into those solitudes once in a way. But not on this particular afternoon, for Dinah looked vainly for some tweed-clothed gentleman with lithe rod over his shoulder and fishing-creel slung on back, to whom she could appeal for protection from the man who followed her so closely behind on the narrow, shelf-like path.

Two miles at least to go yet to the solitary nook in the hills just above the bend in the stream, where the pretty, romantic, flower-clothed cottage stood; and where only, as far as she knew, help could be found. And at last, feeling that she must depend entirely upon herself for protection, she drew her breath hard, and mastered the strong desire within her to cry aloud and run along the stony track as fast as her strength would allow.

But she only walked fast, with her sunburned, ungloved fingers tightly holding her basket, her face hidden by her close sun-bonnet, and her simply made blue spotted cotton dress giving forth a peculiar ruffling sound as she hurried on with "that man" close behind.

She had seen that man again and again for the past two months, and he had spoken to her twice, and each time she had imagined that he was some stranger who was passing through, and whom one might never see again. She knew better now.

He was not a bad-looking fellow of five-and-thirty; and an artist, who could have robed him as he pleased, instead of having him in ordinary clothes, could not have wished for a better model for a picturesque ruffian than Michael Sturgess, a man born in London, but who had passed the greater part of his time in Cornwall and in Wales. A good workman, but one who had a kind of notoriety among his fellows for divers little acts of gallantry, real and imaginary. He was not a man of strong perceptions or experiences out of mines, and he judged womankind, as he called them, by their faces and their clothes. Silk and fashionable bonnets suggested ladies to him; cotton dresses and pretty faces, girls who enjoyed a bit of flirtation, and who were his lawful prey.

"I say, you know," he cried, "what's the good of rushing on like that, and making yourself so hot? Hold hard now; you've done the coy long enough. Sit down and rest, and let's have a good long talk. You need not look round; there's nobody about, and it's a good two miles to the cottage where your old dad lives."

Dinah started and increased her pace.

"You see I know. I've seen the old boy in his brown alpaca and straw hat; I've watched him, same as I have you—you pretty little bright-eyed darling. Come, stop now; I want to make love to you."

As Michael Sturgess said these last words, he bent forward and caught hold of the folds of the dress, and tried to stop the girl, who sprang round in an instant, striking the dress from the man's hand, and facing him with her handsome face flashing its indignation.

"How dare you!" she cried. "Such insolence! You forget yourself, sir, and if my father were here—"

"Which he isn't, dear. But bravo! That's very nice and pretty, and makes you look ten times as handsome as ever. I like it. I love to see a girl with some pluck in her. But come now, what's the good of going on like that and pretending to be the fine lady, I know what you are, and who you are, and where you live, as I told you."

"I desire you to leave me instantly, sir. My father is a gentleman, and you will be severely punished if you dare to interrupt me like this."

"Go on," said the man, with a laugh. "I know the old boy, and have talked to him twice. It's all right, dear, don't be so proud. I mean the right thing by you. I'm down here to take charge of the 'White Virgin' yonder, behind where you live, and want to take charge of this little white virgin too. See? I shall have a grand place of it, and I'll make quite the lady of you. There now, you see it's all right. Let me carry the basket; it's too big and heavy for your pretty little hands."

He made a snatch at the creel she was carrying, but she drew back quickly, and hurried on once more, fighting hard to keep back the hysterical tears, and vainly looking to right and left for help or a means of escape from the unwelcome attentions forced upon her. But she looked in vain. The hillside sloped off too rapidly for any one but a

most able climber to mount, and to have attempted to descend meant doing so at great risk to life and limb.

There was nothing for it but to hurry on, and this she did with her breath coming faster—faster from excitement and exertion, as she recalled his words.

What did he say? He was in charge of the “White Virgin” mine—the old disused series of shaft and excavation down the narrow chasm which ran like a huge ragged gash into the mountain, and from which hundreds of thousands of tons of stone and refuse had been tilted down the mountain-side to form the moss-grown ugly cascade of stones which stood out from the hill-slope forming a prominent object visible for miles.

The shelf she was following led past the narrow ravine, with its many pathways cut in the steep sides all running towards the great shaft, fenced in with blocks of stone. She had been there several times with her father, bearing him company during his walks in search of minerals, so that the way was perfectly familiar to her, though it was a place not to be approached without a feeling of dread. Country superstition had made it the home of the old miners, who now and then revisited the glimpses of the moon; two people had been, it was said, murdered there, and their bodies hidden in the dark, wet mazes of the workings; and within the recollection of the oldest inhabitant an unhappy forsaken maiden, who feared to face the reproaches of her relatives, had sought oblivion in the water at the bottom of the principal shaft, and her body had never been found.

It was an uncanny place on a bright sunny day—after night a spot to be avoided for many reasons; but Dinah Gurdon approached it now with feelings of hope, for she felt that the man who was in charge would leave her there if she only maintained her firmness.

“Why, what a silly little thing it is!” he said, in a low, eager voice, his words sounding subdued and confidential as he uttered them close to her ear. “What are you afraid of? Why, bless your pretty heart, it’s plain to see you haven’t been troubled much by the stupid bumpkins about here. Running away like that just because a man tells you he loves you. And I do, my pretty one, and have ever since I came down here. Soon as I clapped eyes on you, I says to myself, ‘That’s the lass for me.’ Why, I’ve done down here what I haven’t done since I left Sunday-school—I’ve come three Sundays running to church, so as to see your bonny face. I saw you come by this morning when I was yonder leaning over the fence. ‘Going to market,’ I says. ‘Wonder whether she’d bring me an ounce of tobacco from the shop, if I asked her?’ But I was just too late, so I sat down and waited for you. ‘She won’t want me to be seen with her in the village,’ I said. ‘Girls like to keep these things quiet at first.’ So do I, dear. I say, it’s pretty lonesome for me down here till they begin working, but I’ve got plenty of time for you, so let’s make good use of it while we can.”

Dinah paid no heed to his words in her alarm, but they forced themselves upon her unwilling ears, as she hurried through the solitary place, feeling that every step took her nearer home, and toward the entrance to the mine gap, where this man would leave her.

“I say, you know, aren’t you carrying this on a bit too hard?” he half-whispered. “Isn’t it time you gave way just a little bit? You see how nice and gentle I am with you, dear. Some fellows would be rough and lay hold of you, but I’m not that sort. I like to be tender and kind with a girl. Just because one’s big and strong, one don’t need to be a regular brute. I say, come now, that’s enough. Let’s look at your pretty face. Take off your sun-bonnet. It’s a darned ugly one, and I’ll go over to Derby some night and buy you the prettiest that there is in the shops. I will, ‘pon my soul! There’s no humbug about me, my dear. Why, you’ve made this old wilderness look quite cheerful, and if it hadn’t been for knowing that you lived down there by the river, I don’t believe I should have stopped it out. I should have just written off to the governor and said, ‘I’m coming back to London.’ I say, wouldn’t you like to go up to London, my dear? I’ll take you and pay up like a man.—I mean it.”

Dinah’s heart gave a great leap, for not fifty yards farther on there was the narrow natural gateway in the side of the hill, leading right into the deep, zigzag rift which clave the mountain from the top far down into the bowels of the earth, and spread in secondary maze-like chasms farther and farther in here through the limestone, where the dirty grey lead ore was found in company with masses of crystalline growth glittering with galena. Here, too, was the wondrous conglomerate of lily encrinite, once animated flowers of stone, forming the mountain masses of Derbyshire marble, where a calm sea once spread its deep waters in the days when the earth was young. Here were the beds and veins of the transparent violet spar, locally known as the “Blue John,” which glistened here and there in the natural caves, side by side with stalactite and stalagmite, wherever water filtered through the strata, and came out charged with the lime which had gone on cementing spar and shell together into solid blocks.

A weird, strange place to any one save the lovers of the strange, and then only explored in company by the light of chemical and wick. A place generally shunned, and only to be sought or chosen as a sanctuary by one who was pursued. But circumstances alter cases, and matters happen strangely and influence our lives in unexpected ways.

Dinah Gurdon, Major Gurdon’s only child, paying no heed to her follower’s words, kept hurrying on, for she had nearly reached the ragged entrance to the mine gap, feeling that at last she would be free, and then the insolent, self-satisfied ruffian would not dare to pursue her farther, for he had said that this was the place he had in charge. But if he did, another quarter of a mile would take her round the great limestone buttress formed by the mine spoil; and then she would be on the south slope of the Tor, in full view of the narrow valley, up out of which her father would probably be coming, and he would see her, as he came to meet her, a mile away.

She had kept to her steady, quick walk as long as she could; but now the exultation produced by the sight of freedom reassured her, and unable to control herself, she started off running past the natural gateway in the rocky wall on her right.

But Michael Sturgess was too quick for her.

“No, you don’t, my pretty one,” he cried, as he dashed in pursuit, overtook her in a few yards, and caught her by the dress, which tore loudly in his hand. The next moment he had his arm round her waist, but she struck at him wildly as

he now held her and blocked her way. There was a momentary struggle, and she was free once more. She turned as if about to leap down the steep slope at her side; but the attempt was too desperate, and she ran back a few yards, with the man close behind, and then turned again and dashed frantically between the two natural buttresses, down the steep path leading to the mazes and gloomy passages of the ancient mine.

Michael Sturgess stopped short for a moment, burst into a coarse laugh, and gave his leg a slap.

"I knowed it," he cried. "Oh, these girls, these girls!"

The next minute he was in full pursuit, and ten minutes later, faint, wild, and echoing up the walls of the shadowy solitude, there was a piercing cry.

A great bird rose slowly, circling higher about the dismal gap, and then all was still.

Chapter Four.

Jessop's Weakness.

"I don't care. I will speak, and if master gets to know, so much the better."

"Will you hold your silly tongue?"

"No, I won't. I've held it too long. It's disgraceful, that's what it is, and I'll tell Mr Clive of your goings-on with his sweetheart."

"Look here, Lyddy, do you want me to poison you, or take you out somewhere and push you into a river?"

"Yes," cried the girl addressed, passionately. "I wish you would, and then there'd be an end of the misery and wretchedness. And as for that Miss Janet Praed—"

"Hold your tongue, you silly, jealous little fool!"

"Oh yes, I know I'm a fool—fool to believe all your wicked lies. And so would you be jealous. I saw it all last time she was here—a slut engaged to be married to your brother, and all the time making eyes at you, while you are carrying on with her shamefully, and before me, too. It's cruel and disgraceful. I may be only a servant, but I've got my feelings the same as other people, and I'd die sooner than behave as she did, and you did, and—and—I wish I was dead, I do—that I do."

"Will you be quiet, you silly little goose. Do you want everybody in the house to know of our flirtation?"

"Flirtation!" cried the girl, wiping her streaming eyes. "You regularly proposed and asked me to be your wife."

"Why, of course. Haven't I promised that I would marry you some day?"

"Yes—some day," said the girl bitterly; "but some day never comes. Oh, Jessop, dear Jessop! you made me love you so, and you're breaking my heart, going on as you do with that Miss Praed."

She threw her arms about his neck, and clung to him till he roughly forced her to quit her hold.

"Are you mad?" he said angrily.

"Yes, very nearly," cried the girl, with her pretty, fair, weak face lighted up with rage. "You've made me so. I'll tell Mr Clive as soon as he comes back from Derbyshire—see if I don't!"

"You'd better," said Jessop grimly. "You dare say a word to a soul, and I'll never put a ring on your finger, my lady—there!"

"Yes, you will—you shall!" cried the girl passionately. "You promised me, and the law shall make you!"

"Will you be quiet? You'll have my father hear you directly."

"And a good job too."

"Oh, you think so, do you?"

"Yes, I do. Master's a dear, good gentleman, and always been nice and kind. I'll tell him—that I will!"

"Not you. There, wipe those pretty little blue eyes, and don't make your dear little puggy nose red, nor your cheeks neither. I don't know, though," whispered Jessop, passing his arm round the girl and drawing her to him; "it makes you look very sweet and attractive. I say, Lyddy, dear, you are really a beautiful girl, you know."

"Do adone, Jessop," she whispered, softening directly, and yielding herself to his touch.

"I couldn't help loving you, darling, and I love you more and more every day, though you will lead me such a life with your jealousy. I never find fault with you when I see you smiling at Clive."

"But it is not as I do at you, dear. Mr Clive was always quite the gentleman to me, and it hurts me to see you trying

so hard to get Miss Janet away from him.”

“There you go again, little silly. Isn’t she going to be my sister-in-law?”

“It didn’t look like it.”

“Pish! What do you know about such things? In society we are obliged to be a bit polite, and so on.”

“Oh, are we? I know; and if I told Mr Clive, he’d think as I do. I won’t have you make love to her before my very eyes—there!”

“Why, what an unreasonable little pet it is!” he cried, disarming the girl’s resentment with a few caresses.

“And the sooner master knows you are engaged to me the better,” she said, with a sob.

“And then you’ll have the satisfaction of knowing that my father has quarrelled with me, and altered his will, so that everything goes to my brother. He may marry you then, for I couldn’t. I shouldn’t have a penny to help myself. Oh yes; go and tell. I believe you want to get hold of him now.”

The girl gave him a piteous look, and tried to catch his hand, but he avoided her touch, and laughed sneeringly.

“I don’t want to be hard and bitter,” he said, “but I’m not blind.”

She looked up at him reproachfully.

“You don’t mean what you are saying,” she whispered sadly, “so I shan’t fret about that.”

“You don’t believe me,” he said, in a low voice, as he fixed the girl with his eyes, glorying in the knowledge that he had thoroughly subdued her, and that she was his to mould exactly as he willed, to obey him like a slave. “Then you may believe this, that I have told you before. All that has passed between us is our secret, and if you betray it and ruin my prospects, and make me a beggar, you may go and drown yourself as you threatened, for aught I care, for you will have wilfully cut everything between us asunder. Now we understand each other, and you had better go before any one comes.” The girl stood gazing at him piteously now, with every trace of anger gone out of her eyes, and her tones, when she spoke, were those of appeal.

“But, Jessop, dear.”

“Be quiet, will you,” he said angrily.

“Don’t speak to me like that, dear,” she whispered. “Only tell me you don’t care for Miss Praed.”

“I won’t answer such a baby’s stupid questions. You know I only care for you.”

There was a sob, but at the same moment a look of hope to lighten a good deal of despair.

“You are not angry with me, Jessop, dear?”

“Yes, I am, very.”

“But you will forgive me, love?”

“Anything, if you’ll only be the dear, good, sensible little woman you used to be.”

“I will, dear—always,” she whispered.

“And fight for me, so that I may not lose.”

“Yes, dear, of course.”

“Can I trust you, Lyddy?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Then, whatever happens, you will, for my sake, hold your tongue till I tell you to speak?”

“Yes, if I die for it,” she said earnestly.

“I thought you would be sensible,” he said, nodding at her. “Come, that’s my pretty, wise little woman. Now go about your business, and wait for the bright days to come, when I shall be free to do as I like.”

“Yes, Jessop,” she whispered, and after a sharp glance at the door she bent forward and kissed him quickly. “But there isn’t anything between you and Miss Janet?”

“Of course not,” he cried. “As if there could be while you live.”

She nodded to him smiling, laid her finger on her lips to show that they were sealed, and then hurried out of the room.

“Poor little fool!” said Jessop Reed to himself, as soon as he was alone; “you are getting rather in the way.”

Chapter Five.

The Treasure House.

Clive Reed stood up like a statue on a natural pedestal, high on the precipitous slope. It was a great ponderous block of millstone grit, which had become detached just at the spot where, high up, mountain limestone and the above-named formation joined. And as he looked about him, it seemed wonderful to a man fresh from London that he could find so great a solitude in central England. Look where he would, the various jumbled together eminences of the termination of the Pennine range met his eye; there was hardly a tree in sight, but everywhere hill and deeply cut dale, the down-like tops of the calcareous, and the roughly jagged crags of the grit, while, with the exception of a few white dots on a green slope far away, representing a flock of sheep, there was no sign of life, neither house, hut, nor church spire.

"Yes, there is something alive," said the young man, "for there goes a bee wild-thyme hunting, and whir-r-r-r! Think of that now, as somebody says; who would have expected to see grouse out here in these hills?"

There they were, sure enough, a pair which skimmed by him as he stood at the very edge of the great gash in the mountain-side, at the bottom of which the track ran right into the mine he had come down to inspect for the third time, after walking across from the town twelve miles distant, where he had left the train on the previous evening.

"Wild, grand, solitary, on a day like this," said Reed to himself; "but what must it be when a western gale is blowing. Come, Master Sturgess, you're behind your time again."

He glanced at his watch.

"No; give the devil his due," he muttered. "I'm half an hour too soon, and, by George, not so solitary as I thought. Behold! two travellers wending their way across the desolate waste, as the novel-writers say. Now what can bring a pair of trousers and a petticoat there?"

The young man shaded his eyes and looked across the gap to where, far away, the two figures he had seen moved so slowly that they seemed to be stationary. Then they separated a little, and the man stooped and then knelt down.

"Can't be flower-gatherers out here. I know: after mushrooms. But let's see."

Clive Reed dragged the strap which supported a tin case slung from his shoulder, forced it aside, and tugged at another strap so as to bring a little binocular into reach; and adjusting this, he followed his natural instinct or some strange law of affinity, and brought the little lenses to bear upon the female in place of the male.

"Not a gentle shepherdess fair, with tously locks and grubby hands and face, though she has a dog by her side," he said to himself. "Looks like a lady—at a distance. Phyllis and Corydon, eh? No," he added, after an alteration of the glass; "long white hair and grey beard, and—hullo! old chap's got a candle-box. Botanist or some other -ist. Hang it, he's after minerals for a pound, and the lady—in white? Humph, it can't be the 'White Virgin' who gave the name to the mine. Let's—Hands off, old gentleman, or keep your own side. Hah! there goes the dog: after a rabbit, perhaps."

Clive Reed was ready to ask himself directly after, why he should stand there taking so much interest in these two figures, so distant that even with the help of the glass he could not distinguish their features. But watch them he did till they disappeared round a shoulder of the hill.

"Tourists—cheap trippers, I suppose," said the young man, replacing the glass in its sling case. "I wonder where they have come from?" and then with a half laugh, as he took out a cigarette-case and lit up, "I wonder why I take so much interest in them?"

"Answer simple," he continued, with a half laugh; "because they are the only living creatures in sight. Man is a gregarious beast, and likes to greg. I feel ready to go after them and talk. Hallo! here we are! Master Sturgess and two men with a stout ladder, coils of rope, and—if he hasn't brought a crowbar and a lanthorn, woe."

He shaded his eyes again to watch a party of three men toiling up a slope, half a mile away, and began to descend from his coign of vantage to reach the pathway at the entrance to the gap, seeing as he did that he would not arrive there long before the others.

A glance at his watch showed him that it was still only ten o'clock, for he had started on his mountain tramp at daybreak, and as he walked and slid downward, he calculated that he would have time after the mine examination to make for one of the villages in the neighbourhood of Matlock to pass the night, so as to see as much of the country as he could.

"Morning, Sturgess; you got my letter then?"

"Oh, yes, sir, yesterday morning," said the man, as Reed nodded at his two sturdy followers—rough-looking men of the mining stamp, both of whom acknowledged his salute with a half-sneering smile.

"Brought two different chaps this time. Got enough tackle?"

"Oh, yes, sir; ropes, hammer, spikes, and crowbar."

"Lanthorn?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Shouldn't come on a job like this without a light."

"Then come along."

He led the way through the narrow entrance, where the rock had once upon a time been picked away to allow room for the passage of horses or rough trucks, but now all covered with lichen and the marks of the eroding tooth of Time; and then up and down and in and out along the side of the chasm, which grew more gloomy at every step, deeper into the mountain-side, while the bottom of the gully grew narrower and closer, till it resembled the dried-up bed of a stream which had become half blocked up with the great masses of stone, which had fallen from above.

Clive Reed's eyes were everywhere as they went on—now noticing spots where the sloping walls of rock had been worked for ore, others where trials had been made, honeycombing the rock with shallow cells, but always suggesting that this working must have been ages ago, and in a very superficial primitive fashion. This suggested plenty of prospect for the engineer who would attack the ancient mine with the modern appliances and forces which compel Nature to yield up her hidden treasures, buried away since the beginning of the world.

Clive Reed saw pretty well everything on his way to the dark end, and, after making a few short, sharp, business-like remarks, he said suddenly—

"The plans say there is no way out whatever, beside the entrance."

He turned to Sturgess as he spoke, and a curious look came over the countenance of the guardian of the mine, but before he could speak one of the men behind said—

"Man as didn't mind breaking his neck might get up yonder," and he nodded towards the precipitous side.

"Which means that a rough staircase might easily be made if wanted, and—"

He did not finish speaking, but sprang up on to a block of stone, climbed to another, drew himself on to a third, and extricated something from a niche which had caught his observant eye, and with which he sprang down.

It was a fine cambric handkerchief, which he turned over as Sturgess looked on stolidly and with the same peculiar look in his countenance.

"Here, somebody may make inquiries about this. You had better take it, Sturgess. Visitors to the old mine perhaps, but they have no business here now. You will keep the place quite private for the present."

The man took the handkerchief, and a keen observer would have thought that he put it out of sight rather hurriedly.

"Blowed in," said one of the others with a laugh. "Wonderful windy up here sometimes."

Reed had started again, and plunging farther and farther into the natural cutting in the mountain-side, soon after reached the end of the *cul de sac*, where, partly obliterated by time, there were abundant traces of the old workings, notably the shafts with their crumbling sides, one going down perpendicularly, and into which the young engineer pushed over a stone. This fell down and down for some time before it struck against a projection with such force that it sent up a hollow reverberating roar, and directly after came the dull, sullen sound of its plunge into the water which had gathered in the huge well-like place.

"She's pretty deep, sir," said one of the men, with a laugh.

"Yes," said Reed, with a nod, and he went on climbing over the blocks of stone fallen from above, and which cumbered the place, to one of the other two shafts, both of which had been made following a lode running raggedly down at an angle of about seventy degrees.

"We'll try this," said Reed sharply.

"Want me to go down and chip off a few bits that seem most likely?" said Sturgess roughly.

"No. Now, my lads, drive the crowbar well in here," said the engineer, indicating a rift close to where they stood, a crevice between two immense blocks of limestone.

"This here one's handier," said one of the men, pointing to a crack close to the opening.

"Yes, and when you have loosened it by driving in that bar, more likely to be pulled down into the shaft. In here, please."

The man inserted the sharp edge of the bar, and his companion made the great chasm echo as he began to drive the iron in with strokes of the heavy hammer he carried, till it was deemed safe.

"Hold a ridgement o' sojers now, sir," said the hammerman.

"Yes, that's safe enough," said Reed; and after carefully examining the ropes, he knotted two together, and formed a loop at the end of one.

"Shall we two go down, sir?"

"No; I am going," replied Reed quietly.

"Find it precious dirty and wet, sir. Best let us."

"No, thank you. Let me down. How far is it to the first level?"

"'Bout two hundred foot, I should say, p'raps more; but I dare say it don't go down so straight far, but works out'ard like. I d'know, though. I've never been down, and nobody as I ever heard of ever did go."

"No," said the other with a laugh, "and strikes me as you won't find nothing worth your while when you do go. The old folks got out all the good stuff from here hundreds o' years ago."

"You will be ready to haul up when I signal," said Reed quietly.

"Oh, yes, sir. You may trust us. We don't want to make an inquest on you."

"Light the lanthorn," said Reed to Sturgess, and taking off the flat tin case he carried slung under his left arm, he took from it a cold chisel and a geologist's hammer; stripped off his coat, rolled up his sleeves over his white muscular arms, and then secured the lanthorn to his waist with the strap of his binocular.

"You'll be careful about the loose stones, my men," he said in quick, decisive tones. "You, Sturgess, will follow me as soon as I have sent up the rope."

The men nodded as Reed slipped the loop over his head, and then sat in it, and without a moment's hesitation, after the men had passed the rope round the upright bar, he lowered himself over the rugged side of the shaft, and was rapidly allowed to descend past the rough stones which formed the bottom of the slope, and showed traces still of how it had been ground away for ages by the passage over it of the freshly extracted ore.

It was a primitive way of descending, but in all probability the old manner had been as rough, and there was little to trouble a cool man with plenty of nerve, one accustomed to depend upon mine folk, and make explorations in shaft, tunnel, and boring, deep down in the earth. Besides, Clive Reed's brain was too busy as he looked around him, noting some fifty feet down that a great vein of lead ore had been extracted from the solid rock, leaving a narrow passage going off at right angles. Another ran in an opposite direction, and soon after he passed another, just as if they were branches of some great root which he was tracing to its end.

About a hundred feet down, where the light shone now clearly, he dislodged a loose stone, which went on before him with a rushing, rumbling sound, ending in a sullen plunge into the water far below.

"All right?" came from above, the words descending the shaft, and sounding like a strange whisper magnified and uttered close to his ear.

"Yes; lower away."

The rope glided on round the bar; and Reed went on down and down, noting the differences in the formations as well as the crumbling, dripping stone would allow, and mentally planning out fresh drifts here and there, where he expected to find paying ore, till he found himself opposite to a great cavernous opening, black and forbidding-looking enough to repel any one wanting in nerve, while from far below came a gleam of light, apparently reflected from the water.

"Hold hard! Haul up four feet!"

Reed's words went echoing to the surface, and were promptly attended to.

"Now hold fast!"

The next minute he gave himself a swing, and obtained foothold in the great cave whose bottom was worn hollow by the trickling of a tiny stream which drained into the lower part of the shaft, and after throwing off the rope and shouting to the men to haul up, he stood holding the light above his head, examining the roof and sides, while he waited for the descent of his companion; but here the ore seemed to have been chipped and picked out to the last fragment.

Sturgess joined him at the end of a few minutes, took the lanthorn, opened it so as to get as much light as possible, and then turned to Reed.

"Same way again, sir?"

"No; we'll try that gallery off to the left. That third one I noticed last time."

"Why, that's right half a mile away, and goes to nowhere. That's never been worked."

Reed faced round to him sharply.

"Do you object to your job, my man?" he said; "because if so, speak at once, and send down one of the others."

"Oh, I don't object," said the man surlily. "I'll go where you won't get them to venture. I was thinking about you."

"Then don't think about me, but about your duties."

"That's all right enough, sir; only if a regular consulting engineer came down, he'd chip off a bit here, and a bit there, and know directly what a mine's worth. I took stock of this old place last time, and can tell you now without your troubling yourself to go a step farther. 'Sides, I've been down since."

"Indeed!"

"Oh yes. I'd nothing to do, so it was natural I should come down and have a look of the property I was to take care

of.”

“Well, and what estimate did you set on it—as to value?” said Reed, with a smile.

“Oh, about the usual figure,” said the man, with a peculiar laugh. “It’s worth just as much as you can get out of your shareholders.”

“Yes?”

“That’s it, sir; I’ve not been busy over mines ten years for nothing. Not a penny more. The old folks cleared it out clean enough, all but the patch to the right down yonder.”

“Then you think the whole thing is a swindle, Mr Sturgess, eh?”

“Oh no, sir. I don’t say that,” replied the man, with a chuckle. “I only say it’s a mine as will show up well when it has got all its new machinery. Ought to make a good job for a couple of years for a few people. Shall I show you where you can get a few good specimens? I know of some bits as are pretty rich.”

“No, thank you,” said Reed quietly. “I’m not a regular consulting engineer, my man, and we came down to do a good day’s exploring. I want to see the whole of the workings.”

“Then it’ll take you a week, sir.”

“Very well, then, let it take me a week. Now, then, let’s waste no more time.”

Michael Sturgess uttered a sound something like a grunt, and holding the lantern before him led on along the rocky cavernous passage, which was wonderfully free from fallen stones, the rock having formed endless pillar buttresses and arch-like processes of stalactitic growth, cementing and holding all firmly together.

But there was a wonderful sameness as they went on, following the course of what had once been a lode of ore, which had finally been cleared out, leaving its shape in the rock, and forming a tunnel as the ancient miners worked their way.

Far down the main gallery of the mine Sturgess paused by a narrow rift four or five feet across, and running up to nothing some fifteen feet overhead. The rock was different here, being a mass of cemented together fragments of the old geological stone lilies, and looked as if some modern shock had riven the place in two, for the lines on either side suggested that if compressed they would still fit together.

“Mean to go along here, sir?” said Sturgess, holding up the lanthorn, so as to display the stone of which the sides were formed.

“Yes; go on,” said Reed shortly.

“There’s been no working here, sir; this is all natural split in the rock.”

“I am perfectly aware of that, and we are wasting time.”

“Oh, all right, sir,” said the man surlily, and he strode in through the opening, walking as fast as he could, like a sulky, offended schoolboy, for a few dozen yards; but this soon came to an end, for in place of a regular beaten well-used way, they were now compelled to pick their path over broken marble, loose angular masses, and the accumulated débris which had fallen from above, while in places they had to stride from side to side of a narrow crevice which ran straight down.

But the place attracted Clive Reed as they went on and on, with the rift they traversed growing wider, and opening out into a cavern now, or contracting again, till in places their passage was so narrow that they had to squeeze through into curious-looking chambers in the rock. Then the way split and branched off into different passages, suggestive of endless labyrinths leading right away through the untrodden bowels of the earth. Below them in one place ran a good-sized stream, unseen as it threaded its way among the broken stones, but making its presence known by its musical gurgling, till, after they had been walking above it for about ten minutes, Sturgess stood still, holding up the light at the edge of a gulf, down which the water plunged with a dull, hissing roar.

“Won’t go no farther this way, I suppose, sir?” he said, rather mockingly.

Reed made no reply, but stepped forward close to the man’s side, shaded his eyes, and peered into darkness, which he could not pierce.

He stooped to pick up a stone and hurl it outward, and listened till it fell and splintered, and the fragments went rattling down for some distance, before the noise they made was overcome by the roar of the water.

“Along here,” said Reed at last, and he pointed to his left.

Sturgess hesitated for a few moments, and then began to move cautiously along the side of the vast cavern, a place apparently untouched, and very rarely, if ever, visited by man.

At last he stopped short.

“I don’t want to show no white feathers, Mr Reed, sir,” he said, “but our candles’ll only last a certain time, and we’ve got to get back.”

"I have matches and three candles in my pocket," said the young engineer quietly.

"But I don't know whether I can find my way back, sir, now; whilst if we go any farther, I'm sure I can't."

"I have it all perfectly impressed on my brain," said Reed quietly. "But I do not want to go much farther. I only want to examine the rock here and there. Take care, man: mind!"

He darted out his right hand, caught the miner by the coat and saved him from plunging down into the black abyss beneath them, for in taking a step forward, Sturgess had trodden on a piece of loose shell marble, which gave way and one foot went down.

He dropped the lanthorn, though, and it went below, to hang in a crevice upon its side, threatening to go out; but as soon as Sturgess had a little recovered himself and sat down to start wiping his forehead, Reed began to descend.

"Don't do that, sir," cried Sturgess hoarsely. "Light your candle."

"No; I can get the lanthorn," said Reed quietly; and he went on descending cautiously till, getting well hold of the nearest projecting fragment with his left hand, he bent down lower and lower to try and reach the handle of their lamp.

But, try how he would, it was always a few inches beyond his reach; and at last, with the candle within guttering, flaring, and blackening the glass, threatening to crack it and then go out, Reed drew himself up again to try and get a fresh footing upon the side of the chasm.

He looked up to see, faintly, a white face gazing down at him, and, as their eyes met, the man said hoarsely—

"Don't do that, sir. Come up and light a fresh bit. If you slip, I shall be all in darkness. It's horrid to have to come to one's end in a place like this."

"Sympathy for himself, and not for me," thought Reed. "I have the lights."

Just at that moment he noted something just level with where he stood, where there was a plain demarcation between two kinds of stone; and, whereas on the left all was shelly fossil, on his right it was limestone; and again, with a sparkling and gem-like vein of quartz full of great crystals of galena.

"Do you hear, sir? Come back here, and let's get out of this," cried Sturgess again. "It arn't fair to a man to bring him into such a hole. This isn't a mine."

"My good fellow," said Reed quietly, "you are alarming yourself about nothing. I can get the lanthorn directly, and it is a pity to leave it here."

The miner uttered a hoarse sigh which was almost a groan, and crouched on the rugged shelf, looking down with starting eyes, as Reed glanced quickly once more at the face of the rock, and then, taking fast hold of another projection, he tried again to get a little lower, and had looked beyond the lanthorn, to see that he was on a very rapid slope, going down to unknown depths for aught that he could tell; for all below the dim light was black—a terrible void, out of which came the splash and roar of falling water.

He could not help a shudder as his mind raised up horrors in connection with that black darkness, and the possibility of his falling and going down and down into some rushing water which was waiting to bear him away.

But it was only a momentary nervousness. Then he smiled to himself, and thought of home and of Janet Praed—how horrified she would be if she could see him then.

"And nothing whatever to mind but imaginary fears," he said to himself.

"Stop a minute, sir," came in a hoarse whisper from above. "Give me the matches and candles, and I'll strike another light."

"And then I go to perdition for aught you care," thought Clive Reed. "No, hang me if I do."

He took no notice of the appeal, but lowered one foot, got a fresh hold, bent towards the lanthorn, extending his arm to the utmost, touched the handle, but it moved an inch, a stone broke from where he was standing, to go down with a rattle, and then, to the young man's dismay, the lanthorn began to glide.

It was all in a moment. He bent down lower and made a sudden snatch, his left hand slipped from its hold, and he was falling, but in that brief instant he grasped the lanthorn. The next it was beneath him, the light was out, and with a rush of dislodged stones he felt himself rushing rapidly down the cavern side with the water roaring loudly in his ears, but pierced by a cry that robbed him of all power as thoroughly | as if he had received a paralytic stroke.

Chapter Six.

The Lead of Lead.

"Ahoy there! Sturgess! Are you hurt?"

"Hurt, sir? No."

"Then don't make that noise, man. Any one would think you were a child, frightened at the dark."

"But where are you, sir?"

"Down here, of course."

"I thought you were killed, sir, and—and—"

"That you were left alone in the dark, man. There, wait till I get a light."

Michael Sturgess muttered an oath, and leaned forward over the sharp slope, as he wiped the great drops of fear-born perspiration from his face. "Child, am I?" he muttered. "I'll let him see. Enough to scare anybody—place like this."

He gazed downward as Reed, after a little manipulation of the damaged lanthorn, struck a light, which gleamed out some sixty feet below. Then the candle was relit, giving the man a faint glimpse of the horrible-looking slope, and lastly Reed began to climb up, slowly talking the while. "Of course it's an ugly-looking place," he said; "these underground limestone caverns always are, but it's of no use to lose your nerve at the first emergency."

There was a good-humoured contempt in the young engineer's tones which enraged the big strong man above him as he stood looking down at the light.

"Like to scare him!" he muttered, as Reed climbed higher, rested when about half-way up, and raised the lanthorn above his head to gaze at the rock face before him, as if seeking for a good hand or foot hold.

"I daresay this place goes down for far enough," he said, as he continued his climb, and kept on talking as if to take his companion's attention; "it would be interesting to try and plumb the depth."

"Shall I take the lanthorn?" said Sturgess, a minute or two later.

"No, thanks, I'll carry it," replied Reed, as he made his way to where Sturgess stood. "I shall want to look at the walls here and there as we go back. There! might have been worse. A bit scratched, and my clothes a little torn. I will go back to the regular old workings now. There has evidently never been anything done here."

"No, sir; what I told you. No good here."

"No good!" said Reed, with a laugh. "I think there's a great deal of good."

"What, workable stuff, sir?" said the man sharply. "Perhaps; but what I meant was this tremendous hole and the water. Why, Sturgess, man, it's worth thousands."

"Don't see it, sir," said the man roughly.

"I do. A natural drainage of the mine. No expenditure for keeping the workings dry."

"Oh, yes, that's right enough, sir," said the man, with a laugh, "if you've got anything to work."

"I'm afraid Mr Sturgess and I will not get on together," said Reed to himself, as he led the way on, examining the wall from time to time, and now and then chipping off a piece for a specimen.

"If this cockney jockey's going to be over me," muttered Sturgess, "he's got to be tough; but he don't know everything."

They reached the entrance to the grotto-like portion of the mine, where Reed halted, took out a sandwich-box and flask, and began to refresh himself, handing both to his companion first; and as Reed ate, he lifted the lanthorn from time to time, and examined the neighbouring walls, roof, and floor.

"All pretty well cleared out, sir," said Sturgess, with a grin.

"Yes—clean," replied Reed quietly; and soon after they resumed their exploration, following the track of the old veins here and there through an almost interminable maze of passages, and going farther and farther into the depths of the mountain. But it was always the same, passage after passage through the limestone, following the old lode of lead ore which had been diligently quarried and picked out any time during, probably, the past two thousand years, and there was no plan, no special arrangement in driving the various tunnels. Where nature had run her mineral in veins, there the old miners had followed; and, as Reed had noticed before, there was scarcely a passage that had water lying about, the drippings from the roof and cracks in the walls having worn for themselves little channels, which found their way into others, and then by degrees went to swell the fall by whose side he had stood some hours before.

At last, with his bag growing heavy with specimens, and the supply of candles getting less, and after the termination of the workings had been found and examined in several places, Reed stopped.

"Back now," he said.

"Satisfied, sir?"

"Oh yes, for to-day. I shall follow the other leads, of course, till I have well examined all, and mapped it out."

"And settled where you shall begin work, sir," said the man, with a grin.

"Oh, I have settled that," replied Reed.

Sturgess stared.

"Been a lot of good stuff got out of here, sir, no doubt."

"Evidently."

"More than there ever will be again."

"That's more than we can say, Sturgess. Take the lanthorn now, and lead on straight for the mouth. Good heavens! Why, it's five o'clock."

"Yes, sir, I thought it must be," said the man.

"Time goes when one is interested. There, have a cigar. Light up. We have not done a bad's day work. Can you lead back pretty straight?"

"Oh yes, sir, I can manage that," said the man confidently; but he had been trudging along, sending his and the young man's shadows grotesquely dancing upon the roof for quite an hour and a half before the end of the main artery of the mine was reached, with the sloping shaft up to the daylight—"to grass," Sturgess termed it—but here there was no response to their hails for nearly an hour, the men having gone.

"The scoundrels!" Reed cried at last. "Well, it's risky work, but we can't stop down here. We must either go back into the mine, try for the other shaft, which may be climbable, or you or I must go up that rope."

"Who's to climb a rope like that, sir?" growled Sturgess; "and how do we know that the end's properly fastened?—There they are!"

For a faint murmur of voices was heard from far above, and now an answer came to their hail, and a minute later a voice shouted—

"All right below?"

"Yes," cried Reed. "Get in the loop, my man.—Ahoy there! haul up."

The rope tightened and Sturgess was raised from his feet and went up slowly, leaving Reed below in the darkness.

But it was all light to the young engineer, whose tired face shone with joy and excitement.

"The blind cavern lizards," he said, half aloud. "I knew it. God bless the old dad, what a brain he has! He'll be delighted with my report; and Janet, my darling, you shall have a home that will be the envy of all we know, and make the old Doctor proud of us. My darling!" he said softly, as, with his eyes half closed, he raised up her fair young face before him. "Hah! poor old Jessop, too. He must have a bit of the luck. I'll tell the old man by-gones must be by-gones. We'll have a clean slate. Jess isn't a bad fellow after all. I might have gone down the wrong road a bit if it hadn't been for Janet. Hang it all! the love of a dear sweet girl does keep a weak fellow straight."

He glanced down at his hands and tweed suit, daubed with limestone mud, and showing a couple of tears in the stout cloth.

"Delightful party for a drawing-room, and—hullo! here's the loop."

He secured the rope, which came dangling down, felt that his specimens and tools were safe, and then slipped the loop over his head, sat in it as nonchalantly as if it had been a swing, uttered a loud "All right," and the next minute he was being steadily hauled up towards the surface.

Chapter Seven.

Making Friends.

"Hallo, my lads!" cried Reed, as he reached terra firma and gazed around. "I didn't know there was a public-house handy."

"No, no, don't blame the poor lads," said a well-dressed, elderly man, smiling. "They were alarmed at your long absence, sir, and came on to me for help. We came round, and picked up these two brave fellows, and were ready for a search, but, thank heaven, it was a false alarm."

"Oh, that was it?" cried Reed; "then I beg your pardon, my lads, and thank you, sir, heartily. Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?"

"Major Gurdon, at your service, sir," and there was a swift military drawing up of the spare figure, the soft dark eyes brightened up, and the speaker threw back his grey head and gave his long white beard a shake to settle it upon his breast.

"Mr Reed, I believe, the new engineer of the mine?"

"Yes, sir, but at this present moment more like one of the miners," said Reed, with a deprecating glance at his

besmirched garments. "Excuse me one moment."

He turned to the men with his hand in his pocket—a hand that did not come back empty, and the new-comers went off slowly, smiling as Reed turned now to the Major, who had stepped forward, eager to speak.

"You look thoroughly exhausted," he said quickly. "I live quite a cottage life out here with my garden and fishing-rod, but if you will accept my hospitality, such as it is—"

"Really, I could not trouble you—and in this condition," began Reed, as Sturgess changed colour, and an unpleasant scowl came upon his face.

"You will be conferring a favour, my dear sir," said the Major. "One does not often have the society of a gentleman out in this wild place; and," he added laughingly, "the hospitality will embrace soap and water and a clothes-brush."

"Then I accept willingly," said Reed, holding out his hand, but withdrawing it directly as he noted its condition, covered with dried limestone mud, and streaked in two places with blood.

"Nonsense!" said the Major, taking the hand. "I understand these things, my dear sir. I often go prowling about with a geologist's hammer, and have gone home like this. Come along. My high tea will be about ready."

"Well, this is most unexpected," said Reed warmly. "Here, Sturgess, I shall come over again to-morrow about eleven. Be here with the men, and you had better bring a couple of lanthorns."

"Hadn't I better come on to put you in the right road?"

"What! Oh, no! I shall manage. That will do." The man turned away with the look upon his countenance intensifying; but it was not observed, for Reed walked off in company with his new acquaintance, the pair chatting away as if they had known each other for years.

"Quite gave me a scare," said the Major. "Life here is so uneventful. Very beautiful, but lonely, especially in the winter."

"But you do not stay here in the winter?"

"Oh yes; I have lived here ten years now."

"No accounting for taste," thought Reed; and he glanced sidewise at his companion, but learned nothing. He only saw a quiet-looking country gentleman, whose sun-browned face told of an open-air life.

Sturgess followed them to the great natural gateway at the end of the chasm, where he had stood some days before, but not alone; and he now remained watching them as they went on westward along the narrow path, and round by the huge buttress formed by the refuse of the mine, carried and cast down there for hundreds upon hundreds of years. Then as they passed on out of sight, the man raised one of his fingers to his lips, and began gnawing roughly at the side of the nail, till he seemed to make up his mind, and took a step or two forward after them, next stopped short again, for a hail came from behind.

"Coming on down to the village, Mr Sturgess?"

He turned and faced one of the two men, and nodded, walking away with him in the other direction, taciturn and strange, answering his companion in monosyllables, and with his thoughts evidently far away. Not so very, though, for they were with Clive Reed, and promised him no good.

"So you have been examining the old 'White Virgin' mine, eh?" said Major Gurdon. "I heard it was sold. A new company, eh?"

"Yes," said Reed, smiling; "a new company—a solid one."

"Eh? I hope so. But if I had to go in for a mining adventure, I think I should begin here with the material the old miners cast away as rubbish." He pointed to the great buttress they were skirting. "There it is, already extracted from the mountain, and though poor, rich enough, I should say, to pay a company if worked with modern appliances."

"You understand these things?" said Reed, looking at his elderly companion searchingly, and noting how deeply lined his brow seemed, and that care and sorrow more than age had given him his hollow-cheeked, anxious air.

"A man who likes geology, mineralogy, and who always lives among these hills, cannot help picking up a little mining lore," said the Major, with a smile. "I have searched and toiled, my dear sir—much loss and little gain. I hope yours may prove to be a successful venture."

"Let's hope so," said Reed quietly. "All mining is speculative, and in speculative matters there must be losses as well as gains."

"And after all, what does it amount to, my young friend? The chase of a will o' the wisp who bears a golden lamp not worth the winning, you will say when you grow as old as I. But there, I shall bore you with this twaddle. What do you say to that for a view? Derbyshire in front; broad, honest, hardworking old Yorkshire away to your right; at your feet the Swirl—my river, I call it."

"A lovely prospect, but rather wild," said Reed, smiling.

"Say savage, and you will be nearer the truth; but I can show you something a little less stern;" and, chatting away

pleasantly, he led on along first one slope and then another, till at last they came down upon a narrow track beside a rippling stream, shut in between two perpendicular walls of rock, draped with ivy, and with every cleft and crevice green and bright with trailing birch, moss, and clustering fern.

The water of the little river ran swiftly babbling here among the rocks, there swirling round, eddying and forming whirlpools, one of which, across the river where it washed the perpendicular rock, was evidently very deep, for the water gradually subsided there and grew still and glassy, reflecting the ivy-curtained walls as it slowly glided round.

"Ah! this is delightful," cried Reed, as he stopped to gaze at the glancing waters, where the sun made the ripples dazzling to the eye, and then turned to the deep shadows. "Eden may have been lovely, but this would be good enough for a poor commonplace nineteenth-century fellow like myself."

"You like it?" said the Major, smiling.

"It's glorious. Is there much of it like this?"

"About a mile. I call it my river here, and the mining men respect my rights generally—that is, unless the trout they catch sight of in some pool is a very fat one indeed."

He said this with a peculiar smile, as he met Reed's eye.

"Not bad fellows, the miners, but I don't quite take to your guardian of the mine."

"I suppose not," said Reed. "He is rather a rough customer, but he was recommended to my father for his knowledge of underground work.—You have plenty of trout here, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, and I take toll of them all along this stretch of river. Possession is nine points of the law, but I really have only my right on one side as far as my bit of property extends."

"Ah! you have an estate along here?"

"Yes, and I am glad to meet my neighbours, sir. My rough piece of mountain is bounded by the river along here from the corner we just passed, and on another side by the mine land of your Company—the old 'White Virgin' estate. A worthless stretch of barren rock and ravine; but I bought it for the sake of this piece of river fifteen years ago. A place to retire to, my dear sir, suitable for a man weary of the world, and one of whom the world had had enough."

His face was overcast as he spoke, and he frowned heavily, while Reed noticed the sad, careworn aspect of the man, who looked as if he had suffered from some terrible trouble—that which had so deeply lined his face. But it brightened up again directly, as Reed hung back to admire the lovely meandering stream.

"You do like it?" said the Major.

"Like it, my dear sir! If I were not a busy man, bound to go on carving my way, it is just the place where I should like to come and dream away my days."

"Do you care for fishing?"

"Oh yes."

"Then, as we are neighbours, if you come much to the mine, I shall at any time be glad to show you a few good places where you can throw a fly."

"Some day I shall certainly ask you," said Reed frankly; "not often, I have no time."

"Whenever you like, and you will be welcome, Mr Reed; for—excuse me—I like you."

"So soon," said Reed, raising his eyebrows.

"The liking of one man for another comes at once, sir, I think, and seldom errs," said the Major gravely. "You will be welcome if you can content yourself with cottage fare and our simplicity. This is my little home."

Reed stopped short astonished, for they had turned a sharp corner of the rugged wall of rock which towered up, and came suddenly upon a sheltered nook, which ran from the river-side right up into the mountains. There was but one level space of about half an acre; the rest was knoll, crag, mound, and rift, a natural garden full of waving birch, shrubs, evergreens, and flowers all growing in wild luxuriance, with myrtle, fuchsia, hydrangea, and geranium, developing into trees more than plants, showing how sheltered the place must be, how warm and suited to their lives. There was no ugly fence, but moss and ivy covered walls of rugged stone, placed here and there as a protection from wandering sheep, while on the level patch, quaintly built of limestone, thatched, porched with rugged wood, its windows embayed, and the whole covered with wistaria, myrtle, and creeping plants, which fought for a hold upon the walls, stood a cottage, out of whose porch Dinah Gurdon, pale of face, anxious-looking, and troubled, came slowly down.

"Welcome to the wilderness, Mr Reed," said the Major, smiling sadly, as he noted the young man's enthusiastic look of admiration; and then frowning slightly as he saw a wondering look when the figure in white came toward them from the porch. "My daughter, sir. Dinah, my child, I bring a guest to partake of our poor hospitality this evening. Don't look so pale and frightened, my dear. Mr Reed is, I am glad to say, a deceiver. There was no cause for alarm, and his aspect is only due to a long journey underground. He is not hurt."

"I—I am very glad," said Dinah, holding out her hand, which was eagerly taken, and then shrinking as she encountered Clive Reed's eager look. "The men brought such startling news."

"That we were prepared to turn your bedroom into a cottage hospital, Mr Reed, and send off twelve miles for a doctor," said the Major, as he saw his child's large dark eyes sink beneath their visitor's gaze, and a couple of red spots begin to glow in her pale cheeks. "Now, Dinah, my child, Mr Reed must be shown to his room, and let's have your colour back. My daughter is a little unwell, Mr Reed. She was crossing the mountain the other day, coming back from Bedale, and as she passed over one of the ragged pieces by your mine, she had an ugly fall."

"Not serious, I hope?" said Reed, with a look of interest, and his searching eyes once more met those of the pale, intense countenance before them, eyes so full of shrinking horror and fear, that though he could not read them, Clive Reed wondered at their expression, as a flow of crimson suffused the cheeks, rising right up to the forehead, and then died out, leaving the girl deadly pale.

The Major waited, as if expecting that his child would speak, but as she remained silent, he said gravely—

"No; she assures me that it was not serious, but she came back looking horribly startled. It was quite a shock to the system, from which she has not quite recovered yet. Now, Mr Reed, Martha will show you your room."

Reed took a step forward, to find Martha, the hardest-looking, harshest-faced woman of forty he had ever seen, waiting to lead the way.

"A fall," he said, as he stood alone in the prettily furnished bedroom: "alone in the mountains, and no one by to help. I wish I had been there—with Janet, too, of course."

Dinah Gurdon was at that moment indulging in similar thoughts—naturally omitting Janet—and as she stood nearly opposite a glass, she became aware of her face reflected there, when she turned away with a shiver.

Chapter Eight.

Undermining.

"Hallo, Jess, you here?" cried Clive, as he suddenly encountered his brother at Dr Praed's door in Russell Square.

Jessop Reed started, and in spite of his man-about-town confidence, he looked for the moment confused, but recovered himself directly.

"Might say the same to you," he retorted. "I thought you were down some hole in the Midlands."

"But I've come up again. Just got here from St. Pancras now. I say, though, what is it? Out of sorts—been to see the Doctor?"

"Eh? Oh no. I'm all right. But I'm in a hurry. See you at dinner."

"Why, what's the matter with him?" thought Clive, as his brother hurried away. "Fast life, I suppose. I'll run in and ask the Doctor before I go up."

He rang; the Doctor's confidential man opened the door, and stood back for him to enter.

"Patient with the Doctor, Morgan?"

"No, sir; past his time. Gone on to the hospital. Back soon."

Clive stared.

"Miss Praed's in the drawing-room, sir."

"Oh, all right. I'll go up," said Clive; and he began to ascend two steps at a time. "I hope Jess isn't ill. Disappointed, I suppose, at finding the old man out."—"Ah, Janet, darling," he cried, as he entered the drawing-room, to find his fiancée standing with a bouquet in her hand, looking dreamy and thoughtful.

She flushed up as he caught her in his arms and kissed her tenderly, and then frowned slightly, and put on the pouting look of a spoiled child.

"Why, what a bonnie bunch of roses!" he cried. "Let's have one for a button-hole."

"No, no," she said hastily, and a pained look of perplexity crossed Clive's countenance as she held the bouquet from him. Then with forced playfulness, "Mustn't be touched."

"All right," he cried merrily. "I came round this way so as to see you first, pet. Raced up by the early train this morning."

"Indeed!" said Janet, raising her eyebrows; "been in Derbyshire, have you not?"

"My darling!"

"Well, one knows so little of your movements now."

"Oh, I say, Janet dear, don't be hard upon a poor busy fellow. You know why I am away so much. All for your sake, pet," he whispered earnestly; "to make ourselves thoroughly independent, and you a home of which you may be proud."

There was a slight catching in Janet Praed's breath, as she said jerkily, and with a show of flippancy, to hide the emotion from which she suffered, for self-accusation was busy with her just then, and a pang or two shot through her as she contrasted the frank, honest manner of her betrothed, and his words, so full of simple honest affection, with others to which she had in a foolish, half-jealous spirit listened again and again—

"Oh yes, I know," she said, curling up her pretty lip, and speaking hastily to hide her feelings; "but you might have called."

"Now, Janet, love, don't tease me. How could I, dear?"

"Well, then, you might have written. A whole week away and not a line."

"Gently, my own darling, judge, guide, and counsellor in one," he cried warmly. "I might have written, and ought to have written, but I have been, oh so busy all day, and when I got back to quarters, there was the Major to talk to me, and I could not slight Miss Gurdon."

"The Major—Miss Gurdon? May I ask who these people are?"

"Oh, a very jolly old sort of fellow, who lives close to the mine, with an only daughter. He insisted upon my staying there while I was down, and I wasn't sorry; for—O Janet! let me whisper it in your lovely little shell of an ear," he continued playfully—"the miner's cottage I slept at one night was not comfortable; it was grubby, and oh, those fleas! If it had not been for my stout walking-stick—"

"What sort of a person is Miss Gurdon?" said Janet, interrupting him quickly.

"Oh, very nice and ladylike."

"Pretty?"

"Pretty! Well, you would hardly call it pretty. A sad, pensive face, very sweet and delicate, and with the look of one who had known trouble. There seemed to be some secret about father and daughter."

"Oh!" said Janet softly, and the colour came into her cheeks very warmly. "And you were very comfortable there?"

"Yes, very," said Clive emphatically.

"Too comfortable to remember me and write, of course."

"O Janet, my darling!" he said tenderly, as he passed his arm about her waist, "how can you be such a jealous little thing! As if I could think of any one but you. You were with me night and day. It was always what is Janet doing? how does she look? and is she thinking of me? Whether I was scrambling about down in the mine like a mud-lark, or more decent and talking to Miss Gurdon of an evening in their tiny drawing-room."

"About me, of course," said Janet coldly.

"No, dear," said Clive innocently, "I never mentioned your name. I dared not, pet, for fear they should laugh at me, and think what a great goose I was. For I am, pet. Once I begin talking to any one about you, I can't leave off."

"Indeed!" she said sarcastically.

"Why, Janet, dear," he said earnestly, and he tried to take her hand, "what have I said or done? Surely you don't think—Oh, my love, my dear love!" he cried, with his voice growing deep and earnest, "how can you be so ready to take pique over such trifles! Janet, I love you with all my heart, dear. I have not a thought that is not for my own darling."

"No, no; don't touch me," she panted, as he drew her towards him.

"I will—I will, darling wifie to be; but you must master these little bits of uncalled-for jealousy, dear. They are not fair to me, and next time I am away I will at any cost write to you, even if the business fails, and—"

"Scoundrel! ruffian! how dare you put your arm around my daughter, sir? She is not your wife yet."

The words came so fiercely and suddenly that Clive started away, and Janet hurriedly escaped to the other side of the chair. For the Doctor had bustled in just as Clive was trying to take the kiss withheld from him, and now stood there with a terrific frown upon his heavy grey brow.

The next moment he had burst into a hearty roar of laughter.

"Nice guilty pair you look," he cried. "Ah! you may well turn red, you unblushing puss! Eh? No, that won't do, it's a bull. And you, sir, how dare—Well, how are you, Clive, my boy? Came round here first, eh? I called at Guildford Street as I went to the hospital, and they hadn't heard of you."

"Yes, I was obliged to come here first," said Clive.

"Of course. That's right. Janet has been looking pale since you went. Come and dine to-night, and don't let me come

in here and catch you behaving in that rude way again.”

“Papa, for shame!” cried Janet, and she hurried out of the room.

The Doctor laughed.

“Well,” he cried eagerly, “what about the mine?—is it good?”

“For your ears only, Doctor,” said Clive, “in confidence?”

“On my honour, my dear boy,” said Dr Praed gravely.

“Then you may invest as much as you like, sir.”

“Not a company dodge?”

“The mine teems with ore, sir. I have thoroughly examined it, and found out a new, enormously rich lode.”

“Then it’s quite safe?”

“Safe as the Bank of England, sir, and the dad will be a millionaire.”

“Ah! I wish he would be a healthy man, instead of a wealthy,” said the Doctor.

“Oh, you don’t think—you have not found him worse?”

“I don’t like his looks, Clive, my boy,” said the Doctor; “and I beg that you will try to save him from all emotion. This great accession of wealth will do him no good, and—yes; what?—I didn’t ring.”

“Messenger, sir,” said the Doctor’s man, with grave earnestness and a sharp glance at Clive. “From Mr Reed’s, sir—sudden attack, and will you come at once.” Then in a hurried whisper, “Dying!”

But it sounded in trumpet-tones in Clive Reed’s ear, as with a sharp cry he sprang to his feet.

“Good heavens!” he said, “and I came on here!”

“Hush!” said the Doctor sternly. “Here, Morgan, the carriage?”

“At the door, sir.”

The Doctor nodded as he drew Clive’s arm through his own.

“Do not fear the worst,” he whispered; “I may save him yet.”

Chapter Nine.

Two Days Earlier.

“Well, what news?” said Wrigley, as Jessop Reed entered his gloomy office. “Bah! what a dandy you are! Why, you spend enough on barbers and buttonholes to keep you from borrowing money.”

“And you spend enough on ballet-girls to keep you from making profits by lending,” retorted Jessop. “All right, my Jonathan,” said Wrigley.

“All right, my David,” replied Jessop. “Let me see: David was a Jew.”

“Whilst I am not,” said Wrigley sharply.

“Oh, of course not. No one would suppose Wrigley to be an Israelitish name. There, don’t set up all your feathers, man, and look so indignant because I suggested that you belonged to the chosen race. There are good Jews.”

“And precious bad Christians,” said Wrigley sourly.

“Awfully! But I say, don’t be so ruffled, man. Lucky I didn’t come for some hard coin this morning.”

“It is; and hang me if I ever lend you money again if I’ve to have blood thrown in my face.”

“Bah! you shouldn’t be so sensitive about it. I don’t mind about your descent.”

“Enough to make any man sensitive. Gad, sir, any one would think we were lepers, seeing the treatment we receive.”

“Yes, it’s too bad,” said Jessop soothingly; “but you do have your recompense, old man. Nice refined revenge your people have had for the insult and contempt they have met with. There, let’s talk business.”

“Yes, let’s talk business. Now, then, what about the hole in the earth down which people throw their money?”

“Well, it’s a big hole.”

"Yes, I know that, but is it a big do after all?"

"No. As I told you, the old man wouldn't have gone in for it if it hadn't been right."

"Then he really does hold a great deal in it?"

"More than half, that I know of."

"You've carefully made sure of that."

"Yes, carefully. It's all right, I tell you."

"Good! And what about the dear brother?"

"He's still down there."

"Surveying the mine?"

"Surveying? He has been down it every day for nearly a week, examining every crack and corner—adit, winze, shaft, driving, all the whole lot of it."

"Well?"

"He sends reports to the old man every night."

"And what does he say? Do you know?"

"Yes; the old man reads them to me."

"Fudge! Flams to rig the market. Chatter for you to spread on the Stock Exchange and make the shares go up."

"No," said Jessop quietly, as he sat on a corner of the lawyer's table, and swung his cane and one leg to and fro. "The dad and I don't hit it, and we've had more quarrels than I can count about money and—other little matters; but he's always straightforward with me over business, and I'd trust his word sooner than any man's in London."

"Good son."

"Ah! you needn't sneer; you'd only be too glad to get his name to a bit of paper."

"True, O king! He is a model that way. But then he is pretty warm, and can afford to lose."

"Yes; but it would be the same if he were hard up. The old man's dead square."

"Then you believe your brother's reports are all that are read to you?"

"Implicitly."

"No garbling, you think?"

"I'm sure there isn't. No, old fellow, I hate my fortunate brother most bitterly, and I don't love my father; but I'd sooner take their word than that of any one I know."

"Humph!" ejaculated the lawyer. "Well, then, the mine is not quite played out!"

"Played out! Pish! It has never been worked properly. Only scratched and scraped. There's plenty of ore to pay by following on the old workings with modern tackle, and a little fortune in re-smelting the old refuse that has been accumulating for fifteen hundred or two thousand years."

"Yes, it is very old," said Wrigley thoughtfully.

"Old! Why, no one knows how old it is. The Romans worked it, and I daresay the Phoenicians had a finger in it before them."

"Go on, old fellow," said Wrigley, laughing. "Can you prove that pigs of lead were got from it to ballast the ark?"

"Well, you needn't believe it without you like."

"But I do believe a great deal of it. There'll be quite enough for us, if you mean business."

"If I mean business! Why, of course I do. Do you suppose I am going to sit still and let my brother have all the cream of life? He'll get all the old man's money. Plenty without that. I'm not blind. Precious little for me there."

"Then what is going to be done?"

"They are going to set to work directly. My brother has laid his reports before the board. I did not tell you that he has discovered a new untouched lode that promises to yield wonderfully."

"Indeed!" said Wrigley—"a new lode?" and he looked searchingly at his companion.

"Yes; an important vein of ore that promises to be of immense value."

"Hah! that sounds well," said Wrigley.

"For the shareholders?"

"No; for us. Have you forgotten?"

"No," said Jessop gloomily, "but will it work?"

"Work? You, an old hand, and ask that. My dear Jessop, if we cannot work that between us it is strange."

"Yes, but the money necessary. It will be enormous."

"Pretty well, my dear boy," said Wrigley, with quiet confidence; "but don't you fidget about that. Millions are to be had for a safe thing, so we need not be scared about thousands. Yes; that new vein will do. Jessop, my lad, you and I must work that vein. The idea of the great lode is glorious and makes our task easy in that direction; but there is a stumbling-block elsewhere—a difficulty in the way."

"I don't understand you," said Jessop testily. "Hang it, man! Don't be so mysterious. Now then, please, what do you mean?"

"Let me take my own pace, my dear Jessop, as the inventor of our fortune."

"Anyhow you like, but let me see how we are going."

"Well, then, you shall. Now, then, we want an enemy. Clive Reed's or your father's enemy. Has your brother any?"

"Yes; here he is, confound him!"

"And you will not do, my dear boy! Besides, it would not be your work. I meant some man who dislikes him so consumedly that he would not stick at trifles for the sake of revenge—and hard cash. What is more," continued Wrigley, as Jessop shook his head, "it must be some one connected with the mine."

"Bah! How can it be, when the mine is not started?"

"Then it must be as soon as possible after the mine has been started. Some workman under him in a position of trust, whom he has injured: struck him, taken his wife or sweetheart, mortally injured in some way."

Jessop burst into a coarse laugh, and Wrigley looked at him inquiringly.

"My dear boy," said the stockbroker, "I thought this was to be a matter of finessing and making a few thousands."

"It is, and of making a good many thousands."

"And you talk as if it were a plot for an Adelphi drama. My dear fellow, my brother Clive is a sort of nineteenth-century saint—not the cad in a play. Clive doesn't drink, bet, nor gamble in any way. He is a good boy, who is engaged, and goes to church regularly with the lady."

"Oh, yes; that's as far as you know now."

"I do know," cried Jessop. "Clive has never run away with any one's wife, nor bullied men, nor gone to the—your friends for coin. If you can't hit out a better way than that, we may pitch the thing up."

"At the first difficulty?" said Wrigley, smiling. "No, my boy. We want such a man as I have described—a man whose opinion about the mine will be worth taking. He must, as I say, hate your brother sufficiently to give that opinion when we want it, so as to say check to your brother and be believed."

"Well, then, there isn't such a man," said Jessop sourly.

"Indeed! When do you expect your brother back?"

"At any time now. To-morrow or next day, to meet the directors at the board and report again upon his inspection."

"Again?"

"Yes; he has been down twice before."

"Who is down there?"

"Only the man in charge of the mine."

"Who is he?"

"Some fellow my father got hold of in connection with other mine speculations."

"Well, wouldn't he do?"

"Pooh! He is, I should say, out of the question."

"At a price?"

"At a price!" Jessop started and looked keenly at the solicitor.

"Every man they say has his price, my dear Jessop. We want the kind of man I describe. You say there is no such man. I say there are in the market, and I should say this is the very chap."

"But surely you would not bribe him to—"

"Don't use ugly terms. If I saw my way to make a hundred thousand pounds I should not shrink from giving a man five hundred to help me make it."

"No, nor a thousand," said Jessop.

"My dear boy, I would get him for five hundred if I could, but if I could not, I would go higher than you say; in fact, I would go up to ninety-five thousand sooner than lose five. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand. Anything to turn an honest penny."

"Exactly! So now then, as soon as possible, we must begin to feel our way, so as to secure our man."

"But if there is not such a man to be had?"

"Then we must make one."

"Wrigley, I thought I was sharp," said Jessop, with a peculiar smile.

"But you find there is always a sharper."

"Was that a *lapsus linguae*, Wrigley?"

"If you like to call it so," said the lawyer coldly. "But to business. Let me know the moment your brother gets back."

"Yes, but why?"

"I am going down to see what I think of the mine."

Chapter Ten.

The Grim Visitor.

"The game's up, then, Doctor, eh? There, man, don't shuffle. This isn't whist, but the game of life, and nature wins."

The Doctor stood holding his old friend's hand, and gazing sadly down in the fine manly face, which looked wonderfully calm and peaceful as he lay back on the white pillow.

"That's right; don't say medical things to me—clap-trap: you never did. We always understand each other, and I shouldn't like it now I'm dying. For that's it, Praed; the game's up. I haven't read so plainly how many trumps you held in your hand for all these years, old man, without being able to judge your face now."

"Reed, old fellow," said the Doctor, in a voice full of emotion, "God knows I have done my best. Let me send for—"

"Tchah! What for?" said the old man. "You know more than he does. It's of no use fighting against it. Nature says the works must stop soon. Very well; I shall meet it as I have met other losses in my time. Do you hear, Clive—Jessop?"

A murmur came from the other side of the bed, where the two young men were standing, and then all was still again, save the rumble of a vehicle in the street.

"It's disappointing just now, when I had made the *coup* of my life, and meant to settle down in peace; but it wasn't to be, and I'm going to meet it like a man. Clive, boy, come here."

The young man came to the bedside and knelt down.

"Ah! I like that," said the old father. "Good lad!" and he laid his hand gently upon his son's head. "I'm not a grand old patriarch," he sighed. "What, Doctor?—not talk? Yes, I must have my say now, while there's time. Not a good old patriarch, Clive—not a religious man; made too much of a god of money; but I said my wife and sons should never know the poverty from which I had suffered, and I think it was right; but I overdid it, boy. Don't follow my example; there's no need. There—my blessing for what it's worth, boy. Now go: I want Jessop."

Clive rose, and his brother came and stood where he had knelt.

"Well," said the dying man, in a firm voice, "I have little to say to you, Jessop. Shake hands, my boy, and God forgive you, as I do—everything." Jessop was silent, and after a few moments the old man went on—

"I have settled everything, my lad. The Doctor here is one of my executors, and he will see that Clive does his duty by you; though he would without."

Jessop winced, for these words were very pregnant of meaning, and showed only too well the place he would take after his father's death.

"There," said his father, pressing his hand, "that is all. I know your nature, boy, so I will not ask you to promise things which you cannot perform. Go now."

"Not stay with you, father?" said the young man, speaking for the first time.

"No; go now. I've done my duty by you, boy; now go and do yours by your brother. Good-bye, Jessop." There was dead silence, and the old man spoke again as he grasped his son's hand, "Good-bye, Jessop, for the last time."

"Good-bye, father," was the reply; and then, with head bent, the young man walked slowly out.

"Hah! that's over!" sighed the dying man. "He will not break his heart, Doctor; and if I had left him double, it would do him no good. Now then, Praed, I want to see little Janet. Where is she?"

"Downstairs in the drawing-room."

"That's right. Go and fetch her. Tell her not to be frightened. She shan't see me die, for it won't be yet."

The Doctor left the bedroom, and the old man was alone with his younger son.

"Take hold of my hand, Clive. Sit down, my lad. That's right. There, don't look so cut up, my boy. I'm only going to sleep like a man should. It's simply nature; not the horror fanatics teach us. Now I want to talk business to you for a few minutes, and then business and money will be dead to me for ever."

"You wish me to do something, father?"

"Yes, boy. You will find everything in my will—you and the Doctor. He's a good old friend, and his counsel is worth taking. Marry Janet, and make her a happy wife. She has some weaknesses, but you can mould her, my lad; and it will make her happy, and the Doctor too, for he loves you like a son."

"Yes, father."

"That's good. You're a fine, strong, clever man, Clive, but that was the dear, good, affectionate boy of twenty years ago speaking. Now then, about money matters. You'll be enormously rich over that mine, so for heaven's sake be a true, just man with it, and do your duty by all the shareholders. Stick to it through thick and thin. I remember all you told me when I recovered from my fit. I could repeat your report. But I was convinced before, when all the London world thought I was getting up a swindle. There! that's enough about the mine—save this. You'll be thinking of sharing with your brother. I forbid it. Keep to your portion as I have left it to you, and do good with it. To give to Jessop is to do evil. I am sorry, but it is the truth. He cannot help it perhaps, but he is not to be trusted, and you are not to league yourself with him in any way. You understand?"

"Yes, father!"

"I have made him a sufficiently rich man. Let him be content. You are not to trust him. I know Jessop by heart, and I can go from here feeling that I have done my duty by him."

At that moment the Doctor returned with his daughter, and the old speculator's face lit up with pleasure.

"Come here, Pussy," he said. "I'm not very dreadful yet, my dear."

"Dear Mr Reed—dear Mr Reed!" cried Janet, running sobbing to his side; "don't, pray, talk like that."

The old man smiled with content as the girl fell upon her knees by the bed, and embraced him tenderly, "Ah! that's right. That's like my little darling," he said, and he stroked her cheek. "Don't cry any more, my dear. There! you two go farther away; Janet and I have a few words to say together."

Clive and the Doctor moved to the window and stood with their backs to the bed, the old man watching them intently for a few moments, and then smiling at Janet as he held and fondled her hand.

"There!" he said, "you are not to fret and be miserable about it, and when I'm gone it is not to interfere with your marriage."

"Oh, Mr Reed!" she cried passionately.

"No, no, no," he continued quietly; "not a bit. Life is short, my dear; enjoy it, and do your work in it while you can. And mind, there is to be no silly parade of mourning for me. I'm not going to have your pretty face spoiled with black crape, and all that nonsense. Mourn for me in your dear little heart, Janet: not sadly, but with pleasant, happy memories of one who held you when you were a baby, and who has always looked upon you as his little daughter." Janet's face went down on the old man's hands with the tears flowing silently.

"Now, just a few more words, my dear," he almost whispered. "Your father and I have rather spoiled you by indulgence."

"Yes, yes," she whispered quickly. "I have not deserved so much."

"Never mind; you are going to be a dear good girl now, and make Clive a true, loving wife."

"Yes, I'll try so hard."

"It will not take much trying, Janet, for he loves you very dearly."

She raised her head sharply, and there was an angry look in her eyes.

"No, no, you are wrong," said the old man. "Always the same, my pet. I can read you with these little jealous fits and fancies. I tell you, he loves you very dearly, and I'm going to say something else, my pet, my last little bit of scolding, for I've always watched you very keenly for my boy's sake."

"Mr Reed!" she whispered, shrinking from him and glancing towards the window; but he held her hands tightly.

"They cannot hear us, little one," he said, "and I want you to listen. For your own happiness, Janet, my child. It is poor Clive who ought to have been jealous and complained."

Janet hid her burning face.

"It was not all your fault, little one, but I saw a great deal. Innocent enough with you; but Jacob has always been trying to win Esau's heritage, and even his promised wife."

The girl sobbed bitterly now, and laid her burning face close to the old man's, hiding it in the pillow.

"Oh, don't, don't," she whispered. "I never liked him, but he was always flattering me and saying nice things."

"Poison with sugar round them, my dear. But that's all past. You are to be Clive's dear honoured wife. No more silly, girlish little bits of flirtation. You are not spoiled, my dear, only petted a little too much. That's all to be put behind us now, is it not?"

"Yes, dear—yes, dear Mr Reed," she whispered, with her arms about his neck; and it was as if years had dropped away, and it was the little child the old man had petted and scolded a hundred times, asking forgiveness, as she whispered, "I will be good now, and love him very dearly."

"That's like my own child," said the old man. "Now let's hear the true woman speak."

"And do always what you wish," she said, looking him full in the eyes.

"That's right—try," he said, drawing her down to kiss her, and then signing to her to go.

"I'm tired," he said wearily. "Clive, take your little wife downstairs for a bit. Your hand, my boy. God bless you! Now, Doctor, I'll have an hour's sleep."

The Doctor signed for the young people to go down; and as he took a chair by the bed's head, Grantham Reed turned his head away from the light, and went off into the great sleep as calmly as a tired child.

Chapter Eleven.

Jessop Plays Trumps.

Jessop Reed, when he left his father's bedroom, had gone straight down to the study, with his brow contracted and his heart full of bitterness, without seeing that he was closely watched, and that a pale, troubled face was raised over the top balustrade, which looked very dull and gloomy in the yellow light which streamed through the soot-darkened skylight panes.

"So that's it," he said to himself, as he closed the door and threw himself into his father's great morocco-covered chair. "I'm nobody at all. The new king is to reign, and his name is Clive. I'm not even executor. No voice in anything; only the naughty boy to be punished. If I could only see that will!"

His eyes wandered about the dark room with its conventional cases of books that were never read, and he looked at the cabinets and writing-table as if he expected to see some drawer open with the key already in it, so that he could take out the will and read it at his ease.

But he shook his head, for he knew that his father was too business-like a man to be careless over so important a document.

"At the lawyer's," he said to himself; "and there is no need. I know the old man too well; but I wonder what he has said. A few hundred a year for his naughty boy, and the dear, good, industrious youth, who always did as father wished, nearly everything."

"I know," he said, half aloud, as he sat back in the chair and took out his cigar-case to open it and select a strong, black roll of the weed, bit off the end savagely, and spat it upon the carpet.

"I suppose I may smoke here now without getting into grief. Poor old boy! his game's over; but, curse him, he might have played fair."

He lit the cigar, and began to smoke and muse with his eyes half closed.

"I know," he thought, and he laughed bitterly. "To my dear old friend, Peter Praed, M.D., my cellar of wine, the Turner picture, and one hundred pounds to buy a mourning ring and as recompense for acting as my executor. To my servants fifty pounds each and six months' wages. To my son Jessop the interest on bank-stock to produce five hundred pounds per annum, paid in quarterly dividends. To my beloved son, Clive Reed, the whole of my remaining property in bank-stock, shares, and my interest in the 'White Virgin' mine in the county of Derby. Hah! yes," he said

aloud, "and it is good, or the old man would not have taken it up as he has. Yes, it is no balloon business puffed into a state of inflation, but a genuine, solid affair. All to him, and he is co-executor with the Doctor. He said he had made him so months ago; I am nowhere. And that's my father!"

He bit off a piece of the end of his cigar and spat it out angrily, but started up as a thought struck him.

"No, that's not all," he muttered, as his eyes flashed,—*"Janet!"*

"Of course," he said, with a long-drawn breath, full of satisfaction, "he would not forget her. He worshipped the girl, and he would leave her quite independent of Clive. A hundred thousand, if he has left her a penny. The artful little jade: she played her cards right with the old man."

He started from the chair, threw the cigar-end into the fireplace, and hurried up to the drawing-room, to find it empty, and rang the bell.

"Where is Miss Praed?" he asked, as the servant appeared.

"She was fetched up into poor master's room, sir."

Jessop Reed went back to the study, and shut himself in, his brow contracted more and more, and lighting another cigar, he lay back smoking and thinking intently, but with his face less clouded by anger, as he felt more and more satisfied that he was right about his father's disposition of his property, and over his own plans and those of his friend Wrigley.

"There is such a thing as salvage when there is a fire," he said, with a laugh which disfigured his handsome features; "and it comes in too after a wreck. Well, we shall see, my dear brother; matters may balance themselves fairly after all."

He started almost out of his chair just then, for a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and there stood pretty, fair-haired Lyddy, with her eyes red and swollen with weeping.

"How did you get here?" cried Jessop angrily.

"I opened the door, dear, and came in softly; didn't you hear me?"

"Hear you? No; and how many more times am I to tell you not to call me dear?"

"Oh, Jessop, don't, don't!" cried the poor girl, bursting into tears. "Poor master! he's dying fast, they say, and there'll be no need to hide anything from him now."

"But—but—"

"I was on the staircase watching for you, dear, and you were shut up here so long, instead of being with master, that I was afraid you were ill."

"Well, I'm not; so now go, there's a good girl; and wait a bit till I've settled something about you."

"Settled something about me, dear! Why, as soon as poor dear master's dead you'll be master then, and can do as you like. You won't be the first gentleman who has married a servant."

"Oh no, of course not," he replied, with a bitter sarcasm in his tone.

"And you will make me happy then, won't you, dear? For I am so miserable when I see you courting Miss Janet, I could find it in my heart to go some night to the Serpentine and end it all."

"Will you hold your tongue?" he cried, with a shiver. "Do you think I haven't enough to worry me as it is? Now, my good girl, is this a time for you to come bothering me?"

"I'm not a good girl," she replied with spirit; "and it's cruel of you, in your man's selfishness, to talk of my bothering you. No, no, no, I won't be angry with you," she cried, hurriedly changing her tone. "And now, dear, that you can do as you like, you will not think of Miss Janet any more."

"Wait," he said sullenly; "and now go. Do you think I want the servants to be tattling about your being shut up here?"

"Let them tattle," cried the girl proudly. "Let them, if they dare. They shall soon find that I'm their mistress. Tattle, indeed!"

"You heard what I said. Now, then, go away from here at once. There's a ten-pound note. Don't bother about your pay, but get away from here, for your dignity's sake. Your box can be fetched at any time. Go down home."

"Go down home!" said the girl in a low voice, full of suppressed anger; "home, eh? so as to be out of your way now? No," she cried, flashing out into a fit of passion; "it's to get rid of me. I'm in your way now that you are going to be master, and you don't mean to marry me, as you've promised a hundred times. I know: it's Miss Janet."

"Lyddy, don't be a fool," cried Jessop, in a tone full of suppressed passion. "Now, go, there's a good girl. It's all for the best. Hush! you will be heard."

"Then every one shall hear me," she cried, tearing up the note he had placed in her hand and flinging it in his face. "No; I won't be a fool any longer. You're as good as master now; you've promised to marry me, and I will not be

packed off in disgrace. You're master here, Jessop, and I'm mistress; and come what may, I will not stir."

She flung her arms round him as she spoke, and in his rage he raised his doubled fist to strike her down, but it fell to his side.

"Mr Jessop Reed is not master here," said a stern voice at the door, "and you are not the mistress."

Jessop flung the girl from him, so that she staggered, and would have fallen heavily, had not Clive, who had opened the door softly to come and sit with his brother, caught her in his arms.

"Jessop," he said coldly, "have you not done enough to insult our father without this miserable disgraceful episode, now while he is lying upstairs almost at his last."

"The woman's mad," cried Jessop. "Crazy with grief or drink, I suppose. I don't know what she means."

"I'm not, I'm not, Mr Clive," cried the girl, bursting into a violent fit of weeping.

"Lyddy," cried Jessop.

"I don't care; I must, I will speak. He has promised to marry me again and again, and now that master is dying and he is going to be free to do as he likes, he is trying to pack me off—to send me home, and I'd sooner go and jump off the bridges at once."

"Jessop!" cried Clive, "how can you be such a scoundrel?"

"Scoundrel yourself!" shouted Jessop furiously. "The woman's an impostor; it's a hatched-up breach of promise case to get money—a fraud."

"No, no, no," cried Lyddy wildly, as she flung herself at Clive's feet, and caught and clung to his hands. "It's true—all true. Dear Mr Clive, don't, don't you forsake me. Don't you turn against me now."

"Doctor! you here!" cried Clive, as he became conscious of the fact that they were not alone; and he made a step to cross the room to where Doctor Praed was standing with his child's arm locked in his. But, at the first movement, Lyddy uttered a piteous cry, clung to him wildly, and suffered herself to be dragged over, and half lie sobbing hysterically on the carpet.

"Yes, sir, I am here," said the Doctor gravely.

"But my father?" cried Clive excitedly.

"Is spared this fresh trouble, sir," said the Doctor coldly.

"Dead!" cried Clive, in a voice full of agony, and he turned to his brother.

Jessop was drawing Janet's arm through his as she gazed with flashing eyes at her betrothed.

"Come away," Jessop whispered. "Janet, dearest, this is no place for you."

Chapter Twelve.

In Russell Square.

"But surely, Doctor, you don't believe I could be such a scoundrel?"

"My dear Clive, I should be sorry to think ill of any one, but you see I am a student of man's nature."

"Then you believe it?"

"That you are a scoundrel, my dear boy? Oh, dear no; I think you one of the best of fellows, or I would not have allowed that engagement to take place; and as I said to Janet, we must be a bit lenient; there was every excuse."

"What!" roared Clive, leaping from his seat in Doctor Praed's consulting-room the morning after his father's death.

"Now, now, be calm, and listen to what I have to say."

Clive sank back with his face flushed and hands clenched, while the Doctor continued gravely—

"She was hot-headed and angry as could be when I got her home. You see, my dear boy, women are different in their nerve forces to men. There had been a great drain upon her during the interview with your poor father, and then the sad surprise with that woman and the shock of your father's death combined were sufficient to completely disturb the nerve centres."

Clive Reed looked at the Doctor, as though he would have liked to shake him, but he only waited.

"I told her, as I have said, that she must not be too severe."

Clive drew his breath hard.

"That, speaking as her father and a man of the world of a few experiences, a young lady was in error if she expected to find the man to whom she was betrothed quite perfect."

"Doctor, you'll drive me mad," said Clive.

"No, I am going to teach you to be a little philosophical and to be patient, for of course she will come round. I am angry, terribly angry with you; I think it disgraceful—"

"But—"

"Hear me out, boy, or, confound you, I'll have you shown the door," cried the Doctor angrily. Then calming down: "It is most unfortunate, coming at such a time, too. The old writer may well have said that about our pleasant vices and the rods, or whatever it was, to scourge us. Be silent, sir: you shall speak when I have done. I know there was every excuse, living in the same house with a pretty gentle young girl who looked above her station, but was not in her manners. I have known lots of cases. Bit of vanity—good-looking young master—thinks she'll be a lady—flings herself literally at young fellow's head. Yes, a young man needs to be superhuman, I may say, under the circumstances."

"Have you done, Doctor?"

"No, sir, I have not. You will have to go through a kind of probation with Janet—and with me, of course; and in time the matter may perhaps be patched up. Now we will set that aside, and talk about the business matters connected with your father's decease. Poor old Grantham! It's a gap out of my life, Clive. We were chums for thirty years. Thank God he did not know of this, poor fellow, for he thought so highly of you, my boy."

"Would to God he were here now!" cried Clive passionately.

"Amen!"

"To hear his son defend himself. I swear to you, Doctor Praed, by all that is holy, by my dead father lying there at home, and who from the spirit-world may hear my words, I am perfectly innocent. For years I have not had a thought that Janet might not know—that has not been hers. It was all a mistake—a misconception, and in her hurry and readiness to jump at conclusions she believed it."

"But, my dear boy, do you mean to deny that the unhappy girl, whose words I heard as she knelt by you, has not had a promise of marriage?"

"No, sir—unfortunately no."

"Then what do you mean?"

"Oh, Doctor," cried Clive passionately, "why is it in this, world that one man may go on adding blot after blot to his bespattered scutcheon, and at each revelation people smile and shrug their shoulders; while another who has tried to make his life blameless and keep the shield of his honour bright is doubted at the first blur that is cast upon it; every one seems to rejoice, sets him down as a hypocrite, and cries 'Ah! found out at last!'"

"Well, my boy, it is human nature. I must confess to feeling something like that yesterday myself."

"Then shame upon you, sir!—Doctor, you've known me from a boy, and ought to be better able to judge me."

"Well, you see, my boy, the circumstances," said the Doctor—"the temptations. You suddenly lifted up to a position of great wealth and influence, she a poor servant."

"Doctor, she is a gentle woman, and my nature would not let me forsake her like a brute. Damn you, sir!" cried Clive, leaping from his seat, "how dare you believe it of me—that I could come here ready to swear fidelity to Janet, kiss her sweet pure lips, and tender her my love, while I frankly offered you—her father—my hand? It is a shame, a disgrace, a blot upon your own nature, to think it of your old friend's son."

"I—I—beg your pardon, Clive, humbly, my boy," said the Doctor, rising and catching the young man by the shoulders. "I was wrong, I ought to have known you better. I am as hasty and jealous as Janet. Forgive me. I was angry for my child's sake. Things looked so against you. There, there! curse me again, my dear boy, I deserve it, I do indeed."

"Then you do not believe it now?" cried Clive, as the Doctor got hold of his hands and shook them warmly.

"Believe it? No, not a word of it, nor shall Janet neither—a silly little jealous baby. Then it was that scoundrel Jessop, and the poor girl was appealing to you for help?"

"I am not going to be my brother's accuser," said Clive bitterly.

"And he played the hypocrite, and took Janet away home here out of the scene. Here! say damn again to me, Clive, my boy, for I am about the most idiotic old fool that ever lived. But why—why the deuce didn't you speak out?"

"I was literally stunned, sir."

"But the girl—why didn't you make her?"

"You saw, sir; she ran sobbing out of the room."

"Then you must make her speak now. No, no: not now; let's set this aside till after the funeral. We cannot enter into such matters with my poor old friend lying there."

"No, sir, not there; and there is a hindrance: the poor girl has gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes; she disappeared last night. But I cannot go on living like this, Doctor. Take me up to Janet now; I must clear myself in her eyes."

"I would, my boy, but she is not here."

"Not here?" cried Clive excitedly.

"No; she left this letter and went out again within an hour."

The Doctor took a note from his breast-pocket and handed it to Clive to read.

"Cannot stay at home and hear about that shame and disgrace—gone away to be at peace, and try to forget it—with one of her aunts or a schoolfellow—will write," stammered Clive, as he hastily read the letter.

"Yes, my dear boy, you know what a creature of impulse she is; and I don't know that we can wonder under the circumstances."

"But tell me—where do you think she will be? I must follow her."

"Heaven only knows," said the Doctor. "Since my poor wife died she has been mistress here, and naturally very independent and womanly—a strange girl, my dear boy. I have been so wrapped up in my profession, that I have lost the habit of guiding her."

"But the servants—what do they say?"

"That your brother saw her to the door, and she went straight up to her bedroom and shut herself in. When I came back she had gone out again, leaving this letter. I am afraid, my boy, you will have to wait. But there! it will be all right. Poor child! she will be as humble to you as I am.—Yes!"

This was to the Doctor's confidential servant, who brought in half-a-dozen cards with pencilled appeals.

"Dear me! dear me!" said the Doctor, taking the cards. "Any one else?"

"Room's packed, sir."

"Clive, my dear boy, I must see my poor patients. There, there! go and wait patiently. I'll come on to-night. You will see to matters, and perhaps I shall have a letter from Janet, and you will be able to write to her or go and see her. There, there! We are all straight again?"

"My dear old friend!" cried Clive.

"That's right! I did see the lawyer last night. Go and be patient; matters are mending fast. One moment though. Clive, my dear boy, angry passions rise; you will not go and see your brother."

"No, sir; he is keeping out of my way, or—"

"Eh? yes—or what?"

"I believe I should kill him."

Chapter Thirteen.

The Rich Man's Will.

Jessop Reed took good care that his brother should have no opportunity for meeting him to bring him to book, and during the interval before Grantham Reed's funeral the only news Clive heard of Janet was that she would be back to accompany her father to old Mr Reed's burial.

"There! my dear boy," said the Doctor; "I can do no more. You see she does not even give me her address. I believe, though, that she is down at Weymouth with the Hartleys."

This was on the day before the funeral, and Clive had to exercise a little more patience till after all was over.

He was calmer now. There was that awful presence in the gloomy old house, and he felt that it was no time to think of his own troubles or to attack his brother. These matters, in spite of the suffering they caused him, were put aside, and he sat in the study thinking of all that had passed with the stern, kindly-hearted old man lying above there in his last sleep. Of how he had fought the world to amass wealth, and of this his last speculation, whose success he had been fated not to witness, cut off as he was just after his son's announcement of the wealth it must of a certainty produce.

It seemed to Clive to be a hard lesson in the vanity of human hopes; but he did not flinch from his task.

"It was his wish," he said to himself, "that the mine should come out triumphant, and it shall, for all our sakes."

As he mused, he thought of different business friends who had embarked in the speculation upon the base of his father's credit, but mainly upon the reports which he had sent home, his father having made these announcements to him during his absence in the replies to letters, the last being that the Doctor had bought heavily just before the shares bounded up and were still rising.

"Poor old father!" he said to himself; "he shall find that I will do my duty by it to the end, for I suppose he will leave me the management—perhaps fully to take his place."

These business matters would intrude, and he did not cavil at them, for he knew that he was carrying out the old man's wishes.

Then came the thoughts of Janet again, and they were mingled with a bitter feeling of indignation against her for her readiness to think evil of one whose every thought had been true. But he knew that the reconciliation would be very sweet, and told himself that she was still but a girl, and that her character would ripen by and by.

"And be full of trust," he muttered.

Then the scene of her leaving that room, angry, jealous, and proud, leaning upon his brother's arm, came back, and a sensation of fierce anger thrilled him.

"A coward!" he muttered, "a base, miserable coward! Well, we shall meet to-morrow, and afterward the less we see one another in the future the better for both."

Then he hurriedly devoted himself to his father's papers, so as to change the current of his thoughts and try to check the throbbing of his brain.

The next day broke gloomy and chill, well in accordance with the solemn occasion. Grantham Reed had instructed that his funeral should be perfectly quiet, and that few people should be asked, but many came unbidden to show their respect for a business friend whose name had been a power in the City, his word as good as any bond.

Jessop came late, and took his place in the darkened drawing-room without a word; and, nearly the last, Doctor Praed arrived with Janet, in deep mourning, and her face hidden behind a thick crape veil, without a word passing between her and either of the brothers, from both of whom she seemed to shrink.

A few of the oldest friends went up to see the dead; then Janet placed her hand upon her father's arm, and went to the solemn chamber, staying some time, and being led back hanging heavily upon her father's arm, sobbing bitterly and covering her face beneath her veil as she sank down in her seat.

Clive's heart throbbed and his eyes grew dim.

"God bless her!" he murmured to himself; "she did love him dearly."

He felt softened, and as if he could rush across the room, clasp her to his heart, and whisper that he was true, as staunch as steel to her, the darling of his heart, his first and only love.

But it was neither time nor place for such an action, and turning to his brother, he signed to him to come, and, in the midst of a silence broken only by Janet's sobs, they two went out and upstairs without a word, to stand by the open coffin where their father lay calmly as if in sleep.

"How can I feel enmity now!" thought Clive, "as we stand here before you, father, whom I shall see no more on earth? Am I to forgive him and wipe away the past?"

As the young man bent down in that solemn moment, the words of the old prayer came to him, and he breathed out, "As we forgive them that trespass against us," and tenderly kissed the broad forehead.

Then half-blinded he went out, conscious that his brother followed him closely down to the drawing-room, to listen, as Janet's sobs still rose from time to time, to the heavy footsteps overhead, the hurried rustling on the stairs, and then to rise when the door was opened, and pass out with his brother to the mourning-coach.

Two hours, and the party were back in the long, gloomy dining-room, well filled now, for of the many who followed, those most intimate had entered to hear the reading of the deceased's will.

The brothers were widely separated now, while the Doctor, who looked old and careworn, was seated near the family lawyer, who sat there at a table with a tin despatch-box by his elbow, the most important personage present. Janet was by her father's side, clinging to his hand, still closely veiled, but trembling and weak, while a faint, half-suppressed sob escaped from her lips at intervals.

A few remarks were made by old friends, but the importance of the occasion acted as a check, and there was a sigh of relief as the deceased's old legal friend cleared his throat, put on his glasses, and took them off again twice to rub away imaginary blurrings which obscured his sight.

Then he began to read the various clauses of the will, which was singularly free from repetition, being concise, business-like, and clear in the extreme.

Clive, as he sat back in his chair, half closed his eyes, for to him it was as if his father were speaking, and all sounded so matter-of-fact that he felt that he had nothing to learn at first. Everything nearly was as he expected to hear; while Jessop, who kept his eyes rigidly fixed upon the lawyer's lips, smiled in a peculiar way as he found how prophetic he had been.

There were the minor bequests to servants of small sums and six or twelve months' wages; a snuff-box to this old friend, a signet ring to another, the watch and chain "to my dear trusty old friend Peter Praed, doctor of medicine; also one hundred pounds as a slight remuneration for his services as co-executor." And so on, and so on, till the lawyer turned over a sheet and paused for a few moments before beginning again, amidst profound silence now, for the more interesting portion of the will was to come.

In brief. "To my son Jessop Reed, the interest of twenty-one thousand pounds, two and a half per cent, bank-stock, to be paid to him during the term of his life quarterly by my executors, the aforesaid Peter Praed and Clive Reed, the capital sum of twenty-one thousand pounds reverting at the death of my said son Jessop Reed to my estate."

"Exactly what I expected," said Jessop, with a smile of indifference. "Five hundred a year, eh?"

"About, sir," said the old lawyer gravely. Then, after sitting attent, as if expecting another question, he coughed again, and went on.

"I give and bequeath to my son, Clive Reed, the whole of my interest in the 'White Virgin' mine, together with everything of which I die possessed in shares, bank-stocks, freehold and leasehold property, begging him that he will act in his possession thereof as a true and just man, and the steward of a large estate committed to his charge. I do this believing that he will carry out my wishes in connection with the said property for his own benefit, as well as for that of many friends who have embarked their money in my last enterprise, the aforesaid 'White Virgin' mine."

The lawyer read the few remaining words connected with the signature amidst a murmur of congratulations, in the midst of which Jessop started up, black with fury and disappointment.

"Shame!" he cried. "I protest!" and a dead silence fell.

"May I ask why, sir?" said the lawyer coldly. "My deceased friend has done more than his duty by you."

"Your words are uncalled-for and insolent, sir," cried Jessop. "Recollect that you are only a paid professional man."

"And Grantham Reed's trusted confidential friend, sir. Dr Praed and I were the two men to whom he opened his heart—eh, Doctor?"

"Yes, in all things."

"I was not speaking about my own beggarly, tied-up legacy," cried Jessop, who was now deadly pale, "but of the cruel, disgraceful way in which my father has behaved to a young lady whom he professed to love as a daughter, and led to expect that she would stand high in his will."

Janet's hands were extended deprecatingly toward the speaker, and Clive half rose in his chair, but sank back as the lawyer said coldly—

"Perhaps Mr Jessop Reed will listen to the codicil before he adds to a long list of injuries by casting aspersions upon the generosity of my dear dead friend."

"What! is there a codicil?" cried Jessop.

The lawyer bowed his head.

"Then why have you kept it back, sir?"

"Because it comes last," said the lawyer, with a faint smile, "and also because I have had no opportunity to read it on account of interruptions."

A dead silence fell once more, and Clive darted a glance across to Janet, whose eyes, as far as he could see, appeared to be directed at his brother.

"The codicil," began the lawyer, "is dated six months before our lamented friend's death."

He paused, and then read on, after the customary preliminaries—

"I give and bequeath to Janet Praed, daughter of my old friend, Peter Praed, the sum of one hundred thousand pounds, standing in Bank of England and Government of India stock, free of legacy duty."

"Hah!" cried Jessop, in a triumphant tone; and unable to contain himself, he rose and crossed to Janet to take her hands, which she resigned to him, while Clive felt as if he had received a thrust from a knife, as the old lawyer raised his head and gazed curiously at the group before him.

Then, as a low murmur once more arose, the lawyer coughed loudly, and went on; every ear being again attent to his words, as he raised his voice and sent a galvanic shock through the semicircle of his listeners.

"Conditionally—"

He paused, and Jessop dropped Janet's hands, while his lips parted, displaying his white teeth.

"Conditionally," repeated the lawyer, "upon her becoming the wife of my son, Clive Reed. In the event of her refusing to fulfil these my wishes, the above legacy of one hundred thousand pounds to become null and void."

Jessop muttered an oath beneath his breath as he literally staggered at this announcement.

Then, recovering himself—

“Stop!” he cried hoarsely; “there is another codicil.”

“No, sir,” said the old lawyer gravely; and he began slowly to double up the will.

“Wait a minute, sir,” cried Jessop, whose hand, as he stretched it out in the midst of a painful silence, was trembling visibly.

“Jessop—dear Jessop,” said Janet faintly, as she tore off her veil, “be calm;” and she took a step or two towards the infuriated man, while Clive felt sick, as if from some terrible blow, and sat gazing at the shrinking girl as, with her face drawn with misery and white as ashes, she touched his brother on the arm.

“Silence, woman!” he cried. “Here you!” and he turned to the lawyer, “give me that will.”

“I beg your pardon,” said the lawyer gravely. “I have read the document.”

“Give it to me, I say. I want to see for myself.”

“It is not customary, sir,” replied the lawyer. “You have heard its contents, and I am custodian, the representative of every one whose name is mentioned there.”

“Give it to me, I say,” cried Jessop, stepping forward. “I will read it aloud again—myself.”

There was a dull sound, a snap, and the rattle of a key being withdrawn.

“No, sir,” said the lawyer, placing the key in his pocket. “In your excited state, and as the elder son, I would not trust that document in your hand a moment.”

“And quite right,” said Dr Praed firmly.

Quick as lightning Jessop made a dash at the lawyer; but a strong hand was upon his arm, and he was swung aside by Clive.

“Are you mad—and at a time like this!”

“Call it what you like,” cried Jessop, “but don’t you think I am going to be cheated and juggled out of my—of her rights. You have your share and are out of court. I’ll have that will and read it over again.”

“You will do nothing of the kind,” said Clive, “and you will not make a scene in this—in my house.”

“Indeed! Oh, yes, I know it is your house, but you’ve got too strong a man to deal with.”

“Mr Jessop,” said the old lawyer gravely, “you have the remedy in your hands. There is no underhand work possible with a will like that. If you are dissatisfied, go and consult your own legal adviser. The will of course has to be proved, and in a very short time you will find it accurately copied at Somerset House. Under all the circumstances, as my deceased friend’s trusted adviser, I cannot let it pass from my hands into yours. I think, gentlemen, the executors, you agree with my action.”

“Quite!” came in unison, in company with a murmur of approval from the old friends present.

“Then my duties are at an end,” said the solicitor, while Jessop stood panting, speechless, and biting his lips. “Clive Reed, my dear sir, I have made many wills in my time—”

“And you influenced the old man in this,” said Jessop.

The lawyer shook his head and looked at the disappointed man tolerantly.

“No, my dear sir. Your worthy, father was too strong-minded a man to be influenced. You have listened to his own clear, concise words and well-thought-out intentions. As I was going to say, my dear Clive Reed, I never made a will with whose principles I could more thoroughly coincide. God bless you, my dear boy! I congratulate you, and I know how well you will carry out poor old Grantham’s wishes. Ah! Doctor,” he continued sadly, “one dear old companion gone. Many’s the good bottle of port we three cracked together in this room, and many’s the sterling hour of enjoyment, rational and social, we had together.”

“Ay,” said the Doctor, with tears in his eyes, “and our turn must come before long.”

“Yes! He half apologised to me for not putting you down for a big lump sum; but he said you did not want it, and he was favouring you in your children.”

“God bless me! I didn’t want his money,” said the Doctor warmly. “What’s the use of money to me? But a hundred thousand pounds to Janet. Great heavens, what a sum!”

“Yes, and in her husband’s trust,” said the old lawyer, with a tender, paternal smile, as he advanced to Janet, held out his hands, and she nestled with a sob to him, the old family friend, upon whose knee she had sat as a child scores of times. “Hah!” sighed the old man, patting her shoulder gently, “a woman grown, Janet, but still only the little girl to me. Bless you, my dear! May you be very happy!”

“Happy!” she moaned, as Jessop engaged fiercely in conversation with some of the old family friends, and Clive stood

silent and watchful, fighting against the horrible despair in his breast.

"Yes, happy, my dear—eh, Doctor? We old fellows grow to think that death when it comes is not a horror, but a restful ending to a busy life, if we go down to the quiet grave loving and beloved, honoured, too, by all our friends."

There was a subdued murmur of approval here, for the old lawyer had looked round as he spoke.

"Come, come, wipe those pretty eyes."

"I tell you I will," cried Jessop fiercely; and he wrenched himself away from an elderly man who tried to restrain him.

"Oh, Jessop, Jessop," sighed Janet, as she shrank from the lawyer's arms, and then hurriedly turned her head away as she met Clive's searching eyes.

"But I tell you, you haven't a leg to stand on, man."

"Then, curse it!" cried Jessop, "I'll fight on crutches. It's a false will, got out of the old man when he was imbecile. He would never have invented it himself."

"What!" cried the Doctor warmly; and Janet burst into tears.

"I say it's all a made-up, blackguardly concoction, schemed by my smug, smooth brother, who has always been fighting against me. Miner—underminer he ought to be called. But it shan't stand. I'll throw the whole thing into Chancery, and fight it year after year till there isn't a penny left."

"And you have been shut up in a lunatic asylum, and the best place for you," said the Doctor angrily.

"Oh, now you've begun," cried Jessop, with quite a snarl. "You think your child's going to have a hundred thousand, do you, and that you will be able to have your coin all to yourself."

"Jessop," began Clive excitedly.

"No, no, my dear boy," said the lawyer, "there must be no brotherly quarrel. It is so unseemly at a time like this. Let me try and settle it."

"What, make terms?" cried Jessop. "No; those are for me to make, for I've got the whip hand of you, and you shall beg to me if all the old man's cursed money is not to go to the lawyers. Now, then, what have you to say?"

"Oh, Jessop, Jessop," whispered Janet, laying her hand upon his arm.

"Will you be silent, fool!" cried Jessop, seizing her by the wrist, and giving her a rough shake.

He had gone too far. Clive uttered a cry of rage, and flew to save the woman he loved from this indignity, but, as he dashed forward, his brother, with a mocking laugh, full of triumphant pride, snatched the yielding girl to his breast, and held her there.

"No, you don't," he said coolly: "not you, my clever schemer. You can't hit a man through his wife."

"What!" cried Clive wildly.

"Yes, father-in-law," said Jessop, turning to the Doctor. "I am fighting for our legacy. Janet and I were married three days ago, and this is part of our honeymoon."

Chapter Fourteen.

At Dinner.

"Hold your tongue, boy! Don't contradict me. You're not to think because your father is dead that you are going to do just as you like. Try some more of that claret; it's very good. There were only fifty dozen of it, and your father and I shared the lot. I suppose you've got some of it left in the cellar—your cellar. Dear, dear! poor old Grantham, what a change! There, fill up your glass. That won't hurt you. I say it as a medical man. That's wine that maketh glad the heart of man; and one needs it now, for homes desolate enough. The miserable jade!"

"It was not her fault," said Clive sadly.

"What! I say it was her fault, so don't you defend her. Confound you, sir, I know you've grown into a big, ugly, consequential fellow; but recollect this, sir, I consider I take your father's place now he's gone. I'm the first man who ever held you in his hands. Didn't I vaccinate you, and bring you through half-a-dozen miserable little baby disorders? You are Clive Reed, mine-owner and rich man to the world; but you are only the squalling brat and scrubby boy, sir, to me."

The Doctor tossed off a glass of his rich claret, and then swung himself round in his chair.

"Don't take any notice of what I say, boy. I'm not myself."

Clive rose from his chair and went and laid his hand upon the Doctor's shoulder, to have it seized and held.

"My dear old friend!" he said, in a low voice.

"Thank you, my boy, thank you. God bless you! I seem to have no one but you—now she's gone. Clive, my lad, I'll tell you. I came back here after the funeral and went into the drawing-room, and I turned her picture with its face to the wall, after I'd cursed her like old fathers used to do in the plays when I was a boy. I said I cast her off for ever; and then I sat down in my chair, and did what I hadn't done since her mother, my poor dear wife, died. I cried, boy, like a little child. For it seemed as if she was dead too—dead and gone—and I had suddenly turned into a disappointed, lonely old man."

"And then you turned the picture back, and owned to yourself that you loved her very dearly still, as I do, sir. For we cannot tear our affections up by the roots like that."

"I did, Clive, my boy, I did; for you are right. I know too now that it's my own fault, for I spoiled and indulged her. She was left to me almost a child, motherless, and I began to treat her at once as a woman. I let her have her own way in everything, and she grew up pettish and jealous, and ready to resent every check. Times and times, when I've offended her, has she gone right off on a visit, just to annoy me, and show how independent she was. But there! it's all over now."

"Yes," said Clive softly, "it's all over now."

"And how I used to reckon upon it all!" continued the Doctor. "You two married, and the little children springing up—hers and yours, boy, to make my old life young again. But it's all over. I won't say I'll never see her again, but I've done with her; and as for that miserable, cunning, unprincipled scoundrel, how long will it be before he's laid up with D.T., or something worse—if there is anything worse? I'll go and attend him gratis, and pay for his funeral afterwards with pleasure."

"No, no, not you," said Clive quietly.

"I will, sir; I shall consider it a duty to that poor girl to make her a widow as soon as possible, so that she may live in peace and repent."

Clive shook his head.

"The man she loves," he said softly.

"She doesn't; she can't love such a scoundrel. The brainless, little, thoughtless idiot! She believed all that of you directly, and ran off to marry the blackguard who has been trying for weeks to undermine you, so as to get my money. Why, I find he has been constantly coming here to see her, and she in her vanity played with him—a little coquette—played with the confounded serpent, till he wound round and stung her."

Clive hung his head.

"And all the time you and I would have been ready to knock the man down who had dared to suggest that she was trifling with you. Bah! they're a poor, weak, pitiful lot, the women, Clive. I've doctored enough of them to know all their little weaknesses, my lad. A poor, pitiful lot!"

"Do you think so?" said Clive quietly.

"Well, some of them. But, by jingo, boy, what a punishment for the designing scoundrel. He had heard poor old Grantham let drop that he had put Janet—I mean that girl—down for a big sum, and he played for it—gambled. He meant that. By jingo! his face when he found he had lost! I'm going to let you know, too, what I have done."

"What have you done?" said Clive, rather anxiously.

"Made a new will, sir, and had the old one burned before my eyes. I've gone on saving for that girl, and the money's hers, and she shall have it when I die; but he shan't. I went to old Belton, told him what I wanted, and he went into it *con amore*, for he dislikes Master Jessop consumedly. He says it's a natural reversion—the harking back to a bad strain that once got into the Reed blood."

"But what did you do?" said Clive.

"Do, boy! tied the money up as tight as the law can tie it. My little bit is to be in the hands of trustees, and she will get the dividends, but she cannot sell out and give the money to your blackguard of a brother; and in a very short time he'll know it, begin to ill-use her, and go on till she shows that she has some spirit, and then she'll turn upon him, there'll be a row, and she'll come home."

Clive sat frowning.

"It will be my revenge upon the scoundrel. I say, by the way, that little parlour-maid, Lyddy, what about her?"

"I know nothing," said Clive sadly.

"The scoundrel has spirited her away somewhere, I suppose. Ah! well, they'll make him suffer for it in the long-run, and you and I will have a pretty revenge. There now, not another word about either of them. You told me you were going down to Derbyshire again."

"Yes, to-morrow."

"That's right! Go and work, my lad. You won't do it merely for the money, but to carry out my poor old friend's wishes. You've got to make that mine a very big success. I've put a lot in it, my boy, so you mustn't let me lose. I mean to take up what Byron calls a good old gentlemanly vice—avarice. Don't be down-hearted, boy. Have another glass of claret, and we'll drink to your success. One of these days I shall come and drink your bride's health. Some true, sweet girl, whom I can call daughter. Ah! you shake your head now, because you have just been to the funeral of your coming hopes. But wait a bit, my boy. The world turns round, and after the winter the summer comes again."

Clive Reed sighed, and at that hour, sick and sore at heart, and despairing, as much on account of the woman he loved as upon his own, everything ahead looked black but the prospect of his late father's venture, and over this he now set himself to work; not to make money, for he had plenty, but to dull the gnawing pain always busy at his heart.

Chapter Fifteen.

The Undercurrent.

"Hah! I nearly had you that time, my fine fellow," said Major Gurdon, as he stood deep in the shade, where twilight was falling fast, and ever and anon he deftly threw a fly with his lissome rod right across to the edge of the black water, where the deep suddenly grew shallow, and a sharp rippling was made by the swiftly flowing stream.

"Feel it chilly, my dear?" he said, as he made the brass winch chirrup as he drew out more line.

"No, dear," said Dinah, with her pale, troubled face lighting up, as she stood there holding a landing-net. "It is very beautiful and cool and pleasant now."

"Ah! that sounds better," said the Major, as he made his fine line wish through the air and sent the fly far away down-stream. "You have been fidgeting me, my dear."

"I, papa?" said the girl hurriedly.

"Yes. You haven't seemed the same since you had that fall."

"Oh, it was nothing much, dear."

"But it was a good deal to make you look so white and upset ever since.—Missed him!—Do you know, my dear," continued the Major, making another throw, "I lay awake half last night thinking that I ought to take you up to London to see some clever physician."

"Oh, no, no, no," said the girl hurriedly. "You shouldn't fidget about that. I am better. I am, indeed."

"Then impossibilities have come to pass, and your little face is deceitful."

"You take too much notice of things, dear," said Dinah, shrinking a little behind her father, so as to hide the fresh shade of trouble in her countenance.

"Oh no, I don't," said the Major, as he threw his fly again. "I have not studied your face since you were a baby, Diny, for nothing. Do you know, my dear," he continued, as his child stood with her lips pressed so firmly together that they formed a thin white line, "I really think that fish have more gumption than we give them credit for. They really do get to be educated and know when they are being fished for."

"Well, what wonder that they should refuse to take a tiny patch of hair and feathers hiding a hook?"

"But it's a lovely black gnat I am trying, my dear. I couldn't tell it in the water from the real; and there: look at that," he cried, in a tone full of vexation, as a big trout suddenly sucked down an unfortunate fly floating close by the Major's cunningly made lure. "I knew that fellow was there, and I hereby register a vow that I mean to have him wrapped in buttered writing-paper and grilled for my breakfast before I have done. What a—ah! that's a good throw, right above him. That ought to tempt any natural fish. Got him!—Be ready with the net," he cried. "Not yet," as there was a wallow, a boil in the water, a splash, and an ejaculation as the Major's rod, which had bent nearly double, became straight again.

"Lost him, papa?"

"Lost him! Of course. My usual luck. Lightly hooked in the lip.—Eh?—No. A badly-tempered hook snapped short off. I wish the scoundrel who made it—Dinah, my dear, would you mind walking just out of hearing. There are a few good old trooper's oaths just suitable to this occasion, and I should like to let them off."

Dinah did not stir, but a sad smile crossed her features, and she stood waiting while her father selected a fresh fly, straightened the gut, and began to fasten it to the collar of his line.

"Such a pity! Just as I had hooked him too. I wonder whether he will try again. I was going to say what a deal of trouble one does take, and what an amount of time one does waste in fishing. And so you think that I need not take you up to town?"

"Oh, no, no," cried Dinah quickly. "I am quite well."

"Ahem!"

"Well, nearly well again, dear. Don't fidget about me, pray."

"Oh, no. You are of no consequence whatever, not the slightest; and I am to take no interest in you of any kind. Ah! you are a strange girl, Di, but you make my life bearable, only it seems brutally selfish to keep you down here in this wilderness."

"You know I am very happy here."

"No, I do not," said the Major, whipping the stream rather viciously. "You have looked miserable for a month past."

"No, no, dear, you exaggerate," said Dinah, with a smile that was piteous. "There! I am going to be as cheerful as can be now, and you shall hear me singing about the place again."

"Hah! at last!" cried the Major, striking sharply. "Home this time, Di. I believe it's that big trout with the distorted tail-fin. That's right, my fine fellow; run, but I think I have you. No more lovely May-flies to be sucked down your capacious gullet. I have you, my tyrant of the waters. I'll bring him in ten yards lower down, my dear. Mind and get your net well under him, and don't touch him with the ring."

There followed five minutes' playing of the gallant fish, which leaped twice out of the water in its desperate efforts to escape, and then it was gently reeled in and lifted out on the stones.

"Best this season, my dear. A beauty," said the Major, transferring the speckled beauty to his creel, and preparing for another throw. It was suppertime with the trout in the twilight, and they were feeding eagerly now, as the Major began once more—casting his line, and chatting the while to his child, who stood just beside him on his left.

"They're pretty busy bringing the machinery over to the mine, I see."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; and the men told me that Mr What's-his-name, Reed, is down again."

Dinah drew a faint breath and exhaled it in something like a sigh.

"Reed—bad name for a man of trust. I say, Dinah, I don't like that other fellow, that man Sturgess, at all."

Dinah's hands grasped the landing-net handle convulsively.

"He is offensive. A coarse, overbearing, brutal sort of fellow. I don't like the way he looks at me. I suppose in his eyes a man living down here in a cottage cannot be a gentleman. I shall have to give him a setting down. He is not coming to lord it over us. I saw him fishing below here the other day."

"No, no, don't speak to him," cried Dinah hastily.

"Nonsense! I have commanded bigger and uglier fellows than he, my dear. The fellow's insolent, and I saw him twice over clambering round the rocks and staring into the garden. I won't have it. He shall respect my boundaries, and—Ah! good evening, Mr Reed. Down again, then! What is the last news in London?"

Clive Reed had come upon them suddenly from behind one of the angles of the perpendicular rock which rose up from the narrow pathway beside the river, and was quite unnoticed until he was close at hand.

Dinah turned pale as death as she uttered a low gasp, and for the moment looked as if she were about to turn and run.

"Good evening, Miss Gurdon," said Clive.

He took off his hat to the Major's daughter as he spoke; and then, as the fisherman released the hand which had been warmly grasped, the young man stood hesitating; but as Dinah made no sign, he let it fall to his side.

"I have been expecting to see something of you," continued the Major. "Have you been to the cottage?"

"No," said Clive, in a quiet, constrained tone, and to Dinah's great relief he did not look her way, but seemed to stare about him strangely. "I did not call. I did not expect to meet you here."

"Ah! well, never mind; we are glad to see you, but—Good heavens!—Mr Reed! You've been ill or something. My dear sir, have you had some accident up at the mine?"

"No," said Clive, smiling faintly. "The trouble is past. I have lost my father, Major Gurdon, since I was here. He died suddenly."

"God bless me!" cried the Major, in a tone full of sympathy, as he threw his rod aside, and laid his hand with a sympathetic movement upon the young man's arm. "And I was thoughtlessly amusing myself here while you were in trouble. In the midst of life—dear, dear me! I am deeply grieved, sir—we are deeply grieved. Mr Reed, you have suffered much. Dinah, my child, I am sure Mr Reed will give us his company to-night."

Dinah bent her head, and, in spite of herself, gave their companion a commiserating glance, their eyes meeting, and his resting upon hers with a sad, wistful look as if he were grateful for their kindly sympathy. Then he turned to the Major.

"I thank you warmly," he said, "but not this evening. I have been down in the mine all day, and chose this path for the sake of the cool, sweet, moist air."

"The more need for a little rest and quiet communion with others, my dear young friend," said the Major. "You will give us pain if you do refuse, Mr Reed. I too have known trouble, perhaps greater than yours. Don't say no, sir. You will come?" Dinah stood with her lips apart, listening, as she mentally prayed that her father's hospitality might be refused.

"You wish it?" said Clive.

"My dear sir," said the Major, speaking rather stiffly, "I very rarely ask a visitor to my little hermitage. I have many failings, but my daughter here will endorse my words when I tell you that insincerity is not one."

"I beg your pardon, Major Gurdon," said Clive, more warmly, "I beg Miss Gurdon's. I am not a society man, and—and trouble and anxiety have made me rather boorish, I am afraid."

"Suppose we set aside attack and defence, my dear sir," said the Major gravely. "I too am no society man, a mere hermit living in this desolate—no, not desolate spot. Dinah here makes my home a place of happiness and rest."

It was on Clive Reed's lips to say coldly that he was sure that was the case, but he was in no mood for passing empty compliments, and he remained silent.

"Let me be frank, Mr Reed. I look back upon the time you spent with us, sir, as a bright little spot in rather a dark existence. You impressed me favourably, sir. This is a very unconventional admission, but I am eccentric. Let me tell you openly that you impressed me very favourably, and when you do have a leisure evening, you will be conferring a kindness upon me by coming across to the cottage, where we will do our best to make your stay such as would be acceptable to a busy man—restful and calm. There, Dinah, what do you say to that for a long complimentary speech."

Dinah murmured something, but her eyes did not endorse her father's words, for they fell, and the nerves about the corners of her lips twitched slightly as she listened to their visitor's reply.

"This is very good and kind of you, Major Gurdon," he said; "and I should be ungrateful if I did not accept your hospitality. Let me be frank, though, with you, sir. I came down here to try and forget my troubles in hard work. My mission is to make this mine a successful venture for the sake of those who have embarked in the scheme, and my thoughts run upon the work, and that alone. I shall prove to be a very dreary guest."

"Let me have my opinion about that," said the Major, smiling. "You have done wisely, sir. Hard work in these solitudes will restore your tone. I came down years ago in despair, to die forgotten; but I soon found out that 'there is a divinity which shapes our ends, rough hew them as we may.' I was not to die, sir. Life began to have attractions once more. I found that there was something to live for besides self. Here we are, then, and, Mr Reed, you are very welcome."

He drew back for his guest to enter, and he in turn made place for Dinah, who raised her eyes to thank him in silence for his courtesy, when he saw a sudden change come over her countenance, which in an instant was full of a painful look of utter despair, as she seemed to have caught sight of something over his shoulder.

The next moment she had hurried in, and Clive Reed followed, feeling a new interest in his host's child, and at the same moment asking himself whether she were not suffering from some mental trouble, which was eating away the hopefulness of a life so young as hers.

There was something very restful and calm about that evening at the cottage. Dinah hardly spoke a word, but after the pleasant meal sat engaged upon some piece of work, over which her white fingers passed hastily to and fro, as the guest sat back in his chair and watched them, while the Major smoked his cigar at the window, and chatted at times about London and India, where he had gone through some service at the time of the Mutiny.

But there were many lapses into silence, and the whole tone of the evening was grave and still, according wonderfully with Clive Reed's state of mind, as he felt a kind of sympathy for the lady before him, and found himself working out her career, without female companionship, saving that of the stern-looking elderly servant. Dinah Gurdon, he thought, must have gone through some terrible time of anguish to wear such an aspect as he had noticed more than once, and he pitied her, as he saw the busy hands, utterly devoid of any ornament but their natural beauty of form and whiteness, still going to and fro the needlework in the light cast upon them by the shaded lamp.

And then all at once it was late, and time for him to go; but he did not care to stir—all was truly calm, there was such a sweet repose about the place that life had suddenly grown dreamy, and he lay back in his chair listening to the Major, and still watching those hands that were as beautiful as—more beautiful than—Janet's.

Her face came into his mind with that, like a painful jarring discord in the midst of some soft, dreamy symphony, and he started up.

"Eh? What is the matter?" cried the Major suddenly.

"It is late, sir. I am keeping you up far beyond your usual time, I am sure."

"Yes, and thank you for doing so," said the Major. "It is a pleasant change. Early to bed is good, but not too early. Why, you do not suppose, Mr Reed, that we are going to let you tramp across the bleak mountain-side to-night, and have inquiries made for you in the morning, because you have not gone to the mine?"

"But really, Major Gurdon," protested Reed.

"My dear sir, after all these years in this solitude, I know the place by heart, and there are dozens of spots—old shafts

and the like—where a man may lose his life.”

“But indeed—”

“You are a new-comer. Yes, my dear sir, and we must take care of you. See how dark it is. Look, Dinah, my child. Go and see what the night is like.”

Dinah trembled as she went to the open French window, stepped into the verandah, and came back looking ghastly, just as the dog began to bark fiercely from somewhere at the back.

“Poachers after the grouse,” said the Major decisively. “I hope, Mr Reed, you will use your influence to keep your men from trespassing and going after the game—and my trout.”

“Of course, sir, but—”

“Well, Dinah?” said the Major, without noticing her agitated face.

“It is very dark,” she said huskily.

“Exactly! Too dark for you to go, my dear sir. Stay! We will have an early breakfast, and you can walk across to the mine. I will not have my peace of mind destroyed by being summoned to sit on a jury at an inquest upon my late guest.”

There was a mingling of mirth and seriousness in the Major’s words, and Reed hesitated.

“Well, sir,” he said, involuntarily glancing across at Dinah, and meeting her troubled gaze.

“I insist,” cried the Major. “What do you say, my dear?”

Dinah started, and her voice sounded strange as she said hurriedly—

“It would be very imprudent of Mr Reed to go back—on so dark a walk.”

“Exactly! There, my dear sir, you are a prisoner for to-night.”

“Mr Reed will excuse me now,” said Dinah quietly. “Good-night,” and she held out her hand.

“Good-night,” he replied, with a grave sympathy in his tone; and he stood gazing at the door through which she had passed with the touch of her cold, moist, trembling hand still lingering in his, till the Major spoke again, after walking to the window, and shouting to the dog to lie down.

“Been madness to have gone,” he said. “Why, even in broad daylight the way across the mountain needs care. My poor darling there had that nasty slip some little time ago, and she has not been the same since. You noticed, perhaps, that she looks pale and quite hysterical?”

“I had noticed—I did on my first visit too—that Miss Gurdon looked very pale and ill.”

“Exactly! She gives me a great deal of concern about her health. I shall be obliged to take her up to town for good advice. But come, sit down; I will not trouble you about my cares.”

“It is very late, sir.”

“It is. But only a few minutes, Mr Reed. I wish to say something to you.”

Reed seated himself.

“Only a few words, sir, and I shall begin by asking you to pardon a much older man for his frankness.”

“Pray speak, sir.”

“Well, Mr Reed, I like you, and therefore I say, as a man whose life and hopes were blasted when he was young, and who would see with pain another suffer a defeat, be careful.”

“Over what, sir?” said Clive sadly.

“That mine. Don’t think me impertinent; but I would say to you, as a young man to whom the income you receive as engineer or manager may be of importance, don’t put too much faith in that ‘venture.’”

“May I ask why, sir?”

“Because mining is very treacherous, and you might be bitterly disappointed. I have seen so many failures. There, my dear sir, that is all. To put it in plain English, don’t put all your hopes or eggs into one basket. I don’t believe in that ‘White Virgin’ at all. There! forgive me:—good-night.”

“I forgive you, sir,” said Clive warmly, as he clasped the hand extended to him, “and thank you, too. Good-night.”

Half-an-hour later Clive Reed was lying in the pretty little bedroom, thinking again how restful and calm it all was, and that instead of lying mentally feverish, and tossing restlessly in turn, a pleasant drowsiness was coming over him.

Then he was wide awake and attent, for, from somewhere close at hand, he could hear the sound of a woman

sobbing gently, evidently in her despair, and after a time it came to him that the wall on one side of his room was merely a papered over partition, and the sobs that came so faintly to his ears must be those of Dinah Gurdon, suffering from some terrible mental burden of which her father was possibly not aware.

The sobbing ceased, but in spite of the peacefulness of the place, Clive Reed did not drop off to sleep, but lay thinking of the mine. Then came thoughts of Janet and of his brother—his father's wishes—of the Doctor, and then, by a natural sequence, of the Major and his child.

What was the Major? Of course his name would be in old Army Lists, but why was he down there leading so retired a life? He had hinted at some trouble. Then there was his child! Sweet, ladylike, with a charm and dignity that were strange in such a cottage as that. What was her great trouble? It was evidently mental, and her father was in ignorance, and attributed it to bodily infirmity; and that being so, she must have some secret hidden from him, possibly too from her father.

So restless the minute before, now Clive Reed felt as if a hot iron had seared him, and he turned angrily on his couch.

"What is it to me?" he said to himself. "She is like the rest of them—pleasant to the eye and good for food, but once plucked, no more paradise. The old story! Pater in profound ignorance, and there is a lover. Well, I did not come here to play the spy upon Mademoiselle's love affairs. I have had my stab, and it has been sharp. I suppose now that I ought to turn cynic and look on. No; I am too busy even for that. I have my betrothed—my 'White Virgin'—to whom I must be faithful. Hang the girl! why couldn't she go and cry at the bottom of the garden—top, I ought to say—or down by the river, and not where I could hear her? Mademoiselle Dinah Gurdon, you and I will never be friends, but I like the old man, and I should like to know what his secret has been. Has no faith in the mine, hasn't he? 'Don't trust it, young man'—'Don't place all your eggs in one basket.' I suppose he thinks I am a regular employé. Well, I look it, coming fresh out of it covered with limestone mud. Well meant, old gentleman, and I like you all the better for it. I know that you are not civil to me because I happen to be well off, and don't ask me here because I might prove to be an eligible party for your daughter."

"Rubbish!" he muttered; "don't be an idiot. If I thought that, I'd stay away. But it is not that. The old man is a thorough gentleman, and the girl is ladylike and nice enough."

She proved to be nice enough to make Clive Reed lie wakeful still, with his mind running upon her pale, care-marked face, and begin to wonder who the man might be who troubled her rest.

"Some one at a distance," he thought; "and the fellow doesn't write. That's it. Poor lassie! These women do not monopolise all the deception. It is on the other side here. Little Phyllis is left neglected in this out-of-the-way place, quite forgotten perhaps, while Corydon has gone up to London, and plunged into all the gaieties of life—and so the world runs on."

Suddenly it struck him that there was a photograph over the mantelpiece of a fine, handsome fellow in undress uniform. He noted it when he came into the room, but thought no more of it. Now it came strongly to his mind, and suggested a fresh train of thought.

That was it! The portrait of the gentleman. The father was an old soldier: the more likely for the lover to be military, and he was either away on foreign service, or leading a giddy life in some barrack town.

"Why, by Jove!" thought Clive, raising himself upon his elbow. "This is a tiny cot of a place, without a spare room, I should say. The old man would be too Spartan and military to have anything but the simplest of accommodation, and the best is given to the guest. I am in my lady's chamber. Of course. The place is feminine and full of knick-knacks. So that is the cavalier's portrait, and I have the key to the Pandora's box of troubles. Poor girl! But what a shame for me to turn her out. What's that?"

The endorsement of one set of Clive Reed's musings, the overturning of others, and a glimpse into Dinah Gurdon's secret care. For, sharp and clear, there was the rattle of a few shot against the lattice panes of the window.

Then in the stillness that instantly followed there was a movement on the other side of the partition, and directly after the ringing, echoing report of a gun fired from a room on the other side of the cottage.

Chapter Sixteen.

Sturgess Shows his Teeth.

The loud barking of a dog followed the shot, and directly after Reed heard a sharp, light tap on a neighbouring door, and the Major's voice—

"Don't be alarmed, my dear. I thought I heard steps in the garden; my window was open. Some prowling tramp, I expect. Lie down and go to sleep."

"Rather a military order," thought Reed; "as if the poor girl could go to sleep under the circumstances, with her lover being shot at—Yes!"

"Don't be startled, Mr Reed," said the Major, who had tapped at his door. "We don't have policemen here to go their rounds. Some scoundrel was after my chickens, I expect; and the dog was asleep, so I just fired a cartridge at random as a warning to my visitor. Good-night."

"Shall I get up and go round with you?" said Reed.

"My dear sir, no. He's over the hills and far away by now. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," said Reed, who was half-dressed; and once more stillness reigned in the mountain solitude.

"No business of mine," he thought, as he quietly returned to bed; "I've enough to do to-morrow, and want rest. Chickens, eh? Poor old fellow! for chickens read little ewe lamb. Who'd have thought it of the pretty, ladylike girl? And I might have married, and eighteen or twenty years hence have had a daughter like these two in the narrow circle of my acquaintance—a child whom I had tenderly nursed in infancy, trained as she grew up, believed in, trusted, and fancied that I shared her inmost thoughts. Then the revelation would probably have come. No; I don't think I shall marry now; and—well, how strange! I feel as if I can sleep—that engine ought to be fixed in a week, and we'll begin at once. I'll have the smelting-house where I settled, and the furnaces here shall be utilised for supplying additional steam. I must send a telegram off to-morrow to hurry on that tubing. Bah! I'll let all that go to-night, and—"

"Would you like a little hot water, sir?"

Clive Reed started up.

"Eh? No, thanks. I don't shave. Can I have a canful of cold, fresh from the river?"

"I have brought one up, sir. Breakfast in half an hour."

Clive Reed was dressed and out in half that space of time, to find the Major busily tying up some beautiful carnations, one of which he cut and presented, dew wet, to his guest.

"The most aromatic of our plants, Mr Reed," he said. "I'm sorry I disturbed you in the night, but it was no false alarm. Look! I would not rake them out till you had seen them."

He pointed to the couple of heavy footprints in the soft soil, and to one of his carnations crushed by a boot heel.

"Nothing missing," continued the Major. "Our friend was startled; but don't say anything about the footprints at breakfast."

"Certainly not. But are you much troubled in this way?"

"Well, no," replied the Major, smiling grimly.

"The fact is, never. I'm afraid the news of the reopening of the mine has brought some roughs down into the neighbourhood. When you get your men all at work, they'll be too tired of a night to go wandering about."

"I am very sorry," said Reed.

"Oh, don't say a word about it, my dear sir. I am not blaming you. I cannot expect to have Derbyshire reserved to me. There! those are smoothed out, and a man who finds that there are firearms upon premises, with people who mean to use them, will think twice before he comes again."

"Yes, of course," said Reed, looking thoughtfully at the fine old soldierly fellow as he ceased raking his bed. "How will Mademoiselle look this morning? Paler and more startled. A deceitful little minx!"

"We've ten minutes yet," said the Major. "Care to walk up to the top of the garden? I can show you where my boundary runs, and yours touches it. Fair play, Mr Engineer. Keep your own side, and don't come burrowing under me. Hang your rooting and mining! I don't want to have my garden under-drained and my cottage come toppling about my ears."

"Don't be alarmed, sir. I shall keep rigorously within the limits of the mapped-out estate."

"Of course you will, my dear sir. I have no fear. It is fascinating work, that mining, though. If I were a young man I might be tempted to begin myself. As you saw indoors, I do dabble a bit in mineralogy and metallurgy. Dinah, too, is quite an expert."

"Indeed! I was noticing your collection of ores. Some of them very rich."

"Yes; bits I have chipped here and there during the long years of my stay. There we are. Your estate runs—"

A shrill whistle arrested him as he stood on the top of a rugged mass of stone, high above the cottage, where luxuriant ferns clustered in every niche; and placing a little silver call which hung by his watch-chain to his lips, he blew an answer.

"One is obliged to have something of this kind," he said smilingly, "to keep our Martha from going mad. That was the breakfast-bell, or answers for it. Fine place this for your appetite, Mr Reed."

"Yes, one does get ready for one's meals," replied the guest, as he walked slowly back down the glen-like garden, toward the open window of the room in which they had been seated on the previous evening, and from which Dinah, simply dressed, but looking, with her large eyes and pale creamy cheeks, ten times as interesting as on the previous night, came out to meet them.

"A guilty conscience needs no accuser," thought Reed, as they drew near, but to his intense surprise she held out her hand to him with a sweet, winning frankness, and bade him good morning. Then turning to the Major, a sensation as of a sob rising in his throat affected Reed at the tender affection that seemed to exist between the pair, as Dinah raised her lips to her father's while he embraced her.

"What a brute I am!" thought Clive; and in spite of the sharp rattle of the shot seeming to ring in his ears, he told himself that he must have been wrong.

"A girl like that could not be deceitful," he thought; and when a few minutes later they were seated at the table, and Martha came in, bearing a dish of fried ham, he looked hard at the stern robust woman, and wondered whether she was responsible for the nocturnal visitor.

"Impossible!" he said to himself one moment, and the next he owned that it might be so. "Fifty if she's a day," he said mentally. "Well, perhaps so, and the lover has come at last."

Two hours later Clive Reed was back in the great shallow gap, where a couple of teams of horses had just dragged up heavy loads of machinery and materials, Sturgess looking morose and speaking in a surly voice, busy ordering the men about the shaft to look sharp and help to unload. The click of hammer and pick was making the place echo. Masons were busy erecting a stone building; and already the place was beginning to look business-like, and as if waking up from its long, long sleep of years.

The cottage and its occupants were soon as if they were non-existent to Clive, who went at once into the temporary office which he had had erected, wrote and sent off two telegrams to the nearest town for despatch, several letters, and then, after changing his clothes, went out to descend the mine.

He had accidentally arranged his time so that he met Sturgess, who had just ascended.

"Ah! Sturgess," he said, "I wanted to see you. Those rails ought to have been taken down first thing this morning, so that a line might be begun for the small trucks."

"Oh, yes, I know," said the man roughly.

The engineer looked at him wonderingly.

"Then see about it at once."

"Plenty of time, sir; plenty of time," said Sturgess insolently.

"There is not plenty of time, sir," said Clive, in a tone of voice which rather startled the man; "and have the goodness to understand this:—My late father engaged you on the strength of your recommendations, but I am in supreme authority here, and I submit to insolence from no person in my employ."

"I didn't mean to be insolent," grumbled the man.

"Then please understand that you were, and don't venture upon it again, or we part at once. Now go and see that those rails are taken down directly, and that a gang of men begin to lay them at once toward the opening to the great cavern where the water flows."

"No use to lay 'em down there," grumbled Sturgess.

"You heard my orders, sir. I shall be in that direction before long."

Sturgess went out without a word, but with an ugly look upon his countenance.

"All right!" he muttered. "Make much of it. People who get up very high have the farther to fall. Curse him! I'll let him see."

"He must have been drinking," thought Clive, as soon as he was alone.

The next minute he was wrapt in the management of the mine, and giving orders to different men, ending by going to the bucket to be let down, and noting that Sturgess was looking at him searchingly as he rose from bending over the labourers who were lifting the rails.

Chapter Seventeen.

Major Gurdon's Venture.

"My dear boy, you are quite a glutton at work," said the Major one day when a miner had shown him into Clive's office.

"Ah! Major," cried the engineer, looking up from a plan he was making, "glad to see you;" and he shook hands. "Hope Miss Gurdon is better."

"Who is to believe that, when you never come near us. Eh? My daughter! Yes, thank heaven, I think that she is a little better. She is gradually losing that scared, frightened look. Nerves growing stronger."

"I am very glad, sir. You must forgive my neglect. You know what calls are made upon my time. If I am absent, the work stands still, and I have been forced to run up to town four times since I saw you, to hunt up the machinists. I am coming some day for a few hours' rest and a bit of trout-fishing."

"Do. Pray come. I shall be delighted. But, my dear sir, what a change you have made here in a month. It is wonderful.

You have turned a desert into a beehive."

"Well, we are progressing," said Clive, with a smile of pride, as he let his eyes follow the Major's over engine and boiler houses, furnace, and smelting sheds; tramway and lifting machinery finished and in progress. "We shall begin raising ore very shortly."

"And making money for your shareholders, I hope."

"Oh, yes, I hope so," said Clive, with a confident smile.

"I see you are sanguine," said the Major.

"Oh, yes, fairly so, my dear sir."

"I sincerely hope that you will not be disappointed, Mr Reed; but you, as an experienced mining engineer, know what mines are. Don't burn your fingers."

"Oh, no, sir, I'll take care. Have you any money to invest? Would you like a few shares?"

"I! No, no, Mr Reed. I have my little income, and I will be content. Too old to speculate, sir."

"There is no speculation in it, Major. The matter is a certainty, and you might double your income easily," said Clive.

"No, sir, I have enough," said the Major shortly.

"Pray forgive me," cried Clive hastily. "I thought perhaps for Miss Gurdon's sake—"

"Ah! there you touch me to the quick," cried the Major. "But no, no! Avaunt, tempter: I will run no risks."

"I will not tempt you," said Clive, smiling. "That's right. But, my dear sir, you must not deprive yourself of all rest. This struggle to grow rich is one of the evils of the day."

"But I am not struggling to grow rich," said Clive quietly, "only to make others who have trusted me wealthy."

"Then I beg your pardon; but really I think you are over-doing it."

"Don't be afraid for me. I am better and happier with my mind fully occupied. But would you like to look round?"

"Very much indeed," said the Major.

"And go down?"

"Of course. You will take care of me, I know."

"Oh, yes; you shall come 'back to grass,' as we say, safe and sound. Not much grass, though, by the way."

He touched a gong, and upon a boy answering it, sent a message for Mr Sturgess to come to the office.

In a few minutes the foreman presented himself, and receiving the manager's orders, he led the way to the entrance to the mouth, newly fitted with a strong engine-house and wire rope, with a cage which ran down the nearly perpendicular slope into the depths of the mine, where a trolley bore them along with their lights for half a mile.

Then followed a walk, made easy now by the levelling which had gone on through the passages that ran maze-like through the mine. Finally, when the Major was growing weary, Clive led him into the natural cavernous part, and along over the falling water, to stop at length at the bottom of a slope, newly cut, with a platform in front of the discovery made on the day when the lanthorn fell.

"You were asking me," he said, "whether the old workings would pay, and I told you yes. But here is my mainstay: this great vein of ore. I have tested fair specimens of this, and found that not only is it very rich in lead, but the lead, in turn, is rich in silver."

The Major turned from inspecting the dull bluish-looking stone against which Sturgess held up a lanthorn.

"You amaze me," he said. "This is indeed a find. I had no idea that our hills contained anything so good. Yes; I know enough of metallurgy to see that what you say is correct. I congratulate you, Mr Reed. And to think that this mine should have been lying barren all these years for want of a little enterprise and money!"

"There, you have seen enough for to-day, I think," said Clive, smiling; and they returned to the daylight, Sturgess leaving them at the mouth of the shaft.

"Your foreman?" said the Major, as they walked to the office.

"Yes; a very useful man. Not polished or refined."

"Well, no; I—But there; I'm prejudiced."

"Think so?" said Clive, with a grave smile. "He does not impress you favourably?"

"To be frank, no, he does not. I had a great deal to do with men in the army, and as a rule I was pretty good at the study of physiognomy."

"Indeed!" said Clive, smiling.

"Yes, sir. I should say that man was sensual, of a violent temper, and not to be trusted."

"It may be you are about right," said Clive, "but the man is a good worker, has special knowledge, and is very useful. He wants driving with the curb, and with a strong hand at the rein. Now, then, a glass of sherry and a biscuit. But you would like to wash your hands."

"Yes, yes," said the Major, as he discussed his biscuit and sherry, "it is quite absurd for me, an old waif cast aside by the stream of busy life, to try and teach a keen business man like you. Of course, you know how to manage these people, and yes, yes, there was a time when mine was a smart regiment, Mr Reed, and—Ah! that's past. I am out of the world now. But that really is a very fine glass of sherry, Mr Reed. Old East India brown. One does not often taste such wine now-a-days."

"I am glad you like it," said Clive, filling a wine-glass and pouring it into a tumbler, and then brimming it with cold water from a carafe. "It is some of my late father's wine. I am glad to see it appreciated."

"It is remarkably fine, my dear sir," said the Major, making a grimace; "but you'll pardon me: really, my dear Mr Reed, it is sacrilege to pour water into wine like this."

"You think so?" said Clive, smiling. "My walk underground has made me thirsty. I am no connoisseur of wine."

The Major sat sipping from his glass, looking thoughtful and frowning, while Clive began to wish that he would go, for the afternoon was gliding by, and he felt that he had a dozen things to do.

But the visitor did not budge, and readily accepted a second glass of sherry.

"Very shocking, my dear sir, and at such a time, but I have not tasted wine like that for years."

The Major sipped and sipped again, and in despair Clive forced himself to think of the hospitality he had received from his new friend, and giving up all thought of work for the day, unlocked a cupboard and took out a broad flattish cigar-box.

"Try one, sir," he said, as he opened the box, and displayed a row of spindle-shaped rolls carefully wrapped in foil.

"Well, really," said the Major, with his eyes glistening as he glanced at the brand and the box, "I—I cannot refuse, Mr Reed. Dear me, I cannot offer you hospitality like this—the finest of wine, the choicest brand of cigars. Hah!" he sighed, after lighting up, and exhaling a few whiffs of thick smoke, "exquisite! Mr Reed, one has always been taught to be suspicious of strangers. I believe I have been of you—you of me. But somehow you impressed me very favourably as a plain straightforward English gentleman; and I hope—there, I find a difficulty in expressing myself."

"You hope, Major Gurdon, that I was as favourably impressed. I proved it, sir, when I offered to procure for you some shares in this mine."

"Ah! I was coming to that, for I have repented, Mr Reed."

"Then you would like to be a holder, sir?"

"One moment, Mr Reed," said the Major warmly. "You have been my guest; you have seen my child. Mr Reed, my one thought in life is to be ready to feel at death that I have left her modestly independent of the world, single, married, according to her wishes. I ask you, then, as an English gentleman—a man of honour, shall I be safe in taking up some shares pretty largely in this venture?"

"My dear sir," said Clive quietly, "no man can be perfectly certain about a mine. It may grow richer, it may fail, but this was my father's pet scheme; he was a man of great insight and experience, and I believe in the mine to such an extent, that I am ready to trust it and recommend it to my friends."

"Then you think it will pay large dividends?"

"After what you have seen to-day, can you doubt it?"

"No," said the Major, after a few moments' thought, "I cannot doubt either you or the mine, Mr Reed, and this evening I shall write to my broker to get me—a—a—few—"

Clive Reed smiled.

"You will write in vain, sir. I doubt very much whether you could get any."

"Indeed! Too late?"

"They never went upon the market, sir, but were distributed amongst a few friends of my father. You might get some, but only at an exorbitant price, which I would not advise you to give; but I could let you have some of mine."

"At what price?" said the Major, with a searching look which was not lost by Clive, and he smiled slightly.

"At par, of course."

"My dear sir, this is very good of you. I—I should much like to hold five hundred shares."

"So many, sir?"

"Yes. You think it a good venture?"

"I believe in it perfectly, sir, and I would not have suggested the matter if I had not possessed perfect faith."

"That is enough, Mr Reed, and I thank you warmly, sir, and beg you to forgive the slightest shade of distrust. Now will you confer one more favour upon me?"

"Certainly, if I can."

"Let the shares be transferred at once, so that I may get the matter off my mind."

"I will," said Clive, smiling. "Is that all?"

"No; I want you to come back with me, and let me give you a cheque."

"You could send it," said Clive, hesitating.

"Ah! yes. You business men who deal with large sums, what a little you think of a few thousands. Can't you favour me, Mr Reed? You have had a long spell of work: a few hours' rest will do you good."

"I'll come," said the young man, rising; but he did not add, "You have broken my day, so I may as well finish it in idleness."

"That's right," cried the Major; "and of course you will stay till morning."

"And turn Miss Gurdon out of her room?"

The Major laughed.

"Oh, dear, no. That is not her room. She occupies it sometimes for—I don't much understand these things—airing purposes, I believe; sometimes our old maid Martha. Don't let that idea get into your head, my dear sir. There! you will come?"

"Yes, I'll come," said Reed again; and, after summoning Sturgess, and giving him a few instructions, which the man received with scowling brow and a surly "Yes," Clive walked away along the tram-rails toward the gateway of the mine gap, turning once to see that Sturgess was watching them off the road; but he forgot the incident directly, and they turned out on the shelf-like path under a projecting rock, which gave a cavern-like aspect to the place; then round the bastion-like spoil heap, to which Clive pointed.

"There, brother shareholder," he said, with a smile, "I believe there is enough ore in that to keep us working for years, and pay a modest dividend."

"I believe there is," said the Major frankly; and then they went chatting on, descending toward the track by the river, with the view increasing in beauty as they passed down toward the vale.

"I believe you are right," said Reed suddenly. "I have been working rather too closely. This walk does one good. The air is invigorating, like champagne, and one's spirits rise."

"Yes, it is not good to give all one's thoughts to making money. What do you say to having a try for the trout this evening?"

"No," said Clive thoughtfully; "another time. I must, after all, be back this evening."

"Mr Reed!"

"Yes; excuse me, I must plead business. Let me come for an hour or two's chat in the garden, a cup of tea, and then let me return."

"Of course, if you really wish it."

"I do, this time, sir. We can easily finish the little bit of business first."

"My dear Mr Reed, I wish to treat you as a welcome guest," said the Major; and they went on till he struck out away from the path.

"A short cut," he said, with a nod and a smile; and five minutes later he pointed, smiling, to a figure standing by one of the high masses of grit. "Expected, you see," he said.

"Did she know I was coming back?" thought Clive; and, quick as light, thought after thought of his last visit came to him, with the adventure in the night, and his unworthy suspicions about the summons at the window, thoroughly cleared up now by the Major's words.

Two minutes later he was shaking hands, and noting that the object of his thoughts was not so pale. The scared, painful look was gone, and a faint blush rose to her cheeks as she endorsed her father's words that they were glad to see their guest.

"But Mr Reed will not stay the night, my dear, and—What?"

"There is a gentleman here," said Dinah, rather hurriedly.

"A gentleman to see me?"

"No, a stranger. He was crossing the mountain. He has walked from Matlock, and he came up and asked if he might rest and have some refreshment."

The Major laughed.

"Come," he cried, "you are opening up the country, Mr Reed. A visitor to you, I should say. Well, he has had a long walk. You let Martha take in tea, I suppose."

"Yes, dear. Here he is," whispered Dinah, as the visitor came slowly out of the porch, lighting a cigar, and looking round as though in search of something.

The something of which he was in search was within a dozen yards, but not alone, and Clive gave a violent start, for the visitor was slowly approaching him, and now held out his hand.

Chapter Eighteen.

Some one in Eden.

"Jessop!" cried Clive, in a voice full of astonishment and anger.

"Yes, old fellow, Jessop. How are you? Quite a coincidence; Miss—Miss Gurdon, I think?" said the visitor, turning to Dinah. "I called here by accident on my way to find my brother, and he comes to me. Clive, old fellow, will you introduce me to this gentleman?"

"Major Gurdon—my brother," said Clive coldly.

"Gurdon? Then you are papa," cried Jessop boisterously.

"Yes, sir, I am papa," said the Major coldly.

"Then I have to thank you, sir, as well as this young lady, for your kindly hospitality to a tired traveller. I had no idea that it was so far across from Matlock to the mine, or I would not have attempted to walk."

"Mr Clive Reed's brother is quite welcome to any hospitality I can afford him," said the Major, rather stiffly. "Pray make this your home during your stay."

Clive winced, and noticed as he changed his position that Dinah's eyes were fixed upon him.

"Oh, thank you. It is very good of you," cried Jessop. "You see my brother is so much down here, that one can't get a glimpse of him in town; so having a little business matter to settle with him, and wanting a bit of change, I thought I would run down for a day or two."

"A very wise proceeding," said the Major quietly. "Our Derbyshire hills and dales are worth a good look. Dinah, my dear, these gentlemen have a little business to transact. The drawing-room is at your disposal. After you have done, we can have our chat, Mr Reed."

"Eh?" said Jessop.

"I meant your brother," said the Major, smiling; and, taking Dinah's arm, he went slowly into the house, with Jessop watching them till they were out of sight.

"By George, Clive, old fellow, you have good taste," he said, with an unpleasant little laugh and a peculiar look.

"You said that you had business with me, which brought you down. What is it?" cried Clive sternly.

"Oh, come, that will do," said Jessop. "Recollect that we're brothers. What's the good of your cutting up rough?"

"What is your business?"

"I'll tell you directly. But look here, old fellow, aren't you a bit greedy? You can't have everything, you know. You've got all the old man's money, and I knew that you were to have it, so wasn't it natural that I should play for Janet?"

"Will you state your business, sir?"

"Sir? Oh, come, I say, isn't it time to forget and forgive? I wanted Janet, and I won. You didn't care much, or you wouldn't have so jolly soon consoled yourself with another girl. I say, though, do they grow many wenches like that here?"

Clive's eyes blazed, and he felt as if he could strike his brother down where he stood; for he fancied him going back to his young wife, and sneeringly telling her of what he had seen. The thought of this made Clive's blood boil; and his looks were so ominous that Jessop glanced covertly toward the door where the Major had entered.

"Now, sir, if you please," said Clive, in low and angry tones, "your business—what is it?"

"Why, you know, old fellow," cried Jessop, "Janet and I have been talking it over, and she is upset and shocked that we two, with our father only just cold in his grave, should be at enmity. She agreed that I ought to come down and make it up with you, so that we could meet like brothers again."

"Leave Janet's name out of everything which you have to say to me," said Clive, in a husky voice which betrayed how he was moved. "Man, have you no respect for your wife?"

"Respect! Of course I have. Come, I say, when a fellow acts like a brother and comes down on purpose to make it up—"

"You lie, sir," said Clive, in a hoarse whisper, as he moved closer to his brother. "I have known you from a boy, Jessop, and I never found you suffer from pangs of fraternal affection. You have come down here for some purpose of your own—as a spy; but you will get no information from me, and under pain of dismissal no man will give you the information you seek."

"Well, of all—" began Jessop in an injured tone; but he said no more.

"That will do, and I warn you that if you get speculating in any way over the shares of this company, it will be on your own knowledge. Take my advice, Jessop: leave me and my affairs alone, and, above all, leave this place to-morrow. If you do not, I shall be compelled to tell Major Gurdon that he is harbouring a treacherous scoundrel beneath his roof."

"Two can play at that game, Master Clive. What if I give the Major a few words of warning concerning his daughter?"

"As many as you please, sir. He will choose between us," said Clive sternly.

"Not gammoning the poor old man into taking shares, are you?"

Clive, gave so sudden a look that his brother laughed.

"All right! I thought as much, my lad. Then you won't shake hands?"

Clive turned his back and walked into the cottage, gazing at Dinah with a newly awakened interest aroused by his brother's words.

Yes, she was very beautiful—it was the sad, pensive beauty of one who had known trouble, and a curious sensation attacked Clive as he listened to the Major, and then felt angry and ready to oppose. For the Major said—

"Go and talk to our visitor, my dear. Show him the garden while Mr Clive Reed and I settle a little business."

Dinah smiled and went out. The next minute she walked by the window with Jessop, making the blood flush up into Clive's face, as he now felt a shrinking regarding the taking of the money for the shares.

It was all like a dream. The Major kept on talking, and Clive took the cheque given to him and placed it dreamily in his pocket, wondering the while whether his brother would try to depreciate the mine in his new friend's eyes.

And all the time he was listening for voices in the garden, and suffering agony at his brother's presence near Dinah, till, making a savage effort over self, he forced himself to finish the business, and mastered the intense desire to go and watch the pair.

"From what?" he asked himself. "Her father can protect her, and she is nothing to me."

Then he was seated, as if in a continuance of his dream, at the pleasant evening meal, noting his brother's conversation as he tried to make himself agreeable, Dinah listening the while. But she met his eyes from time to time with a sweet, pleasant look of innocency; and it was only after making a fresh effort that he said good-night, and then suffered from a fresh pang. For the Major said he would walk half a mile with him, and did.

"Dinah alone with my brother!" thought Clive, as he tried to grasp what the Major said, but did not comprehend a word.

Then at parting—

"I have been very rude to your brother," said the Major. "Let me have my shares as soon as you can."

"Yes; he shall have his shares, and they shall double his income," thought Clive.

Walking as swiftly as he could, he soon reached the mine, and found Sturgess standing by the new cottage he occupied in his capacity of foreman and guardian of the place.

The man seemed to be scowling savagely at him, or else it was the shadow cast by the porch as he stood listening to his chief's words, nodding from time to time.

"You understand: no one is to inspect the mine without my permission. No one is to have any information given to him whatever."

"Yes, I understand," growled Sturgess.

"I shall hold you accountable."

The man made no reply, and Clive continued his walk of two miles more over the hills, to the farmhouse where he

lodged temporarily.

“Hold me accountable, eh?” muttered Sturgess; and he went in and shut the door, to throw himself into a chair and sit gnawing portions of his thick beard.

That night, when the mine gap was dark and still, a lanthorn was visible swinging here and there as it was borne towards the mouth of the pit, where it disappeared in the cage, and a dark shadowy figure followed it.

“Sit fast!”

“Stop!” came in a husky whisper; “how are we to get back?”

“I can manage that. Not afraid, are you?”

“Afraid!” was the scornful reply.

“All right, then. Now, down.”

The ingenious mechanism was started, and the two men, with their lanthorn, descended swiftly into the bowels of the earth, while a perfectly-balanced empty cage rose to take its fellow’s place.

“Any one likely to come and surprise us?” said the man who had been told to sit fast.

“Not likely. There! you shall see for yourself. But that’s it. You can’t better it. A blind lead.”

Chapter Nineteen.

Jessop and Co. at Home.

“No, my dear, I’m not going to play the tragedy parent and talk about cursing and all that sort of thing. I’m only a plain matter-of-fact Englishman, leading too busy a life to be bothered. You write to me, and call me my dear father and talk of affection—my affectionate daughter; but how do I know that you are not still under the influence of the man whom you have chosen for your husband? How do I know that he has not said to you that you had better try and make it up with the old man, because the old man’s money may be useful one of these days? Mind, I don’t say that you have so base and sordid an idea; but I give him the credit of being moved in this spirit. I am glad to hear that you are well, and of course I wish you to be perfectly happy; but you proved to me that you thought you could run alone, so I feel that my responsibility as a father has ceased. I can’t reproach myself with any lapses. I did my duty by you; with your liking to the front. I chose you a husband—a good fellow, who would have made you happy; but you chose to flirt with a scoundrel and let him delude you even to making a disgraceful elopement, so you must take your course. Let him see this letter by all means, and thoroughly gauge my opinion of him. If he amends, and behaves well to you, perhaps some day I may accede to what you propose, and receive you both here. But he will have to alter a good deal first. I have no enmity against you, Heaven forbid! for I do not forget that you are my child; but, once for all, I will not have him here, and you may let him know at once that, as to what little money I have, that goes to my hospital, unless Clive Reed happens to want it, and that will alter the case.

“There; this is a very long letter, but as it is the first I have written to you since your marriage, I may as well say in it all I have to say, and this is one very particular part, so keep it in mind. If in the future Jessop Reed behaves badly to you—that is to say, more badly than you can bear, come home. There is your bedroom, and your little drawing-room, too, just as you left them. They shall be kept so, ready for you, and I shall cut all the past out of our lives again as of old; but mind this, Jessop Reed does not have you back again, lord or no lord. I’ll buy a yacht first and live upon the high seas.

“There! that is all I have to say as your father.”

Janet let the letter fall in her lap, and sat in her commonly-furnished room at Norwood, hot and red of eye. No tears came to her relief, for their source seemed to have long been dried-up. Every word had combined with its fellows to form for her the old saying in the ballad: “As you have made your bed, so on it you must lie.”

Her father had been correct enough. She had fought against making any advances in her great despair; but Jessop had insisted, and actually brutally used the very words about the old man’s money, with the addition that he had been trapped into marrying a beggar, and he must make the best of it.

“I must have been mad,” she sighed, as she laid the letter on the table and looked at the clock on the chimney-piece; but it was a cheap French affair under a glass shade, and one which doubtless considered that so long as it looked attractive its duty was done. The hour hand pointed to six, and the minute hand to three.

Janet sighed, and looked at her watch, but she had not wound it up.

At that moment a sleepy-looking servant-girl entered the room.

“Want me to sit up any longer, ma’am?”

“No; you can go to bed.”

“I don’t think master means to come home to-night, ma’am, again. He took his best clothes with him o’ Chewsdays.”

“I’m afraid not,” said Janet quietly. “He is very busy now.”

"I'll sit up if you like, mum. I don't think it's no use for both to sit up again to-night."

"No. Go and get a good long night's rest, Mary."

"Yes, mum, thankye, mum," said the girl, with a yawn. "But won't you come, too?"

"Presently. I'll sit up till twelve."

"Twelve, mum?" said the girl, staring. "Why, it's 'most one now."

"Then go to bed. I'll come soon."

"Don't ketch me gettin' married and settin' up for no husbands," muttered the girl. "I'd soon let my gentleman know what the key of the street meant."

Left alone, Janet again read the letter she had received from her father, though she hardly needed this, for she pretty well knew it by heart. Then, laying it on the table again for her husband to see, she sat thinking of what might have been, and contrasted the brothers, her brow wrinkling up as she felt that day by day she was sounding some deeper depth, and finding but a fresh meanness in Jessop's nature.

"But it was only right after all," she told herself; and she went over again the scene in Guildford Street, the hot jealous blood rising to her cheeks, as she thought of Lyddy and her acts and words.

"I could never have forgiven that. Poor father does not believe he was guilty, or else looks upon the offence with the eyes of a man."

She started up listening, for a cab had stopped at the gate, and her first impulse was to go to the door; but she sank back wearily, and listened for the clang of the gate and the rattle of the latch-key in the door.

She had not long to wait, and she was preparing herself for her husband's coming, when the door was shut loudly. There was a scuffling sound in the little hall, and as she turned pale with alarm, dreading some new trouble, there was a strange voice. The door was flung open, and, supported by his friend Wrigley, Jessop Reed staggered into the room.

Both men were in evening dress, Wrigley's faultless, his glass in his eye, and the flower in his button-hole unfaded, while Jessop's shirt front was crumpled and wine-stained, and his flushed face told of the number of times the glass had been raised to his lips. As he entered the little drawing-room he made a staggering lurch towards a chair, and would have fallen, as his hat did, but for the tight hold which Wrigley kept of his arm.

"Now, then," he cried resentfully; "what's the matter? Don't get hauling a man all over the room like that."

"Really I am very sorry," said Wrigley, guiding Jessop into the chair and taking off his hat, "but the fact is, Mrs Reed, Jessop here was quite out of order when I met him this evening to attend a dinner at the Crystal Palace."

"Yes. Dinner at Crystal Palace. But that'll do. You leave my wife alone, Mr Solicitor."

"Yes, yes, dear boy. Let me get you up to bed."

"What for? I'm all right."

"You will be after a night's rest, my dear Jessop. There's nothing much the matter, Mrs Reed. Pray don't be alarmed. The wine was rather bad, too. I really think I drank more of it than he did."

Janet was standing looking from one to the other with her eyes full of the misery and despair in her breast. Miserable as her life had been, full of bickering and quarrel, reproach and neglect, she had never yet seen her husband like this; and for a few moments she was ready to believe in his companion's words.

"Have you a little soda-water in the house?" said Wrigley.

"Yes; bring some soda-water and the brandy," cried Jessop, with an idiotic laugh which contradicted all that his friend had said.

Janet's anger was rising now.

"We have no soda-water or brandy," she replied.

"Never mind, Mrs Reed. Let me get him up to his room."

"You sit down and hold your tongue," cried Jessop, with tipsy sternness. "I'm master of my own house."

"Of course, dear boy. I beg your pardon, I'm sure."

"Granted! I'll let you see I'm not going to be dictated to by haughty, ill-tempered women. Madam, my friend wants some soda and brandy. Get it at once."

Wrigley gave Janet a nod and a smile, as if to say, "Better humour him."

"All right, dear boy," he said; "I won't have any now."

"I say you shall, sir. Sit down. Think I'm going to let her show her airs to you."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense!"

"Hold your tongue. I know what I'm talking about. She's got Clive on the brain. Always throwing my brother at me. Scoundrel about poor Lyddy Milsom, but she can't let him drop."

"Mr Wrigley, I will see to my husband," said Janet coldly. "You will excuse me; it is getting late."

"Really, I beg your pardon," said Wrigley, speaking with gentlemanly deference. "Yes, it will be better. Good-night, Mrs Reed. I am very sorry he should have been so affected, but it is really nothing. Believe me."

"Hold your tongue, will you? Mind your own business," cried Jessop sharply. "I know what you're saying."

"All right, old fellow. Get up to bed now. Good-night."

Jessop made a dash at his wrist and held it fast.

"Sit down. Not going yet. I'm master here. Won't go and fetch the soda and brandy, won't she? Very well; then she shall hear something she won't like. Look here, madam, what do you say to our dear brother now? On the stilts, is he? Well, then, he has got to come down."

"Here, that will do, my dear Jessop," said Wrigley, with a hurried laugh. "Don't take any notice, Mrs Reed."

"You hold your tongue, I say again," cried Jessop, gripping Wrigley's wrist so tightly that, without a struggle, there was no escape. "She has to hear it."

"Nonsense, nonsense!"

"Is it?" cried Jessop, sitting bolt upright now.

"We shall see about that. She's always at me about him."

"Now, my dear old Jessop, friend of all these years, do you think I want you to insult Mrs Reed before me?"

"Insult, is it? You should hear how she insults me."

"And I daresay you deserve it, just as you do now."

"No, you don't. Want to make friends at court, do you?"

"There, there! let me help you to bed, old fellow."

"I'm going up to bed when I like, and when you're gone."

"All right, then, I'll go now. I should have been rattling off to town in the cab if you hadn't stopped me. There! good-night."

"Sit down. She's got to hear it. Do you hear, you Janet? He's a fine boy, our Clive. Sort of Abel, he is, and I'm a kind of Cain, am I? But we shall see. Cries about him, she does, and before her lawful husband. Jealous of him. Do you hear, Janet?"

"Mr Wrigley, pray go," she cried indignantly.

"My dear madam, I really am trying to go, but you see."

"A blackguard with his pretty mistress down in Derbyshire. Nice saint!"

Janet turned and her eyes flashed, while Jessop burst into a jeering laugh.

"That bites her. Nobody must look at a pretty girl. She's everybody, Wrigley. Do you hear? Old Bob Wrigley—I say, wasn't it Ridley, though?"

"Yes, all the same; but come now, be a good boy, and go to bed. You're hurting my wrist."

"Serve you right."

"But you're driving the sleeve-links into the flesh."

"Serve you right. You've driven sleeve-links into plenty of people's flesh. Sit still. And you, Madam Janet, do you hear? We're going to ruin him."

"Reed! Don't make an ass of yourself. He doesn't know what he is saying, Mrs Reed."

"Ha, ha! Don't I? Ruined, I tell you. Play Jacob to me, would he? Down upon his knees he comes."

Janet looked sharply from one to the other, and Wrigley, who made no effort to go now, uttered an uneasy laugh.

"I've been down and found out all about him and his nice little ways. Do you hear, madam? Pretty mistress. Beats you all to fits. Dark. Large eyes. Juno sort of a girl. He's got fine taste, our Clive. He knows a pretty girl when he sees

one. This isn't a white-faced Lyddy, but dark, I tell you; skin like cream, teeth of pearls, and a red, full, upturned lip. A beauty!"

"Pon my word, my dear Jessop, you ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Wrigley.

"I am, to be here, and not down there, trying—bah! it wouldn't want any trying—cutting the blackguard out."

"Really, Mrs Reed, I feel quite ashamed to be here listening to such nonsense, but pray don't take any notice; it is all said in a teasing spirit, and to-morrow morning he will not know what occurred."

Janet looked at him searchingly, but she made no reply. In fact, she had no time, for Jessop chuckled.

"Won't I?" he cried. "Don't you make any mistake, lawyer. Sharper fellow than you think for. I'm drunk, am I? Only my legs, old man. Head's sober as a judge. You think you are making me your tool, do you? All right: perhaps so; but I'm a very sharp tool, old man, and if you don't use me properly I may cut your fingers." Wrigley coughed.

"There!" he said; "you have had a good long talk, and you can let me go."

"Wait a minute. You hear, madam—bring him to the dogs if I like. Schemed against me. Time I schemed against him."

"So you shall, my dear boy," said Wrigley. "Now am I to see you to bed?"

"I don't want you for a valet," said Jessop. "I want you to do my dirty work."

Wrigley gave him an angry look, but turned the spiteful remark off with a laugh.

"All right, old fellow; you shall. Now may I go?"

"Yes, be off."

"Good-night, then."

"No: stop and help me up to bed."

"I will, with pleasure," said Wrigley, giving Janet an encouraging look. "Now then."

Jessop rose, took his friend's arm, offered with a smile, and suffered himself to be led to the door.

"Which room, Mrs Reed?" said Wrigley.

"Come along, I know," snarled Jessop.

"All right, dear boy. You shall show me, then. Good-night, Mrs Reed. The cabman is waiting; and as soon as I've seen him in bed, I'll slip off."

"Thank you," said Janet coldly, as she gazed searchingly at the smooth, well-dressed, polished man, and felt a strong repellent force at work.

Then the door closed, and she sank in a chair, helpless, hopeless, listening to the steps upon the stairs, and thinking of her husband's words.

"And I let myself be led to believe that this man loved me," she thought, in her bitterness,—“this man, who could degrade me as he has to-night before his companion.”

But her thoughts changed from her own misery to Jessop's threats against his brother.

"What does he mean?" she asked herself. "Ruin him?"

She sat gazing before her wildly, her heart throbbing at the thought of the man she had told herself she loved coming to harm; but directly after Jessop's other utterances flooded her mind, and swept the thought of trouble befalling Clive right away.

For was this true? So soon after his father's death! Was there some one whom he had met, some one beautiful—fair to see?

"What is it to me?" she said scornfully. "He is not worthy of a second thought. Better Jessop's wife, even if he sinks lower still."

She listened and heard steps, then the front door closed, and lastly the sound of wheels. Then lying back in the chair, she prepared to rest there for the night, while Jessop sat up in bed, waiting for her to come, thoroughly sobered now.

For as soon as Wrigley had helped him up to and across the chamber, Jessop had felt two nervous hands seize him by the throat, and he was flung quickly and silently back on the bed.

"Look here, you miserable, brainless idiot!" whispered Wrigley savagely, as he held him down.

"Here, what are you doing?"

"Silence, fool! or I'll choke the miserable life out of you. Now are you sober enough to understand? Mind this; if by

any words of yours—any of your cursed blabbings, this business comes to grief, I warn you to run for your life.”

“What?”

“For there are those in it now who would not scruple much about making you pay.”

“Pay?” faltered Jessop, as he gazed in the fierce face so close to his.

“Yes, my dear friend, and so that the world would be none the wiser when you were dead.”

Chapter Twenty.

Dinah Seeks Safety.

Clive Reed crossed the spoil bank one evening after a busy day at the mine, leaving a black cloud of smoke still rising where the furnaces were hard at work, turning the grey stone ore into light silvery metal, which was run off into the moulds ready for stamping there as ordinary soft lead; then, after several purifyings, as hard solid ingots of silver.

For the place had rapidly developed, gang after gang of men had been set on, miners, artificers, smelters; and in the eyes of the mining world the far-seeing man now sleeping calmly in his grave was loudly praised, and his son and the shareholders envied for their good fortune over a property that a couple of years before no one would have touched; even when Grantham Reed had acquired it, they had been ready to ask whether he was mad.

And now, day by day, the new lode which Clive had discovered was giving up such great wealth that the shares were of almost fabulous value, and not to be had at any price.

For the original scheme of continuing the old working and profiting by the clumsy way of production in the past, with its immense waste, had as yet not been touched. The “White Virgin” was rendering up her hidden treasures contained in the new lode, and it looked as if these were inexhaustible.

It had been a long, harassing experience for Clive to get everything in perfect going order, for the work—administrative and executive—had all fallen upon his shoulders. But it had been a labour which had brought him rest and ease of mind. When the hours of toil, too, were over, a sweet feeling of peace had gradually grown up, till the wild moorland had become to him a place of beauty; the river deep down in its narrow valley a home of enchantment, from which he tore himself at the rare times when he was compelled to visit London and attend the board meetings of his company.

At first he did not know why it was that his father’s death and the discovery of Janet’s weakness had grown to seem so far back in the past. When he first came down to the ruined mine, he felt old and careworn; he walked with his head bent, his eyes fixed upon the ground, but their mental gaze turned inward upon the misery in his heart. Now, after these few months, he was himself again, and Janet, his brother, and all that agony and despair, were misty and fading fast away.

“It’s the work,” he used to say, “the work. Nothing like action for a diseased mind.” Then by slow degrees after his brother’s visit the truth began to dawn upon him. At first he doubted, and ridiculed the idea; then he began to wonder, and lastly to ask himself what manner of man he really was. He had believed himself to be strong and determined of purpose, and now he told himself that he must be weak as water, and that, in spite of the past, he had never thoroughly felt a strong man’s genuine love.

“Yes,” he said, as he walked slowly along that narrow shelf-like path towards the Major’s house, “it is the truth—the simple truth.”

The evening was closing in, and the darkness gathered fast in the shadowy valley where the river rippled, so that by the time he reached the spot where the perpendicular side of the mountain had been cut away, forming the sides of a tunnel, with here and there a gap forming a cavernous niche, it was quite obscure for some fifty yards. But the thoughtful man was so wrapped up in the mission he had on hand, that he did not notice the faint odour of a cigar, as if some one had lately passed there smoking; neither did he turn his head to the right and look up when a small stone came rattling down from above; but, as if Fate was leading him into a temptation, he suddenly stopped and stood gazing off to his left at where, in the south-east, a bright star was rising out of the mists.

Had he turned and looked up, he would have seen a man’s face peering over a rugged block of stone which effectually hid the watcher’s body, and that between the face and him a piece of rock was balanced and held by two hands, either occupied in retaining it, or ready to send it crashing down.

It would have been a perilous position for a man to have walked close under that stone where the track was most worn, for the other part skirted the edge of the precipice, which fell sheer two hundred feet, and hence was bad for those who had not a steady nerve.

But Clive Reed’s nerve was once again steady, and he had chosen to walk to the edge and then to stop and gaze down into the gathering darkness.

For a few moments he did think of how easily any one might fall there, and what a fate it would be if the stones which had been left roof-like by the old workers who had made that path should come crumbling down. But the thought passed away, thrust out by others, some pleasant and full of delight, others serious of import, and connected with the purpose of that night.

He passed on directly after, and a faint rustling sound was heard from the narrow rift which led upward behind the loosened stone. The face had disappeared, but a bright light flashed up from behind the rock, and once more the odour of tobacco began to be diffused in the cavernous gloom of the place.

But it was bright and clear where Clive Reed walked on, and his mind too was quite clear, his purpose determined, as he strode on now at a rapid pace till he reached the path down by the river, and then turned up suddenly in front of the cottage, where he stopped short once more to look up at the light shining out of the little drawing-room window.

It was open, and he could see that Dinah was seated at work; and, as if irresistibly attracted by her, he advanced quickly two or three steps to enter by the window; but he suddenly turned off by the path leading to the door.

"Yes; far better, Reed," said a low voice at his elbow.

"Major Gurdon!"

"Yes. It was cool and pleasant out here. How plainly a man's features sometimes show his intentions. Will you have a cigar? I am going to smoke another."

"Not now," said Clive huskily, as he followed his host up the garden to some seats. "You are right, sir, and it was an unwarrantable liberty. I am glad I did not take it."

"So am I," said the Major drily. "But I thought it possible that you might come over this evening."

"And I have come, sir, for I have grave news to communicate."

"Great heavens!" cried the Major, starting from his garden-seat in a nook of the ferny rocks, "don't tell me, sir, that there is anything wrong about the mine."

Clive was silent for a few moments as he gazed at the dimly seen, agitated face before him, and saw that the Major hurriedly wiped his brow.

"Tell me, then," he said hoarsely, "the worst."

"I have no worst to tell, sir," said Clive quietly. "You have been anxious, then, about the mine?"

"Yes; I couldn't help it, my dear sir," said the Major nervously. "This sort of thing is new to me, and it means so much. But there is something wrong about it."

"Nothing whatever, sir."

"Thank God," muttered the Major.

"So far from there being anything wrong, sir, I had a letter this evening announcing, on the basis of our success here, that in a few days the shareholders will receive an interim dividend of twenty per cent, which means, sir, one-fifth of your investment returned already."

"My dear Reed, you amaze me. It is marvellous. But never mind that now. You said you came upon grave business."

"Yes, sir," said Clive, after a pause, "very grave business to me."

"Yes. Pray speak. You are in want of a little money?"

"No, sir, I do not want money; I want time."

"What is the matter, then? Your voice is quite changed."

Clive was silent again for a few moments, and then, after glancing at the window, he said in a low voice—

"Major Gurdon, the time has come for me to know whether I am to visit here again."

"Come here again? I do not quite understand you, sir. Pray speak out."

"I will, sir," said Clive earnestly. "I love your child."

"We all do, sir," said the Major coldly. "Who could help it?"

"Yes, who could help it?" said Clive, in a tone of voice which told how deeply he was moved. "And now, as an honourable man, I ask you, sir, whether I am still to visit here, or my visits are to cease?"

"Have you told Dinah what you have told me?"

"Not a word, sir."

"That's right!"

"How could I without your leave?"

"True! Well, Mr Reed, I will be frank with you. A short time back I had not thought of such a thing. I welcomed you here selfishly, as a visitor who would relieve some of the monotony of my existence. Then, sir, I began to like you, and then by slow degrees I began to see that I had either made a great error, or else fate was working, as she always

does, silently. I have been much exercised in my mind as to what I should do, and ended by acting on the defensive, leaving the enemy to declare his plans."

"And am I the enemy of your peace, sir?"

"Mr Reed, you are, I fear, the enemy of my daughter's peace, and I say to you, sir, as one who has shown himself to be a man of honour, if there is anything likely to militate against my child's happiness, for heaven's sake, sir, speak out, and let this end at once."

"You say you will be frank with me, sir; I will be frank with you. Not many months back I was engaged to be married."

"And broke it off?" said the Major sharply.

"No, sir; I was a poor weak lover, I suppose. Too much immersed in business. The lady chose again, or, poor girl, was tricked into another engagement, and is married. I came down here, half mad with despair, to forget my cares in work; and instead I have awakened to the fact there is still happiness for me if I can win it."

"Ah!" said the Major. "In plain English, then, sir, you wish to speak to Dinah?"

"Yes."

"You are aware, I suppose, that she has nothing but her own sweet nature with which to endow a man."

"I never asked myself that question, sir."

"Of course, at my death she will have a few thousands, upon whose interest we live."

"Will she?" said Clive quietly.

"Yes; and you, Mr Reed, it is my duty as a father to ask you a question or two. Will your position as manager of this mine enable you to keep her, not in affluence, but modest comfort?"

"I think so, sir," said Clive, smiling.

"That's well. But there, if—I say if this goes on, she shall have half my shares at once. A fair white virgin shall go to the altar with so many 'White Virgins' in her train."

"My dear Major Gurdon," said Clive, grasping the old officer's hand, "don't you know?"

"Know—know, sir! What?"

"That exactly one-third of the 'White Virgin' shares are mine, beside a great deal of property my father left. I suppose I am what people call a very rich man."

"What!" cried the Major, literally dazed, "and you work like you do?"

"And why not? It is for myself—for the shareholders—for you. It was my father's wish, sir, that this mine should prove to be a great success, and it is my sacred duty to make it so."

"But—but, my dear Reed, you must be a millionaire!"

"I suppose so," said Clive quietly.

"Then it will be impossible. My poor child could not marry so wealthy a man."

"Then I must make myself poor," said Clive. "Bah! what has money to do with it? Major Gurdon, I came down here to find rest and peace; let me find happiness as well, and that the world is not all base."

"I hardly dare give consent," faltered the Major. "You are the first, sir, who has ever approached her in this way, and I could not help seeing how day by day she has brightened and seemed to grow more restful and content. It has been as if she felt that with you near she could be at rest, that you were at hand to protect her, and that the poor old father was growing to be nobody now. Ah! Reed, she has ceased to care for me as she used."

"Father!"

"You there, Dinah? You heard what we said?"

"I heard you tell Mr Reed something that you cannot mean."

"You heard no more?"

"No, dear; but why?"

She stopped short, with the colour flushing to her cheeks, and her heart beating heavily, for Clive gently took her hand. His voice was very low, and there, in the soft darkness of the autumnal evening, he said earnestly—

"Miss Gurdon—Dinah—I have dared to tell your father that I love you with all my heart, and begged him to let me speak to you. Not as a dramatic lover, but as an earnest man, who would have but one thought, dear, if you gave him the right, to make your life peaceful and happy to the end. Dinah—my own love—can you give me that right?"

Her hand struggled in its prison for a moment, and then lay trembling there, as if too firmly held by the strong fingers which formed its cage.

"I—I fear—I ought not—I—"

She faltered these words painfully; and then, with an hysterical cry, she nestled to him.

"Yes, yes," she cried; "take me, and protect me, Clive. I do love you, and will love you to the end."

"My darling!" he whispered, as he clasped her passionately to his heart, just as the dog burst out into a furious volley of growls and barks, mingled with sounds as if he were struggling hard to tear away his chain.

Dinah nestled to him more closely, and the start she had given at the dog's barking gave place to a feeling of safety in those two strong arms.

"Are you content, sir?" said Clive, turning at last, as he drew Dinah's arm through his with a sense of possession which made his heart beat against it heavily.

But there was no reply, for the Major had gone off to see what had alarmed the dog.

"Nothing that I can see," he said, upon his return. "Why, of course! Clever dog! He scented a thief."

"A thief?"

"Yes, my dear, a scoundrel come to try and steal away my darling girl."

"Ah!"

A low sigh and a shiver of horror, as Dinah shrank away to flee into the house; but as she felt Clive's arm tighten about her, she clung to him once more.

"Why, you silly child, don't you understand a joke?" cried the Major. "I mean this fellow who is holding you fast; and you not shrinking in the least. But there! it is a time to be serious now. God bless you, Clive Reed! You have solved one difficulty in a declining life. I have often said to myself, 'What is to become of my darling when I go?' Now I know, and can go in peace."

Two hours later, with the kisses of love moist upon his lips, Clive Reed started for his lonely walk back over the mountain-side.

End of Volume One.

Chapter Twenty One.

Alarm Notes.

Dinah Gurdon sat near the shaded lamp with her eyes directed toward the open window, and her face transformed by the thoughts within her breast. For the love-light burned brilliantly in those softened eyes, and the happy, satisfied look of one restful and content was there.

The Major sat back watching her, with his brow wrinkled and perplexed by his troubled thoughts as the clouds floated by, now shadowing the sunshine of his life, now making it look the brighter as they passed away and left it clear.

For there were thoughts within that were quite new. Naturally he had felt that the time would some day come when a man would step between them and take away his child's love; but this had seemed to be something belonging to the future, and when the new manager of the mine crossed his path, and the friendly feeling had increased, he, the father, had gone on blindly, never thinking of the possible result, or, at most, giving the idea but a passing thought as something too absurd to retain. And now the true facts of the case had come upon him like a thunder-clap, and he sat thinking over the events of the evening and watching his child. Now he was happy, rejoicing and satisfied that her choice should have fallen upon so frank and manly a fellow; now his selfish feelings were aroused and mingled with a kind of petty jealousy that made him sigh with discontent, and then task himself mentally in his annoyance that he could be so unfair.

He spoke at last, after waiting to see whether Dinah would awaken from her pleasant dream to the present, and it was in a teasing, half-malicious strain that he said—

"I hope that fellow will not go making short cuts to-night, and break his neck down one of the old shafts.—Dinah, my own darling! Don't, pray, look like that," he cried, as he sprang from his seat and caught her in his arms. For she had started up with her hands to her heart, pale as death, her eyes wild and strange, and her lips apart and blanched.

"There, there!" he whispered, as he held her to his breast. "I was only teasing you. It was all nonsense. No, no; don't sob like that. Why, my pet, you are weak still, and as nervous as can be. It was only a joke. He is too keen and clever to make a mistake."

She clung to him, fighting hard to suppress her hysterical sobs, till she grew calmer, but she clung to him still.

"Ah! that's better," he said tenderly, as he stroked her face and kissed her forehead. "That's right. It was very brutal of me, but I never thought you would take my idle words amiss."

He held her tightly to him, and felt the throbbing heart and heaving breast gradually calm down.

"Then you love him very dearly, Dinah?"

She raised her pale face, and looked full in his eyes, gazing at him in silence for a few minutes before she replied simply—

"Yes, father, I love him very dearly."

The Major drew a long breath as he nodded his head slowly.

"Yes," he said, "and it is a different love to that of a child for her father. It will not make any difference, dear? I know; you need not tell me. I shall not grow to be a lonely, desolate old man." Dinah's arms stole round his neck, and she laid her cheek to his.

"You know that, dear," she whispered. "How could it make any difference to us?"

"No; it can make no difference, my darling, save make me the happier. But only to think of it. Which of us could have said a few months ago that our quiet life here would be changed as it has been, I turning into a greedy speculator and holder of mining shares, the most ephemeral of property, and you giving your treasure to this base intruder—no, no, I mean this prince in disguise, who came to the castle to ask for my hospitality. Ah! we can't see into the future."

"Why did you buy those shares, dear?" asked Dinah, as she rested her head upon his shoulder.

"Hang the shares! they are an excitement and worry. No, no, they are not. It's quite right. I'll tell you: I bought them because I wanted my darling to be independent and far above want when I go away on the long journey!"

"Father!" cried Dinah wildly.

"Hush, my pet. Nervous again: I can feel your heart beating. Why, of course I must go some day. And now this Clive Reed has somehow got hold of my confidence as well as yours. I trust him, you see, just as you do, my darling, and—and, Dinah, he's a fine fellow, a fine, true-hearted, manly fellow, and—and I won't be a miserable, selfish old man, but happy and contented, and glad that my darling's choice has fallen upon so genuine a man. There! do you hear, my pet? I am heartily glad, for I like him. God bless him! God bless you both!"

The arms clung more tightly round the Major's neck, and a shower of kisses fell upon his cheeks and lips.

"It's quite right, Di—quite right. You are growing strong and well again. He has done you good. There is no reason whatever why you should not love him, and make him the best of wives."

Dinah's arms relaxed a little, and her cheeks, which had begun to flush, once more turned deadly pale.

"There is no just cause or impediment why you should not love him and be loved. But not yet, Di, not yet."

The Major did not see the frightened look at that moment as it intensified in his daughter's eyes, but he did directly after as the dog's chain was heard to rattle and it burst into a furious baying.

"Confound it! there must be some one about," said the Major angrily. "There, there! don't turn white like that."

"No, no, don't, don't go," whispered Dinah, clinging to him.

"Not go? Why, you little coward, I must go. Where's my stick? It's one of those mining scamps." Dinah shuddered.

"After eggs or chickens, for a sovereign."

"Don't—don't go, father," whispered Dinah again, as she clung to him tightly.

"Not go? Why, what has come to you, Dinah? This will not do, little one. I have only to hurry out and scare anybody who is there into fits. Guilty conscience, you know."

She stared at him wildly.

"Why, my darling, I thought you were getting over this nervousness," he said tenderly. "You used not to be like this. Well, I will not go; but I must do something to scare him, whoever it is." She made no answer, but clung to him half fainting, and he helped her to a chair, noticing the while that she was gazing excitedly towards the open window.

The dog was silent now, but as the Major went and shouted a few angry words it responded with a sharp, clear bark or two, and its master returned.

"Scared away without my help," said the Major, coming back again, and speaking lightly. "Come, come, this will not do! I shall have to tell Reed what a little coward you have grown. Why, you look as if you had seen a ghost. It's all right now. Whoever it was has gone, or the dog would not have calmed down. Nothing stolen this time, I'll venture to swear. There," he cried, as he shut the window and closed the shutters before turning to where Dinah sat fighting hard to be calm, and noticing that she uttered a sigh as if of relief, "if you turn like this, my dear, I shall begin to think that we are living in a lonely spot too secluded for you, and look out for a place in town."

"No, no, I'm better now," she said, turning to her father with a smile.

"Of course you are, my dear. There's a sturdy protector, too, for us now, eh? There, there," he cried, bending down to

kiss her. "Go to bed; you're a bit overdone, my darling; this has been an exciting evening—enough to upset any one's nerves. I'm off my balance too. First, I have had to deal with one marauder who comes to steal my little ewe lamb, and I get rid of him to be permitted to keep her a little longer; and then comes another would-be thief. Dinah! my darling child!" he cried, as she rose to fling herself into his arms and cling to him more agitated and overcome than ever. "There, there, I must play doctor. Dose for soothing the nerves; eight hours' sound sleep. The medicine to be taken instantly. Off with you. Good-night."

Dinah passionately returned his embrace, and hurried to her room, but not to sleep. The nervous excitement kept her wakeful hour after hour, with the intense longing to shelter herself in her lover's arms; and all the time a fierce lurid pair of eyes seemed to be watching her, and, as plainly as if the words had been spoken by her ear, she heard a rough, deep voice whispering, "It's no use, little one. No one is coming betwixt us two."

As she lay in her bed, too, she fancied she could hear the man's firm step patrolling the paths about the place.

But Michael Sturgess was a couple of miles away, though he had been down to the cottage, and so close that he could look in and see that his chief was not there still. For there were bounds to the man's patient doggedness, and he had grown wearied out at last, when Clive Reed had taken a short cut over the mountain, home, and did not return by the spoil bank and the shelf-like path.

Still Dinah Gurdon could not know this as she lay there, torn by the mental fever which made her temples throb.

Loved—loved by one who idolised her, and who had made her heart awaken and unfold to the true meaning of the great passion of human life. He loved her as she loved him, and she had let him press her in his arms; she had thrilled beneath his kisses, and all as in a dream of joy and delight. Safe, too, with him near to cherish and protect. Then he had left her, and the old cloud of horror and dread had come back, and with it the still small voice of conscience out of the darkness of her heart. Ought she not to have spoken? Ought she not to have whispered to her father, or failing him, to have confided in their old servant—the only woman near—the terror of that day, and how she had been haunted since?

Always the same reply as her woman's heart rebelled and shrank from the confession. How could she? She dared not. She would sooner have died than made the avowal, while there before her, looming up, the precursors of a storm, were the black clouds of the future, and Michael Sturgess's words vibrating always in her ears.

Chapter Twenty Two.

Bad Omens.

"No insolence, sir!"

"What?"

"I say no insolence, sir. I am aware of the fact that you are an excellent workman and valuable to me here, but you are presuming on those facts, and I warn you that if ever you dare to answer me in that way again, we part on the instant."

"What way?"

"As you addressed me a short time back. Michael Sturgess, I have long noticed your insolent, overbearing ways with the men. They are beginning to resent it. I have had several complaints from them, and all this must end, if you are to stay here."

"If I'm to stay here, eh? I daresay if the company is tired of the way in which I have made this old mine pay, I can soon get another engagement."

"My good man," said Clive Reed coldly and dispassionately, "prosperity is making you lose your head, and it is an act of kindness to disillusionise you before you go too far and lose a valuable appointment."

The man glared at him as they stood together in one of the dark passages of the mine, close to an old shaft which descended to a lower line of workings.

"Let me tell you, once for all, that, though you have worked well, you are in no wise answerable for the success of the mine, and that it would have been quite as prosperous if Michael Sturgess had not been here."

"Oh, indeed!" said the man insolently; and Reed flushed angrily, but controlled his rising temper, and went on calmly enough.

"Secondly, let me disabuse your mind of the idea that it is open to you to appeal to the company against any decision of mine. Understand this, sir: my power here is supreme, and, though I should be reluctant to exercise that power against a good workman, the trouble of obtaining a successor in your post would not be great, and I should exercise that power sharply and firmly, if I had just cause."

"Oh, I don't know so much about that, Mr Reed. You are chief here at the mines."

"And at the board in town, my man. You are insolent and angry still. Go about your work, and when you are calm and have had an opportunity for thinking all this over, come to me and apologise as a straightforward man should."

"Oh, there's no time like the present," said the man roughly.

"Yes, there is, and I decline to quarrel with you, sir. That will do now. I leave you to think over what has passed, as I don't wish to be angry and do anything to injure an honest man's prospects."

"But—"

"I said that will do," said Reed firmly; and turning his back, he began to walk away without seeing the ominous shadow cast by the lanthorn he carried, as Michael Sturgess took a step forward with his hands cramped like a bird's claws.

It would have been so easy, too; a sharp side-wise thrust and nothing could have saved the man who was touched. There was a slight rail by the side of that old shaft, but a man who slipped must have been precipitated headlong down the stony pit seventy or eighty feet, to the rocky floor below, and mutilation was certain—death more than a probable event.

But the man did not stir, and the shadow grew more and more faint, as Clive Reed strode along the gallery till he passed round a corner and disappeared.

Michael Sturgess stood listening to his chief's steps till they died out, and then taking out a box of matches, he struck one and lit a lanthorn which he took from a niche in the wall, the glow lighting up his savage features.

He muttered an oath as he stood closing the lanthorn door. Then he burst out into a strange laugh. "Make much of it, my lad, while it lasts. It's hard to bear, but I don't want to be hung for the sake of a lass, specially when there's another way."

He went off in the other direction, and Clive Reed made his way to the cage and ascended to daylight and his books in the office, where he busied himself till evening, fully expecting a visit from his foreman; but the day passed, and at last he left the place, and made his way to the cottage over the mountain side where Dinah stood waiting, flushed and hopeful; and as his eyes met hers, the mine with its petty troubles and anxieties passed away, and he was in the land of love and hope and joy.

There was the usual walk among the flowers; and how bright those blossoms were! then the pleasant evening meal, and the adjournment to the tiny drawing-room, where, after a little music, to Clive's disgust, the Major turned the conversation to the very subject the visitor wished to avoid. He asked him questions about the output, and the likeliness of increased yield, all of which questions Reed good-humouredly answered, feeling vexed, but at the same time amused by the love of money the Major had of late developed; while Dinah sat and listened, meeting her betrothed's eyes from time to time.

"Capital—capital!" said the Major, rubbing his hands. "I feel as if I am quite a mine proprietor. Dinah, my dear, this does me good, and makes me feel as if I had been a slug all these years. I wish I had begun sooner."

"Congratulate yourself, my dear sir, that you did not. You are gaining here, but this mine is one in ten thousand. You might have ruined yourself."

"True; so I might, my boy, without your clear head to put me right. But the shares, how do they stand?"

"They are up ten since last week, sir, and steadily rising."

"Then I ought to sell now and realise a big profit, oughtn't I?"

Clive was silent, for he was hearing the Major's words, and listening still to the echoes of Dinah's sweet voice, and repeating to himself the lines of the songs she sang, as she now sat in the shadow, silent and waiting till her lover spoke again.

And how jarring the Major's words were. Clive had come over that evening weary with the noise and worry of the mine, and annoyed by Sturgess's insolent manner. All he wanted was peace and rest, not the talk about money and shares.

The Major spoke again.

"Eh! oughtn't I to realise?"

"What, sell for the sake of a little present profit that which will go on, in all probability, yielding you an increasing income, sir. Surely that would be short-sighted."

"Of course. But all this is so new to me, my dear boy. There! I shall leave myself in your hands; and trust to you to know what is best. You see what a child I am over money matters. Really there are times when I almost wish that I had not begun to dabble in these shares."

"Why fidget about them, sir?" said Reed, smiling. "The amount is not large."

"Not large? Do you hear him, my dear? He says the amount is not large when it is my poor all. One can see that you have been accustomed to deal with pretty heavy amounts, and—There, I will not continue this hateful topic. Let's have something else to think about. Dinah, shall I be selfish if I challenge this man to a game of chess?"

For answer she rose and fetched the board and men, set out the pieces, and then took her seat by Clive and watched the game, which proved to be a long one, ending at last in the Major checkmating his adversary, who was quite a

knight stronger, but he had been simply on his defence all through, listening the while to the soft breathing from the lips by his side, as from time to time it caressed his hand, or sounded like a suppressed sigh. No words passed between them, but they were needless. It was enough that they could be side by side, feeling each other's presence, happy yet saddened by an indescribable portent of something coming to ruffle the placid stream of their existence.

As for the Major, he was happy and triumphant. It was a genuine pleasure to him, a man who had exiled himself from the world, to live in seclusion, to find that he was a match for this clever, keen man of business, and he showed his delight in many ways.

"What!" he cried, as his visitor rose to go. "You are not going to run off without your revenge. Eh! What?" he said, as Reed quietly took out his watch, and held the face toward him. "Oh, absurd! That thing must be wrong! Eh! No. Mine says the same. Eleven; and I thought it was not near ten. But you will stay now?"

"Don't tempt me, sir. I have a busy day to-morrow."

"But you could leave here early."

"Not so early as I could wish, sir. There is a special reason, too, for my being at the mine early. I have a sort of quarrel on the way with my principal man, Sturgess."

Dinah turned pale, while there was a strange, fixed look in her eyes.

"The man has been very strange of late, and I had to take him severely to task to-day. I want to meet him when he first comes to the mine. There cannot be two masters there."

He looked smilingly at Dinah, and saw the trouble in her face.

"Nothing to alarm you," he said, taking her hand to hold in his, while the Major suddenly recollected that he had a letter he should like to send, so that one of the men could take it on in the morning.

"You are nervous again about my crossing the hills so late. Why should you be, dearest?"

He drew her toward him, and she yielded to his embrace.

"It was not that," she said faintly. "You talked of a quarrel with—with—"

"My foreman, Sturgess. Hardly a quarrel, but the sharp talking to, necessary to be given by a master." At that moment the dog began to bark violently, and Dinah caught Clive's arm and clung to him in dread lest he should go possibly into danger.

"It is nothing, dearest," he whispered, proud of the way in which she clung to him for protection, while she listened with her eyes dilated, as there was the sound of the window in the Major's den being opened, and his voice challenging.

"Is Mr Reed here, sir?" came from the garden.

"My clerk—Robson, from the mine," said Reed, rather excitedly. "Whatever brings him here?"

"Your man, my dear boy," said the Major, entering. "He has brought you a despatch."

"It must be important," said Reed quickly; and he passed his hand across his forehead. "I was half afraid there was some accident. Come in, Robson," he continued, as he stepped into the little passage. "What is it?"

"A telegram, sir, from London. The postmaster sent it over at once by special messenger."

Reed took the missive and went back into the little drawing-room, where Dinah stood pale and anxious, while the Major sat writing his letter there.

"Come, little wifie to be," whispered Reed tenderly, "I have no secrets from you. This cannot be business, and you must share my troubles as well as joys."

The Major glanced at them with a sigh full of regrets for the past, and smiled sadly as he saw his child pass her arm through Reed's, and lean on him while he opened the envelope, and held it so that she could peruse the telegram at the same time. It was very brief:—

"For heaven's sake, come at once and help me. I am half mad.—Praed."

Dinah looked up in her lover's anxious face, as it clouded over, her own full of eagerness and sympathy.

"From Janet Praed's father, dearest," he said softly. "You know everything—my brother's wife. There must be some terrible trouble on the way.—Major, I must go up to town at once. Here is a telegram from my dear old godfather, Doctor Praed. You will take care of my darling till I return?"

"Not—not dead?" said the Major anxiously.

Clive Reed started, as a spasm shot through him.

"I pray God, no," he said hoarsely, as for a moment he turned ghastly and wild-looking. Then he was the prompt man of business decision again.

"We must not jump at conclusions," he said gravely. "Good-bye, dearest. I will telegraph the news as soon as I know it. God bless you, darling," he whispered, as he embraced her. "Let's hope for the best.—Good-bye, sir."

"One moment, my boy, would it not be better to sleep here, and go on from Chapel in the morning?"

"My dear sir, I must be in London in the morning. If I run to the mine and get one of the horses, there will be just time to gallop over to Blinkdale and catch the up mail. Good-bye."

The next minute, with the dog barking loudly, the Major and his daughter stood in the garden, listening to the regular beat-beat of feet as the two men went along the stony path, the sounds growing fainter and fainter, dying away, coming again, and finally dying out for good.

"Poor lad! I hope it is nothing very serious," said the Major. "Good heavens! what is the matter with the dog?"

For suddenly as they stood there, the animal gave vent to a piteous, heartrending cry, which sent a thrill through the hearers. It was followed by another less wild and strange, and then came a quick scuffling sound, and the noise of the rattling of the chain.

"Back directly, my dear," said the Major, and he hurried round to the other side of the cottage, leaving Dinah standing on the little lawn.

She took a step to follow, but at that moment there was a slight rustling sound from the bushes close at hand, and she stood as if petrified.

But only for a few moments, for directly after her father's voice came loudly—

"Dinah! Quick! Bring a light."

Before she could reach the little drawing-room a light flashed out from the door, and Martha, who had heard the words, appeared bringing a lamp.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Dinah," she said, as her arm was caught, and they hurried on together to where the dog's piteous whines could be heard; "the poor thing must be in a fit."

She was quite right, but it was a fit of agony—the last, for as they reached the kennel where the Major knelt on one knee, the poor dog uttered one short gasping bark, as it stretched itself out more and more, and then there was a sudden snatching, quivering motion, and it seemed to be drawn backward till it formed a curve.

"Father! Oh, poor Rollo!" cried Dinah, going down upon her knees by her old companion's side; "he is dying."

"No, my child," said the Major sternly; and he drew in his breath with a low hiss, and bent down and softly patted the poor beast's head, smoothing the long silky ears, "he is dead."

"Dead!" cried Dinah wildly, as she sank upon her knees, and lifted the dog's head into her lap. "Impossible!"

But the heavy, motionless weight endorsed the Major's words. There was no joyous movement, no nestling toward her, no gladsome, whining bark; Rollo had had his last gambol over the mountain side, and lay slowly stiffening out, with eyes glazing and seeming to gaze mournfully up at her he had loved so well.

"Oh, sir," cried Martha piteously, "I have been so careful, but he would take them. I always felt sure he would be choked by some bone."

"Choked!" cried the Major angrily; "the poor brute has been poisoned for doing his duty too well."

"Poisoned!" cried Martha, as Dinah looked up wildly at her father. "Impossible, sir. I've kept it in a bottle tied down and locked up where no one could find it but myself."

"Kept what?" cried the Major.

"The arsenic for the rats, sir."

"But this is something worse, woman. There is no doubt about it. There are the signs. Some scoundrel has given him strychnia, and it must be one of those ruffians from the mine."

A low, piteous sigh escaped from Dinah's lips, as she softly laid the dog's head on the stones, and then with a quick glance of apprehension, she rose and took hold of her father's arm.

"Yes, my dear," he said. "Poor Rollo was too true a servant, and watched for the pitiful purloiner. Now let him beware of my gun, for, by Jove, if I find any marauding scoundrel within shot, he shall certainly have the contents."

Dinah said no word, but as Martha stood there holding the lamp, the light shone upon her dilated eyes, and lit up her white, contracted face, which seemed to have grown suddenly hard and stern. It was as if her father's words had sent a sense of satisfaction through her, and she was looking out into the darkness of the night for the cowardly wretch who had robbed her of another friend, that he might come on once more and meet his fate.

She shivered the next moment, and clung to her father's arm.

"I mean it," he said fiercely. "I am a peaceful, quiet man, but I can be roused to action, and then—"

He looked at Martha with his eyes flashing, and a fierce glow in his face that transformed him at once into the old man of war.

"Master!" whispered the old servant, with a low sob, and there was an appeal in her tones which seemed to calm him.

"Yes," he said, as he gazed straight away into the darkness. "Whoever did this deed is mistaken in his man."

A sigh escaped from Dinah's lips, and she drew herself up as she clung more tightly to her father. Two of her protectors gone that night, but there was still a third, and a feeling of confidence strengthened her heart as she gripped her father's arm.

"Sooner or later I shall square accounts with this man," said the Major, as he walked slowly toward the door. "Oh, if I only knew!"

"If I only knew. If I only knew!" The words kept on repeating themselves in Dinah's brain as she sought her room that night, till she found herself repeating them—"If he only knew—if he only knew!"

She had not commenced undressing, and in her agitated, nervous state every sound about the house attracted her attention, so that she listened eagerly as she suddenly heard a light tapping sound, followed by—"Yes, sir, what is it?"

"I didn't want to disturb you, Martha; but have you moved my gun?"

"No, sir. It's in the corner of your study between the window and the bookcase."

"No, it is not there, but I am certain it was this afternoon."

"I'm sure it was there to-night, sir, just before Mr Reed went away."

"Very well, good-night," said the Major; and he went back into the little study, and looked carefully round again.

"Why, of course!" he exclaimed, "I must have stood it in my room."

Chapter Twenty Three.

The Tare Sowing.

A man was going through the street with his pole extinguishing the gas lamps, as the hansom cab bearing Clive Reed went along at a sharp trot toward Russell Square. The waning light looked ghastly and strange, and well in keeping with his anxious state of mind, for in spite of all his genuine love for Dinah, it was impossible not to feel a thrill of misery akin to despair when reminded of one with whom so much of his boyhood and the later past had been mingled.

"Poor, passionate, weak girl!" he said to himself again and again, as he journeyed on, and his heart was full of sympathy for her and indignation against his brother, whom he connected with the trouble, whatever it might be.

"Sick unto death," he muttered. "Heartbroken and despairing after finding him out. Oh, how can a man be so base?"

Then all kinds of projects had flashed across his mind as to what might be done. Janet would certainly separate sooner or later from Jessop, and when she did, as the Doctor had intimated, she would return to her old home, and then why should not Dinah help him to soften her hard lot?

"No," he said, directly after. "It would be madness—impossible. Janet's is not the nature to assimilate with Dinah's. I am not so weak and blind to all her faults as I was then. Poor girl! Poor girl! Her life wrecked, and by my own brother too."

At last!

The cab drew up at the great blank-looking door of the Doctor's house, and Clive leaped out, paid the man, and hurried up the broad steps in the cold, grey morning. How many times, full of expectation and delight, he had hurried to that door bearing presents or bouquets; and now he was there once more—to hear what news of the bright, handsome girl whom he had made his idol from a boy?

His hand was upon the heavy knocker, but it dropped to his side, and he rang the night-bell, and then stood listening to the distant wheels of the cab in which he had come.

"Who is it?" came in a husky whisper from the mouth of the speaking-tube, and he answered back—

"I: Clive Reed."

"Down directly."

Five minutes later the door was opened by the Doctor himself, and quite at home there, Clive Reed sprang in to face his old friend standing in dressing-gown and slippers.

"How is she?" he cried, in a low excited whisper. "How is she?" repeated the Doctor, as he closed the door. "Here,

come this way."

He took a chamber candlestick from where he had set it down on the hall table, and led on into his consulting-room, with its walls adorned with grim-looking engravings of medical magnates, and its table with books and inkstand, two stethoscopes standing upright on the chimney-piece like a pair of very ancient attenuated vases.

"You came up at once, then?" said the Doctor grimly.

"Of course. I caught the mail; but don't keep me—in suspense," Clive was about to say, but he checked himself, for positions had altered now, and he had no right to be in suspense, so he used the word "waiting."

"Waiting!" said the Doctor. "What do you mean?"

"Your telegram—about Janet. Is she very bad?"

"Confound Janet for a weak-minded idiot!" cried the Doctor testily. "Nothing of the kind. I wired to you to come up about this cursed mine."

"Oh!" ejaculated Clive, with a feeling of relief. "Your telegram explained nothing, and I thought the poor girl was ill."

"Ill! No: I wish she were. Be a lesson to her—a hussy. Now, then, what am I to do? Nice business this, sir. Here, on the strength of your representations, I put a life's savings in that cursed mine, and they're pretty well all swept away."

Clive looked at him, as if doubting his old friend's sanity.

"Don't stand staring at me like a confounded stock-fish, sir. You've got me into this scrape, now tell me how to get out of it. Hang it all, Clive, I've been like a second father to you, and the least you could have done would have been to give me fair warning, so that I might have—have—hedged—yes, that's the word my lovely son-in-law would have used. Now, then, before it is too late. I daresay I could get them back from him, as I only saw him to-night. Can you help me to make a better price?"

Clive seated himself, for he was weary, and the Doctor, after setting down his candlestick, was walking up and down the room as he talked.

"My dear Doctor," said Clive, "will you explain what you mean? Cursed mine—too late—get them back from him. To begin with, who is 'him'?"

"Who is 'him'?" cried the Doctor furiously. "Why, that confounded brother of yours. After all that has passed, I was obliged to go to him hat in hand, and humble myself so as to try and save what I could out of the fire."

"In heaven's name, what fire, sir?" cried Clive, who, after his sleepless night and anxiety, was growing more and more confused.

"For," continued the Doctor, without heeding the question, "I said to myself: He's cursedly knowing on 'Change, and for the sake of Janet and his expectations of what he may get from me, he'll do his best, and he may know where to get a good price."

"My dear sir, have you taken leave of your senses?"

"Almost, you scoundrel. Money spoils all men. Sucks all the honesty out of them. You're as bad as the rest. But I didn't think you would put me in such a hole. Now then: shall I leave them in Jessop's hands or place them in yours, to cheat somebody else with the cursed rubbish. I'm a bit reckless now, for it's ruin nearly, and drudgery to the end of my days."

"Look here," said Clive excitedly; "do I understand that you have given your shares in the 'White Virgin' to Jessop to sell?"

"Of course you do, sir. Was I to wait till they were worth nothing?"

"Look here, Doctor: speak plainly. Are you all right?"

"Confound you, no: I'm all wrong."

"But explain yourself. Those shares are worth double what you gave for them."

"I tell you they're hardly worth their weight as waste-paper," roared the Doctor. "Don't stare at me with that miserable assumption of innocency about your cursed bankrupt old mine."

Clive burst out laughing.

"Why, what do you mean, Doctor? What precious mare's nest have you been discovering in the dark?"

"Mare's nest?" cried the Doctor, snatching up a heap of newspapers from a side table, and throwing them in the young man's lap, "look at that, sir, and that, and that. Four days now has this been going on. I was down in the country at a consultation, and I came back to find myself a ruined man."

"What!" roared Clive, as his eyes fell upon a notice with a full heading—"Collapse of the "White Virgin" scheme—bubble cleverly inflated—burst at last—serious loss.' Good heavens!"

“Good other place!” growled the Doctor. “Oh, Clive Reed! You are a broken Reed indeed to lean on, and enter into a poor man’s hand. But there, don’t stop over those papers; they are alike, and the price has gone down to nothing. Tell me; can you sell my shares better than Jessop can? I must have a little back for my outlay.”

“What did Jessop tell you?”

“What does every man tell you when he has you at his mercy? That the paper was worthless, but he might get some speculative fool to buy them; and if I waited there at his office he would try, but I must expect the merest trifle for them.”

“Well?” said Clive, frowning.

“Don’t take it so confoundedly cool, sir. I was obliged to do the best I could, and I put myself in his hands.”

“Well?”

“And he went out and brought the speculative person—a Mr Wrigley, a solicitor.”

“Well?”

“Well! Ill, man, ill!”

“But what did my worthy brother’s friend say?”

“Shrugged his shoulders—said it was throwing money away—mere gambling. He did not want them, but to oblige his old friend, Mr Jessop Reed, he would take them at a pound apiece, and the chance of making an eighth out of them.”

“And you laughed at him?”

“Laughed? I nearly cried at him, and was only too glad to get the little bit of salvage from a man who bought as a speculation, and would not care so much if he lost.”

“But you said you had let Jessop have them to try and sell.”

“Did I? Yes, I think I did.”

“And asked me if you got them back, whether I could deal better with them.”

“Yes, I suppose I did, but I don’t want to swindle any one into buying worthless stock.”

“Look here, Doctor, you are not yourself.”

“Not myself? How can a man be himself under such circumstances. Suppose, though, that I could get them back from the man. He only took them as a favour.”

“Did he pay you?” said Clive eagerly.

“Yes.”

“A cheque?”

“No,” said the Doctor. “I was not going to run any more risks. No cheque: for the residue I insisted upon Bank of England notes and gold.”

“And you were paid like that?”

“Yes.”

“Then you have gone too far to retreat.”

“Oh no, not if we offer the man what he said he would be content with—an eighth. That’s half-a-crown to the hundred pounds, isn’t it?”

“Half-a-crown to the hundred pounds!” said Clive furiously. “Why, as soon as the truth’s known—”

“They won’t be worth that, eh?” said the Doctor dolefully.

“Oh, Doctor Praed!” cried Clive furiously. “You telegraph to me to come and help you when you have thrown your money into the gutter, and it has been picked up and is gone. It is a swindle—an imposition.”

“Yes, I’ve found out that,” said the Doctor bitterly. “But what are the shares worth then, really?”

“What I told you, sir—double the price they were when so many were apportioned to you. This is some cursed jugglery: a trick—a scare—a false alarm to influence the price of the ‘White Virgin’ shares in the market.”

“What!”

“There isn’t a word of truth in the report.”

“Not a word of truth in the report?”

"No, sir. The mine is exceeding my greatest hopes. She teems with ore which grows richer in silver every day. In six months' time the shares will be worth four times what they are now."

"But—but—the papers!—look at the papers," cried the Doctor.

"What for? They only give the reports on 'Change—the facts that the mine is reported to be in a state of collapse, and that consequently every one has rushed to realise, and make what little he could for what is supposed to be nearly worthless paper."

"But—tell me again—are you sure that the report is false?"

"Who could know better than I, who have been down every day, who have watched every working, examined each skip of ore that came up, and assayed every pig of lead and ingot of silver. Doctor, I should have thought that you could have trusted me."

The Doctor sank down into his patients' chair, and stared at his visitor aghast.

"Clive Reed—Clive, my boy—is—is this true?"

"You know it is true, sir!" cried the young man savagely, as he now took up the Doctor's rôle of patrolling the room. "Do you, who have known me from a boy, ask me whether I would have deliberately swindled you into putting your savings into a worthless venture?"

"No, no, not wilfully, my boy, but by a mistake."

"Mistake! There was no mistake. Doctor, an enemy hath done this thing, and people are only too ready to believe the evil instead of the good. Well, I'm glad I know. But how is it that no report has reached me at the mine? Why, of course: I have seen no paper for days. I am so busy that I often do not open them when they come over from the town."

"Then—then this really is a false report, Clive?"

"Literally false, sir, and you have thrown your thousands away."

The Doctor groaned.

"No, no: not yet. There is hope. Look here. I must buy those shares back at once."

"Bah!" exclaimed Clive. "Look here, Doctor: if I were dangerously ill I would sooner trust you than any man in London; but in money matters I think just as my poor father thought."

"That I was a mere baby? Yes, he always told me so," said the Doctor, with a sigh. "But I made a lot of money, too."

"Yes, sir, but couldn't keep it," cried the young man angrily.

"Don't—don't jump on me now I'm down, Clive, my boy," cried the Doctor piteously. "I have been an old fool. I ought to have trusted you that you would warn me. But you were away; all London was ringing with the business, and in my rage and disappointment I thought I was doing right."

"I suppose so," said Clive bitterly.

"But it is not too late. We'll go up to your brother at once."

"My brother will only be too glad to triumph over you."

"But this Mr Wrigley?"

"Knew perfectly well what he was about, or he would not have bought."

"But I must buy again, if not from him—from some one else."

"You cannot. As soon as the truth is known the shares will go back to their old place at a bound, and then in the reaction rise rapidly, for the public will grasp that the mine must be as it is, exceedingly valuable."

"But before the truth is known."

"I shall go and get it made known on 'Change the moment it is open, sir."

"But—but if you waited a little while, Clive, to give me time, I—"

"My old friend—my father's trusted companion would not ask me to wait an instant before crushing a blackguardly conspiracy, sir. I cannot wait, and if I can trace this business to the source, I'll do it, if it costs me thousands."

"You—you don't think that Jessop—"

"No!" cried Clive fiercely. "I don't—I won't think such a thing of my own brother. He ousted me in one great aim of my life; he is a spendthrift, and dishonourable enough; but, hang it, no, I won't give him the credit for this."

There was a tap at the door.

"Yes. Come in."

The Doctor's quiet, grave servant in spotless black, looking as if he had been up for hours, entered with a tray, bearing hot tea and dry toast, placing it upon the table without a word, and leaving at once.

"Take some tea, Clive, my boy," said the Doctor, going quietly now to his visitor, placing his hands upon his shoulders, and pressing him down into a chair. "Forgive me, my dear boy. No; of course, you could not do such a dishonourable act. I beg your pardon."

"Granted, Doctor."

"Confound the money, my boy! It's my savings, but I should never have spent a penny on myself. Let it go, I won't stir a peg about it, and I'll never try to save again. I can always earn guineas enough to pay my way, and that must do for the while I live. There; I'm better now," he continued, as he took a seat and helped himself to some tea.—"Hah! capital cup this. I'm very particular about my tea. And so you're doing well down in Derbyshire?"

"Wonderfully, sir."

"That's right. I'm very glad of it. Clive, my boy, I've been studying up the digestive functions a good deal, and I've had to read a paper upon it. I'm getting honourable mention."

Clive looked at him wonderingly, and the Doctor saw it.

"It's all right, my boy. I have no business to dabble in money affairs. That's all over now. I have too much to do in assuaging human ills to think any more about my losses; but I'm afraid that some people among your father's old friends will be very hard hit."

"Good heavens!" cried Clive, starting up.

"What is the matter?"

"I have a friend down at the mine, who has bought pretty largely—for him—and if this cursed rumour reaches his ears,—here, I must go back by the next train. No, I cannot. I must stop in town, and have this report thoroughly contradicted by letters in the papers, and advertisements, as well as by personal visits to our old friends. Have you a telegram form?"

"Yes, plenty, my dear boy. There: in the drawer."

Clive hastily wrote a telegram for the Major, telling him that if any report reached him, or he saw anything in the papers respecting the stability of the "White Virgin" mine and its shares, he was to pay no heed whatever.

"Can your man take this for me?"

"Of course," cried the Doctor, ringing, and the quiet, grave-looking servant appeared.

"Take a cab and go to the Charing Cross Post Office. That is open all night. You will pay for a special messenger to ride or drive over with it at once. The town is ten miles from Major Gurdon's cottage. Quick, please: it is important."

He handed the man some money, and in two minutes the front door was closed.

"Hah! That is a relief," said Clive, with a sigh. "A quiet old officer who lives retired there, Doctor. He too has put his all into the mine. We have become very intimate."

"And has he a pretty daughter, too, like this old fool?"

Clive started, and his cheeks flushed as he remained silent for a few moments.

"Yes, Doctor, he has a daughter."

Doctor Praed held out his hand, and shook Clive's warmly.

"I'm very glad, my boy," he said gently. "The wisest thing. I hope she is very nice. There, I will not ask you. It is quite right—quite right."

They sat sipping their tea for a few minutes, the Doctor looking perfectly content now, Clive thoughtful; and the black marble clock on the chimneypiece struck six.

"Doctor," said Clive at last, "I am bitterly grieved about this business: more so than I can express."

"Then now throw it over as far as I am concerned. It was an error. I committed it, and I am punished. I have too much to think about to worry any more; so have you."

"But I must make it up to you, sir."

"What! Give me the money?"

"Yes."

"Rubbish, boy! It is of no use to me. I should only go and lose that too."

"But I feel to blame."

"More fool you, sir. There, not another word. The money has gone. Jolly go with it. I should like you to read my pamphlet."

"But, my dear sir—"

"Clive Reed, I will not have another word. Look here. I tell you what," he said, with a chuckle; "have you made your will?"

"No, sir; not yet."

"Make it then, and leave me to be paid at your death the amount I have lost. I won't poison you to get it, my lad. There, no more talk about money. Now then, go upstairs and have three hours' good sleep. Breakfast at nine."

"No: I could not sleep," said Clive. "I'll go on now to Guildford Street. They will be getting up there by this time. Then I'm in for a busy day."

Chapter Twenty Four.

Alone.

Breakfast-time at the cottage, and as a step was heard upon the stony path, Dinah rose quickly from her seat, then coloured and resumed her place, for she knew that it was impossible for her to receive letters so soon.

Then as the steps were heard receding, Martha entered bearing a packet of newspapers and a letter.

"Hallo! what a budget!" cried the Major. "Who can have sent these?"

He opened the letter first, a business-like looking document, and read:—

"Draper's Buildings, E.C., August 18—

"To Major Gurdon, The Cottage, Blinkdale Tor.

"Dear Sir,—As we have frequently done business for you, we esteem it our duty to let you know of the very great fall which has taken place in the mining shares which—as you will remember in opposition to our advice—were bought by you a short time since. We send herewith seven of the daily papers that you may see how serious the business is, and we should strongly advise you either to come up and confer with us, or to telegraph your instructions.

"Of course there may be nothing in these reports, but we felt that an old client residing in so remote a part of England, where he might not hear of the rumour, ought to be advised.

"We are, your obedient servants,—

"Caley and Bland."

The Major groaned.

"Father, dear, is it very bad news?" cried Dinah, rising to go to his side.

"No, no, my dear," he said bitterly. "Not so very bad. Read."

"What—what does this mean?" cried Dinah, changing colour.

"Only ruin once more, my darling," he said bitterly. "Bankrupt in honour and reputation, now I am a bankrupt in pocket."

"Oh, father! But—but surely it is not through this mine."

"Yes, my dear, through my folly in believing in a stranger. Bah, I have always been a fool, and as age creeps on I grow more foolish."

"But I don't understand, dear," cried Dinah piteously. "A stranger! You do not mean Mr Reed?"

"Yes," he said angrily, "I mean Mr Clive Reed. I have let him inveigle me into this speculation, and now nearly every penny I have is swept away."

"Oh, impossible!" cried Dinah, flushing now. "Clive would never have advised you but for your good."

"Pish!" cried the Major, tossing the letter upon the table; "here is a proof of it. Caley and Bland, the experienced brokers, who sold for me, and advised me not to put money in the speculation, show me that it is hopeless."

"But Clive told me it meant fortune, dear; and he could not err."

The Major laughed harshly.

"Of course not—in your eyes, child. There, I am not going to be a brute to you, my dear. He has deceived us both."

"He has not deceived us both," cried Dinah, drawing herself up proudly. "Clive is incapable of deceit."

"No, not quite—self-deceit, then. He meant well, perhaps, but, like all these mining adventurers, he was too sanguine."

"Oh, but, father, it is impossible. It must be a false report."

"False!" cried the Major, with a mocking laugh, as he glanced at a paper. "Look here—ruin—collapse—a bogus affair, got up to sell shares in an exhausted mine. You can read the opinions of the press, my dear, and the letters of indignant, ruined shareholders."

"It is a false report," cried Dinah indignantly. "Let them say this—let the whole world say it. Clive Reed is my betrothed husband, and he is an honourable gentleman. I say it is false from beginning to end."

"Hah!" sighed the Major, as he gazed sadly at the flushed, defiant face before him; and taking his child's hand, he drew her to him, and kissed her tenderly.

"Your mother's child, my darling," he said huskily. "Eighteen years ago she stood up like that in my defence, when the world said that I was a dishonourable scoundrel. She fought the fight upon my side, and fell wounded to the death, Dinah, true to her convictions that I was an innocent man; but it killed her, dear."

Dinah laid her hands upon her father's shoulders, and gazed into his eyes, but he met her fixed, inquiring look without a quiver, and his face grew proud and stern.

"Yes, dear; she was right," he cried, drawing himself up. "I was—I am—an honourable man. But the world has never cleared me, and I have lived a recluse, waiting for the time to come when it should confess the wrong it did me. But it never will, Dinah—it never will."

"It shall, father, some day," she cried passionately, as she flung her arms about his neck and kissed him again and again. "Yes, my dear, noble, self-denying father shall stand in his high place amongst men, and they shall be as proud of him as I am of Clive. For this, too, is all false, father. He could not have deceived us."

"Well, perhaps not willingly, dear," said the Major sadly.

"No, no, no. It is a false report."

"But it has ruined me, my child. Well, fate has worked her worst. She can do no more," he added bitterly, "unless my child deceives me too."

Dinah sprang from him as if he had struck her a deadly blow, and stood there white as ashes, her eyes dilated and lips quivering till he caught her in his arms.

"No, no," he said huskily. "Forgive me, my darling. My words were too cruel. Nothing could come between us two. Forget what I said. The words were wrung from me by my sufferings. It is so hard, dear, to find one's all swept away through my greedy folly, and at my time of life."

Dinah uttered a low piteous sigh, and her face went down upon her father's shoulder, while her lips moved as she said the words in her shame, misery, and despair, the words which she had long wished to confide to him. But they were inaudible—he did not hear, and at last, after a tender, passionate embrace, he placed her in a chair.

"Well," he said firmly, "I must act like a man."

"What are you going to do?" she said, looking up now excitedly.

"Go up to town, and save what I can out of the wreck."

"But, father, it must be a false report. Wait till we hear from Clive. He will be back soon."

The Major shook his head.

"Perhaps not."

"But I am sure. What evidence have you but this letter—these reports?"

"The telegram last night. His agitation on receiving these guarded words. I'll agree, my dear, that the poor fellow meant honourably by us, but he is ruined as well as I. Dinah, my dear, you must be firm. So must I."

"And you will go?"

"Directly."

"Take me too, father," said Dinah excitedly.

"Impossible. No; wait patiently. I must go and see the brokers at once, you see, you know there is no other course open."

"But you will go straight to Clive, dear."

"No," said the Major firmly. "A man in my frame of mind, and with my hot temper, must not meet him for some time

to come. It will be better not." Dinah drew in a long deep breath, and remained silent as the Major hurriedly swallowed a little breakfast, and ten minutes later stood by the river path, bidding his child farewell.

"God bless you!" he said. "I'll believe that Clive Reed is honest, but the money has gone.—Good-bye."

Dinah stood watching him till he disappeared over the shoulder of the mountain slope on his ten-mile walk to the Blinkdale station, and then returned to the cottage, cold and shivering, as a sense of loneliness and want of protection crept over her.

Martha was waiting at the door.

"Oh, my dear, I hope there is no more trouble. Is it about money?"

Dinah bowed gravely.

"Dear, dear! What a nuisance money is. But I have a little saved up, master can have. I wish I'd told him before he went. He won't be very long gone, will he, my dear? I mean he will be back to-night?"

"No, Martha," said Dinah, with the chilly sensation increasing. "Perhaps not to-morrow night."

"And us alone!" cried Martha, "and no Rollo."

Dinah shuddered slightly.

"And I don't want to frighten you, my dear, but I've seen that big dark man from the mine come about here sometimes of a night. Why, my dear child, it must have been him who poisoned that poor dog."

The cold shiver ran through Dinah again, but she made a spasmodic effort to master her feelings.

"Don't—don't say that," she said hoarsely. "Martha, dear, we must bury poor Rollo to-day. Will you help me?"

"Poor fellow! yes. I always hated him, my dear, but I'm very sorry he's dead. There, we must make the best of it. Come and finish your breakfast, lovey, and then we'll get a spade, and bury him under one of the trees."

Dinah went in dreamy and thoughtful, but no breakfast passed her lips; and as, about an hour and a half later, the poor dog was being carried to his last resting-place, there was the sound of hoofs on the bridle-path, and five minutes later she received a telegram for her father, brought over from the town on the other side of the mine.

She hesitated a moment, but the case was so urgent, and she opened the message to read Clive's reassuring words.

"I knew it," she cried, as a flood of bright hope sent joy into her heart.

But it was too late to try and overtake the Major, who was miles away in the other direction, and the messenger was dismissed.

"He will know as soon as he reaches town, and telegraph," thought Dinah, but the day wore away without news, and the night closed in dark and stormy, with the girl's fancy conjuring up strange sounds about the house of so startling a nature in her nervous state, that at last she could bear them no longer. Again and again she had imagined that faces were peering through the window, and though she drew blind and curtain, there was the fancy still. And in this spirit she at last, about nine o'clock, determined to go and sit with their old servant in the kitchen.

"It will be company for us both," she said, and hurriedly gathering together her work, she left the little room, and entered the kitchen to find all dark.

"Martha—Martha!" she cried, but there was no reply, and hurrying back for a lamp, she found that the candle had burned out, the tea things were still on the table, and the woman was seated there with her head down upon her hands, apparently fast asleep.

"Martha!" she cried, shaking her; but there was no reply, only a heavy stertorous breath, and as the old chill came back, Dinah's eyes lit upon the cup and saucer by the woman's side.

A flash of light illumined her brain, and instinctively she raised the tea-cup, and smelt, and then tasted the tea at the bottom.

It was unmistakable. A peculiar, heavy, clammy taste was evident. The cup fell from her hand, and she looked wildly round, as her position came with tenfold horror. Alone there in that solitary dale, far from help. Even her old friend the dog taken from her side—quite alone, for Martha was beyond rousing for hours to come, plunged as she was in a deep stupor, the result of a drug.

Chapter Twenty Five.

Another Pigeon Plucked.

"Major Gurdon? Show him in."

The Major was shown in to the business-like-looking little grey man in his office at Drapers Buildings, but he did not take the seat offered.

"Now then, Mr Caley, I've come up. It is all a scare, is it not?"

The stockbroker shrugged his shoulders.

"Scare, sir? Perhaps; but everybody who holds these shares is realising for anything he can get."

"But I heard such excellent reasons for buying them on the best authority," cried the Major. "It promised to be almost a fortune."

"My dear sir," said the stockbroker; "most people who invest in mining shares do so on the best authority, and anticipate fortunes."

"Yes, yes, but—"

"And then, to use the old simile, sir, find that they have cast their money down a deep hole."

"Tut-tut-tut-tut!" ejaculated the Major. "But the latest news of the mine?"

"The latest news on 'Change, sir, is worse than that which we wired to you. It is disastrous, and seems to me like the bursting of a bubble. But it may not be so bad. We are quiet men, Major Gurdon, and deal with old-fashioned investors in government and corporation stocks. Two and a half, three, three and a half, and debentures. We do nothing with speculative business."

"No, I know. You advised me strongly against what I did."

"Yes, sir. We felt it our duty. But this, as I have before said, may only be a scare."

"But money means so much to me, Mr Caley. Now tell me this: what would you do if you were in my place?"

"You wish for my advice, Major Gurdon?"

"Of course."

Mr Caley touched the table gong and a clerk appeared.

"My compliments to Mr Bland, and ask him to step here."

"I think he's out, sir," said the man. "I'll see." He left the office, and a minute later a thin, dark, anxious-looking man entered.

"Major Gurdon, I think? We met once before."

"Bland, Major Gurdon wants our advice about 'White Virgin' shares. What would you do if you held any?"

"Give them away at once if they are not fully paid up."

"Only a pound a share on call," said Mr Caley. "What would you do?"

"Sell them at once for anything they would fetch; but there would be no buyers."

"Thank you," said Mr Caley. "You hear, Major Gurdon? I quite endorse my partner's views."

"But they may recover," said the Major piteously. Mr Caley shrugged his shoulders. "Things could not look worse, sir; but as you cannot lose much more, and the call that will follow will not be heavy, you might speculate a little and hold on."

"But I cannot afford to pay the call, gentlemen," cried the Major. "It is ruin to me."

"Then sell, sir," said Mr Bland, "and get what you can out of the fire."

"Sell? When?"

"At once, sir."

"I—I think I will see the gentleman first through whom I bought them."

"As you will, sir, but time is money," said Mr Bland. "We might be able to place them to-day, as I hear rumours of some one buying up a few. In a couple of hours' time it may be too late."

"But surely, gentlemen, they will be saleable at some price?" cried the Major.

The partners shook their heads. And in a fit of desperation, the Major decided to sell, and was shown into a room, to wait while the preliminary business went on, Mr Caley himself going out to dispose of the shares.

Hours passed, during which the Major sat vainly trying to compose himself to read the papers on the table, but they seemed to be full of nothing else save adverse money market news; and at last he could do nothing but pace the room.

The door opened at last and the stockbroker entered, followed by his partner.

"I have done the best I could for you, sir," said Mr Caley. "Here is an open cheque, which I would advise you to cash at once. There will be the necessary signature required by-and-by for the transference of the shares to the buyer, but that will occupy some days. Shall we send and get the cheque cashed?"

"Yes," said the Major, as he caught up a pen, and glanced at the amount and signature. "Not a tenth of what I paid for them. Humph, 'R. Wrigley.'"

"Yes, sir, a gentleman who has bought two or three lots, I believe.—Thank you."

The Major threw himself back in his chair, and waited while the cheque was cashed, and then, shaking hands with his brokers, he took a cab and ordered the man to drive to Guildford Street.

"I hope we have given him good advice, Bland."

"The best we could give. It was a chance of chances to get rid of them at all."

"Let me see: that scheme was floated by old Grantham Reed, wasn't it?"

"Yes, and he did very wisely in dying and getting out of the way. What a vast amount of money has been thrown down mines."

Yes: Mr Clive Reed was in, and the Major entered, and felt a little staggered at the solid, wealthy look of his prospective son-in-law's house, as he was shown into the library, where Clive was busy writing.

"Ah, Major," he cried, "then you had my telegram?"

"Your telegram, sir, no."

"Tut-tut-tut! I'm sorry. But I need not ask you any questions. Your face shows that you have heard the rumour."

"Heard the cursed rumour? Yes, sir," cried the Major indignantly. "How can you have the heart to take the matter so lightly?"

"Lightly? Why not? I am only sorry that it should worry my friends."

"Clive Reed!" cried the Major, bringing his fist down so heavily upon the table that the pens leaped out of the tray; "this may be a slight matter to a mining adventurer who lives by gambling, but do you grasp the fact that it is utter ruin to me and my child?"

"My dear sir, no, I do not; and as soon as I found out what was the matter, I sent off a telegram, and paid for a horse messenger to ride over and set you at your ease."

"Set me at my ease!" cried the Major, tugging the end of his great moustache into his mouth and gnawing it. "How can a man, sir, be at his ease who has lost his all—who sees his child brought to penury?"

"My dear sir," began Clive.

"Silence, sir!" cried the Major, giving vent to the pent-up wrath which had been gathering. "Silence! Hear what I have to say. I received you at my home, believing you to be an honourable man—a gentleman. I did not draw back when I found that my poor child had been won over by your insidious ways, and I was weak enough to let you draw me into this cursed whirlpool, and persuade me to embark my little capital to be swept down to destruction."

"Did I, sir?" said Clive quietly.

"No: I will be just, even in my despair. That was my own doing, for I was blinded by your representations of wealth to come. I know: I was a fool and a madman, and I am justly punished: but I did think, sir, that you would have met me differently to this. It is a trifle perhaps to you speculators, you mining gamblers. Your way of living here in this house shows that a few thousands more or less are not of much consequence to you."

There was a look of grave sympathy in Clive's face as he listened patiently to the angry visitor's words: and twice over he made an effort to speak, but the Major furiously silenced him.

"Let me finish, sir," he cried, speaking now almost incoherently, his face flushed, and the veins in his temples knotted. "I came here, sir, meaning to speak a few grave words of reproach—to tell you of the contempt with which you have inspired me; but—but—I—but I—oh, curse it all, sir, how could you let me fall into this pit—how could you come to me and win my confidence—my poor child's confidence, and behave like a scoundrel to one who met you from the beginning as a friend?"

He ceased, and Clive rose from his chair, crossed to where he had thrown himself down, and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Major Gurdon—father,—what have I ever done to make you think me such a scoundrel?"

"Don't—don't speak to me," cried the Major hoarsely.

"I must,—I shall," said Clive quietly. "You are terribly upset by this news; but did I not send you a message—have I not told you that there is no cause for anxiety?"

"What, sir, when all London is ringing with the collapse of your scheme, and people are selling right and left for

anything they can get.”

“Poor fools! yes,” said Clive calmly. “They will smart for it afterwards.”

“What!” cried the Major, trying to rise from his seat, but Clive pressed him back. “I tell you all London is ringing with the bursting of the bubble.”

Clive smiled.

“With the miserable, contemptible rumour put about by some scheming scoundrel to make money out of the fears of investors.”

“What! There, sir, it is of no use. I know what you will say—that the shares will recover shortly. Bah! Nonsense! Some of you have made your money by your speculation; and poor, weak, trusting fools like me, as you say, must smart for it.”

“Major Gurdon,” said Clive sadly, “you ought to have had more confidence in the man you made your friend.”

“Confidence! I gave you all my confidence, and you have ruined me.”

“No.”

“Then stood by calmly and seen me ruined.”

“No.”

“What, sir?”

“My dear Major, life among the Derby Dales has made you extremely unbusiness-like.”

“Yes, sir, an easy victim,” cried the Major angrily. “To panic: yes. There, let us end this painful business.”

“Yes, sir, I understand,” cried the Major, springing up; “let us end this painful business. I understand, and I am going. God forgive you, Clive Reed, for I never can.”

“You have nothing to forgive,” said Clive gravely, as he met the Major’s angry gaze with his clear, penetrating eyes. “Once for all, believe me; this is a rumour set about by schemers. The ‘White Virgin’ is immaculate and growing richer day by day.”

“But my brokers assured me that the case was hopeless.”

“Your brokers, sir, derived their information on ‘Change. I, who speak to you from my own experience, and from that of my dear dead father, give you my opinion based upon something tangible—the mine itself. Does poor Dinah know of all this?”

“Sir, I have no secrets from my child.”

“What did she say?”

“Say? What would a weak woman say?” cried the Major contemptuously. “You have done your work well there.”

“She trusted me and told you to believe?”

The Major’s brows knitted tightly.

“God bless her!” cried Clive, with his face lighting up, and his eyes softening. “I knew she would; and come, sir, you will trust me too. I am so sorry. One of my dearest old friends has ruined himself over the wretched business.”

“You are right, sir,” said the Major. “I have.”

“I did not mean you,” said Clive, smiling; “but Doctor Praed. He actually accepted the news as true, let himself be swept along on the flood of the panic, and sold out to some scheming scoundrel who, for aught I know, may be at the bottom of all this.” The angry flush began to die out of the Major’s face, leaving it in patches of a clayey white.

“If I could only bring it home to the scoundrel—but it would be impossible. I hear that he has been buying heavily and for a mere nothing. But I’m glad you came to me first. Stop—you said you had heard from your brokers.”

“Yes, sir; I went to my brokers at once.”

“Major!” cried Clive excitedly, as a sudden thought flashed through his brain. “Good Heavens! Surely you have not sold your shares?”

The Major was silent, for at last the younger man’s tones had carried conviction.

“You have?”

The Major nodded, and looked ghastly now.

“Then you have thrown away thousands,” cried Clive angrily. “There was not a share to be had when you bought. They were mine—my very own, that no other man in England should have had at any price. Why didn’t you come to

me? How could you be so mad?"

"Then—then it really is a false report?" faltered the Major.

"False as hell," cried Clive, who now strode up and down the room in turn, his brow knit, and eyes flashing. "How could you be so weak—how could you be so mad? The scoundrels! The cowardly villains. Oh, Major, Major, you should have trusted me."

There was a tap at the door, and the Major took out his handkerchief, and made a feint to blow his nose loudly, as he surreptitiously wiped the great drops from his brow.

"Come in," cried Clive; and the servant entered with a number of newspapers.

"The evening papers, sir."

Clive caught them up one by one, and pointed out letter and advertisement denying the truth of the rumour, and denouncing it as a financial trick to depreciate the value of the shares.

"But it will not stop the panic," said Clive sadly. "People will believe the lie, and turn away from the truth. I have given instructions to buy up every share that is offered, but I find that a Mr Wrigley is buying up all he can get."

"Yes," said the Major faintly. "I believe he is the man who bought mine."

"Tchah!" ejaculated Clive. "Yes, it is a conspiracy for certain. There: write a message and send off at once to Dinah. Tell her it is as she believed, only a rumour, and that everything is right."

"Everything wrong, you mean," groaned the Major. "How can I write that?"

"Because everything will be all right, sir. You do not think I am going to let my dearest wife's father suffer for an error of judgment?"

"No, no," groaned the Major, "I cannot lower—I cannot—God in Heaven! how could I have been such a fool."

"Because, my dear sir," said Clive, patting his shoulder affectionately, "you are not quite perfect. There, send the message at once. Poor darling! She must be in agony."

The Major's face went down upon his hands.

"Send it—you—you can write—"

"It shall be in your name then," said Clive, and he dashed off the missive. "There." Turning to the Major, he took his hands. "Come, sir, look me in the eyes, and tell me you believe now that I am an honest man."

"I—I cannot look you in the face, Clive," murmured the Major huskily. "For Heaven's sake, don't humble me any more."

"Humble you, sir? not I. There, that is all past. Never mind the shares. Why, my dear sir, I have never made any boast of it, but my poor father left me immensely rich, and my tastes are very simple. I am obliged to work for others, and, as I told you, it was his wish that the mine should stand high, and stand high it shall. There, our darling will soon be at rest. You and I will have dinner together here, and enjoy a bottle of the father's claret. To-morrow morning you shall go down home again.—Yes, what is it?"

"Mr Belton, sir."

"Show him in directly."

"A moment. Let me go," cried the Major.

"No, no, I want you to know Mr Belton, my father's old solicitor and friend."

"Here I am, Clive, my boy," cried the old gentleman, entering mopping his face. "Oh, I thought you were alone."

"Better than being alone," said Clive; "this is a very dear friend of mine—Major Gurdon. I want you to know each other."

"Any friend of Clive Reed's, sir, is my friend," said the old lawyer rather stiffly; but there was a look of pleasure in his eyes, as he shook hands with the Major, who greeted him with this touch, for he could not trust himself to speak.

"Sit down, Belton," said Clive eagerly now. "What news?"

"Shall I—er—"

"Yes, of course. I have no secrets from Major Gurdon."

The old lawyer passed his silk handkerchief over his forehead, glanced keenly at the Major, and then went on.

"Well, there is no doubt about one thing: a Mr Wrigley, a scheming, money-lending solicitor—rather shady in reputation, but a man who can command plenty of capital—has been buying up every share he could get hold of."

"Then it is a conspiracy," cried Clive.

"Not a doubt about it."

"Then, what to do next. Surely we can have a prosecution."

"Humph! What for? Sort of thing often going on in the money market, I believe. What have you got to prosecute about?"

"I?"

"Yes; you haven't lost. Poor old Praed now, he has something to shout about."

"But scandal, libel, defamation of the property."

"Let those who have lost risk a prosecution if they like. So long as I am your legal adviser, my dear boy, I shall devote myself to keeping you out of litigation."

"But surely you would advise something."

"Yes. Go back to your mine and make all you can, and be careful not to get into trouble over any underground trespassing."

"Well, if I go to the west, here is my neighbour. You'll forgive me, sir?"

"Of course, of course, my boy," said the Major hurriedly.

Mr Belton looked at him searchingly as he went on.

"The shares will recover their position in time, and the sellers will be pretty angry then, of course. There's no doubt about the conspiracy, my boy, but don't you meddle in the matter. We have done all that was necessary to restore confidence. You saw, I suppose, that the letters and advertisements were in the evening papers?"

"Oh yes."

"They'll be in all the morning papers, of course."

"And how long will it be before confidence is restored?"

"Not for long enough, but that will not affect your returns from the mine. But the poor old Doctor; I am sorry that he should have let himself be bitten."

"A great pity," said Clive drily; "but never mind that. You will continue to make inquiries."

"Eh? about the conspiracy? Of course. I have a good man at work—a man who is pretty intimate with the stockbroking set, and I daresay I shall hear more yet."

"There: now let's change the subject. You will dine with us to-night, Belton?"

"Well, you see, my dear boy, I—er—"

"You must," said Clive decisively. "I go back into the country again directly. I have some letters to write now. Seven punctually."

"Seven punctually," said the old lawyer, rising. He was punctual to the minute, and he and the Major got on famously as they chatted over old times, but somehow or other the old gentleman would keep reverting to the losses over the shares sustained by Doctor Praed, with the result that the Major did not enjoy his dinner.

Chapter Twenty Six.

At Bay.

Dinah Gurdon stood for a time grasping the back of a chair, battling with a fit of trembling and the strange sense of dread, which rapidly increased till in the enervation it produced, her eyes half-closed, the light upon the table grew dull, and a soft, many-hued halo spread round the flame as she was about to sink helpless upon the floor.

Then mind mastered matter, and with an effort she drew a long catching breath, her eyes opened widely with the pupils dilated in the now clear light. Then she looked wildly at the door and window, whose panes seen against the darkness merely reflected the comfortable kitchen interior, where she stood. But all the same she felt sure that there was a face looking in at her—a face she knew only too well.

Then, tearing away her eyes from where they had rested upon the lower corner, fascinated and held for a time in spite of her will, she turned and gazed at the door, which she now saw was unfastened, while the bolts at top and bottom showed plainly in the light, waiting to be shot into their sockets.

Four steps would have taken her there; but that face was watching her, and she felt fixed to the spot, her heart beating with heavy throbs, and something seeming to force the conviction upon her that the moment she stirred to

go to that door, her watcher would spring to it, fling it open, and seize her.

So strong was this feeling upon her that for minutes she could not stir. Then fresh imaginings crowded in upon her brain, and she saw that the face she had conjured up was no longer there at the window, but there was a faint rustling outside, and a low sighing, whistling noise, and a regular pat—pat—pat as of footsteps.

The feeling of enervation came back, and the light grew dim and obscured by dancing rays, while the latch of the door appeared to quiver, slowly rise up and up, to stop at the highest point, and the door slowly moved towards her.

“Imagination!” she exclaimed, and in an instant she had darted to the door, thrust in both bolts, and then drawn down the window-blind, to stand now breathing heavily but feeling master of herself, and ready to act again in any way which she might find necessary.

The pallor had gone now from her cheeks, which became flushed by a couple of red spots, as she felt irritated and indignant at her childish fears. But all the same she could not conceal from herself the fact that there was peril; and now, full of energy, she went quickly from room to room and made sure that every window and door was really secure, before hurrying up to the different chambers and examining the casement fastenings. She then descended to the lower floor of the little fortress to stand and think, asking herself whether her alarms were childish and only the effect of imagination after all.

But she was fain to confess that they were not. She had too strong grounds in fact for her dread, and the incidents of the previous night and that evening showed her that the man she dreaded was as unscrupulous as he was daring.

At last came bitter repentance for her weakness. Had she summoned up the courage to speak, and told all to her father, he would have taken steps to guard her from future danger.

She shuddered at the thought, and the colour in her cheeks deepened as she conjured up scenes such as she had heard of in the past.

Too late now; and she felt this, but that if the trouble were repeated she could not have acted otherwise. And now it was of the present that she had to think. There was no help to be expected from Martha, but, in the energy of despair, she went to the woman’s side, shook her, and spoke loudly with lips close to her ear. Then fetching water, she bathed the sleeper’s temples, for, rid of the sensation that her acts were watched, she worked with spirit.

But all was in vain; Martha slept heavily, her breathing sounding regular and deep.

Two or three times over Dinah ceased her efforts, and stood listening, startled by the different sounds of the storm gathering in the mountains. But she grew firmer now minute by minute, and quietly analysed each sound she heard. This was only the drip of the rain from the eaves on the stones below, although it resembled wonderfully the fall of feet. That was no rustling of a body forcing a way through the shrubs, but the work of a gust of wind bending down the little cypress, and making the clematis stream out upon the black darkness.

There was every token of a rough night in the hills, for ever and anon after a lull, the wind hissed and whistled at the windows, and rumbled in the chimneys after the fashion familiar in winter. But as she told herself, there was nothing in this to fear.

Feeling that Martha must be left to finish her heavy sleep, and after seeing that she could not injure herself if alone, Dinah went back with the light to the little drawing-room, where, after an uneasy glance at the window, she satisfied herself that she could not, by any possibility, be watched, and sat down to read.

The effort was vain: not a line of the page was understood, but scenes and faces were called up. Clive’s looking lovingly into her eyes, with that frank, manly gaze, before which her own fell and her cheeks reddened. Then that meeting on the mountain path, when on her way home and alone, for the dog had left her and gone off in pursuit of a hare.

She shuddered as she recalled it all, and hurriedly forced herself to think of her father and his anger that morning against Clive, who was, of course, all that was true and just—her lover—her protector—to whom some day she could tell everything—some day when safe in his arms and quite at rest. It was impossible now.

Her thoughts went to him more and more persistently, as she wondered where he then was—whether he was thinking about her—when he would be back.

The book fell into her lap and glided to the carpet with a loud rap, and quick as thought her hand was extended to the lamp. The next moment she sat in darkness, listening, and half repentant of her act. For though she had sought the enveloping cloak of darkness, she shivered as it closed her in.

For that was not wind or rain, neither was it the effect of imagination. She could not be deceived this time. The latch of the kitchen door had been raised, and had given forth that click with which she had been familiar from childhood. True, it had sounded faintly, but it was unmistakable. The room door was open, so was that leading from the little passage into the kitchen, for she had left both wide, that she might hear if Martha stirred.

She drew a breath of relief the next moment, for she felt that she had not heard their servant stir, but all the same she must have risen, and gone to try whether the door was fast.

Quickly and silently she stole into the kitchen, and felt the way to the table. “Martha!” was on her lips, but she did not utter the word, only extending her hand as she heard a deep, low, sighing breath. The next instant her fingers rested upon the woman’s shoulder, and she knew that there had been no change in position. A feeling of suffocation attacked her, as she held her breath, and listened to a repetition of the sound, for the latch was softly raised now,

and the door creaked as it was evidently pressed from outside.

This was repeated, and then all was black darkness and silence once more, while poor Rollo, who would only a few hours before have loudly given warning of danger and torn at his chain to come to the protection of his mistress, lay sleeping his last beneath the newly-turned earth.

Would he dare to break in?

She was alone.

A question and answer which sent a chill through her: but despair gave her courage, and she stood there pondering as the door creaked heavily once more.

Where would he try to force an entrance? she asked herself, and then, feeling how frail were the fastenings, she silently made for the foot of the staircase, closed the door, bolted it, and ascended to the little landing.

The next moment, her hand was upon her bedroom latch, but altering her mind she passed into her father's room, and closed and locked the door, to stand listening, her mind fixed upon the drawing-room window beneath where she stood.

It would be there, beneath the little verandah, she thought; and extending her hand to touch the wall and guide herself to the window, her fingers encountered something which sent a thrill through her, for she touched the Major's double gun standing in the corner formed by a little cabinet, where he had stood and forgotten it; and in the drawer of that cabinet there were cartridges, for she had seen him place them there only a week or two before.

Continuing her way, she crept to the window to listen, feeling sure that she would hear if any attempt was made below in the verandah, but clinging to the hope that the nocturnal visitor would go on finding that his plan was checkmated.

She was not long left in doubt, for a rustling sound told her that the clematis was being torn away from one of the rough fir-posts which supported the verandah roof; and the next minute she was conscious by the sound that some one had reached the thatch, and was drawing himself up the yielding slope.

For a moment Dinah was giddy once more with dread and despair. The next she was strong again in the wild desire to protect herself—for her own, and for Clive Reed's sake; and stepping softly back, she drew out the drawer of the cabinet and felt that the cartridges were there. Then catching up the gun, she rapidly opened the breech and inserted a couple of the charges, closed it, and fully cocked the piece, to stand with it at the ready, its muzzle directed to the window, which showed darker in the middle where a grating sound was heard.

She knew it at once; a knife was forcing back the leadwork, so that a diamond-shaped pane might be taken out by the man who believed this room to be empty.

She could see nothing, but it was all plain enough; the grating ceased, the pane was eased out by the knife, a rustling told that there was a hand being thrust in, and she heard the fastening yield, and the iron frame of the casement creak as it was drawn outward. Then followed a heavy breath, the sound of some one drawing himself up, and strong now, at bay in her own defence, Dinah Gurdon's finger pressed the trigger, as she still held the gun at the ready with its butt beneath her arm.

Chapter Twenty Seven.

For Clive's Sake.

"For Clive's sake," she said to herself, as the charge exploded, and the recoil of the loosely held gun rent the bodice of her dress and jerked her violently backward.

There was a savage snarl, mingled with the report of the piece, and followed instantly by the tinkling of falling glass, a crushing sound of a gliding body, and then a dull concussion upon the stones beneath, where there was a panting and struggling, accompanied by a hissing as of breath drawn in agony; and then the rushing of the wind as it tore round the house, while within all was silence, as if of the dead.

Dinah stood in the chamber holding the gun, motionless and with a cold perspiration bedewing her face as she breathed the dank, clinging, hydrogenous fumes of the burnt powder. Every sense was on the strain, and her fingers rested now upon the second trigger as she waited, firm and determined to fire again in her defence should her would-be assailant climb up.

It was for Clive's sake. She was his now—his very own; and in her excited, nerve-strung state she was ready to defend herself to the last, and die sooner than that man, her horror and despair, should again clasp her in his arms.

But no fresh sound arose as she waited in the black darkness grasping everything now. How that Sturgess must have deeply laid his plans, and in revenge for a savage seizure made by the dog, as she remembered with a shudder, first poisoned the poor brute, and then somehow have contrived to drug the tea of which Martha had partaken that evening.

She shivered again, as she thought of how closely this man must have watched everything that went on at the cottage, and how often he must have been near at hand at times when she knew it not. Then he must, in the knowledge of her father's absence, have selected the Major's chamber as a place where he could obtain entrance

unheard, little thinking that Fate would inspire his child to select that as a place of safety.

And all the while Dinah stood there motionless, a yard farther from the open window, drawing her breath at intervals, her heart beating, and every sense still upon the strain, as she waited ready to repel the next attack.

Twice over a pang shot through her, and she felt that the time had come, for there was a rustling sound below, and in imagination she saw the dark opening grow more dark. But the sound died away again, and she knew that it was only a sudden gust of wind sweeping the rain-drops before it. And at last a new horror assailed her. That man—Sturgess, she was sure—had been in the act of climbing to the room and she had fired.

Of course she knew all that, but somehow in her excitement—her exaltation of spirit in her defence of all that was dear to her in life—it seemed part of a horrible dream, a something which could not have been true.

But it was true! She had fired and heard the cry of agony, the crushing of the thatch, and the heavy fall, and writhing on the stones beneath, followed by that awful silence during which she had waited in expectation for it to be broken by his coming on again.

But it had not been broken, and she knew why now. The thought came to her like a revelation—Michael Sturgess was lying there, beneath that window, either grievously wounded or dead.

A vertigo seized her, and she nearly dropped the gun. But Dinah's nerves had been too tightly strung to give way now; and once more mastering her weakness, she walked bravely to the window, hesitated and then leaned out, starting back in horror, for she was touched.

But it was only the edge of the iron frame of the casement swung to by the wind; and as she leaned out and looked down, she held her breath and listened, expecting to hear some movement—some slight stir. But there below in the dense darkness all was perfectly still; no movement, no hard-drawn breath as of one in agony, but a silence so horrible that she staggered back to throw the gun upon the bed, and press her hand down to try and allay the laboured breathing of her heart.

She could bear it no longer. She felt that she must go down and see. Evil as the man was, he might be still alive, and she might save him. If not, she must know whether he was dead, for the suspense was infinitely worse than the knowledge could possibly be.

In a state of maddening excitement now, she unfastened the door, and went down the dark stairs, pausing for a brief moment in the kitchen, where a heavy breathing told her that Martha still slept her drugged sleep; and then going to the front door she softly and quickly drew back the bolts, and turned the key, when the door yielded, as she grasped the handle, with a faint cracking sound.

Then, nerved by her excitement, she stepped through the porch into the outer darkness, stooping down and peering before her in her endeavour to make out the prostrate body she expected to see lying prone.

But nothing was visible, and gathering courage and calmness she went farther, walking to and fro over the spot where he must have fallen, without result, till, satisfied that the worst had not happened, and full of hope that he had fled after the shot, she hurried back to re-enter the house, stepping quickly over the stones to the little porch, and right into a pair of arms.

With a wild cry of horror she struck at the man with all her might, with the result that there arose a yell of rage and pain. A brief struggle followed, and in her frantic efforts to free herself, Dinah tore herself away. Then turned and fled blindly, anywhere, so as to escape.

But Sturgess was close behind.

"Stop!" he cried hoarsely. "It's of no use now, little one. Hah, I have you at last."

She was rushing up the rocky garden, and he was close behind and caught her by the shoulders, but with a cry of despair she flung herself side-wise, and he stumbled past her, and fell heavily, uttering an angry oath.

She turned and fled downward toward the river, tripping again and again over the scattered stones and bushes, and making such bad progress that Sturgess had time to gather himself up, hear where she was forcing her way along, and followed wildly in pursuit.

But, mad now with fear and horror, weak too from her exertions and the enervation caused by the dread of being overtaken, Dinah sped on, meaning to run to left or right, along the river edge, but taking neither way; for in her despair, she ran straight into the river, wading right out, so as to try and gain the shelter of the rocks on the further side.

It was shallow where she waded, but she knew that beneath the rocks there were deep holes, where the great trout lay; and she felt that she might step right into one of these. But the cold clinging embraces of the water were better than the clasp of this ruffian, and without a moment's hesitation she pressed on to gain her haven of safety, and then stopped short with the water nearly to her waist, and pressing softly against her, to bear her away: for she heard a loud ejaculation from the path she had left, and then her pursuer's heavy steps, as he ran for a few yards downwards, and then came back and ran upward, and returned.

"Curse her! Which way has she gone?" came plainly to her ears, followed by the rippling sound of the river, as it ran swiftly on.

She knew that Sturgess could not see her, for he was evidently listening, and the slightest movement would have

betrayed the fact that she was standing there only a few yards away.

Two or three times the force of the river was so great that she felt as if she must yield to it; but she stood firm and then felt a fresh chill, for the man snarled out an oath, and the lapping and splashing sound made her turn and wade a little farther, for she felt that her enemy had made her out, and was wading in. But in another moment a savage ejaculation of pain made the truth known, for Sturgess was kneeling down and bathing the wound he had received.

She grasped it all plainly enough now, for from time to time he uttered a low groan, and then rose up and staggered away over the stones, while her heart leaped for joy, as she knew that he was growing weak and faint from exertion.

From this moment everything became plain to her—made known in the darkness by the sounds. She could see nothing, but she knew as well as if she had been by his side that the man was painfully staggering up the stony slope along by the river edge, as if making for the mine. But she dared not move, only try to stand firm against the pressure of the water, and wait till the last sound had reached her ear. Then, and then only, did she stir, but only to wade upward a little into shallower water, where the pressure was not so great. For the river was her protector, and she knew that Sturgess might come back.

A full hour must have passed before, stiff and chilled, she waded slowly out, and crept up the path to the cottage, the water streaming from her as she walked, till she reached the porch, crept in trembling and secured the door, and then did not rest till she had reached her own room to throw herself upon her knees in thankfulness for her escape.

But there was no rest that night. Just at daybreak she went down to find that Martha still slept, and shuddering, lest the events of the night should be known, she went into her father's chamber and replaced the gun in its old corner; looked out in the cold grey morning, and saw that it was possible for the absent pane of glass to be attributed to the work of the wind blowing about a loosened casement. Lastly, there was something else for which she sought in the cold grey light of morning—traces of the gun-shot wound.

There were none visible. If there had been, a sufficiency of rain had fallen to wash all away, and leaving the window ajar, Dinah was in the act of turning back, pondering upon her position and shrinking from telling her father more than ever. She determined that Martha must know nothing, when she caught a glimpse of her pale, troubled face in the glass, and then uttered a faint cry of horror, for her light dress was horribly stained about the breast and shoulder, showing plainly that Sturgess must have received a severe wound, whose traces had been transferred to her when he had seized her in his arms.

"How can I speak!—how can I tell all!" she moaned, as she hurried guiltily back to her own room to remove the still damp and draggled garments. "It is too horrible. Oh," she cried, fiercely now in her desperation, "if he would but die!"

"Oh, my dear, how pale and white you do look," said Martha at breakfast-time; and Dinah gazed at her wildly, as if in dread lest she knew all. "I feel as sure as sure that we both had something that didn't agree with us yesterday, though I can't say for the moment what. Yes, my dear, I didn't really know how it was, but I felt poorly all day yesterday, and grew so drowsy at last that I went off fast asleep. Did you come and find me then?"

"Yes, I came and found you," said Dinah dreamily, as the whole scene of the previous night came back.

"Of course it was very strange, but it was so kind of you not to wake me. But I'm better now—all but a headache. Does yours ache too?"

"Yes, Martha, badly," said Dinah, with a sigh, as for a moment she pondered about taking the old woman into her confidence.

"I thought it did. There; have a good cup of tea. You'll be better then. Will master be back to-day?"

"I hope so, Martha," said Dinah, with a sigh; and then hope came to revive her once more. For he would come and bring news of Clive, who must know all, and then there would be safety—protection, and no more of this abject fear.

In the afternoon news reached the cottage that there had been an accident at the mine, where early that morning Mr Sturgess, the foreman, had fallen down one of the lower shafts, and severely cut and injured his left shoulder.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

A New Horror.

Letters reached the cottage at frequent intervals after the Major's return, in which as he breathed in every line his intense affection, Clive fretted at the chain which still bound him to London.

For, as he explained at length, a heavy blow had been struck at the mining company, bringing ruin upon those who had shown a want of faith, though the stability of the property was not really stirred. The rumour which had so rapidly spread had had its influence though, and time would be needed before many people would believe in the truth, and it was for the protection of the property, and to save other shareholders from following the panic-stricken party, that Clive felt compelled to be in town.

Then, too, he sent a shiver through Dinah, as he wrote to her about his troubles at the mine.

"Misfortunes never come singly," he said. "As I daresay you have heard, my foreman Sturgess has met with a nasty accident, and Robson, my clerk, sends me word that he has been delirious and wandering a good deal. He fell down

one of the inner shafts where he could have no business, and ought to be thankful that he escaped with his life. Now I do not want to be exacting, darling, but if you could do any little thing to soften the man's misfortune, I should be glad. He is an ill-conditioned fellow, but he is my employé, and I want to do my duty by him as far as I can."

Dinah, in her agony of spirit, wanted to rush off to her own room and hide herself from the sight of all. For this appeal seemed more than she could bear; but the Major was present, and at that moment spoke about the contents of his own letter.

"Reed wants us to see and help his foreman, who is lying at one of the cottages ill from a fall. We must do all we can, my dear. He's a good fellow, is Clive. Very thoughtful of others. Dear, dear, if I had only been a little more strong-minded."

"Have you suffered so very heavily, father?" said Dinah, who forced herself to be calm and speak.

"Suffered! Oh, yes, my dear, in mind as well as pocket. You were right, my child; he is all that is honourable and true. But it is very humiliating—very lowering to the spirit of an old soldier."

"To find that you have mistrusted him, father?"

"Er—er—yes, my dear; but—but—there I will be frank with you. I did not mean that."

"Father, you are keeping something from me."

"Yes, my dear, I am," said the Major hurriedly; "but Dinah, my dear, I have not accepted yet. The fact is, I have lost all, my dear—at least all but a beggarly pittance saved out of the wreck; and Clive—God bless him for a true gentleman!"

Dinah's arms were round her father's neck, as the love-light shone in her eyes, and she laid her cheek upon his shoulder.

"Well, yes, my dear, he is; and I suppose with all his simplicity and want of ostentation he is very rich. His house in town is—ah, well, never mind that! He insists upon giving me as many shares in the mine as I fooled away."

"But you cannot accept them from him, dear father," cried Dinah, raising her head, and looking at him anxiously.

"No, my darling, I told him so; that it would be a cruel humiliation; and that I would never accept them."

"Yes; that was quite right, dearest," said Dinah, with her eyes flashing.

"But he said—"

"Yes, what did he say?"

"That I was foolishly punctilious, that I was going to give him something of more value than all the riches in the world, and that I refused to take a fitting present from him."

The warm blood glowed in Dinah's cheeks, and there was a look of pride and happiness in her eyes which were gradually softened by the gathering tears.

"Yes, but you cannot take this, father dear!" she said softly. "It would be humiliation to us both. If we are very poor, and Clive loves me, he will love my dear father too. You must not take this, dear. It would be doubly painful after mistrusting him as you did."

"Then I have done right," cried the Major cheerfully.

"You have refused."

"Yes. I was sorely tempted, my darling, for I felt how I was bringing you down to poverty; that I was no longer in a position to—to—Oh, hang it, Dinah," cried the old man, with the tears in his eyes, "I would sooner march through a storm of bullets than go through this."

"Clive loves me for myself, dearest father," said Dinah, drawing his convulsed face down upon her bosom, to hide the weak tears of bitterness; "and it is not as if you were living in London. Our wants are so few here, and there are the few hundred pounds which you have often told me came from my dearest mother."

"No, no; that could not be touched," cried the Major, very firmly now. "That was to be your wedding portion, child."

"There is no question of money between us, father," said Dinah proudly. "I tell you again Clive loves me for myself, and there is a wedding portion here within my heart that can never fail. No, dearest, you cannot take this gift from my husband. You are rich in yourself as an English gentleman, and with your honourable name."

A spasm shot through the Major, and his face contracted and looked older.

"There," continued Dinah, "that is all at an end. Only we will economise, and live more simply, dear. But tell me I am right."

"Always right, my darling," cried the Major. "There, you have taken a heavy load from my breast. Hang it, yes, pet. We have our home and garden, and there is my preserve. A bit of bread of old Martha's best, and a dish of trout of my own catching, or a bird or two. Bah! who says we're poor?"

"Who would not envy us for being so rich?" cried Dinah, smiling.

"To be sure. And when my lord of the mines comes down," cried the Major merrily, "we'll be haughty with him, and let him see that it is a favour to be allowed to partake of our hermitage fare, eh?"

"Yes, yes," cried Dinah, with childlike glee, though her eyes were still wet with tears. "But, father dear," she faltered, "there is one thing I want to say."

"Yes, my darling?"

"This man who is lying ill."

"Yes, yes. We must do all we can."

"No, father," she said, speaking more firmly now. "We cannot go to him."

"Eh! Why not?"

"Because—because," faltered Dinah, with her voice sounding husky. Then growing strong, and her eyes looking hard and glittering, "Soon after he came down here, he began to follow me about."

"What! The scoundrel!" roared the Major.

"And one day he spoke to me—and insulted me."

"The dog—the miserable hound. But—here, Dinah—why was I not told of this?"

"Because, dear—I thought it better—I felt that I could not speak—I—"

"Ah, but Clive shall know of this. But you have told him? Why has he not dismissed the hound?"

"No, I have not told Clive, father—not any one. Some day I must tell him—but not now."

"Really, my darling!" cried the Major, whose face was flushed, and the veins were starting in his forehead.

"Father, this is very, very painful to me, your child," she pleaded; "and I beg—I pray that you will say no more."

"What! not have him punished?"

"No; not now. He is punished, dearest. But we cannot go to his help."

"Help," cried the Major furiously. "I should kill him."

Dinah laid her hands upon his breast, and at last he bent down and kissed her.

"May I tell Clive when he comes?"

"No, dearest," said Dinah, in quite a whisper, and with her face very pale now, while her voice was almost inaudible; "that must come from me."

The Major frowned, and kissed his child's pale face, prior to making another grievous mistake in his troubled life.

Chapter Twenty Nine.

The Explosion.

There was joy in the little cottage by the swiftly running river one day about a fortnight later, when a shadow was cast across the window; and with a cry of delight Dinah looked up from her work and saw that Clive Reed had approached silently, and was gazing in.

The next moment she was nestling in his strong arms, responding to his kisses, and feeling once more safe, protected, and that there was nothing more to fear or wish for in life.

"Don't laugh at me," she whispered, as she drew him farther in with the blood flushing in her cheeks, and her hands trembling, lest her abandonment in her ecstasy of delight had been seen.

"Why not?" cried Clive. "I feel as if I could melt away into smiles and laughter—there's a beautiful idea, pet—in the joy I feel at being back—at holding you in these great rough arms, at feeling safe, and that you had not forgotten me and run away with some fine handsome fellow while I was gone."

"Clive!"

"Well, I do. I'm quite boyish—childish—oh, my darling, have I got you here in my arms once more?"

There was no doubt of it, for timid and shrinking now, Dinah kissed him gravely upon the forehead, and then gently and firmly shrank from his strong embrace.

"Where is the Major?" he cried.

"He has taken his satchel and geological hammer, and gone for a long walk."

"Without you?"

"Yes; that is why I said, don't laugh at me, and you stopped me from saying more. Clive—I felt that you would come this morning."

"Ah, and how much sooner I should have been, but for the miserable worry of the company's affairs. There, I will not worry you about that, and I am glad to say that I found Sturgess rapidly getting well. But he had a nasty accident. And how's dear old Martha?"

"Quite well. She has been talking about you and longing to see you every day."

"Bless her. And you. Oh, my darling, you look more beautiful than ever!"

"Clive!"

"You do. More sweet, more lovable. Oh, Dinah, there was never such a happy fellow before. This place is a paradise after grimy old London, and—oh, here is the Major, I can hear his step."

Dinah turned pale.

"That is not his step," she said, as she looked excitedly toward the window.

Clive rose, went to it, and looked out.

"Why, it's Robson," he cried. "Hang it! I hope there is nothing wrong. I'll go and meet him." Before he was outside Dinah was after him, and she hurriedly placed her hand upon his arm.

"Eh? Well, come with me then, pet. I have no secrets from you.—Well, Robson, what's the matter? Sturgess worse?"

"No, sir, but you are wanted over yonder directly."

"Wanted?"

"Yes, sir, there's a party of gentlemen come down."

"What—visitors? Oh, hang them; they want to see the mine, I suppose?"

"No, sir. They say they've come to take possession."

"What?"

"I suppose they're bailiffs, sir."

"And I suppose you're a confounded fool!" cried Clive angrily. "That mine does not owe a penny!"

"One of the gentlemen said he was a shareholder, sir, the principal shareholder, and he gave me his card."

Clive snatched it, and Dinah read the name thereon—

"Mr Wrigley, New Inn, Strand."

"Wrigley?" cried Clive excitedly.

"Yes, sir; and he said he must see you at once."

"All right; I'll come. Wait for me yonder at the corner, Robson; and I beg your pardon for speaking so roughly just now."

"That's nothing, sir. You were cross," said the clerk, smiling; and he walked back down the garden to go and stand watching the trout in the river.

"Don't look so scared, dearest," said Clive tenderly; "there is nothing wrong. I'll tell you briefly what it is. You know there was a scare about the mine—a panic."

"Yes, dear."

"Well, a lot of foolish old friends were frightened—oh, dear me! I'm accusing the Major. Well, there, I can't help it. He did act foolishly. A lot of them, I say, instead of coming to me went and sold their shares, and these were bought up by speculators who have since then been interfering at our board meetings, and wanting to meddle over the management of things. In fact, I was so wroth that I would not go to yesterday's meeting, but determined to come down here and see how things were, and—you know why I came. Now I must go on. I suppose they had their meeting yesterday, and passed some resolution or another; but I'm too big a shareholder to be trifled with, and I'm going to meet these people now and have a row. For they shall have their big dividends, but I'm not going to have any meddlesome fools down here."

"But you will keep your temper, dear, and be calm."

"I'll take your sweet face with me, love, and—why, here's the Major. Ah, my dear old dad, how are you? Good-bye,

Dinah. Come over to the mine with me, sir, and help me to keep my temper; well talk as we go.”

“Of course,” cried the Major. “But look here, my boy—so glad to see you down—I saw a party going to the mine, and I hurried back trusting that one of them might be you.”

“Come along,” cried Clive; and after a quick, tender farewell, he hurried away along the path to the mine, explaining matters to the Major as he went.

On reaching the gate in the hill side, and entering the busy little hive of industry, it was plain that something important was on the way; for the men were all up from the workings, and were evidently listening to one of a party of well-dressed men, who was addressing them, and a buzz of voices arose as Clive, looking very stern now, walked up to the front of the office with his two companions.

“Oh, good morning, Mr Reed,” said the speaker, getting down from a pile of lead pigs.

“Good morning, Mr Wrigley. Well, Jessop, you here?”

The latter gentleman nodded, and Sturgess, who had his arm in a sling, stood close behind him.

“I have been telling the men, Mr Reed, that in consonance with the resolution passed at the board yesterday—”

“In my absence, Mr Wrigley.”

“You had the proper notices, sir,” said the lawyer coldly. “I say in accordance with the resolution passed yesterday, it was determined, in the interests of the ‘White Virgin Mine,’ to have a complete change of management.”

“Indeed!” said Clive. “But I, as the greatest shareholder, object.”

“You cannot, sir. I and my friends are greater shareholders, and have the majority with us. Out of respect to your late father’s memory we have made a concession to your brother.”

“Jessop!” cried Clive.

“Yes, sir. You will give up everything into his hands, for he will reside here and take the management, helped and counselled by Mr Sturgess, who now becomes co-manager of the property.”

“And I?” said Clive, who was perfectly aghast at the petard sprung beneath his feet.

“Will clear out at once.”

It was Jessop Reed who said these words brutally; and, as the brother’s eyes met in a long piercing gaze, Clive Reed knew that his enemies had him firmly by the hip, and that the next minute he must fall.

Chapter Thirty.

After the Encounter.

“But, my dear boy, why not have made a fight for it?” cried the Major, as he perspired profusely in his efforts to keep up with Clive, who was striding about the garden.

“I’m going to fight for it, sir,” cried Clive impatiently; “but these matters are not settled by brute force and bayonets.”

“Well, well, no,” cried the Major; “but you gave up almost without a word.”

“Everything was against me, sir. Come: you, as a soldier, know that I was beaten by a clever bit of strategy, and that I must meet the position by something of the same kind.”

“Yes, but you were in possession.”

“I was, sir, but a majority of the shareholders decided that my management was bad, and appointed another man, so I am bound to give up.”

“But not without a struggle.”

“I am going to struggle, sir, but carefully. I cannot afford to fight against what is partly my own property.”

“But you had a great number of shares, my dear boy.”

“I did hold nearly half, sir, and I felt it my duty to help friends who had lost, and—”

“You have ruined yourself to help me!” cried the Major passionately.

“Nonsense! there is no question of ruin in this case, sir. It is only a business of the management. I ought to have known that my brother would never sit down quietly under his disappointment; but I never thought he would be partner in such a scheme as this.”

“Then you think it was your brother who was the man that set the rumour afloat?” cried the Major.

"From his connection with, and knowledge of stocks, I now feel convinced it was."

"The man whom I made my guest."

"Yes," said Clive. "He was down here, evidently as a spy, and this fellow—this solicitor, Wrigley, seems to be an old friend of his. Nice way to speak of my own brother, sir."

"Your own brother!" cried the Major, in a towering passion; "he is a scoundrel, sir; I'd disown him, sir. He's my enemy, sir. He has ruined me as well as you."

"No, no, no, my dear sir. I tell you there is no question of ruin in the matter. There is the mine, and it is so enormously rich that the shareholders cannot suffer. The annoyance is, being kicked out of one's position in the management; but, as we school-boys used to say,—'two can play at that game;' and perhaps at the next board meeting I shall be able to upset Mr Jessop. Why, the scoundrel must have been in league with Sturgess, and that accounts for this fellow's insolence to me on several occasions."

"Of course; and a nice diabolical scheme they have hatched between them. But you shall overthrow them, Clive, my boy, that you shall. Oh, I see it all now, unbusiness-like as I am. They had that report spread, frightened the shareholders into a panic, and then bought up everything."

"Yes, sir, that was their *modus operandi*."

"And they caught all the fools, including my stupid old self," growled the Major. "But wait a bit. I daresay I shall have a settlement with Master Jessop Reed one of these days, and when that day does come, let him look out."

"No, Major, you will leave this to me," said Clive quietly. "Now, then, I'm going to throw over this piece of worry, and have a calm quiet day with our darling. As I tell you, it does not interfere with my monetary position in the least, and it will save me a great deal of hard work; but to-morrow morning I must go back to town and see the other shareholders, for this state of affairs ought not to continue, though I must own that Sturgess is a clever manager, and does his work well."

The Major unslung a satchel from his shoulder at the door.

"Why, you have been carrying that heavy lot of specimens all the time," said Clive, smiling.

"Yes, I forgot all about them," said the Major; and he tossed the contents out into a basket in the tiny hall.

"Lead ore," said Clive, looking curiously at a little block of dull grey stone.

"Yes, there's plenty of that stuff on my wild bit of mountain land. It all interests me, and of course much more since I have been a shareholder in the mine—I mean," said the Major hastily, "since I was once."

"You are, Major. Once for all, no more words about that. A certain number more shares have been transferred to you, and they stand as yours in the company's books. Not another word. Ah, Dinah! I seem to have neglected you sadly. Now, no more business; the whole day is ours. To-morrow morning I must be off back to town."

The parting was sad enough the next morning quite early, for, to Dinah, it was as if she were losing her protector for many days to come, and she could not drive away the forebodings of looming troubles as she clung to Clive after accompanying him with the Major for some distance along the mountain track leading to Blinkdale. But Clive was cheerful and bright, and at last he tore himself away, insisting upon their returning, as he would have to hasten on.

"Take care of her, Major," he cried, "and I'll send you plenty of letters. Keep a good heart—it will all come right in the end. Now—goodbye."

He sprang away, and they stood watching him as he stopped from time to time to wave his hand before plunging down into a hollow, and disappearing from their sight.

They turned then, and walked back in silence to the cottage, each too much occupied with painful thoughts to attempt to speak, for a shadow seemed to have fallen over their lives which was gradually darkening; and there were moments when Dinah looked forward, and then clung spasmodically to her father's arm, for he broke out into angry mutterings from time to time, and as she looked in his face she could see that it was black with suppressed passion.

At last they reached the river path, and the Major broke out:

"I see it all plainly enough," he cried. "Clive was right; that scoundrel of a brother was down here as a spy, and, curse him, I entertained him for his sake. He has won round that fellow Sturgess, and they think they are going to do as they like; but if I am to be a shareholder, confound them! they shall find that I can be a sharp one too, so let them beware."

Chapter Thirty One.

Fox and Wolf.

The days went by slowly and sadly. Letters came regularly enough, but they were not hopeful, for Clive told how he was hemmed in by difficulties which prevented his stirring; and, as he said, it would be madness to do anything which would involve legal proceedings and injure the prospects of the mine. There was nothing for it but to wait: for

Wrigley had laid his plans only too well, and he and Jessop had everything in their own hands.

To the Major he said emphatically that as far as money matters were concerned there was nothing to mind, for the new management was bound for their own sake to do their best, as any lapse and falling off of the returns would be fatal to their position.

To Dinah there were tender breathings of devotion, and the assurance that though absent he was with her always in spirit; and at the first opportunity he would run down.

Ten days had passed, and one afternoon the Major had encountered Robson, whom he was passing with a short nod; but, after glancing round to see whether they were observed, the young man followed the Major and said quickly—

“I’m kept on at the mine, sir, because I know so much of the books, and they can’t very well get along without me; but you looked at me so differently to what you used, sir, that I thought I’d speak.”

“Yes, sir: you belong to the enemy’s camp,” said the Major sharply.

“No, I don’t, sir, though I’m there, and I wish to goodness Mr Clive Reed was back, for Sturgess is unbearable with his bullying ways; and as for Mr Jessop, he’s no more like his brother than chalk’s like cheese. Think there’s any chance of Mr Clive coming back?”

“Yes, my lad, every chance, if we’re true to him,” cried the Major; “and I beg your pardon, Mr Robson, I thought you were one of the scoundrels. I’m very glad to find you are not.”

“I thank you, sir,” cried the young man; “and if you write to Mr Clive Reed, please tell him so long as I’m in the mine office the books shall be kept just as he wished, so that any one can see at a glance how matters stand.”

“And I thank you too, Mr Robson. I, as a shareholder, am very glad that we have so good a man in your administrative post. But tell me, how are the returns?”

“Wonderful, sir. They increase every day. The profits will be enormous.”

“And is this man Sturgess doing his duty?”

“Oh! yes, sir, splendidly,” said Robson, laughing. “By his new agreement he is to get a percentage upon the metal smelted. I don’t like him, but there’s no mistake in his working.”

“Humph, that’s right,” growled the Major.

“And now, sir, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll go, for if it was known that I talked about the mine affairs, I should be packed off; and for Mr Clive Reed’s sake I want to stay.”

“Right: good day. I daresay we shall run up against each other again.”

They parted, and none too soon, for, hammer in hand, the Major had just plunged down into a gully when Robson caught sight of a tiny cloud of smoke rising above a ridge before him.

Quick as thought he threw himself down among the heather, and lay peering between two tufts, till Jessop came into sight directly after, puffing away at a big cigar as he walked sharply along the track, passing the spot where the clerk lay, and evidently going in the direction of the cottage.

Robson looked uneasy, and his forehead began to wrinkle with the thoughts which entered his brain. He was puzzled at first; then suspicious; and at last determined.

He waited until Jessop was well out of sight, and with his mind made up, he was about to scramble to his feet, but he dropped down again, feeling sure he must have been seen, for he was conscious of a figure higher up the slope, coming slowly towards him; and soon after Sturgess, with his arm still in a sling, came close by, went down to the shelf-track, and there seated himself in a nook amongst some ferns. This forced the young clerk to slowly worm himself along among the heath and whortleberry tufts for a couple of hundred yards before the rising ground was well between them, when he went off at a sharp walk in the direction taken by the Major.

Meanwhile Jessop had gone on smoking heavily till he reached the river side, where he stopped gazing down into the sparkling water, evidently thinking deeply, and drawing hard at his cigar, till it was nearly done, when he threw it to fall with a loud hiss into the stream.

Then, with a quiet, satisfied aspect he went on for a few steps, and turned up the tiny gully hard by the Major’s garden.

Fortune favoured him, for Dinah was seated in the shady porch working; and she started up in alarm as he came close up.

“Don’t be frightened,” he said, with a smile, and holding out his hand. “Surely you have not forgotten me?”

“No,” said Dinah, recovering herself, though her heart beat heavily from apprehension. “You called here once before.”

“To be sure I did; but you will shake hands?”

“As a friend of Mr Clive Reed, under the present circumstances, surely, sir, it is better not,” she replied with dignity.

"Sir—under the present circumstances," he cried bitterly. "The old story. Blackguard again. Ah," he said, with a stamp of the foot, "is that man to go through the whole of his life spreading malicious slanders about his brother?"

Dinah was silent.

"Then you will not shake hands with one who spared no effort to get himself appointed to stay down here—whose sole thought has been of her whom he met once—only once—but whose impression was fixed so deeply upon his heart that ever since he has thought of her night and day."

Dinah rose and drew back into the doorway, looking at him with contempt.

"Is this part of some melodrama, Mr Jessop Reed?" she said, "or do you imagine that you are speaking to a weak rustic girl?"

"I am speaking the truth—blunderingly, perhaps," he cried excitedly, "but in the best way I can. I wonder that I am not dumb before you. How can you be so cruel. You must have seen how you impressed me when I was down here before. That feeling has grown into an overpowering passion. Dinah Gurdon," he cried, catching her hand, "I came down hereto live—to love you. I cannot help it."

"And you know that I am your brother's betrothed," she said wildly.

"I know that without doubt he has taken advantage of his position here to try and delude you, as he has deluded other poor girls again and again; but you must know the truth. He is not fit to touch your hand—no, not even to stand in your presence. Hush! let me speak. I know all this is cruelly sudden, but you would forgive me if you knew what I have suffered since I saw you last. Dinah, dearest Dinah, give me some little ray of hope to take away with me. You are too beautiful to be cruel—too gentle to send me away despairing. Ah, you are relenting! A word only, and I will go away patiently, and ready to wait till you know me better."

"I never could know you better than I do at present," said Dinah firmly, and quietly withdrawing her hand.

"Ah, then I may hope?" he cried.

"For what, sir?—an increase in my feeling of contempt? Your brother spared you, but I formed my own estimate of your nature, and it is true."

"I—I don't understand you," he whispered, "only that your words give me intense pain."

"I know, too, my father's estimate of your character. Shall I tell you what he said?"

"If you will. It is joy to hear you speak," he cried, as he tried to catch her hand again.

"He said, sir, that you were a scoundrel."

"Of course," cried Jessop, with a bitter laugh, "from my brother's slanders."

"Did your brother slander you when he told me that you married his betrothed?" cried Dinah indignantly, her eyes speaking her disgust. "Should I slander you, sir, if I told you that your words to me—words from a married man, to one whom you know to be his promised wife, are an insult? Have the goodness to go, sir, before my father returns, or I will not be answerable for the consequences. Ah!"

She rushed past Jessop, forcing him on one side, for the Major, warned by Robson, had hurried back, and was coming up the path with his stick quivering in his grasp.

"Don't—don't, father," she panted in her excitement, "for my sake. I have said enough."

The Major's face was purple with anger, but he did not speak, only raised his quivering stick, and pointed down toward the pathway, while Dinah clung to his arm.

Jessop shrugged his shoulders, uttered a contemptuous laugh, and calmly took out his case, selected and lit a cigar, closed the case with a snap, pocketed it, and walked by them smoking, insultingly contriving to send a puff of tobacco into the Major's face as he passed.

The next minute he was on the shelf path with his face convulsed with fury; and he walked on backward toward the mine, biting off pieces of the cigar, and spitting them out savagely.

"That's it, is it?" he snarled. "Well, we can soon tame all that. He won't come back here, and all that is vapour. Pretty indignation; but a woman is weak. She knows I want her, and she'll dream about it, and grow softer till the siege comes to an end. For it shall come to an end, and in my way, my lady. I never fairly attacked a girl yet without winning; and my pretty, sweet darling shall go on her knees to me yet, and what do you mean by that?"

"I want to talk to you, guv'nor," said Sturgess, who had suddenly clapped him roughly on the shoulder.

"What is it, then? And, confound you, don't you forget your place, sir."

"No fear. I've done your dirty work, and helped you to get your position here."

"And your own," cried Jessop, with a sneer.

"Oh yes, that's all right; but I'm not going to have you ride roughshod over me in every way."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"That you've got to keep away from the cottage yonder. I'm not going to have you poaching on my preserves."

"What do you mean?"

"That Dinah Gurdon's mine—my lass; and that I'd break the neck of any man who came between us two."

Jessop looked at the man in astonishment for a few minutes, and then burst into a mocking laugh.

"You!" he cried. "Oh, this is too rich."

"What!" cried Sturgess, who was black with fury.

"You be damned!" cried Jessop; and rudely thrusting the man aside, making him wince as he touched his wounded arm, strode away.

Chapter Thirty Two.

In a Flash.

It was a curious blending of the bitter and the sweet when Clive Reed came down to the Blinkdale Moor. To a man of his temperament, it was maddening to find himself completely supplanted at the mine—where Jessop reigned supreme, when Wrigley did not come down; and in spite of the past the young engineer would have insisted upon frequent inspection of the place and statements as to the proceedings, but he dared not go, for at his next visit the Major had excitedly told him of all that had taken place with Jessop, and also of Dinah's complaint of insult received from Sturgess.

"I promised her that I would leave it to her to tell, my dear boy, but it's like going into action—one does not care to begin, but the moment one's blood is up, one doesn't know where to stop."

"No," said Clive, with his brow contracting. "The scoundrel, the scoundrel!"

"And that brother of yours is the worst. Why, good heavens, is he mad with conceit as well as brazen wickedness? What does he take my darling for—some silly country wench to whom he has only to throw the handkerchief for her to fall on her knees at his feet?"

"Don't talk about it, please, sir!" cried Clive huskily. "I find that my bad passions are stronger than I thought, for I dare not go over to the mine for fear of the scene which would be sure to follow."

"No: you mustn't go, Clive, or you'd half kill him—though he's your own brother. If I had known all when I came back that day, thanks to that young fellow, Robson, I'd have thrashed him till he couldn't stand. Thirty years older, my boy, but I'm a better man than he is: a miserable, flushed-faced sot! He drinks. I know he does, and he must have been half drunk when he came here that day."

"He will not dare to come again."

"No. Let him take the consequences if he does—him or that black-haired scoundrel, I'll give either of them a charge of shot, I swear."

Still there was the sweet as well as the bitter, during his stays at the cottage; and Clive often asked himself why he, with the large property left to him by his father, should trouble about the mine, when there was a dreamy life of simple, idyllic happiness and joy. No allusion was made to Jessop or Sturgess by either Dinah or her lover, for it was enough that they could be together in that little paradise the Major had in the course of years contrived, wandering hand in hand beside the clear sparkling river which ran on laughing in the sunshine, so stern and calm in the deep shades beneath the rocks. They said little save in the language of the eye, and though Dinah had again and again determined to speak and tell Clive everything—some day when he was seated at her feet holding her hand in his, and say to him, "I dared not tell you lest you should despise me," those words never passed her lips. "I cannot tell him now," she sighed to herself. "I am so happy—he looks at me so full of joy and trust. Some day I will, some day when he is holding me tightly in his arms, and I feel so safe. I will tell him then. How can I make him unhappy now?"

So she went on dreaming; happy in the present. The little river valley had never looked so beautiful before, nor her father so restful and content. It was life's summer, a golden time with nothing to wish for more. The storms were hushed to sleep, and like the beautiful streamlet, they two were gliding onward in that mystic peace that softens down the passion of a strong first genuine love.

"Bah! I wish there was no London, my boy. No work, no worry, no struggle," cried the Major, one evening, when he was alone with Clive, who had been looking curiously at Martha, and recalling that night when he had first slept at the cottage. He was wondering how it all was. Whether the sturdy elderly woman had some love affair. Then he had, in spite of himself, thought of Sturgess, whom he had that day seen crossing one of the hills at a distance. He recalled the Major's words and asked himself whether he, as a man, ought not in his resentment to have taken some step to punish the scoundrel. But with the idea within his mental grasp, he had let it slide again. For why, he asked himself, should he strike and jar the gentle, harmonious life of her who was so happy.

Though the mine was so near, he had only seen his brother and the new deputy manager from time to time, at a distance, and his knowledge of the progress there came either from London or from Robson, who wrote occasionally,

always to say that things were miserable, for Jessop and Sturgess were at daggers drawn, but the profits of the mine still rose.

And now a letter had come down from the old lawyer—Mr Belton—endorsing the clerk's announcements, and saying that an extraordinary meeting was to be held through a movement on the part of Wrigley, and in connection with the advance of the mine under the new management.

"I don't know what plans the man is going to propose, but you had better come up, my dear boy, and be present. I daresay you will do more good here than by staying down there watching and keeping those people up to their work."

So wrote the old family solicitor, and Clive's conscience smote him, as he recalled how little he had done, and how very small was the credit he deserved. For his days had been spent in that dreamy pleasure at the cottage, and for the most part the mine was forgotten.

But this letter had roused him to a sense of his duties, and, commending Dinah to her father's care, Clive departed once more for town, in happy unconsciousness of the fact that his every step was watched; while as his figure grew less and less as she watched him along the moorland track, Dinah's heart sank, and the old dread crept back at first like a faint mist, then growing more and more dense, until it was a black shadow between her and the sunshine of her life.

"But it will not be long—he will not be long, he said," she whispered to herself. "He will come back to-day."

That was on the following morning. But there was no Clive, and on the second morning she rose hopeful, saying the same words—"He will come to-day;" and she waited eagerly till toward evening, when the Major said suddenly—

"No message from Clive, pet. I thought we should have a telegram."

Dinah looked at him wistfully, and then her face brightened up.

"That means," said the Major, "that he is coming back to-night. Look here, my dear, I'll take the rod and get a brace or two of trout for his supper. There are four or five fine fellows in the lower pool, where I haven't been for months. You had better stop in case Clive comes."

Dinah's face clouded over again.

"Nothing to mind, my dear. I saw Robson this morning, and he told me that Jessop and that black scoundrel went up to town to the meeting the same day as Clive. I suppose they didn't meet in the train. If they did, I hope my dear boy turned them both out in the first tunnel they went through. There, I'm off."

The autumn evenings were upon them, and the sun dipped behind the crags of the millstone grit earlier now; and that evening, to prove the truth of the Major's prophecy, Clive Reed trudged over the hill track leading from Blinkdale past the 'White Virgin' mine, where the roadway had been widened and fresh tram-lines laid, to meet the necessities of the vastly increased traffic. He frowned when he saw all this, for it jarred upon him that so much advance should have been made under other management; but the cloud passed away, for he met a group of men returning from their work, to the cottages down in the valley—men for whom there was not room in the new buildings, or who preferred their old homes. These were for the most part known to him, and they greeted him with a friendly smile or touch of the cap as they passed.

Clive longed to stop them and ask questions, but he felt that he could not stoop to a meanness, and he went on in the soft evening glow watching the golden-edged purple clouds in the west, across which the boldly marked rays of the sun struck up, growing fainter till they died away high up towards the zenith. There was a pleasant scent of dry thyme from the banks, and the familiar odour of the bracken as he crushed it beneath his feet, or brushed through it and the heather and gorse. Only a couple of miles farther and he would be passing the spoil bank, and going along the rock shelf in the tunnel-like cutting, along by the perpendicular buttress which stood out from the lead hills like a bold fortification. Then half a mile down and down to the river, where the lights from the cottage would strike out suddenly from the ravine garden, and he could steal up, and announce his coming.

He knew he would see the light, for it would be dark before he passed the spoil bank, almost before he reached the entrance to the gap—the natural gateway to the 'White Virgin' mine.

And how prosperous the place had proved! How correct the dear old dad had been! But how bitterly he would have resented Jessop's interference!

Clive laughed almost mockingly, as he thought of the vote of thanks to Mr Jessop Reed, carried at the meeting with acclaim, for the vast improvements he had made, and the increasing prosperity, all of which were, of course, the natural growth of his own beginnings.

"Never mind," he said directly after; "let the poor wretch enjoy the satisfaction of having tricked me. Better be Esau than Jacob, after all. But I knew that lode must prove of enormous value, and I get my share of the prosperity."

He walked on more rapidly, but with a free, easy swing, enjoying the fresh mountain air, so bracing after the stuffy heat of the sun-baked London streets. The heavens had grown grey in the west, and it was as if a soft dark veil were being drawn over the sky, where from time to time a pale star twinkled, disappeared, and came into sight again.

Then the gap was reached, and a strong desire came over him to go down and look about to see how the place appeared, for the chances were that he would not be heeded. But no: he resisted the desire. His brother and Sturgess might be back, and staying late at the office, when a meeting would probably lead to a fierce quarrel.

"Just when I want to be calm and happy, ready to take my darling in my arms," he said softly. "Poor Janet! I thought I loved you very dearly, but I did not know then that my fancy for the poor, weak, unhappy girl was not love."

He walked faster, for it was as if there was a magnet at the cottage, and its attractive power was growing stronger as he went along the shelf path, round by the spoil bank, and on in the darkness to the path notched in the perpendicular side of the rugged hill.

"Just the time for a cigarette," he said; and he took one, replaced his case, and then taking advantage of the sheltered tunnel close by the cavernous part where Sturgess had watched and waited for his return, he prepared to light up in the still calm air away from the brisk breeze outside.

The box was in his hand; he had taken out a little wax match to strike, when he stopped short as if turned to stone, for there, close by him, he heard in a low murmur—

"Yes, I knew that you would come."

Dinah's voice; and as he struck the match and it flashed out into a vivid glare, there, within two yards, she stood clasped tightly in his brother Jessop's arms.

Chapter Thirty Three.

Divided.

Jessop started aside in abject fear, and made a rush to escape by passing his brother in the narrow path, but, with a cry of rage, Clive struck at him.

The blow was ineffective to a certain extent, but was sufficient to make Jessop stumble and fall forward heavily. Before, however, his brother could seize him, he had scrambled up and ran along that shelf-like path as if for his life, while, as Clive started in pursuit, mad almost with despair and rage, a low, piteous, sobbing cry arrested him, and he turned back into the dark tunnel with his temples throbbing, his eyes feeling as if on fire, and a strange mad desire to kill thrilling every nerve.

"Clive, Clive! what have I done!" came out of the darkness; and quick as lightning his arms went out, and he caught the speaker savagely by the shoulders, his hands closing violently upon the soft yielding muscles, and then falling helplessly to his sides, as if that touch had discharged every particle of force with which he was throbbing.

"Clive," she cried; "I thought—your message—oh, speak to me."

"Silence!" he cried, in a low harsh voice, which made her tremble. But the next moment, wild with excitement—and as they stood there in the darkness, face to face, but invisible one to the other—she stepped towards him, and caught his arm in turn.

"Clive, dear," she cried wildly. "Oh, for God's sake, speak to me! You don't think—"

"Think!" he cried, with a furious, mocking laugh. "Yes, I think all women are alike—a curse to the man who is idiot enough to believe."

She drew a long, sobbing breath as she shrank from him now, the words of explanation which had leaped to her lips checked on the instant by the shame and indignation with which she was filled; and the next moment she was like stone in her despair.

"I am sorry that I returned so soon," he said, in a bitter, sneering tone; "but I have some respect for the poor old Major—even now. Come back."

She did not speak, but he could hear her breath come in a short, quick, catching way.

"You hear me?" he said harshly. "Come back to your father now; but don't speak to me, or the mad feeling may rise again. I cannot answer for myself."

"Take me home," she said, in tones that he did not recognise as hers, and once more the furious rage within him flashed up like fire, as in his wild, jealous indignation he cried—

"And him of all men. Quick! Back to the cottage first."

He caught her wrist now so fiercely that the pain was almost unbearable, but she did not shrink. The suffering seemed to clear her brain, and in a flash she saw a horror that made her tremble.

"Clive," she cried excitedly, "what are you going to do?"

He laughed bitterly.

"Perhaps what you think," he said. "Likely enough. What should the man do to one who robs him twice. Why not? There is not room for two such brothers upon earth."

She panted to speak, but no words came for a time, as with her wrist prisoned with a grasp of iron, she let him lead her back toward the cottage half a mile away—out now from the rock cutting, to where the stars shone down upon them with their calm, peaceful glimmer, as if there were no such thing as human passion upon earth.

At last she spoke.

"Clive, you will not hear me," she pleaded now, as her womanly indignation was swept away by the great horror she saw looming up before her.

"No," he said, "I will not hear you. I know enough. Are you trembling for your lover's life?"

"Oh!" she ejaculated, and she made an effort to snatch away her wrist; but the ring around it grew tighter as they walked on now in silence, till in her dread, as the icy perspiration gathered upon her forehead, she stopped short and faced him.

"I would not speak," she said, in a low hurried voice. "You should go on thinking me everything that was false and bad. I would not say a word to show how you are misjudging me."

He laughed scornfully.

"But I will not have you go in your mad anger and ignorance to commit some act for which you would repent to your dying day."

"Only a short time of suffering, perhaps," he said mockingly.

"Oh, Clive! you of all men to misjudge me so," she moaned. "Let me tell you all."

"Hah!" he ejaculated, as he fiercely swung her round and continued his walk, half dragging her beside him as if she were a prisoner.

"You do not know, dear—there: I call you dear," she whispered, in her sweet, soft, caressing voice. "You are hurting me terribly with your cruel grasp, but it is nothing to the agony you make me suffer by believing I could be so deceitful and base."

He laughed mockingly again, and she drew in her breath with a low sigh, as a wave of hot indignation mastered her once more, and closed her lips.

But love prevailed once more. She stopped, and tried to fling herself upon his breast, clinging wildly to him with the arm that was free.

"No, no; Clive, my own love, my hero, I would rather that you killed me than believed all this."

He repulsed her with a cry of disgust, and again there was the low sighing sound of her breath, but she went on again —

"I forgive you, dear," she said hurriedly. "You are my own; I am yours. I gave myself heart and soul to you, Clive, and you shall hear me."

He tried to drag her onward along the path, but she would not stir, and nothing but the most cruel violence would have moved her then, as she went on.

"Something tries to make me say 'Go on in your disbelief, for you are cruel, and do not deserve my love!' but I must, I will speak. Kill me, then, if you will not believe. It would be so easy. There," she cried; and she took a step before him right to the edge of the path where the precipice went perpendicularly down to the rough stones among which the river gurgled three hundred feet below.

He made a snatch to drag her back, but she resisted him and stood firm.

"I was sitting at home—alone," she said hurriedly, "when the man brought your message."

"My message!" he cried, with a mocking laugh.

"Yes; your telegram with its few words which sent joy to my weary heart, as I waited for news of him I loved."

"My telegram!" he said, with the same low, harsh laugh. "There, back home to your father, woman. I believed, but I am awake now, and can be fooled no more."

She struggled with herself again, and panted wildly.

"You must, you shall believe me, dear. I forgive you all this because I know it is your great love for me, and you think I have deceived you. Yes; I know what you must feel, dear, and so I beat down all my cruel anger, and humble myself like this in my pity for you and despair. I read your dear words."

"My words! I sent no telegram. I came down hurrying to be once more at the side of the woman who in my folly I believed to be a saint. I come and I find her clasped in the arms of my greatest enemy—my own brother—and you talk to me like this."

She uttered a low, piteous wail, and the struggle within her was intense.

"Yes, it is true; you sent me that message—'Coming down by the three six train to Blinkdale. Meet me along the high path.'"

"It is false," he cried hastily.

"No, no," she cried, as her hand went to the bosom of her dress, and she snatched out a crumpled-up piece of paper. "Take it and read."

He made a fierce clutch at the paper she held out in the darkness, half to take it, half to strike it from her hand, as only part of some miserable deceit, and the latter act was successful, for it fell down the side of the precipice—down toward the river surging on its way.

She muttered a wild cry, and then went on quickly.

"It was late—my father had gone out, but I would not disappoint you, Clive; and I came on, shivering as I found it would soon be dark; but I knew that your strong arms would soon be round me to protect me, and I hurried on, till there in the darkest part I felt that you were waiting for me, and—that is all."

Her hurried, passionate words ceased, and she ended her explanation with those three feeble, lame, to him inconclusive, words. Then yielding herself to his pressure, she walked on by his side, broken, exhausted by her emotion, dumb now, as she waited for him to speak. She waited in vain till the river side was reached, and from lower down in the darkness there came a cheery whistle as the Major was returning from the long walk into which he had been drawn by his ill success.

Clive Reed's nerves twitched, but he turned rapidly through the garden with Dinah half fainting, and ready to cling to one of the supports of the porch as he at last set her free.

"What—Clive—dearest," she whispered faintly—"tell me—what are you going to do?"

He bent down with his lips close to her ear, and whispered sharply—

"Kill him—or he shall me."

Then, with a hurried step he sprang up through the higher part of the garden in and out among the shrubs and bushes, climbed on to the very top, and struck out over the mountain slopes.

Dinah listened till the rustling sounds he made died away, and then, hot and trembling, she went up slowly to her room, and sat down with her face buried in her hands; but there was no relief—the source of her tears was dry.

Clive took a short cut across the rugged moorland, and twice over he narrowly escaped death. The first time he was pulled up short by coming violently in the darkness against the rough, unmortared wall built up round an ancient shaft on the mine land; and as he checked himself by grasping the loose stones, one of them fell over and went down and down, striking once against the side, and sending a chill through him as a reverberating roar came up, followed at a short interval by a dull echoing splash, after which he could hear the water hiss and suck against the sides, sending up strange whisperings, which sounded to his disturbed imagination like demoniacal confidences about Dinah Gurdon and his brother.

He hurried away, as another stone was dislodged, and the sullen plunge came to his ear when he was yards distant, tearing along in the most reckless way, to trip at last over a stone and fall headlong down one of the deep gully-like ravines with which the mountain land was scored.

He caught at a rough projection, against which he struck, and held on while a little avalanche of stones continued falling; then half-stunned and trembling from the shock, crept back again to proceed more cautiously along the edge of the gully, making for the path once more, fully awake now to the fact that it was utter madness to attempt to cross that region in the darkness.

"Not yet," he muttered, with a savage laugh, "I must square accounts with brother Jessop first."

Then he laughed as he wiped away the blood which had trickled down like perspiration from a cut in the forehead, and which came like a blessing in disguise, relieving, as it bled freely, the tension upon his overcharged brain; for if ever man was on the border-line which stretches between sanity and utter madness, Clive Reed was then.

"Of course," he said, "I am a fool, a pitiful, childlike fool, ever to imagine that a light-hearted girl would care for such a dreamy student as I—a man whose whole conversation is about mines and shares, and money. I had my lesson with Janet, who tolerated me, as long as she could, for her father's sake; but I would not take it, and went on in my folly once more. Jessop again! Of course: the good-looking, well-dressed, plausible scoundrel. They always said he was a ladies' man, and the more infidelities proved against such a one, the more attractive he becomes, I suppose."

"Ah!" he ejaculated savagely, "what is it to me? It shall not be for that, but for the money. If I want an idol, it shall be gold, and he is trying to rob me of it."

He struggled on, stumbling in the darkness over stones and tufts of heather, till he reached a rift which led sloping to the pathway close by the tunnel-like notch, and as he let himself down on to the firm, level way, he ran through the dark part with his hands holding his head as if to keep it from bursting with the agonising memories of what he had witnessed that night, a scene photographed upon his brain by that sharp flash of light before all was black darkness—a darkness which now enshrouded his soul.

"But I must be cool and strong," he muttered, as he subsided into a walk once more, and went steadily on toward the entrance to the mine gap with a confused idea in his head that he would hunt down his brother, bring him to bay, and then—

Yes—and then? His brain carried him no farther. Something was to happen then to one of them; and he only muttered an insane, mocking laugh, and either could not or would not try to plunge into the future.

Chapter Thirty Four.

Another Stroke.

"Where's your mistress, Martha?" said the Major, as he entered the cottage, and handed the old servant the creel. "What—has Mr Reed come?"

"No, sir," said the old woman, shaking her head, as she opened the basket, and looked at the three brace of handsome trout lying in a bed of freshly-plucked heather. "Poor girl! she has been wandering about in the garden and in the path this hour past, and only came in when it was quite dark. I heard her go up into her bedroom and lock the door, and I could hear her sobbing as if her heart would break."

"Tut—tut—tut!" ejaculated the Major, as he glanced at his watch. "Humph, too late for him to get here this evening."

"Shall I cook the trout, sir?" asked Martha.

"Cook them? Yes, two, woman, of course. I'm starving. I've been miles and miles to get them. I want some supper as soon as you can. Dear, dear!" he said softly, as the servant went out, "what a nuisance this love is! I shall be glad when they're married."

"No, I shall not," he said to himself after a pause. "Poor child! She was reckoning so on seeing him to-night."

He took a turn up and down his little room, and then sought for and filled his pipe.

"Finest lot of trout I've caught for months. I should have liked the boy to be here.—Poor little lassie!" he sighed, "how she loves him. Well, he's a fine fellow and worthy of her."

He struck the match, raised it to his pipe, and threw it down again, placed his newly-filled pipe on the chimneypiece, and went softly into the passage and upstairs to the door of Dinah's room, where he tapped, and again before his child answered.

"Coming down, my darling? Supper will be ready directly."

"Don't ask me, dear," she said. "I am so unwell to-night."

"Her voice is quite changed," thought the Major. "She must have been crying bitterly." Then aloud—

"But, Dinah, my dear, don't, pray don't take on like this. Come, come, be a dear, strong-minded little woman. Business has stopped him. He'll be here to-morrow I daresay. Come, I say. I shall be so lonely without your dear face at the table."

The door was opened softly, a little white hand stole out through the narrow crack, and played about his face for a few minutes caressingly before it was withdrawn.

"I cannot—indeed I cannot come down," she whispered tenderly; and the hand stole out again, and its back was laid against his lips, for him to kiss it lovingly. "Indeed I am unwell and must lie down again. My head is unbearable."

"Very well, my dear," said the Major sadly. "But, Dinah, my little one, don't—try not to give way like this. Silly girl," he continued, as he kissed the little white cold hand he held, and laughed. "I've a good mind to tell him what a love-sick little goose it is."

The Major did not hear the piteous, broken-hearted sob which followed his words, for the door was closed, but went down and ate his supper alone: nor did he know of the sleepless night his child passed as she went over the events of the evening again and again till her head grew confused, her brain wild, and as she sank upon her knees with uplifted hands it was in a rebellious spirit, to ask what had she done that the love time of her young life should be turned to one of misery and despair.

Dinah's pale drawn face and the dark rings about her eyes when she appeared at breakfast the next morning raised a feeling akin to resentment in the Major's heart; but he said nothing, only kissed her tenderly, and making an effort to rouse her from her state of despondency, chatted pleasantly about his fishing adventures on the previous evening, and the cunning displayed by trout at that time of the year.

"I declare, my dear, that I was ready to give up over and over again. Their eyes are as sharp as a needle, and it was not until it was almost dark that I could get them to look at a fly, and then it was only at the very smallest gnat I could put on. Come," he cried, as he tapped the plate upon which he had placed one of the broiled trout, "don't let my poor fish spoil. They're good for nervous headache, puss, and Master Clive has missed a treat."

It was hard work to preserve her composure and gratify the old man by eating a little, but Dinah tried, and succeeded, saying to herself the while—"He will come soon and ask me to forgive him for all his cruel thoughts and words, and I ought to hold back and refuse, but I cannot. For, poor love, what he must have suffered. I should have been as mad and cruel had I seen him holding another to his heart. I could not bear it—I should die."

She brightened up a little then, as the Major chatted on, but she did not hear a word, for she was fighting a feeling of resentment against her betrothed and beating it down, her eyes losing their dull, filmy look as she thought of that meeting to come when he would be asking her to forgive him, and she told him that she had never had a thought of love that was not his, never could have one that was not loyal and true to the man who had first increased the

beating of her pulses.

Then, all at once, she gave a violent start, and dropped the cup she held into its saucer.

"Why, what is the matter now, darling?" cried the Major, as he saw her eyes half close and her pale face flush to the very temples.

She made a quick gesture toward the open window.

"Well, what does that mean?" cried the Major. "You are as nervous as an old woman. There is nothing there. By George, there is. What ears you have! How has he managed it? Here, quick! Ring and tell Martha to bring a cup and saucer, and to broil another trout. He'll be as hungry as a hunter after his morning's walk."

For steps were perfectly audible now coming along the stony path; but Dinah did not spring from her chair to hurry out and meet their visitor, but sank back, with the flush dying out once more, leaving her face almost ghastly, as her heart told her that Clive was not coming to ask her forgiveness. It was not his quick, impatient step; and the endorsement of her thoughts came directly from just outside the window, through which the Major had hurriedly stepped.

"Morning, Mr Robson," he cried. "I thought it was Mr Reed. Good heavens, man, what's wrong?"

"I hardly know, sir," said the young man hastily. "Two of our men coming to work this morning found him in a cleft, bruised and bleeding from a cut on the head."

"A fall?" cried the Major.

"No, sir. Been set upon and half murdered, I'm afraid. Ah, Miss Gurdon! I'm very sorry, I didn't know you were there."

For Dinah had just made her appearance at the window, having heard every word.

Chapter Thirty Five.

With their own Petard.

"Go on," cried the Major excitedly; "she must hear it now. Hold up, my child, only an accident—a slip: trying to make some short cut in the dark. Now, then," he continued, with military promptitude, "when did they find him?"

Dinah listened with her head held forward, lips white and trembling, and her nostrils dilated, hearing her father's words, and all the time picturing, in imagination, a desperate encounter between two brothers on the dark hillside. Then the one misjudging, bitter, and mad about her, struck down, to lie through the night half dead, with upbraidings against her upon his lips.

It was like a flash: she saw the whole scene while the young clerk went on in answer to the Major.

"Just off the path, sir."

"And what have you done?"

"Had him carried directly to my rooms at the office, sir."

"Where his brother is seeing to him?"

"No, sir; Mr Jessop Reed has gone off in haste to London on business. Left a letter for Mr Sturgess. He's ill too, sir. Half delirious with his bad shoulder, which has broken out again."

"Tut—tut—tut!" ejaculated the Major. "Well? You did something more?"

"Yes, sir, sent off directly to Blinkdale for the doctor, bathed and bound up Mr Reed's head, and then came on to you."

"Good!" cried the Major sharply, clapping the young man on the shoulder, and drawing him into the room. "Sit down and swallow a cup of coffee, my lad. You've had no breakfast. Dinah, my child, be a woman. We'll go over at once. No. You and Martha make a bed for him in my study. I'll have him carried here. He cannot stay at that noisy mine."

"Yes—yes," said Dinah, in a whisper, as with trembling hands she hurriedly placed the coffee before the messenger. "Martha will get that ready, father. I must come too."

"No, no, my child!—well, yes, you may be of use. Be quick, then. In a minute we must be off." Then, as Dinah ran up to her room, he went to the study and returned hastily, placing something in his breast.

"Old soldiers know a little about surgery, Mr Robson," he said. "It will be a couple of hours before the doctor can get to the mine."

"Three, sir."

"Perhaps, and I may be of use."

"I thought you would come, sir," said Robson, as he hurriedly appeased his hunger. "There's something wrong, too, at the mine, so one of the principal men says, but I didn't stop to hear what it was, for I was coming on here."

"Curse the mine!" roared the Major; "let's think of poor Mr Reed. Ah, that's right, my dear," he cried sharply, as Dinah came into the room, looking very white, but firm and determined. "Ready, Mr Robson?"

"Quite, sir," said the messenger, starting up.

"Tell Martha, my dear?"

Dinah nodded. She could not speak, and the next minute they were down by the river, and then ascended the mountain path, walking quickly along the narrow shelf, with thrill after thrill passing through the girl, as she went by the spot where Clive had struck the paper she had offered him from her hand; and this was supplemented by a suffocating feeling of despair as they reached the cool, dark, shady cutting, tunnelled out in the precipitous cliff. Here she glanced wildly at the spot where she had flown, as she believed, to her lover's arms, and rested in them for a moment, murmuring her delight that he had come.

There was a heavy dull pulsation in her brain, as she passed on with her father out into the sunshine once again, deafening her to the words he spoke from time to time, while the mountain side seemed to swim around before her and the purple heather to rise and fall in waves till the gap was reached. That pathway to the mine chasm with all its host of terrible recollections brought her back to the present with a shock, and she walked down it clinging to her father's arm.

She shivered and felt cold now as she gazed wildly before her. It was wonderfully changed, but the salient points were the same, and she hardly noted the many buildings which had sprung up, but gazed excitedly round, expecting moment by moment that her eyes would light upon the fierce mocking face of Sturgess; while by a strange confusion of ideas, the beating of her heart seemed to form itself into the heavy steps of the man from whom she fled panting with horror, coming in rapid pursuit.

She started nervously again and again, as the figure of some sturdy workman passed before them, coming or going from different portions of the busy hive, where a steam-engine was panting heavily, or a huge pump toiled on tossing out the water from the depths of the mine to run gurgling along by the side of the path they followed.

At last the new-looking offices were reached, and a group of workmen drew away to let them pass, while Dinah gazed round nervously, clinging more tightly now to her father's arm, feeling sure that in another moment or two she must face the man she feared.

A spasm shot through her, as Robson exclaimed sharply—

"How is he?"

And she strained her ears for the answer from a man in the doorway.

"Just the same, sir. He hasn't moved."

The next question turned her giddy.

"Where is Sturgess—in his room?"

"No, sir. He got up when they told him, and went down the mine."

"Why, he wasn't fit to stir! This way, sir."

Robson led them into his room; and there Dinah fell upon her knees beside a mattress, upon which, pale and stern, with his head enveloped in a broad bandage, lay Clive Reed, his eyes half-closed, and his lips moving as he went on muttering incoherently; while as Dinah bent down over him, she heard her name faintly whispered.

For a moment she believed that it was in recognition of her presence, and her heart gave one great leap of joy. But it sank down directly into a slow, feeble beat, as she grasped only too truly that the speaker was delirious, and there was a look in his face which sent a terrible foreboding to her heart.

"Let him not die, O God, without knowing that I was his very own," she moaned to herself, as an intense longing came over her to clasp him tightly to her heart.

Then she gave way, and rose with a low sigh, as her father said sternly—

"Let me come, my child. Minutes are precious. At all costs we will get him away from here."

What followed was like a dream, but she heard the Major's sharp military voice as he gave decisive commands. She saw him remove the bandage and replace it with another well saturated with water, and then as she stood back, she saw four sturdy, willing men stoop down at her father's order, each take a corner of the thin, narrow mattress upon which Clive lay, and keeping step, bear him out of the place and along the path toward the entrance of the gap. Then she was conscious that she was walking behind in the little procession, with the Major grasping her arm, and carrying a large bottle of water.

"It is the best way," he said, "and he will see the doctor all the sooner, for he must pass us on his way from Blinkdale."

The little procession went steadily on, Robson leaving them now, and Dinah's breath came more freely as they reached the mouth of the gap, and turned round on to the path without Sturgess having been seen. In this fashion they made their way steadily on to the cottage, the Major calling a halt, so that he could saturate the bandage from time to time. But the little ambulance party had hardly passed out of sight of the mine entrance, when in answer to the signal the engine gear began to work, the wire rope ran over the wheel as it revolved rapidly, till with a sudden clang the ascending cage reached the platform and Sturgess stepped out, with his arm and shoulder roughly bound up, and with a wild look in his eyes as they burned feverishly above his hollow, pallid cheeks.

The captain of one of the underground gangs stepped out after him, and laying a hand upon his arm, said quietly—

"You take my advice, Mr Sturgess; that place is turning ugly. You go and lie down again, and let the doctor see it when he comes."

"You hold your tongue for a fool," said Sturgess savagely; and then he made a lurch as if he had turned giddy, but he recovered himself directly. "Here, some of you: where's Mr Jessop Reed?"

"I told you," said Robson, who came up just then, "he has gone to town."

"It's a lie!" said Sturgess. "He wouldn't have gone without telling me."

"Then he told it himself on paper," said Robson coolly. "I read you what he said."

"And it's a lie, and so is what Smithers says like a fool."

"Ah! you told me there was something wrong below just as I was off this morning," said Robson eagerly. "Nobody hurt, Smithers?"

"Nobody hurt?" said the man, with a coarse laugh; "well, I suppose everybody concerned. It's a general burst up, Mr Robson."

"A lie. All a lie," said Sturgess, stretching out his hands and groping as if to save himself from falling. "All a big flam."

"Is it? you'll see," muttered the captain.

"A lie, I say!" growled Sturgess, half-deliriously, as he looked round from one to the other, pressing his hand to his heated shoulder all the while. "A lie, I say, to frighten the people into selling their shares, and they did, the fools. Bah! The 'White Virgin's' the richest mine in England, and I'll break the neck of any one who says it arn't!"

"No, you won't break anybody's neck," said the man gravely, "unless it's your own, Mr Sturgess, and unless you take care you're going to be very badly. It's all true, Mr Sturgess. I thought that lode couldn't go on yielding like it did."

"In Heaven's name, man, what do you mean?" cried Robson.

"Only this, sir: we've come upon a blind lead."

"What?"

"The lode has stopped dead in the rock, and we can't find any more trace of it. Nothing but the stone, and I don't believe there'll be another scrap of ore ever found."

"A blind lead," cried Robson, astounded.

"Yes, sir, that's it; and if Mr Clive Reed holds any shares still it's a cruel bit of news for him. As for the other chaps—well, they can take their chance.—Ah, I thought so!"

For Sturgess had reeled and nearly fell, to be lowered down by the man, breathing stertorously, evidently insensible to all that passed around.

The news was true. The rumour Wrigley and Jessop Reed had set afloat for their own nefarious ends had proved prophetic. Hoist with their own petard, they had yet to learn that they were ruined men.

Chapter Thirty Six.

The Days of Peril.

"Live, my own dearest, live," murmured Dinah, as she knelt beside Clive's couch, listening to his never-ending mutterings, as the fever ran its course, and mingled with the incessant babblings about the mine, his brother's trickery and deceit, she heard him burst into torrents of reproaches against him who was slandering his character. Then would come appeals and declarations of his innocency, and Dinah's tears fell softly as he rambled on about Lyddy.

"Shame on you, Janet!" he would cry. "How could you think it of me? That I came telling you of my love fresh from the embraces of that weak creature. Poor Lyddy! A cruel betrayal of a weak, easily flattered girl. I swear it was all false. To save himself. Yes: false as hell! But I pity you, dear. You are my sister now; and I pity you."

He would calm down for a while, and then begin again, mingling his troubles in so confused a fashion, that Dinah would grow puzzled. But she could not tear herself away, and listened eagerly as the sick man rambled on, and laid

bare the whole of his troubled life.

Then she would writhe in her agony, as from out of the tangle her own name would come, and he grew excited as he wandered on, going back to hearing her sobbing in the next room, the shots pattering on the window, and on and on to the surprise in the tunnelled pathway.

"All, all the same. So gentle and loving, but all so weak. Poor little sweet: so beautiful. Her words would ring like music, and yet she could throw herself into his arms. Forgive her? Yes, I must forgive her. So weak, so hard to trust."

And then, sobbing gently, Dinah would bend over, and lay her cheek against his aching forehead, and whisper to him to believe in her. That there was nothing to forgive—that she was his own, and that he must live to learn the truth or she would die.

But her tender appeals were to one who could not understand. Still they were a solace to her, as she hung about his bed. She had him with her, the man who loved her so tenderly, and in those secret moments, when they were alone, often enough in the silent watches of the night, she could fall into an ecstasy of joy, as in the abandonment of her love, with none to know, she could draw the dear head upon her throbbing breast, and cover his face with her kisses.

"My own, my loving husband!" she would coo softly in the midst of her caresses, at first with burning cheeks, later on with her pulses undisturbed, her heart suffused by a sweet placid joy which made her beam upon him as a mother over her babe.

"Some day he will know all, and I can wait till then," she sighed, as even in the midst of her agony of doubt as to his recovery, she revelled in the joy of having him there insensible, ignorant of her caresses, but still all her own.

The doctor had reached them soon after they arrived at the cottage, two of the bearers having been stationed upon high points to intercept him should he take any other track, and after his examination he had removed one horror from Dinah's breast. For he declared the injury to be the result of a fall, and hence it was not through some furious encounter between brothers—a fratricidal strife.

But the fall, he declared, was not the sole trouble. There was fever, brain fever, and when pressed as to the result, he only shook his head, wisely, and said—

"We shall see—we shall see."

Then in obedience to a letter from the Major, Doctor Praed had come down, to enter the cottage fussy, tired, and irritable.

"Most unreasonable, Major Gurdon, to bring me down to this out-of-the-way desert to see Clive Reed. Hang him, and his brother too. They've been the curse of my life. Dozens of important patients waiting for me, and I leave them to come down here to see this boy. Hang him, and his father too, sir. I wish I had never seen them. Ruined me—almost, and I'm very glad the mine has turned out a failure, after all."

"I am afraid you are a little tired with your journey, sir!" said the Major stiffly.

"Tired, sir! I don't seem to have a bone left. Of course, I'm tired. How a sane man could ever come and live in such an out-of-the-way spot, I don't know."

"A very peaceful spot, sir, for a heart-sore man," said the Major coldly. "I will ask you to come and see the patient as soon as you feel refreshed."

At that moment the door opened, and Dinah, looking pale, subdued, and anxious, appeared.

The Doctor started from his seat.

"Dinah, my child," said the Major, "Clive Reed's godfather, Doctor Praed. Can he come up now?"

The Doctor advanced, and took her hands, raised them one by one to his lips, and then letting them fall, he took her in his arms and kissed her forehead reverently.

"God bless you, my dear!" he said, in a softened voice. "So you are his tender nurse. It is you whom he spoke of as her who had made him think the world was not all bad. Hah, yes," he continued, looking at her curiously, "the face of an angel. Major Gurdon, forgive my petulance. Getting old, sir. Tired and worried. I'm very glad you sent for me. Clive is my own dear boy. I always looked upon him as a son. There, I'm only an ignorant man, my dear," he continued, turning to Dinah with a pitiful smile on his face, "but with God's help and yours, he shall ask me to his wedding yet. I'll come and claim the first kiss from her who is going to help me try and save his life. Hah! now I feel ready to go to work. As for the other patients, Major, there are plenty of doctors in town. I'm going to stop here with my boy Clive."

The tears coursed rapidly down Dinah's cheeks as she listened, while Doctor Praed patted the hand he held, and smiled.

"Ah," he said, "you have no faith in me. You think I am a prattling old man, who talks instead of acts. Come along, and let's see my patient, only really, according to etiquette, I ought to be meeting your regular attendant in consultation."

"He is twelve miles away, sir," said the Major rather coldly, "and unable to get over here much. He said it was a case for nursing."

"No doubt, no doubt," said the Doctor; and he followed Dinah to the patient's couch, and then drew up the blind and sat down by the pillow.

"Poor boy!" he said tenderly, as he took Clive's hand and noted his hollow cheeks, large burning eyes, and the restless muttering he kept up. "No doubt about it, my dear. That injury is nothing. Bled a good deal, you say?"

"Terribly," whispered Dinah, with a suppressed sob.

"Weakened him, but on the whole I should say it was favourable. This is all brain, my child. Overwork and anxiety. He must have had some mental shock. He must have known that his father's pet scheme had failed before any one else had suspected the fact."

Dinah looked at him piteously, as she felt that it was her doing, as much so as if her acts had been intentional instead of the work of others.

"Well, this will not do," said the Doctor, replacing a tiny clinical thermometer in its case. "His head is far too hot, and I suppose you have no ice here. All this must come off."

He pointed to the sufferer's hair, and Dinah's face contracted with horror.

"I can't help it, my child. Come; we must save his life. Where are your scissors? It will be a task for you. Pooh! don't look like that, my dear. It will all grow again."

A few minutes later, with the tears slowly trickling down her cheeks, Dinah sat, carefully cutting off lock after lock, the Doctor looking on impatiently.

"There," he cried at last, "you must let me do it, child. You are snipping little bits off as if they were more precious than gold. I tell you it must all come off at once. His head ought, to be shaved.—Scissors."

"No, no, please. Let me," pleaded Dinah, hurriedly placing the scissors behind her.

"Very well, then, will you cut close?"

"But must it all be cut off?"

"Every scrap, and at once. It will relieve his poor burning head. You can save a nice curly bit. Save it all if you like."

Dinah coloured, and darted at him a resentful look, then the sound of the scissors went on—snip, snip, as they closely sheared away the thick hair, the fall of every lock giving the operator a sharp pang.

"Ah, that's better. Closer by the temples. The doctor you had ought to have insisted upon all that coming off at once."

"He did," sighed Dinah; "but I pleaded so hard for it to be left that he gave way."

"And you nearly killed the poor fellow—because you were so proud of him, eh? But I will not reproach you. Ah, no evasion, please. Once for all I want that hair all removed, and possibly then I may think it necessary to operate with your father's razor—that is, if you do not do your work well."

Dinah sighed, and went on, shivering slightly as she saw how she was disfiguring the poor fellow, but steeling herself now to her task, till it was thoroughly done. Then she stood back full of remorse, and feeling that at last she had really done something which would make Clive hate her.

"Now, we can give him a chance. The cold bandages to his head will be of some service. The wind can blow upon them, and the evaporation will take away a great deal of heat from the poor fellow's brain."

To Dinah's great delight their patient soon grew calmer, and the low mutterings and tossing of the head from side to side partially subsided.

"Well, sir," said the Major that evening, after patiently waiting for the Doctor to give him some report, "can you tell us that we may hope?"

"I will not say that," replied the Doctor. "Give me another twenty-four hours. A fever like this is slow. I must own that he is in a very critical condition; but do not tell your daughter that."

The Major groaned.

"If he dies it will kill her."

"He shall not die if medical knowledge can save him," said the Doctor firmly.

"And you will stay, sir?"

"Stay? Great heavens, man, his father and I were school-fellows. His mother was like a dear sister to me; and as for this boy, I could not have thought more of him if he had been my own son. Stay? I sent a message back from the station to say that the date of my return was indefinite, and to place an old friend in charge of my practice. I presume that you will find me an easy-chair and a crust of bread while I am here, and I shall not go till I feel that I can leave him safely to his nurse, or it has pleased God to take him into His rest."

The Major's breast heaved, and he held out his hand, which was firmly grasped.

"God bless you for those words," he said, with emotion. "We must save him for her sake."

Doctor Praed's forehead grew more wrinkled day by day; and there was a hard, stern look in his eyes as the time slowly glided on, and the fever fought stoutly against all the medical skill which could be brought to bear.

And all the time he was haunted by the piteous, almost upbraiding, look of Dinah, which wistfully followed every movement, paining the old man so that at last he avoided it when he spoke to her; and in his ignorance inflicted stab after stab.

"It is the great trouble which is killing him. I never could have thought that he would care so much for money, my child. But I suppose he felt that his honour was at stake after all that he said to his friends who took shares in the mine. I wish you were not here."

"Why, Doctor Praed?" said Dinah faintly, as she recalled her last parting from Clive, and thought how little the visitor knew.

"Because I should like to let my tongue run loose and say all manner of evil things concerning that wretched mine. But I suppose I must not." Dinah rose and laid her hand upon his arm.

"You do not talk to me about Clive," she whispered. "You cannot think of the agony I suffer."

"I do not speak because to one like you it would be cruel to talk in the slow, hopeful twaddle used by some of my weak brethren. My dear child, there is nothing to say. His life is not in my hands. We can only wait."

"But, Doctor, think, for pity's sake, think—is there nothing that can be done? It is maddening to stand here helpless and see him gliding slowly away from us. For he is weaker. I did hope that the quiet which has come over him was a change for the better. I know now that it is all increasing weakness."

"May I come in?" said the Major at the door.

The Doctor hurriedly moved to him, glad of an excuse to escape from those pleading eyes, and followed the Major into the adjoining room.

Chapter Thirty Seven.

The Turning-Point.

"There is a messenger from the mine," the Major whispered.

"Don't talk of it," said the Doctor angrily. "Who is down there now?"

"Mr Jessop Reed and that Mr Wrigley. They are trying everything to discover a continuation of the lost lode."

"Bah! let them. Well, what do they want? Do they expect me to operate on the vein and make it bleed again?"

"No, no. There is a man there, one Sturgess, the foreman, grievously ill, and this Mr Wrigley, knowing that you are here, has sent their clerk Robson over with a message begging you to see him."

"I? No: impossible. Let him see the local man. I am engaged solely to watch my old friend's son."

This was said so decisively that the Major walked away, but stopped by the door and returned.

"I don't like this man, Doctor," he said; "he once insulted my child."

"What? insulted Dinah—the girl my poor boy worshipped!" cried the Doctor angrily; "then let him die."

He added something respecting Michael Sturgess's future, as he angrily turned away.

"Think again, Doctor," said the Major. "They say the man is in a dangerous state. He has been bad for some time. It was from a fall, I believe, down one of the shafts."

"That mine again. Why, Major Gurdon, it has been a curse to every one who has had dealings with it. Well, it's of no use to profess to be a Christian if one does not act up to it. I'll just go in and see how Clive seems, and whether he can be left."

"And then you will go?"

"Oh yes, I suppose I must. That's the worst of being a Christian. One cannot hate or curse a man conscientiously. Yes; I'll go and see the fellow, and I hope I shall not be tempted to give him too strong a dose."

He went into the next room, bent over Clive for a few minutes, and rose as if satisfied.

"You will not leave him," he said.

"You think there is fresh danger?"

"No, my child, the danger has always been great enough. They want me to go and see a man at the mine—one Sturgess."

Dinah started and shuddered. The Doctor noticed it, and thought of her father's words.

"You would rather I did not go."

"I don't like you leaving me, but if it is urgent—"

"They fear the man is dying."

"As we forgive them that trespass against us," rose to Dinah's brain. "Yes, Doctor, you must go," she said softly; and he nodded his head.

"Good girl," he said, and he left her.—"Ah, Janet, my child, why were you not like that? My training, I suppose.—Now, sir, I am ready."

Robson started from his seat in the porch, and led the way toward the mine, relating all he knew of the case to the Doctor as they went.

"He was alone in the mine one morning, sir, and had a nasty fall. He injured his shoulder a good deal, and refused to have any medical advice till it had all gone bad. He said the doctors were fools, and that a bandage and cold water were all that was necessary."

"And found out that some one was a bigger fool than the doctors, eh?" said the old man drily.

"Yes, sir, I suppose so," replied the clerk, smiling. "This way, please."

He led the Doctor down to the little house apportioned to the foreman; and as they approached it, Jessop and Wrigley came out, the former, who looked haggard and careworn, seeming disposed to hurry away, but he mastered his shrinking and stood firm.

"How do?" said the Doctor, with a short nod. "Janet quite well?"

"Yes, Doctor," cried Jessop eagerly, "and—"

"Stand aside, please," said the old man testily. "I want to talk to this gentleman. Are you Mr Wrigley?"

"I am, and I am very grateful to you for coming, sir. I am very anxious about our man."

"Where is he?"

"This way, please."

The Doctor followed into a bedroom where the man lay, hollow of cheek and half delirious, while one of the miners' wives was playing the part of nurse.

"Mr Jessop Reed, I can dispense with your company, sir. I want to be alone. You can go too, my good woman, and you, Mr What's your name? Robson. No, you stay, Mr Wrigley. I may want to ask some questions."

Jessop went out scowling.

"A brute!" muttered the Doctor. "Knows his brother is, perhaps, on his deathbed, and has never sent to ask how he is."

The next minute he was examining the patient, who lay perfectly still, while a hideous wound in the shoulder, which was evidently of long standing, was bared.

"Curious kind of hurt!" said the Doctor. "Here's something within which irritates it."

"Piece of rock splinter, perhaps," suggested Wrigley.

"Very likely; but he will never get well with that in his flesh.—Don't groan, man. It's to do you good. Humph, look here. I thought it was a singular injury."

He held out a piece of green metal with some fine-looking letters upon it, and Wrigley examined them.

"Eley!" he said. "Why, it is a piece of a brass cartridge."

"That's right. The man has been shot. Hallo! That makes him wince. Why, he is hurt here, too, in this leg. No doubt about this. The bite of some animal. Dog, I suppose. Are you sure that our friend here is not a poacher?"

"I never heard of anything of the kind," replied Wrigley.

"Humph!" ejaculated the Doctor, "just the sort of case I should expect to meet with where men went out after game, and then lay in hiding after a fight with the keepers."

"I can do no more now," he said, after a busy pause. "I'll come and see him to-morrow, and dress the places again. They will not kill him. I daresay the wound in the shoulder will heal now; the bite, too, for a time—may break out

again, though.”

Just then Wrigley’s hand went to his pocket, and the Doctor frowned.

“Never mind that, sir,” he said. “This was done out of charity. If all I hear is right, we are fellow-sufferers.”

“You lost, then, by the mine,” said Wrigley eagerly.

“Yes, sir, heavily, when some confounded scoundrel put about that report, and made me join in the panic. But the fellow who bought up the shares has been nicely trapped—and—why, hang it all, are you the Mr Wrigley?”

“At your service, sir,” said the solicitor coldly, but looking rather white.

“Then, Mr Wrigley, I have the pleasure of telling you that you are a confounded scoundrel, and I’m glad you’ve lost by your scheme. Stop! one word! what about Jessop Reed?”

“He is outside, sir; you can speak to him.”

“Not I. The pair of you hatched the swindle, I’ll be bound. Take care of this man, and he is to have no spirits or meat yet, but I’ll come in and see him again.”

Wrigley said no more, and the Doctor marched out with his head up, gave Jessop a short nod, and strode back to continue his watching by Clive Reed’s couch; but, on entering the room, he gave a start, for his patient’s eyes turned to him directly.

Dinah suppressed a cry, and the Doctor made her a sign to be silent, while he quickly sat down and took his patient’s hand, which closed softly upon his fingers. Then, as the eyes still gazed in his in a dreamy way, there was a faint smile of recognition. Soon after the lids dropped softly, like those of a weary infant; and as the Doctor bent lower, there was a sigh, and the regular rise and fall of his breath.

Dinah stood back with her hands clasped, her pupils widely dilated, and a beseeching look of agony in her eyes, as the Doctor slowly rose. Then, seeing the dread and horror painted in her face, he smiled, took her hand, and led her, trembling with hope and apprehension, out of the room.

“Dying?” she cried, in a low, piteous, wailing tone.

“Yes: we’ve killed the fever, and he is sleeping as peacefully as a child.”

“Ah!”

One low, piteous sigh, and Dinah would have fallen to the floor had not the Doctor caught her in his arms, for she fainted dead away.

The Major, who was, in his dread, always upon the *qui vive*, joined them on the instant, and helped to bear his child to a couch.

“Overcome?” he whispered.

“With joy. Yes: our poor boy will live.”

Chapter Thirty Eight.

The Ruptured Vein.

“He’s my father-in-law, Wrigley, but he’s an old beast,” said Jessop, in a low snarling tone, as the Doctor’s steps died away in the distance.

“I daresay he is,” replied Wrigley; “but this is no time for pouring your domestic troubles on my head. What did you mean by telling me that this man, Sturgess, fell down a shaft?”

“That’s what he told me—a brute! I’ve no sympathy with him whatever, but I don’t, want it to be said that we neglected him, in case he dies. We’ve got troubles enough.”

“Rather. It’s about as near utter ruin as a man can get. Stockbroker? You’re lucky if you don’t turn stone-broker.”

“Mind what you’re talking about. You’ll have that fellow Robson hear you.”

“Doesn’t seem to matter to me who hears me now. The game’s up.”

“No, no, wait till that fellow comes and makes his examination.”

“Oh yes. I’ll wait. Here by twelve, won’t he? But I’m not going to pin my faith to his coming. To me as good an idea as ever man put upon the market has gone dead.”

“Yes, curse you, and ruined me,” growled Jessop. “You always were so cursed clever.”

“Come, I like that; ruined you, eh? Ruin the ruined. Why, for years past you’ve never been worth a rap, and have had

to come to me to keep you going.”

“And pretty dearly I’ve had to pay for it.”

“Yes; a man who wants his bills discounted, and who is known to be stone broke, does have to pay pretty smartly for the risk that is run. But never mind, Jessop, we must try something else. I say, though, that father-in-law of yours is a tartar. You don’t expect to get anything out of him, do you?”

“He must leave his daughter his money.”

“No, he mustn’t. There are plenty of hospitals and charities about. He’ll never let you have a sou.”

“Can’t you find some other cursedly nasty thing to tell me, Wrigley,” snarled Jessop. “It’s infernally cowardly of you, that’s what it is. Thank goodness, here’s the engineer.”

“Then now we shall get out of our difficulties or plunge deeper in. Why couldn’t you know something about mining engineering, and so have saved this expense?”

“Mr Wrigley?” said a quiet, solid-looking man, riding up to the office door.

“My name is Wrigley, sir. Are you Mr Benson?”

“Yes; and I came as soon as I could, after I heard from the Woden Mine Company’s secretary. What is the question, gentlemen. Deeper sinking? Troubled with water?”

“No,” said Jessop eagerly. “The lode we have been working has suddenly come to an end in the solid stone.”

“I see. A blind lead,” said the newcomer, dismounting.

“And we want advice as to what is best to do so as to hit again upon the ore,” said Wrigley. “I hear that you stand at the top of the tree in such matters.”

“Very kind of people to say so, sir,” replied the mining engineer. “I do my best. But you used to have a first-class man here—Mr Clive Reed.”

“Yes; but he is dangerously ill, or I should have called him in,” said Wrigley; and Jessop’s countenance cleared. “Well, sir, shall we go down the mine?”

“Better let me go alone, sir,” said the engineer. “I cannot tell you what you want to know in a minute. Perhaps it will take me a week.”

“Take your time, only get to work, and let’s have the full truth, as soon as you can,” said Wrigley, and the engineer nodded, had himself put into communication with the underground foreman, and passed the whole of the following week in the mine. At the end of that time he announced that he was ready with his report, and an adjournment was made to the little office, where Wrigley threw himself into a chair, and Jessop lit a cigar which kept going out, and had to be re-lit again and again, as the expert began to read his carefully written report of his work from day to day.

“My dear sir,” said Wrigley at last, impatiently, “we do not want to hear what time you went into the mine each day, or when you came out, nor yet about how you tested the surroundings of the great lode in different places. Let’s have your final decision, and the position.”

“Very good, gentlemen. I’ll give you both together. The lode ends dead against the barren rock.”

“Which we had already discovered,” said Wrigley sarcastically.

“Through a geological fault,” continued the engineer; “and I have tried hard to make out whether the vein of silver lead, where it was snapped off in some convulsion, or gradual sinking, went down or up.”

“Down or up,” said Jessop, who was listening eagerly, trying with nervous fingers to re-light his cigar from time to time.

“If it went downward, by constant search and sinking—”

“Money?” interrupted Wrigley.

“I mean shafts, sir,” said the engineer, smiling; “but you may include money; you might perhaps hit upon the lode again; but I am inclined to think, from the conformation of the strata, that the vein was snapped in two and thrust upward.”

“What!” cried Jessop, “then it must be close to the surface?”

“I should say, sir, it was on the surface, and all cleared away hundreds upon hundreds of years ago.”

“But you would sink shafts to try if it had gone down?” said Wrigley, eyeing the engineer keenly.

“No, sir; if it were my case I would be content with the money I had got out of the mine.”

“General burst up, Jessop, my lad,” said Wrigley coolly. “The ‘White Virgin’s’ reputation is smirched, and she is not immaculate after all. Thank you, Mr Benson, I am quite satisfied with your judgment. There, you must have your

cheque. There will not be many more for any one."

Just about the same time, after a week's trembling in the balance, Clive Reed had taken a turn which filled all at the cottage with hope. His senses returned upon that day a week earlier; but after some hours' calm sleep, he woke in so enfeebled a state that it required all the efforts of nurse and doctor to keep him from sinking calmly away into the great sleep of all.

Now he was undoubtedly amending, and getting better hour after hour, though still so weak that he was unconscious of who it was who tended him night and day. Nothing seemed to trouble him. Nature had prescribed utter rest so that she might have time to rebuild the waste, and the Doctor's chief efforts were directed towards keeping him free from the slightest trouble which might ripple the placid lake of his existence.

"There now," he said, "let him sleep all he can. That is the best."

He walked over to the mine, arriving there soon after the engineer had gone, and avoiding Jessop, went straight into the room occupied by Sturgess, who lay waiting for him eagerly.

"Better, arn't I, Doctor?"

"Yes; getting stronger fast. The festering wound looks healthy now."

"What festering wound?" said the man, with a stare.

"The one in your shoulder, which you said was caused by a fall."

Sturgess scowled.

"Lucky for you I was fetched to you in time, and then dressed the wound in your leg. Your flesh was in a bad way, my man. You should never neglect the bite of a dog."

"Fear he should go mad?" said Sturgess grimly. "No fear o' that one going mad now."

"Shot him, I suppose."

"Yes," said Sturgess, smiling. "I shot him, Doctor. When may I get about again?"

"Oh, not for a week or two yet—perhaps three. You mustn't hurry."

"Can't you get me up in a week, sir?" said the man anxiously. "I have got a good deal to do."

"Not in the mine. That's at an end."

"Yes, I heard that. But no, it arn't that. It's business I want to settle about some one I know."

"Ah, well, we shall see," said the Doctor. "Be patient."

He walked back to the cottage, and not seeing either the Major or his child, hung up his hat, and went to Clive's chamber, where he stopped short at the door, startled by the scene within. For Dinah was in the act of advancing to the bed just as Clive lay half dozing.

The sharp crack of a floor board roused him into wakefulness, and he opened his eyes wonderingly, so that they fell upon Dinah's sweet, sad face.

The result was startling to the Doctor, and filled Dinah with agonising despair. For as the light of recognition came into the suffering man's countenance, his features contracted, his brow wrinkled and twitched, and he turned his eyes away with a look of disgust and horror, while Dinah uttered a low moan, covered her face with her hands, and fled from the room, her whole attitude and every movement suggesting utter despair.

Chapter Thirty Nine.

After a Lapse.

"Why, my dear child, it is one of the commonest of things. I've known plenty of cases of this kind, and I daresay your father has."

Dinah looked at the Doctor wistfully, with her face growing old and careworn; but she said nothing, only turned to her father, as he took and held her hand.

"Come, come, this will not do," continued the Doctor. "I don't want to have you upon my hands as a patient. Now, look here; I promise you that all will come right, and it is not the physic-monger speaking now, but your father's friend."

The Major darted a grateful look at the speaker, while Dinah did not stir, but sat hardly hearing him, alone with her despair.

"They do not know all," she said to herself; "they do not know all."

"You see, my dear," continued the Doctor, "he is rapidly mending, and he knows us all, and speaks sensibly; but he is not quite *compos mentis* yet his brain had a nasty shock, from which it is recovering, but it must have time. You feel it bitterly, of course, but it is a natural, though only temporary, outcome of this ailment. Over and over again we doctors find that the one the invalid loves best—wife, mother, betrothed—is the one against whom he takes an unaccountable dislike, and in endless cases this is the one who has devoted herself to constant nursing. Ah, they are an ungrateful lot, patients, when they are a bit off their heads. I had one to whom I was administering nothing but beef tea, and water just flavoured with syrup of aurantia—orange and sugar, you know. Well, that ruffian swore that I was slowly poisoning him."

"But Reed has quite recovered his senses," said the Major uneasily; "it is six weeks to-day since he turned like this."

"He has not quite recovered his senses, or he would be upon his knees, asking pardon of an angel, sir. No, my dear, I'm not flattering you, for if ever woman displayed devotion and love for sinful man, you have done so for my boy Clive. Come, promise me that you will try and hold up, for your father's sake. Yes, and Clive's. He is rapidly growing stronger, but he wants your help to console him for his losses. That is what we want to get off his brain. Once he can bear that philosophically all will be well."

The Doctor's long speeches were cut short by a visitor in the shape of Wrigley, who was shown in by Martha, Dinah at the same moment escaping to her room, where, on approaching the window, she became aware of the fact that Jessop had accompanied the visitor. He was waiting at the bottom of the garden down by the river, and she shrank away in horror and dread as she trembled lest Clive should see him and it might bring on a fresh attack.

For a few moments she thought of going to Clive's room and telling him. But the dread of meeting his cruel searching eyes, and experiencing another of those shrinking looks of horror and disgust, kept her away, and she sank wearily into a chair, shivering, and with the feeling of utter despair growing upon her more and more.

Meanwhile a scene was taking place in the little dining-room below, where the Major had made a sign toward a chair.

"Thank you," said Wrigley. "I will not detain you long."

"What is it, sir? Sturgess worse?" said the Doctor.

"Oh, no! The fellow is, thanks to you, Doctor, growing stronger and more impudent every day. The fact is, gentlemen, I have come over to see Mr Clive Reed. His brother is waiting down by the river. He would not come in, as they are not on good terms."

The Major frowned.

"As I am Mr Clive Reed's doctor, sir, I have a right to ask you what you want with him."

"Simple matter of business, sir. I want him to come over and inspect the mine."

"Not fit, sir. Too weak," said the Doctor sternly. "Bless my soul! my dear boy, are you mad?"

"I hope not, Doctor," said Clive, as he entered the room, looking very white, but quite able to dispense with the stick he held in his hand.

"Glad to see you about again, Mr Reed," said Wrigley at once, and he held out his hand; but it was not taken. "Mr Reed, I have come on behalf of the shareholders in the 'White Virgin' mine."

"Including yourself, sir, and Mr Jessop Reed?" said Clive coldly.

"Of course," said Wrigley, with an assumption of frankness. "We stand to be heavy losers over the mine if the lost lode is not discovered. But perhaps you don't know that the rich vein has ended suddenly?"

"I know everything in connection with the mine, sir," said Clive, as the Doctor watched him anxiously; but to his intense gratification saw nothing to cause him uneasiness.

"That's well, sir. Then I will be quite plain with you, and ask you to let bygones be bygones, for I am sure that you, as an English gentleman, and one of our principal shareholders, wish for nothing but what is fair and right by all concerned."

He ceased and waited for Clive to speak, but the engineer remained silent, and Wrigley went on—

"I should tell you, sir, that our foreman, Sturgess, has made the most careful investigations, both before his illness and since. He is hardly fit to be about."

"Not fit," said the Doctor.

"Exactly, sir; but he has insisted upon going down the mine during the past four days, and testing in different directions. Then, too, we have had the advice of an eminent mining engineer, Mr Benson, and unfortunately both give a decidedly adverse report. Well, sir, this is bad, but for my part I have great faith in your knowledge."

"Which you showed, sir, by scheming with my brother to get me ousted from the post!"

"An error in judgment, Mr Reed, due to an eager desire to make money. I made the mistake of choosing the wrong brother. I apologise, and you know that I have suffered for my blunder. But let us repair all the past for the sake of everybody concerned. Mr Clive Reed, in perfect faith that you will restore the 'White Virgin' to her former prosperity,

I, as a very large holder of shares, ask you to resume your position as manager and engineer. Tell me that you will do this, and I will at once go back to town, call an extraordinary meeting, and get your reappointment endorsed."

A slight flush came into Clive's pale cheeks as he sat listening to Wrigley's words, and the latter took hope therefrom.

"I see that you feel that there is hope for the mine, sir," he said eagerly; "and that you will sink the past and join us in working heart and soul for every one's benefit."

The Major looked curiously at Clive, whom the excitement of the interview seemed to be rousing from his despondent state, but drawing himself up, the latter said quietly—

"I am sorry, of course, sir, for the innocent shareholders in the mine, but the interim dividends that they have received prevent them from being heavy losers. As to the speculators, they must thank fate that their losses are not greater."

"Yes, yes, of course, Mr Reed, but you will soon set all that right. Take a month at sea, sir, at the company's expense, and come back strong as a lion, ready to go to work again, and make the 'White Virgin' richer than ever."

"No, sir," said Clive coldly. "I lose more heavily than any one, and I am prepared to stand by my losses."

"Yes, yes, but you will soon recoup—there will be no losses. I know that you must naturally feel a jealousy of my friend, Jessop Reed."

Clive's face darkened.

"But he shall not be in your way, my dear sir. You can take it for granted that he will in future have no part in the management. You shall stand at the head, and your judgments shall be unquestioned."

"I thank you, sir, for this great display of confidence," said Clive coldly; "but I have ceased to take any interest in the mine—I may say in anything whatever in life. No, sir, I will have no dealings whatever with you and your partner in the cowardly scheme by which I was overthrown. I can only thank you for arranging that this collapse should not occur during my management. All right, Doctor; I have done. I am not going to be excited, and this interview is at an end."

"Yes, this one," said Wrigley, rising. "You are still weak, Mr Reed, and I will not bother you more to-day. I shall stay at the mine, and be happy to run over on receiving a message, for that you will come round to my wishes I am convinced. Good morning, gentlemen, and I should advise you both to invest heavily in the mine shares, for this second panic has sent them down almost to zero."

He smiled pleasantly and went out to join Jessop, who was waiting impatiently, but with his eyes fixed upon Dinah's open window all the time.

"A smooth, deceitful scoundrel!" said Clive contemptuously, and he held out a hand to the Doctor, who laid a finger upon his pulse. "Quite calm, Doctor," he continued. "Yes, I'm about well now. I only want rest and peace. As soon as you will let me, I will go right away. On the Continent, I think."

"Yes; do you a great deal of good, my dear boy," said the Major. "We must have a change too. Poor Dinah is very pale."

Clive was silent for a few moments, and then said coldly—

"Yes, Miss Gurdon looks very white. I am most grateful to you, Major Gurdon, for the care and attention I have received in this house."

"Then prove it, sir," said the Major sternly.

"I will," said Clive, with not a muscle moving. "I will do so by releasing your daughter from an engagement which has become irksome and painful to her."

"What!"

"From any ties which held her to a kind of bankrupt—to a man broken in health, pocket, and his belief in human nature."

"Mr Clive Reed," began the Major haughtily. "No: Clive, my dear boy, you are sick and look at things from a jaundiced point of view. Don't talk nonsense. You will think differently in a week."

"Never," said Clive firmly. "All that, sir, is at an end."

"And pray why?" cried the Major. "When that attachment sprang up we believed you to be a poor man. Do you suppose Dinah's love for you came from the idea that you were well-to-do?"

"We will not argue that, sir. Your daughter wishes the engagement to be broken off."

"Indeed! I'll soon prove that to be false," cried the Major, springing up.

"No, sir," cried the Doctor; "there has been enough for one day."

But he was too late, for the Major had flung open the door, called "Dinah," loudly, and her foot was already upon the

stairs.

"You want me, father?" she said as she entered, looking wan and thin, but perfectly quiet and self-contained.

"Yes, my child," cried the Major, taking her hand. "Our patient is better, and wants to go away for a change."

"Yes, father dear," she said, without glancing at Clive, who kept his eyes averted; "it would be better as soon as he can bear a journey."

"But he says that you wish the engagement to be at an end."

She bowed her head.

"Yes, dear," she said gently, "it is better so."

"For the present," cried the Doctor quickly.

"For the present that lasts till death," said Clive sternly.

And Dinah in acquiescence bowed her head without uttering sob or sigh, but to herself—

"It is the end."

Chapter Forty.

The Telegram.

"Go on, Doctor, say what you like. I cannot defend myself."

"I will go on, sir; I will say what I like, and I will risk its hurting you, for I feel towards you as a father, and it maddens me to see my old friend Grantham's son behaving like a scoundrel towards as sweet and lovable a girl as ever lived."

Clive drew a deep breath as they walked slowly along the shelf path towards the mine.

"Yes, sir, you may well shrink. I brought you out here for a walk to make you wince. I can talk to you, and say what I like out here without expecting the poor girl and her father to come back and interrupt. Look here, Clive; I'm a cleverish sort of old fellow in my way, and experience has put me up to a good many wrinkles in the treatment of disease, but I tell you frankly it was not I, but Dinah Gurdon, who saved your life by her nursing."

"I suppose so," said Clive, with a sigh.

"Then why the deuce, sir, do you go on like this and break the poor girl's heart?"

"I cannot explain matters," said Clive sadly. "You saw for yourself that Miss Gurdon accepted the position."

"Of course she did, sir; so would any girl of spirit if she found a man playing fast and loose with her. Now look here, Clive, my boy, surely you are not throwing her over because you have lost all this money? Hang it, man! she would be just as happy if you hadn't a penny. Now, then, out with it; was it because of the money?"

"The money! Absurd!" cried Clive, with an angry gesture.

"Then it must be due to some silly love quarrel. Look here, Clive, my boy, for your honour and your father's honour, I'm going to take you back to the cottage, and when they return this evening, you will have to show them by your apology that if there is a scoundrel in the Reed family his name is not Clive. What do you say to that?"

"Impossible, sir. Doctor, you do not know, and I cannot tell you, the reasons why I act as I do."

"You're mad; that's what's the matter with you."

"I wish your words were true, sir," said Clive despondently, and stretching out his hand, he rested against the rock, and then let himself down to sit upon a rough stone. "I'm very weak, I find," he continued apologetically; and then he shuddered as he noted that they were in the spot where Dinah had turned upon him and handed him the paper which he struck from her hand.

"Yes, my boy, you are weak, and I oughtn't to press you; but I cannot stand it. Come, be frank to me. What have you done to make that poor girl throw you over?"

"I? nothing," said Clive sternly.

"What! then you accuse her? Hang it, I won't believe a word of it, sir. That girl could no more do anything to justify your conduct than an angel could out of heaven. Look here, sir, I constitute myself her champion.—What's that noise?"

"I don't know. I heard it twice before. Some shepherd calling his sheep, I suppose."

The Doctor looked up at the bold precipitous bulwark of rock above their heads, and then downward toward the far-stretching vale below the shelf-like path, where a flock of sheep dotting the bottom by the river, endorsed the

suggestion that the sound might be a call.

"Never mind that," said the Doctor. "Come, I say that Dinah has given you no reason for behaving as you have."

"Doctor, I resent all this," cried Clive angrily. "I make no charge against Miss Gurdon, and I tell you that you have no right to attack me as you do. A man is helpless in such a case. Hush! No more.—Major Gurdon."

For the old officer came round an angle of the steeply-scarped rock above them, walking fast, and descended agilely to where they stood.

"You here, gentlemen?" he said; "have you seen my daughter?"

"No, but we have been no farther than this," said the Doctor.

"I'm growing uneasy about her," said the Major; and a curious sensation of mingled dread and jealousy attacked Clive.

"Did she go out—come this way?" said the Doctor.

"Yes. Martha told me she struck off over the mountain in this direction."

He looked sharply about him, but the path curved suddenly before toward the mine, and backward in the direction of the river, forming out there a natural terrace in the huge rampart of limestone.

"Perhaps you have missed her," said the Doctor. "She may have returned home another way, without she has gone on toward the mine."

A spasm shot through Clive, who stood up firmly now, nerved by the bitter thoughts which suggested to his jealous mind Dinah seeking his brother once more.

"She would not go there," cried the Major angrily. "Ah, what's that?"

For at that moment the cry they had before heard came faintly to their ears.

The Major stepped quickly to the edge of the path, protected only by a rough parapet of loose stones, looked over, and then, leaping back, threw off his coat, leaped over the rough protection, and began to lower himself down the steep precipice.

For a moment or two Clive could not stir; then, weak, trembling, and with his mouth hot and dry, he walked to the edge, and looked down to see, quite two hundred feet below, a portion of a woman's dress, and directly after, as she clung there desperately, Dinah Gurdons white upturned face; and he knew now whence came the wailing sound.

"Clive! what are you going to do?"

"Get down to help," he said hoarsely.

"Madness! You have no strength. You could not hold on for a minute."

Clive groaned, for even as he stood there a sensation of faintness came over him, to teach him that he was helpless as an infant.

"Good heavens! what a place!" cried the Doctor. "I cannot—I dare not go down. It would be madness at my age."

Then he stood speechless as his companion; and they craned over, and watched the Major, active still as a young man from his mountain life, descending quickly from block to block, making use of the rough growth of heather for hand hold, and now quite fifty feet below where they knelt, while the look of agony in Dinah's eyes as she clung there, apparently unnerved and helpless, was as plain through the clear air as if she were close at hand.

"Your work, Clive," cried the Doctor furiously, but in a low whisper. "The poor girl in her misery and despair has thrown herself over, and lodged where she is. Thank God, I am down here. I can be of use when we get her home. If we get her home alive," he added to himself.

Clive made no reply, but knelt down panting and enraged against the weakness which kept him there supine, when, in spite of all, he would have given a dozen years of his life to have been able to descend and bear the poor girl up to a place of safety.

But he could only gaze down giddily with heart beating as he watched the Major slowly and carefully descending, now making good progress, now slipping or sending down a loose stone. Once they saw him hanging only by his hands, again losing his footing and seeming to be gone. The next minute, though, he was still descending, and in the silence of the mountain side, they could hear his words, short, sharp, and decisive, as he called to his child, bidding her be of good heart, for he would be with her directly; and that she would be safe.

Then, to Clive's horror and despair, he saw the starting eyes which had looked up so wildly, gradually close, and the sun gleamed on them no more. He knew only too well what it meant; that Dinah was turning faint and weak; and once more unable to bear the agony, he made a rapid movement to descend.

"Madman!" cried the Doctor, and he flung himself upon Clive, mastering him directly, for the sudden strength flickered away at once. "Don't you see," he panted, "you cannot do it, and your fall would be destruction to them both. Keep still and silent. The Major will reach her directly. Yes: look: he is as active as a goat. Ah! great God! No:

saved—he has her!”

The Doctor shrank away unable to bear it, for as they stared below with dilated eyes they saw Dinah begin to glide downward just as her father was steadying himself, holding on by one hand to a tough root. Then he seemed to make a dart with the other, and his child suddenly became stationary while he shifted his position, got his feet against a piece of rock, and they saw him draw her up to his side and hold her there.

The rest of that scene was dreamlike to Clive, as he lay with his breast over the edge looking down, till nerved and urged on by her father’s strong will, Dinah seemed to recover, and began to climb up under his directions and with his help, step by step, and inch by inch, till at last she was so close that Clive stretched out his hands to help her, while the Major supported her from below. But their eyes met, and she did not touch those hands, but gave her wet and bleeding fingers to the Doctor, who drew her into safety on the path, where she rose now to stand shivering while the Major sprang to her side.

“I did not think I could have done it,” he panted. “Oh, Dinah, my child, don’t say you threw yourself down there.”

“No,” she said, giving him a piteous look, and then turning slowly to face Clive. “I went down to fetch this—to give to Clive Reed before he left us for ever. I thought it must be there.”

She took from her breast, where it had evidently been thrust, a stained scrap of reddish paper, made more ruddy where she held it, for her fingers bled freely.

“A telegram,” cried the Doctor.

“Yes. Take it, Clive,” said Dinah slowly, but evidently rapidly recovering her strength. “It is the message I received from you that day.”

“I sent no message,” he cried, as he hastily read the stained slip, and caught the words “come”—“meet me”—some figures “P.M.,” and his name in full—“Clive Reed.”

“A forgery!” he cried wildly, as the truth flashed upon him. “There is no postal mark upon it. I did not send this lie.”

“No?” said Dinah faintly, as the look of despair grew more marked in her eyes. “I have thought since that I had been deceived, but I felt that I would sooner die than you should not know the truth.” Then she turned pale and shrank to her father’s side, as a spasm of rage shot through Clive Reed.

“Jessop again!” he whispered hoarsely to the Doctor; and his fingers crooked, and he held out his hands as if about to spring at another’s throat. Then he reeled, but recovered himself with an exultant cry, for a voice came loudly to their ears from round the buttress toward the mine.

“Curse you! I will. The police shall stop that.”

“No; you don’t get away,” cried another voice; and Dinah turned of a sickly white. “Stop, you! and let’s have it out, or I’ll heave you down below. Blast you! I tell you she was my lass—before you and your cursed brother came in the way. Mine, I tell you.—Ah! just in time!”

Sturgess uttered a savage laugh, and he stopped short facing the little group upon the shelf, and holding on by Jessop’s collar, in spite of the latter’s struggles to get free.

“Look here, all of you. This man, my servant—you are witnesses—he has threatened my life. I go in fear of him. I’ll have him in charge. I go in fear, I tell you.”

“Yes, so much,” cried Sturgess, with a mocking laugh, “that he was off down again to the cottage to see pretty little Miss Gurdon here, only I stopped him, for I’ve had enough of it. Master or no, he don’t go poaching on my estate. I’d sooner break his cursed neck.”

“Silence, sir!” roared the Major.

“Silence yourself!” cried Sturgess savagely. “Who are you?”

“The father of the lady you insulted, and but for her sake you would have been sent to gaol.”

“For courting a pretty girl,” cried Sturgess, with a mocking laugh. “But I’ll have no more of it. Do you hear, both of you—you too, Clive Reed? You call yourselves my masters. I’m yours. Keep off, both of you, if you value your necks. I tell you she’s my girl—my lass—my very own to marry or leave as I please.”

Dinah uttered a piteous moan, and turned her agonised face to Clive, who stood there with jaw dropped and the paper trembling in his hand.

“Yes. You see. She don’t deny it.”

“Dinah!” cried Clive wildly, and there was so agonising an appeal in his voice, that his cry thrilled her, and sent the blood flushing into her pale cheeks, as she now stood up unsupported.

“Yes, all of you; it’s all right. I used to meet her on the hill side, and we used to go courting among the heather before these white-faced hounds came down. She don’t deny it. She daren’t. Dinah, my lass, come here.”

Clive made a movement to fling himself upon the ruffian, but the Doctor passed a hand across his chest.

"Too weak, boy," he whispered. "Give the scoundrel rope."

"I do deny it," said Dinah at last, as she drew herself up, a true woman now, her honour at stake, and all listening for her refutation of her pursuer's words.

"There, what's the good of lying, little one," cried Sturgess, with a mocking laugh. "It's all nature, and there's nothing to be ashamed of in a strong man's love."

"I do deny it," said Dinah again, more firmly now. "Father, dear—Clive Reed—this man lies. It is not true."

"What!" cried Sturgess. "There, what's the good of hiding it all, pussy? I'm an honest man, and I love you. I'll marry you to-morrow if you like."

"Must I speak again?" said Dinah proudly, as she looked round, letting her eyes rest last on Clive's deadly white face; and then she uttered a gasp, for she saw his cheeks flush, and his eyes brighten, as they met hers, for she knew that she was believed. "It is an insult, father, and a lie."

"What!" cried Sturgess, as the Major caught her to his breast; "didn't you meet me that afternoon yonder, and go with me down the mine gap? Before there was any one there but me, gentlemen all."

"Yes—wretch!" cried Dinah fiercely, "coward! You did pursue me down there; I, a poor defenceless girl—you, a strong, savage man. I must speak now, father, Clive; God, who is my judge, hear me too. Faint and exhausted, he seized me at last, and I was at his mercy, till my poor old faithful Rollo came and set me free."

"Yah, nonsense!" cried Sturgess triumphantly. "Perhaps you will say I did not come to your window night after night. What about that time when your father had gone up to town?"

"The wound upon your shoulder is my answer, my witness to the truth. Father, my only protector lay helpless in a drugged sleep. Poor Rollo was poisoned by this miscreant's hand. I was alone, and at his mercy, till I fired!"

"What, this?" cried Sturgess mockingly; "this was a fall."

"Yes," said the Doctor, "when the shot had entered in. Major, it was a gun-shot wound, and the marks of the dog's teeth are in his leg. I'll swear to that."

"Liar and hound," cried the Major, dashing at him, but he was too late, for, nerving himself for one blow, Clive Reed threw himself upon the ruffian, and the next moment he lay quivering on the ground, with the young man's foot upon his chest.

"Dinah, my child," cried the Major reproachfully, "why was I not told all this?"

"Because I was a woman, and shame closed my lips," she said softly. "Take me home, father. Silence has been my only sin."

"One word before you rise, my good fellow," said Doctor Praed, as he drew his patient from where Sturgess lay; "whether the law deals with you or no is not my affair; but I, as a doctor, tell you this: mad or only enraged there's sometimes a deadly poison in the tooth of a dog. You have had a long taste of delirium from that gun-shot wound. Mind what you're about, or I wouldn't give sixpence for your life; and if you're bad again you may die before I'll run a step to save you. Here, Jessop. Those of a feather flock together; take this bird of prey back to his cage. You're not wanted here."

He stood watching as Sturgess rose and staggered away like a drunken man, while Jessop, after a vain effort to speak, walked rapidly off in turn.

Then the Doctor turned to where the Major stood with Dinah in his arms, her face buried in his breast.

"You will not fear to be alone, Major?" he said quietly.

"Afraid, sir," said the Major, with an angry look. "No."

"Then I will leave you now, and take my patient back to town. Good day, my dear sir, and God bless you. I must come and see you again. Dinah, an old man wants to say good-bye."

She turned her wild eyes to his, and his look was sufficient. She left her father and the next moment rested in his arms.

"Good-bye, and I need not say God bless you, my darling," said the Doctor, with his voice quivering a little. "There, *au revoir*. Clive will ask your pardon another time. Not now."

The next morning Clive Reed had to be helped up the steps into Doctor Praed's house in Russell Square, a relapse having prostrated him; and by the time he was about again the 'White Virgin' mine was a solitude once more. It was waiting for orders to go forth about the sale of the valuable engines and other machinery, Robson now having the property in charge, and going over four or five times a week to see that the place was uninjured, though the weather had already begun to make its mark.

One day he met the Major, and was ready enough to become communicative, and tell how Sturgess had been taken bad the day he returned to the mine, and how he had been fetched at last by friends who came all the way from Cornwall.

"Death's mark was on him, safe enough, sir. I shouldn't be at all surprised to hear that he had gone."

"And those gentlemen?" said the Major, clearing his throat, and speaking still huskily, for he did not like his task.

"Mr Jessop Reed and Mr Wrigley, sir? Oh, they haven't been down again. Don't suppose they will come, for the poor mine's played out."

Two months more had passed away before Clive Reed visited those parts again. He was thin and worn, but there was a bright look in his eyes, as he breasted the hills from Blinkdale and plunged down into the deep, chasm-like vales. For he knew that the past, with its cruel doubting, was forgiven, and that the woman he loved more than life was ready to take him to her breast.

It was down the deep valley by the side of the rushing river that Dinah did take him to her throbbing heart, and hold him as tightly as his arms grasped her; for in that solitary place, where the glancing sunbeams shot from the silver river, there were only the trout to tell tales, and the tales they told never reached the air.

She had gone to meet him, and when they had sauntered on another half mile there was the Major whipping a dark pool under the shadow of the rocks.

"Ah, Clive, my boy," he cried, winding in his line and speaking as if they had only parted the previous day, after a glance at Dinah's eyes where the love-light burned brightly. "Glad to see you down again. Why didn't you bring the Doctor?"

"He is rather in trouble about his daughter?"

"Ill?"

"Well, mentally more than bodily, sir. She is back home, and he will hardly leave her for a moment."

"Home, eh? And her husband?"

"He is in New Zealand, and not likely to return."

"So much the better for old England, my boy. Come along, you must be like me, hungry."

They walked through the old wild garden, which looked more beautiful than ever; and Martha was ready to smile a welcome; while to Clive, as he let himself sink back in his old seat, it was as if he had at last found rest.

It was during a walk next morning with the Major, who took Clive round by the 'White Virgin' mine, that the old officer suddenly turned to him and said—

"Clive, my lad, the machinery here is to be sold next week."

"I know it," said the young man, frowning slightly.

"You must buy it, and start afresh. I can't have you turn rusty for want of work."

"No, sir, it is useless. The chances are too great against the old lode being found again."

"Not at all, boy; it is found close to the surface."

"What!" cried Clive excitedly. "Where?"

"On the patch of old waste of limestone that I bought all those years ago, when, for a fault I never committed, I had to exile myself and come to live down here—to rot in despair, as I thought, but to find a lasting peace."

"Oh, impossible!" cried Clive. "Are you sure?"

"As sure as a man can be who has dabbled over minerals for twenty years. There it is—a foot beneath the surface, and as rich as it was in the 'White Virgin' mine. The White Virgin—my dearest child—gives it to you as her dowry, the day you call her wife."

The Major held out his hands; and as they were taken a white dress was seen fluttering on the hill side a few hundred yards away, and the Major said softly—

"She does not know it. I have left the news for you to tell. One moment: I have a stipulation to make."

"That you never leave us, sir."

"No; but you may throw that in, boy, and not rob me of all. Let the new vein still be called the 'White Virgin' mine."

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