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(Michigan State University)

**AT THE SIGN  
OF  
THE SILVER FLAGON.**

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OF**

# THE SILVER FLAGON.

BY

B. L. FARJEON.

AUTHOR OF "BLADE-O'-GRASS," "JOSHUA MARVEL," "LONDON'S HEART," "GRIF,"  
"BREAD-AND-CHEESE AND KISSES," "AN ISLAND PEARL," ETC.

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AT THE

SIGN OF THE SILVER FLAGON.

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CHAPTER I.

SILVER CREEK TOWNSHIP.

It is December, and the sun marks the record of a hundred and six in the shade. We are at the golden end of the world, in Australia, at Silver Creek, twelve months ago a wilderness, now a busy and thriving township. Within this brief space, an infant in the history of cities has grown into what promises to become a strong and healthy man. Unknown, unthought of but a year ago, the name of Silver Creek is already a household word in a new and flourishing colony, and holds an important place in the journals of commerce.

There are turnings and thoroughfares in Silver Creek sufficiently irregular to drive land surveyors into a state of distraction, and there is but one street which exhibits anything like regularity in its formation; but this is a result more of accident than design. It is the principal street in the township, and is lined with wooden tenements and calico tents, in which the business of the town is transacted. Stores of every description, in which all things necessary, and many things unnecessary, for the requirements of life, are to be found within the limits of this thoroughfare, which is known to the residents as High Street. If you are curious in such matters, you may calculate how many stores High Street contains by setting its length at a mile and a half, and giving each store an average frontage of sixteen feet. A few of the buildings are of wood, the majority of calico, and the inhabitants of one Englishman's castle can hear the inhabitants of the next talking and bargaining during the day, and sighing and murmuring during the night. Not that the inhabitants of Silver Creek are all Englishmen. Other nations thirsting to have their fingers in the golden pie, have sent their representatives across the seas and through the bush, and Americans, Germans, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Italians, Mongols, and Africans, form a rare Tower-of-Babel community. As, however, they have all been drawn thither by one magnet-fashioned of bright gold--they do not emulate the Tower-of-Babel folk, but hob-a-nob amicably with one another, and make common cause of it with the ubiquitous Englishman. The pie is a rich one, but the fruit is unequally distributed, and there are many waste places in it (unfortunately not seen until the crust is dived into), the discovery of which brings disappointment and despair to the hungry seekers. The despair does not last long; they are soon tearing up the earth again, animated by new hopes of coming suddenly upon rich pockets of gold.

High Street had only one side, where the stores were built. Opposite, it was open ground for a distance of some four hundred yards; then commenced the upland, on the ridge of which a long thin range of wooden buildings was erected, which formed the Government Camp, where the official business of the township was transacted. There were the resident-magistrate's court, the treasury, and, in dangerous proximity, the gaol, and all the other necessary adjuncts of civil government. The goldfields' commissioner, or the warden, as he was usually called, and his staff, and the resident magistrate, and a few of the lesser luminaries, dwelt there in snug habitations with their Chinese cooks, who were rare masters at crust and paste--which is but natural, as they are proverbially light-fingered. There these children of the sun and the moon chattered, and cooked, and smoked opium in their little wooden pipes, of which they were as tenderly solicitous as though they had been children of their blood; and went elsewhere, to the vilest and dirtiest nest of thoroughfares the imagination can conjure up, and which was known as the Chinese Camp, to gamble away their hard earnings. In this camp, of course, was the Joss-House, with its absurd and senseless mummeries; and there, also, were certain dens, which every night were filled with Chinamen, smoking themselves into helpless idiocy. The provision stores in the Chinese camp were stocked with curiosities in the eating way which made fastidious persons shudder: such as preserved slugs and snails (delicious delicacies to the Chinese palate), and bottles crammed with what seemed to be pieces of preserved monkey, while thousands of shreds of shrivelled meat hung from the calico roofs, which were black with smoke. These shreds

weighed about an ounce each, and looked like the dried and twisted skins and tails of rats. To judge from the glistening pig-like eyes of the children of the celestial sphere when these morsels were on their platters, and they were preparing to discuss them with their chop-sticks, they must have contained some exquisite and delectable charm, which was hidden from the sight and sense of the English barbarian. If ever night was made hideous, the the Chinamen made it so in their dirty camp with the clanging of their gongs and tom-toms, and the harsh treble of their voices. To unaccustomed ears it appeared as though Bedlam had been turned loose in this remote part of the globe.

Between the Government Camp and the High Street ran a valley through which a sparkling stream of water meandered; this was the Silver Creek, from which the township derived its name. At the back of the High Street stores, dotting the hills and gullies for miles around, and in the rear again of the Government Camp, were the white tents of the gold-diggers. There was a range of hills from which one could look down upon the scene, and it was well worth the labour to climb this height on a moonlight night, and gaze at the perspective of snow-white roofs, beneath which the tired miners were sleeping, and at the silver stream of water threading its way through the undulations. Then there were the Government buildings, prettily situated, and here and there clumps of silver-bark trees, and, in the distance, shadows of great ranges melting into the clouds. It was a picturesque scene, and the solemn silence and its romantic history afforded food for the mind as well as for the eye.

The Silver Creek diggings more than fulfilled the promise of its name, for gold was found in its soil instead of silver. It was first discovered by Chinamen, who had been hunted off another goldfield fifty miles away, where their presence had been considered an abomination by the European miners. They brought this judgment on themselves by stealing, in the dead of the night, golden dirt which did not by right belong to them, and severe skirmishes had taken place between the rival races, in which the Chinamen were worsted. They had to fly for their lives, and they wandered wearily, and yet with spirit, further into the interior of the country, prospecting here and there for gold, but without satisfactory results until they reached the hitherto unexplored district of Silver Creek. Here, by their discovery of the precious metal, their wanderings came to an end, and they pitched their tents and lit their fires, and worked undisturbed for a few weeks, getting much gold, and laughing doubtless in their capacious sleeves at the lucky chance which had led them to the place. But if they had indulged in the dream of keeping Silver Creek and its precious deposit all to themselves, it was rudely disturbed one fine morning, and they screeched like magpies when they saw six lusty Tipperary men march on to their diggings, and stick their picks into the ground. The Mongolian saw his enemy before him, and waited in dread for what was to come.

The following was the order of the proceedings of the Tipperary men:

They first stuck their picks into the ground, at a distance of about twenty yards apart from each other; then they clustered together, and tightened their belts. When these were arranged to their satisfaction, they solemnly and simultaneously produced six cutty pipes, all very short and very black, and carefully lighted them. Being now, with their pipes held firmly between their teeth, prepared for action, they sauntered in an indolent kind of way towards the shafts at which the Chinamen were working, and pausing at one, watched the man at the windlass winding up the bucket. The Chinamen spoke not a word; the Tipperary men spoke not a word. For full five minutes this was the state of things, and the Chinamen proceeded sullenly with their work; from screeching magpies, they were transformed into mute, fear-stricken slaves. Wrath and animosity were in their hearts, but outwardly they were the humblest of mortals. Their sallow faces grew sallow, and they cursed their ill-fortune; for it happened that when the Tipperary men appeared upon the scene, they were pulling up wash-dirt, in which specks of gold could be plainly seen. But they cursed in silence.

"How deep, John?" asked one of the Tipperary men, touching the Chinaman gently on his blue dungaree sleeve.

He referred to the depth of the shaft at which the Chinaman was working.

John did not reply.

But be it here understood that on Australasian and doubtless other goldfields, all Chinamen have but one name--John--not given to them by their godfathers and godmothers; and the countrymen of Confucius have meekly accepted it.

The Tipperary man repeated his question.

"How deep, John?"

John preserved silence. The Tipperary man and his mates followed suit for a few seconds. Then he broke cover again.

"M'lenty gold, John?"

M'lenty means plenty; this was everywhere recognised as Chinaman's English.

"M'lenty gold, John?"

Compelled to reply by the sense of danger which the slightly raised tone in which this second question was repeated conveyed to the sensitive soul of the Mongolian, John looked blankly into the face of his interlocutor, and said, with all the innocence of a babe.

"Me no sabby!"

Perhaps no race in the world combines so much simplicity with so much cunning as the Chinese. They utter falsehoods, as children do, with an absolute conviction that it will be believed. In this instance, it need scarcely be said that John understood perfectly the nature of the inquiries addressed to him, and professed ignorance from a mingled feeling of cunning, impotent anger, and helplessness.

The Tipperary man quietly knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the barrel of the windlass, and sticking it in his belt, produced from his pocket a cake of Cavendish tobacco and a great spring knife. His mates followed his example. They knocked the ashes out of their pipes, and began cutting up sticks of Cavendish tobacco with great spring knives. There was a wicked click in their knives as they opened them. The Chinamen's eyes grew white, and they sighed for thunderbolts, or lightning to strike these desperadoes into ashes, or for some secret and as effectual means of getting rid of them. The Tipperary men leisurely filled their pipes, applied a match to them, and puffed away till they were well lighted. Then the one who had acted as spokesman took the Chinaman's ear between his fingers, and the foreigner betrayed himself by yelling out, "What for, you? What for, you?" Another Tipperary man laid hold of the handle of the windlass, and the Chinaman was whirled aside, screaming and yelling, and, after spinning like a teetotum for a dozen yards, found himself in a favourable position for studying the celestial sphere. A third Tipperary man put his foot into the bucket which was about to be sent empty to the bottom of the shaft, and grasped the rope above him with one firm hand, while the second man, working at the windlass, slowly unwound the rope, and let his mate down the pit.

The yelling of the Chinaman who had been whirled from the windlass brought every one of his companions to the spot. They formed quite a small colony, numbering in all, twenty-two souls. The Tipperary men would have grinned had they been told that they were surrounded by twenty-two souls. They knew as much of theology as a laughing jackass does, but, had they been put to it, they certainly would have denied with powerful emphasis that Chinamen have souls. They saw around them twenty-two pasty faces, and twenty-two bodies dressed in blue dungaree; had the Chinamen turned their backs, the Tipperary men would have seen twenty-two pigtailed dangling from the crowns of the Chinamen's heads, all trembling simultaneously and responsively from agitation. This feature in the scene was curious and unique; but, indeed, speaking in a dramatic sense, the entire situation was stirring and interesting. One Tipperary man was hanging between heaven and earth, with his foot in a bucket; a second was letting him down the shaft. So that there were four Tipperary men left to confront, and if necessary do battle with, twenty-two Chinamen. Long odds: but the Tipperary men did not seem to think so, did not seem even to consider that there was the slightest danger. Certainly they trifled with their knives, but they trifled with them unconcernedly, opening and shutting them with cruel clicks, and as though they had not the slightest notion that they might be required for the cutting-up of Chinamen instead of the cutting-up of tobacco. These Tipperary men--or, as they should be more properly called, Tipperary boys--looked upon Chinamen as the scum of the earth, as so many cattle. And the Chinamen, in this instance, really did behave as though they were dirt beneath the feet of the Tipperary boys. They screamed, they stamped, they expostulated, they flashed their fingers in each other's faces, but not in the faces of the Tipperary boys; but they did nothing more. The Tipperary boys scarcely looking at the Chinamen, calmly sucked at their pipes and played with their knives.

Suddenly a great screeching was heard at the bottom of the shaft, which might have come from twenty hungry and venomous cats let loose upon one another; the Chinamen made a movement towards the shaft, but did not approach close enough to mingle with the Tipperary boys. The screeching continued, and an Irish oath or two, heartily uttered, gave it variety. A voice was heard from below, calling out one single word:

"Up!"

The moment this word was uttered, the man at the windlass worked at the handle, and began to wind up the rope. There was a heavy weight at the end of it but the muscles of the Tipperary boy were equal to greater emergencies, and he turned the handle slowly and easily, until there came in view the shaven head of another Chinaman, and then an antique weazened face, in which wrath and dismay were strongly expressed. The man at the windlass, stooping, clutched with his left hand the collar of the antique Chinaman, and pulling him out of the bucket, flung him among his companions, who instantly recommenced screaming, and chattering, and gesticulating with so much vehemence that one might have imagined that their tongues had just been loosened for the first time for twenty years. The arrival from the lower regions was much older than his companions: their faces were large and expressionless, his was small and vivacious; theirs were smooth, and looked as though they were made out of dirty dough, his was lined and wrinkled, and looked like an old and elaborate carving; their eyes were mild and fishlike, his were full of dark fire. Evidently he was the leader of the Chinese crew, for the moment he recovered his breath he began to harangue them with almost frenzied eloquence. A man of spirit he, inciting his mates to open resistance. His fingers flashed the number of friends and foes as his tongue uttered them--five to twenty-three; he even drew partly out of its sheath a long, thin, glittering knife--but

nothing came of it, for one of the Tipperary boys, observing the action, caught him instantly by the neck, dragged him from the midst of his companions, wrested the knife from his hand, and hurled him far away on the other side of the Chinamen. It was the work of an instant, and the twenty-three Mongolians--twenty-two on one side, one on the other--looked on, cowed and trembling.

What had occurred at the bottom of the shaft is soon told. The Tipperary boy, when he stepped out of the bucket and landed on *terra firma*, found the antique Chinaman busily at work in the gutter, where the gold was found. The intruder made short work of it, trying pacific means first. He pointed to the rope and the bucket, and motioned to the Chinaman that he was wanted above. The Chinaman shook his head, and did not understand. The Tipperary boy, not being in the humour to waste time, seized him, placed him by main force in the bucket, and then called to his mate to haul up. Having a sensible regard for his limbs, the antique Chinaman was compelled to hold on to the rope. After this a tape-line was let down the shaft, and the depth measured: then the man below busied himself in tracing the bearing of the gold gutter, its dip and direction, and what was the nature of the earth above and below it. Having satisfied himself upon these points, he half filled the bucket with the auriferous soil, and, stepping into it, was pulled to heaven's light.

"All right, mates," was all he said.

Then he took a tin dish which belonged to the Chinamen, and, filling it with the earth he had dug out of the gold gutter, walked towards the creek, followed by his mates and the rightful owners. He washed the earth carefully and deftly, and with experienced hands: all of them looked on, animated by various feelings, as he swung the dish round and round. Soon the gold came into view, dotting the lessened earth brightly, like stars in a dirty sky: little by little all the earth was washed away, and the pure gold lay in a little heap in the corner of the tin dish. One of the Irishmen produced a pair of gold scales, and the gold was weighed.

"Four pennyweights to the dish," he said.

"How thick is the wash-dirt?" asked one, of him who had been below.

"About two foot and a half," was the reply.

Hurrah! It was a fortune if they could get claims on the gutter. The Chinamen waited anxiously. What were their enemies now about to do? The man who had washed the gold held it towards the rightful owner.

"M'lenty gold, John," he said, with a pleasant laugh.

Somewhat more satisfied as to the honesty of the intentions of the Tipperary boys, the Chinamen nodded their heads violently enough almost to shake them off, and found their tongues and their understanding.

"Yes, yes. M'lenty gold! Englishman welly good man! Englishman get m'lenty gold!" And pointed to some distance, with tempting fingers, to show where gold was sure to be found in larger quantities.

"All right, John," they said; "we don't want your claims. We only want to find out the lay of the gutter. There's room enough for all at present."

The Chinamen, understanding now the English language, of which they were before so ignorant, became gratefully effusive. The old man darted forward to take the four pennyweights of gold.

"Stop, though," said a Tipperary boy, the lawyer of the company. "Have you got Miners' Rights! Where's your Miners' Rights?"

Without their Miners' Rights--which, it may be necessary to explain, were parchment grants from her Majesty the Queen, to mine the soil for gold, at the rate of one pound per year per man--the claims which the Chinamen were working were not legally theirs, and could be taken from them at a moment's notice. In reply to the query, twenty-three hands were thrust into twenty-three blue dungaree bosoms, and twenty-three pieces of parchment were waved like flags of freedom triumphantly in the air. The gold was returned to the rightful owners, and the Tipperary boys marked out claims for themselves on the line of the gutter, and were fortunate enough to hit the mark. Next day more men arrived on the ground, and the gold rush having set in, in less than three months the township of Silver Creek was formed. Diggers and traders flocked there from all quarters, and a strangely mixed crew was soon assembled together.

## CHAPTER II.

### HOW BABY OBTAINED HER SHARE IN THE STAR DRAMATIC COMPANY.

Silver Creek could soon boast of its newspaper, of course; and equally as a matter of course, it could almost as soon boast of its rival newspaper. It is strange that in communities where one newspaper would languish, two are almost sure to flourish; and the *Silver Creek Herald* and the *Silver Creek Mercury* were not an exception to the rule. They led a prosperous and noisy life, and were conducted upon the usual abusive principles, with great vigour and some ability. Their establishments were in the High Street, where there were also sale-rooms, banks, hotels and restaurants, billiard-rooms, clothes and provision stores, and a store with "Pie-office" written over it. This was almost as good as the peripatetic vendor of baked potatoes, upon whose tin can was painted "The Universal Baked Potato Company (Limited)." The stores drove a roaring trade; flags waved gaily over them; a continual stream of people was flowing up and down. It was like a fair. Here were two Chinamen bearing a pole on their shoulders, in the centre of which dangled, head downwards, a pig at the end of a rope, with its four feet tied in one knot. (When the Chinaman gets to Paradise he hopes to eat roast pig for breakfast, dinner, teas and supper, through all eternity.) Here were half-a-dozen gold-diggers in great thigh-boots, dragging a jibbing-horse along for their puddling machine, cracking their whips and leaping here and there in sympathy with the antics of their wild purchase. Here were American wagons, with handsome teams of horses, and bullock-drays yoked by patient long-suffering cattle, the drivers of which were unloading their stores. Here was a negro, with his gleaming teeth, and his face alight with humour, badgering a perplexed Mongolian, and a crowd of noisy gold-diggers around them egging him on and laughing. The negro was proving by the most absolute and logical of arguments that he had a perfect right to enjoy the privileges of Silver Creek township, and that the Mongolian was an interloper--"A foreigner, sah!" and had no right there at all. The contest was an unequal one. All the sympathies of the Europeans were with the negro, whose amazing flow of natural spirits would have borne down far greater obstacles than were presented in the distressed actions and thin voice of the Mongolian. It was a peculiar feature of the goldfields that the African was everywhere welcomed, and the Mongolian everywhere scowled at. Here was a great dray creaking along, loaded with portions of the first quartz-reefing machine which Silver Creek could boast of; and all along the road were men buying boots and clothes, and picks and long and short-handled shovels, and bars of steel, and powder and fuse, calling out to one another heartily the while. It was a scene filled with life and colour.

Among the new arrivals, of whom thousands flocked into the township every day, were some dozen men and women, who came in dusty and weary with the toils of the road. They had travelled more than a hundred and fifty miles, being attracted to Silver Creek township by the news of its wonderful prosperity. They were a common-enough troop in outward appearance, and did not look like traders or gold-miners. They had with them a dray drawn by one horse--a poor weak-kneed creature, to whom existence seemed to be a burden as he toiled painfully along with his load behind him. What this load was could not be seen, for the dray had a tarpaulin over it. Upon the tarpaulin were seated three women. The first who calls for notice by virtue of her position was a stately person, probably about thirty-five years of age; her complexion was dark, and in her face was an expression, which might be said to be stamped upon it, and which represented all the tragic passions in little; she bore herself loftily in more senses than one. Her mind was a storehouse, filled with tragedy queens, intermixed with heroines of tenderer sentiment--which latter, however, were somewhat out of place; but you would have roused her to great indignation had you said so in her hearing. The second, about twenty-three years of age, was a nice-looking saucy widow, with a pretty baby in her arms. The third was a beautiful girl, of some eighteen or nineteen summers. The men, who were all much sunburnt, walked along by the side and in the rear of the dray, and when they entered High Street, peered curiously about them, and then at each other, with an air of "This will do." The eyes of one of the party, the eldest, a man of over sixty years of age, were expressive of something more than curiosity: anxiety was plainly there, but presently this vanished, and bright twinkles took their place. He rubbed his hands joyously, and smiled upon one and another.

"It looks well," he said.

He was the chief of the party, which was nothing less than a company of actors and actresses come to open the first theatre at Silver Creek. Before they started from Melbourne, they had formed themselves into a joint stock company, and agreed to divide profits in proportion to their abilities. There were twelve in the party, not reckoning the baby, and the number of shares were thirty-six. These, after much anxious discussion and deliberation, and some display of the peacock's chief attribute, were distributed as follows:--

	<b>Shares.</b>
<b>1. Tragedian, light comedian, and stage-manager, playing the lead in everything</b>	<b>4½</b>
<b>2. Heavy man</b>	<b>3</b>



<b>3. First old man</b>	<b>2½</b>
<b>4. Second old man</b>	<b>1½</b>
<b>5. First low comedy</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>6. Second low comedy</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>7. Walking gentleman and treasurer</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>8. Supernumerary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>9. Juvenile lead and general utility, scene painter, acting-manager, and general director</b>	<b>4½</b>
<b>10. Leading lady</b>	<b>4½</b>
<b>11. First old woman</b>	<b>3</b>

*(There was no second.)*

<b>12. Chambermaid (who could sing and dance)</b>	<b>2½</b>
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These proportions being settled, they jogged along comfortably, dreaming of full purses; but on the second day the First Old Man drew attention to the circumstance that although there were thirty-six shares in the company, only thirty-five had been allotted. The Walking Gentleman, who, as treasurer, was looked upon as the arithmetician of the company, and was, therefore, the great authority in figures, instantly began to reckon up, for the fifty-seventh time, and made the number of shares thirty-seven: he tried again and made them thirty-four; tried again, and made them thirty-eight. Then, in desperation, he said that the First Old Man had "discovered a mare's nest," and that the figures were right--thirty-six shares in the company, and thirty-six allotted. Hurt in a tender point, the First Old Man began again to pencil and reckon, and after achieving a dozen different results, came back to his original discovery, and stuck to his guns like a man. Thereupon high words ensued between the Walking Gentleman and the First Old Man, and the matter was referred to the arbitration of the other ten, who immediately set to work to settle the dispute. The results they produced were extraordinary, varying from seventeen to fifty-two, the highest and the lowest totals being accomplished by the First Old Woman (who, to prove the general fitness of things, should have been the First Old Man's wife, but in proof of the general *unfitness* of things, wasn't) and the singing and dancing Chambermaid.

"I make it fifty-two," said the First Old Woman, in a despondent tone, "and what's to become of us, I'm sure I don't know."

She said this in a tone which denoted that the salvation of the Company was imperilled by this arithmetical crisis.

"Fifty-two!" exclaimed the singing and acting Chambermaid, with a melodious laugh. "Why, my dear, its only seventeen!"

The matter was so serious, and everybody became so positive, that in a very short time they were all wrangling and disputing. Nothing was clear but one thing, that if these actors and actresses were a fair sample of the profession they represented, then very few actors and actresses are blessed with a genius for figures.

"This is a bad commencement," frowned the Heavy Man, as was becoming in him: frowns were his special privilege.

The Supernumerary was the only indifferent person; his being the lowest share and represented by the simple figure 1, he considered himself safe. Besides, he was a neophyte, who had fully made up his mind to rival the elder Kean one of these fine days; he was content, in the meantime, to wait and suffer. Suffering is the badge of all his tribe.

Those were most uneasy and perplexed who held fractions of shares, such as the Tragedian and Stage-manager, and the Leading Lady of the company.

A happy thought entered the mind of the eldest man of the party, whose shares, represented by 4½, were set against No. 9, General Utility, Scene-painter, Acting-manager, etc.

"I have it!" he cried, slapping his thigh with the vigour of a younger man.

The others looked doubtful, but listened with attention, for he was one whom they all respected and regarded with affection.

"It is easily arrived at," he continued; "let us take thirty-six shillings, which will represent the thirty-six shares, and give each his proportion. Then, if there is no money left, no mistake has been made."

This proposal was received with laughter and applause, the largest demonstrations coming from those whose pockets were bare of shillings. For, truth to tell, these heroes and heroines of the sock and buskin were impecunious. This circumstance is not uncommon; the condition is almost chronic in the Profession.

"Contributions!" cried the Acting-manager, pulling out of his own pocket no fewer than seventeen shillings: a very Cræsus he.

Others gave timidly, hesitatingly, grudgingly, doubtfully, for the risk was not small. The Heavy Man had nothing to give; the Second Old Man the same contribution; the Supernumerary the same. The Treasurer, as became a "Walking Gentleman," was light of heart as he was of pocket; he looked forward with hope, rich argosies were before him. The First Old Woman produced a plethoric purse, which proved, however, to be stuffed, not with bank notes, but with critical notes of her abilities as the first of First Old Women. She managed to get together a sixpence and two fourpenny-pieces, which she handed to the Acting-manager, asking for twopence change. He gave her the demanded twopence, and was haunted by visions of future complications. The Leading Lady assumed an air of scornful indifference. The Leading Tragedian contributed three shillings, the whole of his wealth. The First Old Man produced four shillings, saying, "I give thee all--I can no more," but he had money concealed. "Who steals my purse, steals trash," observed the Low-Comedy Man, tossing a bad shilling to the Acting-manager. In due time the full complement of thirty-six shillings, representing thirty-six shares, lay in the Acting-manager's palm. He apportioned them to the cry of "The Ghost walks!" Four and sixpence to the Acting-manager, three shillings to the Heavy Man, and so on and so on, until each had received his share. Then he found he had a shilling left, and by this primitive arithmetic the First Old Man was proved to be right.

The next thing to be accomplished was the difficult task of collecting and re-distributing the shillings which had been advanced. This occasioned some comically-distressing scenes. The responsibility fell upon the Acting-manager, who had advanced seventeen shillings. When everybody was satisfied, he had only fourteen shillings left (a bad one among them which they all repudiated) which he pocketed with a grimace, amid general laughter.

Then,

"What's to be done with the other share?" was asked.

It never occurred to these Bohemians that the matter might rest where it was, and that the company could be carried on as well with thirty-five shares as thirty-six.

"O! I'll take it," said First Low-Comedy, "rather than it should cause disturbances."

"Will you?" from other throats. "But I'll take it!"

"And I!"

"And I!"

It threatened to become a bone of desperate contention.

Another happy thought occurred to the Acting-manager. Again he slapped his thigh.

"I have it!" he cried. "Give it to the baby."

"Bravo!" cried the other ten; the mother remained silent. "Bravo! Give it to the baby!"

"Agreed!" sang the First Low-Comedy Man, in the character of one of "Macbeth's" witches.

"Agreed!" sang the Second Low-Comedy Man, in the character of another of "Macbeth's" witches.

And,

"Agreed!" they all broke out in full chorus.

Then they filled the woods with the music from "Macbeth," and danced round an imaginary cauldron.

Thus the baby became a shareholder.

It was not the worst of small comedies this that was played in the Australian woods on a blazing summer's day in January. Many passions and emotions were represented in it in a small way. The curtain falls down as the mother tosses her baby in the air, and as the child is passed from one to another to be kissed.

If in response to the general applause, which I hope will not be wanting, the curtain is drawn aside again, the weak-kneed horse will be seen shambling leisurely along, and the Heavy Man will be taking great strides in advance of the others, with the baby on his shoulders, crowing and laughing and flourishing her dimpled fists in the air.

### CHAPTER III.

#### **THE OPENING OF THE THEATRE, AND WHAT PART BABY TOOK IN THE PERFORMANCES.**

The news of the arrival of Hart's Star Dramatic Company spread through the Silver Creek Goldfields like wildfire, and every able-bodied man and woman (about thirty of the former to one of the latter, so you may guess what a precious commodity woman was) within ten miles around, resolved to pay them a visit. It was really an event in the history of the township; with the exception of casinos, sing-songs, and negro entertainments, there had been no amusements, and the inhabitants looked forward to the opening night with great interest and excitement.

Mr. Hart, who was the originator and guiding-star of the company, was the old man already referred to as the Acting-manager; he was the putty that kept the separate parts of the venture together, for without him the concern would have gone to pieces. A tradesman takes a small order, and is thankful for it; but give a small part to an actress who aspires (and lives there an actress who does not aspire?) and wait to hear the thanks that are showered on your head! Heaven and earth! These little Junos are sublime in their indignation, and as for the little Jupiters, it is well for some persons that they are not Vulcans. It devolved upon Mr. Hart to heal every difference that arose among the members of the company. No sinecure this, for Vanity's ruffled feathers had to be smoothed a dozen times a week. In every difficulty he was the one appealed to, and his decision was invariably received with respect, if not with equanimity, for he was known to be a just man. He had led a strange and wandering life, had been Jack-of-all-trades and master of none, as he himself said, and was in every respect a gentleman. He spoke French and German, and was in other ways well educated; he painted, he sang, and knew how to conduct himself--in other words he had no low vices, and here he was an old man, fourteen thousand miles away from the land of his birth, an adventurer, with a purse as lean as Falstaff's. He had been all over the world, and (rare gift) had made friends everywhere; no one had ever been heard to speak an ill word of him. That so old a man, becoming attached to a Star Dramatic Company, should play the juvenile lead will not be wondered at by persons acquainted with the peculiarities of the profession; as little will it be wondered at that the First Old Man was barely out of his teens. These reversals of the proper order of things are common. Was Mr. Hart happy? His eye was bright, his step was light, and his heart was as fresh as a young man's. For the rest the question will be answered as this story proceeds.

Being in the Silver Creek township, with probably five pounds between them, the first thing to be seen to by these wandering Bohemians was the building of a theatre. An impossibility do you say? Not at all. Easily accomplished. Directly their arrival and purpose became known, the proprietor of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle Hotel and Restaurant addressed Mr. Hart.

"What have you come here for?" he asked.

"To act," replied Mr. Hart.

"You will want a theatre to act in."

"We shall."

"Is your company a good one?"

"I think I may say it is. Go and look at our women."

"I've seen them. You've a real beauty among them. I'm not a man to beat about the bush, and you look like a man to be trusted."

"Try me."

"I will. I'll build you a theatre at the back of my hotel on the following conditions." (The proprietor of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle Hotel dotted off the conditions on the fingers of his left hand with the forefinger of his right hand.) "You will undertake to play in no other place for three months. You will undertake to play in my theatre for six nights a week for three months, and the entertainment shall not last less than four hours. You will undertake to hand over to me every night one-fifth of the gross money received, that being the rent I shall charge you. You will undertake that you and all of you shall board and lodge at the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle, and to pay me three pounds per week per head for such board and lodging--baby not to count." He looked at his thumb with a pucker in his forehead, and finding no condition to which it could be applied, concluded abruptly by saying, "That's all."

Mr. Hart, with the mind of a general, debated for one moment, and resolved the next.

"How many people will the theatre hold?"

"A thousand," replied the enterprising hotel-keeper promptly.

It was a rough guess; he had not the slightest idea as to the size of the place required for the accommodation of the number.

"How long will the theatre take to build?"

"A week," was the brisk reply.

"Then we can open in ten days," said Mr. Hart. "There's my hand on it. What shall be the name of the theatre?"

"I'm a loyal subject," said the hotel-keeper. "We'll call it 'The Theatre Royal.' God save the Queen!"

"So be it."

And there and then the matter was settled.

Within an hour a contract was given for the building of the Theatre Royal; within two it was commenced; within a week it was finished; and on the tenth night it was opened. Men never know what they can do till they try; wonders can be accomplished only by saying they shall be accomplished, and setting to work on them. It is grappling with small things that dwarf men's minds; give them a wilderness to conquer, and they rise to the occasion. When I say "them," I mean especially Americans and English; next to them, but not equal to them, the Germans; least of all civilised nations, with capacity to make grand use of such opportunity, the French.

The excitement in Silver Creek was tremendous. Crowds thronged the High Street during the opening day of the Theatre Royal. The Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle did a roaring trade. Eight hundred pounds were taken over the bars for drinks before six o'clock in the evening; no drink less than a shilling. Some contemptible rival grog-shop in the vicinity had already reduced the price of a glass of ale to sixpence, but the miners turned their noses up at it. They were as generous as sailors, and they were not going to pay sixpence for a glass of ale when a shilling was the regulation price. There was something sneaking in it, and many a gold-digger lost caste by patronising the cheap grog-shop. Fabulous prices were offered for the privilege of going into the theatre before the doors were open, and securing front seats; but the landlord of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle turned a deaf ear to the tempters.

"Fair play, mates," he said. "First come, first served; and the devil take the hindmost."

(Which, if the devil did, he would have had a good haul, for the hindmost on that night stood for a thousand at least.)

"Bravo, mate," the rough diggers cried; "you're the right sort!"

He looked it, as he stood behind the bar, passing the jest and merry word, with one eye gleaming cordially on his customers, and the other eye looking sharply after his till, and nothing loth to make his "pile" (or fortune) with his sleeves tucked up, and to boast of it afterwards.

The scene that took place that night within the walls of the new Theatre Royal was one which not many have the privilege of witnessing. Before the curtain drew up, there were two hundred and twenty pounds in the drawers. And listen to this with envy, you harassed lessees; there were only three persons admitted within the walls of the Theatre Royal who did not pay; these were the proprietor of the theatre and the editors of the two newspapers. Happy theatrical manager! Only two critics to woo and conciliate! Deducting the landlord's fifth, and the expenses for printing and lighting, there would not be less than one hundred and forty pounds to divide. Why, at that rate, even the baby would have four pounds for her share so curiously acquired! The entertainment was arranged to show off the full strength of the company. A "screaming" farce, to set the audience in a good humour (it was not required, for they came in prime spirits, full set for enjoyment); a dance by the pretty Chambermaid, *not* dressed as a chambermaid, be it here remarked; a stirring mob-drama; and a two-act comic drama to conclude with. A liberal programme—one which made the proprietor of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle rub his hands with satisfaction. The actors and actresses, as they came on the stage, were greeted with roars of applause, as they were already old established favourites; the very supernumerary, the neophyte who intended to rival the elder Kean, received a round which made him certain that fame was within his grasp. All through the night, the audience appeared to be anxiously looking out for new faces to give them cordial greeting. The farce was literally a "screaming" farce; had the author of the poor little literary bantling been present, it would have done his heart good, and he might have had dreams of greatness. When the curtain fell on the farce, it seemed impossible for anything to be more successful; but the dance that followed it eclipsed it. The gold-diggers could not have the farce repeated—although they would have been well content to have had it, one fellow actually crying out, "Let's have it all over again, mates!" but they could have the dance again, and they did, once, twice, thrice, and would have insisted on it again, but that the poor girl stood before them with panting bosom, like a deer at its last gasp, and appealed to them as prettily as her exhaustion would allow her to do. The gold-diggers stood up, waved their billycock hats, and cheered her as she had never been cheered before; and one threw a crown-piece on the stage, and another cried, "I can beat that, mate!" and threw a sovereign. Then it commenced to

rain silver and gold, and the girl stood aside at the wings, half frightened at the shower. It amounted to no less than eleven pounds, which she gathered up in her gauze dress and walked off with, kissing her hand and smiling bewitchingly on the generous givers, who felt themselves well paid for their liberality.

(Before the week was out this dancing and singing Chambermaid had forty-two distinct offers of marriage, and the other two ladies of the company each about half as many.)

Then came the Tragedian's chance in the melodrama, and good use did he make of it. He emulated Bottom in his roaring, and the louder he roared the louder the audience cheered. But decidedly the greatest success of the night was achieved by the smallest member of the company, and in an unexpected way. If any person was to be thanked for it, it was the Acting-manager, Mr. Hart.

It occurred in this wise: The Leading Lady dropped a few words, which were construed into an objection to the baby receiving its one-thirty-sixth share of the receipts. The mother (who was the First Old Woman of the company) heard them, and spoke to Mr. Hart with tears in her eyes. The singing Chambermaid stood near.

"The spiteful thing!" she exclaimed.

"Never mind," said Mr. Hart, "we will get over the difficulty; the baby shall appear in the last piece."

The mother in astonishment said that was impossible.

"It is quite possible," answered Mr. Hart, "and shall be done."

"But she'll be asleep, the darling!" exclaimed the mother.

"All the better," was the answer. "She'll have nothing to say. You play in the piece. Now attend to my instructions;" and he forthwith gave them to her.

In the drama, the mother, who really played the part of a mother, had to sit at a table for five or six minutes sewing, and speaking perhaps a dozen words, while the action of the piece was being carried on by two characters who occupied the front of the stage. Mr. Hart, in this scene, placed the cradle on the stage, with the baby in it. When the mother went to her seat at the table, she took the baby from the cradle on to her lap.

"Why, it's a real baby!" cried the gold-diggers, and a buzz of delight ran through the house.

Suddenly the baby awoke, opened her eyes and stared with all her might at the audience, whose attention was now entirely fixed upon the movements of the pretty little thing. The mother raised her to her feet on her lap, and the child, pleased with the light and glitter of the scene, clapped her little hands--one of her pretty tricks--while her face broke out into smiles and dimples. This was enough for the gold-diggers; they laughed, they clapped their hands, they applauded, they cried:

"Bravo, young un! Bravo!"

As though the baby had performed the most marvellous feats; and when the mother, carried away by her feelings, tossed her baby in the air, who fell into her arms crowing and laughing, this little touch of nature roused the audience to a pitch of the wildest enthusiasm. They called for three cheers for the baby, and three for the mother, and three more on the top of those, and some of the men left money at the bars of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle, to buy sweets and cakes for the youngster.

"A great success," remarked Mr. Hart; "no one can say now that she is not entitled to her share. It will be as well to repeat baby every evening until further notice. We will make a feature of baby. She will draw."

Baby did "draw," and the performances went on bravely. Full houses every night. At the end of the week, after paying expenses, there were nearly six hundred pounds to divide. The money was shared on the Saturday night, after the performance. Mr. Hart, with his share tightly clasped in his hand walked into his bedroom and locked the door. Then he lit a candle, and out of a small trunk took a little packet of letters and a portrait. He knelt by the bed, and read the letters with slow delight; they were short, and the earlier ones were written in a large straggling hand. He opened the portrait-case, and gazed lovingly on the picture of a beautiful girl; a child, with laughing hazel eyes and light curls. He kissed it again and again; and taking from his share of the money he had received a sum barely sufficient for his necessities, he deposited the balance in a safe corner of the trunk.

"For you, my darling, for you," he murmured, speaking to the pretty picture before him. "God preserve and bless you, and make your life happy!"

Tears came into his eyes, and rolled down his cheeks; and sweet remembrance brought his darling into his arms, where she lay as she had lain on the last day he saw her, seven years ago.

"My darling must be almost a woman now," he mused, with a yearning heart.

And so he knelt and dreamed, and garlanded his heart's treasure with loving thoughts. Many a rough hard life is in this way sweetened and purified.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### **MR. HART SEARCHES FOR A GOLDEN REEF.**

Gold was first discovered in the alluvial soil in the gullies, a few feet beneath the surface. In some cases the metal was picked up on the surface, and tracked into the bowels of the earth. Sometimes the gold gutter ran across great plains, which soon were riddled with holes, and covered with hillocks of pipe-clay soil; sometimes it ran into hillsides, where the miners tracked it, until the sinking became too deep for profitable labour, or until the "lead," as it is called, was lost. Some of the richest patches of gold that had been found in the colony were found here and there in Silver Creek. In Sailors' Gully, for instance, there was a famous claim, where one gold lead crossed another; the fortunate men who happened to light on this rare junction were runaway sailors, and they made no secret of the fact that they washed fourteen hundred ounces of gold out of twelve buckets of earth in one day. In the same week, the man who was working at the windlass (there were only two partners in this concern) began to turn the handle, and found that the weight at the other end of the rope was greater than he anticipated. He knew that it was only a bucket of earth he was winding up, for he heard it bump against the sides of the shaft. When he caught sight of the bucket he almost let the handle of the windlass slip from him in his excitement. It was not earth he was hauling up, it was gold; and it proved to be the richest bucket of earth that was ever found in Silver Creek. It yielded thirteen hundred ounces of the precious metal; no less. The fortunate sailors celebrated the occasion, decorated the shaft with as many flags as they could get together, fired off their revolvers for an hour as rapidly as they could load them, bought up all the grog in the gully, and invited all the diggers round about to join them in drinking it. That bucket of gold and dirt was almost the death of them, for the carouse was a wild one; but they recovered themselves in a day or two, and set to work again soberly and sensibly, and retired, after ten weeks' labour, with a fortune of seventeen thousand pounds between them.

After a time men began to look for gold in the hills. It was settled years ago by the miners that all the gold that was found in the gullies was washed down from the ranges. Before many days had passed, quartz reefs were found with great lumps of gold in the stone; and one Saturday the principal gold-broker in Silver Creek displayed in his window a mass of quartz which could not have weighed less than two hundred pounds, and which was literally studded and veined with gold. It was labelled "From Pegleg Reef," so named because it was discovered by a man with a wooden leg. Then commenced a craze, and everybody went mad on quartz. This brings us to a day when Mr. Hart, who, with his company, had now been in Silver Creek for three weeks, winning money and laurels, was walking over the ranges, at some distance from the township, with a short-handled pick over his shoulder, a hammer in his hand, and a "fossicking" knife in his belt. The craze for discovering a quartz reef had infected him, and he was looking for a trail.

If you can love this man as you proceed with the story, I shall be glad; for he was a large-souled man, who had never been guilty of a meanness. That he was always poor came from the generosity of his nature, which frequent disappointments had not been able to sour; he could never stoop to trickery for money. In his younger days he had frequently been heard to despise money; but I think, now that he was old, his views were beginning to experience change. Else why should he be toiling over the hills on this hot sultry day, with his eyes eagerly bent to the earth, in search of gold?

He came to the ridge of a range, and he paused for a few moments to look back on the township. The air was still; the heavens were full of beautiful colour; the white tents of the diggers shone in the sun. A world in miniature was before him. Gold had lately been discovered in a large plain which with its busy life was stretched beneath him. Although he was at a great distance from it, he could see it clearly from the height on which he stood. At the farthest edge of this plain were a dozen puddling machines at work, and two or three dams filled with clear water which had not been polluted. The water gleamed and glittered like sheets of burnished silver; the tiny horses walked round and round, yoked to their wheels; the tiny men flitted here and there across the plain, and bent over heaps of auriferous soil, and worked at toy windlasses, with ropes no thicker than thread; thin wreaths of smoke curled from the rear of the tents, where the smallest women in the world were washing and cooking; lilliputians were cutting down trees for firewood with bright sharp axes which were indicated by thin keen flashing edges of light as they were flourished in the air.

Mr. Hart turned his back upon these signs of busy life, and descended the range on the other side. On and on he walked, without discovering any indications of gold, although he paused to crack many a score pieces of the quartz which studded the hills. He smiled curiously at his ill-success. "Well," he mused, as if arguing with himself, "but I should like to find a golden reef! Let me see. A golden reef, yielding say twenty, thirty ounces to the ton. Ah, Gerald, Gerald! don't be greedy. Say fifteen ounces and be satisfied. A hundred tons--fifteen hundred ounces; six thousand pounds. And then, Home! Home! Home! Ah, my darling, how my heart yearns to you! But you are happy, thank God, and if I never look upon your sweet face, if I never hold you in my arms!----" He paused suddenly, with an aching feeling in his breast. "I must see her--I must see her!" he murmured; and stretching forth his arms, cried half seriously, "Come, Fortune, and take me to her!"

He was alone, and no one heard him. For an hour he had seen no evidences of human life about him; Silver Creek township was entirely shut out from view. On he walked, not stopping to chip now, for he thought that he might have a better chance of finding a golden reef if he went farther afield. He must have walked fully two miles farther, when he saw before him at a distance of a few hundred yards a thick clump of trees arranged by nature almost in a straight line, and entirely obscuring the view that lay beyond it. He plunged into the thicket--for it was no less--and through it, and found himself before another thicket of trees similarly arranged. Between the two thickets there were not more than two hundred feet of clear ground. The intervening space was level and bare, and the trees between which he stood were of a great height. The light came through the uppermost branches in slanting devious lines, which, as he moved, darted hither and thither, as though imbued with life. The ground was all in shadow, and so solemn was the stillness and so dim the light in this place, that it seemed like a page out of another existence.

Lost in admiration, Mr. Hart paused for awhile, and then plunged into the second thicket, and found it denser than the first. In a quarter of an hour he emerged into the open unobscured sunlight again.

Before him rose a vast range with masses of outcropping quartz. He considered within himself whether it was worth his while to climb this range; the quartz looked tempting. There were traces of iron pyrites in it, and he had heard that the richest reefs were sometimes found on such heights. Moreover, it seemed to him as though the hill had never been prospected. He decided that he would mount the range.

It was a difficult task that he had set himself; the range was higher, steeper, than he had imagined, and the day was very hot. He was compelled to stop and rest. "Shall I go to the top or turn back?" he asked of himself. He was inclined to retrace his steps, until he thought of his darling at home; he took her picture from his pocket, and kissed it many times. "I will go up," he said "to the very top. I might hear one day that a golden reef had been found on the summit of this hill, and then I should never forgive myself."

Little did he suspect how much hung upon that moment of hesitation. Little did he suspect that simply by mounting this hill, the means of bringing into his daughter's life its greatest joy and happiness were to be put into his hands. But even had he suspected it, his wildest dream would not have afforded a clue to the manner of its accomplishment.

He mounted the hill; he reached its summit. Then he found that others had been before him.

A shaft had been sunk; a windlass was erected. Mr. Hart judged, from the great hillock of earth by the side of the claim, that the pit could not be less than a hundred feet deep. A tree, split in two, was on the ground close by, with its inner surfaces exposed.

Mr. Hart went to the windlass, thinking at first that the shaft was a deserted one, for he saw no person on the hill. But the sound of metal upon stone which came to his ears from the bottom of the pit was sufficient to convince him that his idea was wrong, and that a miner was working in the shaft.

A little heap of quartz lay within a yard or two of him. He examined it, and found gold in it. He took up piece after piece, and in every other piece there were traces of gold. He cast greedy glances, not at the quartz he was examining, but along the brow of the hill, beyond the boundary pegs which marked the area of the prospectors' claim. Then turning, he jumped back with a loud cry, for a man whom he had not before observed was lying on the ground at his feet, and he had almost trodden on his upturned face. But another thing that he saw held him for a moment motionless from fear.

The man was asleep, and in his hair was moving a long brown reptile, with, as it seemed, numberless legs, which were all in motion, stealthily and venomously. Two slender horns protruded from its head, and behind its horns its eyes gleamed with spiteful fire. Mr. Hart knew immediately that it was a centipede--a very large one of its species--and that its sting might bring death to the sleeper. It had crawled out of the centre of the split tree which lay near, and was now crawling from the hair on to the face of the sleeping man. Taking his handkerchief in his hand for protection, Mr. Hart, with a swift and sudden movement, plucked the crawling reptile from the sleeper's hair, and threw it and his handkerchief a dozen yards away.

"Holloa, mate!" cried the man, aroused by the action, and jumping to his feet, "what are you

up to?"

He was a young and handsome man, with a noble beard hanging on his breast, and with his hair hanging almost to his shoulders. His eyes were blue, his hair was brown. His skin was fair, as might be seen, not on his face, nor on his neck where it was bared to the sun, but just below the collar of his light-blue serge shirt, the top button of which was unfastened. In age probably twenty-five or six. In height, five feet ten inches, or thereabouts; a model of strength, beauty, and symmetry. Such a form and figure as one of the old painters would have loved to paint, and as might win the heart of any woman not in love and that way inclined--as most women are, naturally.

Impetuous, fiery, aggressive, his first thought was that the stranger had attacked him in his sleep. He did not wait for a second thought, but pulled a revolver from his belt, where it was slung, covered by a leathern sheath, and levelled it at Mr. Hart. In new goldfields these weapons were necessary for self-defence; like vultures after carrion (although the simile does not entirely hold good), the most desperate characters flew to the new goldfields on the first scent of gold, resolved to get it by hook or by crook.

Mr. Hart held up his hand and smiled deprecatingly.

"I think I have done you a service, young sir," he said. "I saw a centipede crawling in your hair on to your face as you were lying asleep, and I plucked it away. That is all. I was once stung in the arm by such a reptile, and was disabled for three months. I fancied you might not relish a like experience; your face is far too handsome to be spoiled in that way. If you will lift my handkerchief gently and carefully--I did not care to seize the beast with naked fingers--you will see for yourself."

The young man had no need to lift the handkerchief. The long ugly thing was wriggling out of it; half its body was exposed.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the young man, seizing a spade and cutting the creature in a dozen pieces, all of which immediately began to crawl away in different directions, north, south, east, and west, with the intention of commencing independent existences.

## **CHAPTER V.**

### **PHILIP'S RIDE FOR FLOWERS FOR MARGARET.**

"Thank you," said the young man to Mr. Hart, replacing his revolver in his belt.

"Thank *you*," returned Mr. Hart drily, "for cutting up my pocket-handkerchief."

The young man laughed.

"Take mine," he said, offering a red-silk handkerchief to Mr. Hart.

Red was a favourite colour in the diggings in the matter of personal adornment. Red handkerchiefs, red serge shirts, red scarves and sashes, red tassels and bindings, were much coveted.

Mr. Hart shook his head.

"No; I will keep my own as a remembrance."

He gazed admiringly at the young man, and with curiosity, for he saw that the young fellow was superior to the general run of gold-diggers.

"What are you looking at?" asked the young man merrily.

"At what seems to me an anomaly."

"That's me."

"That is you. What made a gold-digger of you?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"A thirst for freedom and adventure. That answer will do as well as another, I suppose. I was



cramped up in the old country, so I thought I would come where there was room to move and breathe."

"You find it here."

"Rather!"

He inflated his lungs, and expelled the air with vigorous enjoyment.

"What part of the old country do you hail from?" There was an unconscious tenderness in their tones as they spoke of their native land.

"Devon--dear old Devon. Oh, for a tankard of real Devonshire cider!"

Mr. Hart sighed. "You have home ties, then?"

"Yes, I have an old father at home, who is old only in years. Let us drink to him." He took a tin saucepan half filled with cold tea, and handed it to Mr. Hart, who drank from it, and returned it. "He is about your age, I should say. Have you been long in the colony?"

"Seven years."

"Ah! I haven't served my apprenticeship yet. Now, what brought *you* over these hills to-day?"

Mr. Hart stammered and hesitated; no man on the goldfields liked to confess that he had been wasting hours and days in the wild hope of discovering a golden reef, simply by wandering about and chipping up stones, although every man did it at some time or other, in secret. However, Mr. Hart blurted out the truth.

"Well," said the young man, "that's the way I and my mate discovered this reef. We found a vein of quartz with gold in it, cropping out on the surface, and we followed it down until we came to another vein about two feet thick, and this we are working now. We're down a hundred and two feet. You see we have about twenty tons of quartz up now; it will go about twelve ounces to the ton, I should say. But we're stuck for a machine to crush it."

"There's one being put up in Iron Bark Gulley."

"Yes; that's nine miles off," said the young man fretfully; "how are we to get the stone to the machine over the ranges, unless we carry it on our backs? A nice job that would be, and would cost as much as the stone's worth!"

"When Mahomet found that the mountain wouldn't come to him----" Mr. Hart said, and paused.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the young quartz miner, "you're a gentleman. It does one good to talk to a man who *can* talk. Well, then Mahomet went to the mountain. That is to say, as we can't take the stone to a machine, we must bring a machine to the stone. But that would cost money, and we're on our beam ends."

Many a gold-miner has been in the same strait--with wealth at his feet, staring him in the face, and no money in his pocket--a rich beggar.

Mr. Hart considered. Should he offer his savings for a share in the claim? He had a hundred and twenty pounds in the corner of his trunk. The chance was a good one. He made the offer. The young man laughed at him.

"We should want twenty times as much," he said.

"I shall mark out a claim for myself, then," said Mr. Hart.

"All right, mate; but you'll have to go a mile away for it. The reef is pegged, north and south, for quite that distance."

This was true; Mr. Hart, with regret, gave up the idea. He looked at the sun, and saw that if he wished to get back to the theatre in time for the performance he must start at once. He bade the young man good-day.

"What's your hurry?"

Mr. Hart explained.

"By Jove!" cried the young man, his face flushing scarlet. "I thought! recognised you. How I should like to go behind the scenes."

"Come then; I shall be glad to see you. This will admit you." And he took a card from his pocket, and wrote some words in pencil upon it. "What name shall I say?"

"Rowe."

"Here is the open sesame. Admit Mr. Rowe by the stage-door. Hart's Star Dramatic Company.-Signed, John Hart."

"You're a brick!" said the young fellow, looking at the card with a flushed face. If it had been an enchanted wand, it could not have made his heart beat more quickly. "I'll be there to-night."

He was as good as his word. What made him so eager was that he had been to the theatre three times, and had fallen dead in love with the singing and dancing Chambermaid. Such an opportunity to make her acquaintance was not to be thrown away. At eight o'clock he stood by the wings, as handsome as Apollo, as strong as Hercules. When he was introduced to the singing and dancing Chambermaid, he was as shy as a sensitive plant, and would have looked foolish but that his beard prevented him. Many a man has to thank his beard for similar grace. The Chambermaid, as good a girl as she was beautiful, saw the state of affairs at once, and knew, by feminine instinct, that she could twist him round her little finger. Nevertheless, she fell in love with him. Nature will not be denied, and he was a man to be fallen in love with. Her name was Margaret. His was Philip.

After the performance, John Hart and Philip Rowe had a glass together. They spoke of the old country.

"I'll give you a toast," said Philip Rowe. "Here's to the Silver Flagon."

"To the Silver Flagon," responded John Hart. Philip Rowe drank another toast, but did not utter it: To Margaret.

He went to the back of the stage on the following night, and many nights after that, and made friends with the company. All the men liked him; he was free-hearted and free-handed. But the Leading Lady, after a night or two, looked upon him with displeasure, for he paid her less court than her state demanded. Her displeasure was the greater because she had shown that she was inclined to be gracious to him. It was incredible that a lady who enacted Pauline, and Juliet, and Lady Macbeth, should be overlooked for a chitling who played simple chambermaids, and could dance a little. But then Philip Rowe was blind--which was not a valid excuse for him. The Leading Lady--being a woman as well as a Leading Lady--would have been well pleased to receive the attentions of so handsome a young man, who was evidently a gentleman, and she snubbed Margaret one night, and was spiteful to her, because of her good fortune. Philip Rowe, going behind the scenes, found his Margaret in tears, in a convenient corner. She had a spare half-hour, and he coaxed her to tell him the cause of her distress.

"Never mind, Margaret," he said tenderly. "Don't cry!"

She looked up shyly at this. It was the first time he had called her by her Christian name. If brevity be the soul of wit, it is also frequently the soul of love. Margaret was comforted.

When Philip Rowe came face to face with the Leading Lady, he glared at her. She glared at him in return. He felt awkward and hung down his head. Her glare was more potent than his; she had to glare often on the stage, and was an adept at it. Besides, her face was smooth; his was hairy.

Margaret coaxed him to do something that night; she knew where and how to plant a dagger in her rival's bosom. She whispered to Philip and he ran out of the theatre in a glow of ecstatic delirium, for her lovely lips had almost touched his ear. Her warm breath on his neck made him tremble.

She had asked him to get a bouquet of flowers, to throw on the stage to her in the last piece, in which both she and the Leading Lady appeared. Flowers have before now been used for purposes as sharp.

But where to get the flowers? A bouquet of flowers was unheard of in Silver Creek township. Where to get them? Where?

Could not love grow them?

Where to get them? Ah, he knew! Six miles away on the main road to the metropolis, there was a--yes, call it so--a garden; a little plot of ground tended by a woman with country memories. In less than two minutes he was in the saddle, galloping in that direction, and right in front of him, all the way, shone Margaret's face and Margaret's eyes and hair. No will-o'-the-wisp was ever more alluring. Margaret lurked in the bushes, glided among the trees, shone in the open spaces, and Philip's heart beat fast and joyously. The six miles of bush road, so soft and pleasant to the horse's feet, were soon traversed, and there was the garden with a few--not many--flowers in it. Philip Rowe leaped off his horse, with joyous exclamations. A woman came to the door.

"Here, Jim!" she cried, to her husband, running into the house, thinking that a bushranger (*Anglicè*, highwayman) was paying them a visit.

Jim promptly appeared, with a gun in his hand. "Now then?" he demanded, nothing daunted.

"Oh! it's all right, mate," said Philip; and in a few moments he explained the motive of his visit.

"About a dozen flowers done up in a bunch are all I want. This for them."

He held up two pieces of rich quartz, in which there were probably two ounces of gold.

Jim was agreeable, coveting the specimen; his wife was not, loving her flowers. But when Philip pleaded, and told his story, she relented.

"Oh, if it's for that!" she said with a sly smile, and took a good look at Philip, and thought that the woman was to be envied who had won so fine a young fellow.

While she cut the flowers the two men had a nip of brandy each, which Philip paid for. The place really was a sly grog-shop.

Soon Philip was galloping back to Silver Creek township in a glow of triumph. He arrived in time, and paid for admission into the body of the theatre, hiding the flowers in the breast of his dandy serge shirt. He was a bit of a dandy in his way, and especially so when he expected to see Margaret. He followed her instructions to the letter; she had told him at what point to throw the flowers, and plump at her feet they fell, at the precise moment she desired. The audience stared at first at the unusual compliment, and then applauded loudly. Margaret curtsied, at which they applauded still more vociferously; the beautiful girl was a pet of theirs, and they approved of the tribute. The Leading Lady turned pale, and clutched at her bosom tragically. The dagger had been deftly planted, and she felt the smart--as only a woman would feel it. Margaret placed the flowers in the bosom of her dress, and sent a look straight into the eyes of Philip, which made every nerve in his body tingle.

## CHAPTER VI.

### **ROMEO AND JULIET.**

The Leading Lady was fond of money, and the theatre was doing so well that her dividend every week was a very handsome one, three times as much as she could expect to get elsewhere; but what woman is prudent when her vanity is hurt? A man with a large bump of caution occasionally hangs back, and calculates consequences. A woman never does. The Leading Lady in a towering passion confronted Mr. Hart, the manager, at the end of the performance.

"Here comes a tragedy," thought he, as he looked into her wrathful eyes. There was a smile on his face, nevertheless.

"I leave the company!" she said abruptly, with heaving bosom.

"My dear lady!" remonstrated the manager.

"To-morrow. I shall take a place in the coach that starts at eight o'clock."

She knew well enough what the result would be if she left; the company would collapse. A man might be spared, and his place filled, or his parts doubled, but the loss of a woman would inflict irreparable injury upon the prospects of the theatre. Mr. Hart knew this also.

"You don't forget," he said gravely, "that we have your signature, and that if you leave without consent we can make you pay heavy damages!"

"That for my signature! that for your heavy damages!" Each time she snapped a disdainful finger.

"My dear lady," he said, in a soothing tone, "you are excited, you are overstrained. We have taxed you a little hardly. We'll play light pieces for a night or two, and give you a rest."

Inconsiderate man He could not more successfully have fanned the flame in her breast.

"You'll play no light pieces to give me a rest! Play light pieces, and give *her* the opportunity of taking leading characters! The shameless hussy! Not if I know it!"

Mr. Hart began to understand. This colloquy was taking place on the stage; the theatre was clear, the curtain was up. Down the stairs which led to the ladies' dressing-room tripped Margaret, fresh, and bright, and happy, with her bunch of flowers in her hand.

"Good night, Mr. Hart," she cried gaily.

In the shadow of the door which led on to the stage a man was waiting for her--Philip. They met, clasped hands--her supple fingers lay in Philip's great palm as in a nest, and he imprisoned them, be sure!--and walked out, side by side, chatting confidentially, with their heads close together. The Leading Lady saw this, and her anger rose higher; but still it was bitter gall to her to reflect that if she went away, the field would be clear for her rival.

Mr. Hart felt that he was on the horns of a difficulty; he could spare neither one nor the other of the ladies.

"You're the manager of this company," said the Leading Lady, "and you ought long ago to have put down such shameless goings on. Did you see the way they went out together, and do you think people are blind? We shall be the talk of the town; but I'll not be implicated in it. My name musn't be used lightly." The manager smiled grimly. "I leave to-morrow. Understand that."

"I decline to understand it. You will fulfil your engagement, and if it is necessary for me to take steps to prevent your departure, I must do so for the sake of the others. I will swear a declaration against you!"

He was aware that he was talking the most arrant nonsense, but he relied on the feminine mind to assist him with its fears, and with its ignorance of legal subtleties.

"I shall be sorry to do so against a lady whom I esteem and respect so much, and of whose talents I have so high an opinion, but no other course will be open to me. If I allowed you to go, the diggers would rise against me. And quite right they would be! Why, my dear lady," he said, cunningly, "you know as well as I do that we are nothing without you--that you are the soul of the company--that there is not your equal on the colonial stage!"

The Leading Lady began to soften beneath the influence of such gross flattery, but it would not do to give way at once.

"I will *not* stop to be insulted!"

"No one *shall* insult you."

"But some one has--you know who--and she shall not do so again--no, not if you swear a million declarations!"

"Come, now, tell me all about it," said the manager, taking her arm, and walking slowly with her up and down the stage. "By the way, the Honourable Mr. Simpson, the Warden of Moonlight Flat, said last night, when you were playing Ophelia--you know him; he was in the theatre with the Commissioner of the Goldfields and the Resident Magistrate----"

"Yes, yes," said the Leading Lady impatiently, "what did he say?"

"That your Ophelia was equal to anything he had seen on the London stage, and that he believed you would create a sensation there. He is first cousin to the Earl of Badmington, you know, who has a theatre in London. I thought you would like to hear it. He is very anxious to make your acquaintance--as all gentlemen of taste and refinement would be."

He glanced slyly at the Leading Lady, whose head was nodding gently up and down, in sweet contentment.

"And now, my dear lady, tell me your grievance."

"It's yours as well as mine, but if you like to stand it, I shan't. If bouquets of flowers are to be thrown on the stage, they must be thrown to me--do you understand, sir? to *me*, as the Leading Lady, and as the star of the company!"

It happened that Mr. Hart had been busy elsewhere during the episode that had very nearly brought the ship to wreck, and had heard nothing of it. He asked the Leading Lady for an explanation, which was given to him.

"And if you don't stop these shameful goings-on," were her concluding words, "I give you fair warning, I will not stay with you. *I* have a character to lose, thank God!"

Which was to be construed in so many queer ways, that Mr. Hart could scarcely refrain from laughing. "Confound Master Philip!" he thought, and said aloud, "Well, well, my dear creature, I will see to it. And no flowers shall be thrown--by Mr. Philip Rowe, at all events--on the stage to any one but you."

This difficulty being soothed over, he went in search of Philip Rowe, and found him leaning against a fence outside the hotel, gazing up at a light in a bedroom window on the first floor.

"Rehearsing 'Romeo and Juliet?'" asked Mr. Hart kindly, taking the young man's arm.

Philip blushed, and stammered some unintelligible words.

"That *is* her window, Philip," said Mr. Hart, "so you will not make the same ridiculous mistake

that I did for a fortnight together, gazing up every night at the light in my lady's bedroom, and working myself into a state of gushing sentimentalism over the slender waist and the graceful turn of the head I saw shadowed on the blind, until I discovered that I had been watching the bedroom window of a black footman."

This was a piece of pure invention on the part of Mr. Hart.

Philip, having nothing to say in reply, shifted one foot over another restlessly. If he could have retired with a good grace, he would have done so, but Mr. Hart had hold of his arm. Mr. Hart continued:

"Putting sentiment aside, a nice scrape you were almost getting me into to-night. Ah! you may stare, but I should like to know what you mean by throwing flowers to my singing Chambermaid--who is not by any means clever, let me tell you, and will never make her fortune on the stage--when we have in our company a lady who plays leading characters, and who knows every line of Juliet's part?"

"Ho, ho!" laughed Philip; "Juliet was a girl of sixteen or seventeen, and your Leading Lady is forty."

"Woe for your life if you said so in her presence!" exclaimed Mr. Hart, with a quiet chuckle; "it would not be worth a moment's purchase. Forty, sir! and what if she is forty?--which she is not by five years--she is the only woman that can play Juliet to your Romeo."

"Hush!" whispered Philip. "She is opening the window."

Margaret, alone, in her white dress, was indeed opening the window. She did not know--not she!--that her lover was below, nor that her form could be seen, for she had extinguished the light in the room. Her shadow might be discerned, but what is there in a shadow? She sat down by the window, and rested her head on her arm. The graceful outlines of her arm and neck and bended head were clearly visible, and the lover feasted his eyes upon them. She held in her hand the flowers which Philip had thrown her! Her lips were upon the tender leaves--sweets to the sweet. He saw her kiss the flowers, and his soul thrilled with rapture. The night was beautifully still; not a sound was stirring; and as far as eye could see the white tents of the diggers were gleaming. So Margaret sat and mused, and Philip looked on and dreamed. Here, in the new world, but yesterday a savage waste, the old, old story was being enacted with as much freshness as though the world were but just created. What wonder? Because the sun has risen a few million of times, is the dew on the leaves less sweet and pure in the early morning's light than on that wondrous day when Adam awoke and found Eve by his side?

So Margaret sat and mused, and Philip looked on and dreamed; and I think that Margaret peeped through the lattice-work of her fingers, and saw with her cunning eyes that her lover was there, worshipping her.

How long they would have thus remained, Heaven only knows. Mr. Hart gave them at least twenty minutes, and then touched Philip's arm. Philip started, and Margaret at the window started also, and with a swift happy glance outwards, and with wave of the pretty hand and arm, closed the window. Philip was standing in the light, and Mr. Hart, like a kind and careful friend, had crept backward in the shade; so that Margaret, when she cast that straight swift glance in her lover's direction, saw only him. Surely as the hand--love's white flag of recognition--waved towards him, it had touched her lips first, and she had sent a kiss into the air--which he received in his heart. It stirred tender chords there, and through his veins crept love's fever, which turns dross into gold, and makes a heaven of earth!

## **CHAPTER VII.**

**AH, PHILIP, MY SON! I, ALSO, HAVE A GIRL WHOM I LOVE.**

Then said Philip, as he and Mr. Hart moved slowly away--then said Philip softly, as though but a moment had passed since his companion last spoke:

"Her name is Margaret, not Juliet. I have no need to play Romeo to Margaret. Margaret!" he whispered to himself, finding a subtle charm in the name; "My Margaret!" and then aloud, "Has your Leading Lady ever played such a character?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Hart, without any direct meaning, "in 'Faust.'"

Philip's face flushed scarlet, not at the words, but at the tone, which was sad and significant, without the speaker intending it to be so.

"I know you to be a gentleman----" pursued Mr. Hart.

"I thought you to be one," interrupted Philip hotly.

"I hope you will see no reason to change your opinion," said Mr. Hart.

"I see a reason already."

"Let me hear it," asked Mr. Hart, secretly pleased at the young man's ill-humour.

"You associated my Margaret's name--"

"Your Margaret!" exclaimed Mr. Hart. "My Margaret, if you please!"

"Mine!" cried Philip, in a loud voice.

"Mine!" echoed Mr. Hart, in a calmer tone.

"Call her down and ask her!" demanded Philip in his rashness, without considering; and, for the life of him, Mr. Hart could not help laughing long and heartily.

"O that you were twenty years younger!" said Philip.

"O that I were!" exclaimed Mr. Hart, with grave humour. "Then you would really have cause for uneasiness when you hear me call her mine."

"How do you make her yours?"

"I stand to her in the light of a father," replied Mr. Hart more seriously. "When I persuaded her mother in town to let her accompany us, I promised that I would look after her and protect her. Therefore she is mine, because I am her father."

"And without any 'therefore,'" responded Philip, "she is mine, because I am her lover."

"Ah," said Mr. Hart, with a bright smile, "here is a case to be settled, then. But if every pretty girl was her lover's, then one might belong to fifty, or more, for there are hearts enough. Why, you rash-head! do you know how many men in Silver Creek might call your Margaret theirs by the same right as that by which you claim her?"

"No," said Philip, a little sulkily, "I don't know."

"Then I'll tell you. To my certain knowledge, sixty-nine; to my almost as certain conviction, some five hundred. She had forty-two offers of marriage the first week, and has had twenty-seven since. Come now, divide her between the sixty-nine lovers who have declared themselves; what part of her is yours?"

"You talk nonsense," said Philip roughly.

"Well, suppose you talk sense," said Mr. Hart blandly.

"It is hardly believable," cried Philip, clenching his fist. "Sixty-nine offers of marriage! She never told me, and I'm her lover."

"She has told me, and I'm only her father."

"By proxy," corrected Philip.

"Well, by proxy."

"Why should she tell you and not me?" asked Philip, more sulkily still.

"Because, my dear Philip," said Mr. Hart, laying his hand kindly on the young man's arm, "up to the present, as I have said, she is mine, and not yours; and because she has a frank open nature, and must confide in some one. As I come first, she confides in me. She has given me all the letters to read, and a rare collection they are. If they were printed they would be a curiosity."

"I should like to see them, and the names at the bottom of them."

"So that you might fight all the writers for falling in love as you have done! Well, you would have enough to do, for you would have to fight according to the fashion of different countries. I have made an analysis, my dear Philip. Seven Frenchmen, four Germans, one Spaniard, three Americans, fifty-three Englishmen, Irishmen, and Scotchmen, and one Chinaman, have offered marriage to--I will say--*our* Margaret."

"A Chinaman! Good heavens! such a creature to raise his eyes to my Margaret! Tell me, at least, *his* name, that I may cut his pigtail from his dirty crown!"

"There's an Ah in it and a Sen in it and a Ping in it; and if you can find him out by those signs you are very welcome. But why should a Chinaman not love? Hath he not eyes, hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? His letter is the greatest curiosity of the lot, and he has evidently educated himself in the English language. I know his proposal by heart. Here it is: 'You welly good English girl; me welly good Chinaman. You mally me, welly good match. Roast pig and m'landy (brandy) for dinner every day. M'lenty gold--make m'lenty more. Me take you to my country, by bye. Chinaman welly good man.' Then comes the Ah and the Sen and the Ping. But let us be serious, although this is true enough that I have told you--truth with a comical side to it. You were angry with me a little while ago."

"Yes, for associating my Margaret's name with mine in the character of Faust."

"I had no distinct intention in my mind, Philip; the conversation happened to take that turn. It would pain me very much to have to think of you in that way. But Margaret is a simple good girl, and it is my duty to look after her. I never knew till to-night that you were paying marked attention to her."

"Who told you?"

"Our Leading Lady."

Philip Rowe smiled: he had his vanities.

"O, indeed!" he said, with assumed carelessness.

"And that will bring me back presently to a subject I mentioned when I surprised you to-night. First, however, there is another thing to be settled. You must cease your attentions to Margaret."

"Not if I know it!" said Philip, with a defiant shake of his head. "I mean to marry her. If you throw any obstacles in the way I'll run away with her to-morrow, in spite of your teeth."

He laughed confidently: he knew his power.

"But you are a gentleman," remonstrated Mr. Hart. "And she is a lady," quoth Philip.

If love's guild could give titles, a peasant would rank higher than a duchess. Not that there was anything common about Margaret. She was born of humble parents, it is true; but she was a good girl, and that is enough for any man.

It was enough for Mr. Hart. He gazed at Philip in frank and honest admiration; but he determined to apply a test. He was not a suspicious man, but he had a duty to perform.

"Suppose there is an obstacle already in the way," he said, looking Philip steadily in the face; "suppose she is already married."

Philip staggered, and the blood deserted his face. "Good God!" he cried. "Then she has been playing me false!"

Mr. Hart wished he had not applied the test; he was satisfied of Philip's sincerity.

"Not so fast!" he cried, in a cheery tone, "not so fast! I only said 'suppose;' I didn't say it was so. How you young hot spirits jump at conclusions."

But it was a few minutes before Philip recovered himself.

"You frightened me," he said, with a feeble smile. "Then it is not true! If I had considered a moment, I should have known; for if truth and innocence have a home in this world, they have it in Margaret's breast. But you came upon me suddenly."

Mr. Hart thought, "Ah! youth, youth, what a painter you are!" And said aloud, "Here is my hand; knowing that you mean honourably by Margaret, I give my consent to your seeing her as usual."

"I'll marry her to-morrow," said Philip, taking the hand offered him.

"Softly, softly; there are conditions."

"I'll have no conditions!" shouted Philip impetuously.

"You'll have this and you'll have that!" said Mr. Hart, in a tone of gentle sarcasm. "You won't have this, and you won't have that! Very well, then. I wish you good-night." And he turned away.

"What!" cried Philip, turning after him, "desert me when I want you to be my friend!"

The old man's heart warmed to the young fellow; he admired everything in him--his hot blood, his impetuosity, his obstinacy, his generous imperiousness.

"I am your friend," said Mr. Hart, "and I will continue to be so if you will let me. But when a man says of something that is mine, as Margaret is--ah, shake your head! it doesn't affect *me!*--"

when a man says of something that is mine, and that he wants to be his, that he'll have no conditions, he compels me to act in self-defence. Attend to me, young sir! Be reasonable, or tomorrow I take Margaret back to her mother, a hundred and forty miles away, and you shall not speak another word to her, as sure as my name's Hart."

"Ho! ho! you speak boldly; but it doesn't matter--you're a man in a thousand. In a thousand! in ten thousand. I'm glad you're not younger, or you might prove dangerous." Mr. Hart took off his cap, and bowed lowly at this compliment. "You'll not let me speak to her, will you not? I'll borrow a speaking-trumpet, and shout to her that you are parting us for ever. But there! give me your hand again. I'm not frightened of you. I am in such spirits that I must do something desperate. As you value your life, give me a back!"

With the readiness of a boy, Mr. Hart stooped and rested his hands on his knees. Philip took a run backward, then darted forward like a deer, and, lightly touching the stooping man's back, flew over him like a bird. Then stooped himself, and folded his arms; and old as Mr. Hart was, he took the leap.

After that they had a hearty laugh together.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Philip, "you are as young as I am, and yet I should say you are over sixty."

"I am," said Mr. Hart proudly, straightening his back.

"I don't mind giving way a little to such a man. Name your conditions."

"You want to marry Margaret?"

"I do--to-morrow!"

"Nonsense. You want to marry her."

"I do--I will; stop me who can!"

"She has a mother."

"God bless her, and all belonging to her!"

"Bravo--a good mother, mind."

"All that belongs to Margaret must be good."

"Her mother must be consulted."

Philip scratched his head. "Must?" he asked dubiously.

"Must."

"How is that to be done?"

"By letter."

Philip counted rapidly on his fingers.

"Why, we shall have to wait a week!"

"For the consent. And then perhaps she'll not give it."

"It will be all the same. We'll marry without it."

"But you'll have to wait longer than a week, Philip. You'll have to wait until our three months' engagement at the theatre is at an end."

"Impossible."

"It must and shall be. Why, without Margaret we are nothing."

"I know it," chuckled Philip.

"She is the soul of the company." The wily old fellow was using the very words he had used to the Leading Lady, and he thought nothing of contradicting what he had said a few minutes before, when he declared that Margaret was not clever, and would never make her fortune on the stage. "Do you hear me? She is the soul of the company."

"I know it," chuckled Philip again.

"Well, then, do you think I am going to let you ruin our prospects, and rob us, as you propose doing?"



"Gently, gently there! Not so fast with your robbing!"

"It is the truth that I am speaking, and you know it; you have said so yourself. Margaret is the soul of the company--she is our greatest draw. If she goes without my being able to get another girl as pretty in her place----"

"You can't do that; I defy you."

"Hold your tongue, hot-head!--without our getting another girl *nearly* as pretty in her place----"

"That's better," interrupted the incorrigible Philip; "but you'll have a rare hunt even for such a one. They don't grow on gooseberry bushes."

"Our business is as good as ruined without her, or some one in her place; and do you suppose I'll stand quietly by and see that done? Besides, think of the money Margaret herself is saving----"

"*That* for the money!" said Philip, with a snap of his fingers. "Money-making's a man's business, not a woman's."

"That's true, and I like you the better for saying so. But leaving Margaret out of the question, there are persons in our company the happiness of whose life hangs upon their being able to save a certain amount of money within a certain time. Not only their happiness but the happiness of helpless ones who are dearer to them than their heart's blood, depends upon this."

"By Jove! you speak strongly. Mention one of them."

"One of them stands before you now."

Philip turned and looked Mr. Hart straight in the face. Tears were gathering in the old man's eyes, and the young man turned away again, so that he should not see them.

"Forgive me, mate," he said softly; "I am so wrapt up in my own happiness that I am forgetful of the feelings of others."

"Ah, Philip, my son"--there was so tender an accent in the old man's tone, that the tears rose to Philip's eyes as well--"I also have a girl whom I love. See here, my dear boy. This is my daughter. She is at home in England, and I am here sixteen thousand miles away."

He had taken the picture of his darling from his pocket, and now he handed it to Philip. The young man looked at it in the clear moonlight. A round fresh face, open mouth with rosy lips, bright ingenuous eyes, fair curls around her white forehead. She was standing within an ivy porch, and one little hand was raised as though she were listening.

"It was taken seven years ago," said Mr. Hart; "she was twelve years old then."

"She is beautiful, beautiful!" exclaimed Philip enthusiastically. "And you haven't seen her since then?"

"No--and my old heart aches for a sight of her. This money that I am earning will take me to her."

"By Jove! and I was going to step in your way! Brute that I was! Margaret shall stop. I'll wait till the end of the time. I can see her every night; and I can build a wooden house for her in the meantime. God bless you, old boy! Give me your hand again. Next to my own father, you are the man I love and respect the most."

## **CHAPTER VIII.**

### **GOD BLESS EVERYBODY.**

"But I haven't finished yet," said Mr. Hart, after a short pause. "I have another condition."

"Another!" exclaimed Philip, with an inclination to turn ill-humoured. "You are insatiable! And how many more after that, pray?"

"None."

"That's a mercy. Out with your last condition--which I'll not comply with."

"Which you will comply with, or I'll know the reason why."

"Ah, ah! my Cornishman, go on with your conditions."

"Where did you get those flowers from?"

"Where did I get them from? I gave Nature an order for them, and they grew for me--and bloomed for Margaret. I rode a dozen miles for them, and I'd ride a thousand if she bade me."

"Or fly to the moon, or swim, or dive in the fire, or ride on the clouds, no doubt!"

"Yes, if she wanted me to. She has but to speak."

"Quite right," said Mr. Hart, turning his face from Philip, so that the smile on his lips should not be seen "but that's not my concern. This is. Mind what I say, sir. I'll have no more flowers thrown to my singing Chambermaid."

"O," retorted Philip, "now it's you'll not have this, and you'll not have that! Very well, then. I wish you good-night."

And off he went, taking huge strides purposely, and stretching his legs to their utmost.

"No, no, Philip!" cried Mr. Hart, running after Philip, and laughing heartily at the wit of the retort. "No, no; I'm serious."

"And so am I," said Philip, stopping so that Mr. Hart might come up to him. "No more flowers, eh! Why, I'll smother her with them every night. I'll compel you to engage some one to carry them off the stage. No more flowers! I'll show you! Why, I'm going to scour the country for flowers, and I shall set seeds all round my tent."

"If you wait for the flowers to grow, I shall be satisfied. You can't make them come up by blowing on them with your hot words and hot breath. But seriously, Philip, there *must* be no more flower-throwing."

Briefly he explained the reason why, and then upshot of it all was that Philip promised. Then Mr. Hart said that Philip had better return with him to the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle Hotel; it was too late for him to walk back to his reef.

"I can give you a shake-down in my bedroom," said Mr. Hart.

"All right!" said Philip, and thought with ecstasy, "I shall be near Margaret; I shall sleep under the same roof as Margaret."

"Have you anything to drink?" asked Philip when they were in Mr. Hart's room.

Mr. Hart wanted Philip to sleep in his bed, which was but a stretcher, barely wide enough for one fair-sized man, but Philip would not hear of it; so they obtained a straw mattress, and laid it on the floor, and Philip tossed off his clothes, and stretched himself upon his hard bed (and slept upon it afterwards as soundly as if it had been made of eider-duck's feathers), in a state of complete satisfaction with himself and every one in the world. It was while he was lying like this, and while Mr. Hart, more methodical than his companion, was slowly undressing himself, that Philip had asked if he had anything to drink.

"I'll get something," said Mr. Hart, and left the room, and returned with a bottle and glasses.

While he was gone, Philip looked about him, and soon discovered that his Margaret's bedroom was immediately above him. He gazed at the ceiling with rapture, and sent kisses thitherward. A single partition parted him from his sweetheart. He fancied that he could hear her soft breathing. The same roof covered them. It was as yet his nearest approach to heaven.

"Here's to Margaret," said Philip, holding up his glass.

"To Margaret," responded Mr. Hart, "and happiness to you both."

"Another toast," said Philip; "to my old dad and the dear old Silver Flagon."

They drank the toast.

"What is the Silver Flagon?" asked Mr. Hart.

"One of these fine days perhaps I'll tell you," replied Philip.

But Philip never told him. One of these fine days Mr. Hart discovered for himself.

The light was out, and Mr. Hart knelt by a corner of his stretcher, and prayed for a few minutes. He was praying for his daughter, and thinking of her; he beheld her pretty face very plainly in the dark room. Philip saw the shadow of the kneeling man; it made him very tender towards Mr. Hart.

"Heathen that I am!" he whispered to himself. "I haven't knelt at my bedside for many a long month."

Then he prayed in silence, without getting out of bed.

"Are you comfortable, Philip?" asked Mr. Hart presently.

"I am very happy," replied Philip. "Good night--God bless you."

"And you, my boy. Good night."

Philip thought, "I am glad my Margaret has had such a protector. God bless everybody."

The next moment he was asleep.

He was up an hour after the sun, and off to his reef. Things were looking well there. Mr. Hart had spoken to the proprietor of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle, whose name, by the way, as something has to be said concerning him, it may be as well to mention. You will have heard it before--it was Smith. Mr. Hart had spoken to Mr. Smith about Philip's reef, and showed him some pieces of golden quartz, saying what a pity it was that there was no crushing-machine near such rich stone; and what a fortune a man might make who had money and enterprise enough to erect one. Mr. Smith had both. Four years ago---- But no, common as his name is he deserves a chapter to himself, and shall have it.

## **CHAPTER IX.**

### **A MAN OF METTLE.**

Not longer than four years ago, Mr. Smith was a bricklayer in the old country, earning an average wage of thirty shillings a week, out of which he supported himself and his old mother; and one day, for want of something better to do--he was out of work at the time--he emigrated almost by accident. This is a literal fact. He arose early in the morning, with no intention of leaving the country, but somewhat sad at heart because he had no work to do. (When he related the story in after days he said that his hands felt like lumps of lead as they hung by his side.) On this morning, then, he strolled to the London Docks, and saw a ship making ready to start for Australia; was told that it would sail for Gravesend in the afternoon; idly inquired the price of a steerage passage, and found that he had just money enough in his pocket, and a trifle over, the scrapings and savings of ten years' bricklaying; and had a chat with an enthusiast, who painted Australia in the colours of the rainbow, and then painted England in ditch colours.

"What is the use of wearing one's life away in such a country as this?" demanded the enthusiast. "What has a man got to look forward to when he's old, and not fit to work?"

Mr. Smith considered. What *was* the use of grinding one's life away in such a country as England? What was there to look forward to, to hope for, to work for? A poor man's grave. Perhaps a pauper's funeral. Born a bricklayer, died a bricklayer; that might be his epitaph, if he left money enough to pay for one.

"Australia's the place for such men as us," continued the enthusiast. "Australia's the land of gold, and milk, and honey. England's no country for men of spirit; it's used up, sir--used up. And there's the new land waiting to make poor men rich--holding out its arms for them."

"I should like to go with you," said Smith.

"Come, then," said the enthusiast.

"I'm afraid there's not time," said Smith; "there's my old mother. I couldn't leave without saying good-bye to her."

"What's your name?" asked the enthusiast.

"Smith," replied Smith.

The enthusiast gave a start, and uttered an exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked Smith.

"Nothing," said the enthusiast; "only I was thinking that I *should* like you to come."

"But how is it to be managed?" inquired Smith, glancing at the name of the vessel, with his mouth watering. It was a nine-hundred-ton ship, called the Gold Packet. "But how is it to be managed? A man that I know emigrated a year ago, and he had to buy bedding, and tin cups, and soap and towels, and I don't know what else; those things ain't got by whistling for them."

"I'll manage it for you," said the enthusiast. "You go home and say good-bye to your mother. Be back here at one o'clock. By that time I'll have your passage-ticket, and your berth, and bedding, and tin cups, and soap and towels, and everything else ready for you. What do you say?"

"What do I say? There's my hand upon it, and thank you. I'll do it."

And with quickened pulses he hastened home, kissed the amazed old woman--who was so dumbfounded that she could do nothing but look at her son, and cry--promised to send her plenty of money from Australia and to make a lady of her in five years, and was back to the Gold Packet at one o'clock.

"You're a man of mettle," said the enthusiast; "you're just the sort for the gold-diggings; it's such men as you they want. You'll make your fortune there as sure as eggs are eggs. Here's your ticket. Come down-stairs; I'll show you your berth and things."

"How much does it all come to?" asked Smith. The enthusiast pencilled some figures on a piece of paper, and gave it to Smith, who looked at the items, and added them up. Everything was correct; he handed the enthusiast the money, and had exactly two shillings and fourpence left to conquer the new world with. Smith went down-stairs (to speak courteously of the descent; but there are worse, we are taught) into the den where the steerage passengers were packed, and the enthusiast showed him his berth, his bedding, his tin cups, his bar of yellow soap, and other necessary paraphernalia. The enthusiast showed these things to Smith, but Smith could scarcely see them, the place was so dark. Smith was not daunted because the place was dismal, and because it was filled with women crying, and children screaming, and men growling--a very pit of discomfort. His soul rose to the occasion; he had a spirit above a bricklayer's; with his passage ticket in his hand, and two shillings and fourpence in his pocket, he felt himself a king. There was work before him to do, and he was happy in the prospect of no more idle days. When he went on to the deck he did not see the enthusiast, but he did not miss him, he was so interested in what was going on about him, the hurrying to and fro, the shouting, the singing of the sailors, the loosening of the sails, the hauling of ropes. In an hour the ship was off, winding its way through such a complicated labyrinth of boats and ships and ropes, that the wonder was how it disentangled itself safely. Smith watched the manœuvres with admiration. Then he glanced at the passage ticket. "Holloa!" he said, "they've made a mistake in my Christian name. I'm William Smith, not John."

(Let me mention here, briefly, that our Smith never set eyes again on the enthusiast, whose name was also Smith, prefixed by John. It was his passage ticket, indeed, that our Smith held in his hand. All the time he had been painting in the most glowing colours the glowing attractions of the goldfields on the other side of the world, he had been filled with the most gloomy forebodings. His courage had failed him at the last moment, and seizing the opportunity which had so fortunately presented itself of giving the new world another Smith instead of himself, he had sold his passage ticket and bedding and cooking utensils to the bricklayer, and after receiving the money for them, bade good-bye to the Gold Packet and all the fair promises it held out.)

With his two shillings and fourpence in his pocket, William Smith started on the voyage, and made himself so useful, and was altogether so cheerful and shrewd and bustling, that he soon became a prime favourite with the passengers and crew. In ninety-two days from the date of sailing, the ship passed through Port Philip Heads, and from that day Fortune smiled upon William Smith. In a fortnight he was on the goldfields; in six months he was a speculator; in twelve, he had saved a thousand pounds. And now he was proprietor of a fine hotel and a theatre, and had a dozen other irons in the fire, not one of which did he allow to grow cold.

I think I shall be pardoned for this digression. This story is of the Mosaic kind, and although there are some strange bits in it, I hope none will be found incongruous, but that they will all fit in one with another, and form a complete and original whole.

## **CHAPTER X.**

**TO-MORROW IT IS ST. VALENTINE'S DAY.**

Mr. Hart, then, had spoken to William Smith about Philip's golden reef, and what a capital chance there was for a crushing machine. His words did not fall upon listless ears. The same day William Smith walked to the reef, examined the stone, went down the shaft, chipped here and there, putting two, or three bits of gold and stone in his pocket, as treasure-trove, came up from the hole, strolled about the locality, Argus-eyed, and made up his mind. He spoke it to Philip and his mate. Said he: "In three weeks I will have a machine erected here, with twelve heads of stampers, which shall be working day and night, and which shall crush forty tons of quartz every twenty-four hours. You have raised, I should say, about one hundred and fifty tons of stone. You shall put a dozen men at work in your claim--I will provide the money for their wages, and for powder and fuse--and in three weeks you shall raise another hundred tons. I will do all this on the following terms: You shall contract to give me the first two hundred tons of quartz to crush, and I will contract to crush it at the rate of three ounces of gold per ton." (The shrewd speculator had seen clearly enough that there was plenty of gold in the stone to pay him, and leave a handsome margin; indeed, he calculated that the quartz already raised from the bowels of the earth, and lying on the surface of the claim, would yield not less than ten or twelve ounces to the ton.) "The next two hundred tons I will crush for two and a half ounces of gold per ton; the next two hundred for two ounces per ton."

Some men are born with a genius for figures: William Smith was one; and he had already totted up in his own mind that the crushing of these six hundred tons of quartz would bring him in no less than £6000; and that it could all be done in fifteen days. His £6000 would pay all expenses of labour and the purchase and erection of the machine, which in little more than a fortnight after it was put up would stand him in nothing. There were many chances of this kind in the goldfields for enterprising men.

"After that," concluded William Smith, "we can make fresh arrangements."

Philip and his mate jumped at the offer. Then, practical William Smith, to their astonishment and admiration, told them that although he had been but a short time on the range--it could not have been more than three hours altogether--he had settled on the very spot where the machine was to be erected. He showed them the place. It was on the slope of a natural basin, which, with a little labour, could be made into a splendid reservoir for the rain. Here the machine was to be erected; here the dam was to be built; here the sheds for the furnace and for the washing-out and retorting of the gold were to be put up. All was arranged. The only thing that would be wanted was water. "Pray for rain," said William Smith; and fancying that he saw in Philip's face an intention to fall on his knees that instant, cried out, in a fright, "Not now, not now! In a fortnight, when the dam is ready." So Philip deferred his prayer for two weeks.

Now, it was manifestly impossible to get a crushing-machine from the capital of the colony in time. But William Smith, when he made his offer, knew what he was about. He knew of a machine on a neighbouring goldfield not many miles away, which had been erected in a foolish spot, where it was practically useless, for the quartz would not yield sufficient gold to pay expenses of labour. Those who had bought and erected the machine had done so on the credit of a small patch of gold which they had found, and which they thought would lead them to precious deposits. They found no more gold, or not sufficient to pay. They built castles in the air--which practical William Smith never did; he always went upon solid ground, and seldom made a mistake. Before he was two days older he had bought the machine for a quarter of its value, and fifty men were set to work on it, so that it was almost literally torn down. But he had an experienced man at the head of his workers, and everything was done right. Fifty more men were working at the reservoir, digging out the earth, and piling up the banks, and on the very day succeeding the scene which had taken place between Philip and Mr. Hart the first portion of the crushing-machine arrived on the ground. This kept Philip busy, and although he was burning to get away to his Margaret, he could not do so until the night. The first thing that he saw when he went behind the scenes was one of the flowers he had bought the night before. He raised his eyes from the flower to Margaret's face, for the flower was in her bosom.

"Ah!" he sighed, flushing with delight.

Of such simple things are life's sweetest pleasures born.

The bunch of flowers had, as a matter of course, formed a fruitful subject of conversation among the members of the dramatic company, and Margaret, being a woman, and womanly, was obliged to make a confidante of some one of her own sex. The Leading Lady was out of the question; so the First Old Woman, the mother of the baby who had proved such a hit, on the first night, received Margaret's confidences, and being a good-hearted, unselfish creature, and delighted at the opportunity of indulging in a little bit of match-making, and also of revenging herself upon the Leading Lady for her objection to baby being a shareholder in the Star Dramatic Company, she listened, and smiled, and congratulated the young girl.

"To-morrow it is Saint Valentine's Day!" she sang.

"You've come to silver Creek for something. Here, my dear, nurse my baby, and get your hand in."

Which caused Margaret to blush furiously.

"O," cried Margaret, "but there's been nothing said between us!"

"Nothing, my dear!" exclaimed the First Old Woman, with a mischievous laugh. "Really nothing!"

"Well, nothing *very* particular."

"Indeed!" said the First Old Woman, with good-humoured sarcasm. "Is coming behind the scenes every night saying nothing? Was throwing you the flowers saying nothing? Was standing outside your window last night for a full hour and a half--I saw him with my own eyes, my dear! I did; and envied you--was that saying nothing? I declare, then, I shall set *my* cap at him; I may as well take a chance in the lottery. He's as handsome a young fellow as ever walked in two shoes, and if you intend to disappoint him----"

"O, but I don't," interrupted Margaret, apprehensively.

Whereupon they fell to kissing one another, and baby came in for her share.

## **CHAPTER XI.**

### **"I AM GOING TO SPEAK OUT," SAID PHILIP.**

When Philip made his appearance that evening behind the scenes, the First Old Woman smiled significantly at him, and once, when her cue to go on the stage was given, she cried to him, of malice aforethought:

"O, dear me! I'm wanted on the stage! Hold my baby, Mr. Rowe, till I come off again."

And before he had time to utter a word one way or another, baby was in his arms, and the mother darted away, laughing to herself.

Philip was not ashamed of his burden; he nursed the baby tenderly, but somewhat gingerly, it must be confessed--fearful, perhaps, lest he should break the little thing, or dislocate something. Margaret, who was on the stage at the time, looked at him furtively as he was kissing the mite, and her mind was in such a whirl, that for the first time during her engagement she forgot the words she had to speak. Observing which the First Old Woman made matters worse by whispering sly nonsense in Margaret's ear. Little did the unconscious baby suspect the important part she was playing in the sentimental comedy.

Later on in the night, Philip said to Margaret:

"I am going to speak out."

This was the very thing she was pining for, and now that her wish was about to be gratified, she exclaimed:

"If you dare, sir!" saucily, mischievously, coquettishly.

Then what did Margaret do but lead him into a more retired spot, where, if he did speak out, no one but herself could hear him.

"If you dare, sir!" she repeated, with a smile which magnetised him. There was but little need for that; he was bewitched already.

"Call me Philip," he entreated.

"Philip," she sighed.

It was like the whisper of a rose.

He was radiant; the joy in his heart was reflected in his face. He toyed with her fingers. Slender they were, and supple, and not strong. But never were chains more potent.

"Well, Philip?" said Margaret shyly.

"Well, Margaret?"

He could find at that moment nothing more sensible to say. He was engaged watching the

light of her eyes, and the colour come and go on her cheek.

"What is that in your hand?" said she.

"A letter."

"Ah, that's what you brought me here for! A letter! For me! Give it to me!" She held out her little hand eagerly.

He withheld the letter from her.

"It is not for you."

"O, indeed!"

She tore her fingers from his grasp, for he had taken them and was kissing them.

"But you may read it," he said ruefully.

She nestled to him, and gave him her hand again, and looked remorseful. When she pleaded mutely for forgiveness, with her pretty face upturned to his, and with her soft red lips within an inch of his, what would you have done, had you been in his place? He did what you would have done--and did it again--and again--and---

"No, sir," she cried, putting her hand upon her lips. "No, Philip, I mean. You shall not--you must not! Some one will be coming this way----"

There was nothing for it, as her lips were covered, but to kiss her neck; and he did so, until she lay in his arms panting.

"You frighten me," she sighed; "and if you are not still, I'll run away."

And she meant it. Dramatic lovers she had had by the score, in silk and fustian. She had been made love to a hundred times upon the stage, but those were sham engagements, and her gentle breast was not fluttered by them, nor was her sweet nature spoiled by them. This sort of thing was quite different.

"And I've a great mind to be angry with you," she said, not moving from his embrace.

"Why?"

"You have brought me no flowers."

He looked disconsolate. "If I had known you wanted them!"

"If you had known, sir! You must guess things. You must look into my face, if you think it will not frighten you, and you must say, Margaret wants this; Margaret wants that----' No, no, Philip I did not say I wanted *that!*"

"But you told me I must look into your face, and guess things, and I did!"

"Then I'll take back all that I have said, for men are such foolish creatures." She gave him the tenderest smile, to strengthen the words. "And indeed, and indeed, I've a good mind to be angry with you."

"Be angry with me after you have read my letter."

"How can I read it when you will not let me go?"

Certainly his arms were round her, but she did not make the least effort to get away from them.

"*Shall* I let you go?"

"If you like."

"I don't like."

He pressed her closer to him.

"Tell me, first, how you got my flowers last night."

"Why, you puss, I have told you twice already."

"I forget it, I want to hear it again."

These small deceptions are permissible between lovers, when they are used to such felicitous purpose. He told her again, and her bosom panted, and her heart beat, and a proud and tender light shone in her eyes as he described the mad gallop he had taken; how her face was ever

before him, urging him on; how he had won the flowers; the way the woman had said, "O, if it's for that!" then the ride back, singing as he rode----

"Singing!" she exclaimed, interrupting him. "O, you didn't tell me that last night. I knew you had left something out."

"I did sing, and the trees heard me."

"What song was it, sir?"

"Philip!"

"Philip, then. What song did you sing?"

"No song at all--yes, the sweetest song! A song with only one word to it."

"With only one word to it! Dear me I know some, and I don't know that--and the sweetest song, you say."

"The sweetest, the dearest, the best word in the world."

"What word was it?"

"Margaret--Margaret--Margaret!"

"O Philip! And everybody heard it!"

"I left it behind me--no, I didn't; I wouldn't part with it. Part with it! Never, while my heart beats! Yet I did lose it too, for an echo stole it--and I heard it singing Margaret as I rode on."

They were talking together in the open; there was a light in the sky, but the moon had not yet risen. Ten minutes afterwards he said:

"Now read my letter."

"I can't see it," placing her eyes close to it; "it's too dark."

"Not for my eyes." He bent his head to hers; their cheeks touched. "'Dear madam,' he commenced, 'my name is Philip Rowe----'"

"What a stupid commencement!" she said, laughing.

"Is it? Wait. Perhaps it will improve farther on. 'My name is Philip Rowe. I am twenty-six years of age, and I am an Englishman, born in Devonshire. I have a half share in a rich claim on a rich quartz reef. I love your daughter----'"

"O, O," she cried, trembling from happiness. "It's to my mother. And you're from Devonshire. Mother has friends in Devonshire. One in particular, that she has often talked of. I've never been there. Go on, Philip. 'I love your daughter.' Do you, do you, Philip?"

"Do I, my darling?" he said passionately. "Listen to my heart. What does it beat but Margaret, Margaret? I came here to find my life, and I have found her. I love you with all my soul. I never knew what a beautiful thing life was until I saw your dear face."

This was heaven to her to hear. Presently, "Go on, Philip, I love your daughter."

"And she loves me."

"O, Philip, who told you? What are you doing, sir?"

"I am listening to your heart, My darling."

"And what does it say! As if it could speak! What does it say, sir?"

"I think I hear it. I think it beats for me."

So inexpressibly tender was his tone, that her arms crept round his neck, and she sighed, "It does, Philip; it does!"

It was the proudest, happiest moment in his life. A blissful silence encompassed them.

"I haven't much more to read," he said, and added cunningly, "Where did I leave off?"

"You know, Philip."

"No, but tell me."

"And she loves me," she whispered.

"My darling! 'I love your daughter, and she loves me. I cannot make a lady of her, for she is



that already, thanks to you.' Isn't that good?" he asked, breaking off.

"Yes. Go on; go on. I want to hear the end."

"I will do all in my power to make her happy; and I write with her permission, to ask you to allow me to subscribe myself, in every letter that follows this, your affectionate son, Philip Rowe.' There!"

"And how can you see to read such a bold letter, sir? My eyes are as good as yours, and there's no light."

"I did not read with my eyes, dear Margaret."

"With what then, Philip? You are full of riddles."

"With my heart, my darling."

## CHAPTER XII.

### "PRAY FOR RAIN, MY DARLING."

"We are getting along finely," said William Smith, rubbing his hands briskly as he looked about with satisfaction upon the busy scene. The crushing machine was nearly fixed. It was a Berdan's, with twelve stampers to pound the stone to dust. The steam-engine was in fine order. The glistening white quicksilver was ready for the work of amalgamation with the bright red gold. The dam was built and ready for water.

William Smith had good reason to feel proud, for by his enterprise he had peopled this hitherto deserted spot. A hundred tents of drill, and a few more pretentious with walls built of slabs, were scattered about, and by a wave of his hand three hundred strong men had found profitable employment. Some had their wives with them, and goats and children scampered about the gullies and over the adjacent hills. The stores, the principal one of which and the most favoured by the gold-diggers belonged to William Smith, were doing a roaring business. A wise man, William Smith; no half-hearted worker; what he did was thoroughly done. He was an honest straightforward man too, driving a hard bargain always, and always to his own advantage; but those he dealt with had their gains also, and they knew that his words were to be depended upon down to the last letter. Wherever he competed he took the lead, and deservedly. His hotel was the best in Silver Creek; the best accommodation was to be found there, the best liquors were to be obtained there. His theatre was a model of comfort. His store on the Margaret Reef (I have not had time before to tell you that Philip had christened it the "Margaret," immediately he knew the name of his sweetheart) was as complete as it was possible for a store on the gold-diggings to be. He sold the best of everything--the best and nattiest water-tight boots with square toes and clean-cut nails in the soles, the strongest laces, the stoutest and soundest drill and calico for tents and flies, the trustiest steel for gads, the most serviceable serge and Scotch twill shirts, the finest pea-jackets, the most expensive cabbage-tree and Panama hats, the best tobacco, and everything else of the first quality. His store was the post-office, and there was a corner in it where the gold-diggers could write their letters and read the *Silver Creek Herald* and the *Silver Creek Mercury*. He had planned roads, and had some idea of using his influence for the laying-out of a township by the Government. In his way, William Smith was a small Moses; with room and opportunity and a thousand men at his back he could have laid the solid foundation of a great nation. He had the true legislative faculties for such an undertaking, and I am sure that he would have looked after Number One. The bricklayer who could only earn thirty shillings a week in England, might have become a ruler of men.

The scene, altogether, that was to be witnessed day and night on the Margaret Reef was such as never can be witnessed in an old country. In civilised countries men seem to go about their work with a sadness upon them, and as if they were labouring under some kind of oppression. In such-like places as I am describing, men rise in the morning and set about their work with smiles and vigour, and hearty cheerfulness. In the old country it is, "It's a hard thing to have to work like this! Alas!" In the new country it is, "Come along, boys, with a will! Hurrah!"

I have said that the dam was built and ready for water. William Smith said the same thing to Philip at the conclusion of a conversation. He was in high spirits; there were two hundred and fifty tons of quartz waiting to be crushed, lying in great heaps near the shaft. Half of it was burnt, and was ready for the machine; the other half was piled on the wood kilns and was blazing away, filling the air with not the pleasantest arsenical fumes. New shafts were being sunk along the

brow of the Margaret Reef, and one or two were beginning to yield gold-bearing stone.

"What do you think it will crush?" asked Philip of William Smith, as they stood by a heap of the quartz which had been burnt.

William Smith poked about the stone and averaged it, a piece from one place, a piece from another, a piece from another. He saw plenty of gold in it.

"About nine ounces to the ton, I should say," replied William Smith. "We'll first crush fifty tons, and wash up and see what the yield is. Then we'll go straight on with two hundred tons, and get the biggest cake of gold that has ever been seen in Silver Creek and exhibit it in High Street. It'll do the diggings good."

"When shall we commence to crush?"

"We shall be ready in three days. All we want is water in the dam. Now is the time to pray for rain."

Philip went straight to Margaret, as one goes to one's high-priest.

"Pray for rain, my darling," he said, "pray for rain;" and told her the reason why.

Margaret prayed for rain, obediently, as she had been bidden, and prayed for it so hard that, whether you will believe it or not, such a downpour commenced on Silver Creek at ten o'clock that night as had never been witnessed by the oldest inhabitant--a veteran of two years or less. Silver Creek overflowed its banks, and the lower parts of the township were flooded. Philip was wild with joy.

"You duck!" he said to Margaret--he was in the theatre when the rain commenced--"this is all your doing!"

We sober-going persons know, of course, that it was only a coincidence. Margaret, however, smiled demurely. She was quite ready to take the credit of it; she would not have been a woman else. But it *was* rather a stretch on Philip's part.

William Smith looked anxious. He wanted rain, but he was a little bit afraid of such a downpour as this, thinking that the dam might not be strong enough to bear it. Philip ran to Margaret, and told her of William Smith's fears.

"The dam not strong enough!" she exclaimed. "O, but it is!"

Philip was satisfied. The most profound logic could not have so convinced him of the soundness of the dam. He could not convince William Smith, however, for Smith was not in love. That enterprising person wanted to set out at once for the Margaret Reef, but it was impossible to get there in such a storm. Raging torrents were in the way. Smith fretted that he could not whistle them aside. But he did not fret long; he accepted the inevitable with a grimace. Philip accepted it in a very different fashion; but then it was pleasant to him, for it compelled him to remain for the night in the hotel where Margaret was. He blessed the rain that kept him by Margaret's side. He had also a little private business to do with Mr. Hart. Margaret had related to him the incident on the road which had led to the baby becoming a shareholder in Hart's Star Dramatic Company, and how that it was Mr. Hart who had suggested it. She enacted the entire scene, and burlesqued the Leading Lady in fine style. Philip, who was fond of children, was mightily pleased, and was loud in his praises of Mr. Hart, and Margaret chimed in. She loved the old man; and, indeed, they both had occasion to be grateful to him. Between them they had concocted a plan--that is to say, Philip had concocted it, and Margaret had said, "Yes, yes," to everything; which, in Philip's eyes, made her the author of it. What that plan was will now be seen.

The performances concluded at eleven o'clock: The roof of the theatre was made of zinc, and the rain fell on it so heavily and loudly that not a word could be heard within the walls. But the actors went on with their parts nevertheless, and to keep the audience in good humour, introduced dances in the piece, and played such impromptu antics that the gold-diggers were rather pleased with the storm than otherwise.

When the performances were at an end, Philip and Margaret stood at the side-scenes, talking softly over their plan concerning Mr. Hart. What they really had to say about it might have occupied two minutes--but it took them twenty, they were such bunglers.

"Now I shall go to Mr. Hart," said Philip, and kissed Margaret.

The part he was playing in those happy days was full of cues for kisses. There may have been meaning in the kisses; there was certainly none in the cues.

I think that Philip must have spoken this particular cue, "Now I shall go to Mr. Hart," at least a dozen times (invariably, of course, using it as a fresh cue) before he attempted to stir from Margaret's side. But at length he did say, with something like determination:

"Now I must really go."

Margaret replied with a sigh, "Yes, Philip, you must."

Even then, I think, he would not have gone, if they had not been disturbed in their love-making.

"When it is all settled," said Margaret, "run up to my room and knock at the door; then I will come down and give Mr. Hart a good hug and half-a-dozen kisses."

Philip looked blank at this.

"You goose!" said Margaret. "I have kissed him I don't know how many times. Why, he's over sixty! and don't you think he deserves it, sir, for the care he has taken of me."

"Of course," responded Philip, the cloud in his face clearing. "I *am* a goose. I know you wouldn't kiss a younger man--unless it was me."

"Not a much younger man," replied Margaret with a merry laugh, as she ran away from him.

### CHAPTER XIII.

**"WHAT IF THERE ARE VILLAINS AND SCOUNDRELS IN THE WORLD?" HE CRIED, "WE WILL NEVER LOSE OUR FAITH IN GOD AND MAN--NEVER! NEVER! NEVER!"**

Philip watched until Margaret was out of sight, and then walked slowly to Mr. Hart's room, and knocked at the door, but received no answer. He strolled into the bar of the hotel, but could not see Mr. Hart.

"He must be in his room," quoth Philip to himself. "There was a light there."

He knocked at the door again, and still receiving no answer, turned the handle, and found the door unfastened. He entered the room, and saw Mr. Hart sitting before his little table with his head buried in his hands.

"Ah! you're there," said Philip, closing the door behind him, and drawing a chair to the table. "I want to say something particular to you."

Mr. Hart, with a wave of his hand, motioned the young man to proceed.

Philip was flushed and excited, and somewhat nervous as to how his mission would be received; and being in this condition he did not observe any change in Mr. Hart's face or manner.

"This is how it is," he continued. "You made me an offer for a share in my claim once, and I refused it. Well, I was wrong in refusing, and I want to accept it now. Don't think there's any favour in it, or that the claim is any better or any worse than it was. The stone is looking splendid, and now that the rain is falling the dam will be filled, and we shall commence to crush directly it clears up. I want you to give me two hundred and fifty pounds for a quarter of my half-share. That is an eighth part of the claim, and it sets the claim at a good price--two thousand pounds; and I'll make you a bet of three hundred pounds, and stake the money, that in less than six weeks your share of the profits will amount to three times as much as I ask you for it. There, that is how it is. Now say 'Done!' like a good fellow, and place me under an obligation to you for life. I know you have the money."

He blurted out these words, not coherently and smoothly as they are written here, but in as bungling a manner as can well be imagined. He stammered, he hesitated, he repeated his words, but at length he had explained himself. Mr. Hart had listened quietly, the only motion he made being one which would hide his face more effectually from Philip. When Philip had finished his lame speech and was waiting for an answer, he noticed that Mr. Hart's trunk was open, and that all its contents were scattered about the floor; indeed the whole room was in a state of confusion. Mr. Hart spoke in a low tone.

"You offer me a fourth of your share for two hundred and fifty pounds."

"Yes, and I have the agreement in duplicate in my pocket, with my name to it. I had it drawn out to-day by a lawyer. It only wants your signature, and the thing is settled."

"And you will bet me three hundred pounds, staking the money, that in less than six weeks I shall receive back for my share of the profits three times as much as I give you for it."

"That's it."

"With whom will you stake the money?"

"With you."

"So that I shall really have in hand fifty pounds more than you ask for the share."

"That's it; but why so many words? Say, 'Done and done!'"

Philip was on thorns while the matter was unsettled.

"I must clearly understand," said Mr. Hart, in the same low tone, which, indeed, he preserved throughout this part of the conversation "before I can say anything to the offer. I want to be certain that you mean honestly by me. The world is full of thieves. There is plenty of roguery about."

"That's true," replied Philip complacently; "I'm a bit of a rogue myself."

"And," proceeded Mr. Hart, with a strange hesitation in his voice, "supposing the claim to be utterly worthless, at the end of six weeks I shall be sure to be fifty pounds in pocket?"

"You will be more than that in pocket. The claim's a good one; there's no telling how much gold is in it."

Mr. Hart paused, to steady himself. "I'm not much of an arithmetician; I was always a bad hand at figures; but I can see that I must be a gainer if I accept your offer."

"I hope you will be."

"Your claim is a rich one. All the diggers say so."

"We shall make a fortune out of it in three months," replied Philip, with a bright smile--"you, and all of us."

"On the first day I saw you----"

"When you pulled the centipede out of my hair," interrupted Philip. "A lucky day for me, that was. Good luck to you, old fellow! Yes: on the first day you saw me--go on."

"I offered you, if you remember, a hundred and twenty pounds for a small share in the claim."

"I remember."

"And you refused, saying you would want twenty times as much."

"I spoke like a fool; I didn't know you then." Again Mr. Hart paused.

"Philip," he said presently, in a tremulous tone, "why do you make me this offer?"

Philip hung his head upon his breast, and with a slight trembling of his lower lip, replied softly:

"Because I love you."

A sudden rush of tears came into Mr. Hart's eyes, and he laid his head upon his arm.

"For God's sake don't do that!" cried Philip, rising hurriedly, and looking about him in distress. "If I've said anything to hurt you, forgive me. I'm a great hulking brute; Margaret will never look at me again. There, there, old fellow!"

And Philip, whose heart was as tender as a woman's and whose first intention had been to fly from the room, and dash through the storm, knelt by the side of Mr. Hart, and used words as gentle, and actions as fond as though he were kneeling by the side of a child. And all the time he did this his great limbs were trembling, and the tears were running down his strong beard. Mr. Hart raised his head, which was now on a level with Philip's, and with no more shame or awkwardness than a child would exhibit, put his arms across Philip's shoulders and kissed him.

I draw a veil over the next few moments; neither of them spoke during that time, but their hearts were throbbing with eloquent and tender emotion.

Then said Mr. Hart, when he was calmer:

"Philip, my son, you have taught me a lesson; you have made my heart green again. It was turning bitter against all men, and you have softened it, and restored my faith. Ah, how proud your father must be of such a son!"

Philip groaned. "I ran away from him; I was a scapegrace at home, and I caused the dear old fellow many a heartache. Never mind. I will repay him; I know better now."

"You did nothing wrong, my dear boy, I am sure."

"I almost broke his heart, I think. I tried his patience sorely. He sent me to Cambridge to do honour to his name, and I did my best to disgrace it. I went home with a long tail of debts behind me; he paid them, and said, 'Never mind, my lad; promise me that you will not do so again; see here, I will double your allowance.' I promised him, and took the double allowance, and got into debt again. It hurt him--I saw that. That I should break a promise to him, who had never broken one to me, who had never said a harsh word to me, made him wince. Again he paid my debts; again I promised; again I broke my word. More than that: I involved the son of a friend of his, who gave his name for me to the money-lenders. Well, I couldn't face him the third time. I sent him a list of my debts, and I ran away. The best thing I could do--and the worst, I think, for he loved me, the dear old dad!"

"You will live to repay him."

"I will do my best. I will go home to him, with my dear Margaret on my arm, and say--and say, 'Dear old dad----'"

But he broke down here, and it was Mr. Hart's turn to console him. He was not long in this mood. He jumped to his feet, and with a great shake of his shoulders cried:

"Enough about me! You are in trouble. What is it?"

"I cannot buy the share you offer me, Philip."

"Why? You have money enough, and you *shall* buy it. You shall! I'll drag the money out of your box. O, I know where you keep it, and I'm strong enough to do what I say."

"You'll find no money there, Philip," said Mr. Hart, sadly.

"You don't mean to say you've been speculating and lost it!" said Philip, pulling a long face.

"No, I have not lost it by speculation, but it is gone all the same. See here, Philip, my son. I had saved nearly four hundred pounds, and I had almost made up my mind to go home and see my daughter at the end of this three months' engagement. It would have been madness to do so when, by staying here for three months longer, I might have doubled my savings, which are all for her; but I am yearning to hold her in my arms, and press my darling to my heart. Ah, Philip! you don't know what a father's love is--you may, one day, my boy, and then you will understand my feelings. Prudence said, 'Stay a little while longer;' but my heart's yearning beat prudence out of the field. It said to me, 'You are an old man; young as you feel, you may break down. Let your daughter see you when you are strong, and able, old as you are, to protect and advise her. Don't wait till you are decrepit and feeble, when she cannot have faith and confidence in you. You have saved money enough three times during the last seven years, and each time you have stayed a little longer, and lost it. Go now, and don't tempt bad fortune again.' About my having saved money enough three times, Philip, it is true, and true that I have lost it, lost it by trusting friends, who deceived me, and played me false. Well, I began to get frightened by these reflections, and to-day, you know, the letters by the Overland Mail camp up to Silver Creek. Among them was a letter for me by my daughter, a letter filled with such expressions of love and affection that I should have been less than a man not to have hungered for a sight of her. I resolved; I would go home when the engagement here terminated. I reckoned that I could land in England with six hundred pounds. After the theatre was closed, I came into my room, and opened my box, to count my money as a miser does. How often have I done it, and with what different feelings from those which must animate a miser! Imagine my despair, my boy, when I found that I had been robbed. Philip, I haven't a shilling in the world! Once more I am left a beggar. It was while I was contemplating the dreary prospect before me that you came in. In my heart I was cursing all mankind, and a terrible feeling of doubt of higher things was creeping into my mind. But your noble offer has restored my faith again. What if there are villains and scoundrels in the world!" he cried, standing up before the admiring Philip. "Let them creep, and crawl, and plunder, and grow rich; and then die their death of shame! We will never lose our faith in God and man--never, never, never! Ay, though our dear heart's wishes may never be gratified, we will bow our heads reverently, and believe in goodness, and hope to the last!"

He held out his hand, and Philip took it. The grasp was to the younger man as though he were pledging himself to a life of honour and integrity.

"In my young days," continued Mr. Hart, with a soft light in his eyes, "I had a friend; in my young days I loved a woman as truly as you love Margaret. I have not seen my friend for thirty years. I have not received line or message from him, nor he from me, and he is still my friend, and I am his. The woman I loved did not love me, and I went from her sight. But though in after years I loved another woman who became my wife, and who gave me my daughter, the memory of the first has never left me, and I think of her with tenderness still. These and other remembrances have in a measure sustained my faith, and, I humbly hope, purified my life. Shall I turn a misanthrope now in my old age, and snarl at mankind because I have been deceived for the dozenth time? No, Philip, no! It would be robbing life of all its sweetness."

But in spite of this generous outburst, his grief was too powerful to be thus suddenly conquered, and his lips quivered again with emotion as he thought of his loss.

"Leave me now, Philip," he said. "I cannot accept your offer, but while my heart beats, you have a place in it."

He had barely uttered these words when the storm without grew more furious. The rain came down like a flood. The wind rattled about the wooden walls of the hotel to such an extent that it seemed as though the building could not possibly hold together. A flash of lightning, so vivid that it almost blinded them, pierced the ground, and at its heels followed a peal of thunder so terrible that it shook the very foundation of the earth. They stood spell-bound. When sight and hearing were restored to them, they heard what sounded like a great crash outside, mingled with human cries; but their attention was diverted from these by the appearance of Margaret, white and trembling, at the door.

#### **CHAPTER XIV.**

**"THIS IS LIKE THE DAWN OF LIFE, MY SWEET."**

"I am frightened," she murmured, and ran into her lover's arms, and hid her face in his breast, and tremblingly asked if the world was coming to an end.

Philip, who was really startled by the fury of the storm, recovered his self-possession the moment he saw Margaret. Lovers are not only proverbially, but actually selfish. As Philip embraced Margaret, and pressed her to his breast, I do not believe he cared a pin for the storm--nor Margaret either. She felt quite safe in his arms, but, womanlike, she still expressed her fears.

"O, Philip!"

Clinging closer to him.

"There is nothing to be frightened at, darling," said he.

"It is coming to an end, I know," she murmured (meaning the world), "but it is a comfort to die in your arms!"

"It will be a greater comfort to live in them," replied Philip, half gaily.

She reproved him, asking, "How could he, at such a time?" and murmured that it was wicked to think of such things (never mentioning what things) in the midst of such terrible goings-on. I doubt if any other two persons in the hotel, speaking so softly; could have heard one another, but these two were lovers, and their lips almost, perhaps quite touched. The storm was raging so furiously, and there was such a din and confusion all around them, wind blowing, thunder thundering, and people shouting, that Mr. Hart had to raise his voice very high when he spoke, so that Philip might hear it.

"Something has occurred," he said; "did you hear the crash?"

Philip nodded that he had heard it.

"It was not all thunder. Mischief has been done; I shall go out and see."

"I will go too," said Philip.

"And leave me?" cried Margaret.

He would have found it difficult to do so, she clung to him so closely.

"No," he answered; "come along with us."

Philip caught up a blanket, and wrapped his Margaret in it from head to foot. All was dark outside, except when the lightning lit up the scene.

"Keep close, Margaret," said Philip.

As if she needed telling!

"A black night, indeed," said Mr. Hart, holding his hand before his eyes; "a black night, in every sense of the word. One wants sailors' eyes at such a time. Why, where's the theatre?"

A flash of lightning had revealed to him the space where the theatre had stood, but the roof

was no longer visible. Their forms had been recognised in the flash.

"Is that you, Hart?" cried a hearty voice.

It was William Smith who spoke, and his voice was as cheery and as ringing as the blast of a silver trumpet.

"Yes."

"Who is that with you?"

"Philip."

"Ah, Philip! if the dam has stood, our fortune's made, Philip."

"The dam's all right!" shouted Philip.

(Please to remember that there *could* be no doubt about the safety of the dam, Margaret's lips having insured it.)

"I hope so," shouted William Smith. "It'll be a bit of good luck to make up for a bit of bad. Mr. Hart, the theatre's down!"

Mr. Hart groaned.

"It needed but that," he murmured.

"You could play a piece now with real thunder and lightning," continued William Smith, at the top of his voice. "Why don't you speak? I suppose you're down in the mouth because your theatre's all to pieces! Never say die, man!"

Mr. Hart said nothing. This stroke of bad fortune coming so close upon the loss of his savings almost crushed him.

"We'll have it up again in less than a week," cried the plucky speculator. "William Smith's hard to beat!"

He really seemed to enjoy it. If those who had known him in London could have seen and heard him now, they would scarcely have believed. In the old country he was a mouse; in the new country he was a man. The wind was enough to blow them away, and it was impossible for them to remain longer in the open. They were already wet through, so they turned into Mr. Hart's room; and presently William Smith joined them, smiling, and fresh as a flower, with the rain glistening on his face and in his hair. He did not stop with them long, for he had his business to look after; his bars were thronged with gold-diggers, drinking the lightning and thunder down. Margaret ran up-stairs to her room, to change her dripping clothes, and when she presented herself again, she was dressed in a loose gown, and her long brown hair was hanging down her back.

"By Jove!" said Philip, under his breath, gazing at her in silent admiration.

There was nothing sham about his Margaret, he thought; she was genuine to the very roots of her hair. What had he done to deserve such a prize? Had any other man in the world ever been so blessed?

Margaret smiled coyly; she knew what was passing through her lover's mind, and was not sorry for the opportunity to show herself. So these small bits of sentimental comedy were played, while the tragedy of the storm was being enacted without.

"We'll make a night of it," said Philip.

All this while he had forgotten Mr. Hart's loss, but it flashed upon him suddenly in the sad look that dwelt in the old man's eyes.

"Margaret," said Philip, "go and sit in that corner, and shut your eyes. Mr. Hart and I have a little bit of private business to transact; it won't take five minutes."

Obedient Margaret moved a few paces away, and closed her eyes, and raised the picture of her lover, handsome, and brave, and noble, to feast upon mentally. Philip stole to her, kissed her fresh lips, and whispered a word in her ear. Then he looked about him for pen and ink, and brought them to the table.

"Now," he said, in a low tone to Mr. Hart, "please to sign these papers."

He took from his pocket the duplicate agreements, by which he sold, and Mr. Hart bought, a fourth of his share in the claim on the Margaret Reef. Mr. Hart gently shook his head. But Philip would not be denied. He pressed and argued, and argued and pressed, and even threatened, until all that Mr. Hart could do was to sit still and listen. But still he would not sign.

"Margaret," said Philip, "come and help me."

Up jumped Margaret, and ran to the table.

"This is how it is," said Philip, appealing to her, but Mr. Hart interrupted him.

"No, no; let me explain."

"Stop his mouth, Margaret!"

Margaret placed her small hand on Mr. Hart's mouth, having to encircle his neck with her soft arm to do so. He could not quarrel with the necklace, and he kissed her hand.

"O, you may kiss it!" said she. "Philip will not be angry, nor will I."

"I angry!" exclaimed Philip, "with him or you. Keep your hand there, and let him kiss it as often as he likes."

She gave Philip her other hand as a reward, and he warmed it in his.

"This is how it is, Margaret----" and Philip explained the matter to her.

She was grave and silent when his story was finished, out of sympathy for Mr. Hart's loss, and also out of gratitude for her lover's goodness. There was nothing sordid in either of their souls.

"It amounts to this," said Margaret, in unconscious imitation of Philip's style, "that Mr. Hart wants to part us."

"My dear child!" he remonstrated.

"You do! You know you do! for if you don't sign, and become a shareholder in the Margaret Reef, Margaret and Philip will never be married. No, Philip; I'm resolved! I'll never marry you unless I have my own way in this."

"Do you hear what she says?" shouted Philip, triumphantly. "And do you intend to part us for ever?"

The upshot of it all was that Mr. Hart was compelled to yield; but he declared, in broken words, and with tears in his eyes, that he yielded only under compulsion. It might have been, for at the last moment, before signing, he was about to dash the pen away, when Margaret stayed his hand, and with her fingers upon his guided them to sign his name. It would not make a bad picture this; and one almost as good followed, for Philip seized Margaret round the waist, and they waltzed round the old man, singing and laughing, while the storm howled without, and the tears were running down Mr. Hart's face.

"God bless you, my dears!" said Mr. Hart, and would have continued his expressions of gratitude, had not Margaret drowned his voice with her tra-la-la. It was arranged that the share should be paid for with the first two hundred and fifty pounds that would come to Mr. Hart out of the division of profits.

"So after all," said Philip, "it's only lending you the money for a week or two."

"It is giving me the gold," observed Mr. Hart.

"You gave me Margaret," replied Philip softly; "and do you think she's not worth more than all the gold in the world! I am your debtor still, and shall be all my life."

Delicious words, both to utter and hear.

They sat together until sunrise, and Margaret fell asleep in her lover's arms. Lives there the man who has not enjoyed some such heavenly minutes as these? Philip tasted then the most perfect happiness in his life.

When the sun rose, the storm cleared away. Margaret awoke, and sighed and blushed, and looked tenderly at Philip, and Mr. Hart found something so interesting at his window that he was compelled to keep his back to them. They forgave the rudeness; and presently came also to the window, and looked out upon a glorious sight. The skies were glowing with grand colour. Broad masses of golden light fringed with purple, which changed gradually to crimson, rose from the dip of the horizon. Brightly shone the sun in its bed; the sky was dotted with feather-clouds of rosy red in the east, and fairy islands of the loveliest shades of blue, flecked with white, moved towards them from the west. Raindrops seemed to hang, like glistening eyes, between cloud and land; the heavens laughed; all was sweet, and fresh, and beautiful.

So, in another land, which lay beneath them, and on another morning, when summer was waning, the old man shall stand, after a strange and eventful night, gazing on the sunrise with grateful eyes and grateful heart, embracing her who is dearer to him than his heart's blood.

"This is like the dawn of life, my sweet!" whispered Philip to Margaret.

"Of *our* life, Philip," she whispered.



Mr. Hart heard them.

"A happy dawn," he prayed. "May it bring a happy day!"

But prayers could not avert what was soon to come.

## CHAPTER XV.

### **PHILIP IS CONVINCED OF THE EFFICACY OF MARGARET'S PRAYERS.**

William Smith, the practical, the indefatigable, the restless, the dauntless, the man of action, who seemingly could do without sleep, and who had become a hero by contact with opportunity--(well, that is my opinion, and I alone am responsible for what is here written)--William Smith, I say, burst into the room, crying:

"Come, Philip, come! To the Margaret reef!"

Margaret darted out of Philip's arms; she would not let all the world see. Smith knew how matters stood between Philip and Margaret, and he winked at Mr. Hart, and did not look at the lovers--that is, significantly.

"Ah!" said Philip, reluctantly coming back to earth--and water, I might say; "the dam!"

"Yes," said William Smith, "the dam. I told you you might pray for rain. Now pray for the dam."

"I know a prayer," thought Philip and prayed; "Margaret!"

"You get to bed, my girl," said William Smith to Margaret; "all the danger's over now, and all the harm's done. The horses are outside."

"I shall want one," put in Mr. Hart.

"You!" exclaimed William Smith. "What interest have you in the dam? See to your theatre."

"What interest!" said Philip. "Why, he happens to be a shareholder in the Margaret Reef. Didn't you know?"

"No; but I'm glad to hear it. Good luck to the Margaret, and all concerned in it. I'll have a horse ready for you in a jiffy." (A new kind of conveyance for a horse to be harnessed to.)

Out he went again, and before he returned, Margaret had disappeared, first telling Philip that she was going to pray for the dam. Philip was satisfied that her praying was better than the best of puddling. Before the men mounted, they had a look at the theatre; it was a mass of ruins. The wind only had not only blown it down, but had blown pieces of it miles away. In a gully, four miles from the spot, into which a pick had not yet been stuck, the first thing that was found some months afterwards by men who went to seek for gold was a scratch wig belonging to the Low Comedian: which puzzled the prospectors. They did not go to that gully to find scratch wigs. Some part of the wardrobe belonging to the actors was buried beneath the ruins of the theatre, but a great deal had been blown away. Most of it was brought back, at odd times, by diggers and their wives, who had rare laughs over the queer vestments. Some of them made a great commotion in the township one day, by marching into High Street, dressed most absurdly. Charles the Second, in a red wig and with Macbeth's shield on his arm, was followed by Clown, with heavy eyebrows, moustaches, and Lord Dundreary whiskers; behind him came one who was half Roman and half Scotchman; and a perfect piece of patchwork brought up the rear. A fine jollification followed, you may be sure, when they halted at the Rose, Shamrock and Thistle.

As William Smith and his companions were gazing on the ruins of the theatre, a dozen labourers came up, and under the direction of one began to clear away the fallen timber. Mr. Hart and Philip looked to William Smith for an explanation. He gave it them. While the storm was raging, he had made a contract for a new theatre. It might almost be thought that he slept with one eye open. Mr. Hart said as much. William Smith laughed.

"It would be a useful thing to be able to do," he said. "But what are you wondering at? William Smith never loses a day."

He was a kind of man to put heart into men when misfortune overtook them. He would say, "If bad fortune gives me a slap in the face, I don't lay down and whimper." (He was not particular as

to his grammar, although he had a proper respect for knowledge and education.) "I don't lay down and whimper," said he; "I tuck up my sleeves, and set to--with a will."

When they were in the saddle, and riding along towards the Margaret Reef, they saw evidences of the same kind of spirit in other men. Numbers of tents had been literally torn into shreds by the storm; valuable shafts had fallen in; tools and windlasses and puddling machines had been swept away by the flood, which in many places had made hills of gullies and gullies of hills. All was confusion, but men were working everywhere, with goodwill, to repair the damage. Very different were the faces of these men and women from the faces of some poor people I saw a short time since, in the crowded city in which these words are written, after an extraordinary high tide in the river, the waters of which had overflowed its banks, and washed into the cellars where they lived and slept. In the new country the men and women bustled about vigorously, with faces almost cheerful; in the old, they stood, banging their heads dolefully, and with not spirit enough amongst them to make one good worker out of a hundred. But the cases are different.

As William Smith and his companions rode along, looking this way and that, Philip suddenly cried "O!" as though he was shot, and turned his horse's head to the west, whereas the Margaret Reef lay to the north of them. Away he galloped, as though for dear life, with no thought of the Margaret Reef in his mind, and William Smith and Mr. Hart followed him. They went only some five hundred yards, but the horses had to make some big leaps over new watercourses in that short distance. Philip jumped off his horse, and tying the animal to a fallen tree, set to work helping some men to dig the earth away from a tent which had been nearly buried by the caving in of a hill. Seeing what was the matter, William Smith, who was at first disposed to grumble, jumped off *his* horse, and in another minute he and Mr. Hart were by the side of Philip, with their sleeves tucked up. Philip worked like a young Hercules, and when sufficient of the earth was cleared away, he cut a great gash in the canvas roof, and, stooping over with a rope tied round his waist, tenderly lifted two children from the chasm, and handed them to the gold-diggers. He was like a steam hammer, that can come down one minute with an awful thump and beat ten tons of metal into shape, and the next can come down with a tap gentle enough to fashion a thin leaf into the likeness of a delicate flower. After the two children came a woman, whom he raised in his arms as though she weighed about an ounce, and at sight of whom the gold-diggers, seeing that she was alive and comparatively unhurt, raised a great shout. And one, her husband, who was lying on the ground, crippled, burst into a passion of grateful tears. I should like to tell you the story of this family, but I have not time just now. Philip and his companions could scarcely escape from the persons they had helped to rescue, but they had other work to look to, and having ascertained that there was no more human life to be saved, they mounted their horses, and resumed their course. At the foot of the range, on the other side of which the dam lay, Philip paused for a moment to breathe the spell of Margaret's name, but William Smith dashed straight on. The first things that met their sight were wrecks of canvas tents and broken tent-poles lying about. William Smith bit his nether lip, but said not a word. He was already calculating the cost of another and a stronger dam; what he chiefly regretted was the waste of time and water. The panting horses reached the brow of the range, and the men leaped off. William Smith did not stop to ask questions of his workmen, but ran swiftly onward, to see with his own eyes. He was an older and a weaker man than Philip, who raced at his heels, but he was the first to reach the dam.

"Hurrah!" he screamed. "Hurrah! hurrah!" And Philip followed suit, and made the hills resound again with his joyous shouts.

A fair sheet of water lay before them, winking in the eyes of the sun. The head man--I cannot call him master; there was no such thing, in the sense that we in England understand it--met William Smith with a smiling face, and they shook hands. But both of them sobered down within a minute.

"A tolerable piece of work this of yours," observed William Smith, in an off-hand way.

"Middlingish," was the reply, in an indifferent tone.

This implied that making such a dam as this was nothing to him. Give him a real difficult job to accomplish, such as joining two seas, or levelling a mountain a few thousands of feet in height, or making a new river within a week or so, and then you might be able to see what he could do. To construct such a dam as this, however, was really no joke. It was a masterly piece of work, and it was executed in a masterly manner; there was not a flaw in not it, a crack in its sides. They examined it carefully, critically.

"If it will stand such a storm as last night," said William Smith, "it will stand anything."

Philip, as you may guess, was overjoyed; but he was unjust. He gave all the credit to Margaret. He complimented the responsible man in a cool way, which implied, "It is capitally done; but you have Margaret to thank for it, you know."

Philip's faint praise did not affect the contractor. He was not vain-glorious; he had undertaken a piece of work, and had done it well, and was satisfied, having been well paid for it.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE CHRISTENING OF THE WILLIAM SMITH.

Before two days had passed, the fires were lighted in the boiler, and the quartz-crushing machine commenced its merry rub-a-dub-dub. The ugly black rooks that were wont to cluster in huge flocks in the once deserted woods and make night hideous with their rusty voices, ceased for a time their harsh cawing and their seemingly interminable circular flights--wondering, doubtless, as the sound reached their ears, what new and strange monster it was that had invaded their domain. For it was evening when the iron-shod stampers first began to thump. It was but a trial. Before actual work commenced, a little ceremony had to be performed. The quartz-crushing machine had to be christened.

William Smith mentioned this to Philip, saying it was a necessary ceremony.

"All right," said Philip, and ran straight to his princess.

The First Old Woman was with Margaret; they were snipping up old dresses, and making them into late new ones. A new piece was to be played at the theatre that evening.

"Margaret," said Philip, "we are going to have a christening."

"O, O!" cried the First Old Woman, and set off laughing.

Philip did not condescend to notice her, nor would he so much as smile at a mock baby she fashioned in a moment out of the dress pieces, and dandled in her arms. Margaret did, and pulled it away from her.

"We are going to christen the machine, Margaret."

"Who is to be godmother?" inquired the First Old Woman briskly.

"Who!" exclaimed Philip. "Why, who but Margaret, I should like to know."

Margaret's eyes sparkled more brightly. The proposition delighted her.

"You'll have to break a bottle of Moselle against the machine, Margaret. You would like to do it, wouldn't you?"

Margaret nodded, and gave Philip a bright look. "O, don't make a stranger of me!" cried the First Old Woman.

The remark was suggested by Philip's stooping over Margaret under the pretence of whispering to her, but really to kiss her--being tempted to do so by the look she had given him. William Smith joined the party.

"We've settled it all," said Philip to him.

"All what?"

"About the christening. Margaret will set the machine a-going."

But William Smith had settled it another way. "Margaret can christen the next machine," he said. "The Warden's lady will christen this."

"The Warden's lady will do no such thing!" cried Philip.

"She has promised to do so," replied William Smith calmly. "Don't be a fool, Philip. Who has it in his power to be our best friend in the Margaret Reef? The Goldfields Warden. Who grants leases, who settles all disputes as to boundaries and encroachments, who, in short, rules Silver Creek? The Goldfields Warden. Who rules the Goldfields Warden? His wife. Nothing can be clearer."

Dissatisfied Philip refused to see the logic of the argument. But William Smith was wise in his generation; he was very desirous of ingratiating himself into the good graces of the lady who was at the head of society in Silver Creek, knowing the value of her influence. He made further efforts to convince Philip, but Philip would not be convinced. Love and prudence were at daggers drawn within him. William Smith appealed to Margaret.

"You are a girl of sense. It is for Philip's good."

"Mr. Smith is right," said Margaret to Philip. "I don't care a pin about it."

She said this with a pang of disappointment, for she did wish to christen the machine; but she recognised the soundness of William Smith's arguments. So Philip was overruled.

I said it was to be a little ceremony. William Smith made it a big one.

He prepared a great feast, and invited all the bigwigs of Silver Creek township to come to the christening. No infant was ever more honoured than this iron baby with its twelve heads of stampers and its iron cradles ready to receive and imprison the gold. Not one person refused the invitation, and a great many came who were not invited, and who, being cordially welcomed, went home in the evening with a skinful and a bellyful. The Goldfields Warden, the police magistrate, the chief of the police, the commissioners, the lawyers, the editors of local papers, and all the lesser luminaries of Silver Creek were present. William Smith had captured a Judge, who happened to be passing that way, within twenty miles of the township; and he was there, in all his glory, and right well was he treated, and right well did he speak, and did not say a cross word even when William Smith slapped him familiarly on the shoulders.

Talk of your laying of foundation-stones by princes and nobles and members of parliament, with their set speeches and stale platitudes! The present christening beat all such ceremonies out of the field. Never could such a sight as this be seen in the old countries. Free hand, free heart; everybody served alike; all standing together, shoulder to shoulder, man to man. Be thankful that I have not time to describe the entire proceedings in detail. Those who wish to read of it more fully can send to Silver Creek for the *Herald* and the *Mercury*, where (supposing the copies not to be all sold) they will find fourteen columns of description--no less; and in small type, too. There was a supplement to each paper, and William Smith bought a thousand copies of each, and scattered them broadcast over the land and over the seas. When his old mother in London received the papers, and had the accounts of the grand doings read to her, she could at first hardly believe that she had borne him; but she soon recovered herself, and related to the gossips who sat about her, and whom she was regaling (being quite a lady now with the money William Smith regularly sent her), insignificant incidents in her son's baby life which shadowed forth the great position he was one day to make for himself. If he had heard them, they would have been new to him, for he had no remembrance of them. But when does a mother ever forget the smallest trifle relating to the baby she suckled at her breast? In the glowing reports of the christening in the *Silver Creek Herald* and *Mercury* William Smith's name was mentioned ninety-seven times, and there was a wonderful unanimity in the praise bestowed upon him for his enterprise. He deserved all the good things that were said of him, for such men as he are the life and soul of new communities.

And all this time I have not told you the name of the machine. Well, not a soul knew it before the words passed the lips of the Judge, who acted as spokesman on the occasion. Truth to tell, no one thought of it. Being requested by William Smith to perform the ceremony, the Judge rose, and standing on an eminence before the great baby, said it struck him as a strange thing that when he asked William Smith what was to be the name of the infant, William Smith scratched his head, and said he did not know.

"It shows the modesty of the man," said the Judge, assuming a judicial attitude--"and true greatness lies in modesty--not to have thought of the only name which this iron infant can appropriately bear." (William Smith chuckled slyly at this. The idea of calling him modest! A man who could laugh in the face of a storm, as he could and did!) "I can say nothing in praise of William Smith," continued the Judge, "that he does not deserve. He is a representative man; in him enterprise, industry, forethought, and that truly British quality, Pluck, are typified. Although I have only been in this thriving township a few hours, I have heard enough of him, and seen enough of him, to make me wish to hear and see more; and I look forward to the day when I shall welcome him as a member of the Legislative Assembly which makes the laws for this prosperous colony. I hear that William Smith has made up his mind that this machine shall turn out the largest cake of retorted gold which the gold-diggings have yet produced. He will do it, if he has made up his mind to it, for nothing can check or frustrate determination when it is in partnership with common sense and sound judgment--as it is in this case. In christening this machine the 'William Smith,' I pay a fitting tribute to the man by whose enterprise it was placed on this spot;" et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

No occasion to speak of the cheers with which the Judge's oration was received; but loud and deafening as they were, they were nothing to the volleys that were given when the wife of the Goldfields Warden, as the leader of fashion in Silver Creek, broke the bottle of champagne against the machine, and dubbed it the William Smith. Then, everything being prepared, the first shovelful of golden quartz out of Philip's shaft was thrown beneath the stampers by the Judge, and the machine commenced its music, and every man and woman present drank success to it, in sparkling Number Two Moselle. With three times three! And three times three again! And again! And again!

After the lady of the Goldfields Warden broke the bottle of champagne against the machine, cunning William Smith begged her acceptance of the handsomest specimen of quartz and gold which had been found in Philip's claim. She thanked him and smiled sweetly on him, and conversed with him, telling her husband afterwards that William Smith was a most superior man, and had evidently moved in good society in the old country.

You understand that Margaret was at the ceremony of the christening. She looked lovely, not

only in Philip's eyes, but in the eyes of all the men and the unfashionable women. Would you like to know how she was dressed? Her gown was of pale-blue muslin, daintily trimmed with ribbons of the same colour. Around her white throat and slender wrists were frillings of delicate lace. And on her head was the sweetest hat, whispers of which must have floated across the seas and set the fashion here, notwithstanding that other ladies may claim the credit of designing it. It was a broad flapped Leghorn hat, turned up coquettishly on one side with a bunch of cornflowers, with a blue-gauze veil floating behind it. And if any lady quarrels with Margaret's taste, or with my description, and says I am wrong in my particulars, I shall be glad to hear from her.

The few fashionable ladies--numbering not more than half-a-dozen--who were present, acted as they act in more civilised circles. They put up their gold spectacles, and surveyed Margaret as they would have surveyed a curiosity, and canvassed and appraised her features and her clothes. They rendered her a kind of patronising justice; they said she was pretty, and dressed in fair taste, but they spoke of her in a tone that plainly proclaimed she was not of their order. Margaret cared not a whit for their looks; she was very happy. The gold-diggers regarded her with pride and admiration, making it a sort of boast--as though it reflected credit upon themselves--that Silver Creek could show the prettiest girl on any gold diggings; so Margaret was surrounded with friends and admirers. She was presented to the Judge, who said many fine things to her, and she not only carried off the palm in beauty, but also in manners and conversation. Philip's joy and delight in her knew no bounds; he discovered fresh charms in her in every new dress that she wore, and if she had not restrained him, he would have made open love to her before all the people. She was compelled to give him a few moments now and then, so that he might have opportunities for secretly pressing her hand. She was as proud of him as he was of her, for as she was the handsomest woman he was the handsomest man there.

The fine ladies were more than gracious to him, sighing, no doubt, that Heaven had made them such a man; but he had no eyes for any but Margaret. The Judge conversed with him, and in conversation showed off his learning, as even such high and mighty persons as judges are glad of the opportunity of doing, by introducing a quotation from Horace. Philip immediately capped it by another; and the judge, after his first surprise, there and then set his stamp upon Philip, and said in the hearing of the fine ladies that if Philip happened to come to town, he would be glad to see him at his private house. This flew round, and Philip became a king; even William Smith paled before him. But William Smith was not to be hurt by this; so long as his speculations were going on all right, he was satisfied. He longed to hear the music of his machine, beating out of the quartz the bright gold, so much of which would fall to his share; for after it was christened, it was only set going for a few minutes; then it was stopped, so that the workmen engaged on it might make merry with the others.

If you had seen the jolly faces of the jolly crowd of gold-diggers and their wives and children, and the pleased and more sober faces of the gentlemen and their ladies; if you had seen the new tents with their decorations which William Smith had put upon the ground; if you had seen the leaping, and racing, and other sports which William Smith improvised, giving handsome prizes to the winners; if you had seen the attendants carving away at the beef and mutton, under the shadow of a great canvas roof, without walls, for the purpose of showing, mayhap, that every one was free to enter, and welcome to partake of the good cheer provided; if you had seen the waving of flags and heard the laughter and clapping of hands--you would have thought you were at an English merrymaking of the very finest description. And a couple of years ago the spot in which it was held was a wild tract of country, over which the feet of twenty white men had not passed. Now hundreds of men were working vigorously there from sunrise to sunset, working and hoping and scheming and living their lives, and thousands more would soon flock around them; now the hollows echoed their shouts, and the forests of trees fell beneath their axes; now the eyes of forges were glowing in their lairs, and the music of the anvils rang along the hills; now diggers sat around the blazing trees of a night, and smoked their pipes, and told their stories, and spoke of their chances, or in more tender tones, of dear friends in the old land so many thousands of miles across the sea; now the women, as with grateful hearts they looked at their healthy well-fed children running about the hills or lying asleep in their cots, thought of the future with hope and pleasure; now men were on the earth and in its bowels, tearing the golden rock from its bed; now steam was doing its wondrous work, and gold was being sent down to the ports, to make men rich in the old countries, and to pay better wages to the working man.

Some who were on the Margaret Reef on that day thought of these things. The Judge for one; William Smith for another; our dear friend Mr. Hart for another; Philip for---- But no. I must be veracious; Philip thought of no such thing; he had enough to do with Margaret.

When the bustle of the ceremony was over, and people were more free to act in accordance with their whims and fancies, Philip conducted Margaret to his tent, and played the host to her. It was a small house, measuring, I should say, not more than ten feet by sixteen, white as snow outside, with a chimney the apex of which was neither more nor less than a whisky barrel, with the ends knocked out of it. The tent was lined inside with green baize, and Indian matting was laid down by Philip especially for the occasion; there was a little cupboard with two shelves in it fixed up in a corner, with an oilcloth flap which served for a door. In another corner there was a little shelf of books. The mantelpiece was of deal, covered with baize, and in the very centre was Margaret's picture, smiling demurely at you; and it deeply touched the living Margaret to see her picture garlanded with fresh green leaves and a few simple wild flowers. On either side of the picture were pipes and two or three dandy gimcracks which Philip had brought away with him

from Cambridge. The bed was a stretcher, with an innocent-looking white counterpane covering its imperfections--covering also a life-preserver and a revolver, which Philip had put out of sight, for fear of frightening his girl. The chairs were two stools and part of the trunk of a tree, polished in its seat and of a comfortable height. You may be sure that everything was sweet and clean, or Philip would not have brought his Margaret there. She looked about in every corner, making grand discoveries and uttering little screams at this and that.

"I declare, sir," she exclaimed, "you are more comfortable than I thought you were! I wonder why you want to change."

"Wouldn't you," he asked gaily, "in my place?" She considered deeply, making wrinkles in her forehead.

"No," she said, in a decided tone, "I really don't think I should. If I were in your place, I would change my mind."

"You would not--if you were in my place."

"I would! unless I was a very foolish creature."

He shook his head with fond seriousness.

"My name is Constancy," he said: and was proceeding, when she interrupted him quickly with:

"Constancy's a woman; I'll take that name, if you please, sir."

All the time they were in the tent together he did not kiss her; a feeling of delicacy restrained him.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### **NATURE PUNISHES THE THIEF.**

The festivities at the Margaret Reef did not conclude the celebration of the christening. In the night a ball was given by William Smith to the gentry of the district. He had a marquee put up especially for the occasion, and so that the fine ladies of Silver Creek might not think it a trade affair (they were mighty particular in some matters, let me tell you), he had requested permission to erect the tent on the ground where the Government Camp buildings were. Of course it was granted, with smiles; one of the small results of William Smith's wisdom in asking the Warden's lady to christen the quartz-crushing machine. The ball was a complete and most brilliant success. The Judge was there, and danced in the first quadrille, and so far forgot himself when he saw Margaret that he asked for the honour of her hand for the second: a proof that judges are human. Many a lady there envied Margaret the honour, and wondering what the Judge could see in her, did not wonder at themselves for wondering at his good taste.

If Margaret was lovely in the morning at the Reef, what shall I say of her in the night at the ball? and what shall I say of her dress? Again, but in a lesser degree, I lay myself open to the criticism of the ladies. Margaret's dress was composed entirely of clouds of fleecy tulle, looped and caught back by tufts of feathery ferns and grasses. And a long trail of bright grass was in her beautiful hair. This is all that I saw, for her charming face took away my eyes from all the rest, and I should scarcely have been surprised to see her floating away on a cloud. Entranced Philip was fairly dazzled by her appearance as she came sailing in on the arm of Mr. Hart, who looked what he was, every inch a gentleman. Everybody shook hands with everybody, as though they hadn't seen one another for weeks. When Mr. Hart resigned Margaret to Philip's care, Philip trod on air. He danced with her, and afterwards said:

"I shall keep possession of you the whole of the night."

Just then the Judge came up to her, and Philip moved a little aside, never thinking that so sedate a man, and one in such a position, would dance with a girl like Margaret.

"Now I am happy," said Margaret to Philip, after the dance, "I have danced with a judge That's one of the things I shall keep on saying all my life. I've danced with a judge!--I've danced with a judge!"

Then came another and younger man, and Margaret waltzed away with *him*. Seeing jealousy in Philip's face, Margaret whispered:

"Be good. I love only you."

He tried hard to be good, but strive as he might, he could not help feeling a little bit wicked. He contrived, however, to obtain many crumbs of consolation during the night. Crumbs! Slices, I ought to say; for the night was lovely, and now and then between the dances Philip stole into the open with his sweetheart on his arm. Being in the shade once he wanted to embrace her.

"Be quiet, sir," she said, coquettishly. "I'm only to be looked at to-night. How *do* I look, Philip!"

His eyes answered her, and he became more demonstrative.

"No, Philip, no!" she cried. "I must not be crushed."

"Why," answered Philip, with tender adroitness, "when I am dancing with you, I put my arm round your waist--so!"

"Ah!" she said, with a most delicious little laugh, "that's more neatly done."

"And my face, then, is close to yours--so!"

He had his way, and she became an accomplice. Being fired to emulation, she showed him that she was not to be outdone in tenderness. When a woman is in love, she forgets her cunning.

William Smith said rather a good thing. The Judge had a crisp short habit of speaking.

"I like that judge," said William Smith. "He must be a merciful man. He speaks in short sentences."

At midnight Smith came to the side of Philip, and pulled out his watch. It was exactly twelve o'clock, and at that moment he had arranged that the William Smith quartz-crushing machine should be set going.

"They've commenced to dance," he said gleefully.

He referred to the stampers of his machine.

Philip, gazing at Margaret and a handsome partner, who were whirling away from him, muttered somewhat moodily: "*I see them!*"

William Smith glanced at Philip in surprise.

"My imagination doesn't carry me as far as yours," said William Smith; "but I daresay you are as impatient as I am."

Philip scarcely heard the words. William Smith continued:

"Mr. Hart and I are going to steal away for an hour; we shan't be gone longer. Play the host while I am absent, and if they ask for me, say I'll be back in a minute or two."

Philip nodded, and presently Mr. Hart and William Smith were in the saddle, galloping away over the hills in the direction of the Margaret Reef; the horses did the distance in twenty-five minutes.

"Do you hear them--do you hear them?" cried William Smith exultantly, as they breasted the hill.

The music of the stampers fell on their ears. They halted at a distance of a couple of hundred yards from the machine. Sparks were flying from the chimneys; the fires were roaring; the machine was thumping away, beating the gold out of the quartz; dark forms of men were moving busily about in the shade and lurid light.

William Smith had good cause for triumph; many a man has won a name in history for doing less than he had done.

But in the midst of his exultation a tender sadness came upon him.

"What would you suppose I am thinking of?" he asked of Mr. Hart.

"I can't guess," replied Mr. Hart, who had thoughts of his own.

"I am thinking of my old mother at home," said William Smith, "and wishing she was here to see this day's doings. How proud she would be of her Billy, as she calls me!"

Mr. Hart was also thinking of a dear one at home and of the time, soon to come he hoped, when he should fold her in his arms. He blessed the music of the stampers; he gazed with tearful eyes upon the bright sparks flying upwards from the chimneys. They would give him the means of seeing his darling daughter in her bloom of womanhood, of sharing her life, of administering to her happiness.

At that moment, also, Philip was talking to Margaret of his father.

So beneath the stars, the old country and the new were joined by the tenderest heart-links that love can forge.

\* \* \* \* \*

A word as to the money which had been stolen from Mr. Hart. The thief was no other than the Walking Gentleman and Treasurer of the dramatic company. It has already been seen that he was ignorant of arithmetic; he might have pleaded this as an excuse, had he been called before a human tribunal to answer for his crime. He carried out his character of Walking Gentleman consistently to the end, by walking off with Mr. Hart's money and other money as well. But it was the last opportunity he had of playing a part on this earthly stage. I am inclined to the opinion that nearly every man in the course of his life has an impulse of, and the opportunity for, dishonesty. Another opinion as to the proportion of those who fall to those who conquer I keep to myself. The Walking Gentleman fell--but fell with the distinct intention in his mind of leading an honest life afterwards, if he escaped with his spoil. How many men do you know within the circle of your acquaintance who are leading respectable lives on stolen money, or money as good, or as bad, as stolen? The thief that we have to do with had planned everything carefully. He had so much money of his own; he appropriated Mr. Hart's savings, having learned where the trustful old man was in the habit of depositing them; he had, as treasurer, more than three hundred pounds in hand belonging to the company. A ship was to sail from Hobson's Bay for England in four days; he could do the distance to the port very well in that time. Then on to the ship, and away for home, with nearly a thousand pounds of stolen money in his purse.

All was accomplished an hour before the storm; he played only in the first part of the performances on that night, and at nine o'clock he was off, dashing away from Silver Creek on the back of a fleet horse. He had taken the precaution to disguise himself so that he might not be recognised. It was his intention to ride all night, and to catch up Cobb's coach at a certain point in the morning. All went well for an hour; but then the skies blackened, the thunder began to growl, the lightning to flash, and presently the storm fell upon him. He went on, nothing daunted, thinking it impossible that such a downpour could last. But it did last, as we know, and increased in fury. The thief began to wish that he had chosen another night, and he cursed his bad luck; but curses did not avail him, and there was now no turning back. On he galloped, with his head sunk on his breast, and the heavy rain beat down on him, and caused a singing in his head. It was at first only an indistinct buzzing that he heard, but it took shape presently, and the words, "Thief! thief! fool! thief!" hissed and plashed in his ears. On and on he galloped, and conscience filled the air with accusing shapes and sounds, which pursued and surrounded him, and made him sick and faint. Once raising his eyes, his heart almost leaped out of his throat as he saw a tall thin form bending towards him, with the intention of clutching him. It was but a slender tree, bent by the force of the wind, and he escaped it without really knowing what it was. And now, every branch that swayed brought new terrors to him, and he began to wish that he had remained honest. He was in the bush, with not a tent in sight, having chosen the remotest track, so that he might not be seen; but had a human habitation been within twenty yards of him he would not have been able to see it, for by this time he was enveloped in blackness. He stumbled on, not knowing now whither he was going. For a little while he had strength and sense enough to keep a tight rein on his horse, but a frightful flash of lightning, and a more frightful peal of thunder, so unnerved him that the rein slackened in his grasp. The horse dashed madly forward--over fallen timber, through light thickets of bush, into great pools of water, that plashed up and blinded the runaway. The branches of the trees caught at his clothes and tore them in fragments from his body. His wig had been the first thing to go, and the brown paint with which he had striven to hide his villany was washed from his face with, as it seemed to him, stinging whips of water. A pitiable sight he presented to the lightning, every flash of which caused him to scream with terror, as he clung with wild desperation to the horse's neck. Torn, bleeding, and literally in rags, with the stolen money in a belt fastened round his waist, he rode on madly, a thief confessed. Louder shrieked the storm; over the ranges and through the uneven valleys dashed the maddened horse. A raging torrent was before them, and the animal leaped into it, and in the leap the thief was unhorsed. While he was struggling in the surging waters, and while the only thing that was certain was death in a few seconds he repented most heartily of his crime, and I leave it to priests to say of what value were the choked words and the agonised thoughts that typified repentance.

When the next flash of lightning lit up the wild scene, it illumined the furious waters rolling onwards, and, for the millionth part of a second, the lifeless body of a thief justly punished.

In this way he played his last part in life, and was never more heard of.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### WILLIAM SMITH'S AMBITION.

Merrily worked the William Smith quartz-crushing machine. Day and night the stampers kept thumping and pounding. The first rest given to it was when the first fifty tons of stone had been passed beneath the stampers. Then the iron baby was quiet for awhile.

The iron cradles were emptied of their treasure in strong washing-tubs--hogsheads sawn in two, and made stronger by the blacksmith with additional belts of iron. The treasure consisted of finely-pounded stone and water, amongst which rolled three or four hundred weight of quicksilver. No gold was to be seen; it was hidden in the quicksilver.

Now commenced the process of washing-up. The deposit in the tubs was panned off in ordinary gold-washing dishes, the quicksilver with its precious treasure being put into a separate tub, and the waste earth which the quicksilver refused to embrace thrown aside in a little heap, as though it were of no account. This waste refuse was considered to belong, by right, to the proprietor of the crushing machine, and consisted chiefly of iron pyrites; it was a valuable privilege, producing a good many ounces of gold to the ton sometimes. The quicksilver, having all been extracted, lay in a silky white mass in the large tub. The strongest man could not have lifted it. The precious liquid was ladled carefully into skins of chamois leather, which, when fairly filled, were squeezed tight over buckets of clear water. The quicksilver which did not contain gold oozed out in silver tears, and wept into the water; it might truly be said that it was alive, *argentum vivum*. There then remained a thick solid mass of white metal. If you took up a handful of it, you could feel the beaten lumps and nuggets of gold which it concealed from view. The last process was the retorting of the metals. The quicksilver and the gold were deposited in the retort, a spherical vessel, to the cover of which was fixed a slender curved tube, up which the heated quicksilver ascended, as smoke ascends a chimney. This retort, with its precious treasure, was plunged into a fiery furnace, and heated to a white heat. Through the curved tube the boiling quicksilver rose in a silver stream, and rained into the tub of water which lay to receive it; gradually the stream grew less, and when the last few globules of pretty silver spray had fallen, the retort was unscrewed, and a large mass of molten gold, lit up by the most lovely colours, that seemed to flash and play upon its breast with fairy's touch, was exposed to view.

When Margaret, who was present, saw the pretty sight, she clasped her hands, and cried, "O! O! O!" which round circles stand for as much delight and admiration as could be expressed in three pages.

Philip and the rest looked on with sparkling eyes. "What's the weight of it?" asked William Smith. Philip, who was a novice in the matter of cakes of gold, guessed it at four hundred ounces.

"At four pounds an ounce," said William Smith, ever ready for a bargain, "that's sixteen hundred pounds. I'll give two thousand pounds for it as it stands."

Philip would have consented right away, but his more experienced mate laughed at William Smith, and with a knowing look said it would be a thousand pities to make him a loser by his enterprise. William Smith nodded cheerfully, and winked at the shrewder man, as much as to say, "We two are a match for each other!" Then they stood in silence about the retort, waiting for the metal to cool, and gazing at it with an interest as great as that of a fond father who gazes at the cot in which his child is sleeping. When all the rainbow-colour had died out of the gold, and it had become solidified, the cake was put into the scales. It turned fifty-six pounds troy--six hundred and seventy-two ounces. Deducting one hundred and fifty ounces, that being William Smith's payment for crushing the fifty tons of stone, at three ounces per ton, there remained five hundred and twenty-two ounces of pure gold, which Philip sold at sixpence less than four pounds an ounce, receiving in hard cash two thousand and seventy-four pounds nineteen shillings. William Smith obtained threepence an ounce more for his hundred and fifty ounces.

This business being satisfactorily concluded, Philip went to the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle, and made out a fair statement, showing the value of Mr. Hart's share in the gold obtained, Margaret looking over his shoulder the while.

"Just listen to me, Margaret," said Philip.

They laid their heads together for five minutes, at the expiration of which Margaret ran away, and returned enveloped in a large overcoat, which reached to her heels, and with a billycock hat slouched over her head. In that disguise she, followed by Philip, went in search of Mr. Hart. They found him on the stage, giving directions to the property-man.

"Rowe *versus* Hart," said Margaret, in a gruff voice, tapping him on the shoulder, and thrusting the balance-sheet into his hand in the form of a writ, "suit for two hundred and fifty pounds. If not paid. in five minutes, instant execution is ordered."

Mr. Hart peered beneath the slouched hat, and recognised Margaret. His lips being very close to Margaret's laughing face, he took an unfair advantage of her, and kissed her.

"What's the fine for that, Philip?" cried Margaret. "This," replied Philip, shaking a bag of money vindictively at Mr. Hart. "Here you are, old fellow;" and he handed Mr. Hart two hundred and fifty-nine pounds odd, being an eighth share of the gold. "For this unwarrantable assault, you will instantly pay me the two hundred and fifty you owe me. I don't intend to wait three minutes for the money."

Mr. Hart paid Philip with a grateful sigh; he knew that it would be useless to remonstrate with the young man. Had Mr. Hart been alone in the world, with no ties, he would not have accepted Philip's generosity; he would have quarrelled with him first. But you see how it was with him, and you will not blame him, I am sure.

The theatre was open again, and was thronged as usual. The actors and actresses were much concerned as to the fate of the missing treasurer; none of them, with the exception of Mr. Hart, suspected him. (Mr. Hart had enjoined secrecy upon Philip and Margaret, and no one but the three knew of his loss.) As they never received any tidings of him, they settled that he had been lost in the storm, and they mourned him as one who had come to an undeserved end.

Silver Creek township thrived and flourished. New discoveries were made every week, and new leads of gold found in gullies and plains. William Smith, always playing his cards well, knew that now the township was becoming a settled thing, there must soon be a Government land sale, and he began to build and let, and to buy up rights of land wherever he could. Depend upon it, he bought in the proper places, having settled, after careful survey, where it was imperative that the streets would be laid out. You would have thought he had enough to do, what with one thing and another, but he seemed never to have his hands full. He was not of an envious disposition, but he did covet one thing: Philip's quartz claim. It was yielding finely, and he believed he saw a colossal fortune in it. Not to be made out of it in the way Philip and his mates were working it. No; he would put up machinery. He would sink new shafts. The stone should be drawn from the bottom of the shafts not by hand, but by steam-power; the men should be lowered by steam; he would have a steam-engine below, if it was necessary; everything should be done by steam, and labour should be economised. Would that reduce the number of men necessary to work the claim? Not at all. Where there were a hundred men at work now William Smith would have five hundred. What he would do really would be to get ten times as much gold. He would open the claim to its fullest extent; he would buy up as many claims as he could get hold of north and south of Philip's land, and would pay for them all liberally.

You may ask why William Smith wanted to do this. He was making so rapid a fortune, that if things continued as they were for twelve months, he would be at least a fifty-thousand-pounds man. And in three years these figures would be doubled. A hundred thousand pounds! When he was a bricklayer at home working for a bare pittance, on high scaffoldings at the risk of his life, the very idea of possessing such a sum would have been enough to take away his breath. Now he thought nothing of it. But he wanted Philip's claim. For this reason: he burned to be a master of men, not of twenty, or fifty, or a hundred. He wanted to be a master of not fewer than five hundred men, all doing well under him, all living comfortably and being well paid, and if he had Philip's claim he saw his way to it. Then when he went home to the old country, he could say to his old master, "You thought it a great thing to have eighty men under you, each of whom could earn about a guinea and a half a week. Why, I, one of those eighty, went into a new country and employed five hundred men, and every one of them had a house of his own and was well clothed, and could give his family meat for breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper; and after paying for everything, and more besides, could put by thirty shillings a week in the savings bank--in the savings bank, which I started and am trustee of!" You see, the master used to cry out that working men in the old country were better off than they were in any other part of the world. William Smith wanted to show him that he was wrong.

So William Smith yearned to be king of five hundred men, and the proper complement of women and children--to be master of five hundred pairs of hands--to see peace and plenty and industry all about him--to walk among his workmen, and chat and smile with them--to walk among the women and children, and pat the youngsters on the head, and pass kind words with the mothers. He had all these thoughts. It was not a bad ambition.

He offered money for Philip's claim--a large sum. Philip and his mate shook their heads. Mr. Hart would have been glad to sell his share; if he had one-eighth of what William Smith offered, the white sails should spread for him over the seas, for Home, dear Home! But he decided that it would be base to sell; it would be like deserting Philip. "I'll wait yet a little while," he thought. "A few months will soon pass."

William Smith tempted him. Philip stood by.

Mr. Hart declined, and saw in the look of joy which flashed into Philip's face what pleasure his refusal had given the young man.

The largest retorted cake of gold that had been produced for many a score of miles round was produced from a great crushing out of Philip's claim. It weighed no less than two thousand two hundred ounces. It was exhibited in the principal gold-broker's window on a Saturday, which was

the busiest day in the township. On that day all the gold-diggers and their wives and children came in from the hills and gullies, and made their purchases. A more bustling scene of its kind could not be witnessed in any other part of the world. All day long the diggers and the women poured in, from east, from west, from north, from south. Where a storekeeper took ten pounds on another day, he took fifty on a Saturday. You should have seen the theatre on Saturday nights.

The people stood round and about the gold-broker's window, and those who were nearest stared and stared, and those who were farthest away peeped over their neighbours' shoulders, at the great beautiful cake of gold, duly labelled. Two thousand two hundred ounces It made every one's mouth water.

But on the Monday morning following this splendid exhibition, Philip arriving at his claim--he had spent the Sunday with Margaret--found the miners standing about in idleness: which was not the way of the men. A part of the shaft had fallen in, and they were waiting to know what to do.

"Do!" exclaimed Philip. "Go down, of course."

And down he went, and made an anxious and critical examination. When he came up again he decided to get the Government mining surveyor to report upon the condition of the shaft. This was done, and the surveyor gave certain directions. The shaft would have to be slabbed round all its sides for fifty feet from the surface--boxed in as it were. Until then it was not safe to work below. The slabbing was done; it occupied a week, and cost some money.

Philip fretted at the delay, and no one was glad but William Smith. He rejoiced. He had not one particle of malice in his nature, but he said quietly to himself, "I'd like that shaft to cave in from top to bottom. Perhaps they'd sell it to me then."

Margaret heard of the disaster--from William Smith's lips, I think. She turned white, and clung to Philip on the night she heard the news. He was annoyed that she knew, but what was there to be frightened at? he asked.

"Frightened at!" she cried. "Oh, Phillip! how can you ask? The shaft will fall in again----"

"How do you know that?"

"I know it--I feel it! And you will be underneath, perhaps!----"

She could not proceed for her terror. He could not but feel glad at this solicitude for him, and he used lover's arguments to prove that there was no danger. These arguments were sweet and delicious to her, but they had a contrary effect from that which he intended. Making her love him more, they made her more anxious for his safety.

"Promise me not to go down," she begged. "Promise me to work at the top.

"And let another man be crushed in my place?" he said proudly. She shuddered, and held him closer to her. "Not if I know it!"

"Then you don't value my life?" she cried, with womanly tact and womanly unreason.

"Your life, my dearest! not value your life, when a single hair of your head is more precious to me than all the gold in Silver Creek!"

"No," she persisted, "you don't value my life, when you are determined to risk it in this way."

"What are you talking about, Margaret? *I* risk *your* life!"

"Yes," she cried, "you are about to do it. For if anything happens to you, I shall die."

To pacify her he was compelled to promise that he would not go down below, but he did not keep his word. It was not often he broke it, but here his manhood was in question. He was not going to shirk his fair share of risk. He did not deceive Margaret long, however. She coaxed Mr. Hart to take her to the Reef one day, and did not scruple to say that Philip expected her. When they arrived at the shaft, she was told that Philip was below. White from apprehension, she walked a few yards away, and sat down upon a trunk of a tree, while the workmen from a distance gazed at her lithe and graceful form with respectful admiration.

"Phil Rowe's a lucky fellow," they said.

Mr. Hart passed the word down for Philip to come up, and up he came, strong and handsome, with the veins standing out on his bare arms and throat: a fair sight for a woman who loved him. But Margaret turned from him, and repulsed him, secretly admiring him all the while for his courage.

"This is the way that men deceive women," she said--"promising one thing and doing another!"

Had she been a scholar, she might have flung at him the proverb, "False in one thing, false in all," but she was only a woman in love. Besides, she would have known that there would have been no truth in the proverb, in this case. Perhaps that would not have mattered, though. Women

are queer logicians; their logic comes from the heart, not from the head.

"What can I do?" he asked, after listening to her reproaches. "You don't want people to think me a coward, do you?"

"If they dared to say so!" she exclaimed, with a motion which implied that she would defend him.

"They will say so if I do as you wish," he said; her hand was in his now: he did not mind the workmen seeing. "No, no, Margaret. Your word shall be law in everything but this, Women don't understand these matters." She tossed her head disdainfully. "Besides, don't I want to get rich for my Margaret's sake?"

"Rich!" she exclaimed. "Why, you have thousands of pounds!"

"I want thousands more to throw into your lap."

She wavered a little, for just three seconds.

"No," she said then. "You don't want thousands more, if your life is to be risked in the getting of them, Philip," and she looked at him earnestly, "if you were a beggar, I should not care."

"Do you mean to say you would love me all the same?"

"Yes; and work for you, if it was necessary."

She meant it. However, she did not persuade him to act as she wished. But things were working in her favour.

Within a few hours of this conversation, Philip, still working below, made a disheartening discovery. They were preparing for a blast. He was holding the gad, while a workman was striking it on the head with his hammer. Half an inch this way or that, and Philip would have been maimed for life, but it was seldom a man was so unskilful as to cause an accident in this way. The hole for the gunpowder was two feet deep, and Philip lifted up the gad and spooned out the dust. It came up in a liquid state; Philip looked anxious, and more anxious still, when the whole was cleared, to see water bubbling up. They had struck a small stream. It was not very serious at first. They continued working during the day, and fired the blast the last thing in the evening, before knocking off work. When Philip went down the shaft the next morning, he stepped up to his waist in water. They set to manfully, and baled it out; more than half the working hours of the day were lost in this necessary labour. They dug a shaft within the shaft, to serve as a well, and so managed to keep themselves tolerably dry; but the water came in faster and faster.

William Smith smiled and rubbed his hands. The claim was already as good as his; he began already making bids for other claims, north and south. In his mind's eyes he mapped everything out. He saw himself king of this great range. He saw a happy village springing up. Here should be this; there should be that. Tents for the gold-diggers here; a wooden house for himself there. On this spot should be a church; on that a school-house. He saw a well-dressed and happy congregation, his workmen and their families, walking from the church on the Sabbath day, smiling and talking together: he saw the children trooping out of the school-house after school hours, and the schoolmaster standing in the porch, with his cane under his arm: joy stirred in his heart as he fancied these things, and as he heard the shouts and hurrahs of the youngsters. There should be gardens too; yes, every tent should have its garden. He saw the cabbages and peas coming up; flowers also. He went to the highest point of the range, and folding his arms, looked down upon his kingdom. It had been a pleasure to him hitherto to make money, but he had not thought much of it. He had made it so easily, that his heart had scarcely been fluttered by the success of his speculations. But now, as he contemplated the realisation of his pet scheme, money was really sweet to him for the first time.

The quartz-crushing machine hammered away as steadily as ever, the water in Philip's claim increasing in volume every day. It served one good purpose. A race was made from the shaft to the dam, and a continual stream of water was running down it.

"You ought to pay us for the water," said Philip's mate.

"You ought to pay me for taking it," said William Smith.

Matters were growing serious. Out of every twelve hours they could work in the quartz but three.

Yet I do not think that William Smith would have obtained the claim, if it had not been that a woman was on his side.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### MR. HART DECIDES TO WAIT A LITTLE LONGER.

Margaret had a tender, yielding nature, but she was firm withal. It is surprising how determined these soft weaker vessels can be! And they generally get their way. If men, in addition to their naturally greater strength of character, possessed woman's delicate cunning, great results would be accomplished. But men are deficient in *finesse*. The nature of many a great diplomatist has assimilated closely to that of a woman. A clever man can do fine things, but a clever woman with the same opportunities would beat him hollow.

William Smith, then, found an ally in Margaret. She ran up her colours by the side of his, and declared war against Philip. Innocent, unsuspecting Philip knew nothing of the confederacy; and this is the way his treacherous Margaret undermined the fortress of his resolution.

On one day, "Am I not growing pale?" she asked of him, in a plaintive tone.

Philip, gazing at her in tender solicitude, saw that she *was* a shade paler than usual.

"And thin, Philip. Feel my arm." He obeyed her. "I'm wasting away," she said.

Now, that Margaret was a little paler than usual is not to be disputed. She had contrived it; by what means, I am not sufficiently in the mysteries to state.

That she was any thinner, I deny. Yet Philip thought differently from me. But he was in love with Margaret; while I--- No, I must not write what was about to glide off my pen. The pen tells many untruths, and I will not add one to the number on this occasion. I also love Margaret.

"You are working too hard," said Philip.

"No, it is not that," sighed she.

"You want a rest, my darling."

"It would do me no good, Philip."

"You are worrying yourself about something."

She sighed. It was a most eloquent affirmative. Then Philip paused. He felt that he had touched dangerous ground. Seeing that Philip did not speak, she used her tongue.

"Yes, I am indeed worrying myself about something. It will be the death of me, Philip."

"Nonsense, my darling, nonsense."

"I should not speak of *your* death in that way, Philip!"

The ground was crumbling beneath him.

"You are in low spirits, Margaret. You must rouse yourself for my sake."

She shook her head. "I would do anything for your sake, Philip. But I seem to have no strength left."

"Ah! that's it," he said eagerly, catching at a straw; "you are weak and low; you must eat strengthening things."

(Soft-minded fellow! as if, in her languid condition, she was not stronger than the strongest man!)

"Strengthening things!" she echoed, in a tone of soft reproach.

"And you must drink bottled stout. A bottle every day," he said uneasily.

"Bottled stout!" she echoed, in the saddest of tones, which, although she did not say so in as many words, conveyed a distinct denial that bottled stout was a cure for a breaking heart.

On another day it was--"I had a dreadful dream the night before last, Philip."

"There! there! frightening yourself with fancies."

"They are killing me, Philip. I dreamt about you and the shaft. You were working at the bottom. I don't know where I was standing, but dreams are such curious things you know, Philip. I was standing there, and saw you below, and I saw the men at the top, also, working. I saw right

down the shaft, Philip, and all at once there was a great crying and screaming, and the men flew wildly about. The shaft had fallen in, and you were buried beneath tons and tons of earth. I could see you even then, holding out your hands to me, and crying to me to help you!"

Margaret's eyes were full of tears, and she shivered and cowered. And I declare I do not know how much of this was acting and how much was genuine.

What could a man do under this sort of persecution? What can he do but yield?

"But, Margaret," said Philip, "we are young, we are strong. It would be folly to go away from Silver Creek, where we are making so much money."

"I don't want to go away from Silver Creek," she replied, her heart beating a little more quickly. "I love the place; if it had not been for Silver Creek, we might never have met, Philip. I can show you a way to make more money than you are making at the Margaret Reef. Ah, how good of you to name it after me! Yes, I can show you how to make more money."

"You show me a way how to make money, little woman! Why, what is there in that pretty little head of yours?"

He took it between his hands and kissed her lips.

"Look straight into my eyes, Philip. Don't they sparkle?"

"Sparkle, my dear little woman! They are the stars in my heaven!"

"But more than usual, Philip? Are they not brighter than usual?" (She made them so.) "Well, now, what makes them so bright just at this moment? I'll tell you without asking. I know you are going to say yes to what I shall propose, and that fills my heart with joy. My heart is in my eyes, because--because, Philip--- Turn yours away, sir! I don't want you to look at me---- Because, I think we might be married next week."

He caught her in his arms, and tried to raise her face to his; but she hung her head, and murmured that she would never be able, for shame's sake, to look at him again if he did not consent at once to what she was about to propose.

"Well, what is it, Margaret? What is it?" he asked, in a rapture of happiness.

"I can't tell you, Philip," she murmured, with her lips close to his ear, "unless you say 'Yes' beforehand."

"Yes, then," he cried. "Yes, a thousand times over!"

Who was the weaker vessel? Margaret or Philip! Really, we have accustomed ourselves to believe in some very fine delusions.

"Well, then," she said, "buy Mr. Smith's hotel and theatre. You will make more money in twelve months than you can get out of your claim in three years."

He was staggered at the suggestion, and was not displeased at it. But after a little consideration he said he was sure that Mr. Smith would not sell a property so valuable. Margaret knew better. All the while William Smith was dropping quiet hints to her as to the dangerous condition of the shaft in which Philip was working, the eyes of Margaret's mind were piercing him through and through.

William Smith himself would have been surprised if he could have heard her summing-up of him. But it is the way of this kind of woman--and let me tell you her name is legion. You and she are in the same room for five minutes, and she never raises her eyes to your face, and when you go out she can make an inventory of you, from the way you part your hair down to the style of your shoe-strings. She knows a great deal better than you whether your clothes fit well or ill, and whether your hands and feet are nice, and I do not think you would care to consult her physiognomically. If you knew what was going on within that little head while her eyes are directed demurely towards the carpet, it might make you uncomfortable. How she gained the power of discovering occult things is a deep unfathomable mystery.

Margaret was one of this kind of women. She had read William Smith through and through, and she talked and talked to Philip until he said he would consult Mr. Hart. Mr. Hart was called in. He thought the idea a fine one; he was filled with grave doubts of the safety of the shaft in which Philip was working, and in a lesser degree shared Margaret's apprehensions. He also thought that William Smith would be willing to come to an arrangement.

Suddenly Philip said:

"I'll do it on one condition, supposing it can be done. Mr. Hart must join us, and become a partner. You want to go home, I know, old fellow, but if you will stay with us for six months and see us fairly afloat, I'll put you on the ship myself at the end of that time with a clear four thousand pounds in your pocket, and wish you good-bye and God speed, and in less than two years Margaret and I will be after you, and we'll all settle down together in a spot I know of, you

and your darling, and I and mine."

Margaret clapped her hands in delight.

"I say 'Yes' for him!" she cried.

"I say 'Yes' for myself," said Mr. Hart, without hesitation.

He knew that the share of gold he had received out of the claim would be required in the transaction of the business, and he considered that Philip had a right to dispose of it.

He was appointed agent to moot the proposal to William Smith, and carry it through if it was well received. Philip had not a sufficiently calm head for the transaction. Mr. Hart did his work well; William Smith entertained the scheme, chuckling quietly while it was being propounded, and of course made a good bargain. There was no delay. In four days (William Smith having bought out Philip's mate) William Smith was master of the quartz reef, and Philip was the proprietor of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle Hotel and Restaurant and the Theatre Royal, Silver Creek. As Mr. Hart had supposed, his money was required for the completion, of the purchase. Philip entered into his property free from debt, and with a good stock in hand, but with very little ready cash. William Smith, had swept it all into his pocket. But it was a fair bargain. The hotel was doing a famous business, and money began to tumble in the first day. On that day the name of the hotel was changed. The new sign-board hoisted up had on it the words,

### **"The Silver Flagon."**

And the place was crowded with friends and acquaintances drinking success to it.

So for the fourth time during the last seven years, Mr. Hart, having saved sufficient money to carry out the project nearest to his heart, decided to stay a little longer, and make a little more, before he took ship for home. But in this last instance, he could scarcely help himself. Gratitude called upon him to act as he had done, and he was satisfied that he would be well rewarded for his patience. It was a consolation and a pleasure to reflect that the date of his departure was fixed. He had only six months to wait, and he would carry with him a well-filled purse. He counted the days, and, making his calculations, he wrote home to his daughter that, in such and such a month he hoped, with God's blessing, to fold her to his heart, and that he would never leave her again.

Within a few days of Philip's taking possession of the hotel, he and Margaret were married. I leave you to imagine the festivities on the occasion; how handsome, strong, and brave Philip looked upon that happy morning, and what a fairy vision burst upon his gaze when Margaret appeared before him in her bridal dress. Margaret's mother--a short pale woman (what lovely daughters many of these small thin women have)--was there, approving of everything. She had also been an actress in her time, and, having had her ups and downs, was glad to see her daughter well and comfortably settled in life. But Margaret was a prize which any man might have been proud to win. The ceremony was a quiet and sober one, but there was plenty of feasting afterwards. In the hotel there were well-spread tables during the whole day, free to all comers. There was a private breakfast, at which Margaret's mother shed tears, and William Smith and Mr. Hart made fine speeches. Philip, in his speech, broke down most ignominiously; he could not utter six words in smooth order. But his face was eloquent, if his tongue was not. The bride was radiant. A handsomer pair never was seen. They drove away amid the cheering of a thousand gold-diggers.

In the evening they sat together on the banks of a beautiful river, rather low in its bed at the time because of the heat. On the distant hills cattle were browsing and smelling for water. The only sound that reached their ears was the sound of the woodman's axe. That came through the air sharp and clear, although the woodman was a long way off. The lovers, now man and wife, talked in low tones of their future, and laid their plans. All was smooth before them. No rough roads, no sickness, no misfortunes. Sunshine was in their hearts, and there was no shadow in the bright clouds that floated above them.

"All your acting days are over now," said Philip. "Well," replied Margaret, "I must act at home."

"All right," responded Philip; "one stipulation, though. No more than two characters in any of our pieces."

She laughed at this.

"Philip, I hope you love mother!"

"I do love her; she is a dear little woman."

"Do you know that when she was young she was the most beautiful creature that ever was

seen?"

"How could she have had such a lovely daughter if she had not been lovely herself?"

"Nonsense, Philip; but she was. She has the remains of it now. Have you noticed her teeth? They are like pearls. And her hands? Much smaller than mine. She must have been a beautiful actress, too; she has had verses written about her in the papers. She acted in the Plymouth and Exeter theatres and was a wonderful favourite. She had dozens and dozens of offers, and what do you think one of her lovers was, Philip? Well, but you would never guess. He was a Jew, and I really think mother was fond of him a little, little bit, from the way she talks about him. He must have been a god man, but of course mother couldn't marry a Jew. Wasn't it a mercy she didn't, Philip, for then what would have become of me--and you? I want you to love her very, very much; more than you do me, Philip."

"I can't do that, my darling; but I do love her, and will, both for her own sake and yours, my dearest, dearest! And so we are man and wife, darling! can scarcely believe in my happiness. You'll not melt away out of my arms, will you, Margaret?"

"Not if you're very good to me, Philip," she replied, with a tender nestling motion. "Look at that beautiful cloud, dear."

"It's coming over us, and it is shaped like an angel. I want to hear you say you love me, Margaret."

"Philip!"

## **CHAPTER XX.**

### **THEY FLEW LIKE MADMEN INTO THE TOWN.**

Mr. Hart took some interest in home politics--that is to say, in the politics of the old country; Philip took none, not from lack of sympathy, but because he had no room. Every nook and corner of his mind was filled by one idea, which presented itself in a hundred different shapes; that idea was Margaret.

The Overland Mail came into Silver Creek once a month, pretty regularly, with letters and papers from home; and if you had seen the post-office on the day the four-horse coach brought the mails, you never would have forgotten the sight. Crowds stood around the doors and windows of the wooden building, for up to the present time every building in Silver Creek township was either drill, calico, or wood. There was some talk of a stone building, and when this was once up, you may be sure that others would soon follow. Well, around the wooden post-office, hundreds and hundreds of men and women were assembled when the Overland Mail arrived, waiting for the windows to open so that they might receive their letters. If the mail came in somewhat later than usual, the clerks at the post-office would be kept at work until late in the night sorting the letters and the newspapers, to allay the anxiety of the people. News from home! Ah, you who have not been a wanderer, and parted from friends and relations and all whom you love, do not know what those words mean! For many hours after the arrival of the Overland Mail, Silver Creek was filled with tender memories. The faces of those who received letters from home through the little window lit up with joy; they laughed at the well-known handwriting and their eyes filled with tears. Ah! this is from mother. Dear old mother! What a queer hand she writes! And this from the old boy! And this from Jim! And this from Arthur! And these from Mary, and Fanny, and Nelly, and Kate, and Maggie, and I don't know whom all besides! God bless them every one! There was electricity in the very envelopes, which went from the tips of the fingers, when the paper was touched, into the palm of the hand--where hers, and hers, and hers, lay once upon a time--up the arm, straight into the heart, and illumined faces there. Very plainly illumined them, I can tell you. Old faces, young faces, wrinkles and cheeks of peach, eyes dim and bright, parched lips and lips sweetly fresh, horny fingers and soft, white hair and brown--all were plain and visible, looking, smiling, speaking to those who held their letters in their hands. They did not take their letters home to read; they opened them there and then, and stood about reading; and their eyes sparkled, and they grew sad, and tender, and joyous, and pensive, as the news moved them. Those who received no letters walked slowly and mournfully away.

Always for two or three days previous to the arrival of the mail Mr. Hart became restless and anxious and impatient. Perhaps it would come in a day or two earlier, and he was always hoping that it would. The coach stopped at the hotel, and Mr. Hart would run to the door, and cry out to Levy the driver, "Brought the mail, Lee?"



He was in that state now, some six weeks after the marriage of Philip and Margaret. The mail really was due, and the coach had come in without it. When Levy, who had driven all the way this time, left town for Silver Creek, the mail-ship was not signalled at the Heads. It was a great disappointment to Mr. Hart.

Everything was going on well. Since Philip had bought the hotel, the business had increased, as it would have done under William Smith's management. Silver Creek was growing more prosperous every day, and these things were natural. Philip was a favourite; so was Mr. Hart. As for Margaret, the gold-diggers would flock to the hotel, and hang about, and talk, and drink, only on a chance of catching a sight of her; and Margaret knew this, and did not disappoint them. "There she is!" they would say. The sight of her did them good. And when she walked out, admiring eyes followed her at every step. No lady in the world was more genuinely respected and more highly thought of.

I was almost forgetting to state a little incident. Upon Philip's return from his honeymoon, he said to Mr. Hart, when they two were alone together:

"I want you to take care of this packet for me, and to promise me one thing."

He handed Mr. Hart a sealed envelope, on which no name or address was written. There was an enclosure in it, somewhat bulky.

"What is the promise, Philip?" asked Mr. Hart, taking the envelope.

"That you will not, under any consideration, give it to me until we meet in the old country. I don't want to be tempted."

These singular questions caused Mr. Hart to ask questions, but Philip would not answer them.

"I want you to accept this trust unconditionally," he said; and as he was evidently very anxious in the matter Mr. Hart gratified him, and placed the envelope in a safe corner of his pocket-book.

Philip had commenced business on a straight plan, of which Mr. Hart fully approved. He took no credit, and when he sent an order to town he sent the money with it. Being desirous to make money fast, he cast his eyes further afield than selling grog and beer retail to the diggers. Why should they not become wine and spirit merchants! He consulted Mr. Hart; the old man was satisfied to leave everything to Philip, who went to work with the spirit of William Smith. In a very short time a great wooden shell was built, and large orders were sent to town for wines and spirits. On the day the mail was expected, a long string of bullock-drays wound its way slowly along High Street, Silver Creek, and stopped at the great wooden shell, which was the new wholesale wine and spirit store, belonging to Philip and Mr. Hart. The bullock-drays contained the stock, the invoices of which had totted up to no less than eight thousand pounds. Philip had been sending money through the post every day in payment of this fine stock of goods; about one thousand pounds remained to be paid, and on the day following the arrival of the bullock-drays, a draft for this amount was sent to the merchants. Every shilling in the place had to be scraped together to make up the sum.

"Now we're all right," said Philip cheerfully; "we don't owe a shilling in the world, and we have at least eleven thousand pounds worth of stock in hand. The hotel, theatre, and goodwill are worth another ten. We'll open the new store to-morrow. Maggie, my dear! in twelve months we'll be on our way to Devonshire."

That evening the mail from home arrived at Silver Creek. Mr. Hart was soon at the post-office. There was a letter for him from his darling child, a letter which made his eyes run over. William Smith had sent in during the day from the Margaret Reef, asking Mr. Hart to inquire if there were any letters for him at the post-office. There was one from William Smith's mother, and Mr. Hart started off to the Margaret Reef to deliver it to his old friend. He called in at the hotel to ask if there was any message for William Smith.

"Tell him," said Philip blithely, "that I think we've got the best of the bargain."

"At all events," said Mr. Hart, "I shall tell him that you are quite satisfied with it. Any message, Margaret?"

"Give him my love," replied Margaret, "and say we're all coming to dine with him next Sunday, and that he's to get something nice for dinner."

Mr. Hart nodded and walked away. He was in a tender and serious mood. The letter from his daughter had somewhat disturbed him. Its tone was as affectionate as usual; but hidden in its words, like the scent of a flower in its leaves, was a confession of unhappiness. It was not expressed in so many words. The writer told him this and that, as she was in the habit of doing, and a stranger reading it would have said, "It is a happy girl who wrote this letter." But Mr. Hart read with the heart of a father, and he saw what would not have been visible to others. He seemed to hear his daughter whisper to him to come home and counsel and advise her--to come and love and protect her. It made him terribly uneasy.

"When the six months are up," he thought, "I will not wait another day. Father and daughter

should be together; she is just of the age when a girl most needs a father's love and care. Thank God, there is not long to wait; in a little more than four months I shall turn my back on Silver Creek."

And yet the thought brought a certain regret with it. Silver Creek had been a good place for him, and he had cause to bless the day he entered it, with his company of actors and actresses and his weak-kneed horse. He paused at the foot of the Margaret Range, and thought of the first day he had seen it, and how he had debated whether he should ascend it or not.

"The happiness of our lives hangs upon chance," he said. "If I had not ascended this hill I should not have made the acquaintance of Philip in the way I did. We should not have been together now, and I should not have had the means of joining my child and making her life happy. Four thousand pounds! Aha! Gerald! Fly away, time!"

He called it out to the hills, as a light-hearted boy might have done.

He found William Smith in all his glory. The hill was alive with men. Philip's claim was in full work; a steam-engine was at the top of it, puffing and blowing day and night, pumping up the water. The William Smith quartz-crushing machine was thumping away merrily. New veins of golden quartz had been discovered, and were being worked. Some of the workmen's slab huts were already erected, and the plots for kitchen-gardens laid out. Two or three score of goats were scampering about; in the fowl-houses roosted five hundred head of poultry; women were hanging clothes on the lines to dry; children were running after one another and playing. William Smith was supremely happy and satisfied with himself. He stood there, dusty and brown, with his sleeves tucked up, a king. He conducted Mr. Hart over the ground, and showed him what he had done, and told him what he intended to do. Everything was planned and arranged in an admirable way. William Smith, in this carrying out of his ambition, was an enthusiast, but he was no dreamer. He was a practical man to the edges of his nails.

"I will ride back with you," he said to Mr. Hart, "and sleep at the Silver Flagon to-night, if you will stop with me till ten o'clock."

Mr. Hart consented, and went among the workmen, and talked with them while William Smith read his mother's letter. They had supper together, and a pipe afterwards, and sat outside William Smith's wooden house, which had a fine broad verandah all round it.

"See this place in twelve months," said William Smith, "and you'll not know it."

"I shall be away then," said Mr. Hart, "and shall be hearing one day that you are at the head of the Government."

It was not by any means a wild supposition. William Smith would not have been the first working man who was gazetted prime minister in the colonies.

Night came on. The day-men were at home enjoying their ease; music was heard in various tents. There was no moon. At a little before ten o'clock it was dark. No part of Silver Creek township could be seen from the Margaret Range. Exactly at ten o'clock Mr. Hart and William Smith were in the saddle.

They rode slowly. Over one range, over another, along a valley, up another range.

"We shall see the township soon," said William Smith. "What are you stopping for?"

Mr. Hart had reined up suddenly.

"I don't know," replied Mr. Hart; "something in the air. Look yonder; what is that light in the sky?"

A pale red light was coming in the clouds.

"The moon rising," said William Smith.

"There is no moon to-night."

"Ah! no; I forgot."

They rode up the range; it was steep and stony, and their horses stepped carefully; the light in the sky became stronger--more lurid; up they toiled; they were nearly at the top. They spoke not a word to each other, but their anxious eyes were fixed upon the sky. Deeper and deeper grew the colour, wider and wider it spread; and a sound like a muffled roar came to their ears.

"Now then," cried William Smith to his horse, and gently touching it with his whip. "Up with you, my lad!"

The horses leaped onwards, and when they reached the top of the ridge, stopped suddenly, in obedience to the action of their riders.

"Great God!" cried Mr. Hart; "the township is on fire!"

They saw now the meaning of the lurid sky. A vast sheet of flame was before them extending this way and that, licking up everything before it. They could hear the dull roar of the fire and the cries of the people, who were rushing wildly about. They paused but for one instant. The next they were galloping madly towards the township; their horses needed no urging, they flew like the wind.

"Are you insured?" shouted William Smith.

"Not for a penny," answered Mr. Hart, with a spasm in his throat.

"The stores will burn like tinder," muttered William Smith between his clenched teeth.

They flew like madmen into the town.

## **CHAPTER XXI.**

### **DRIVEN BY LOVE INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH.**

By the time Mr. Hart and William Smith reached the township, there was a straight sheet of fire, more than a mile in length. At least three hundred stores were in flames. Silver Creek could boast of a volunteer fire brigade, and the brave fellows worked at their two small fire-engines with the perspiration pouring down their faces in streams, but they might as well have pumped water into the creek for all the good they did. However, they worked away, approaching as close as they dare to the immense body of flame; those who were closest to the burning stores directed their hose towards the blazing rafters, whilst their comrades pumped upon them to prevent their catching fire. The shouting, the screaming, the confusion were terrible; loud cries ran along and about the crowd with the rapidity of the flame itself, and every few moments another store on each side of those already on fire caught light. Strange to say, no attempt was made to stop the fire by pulling down the buildings on either side, and so create a gap across which the flames could not leap. The only thought that people had was to save their goods; but even as it was, very little was preserved from destruction.

When Mr. Hart and his companion plunged into the crowd, their first thought, of course, was of the hotel and theatre.

"Ah," said one and another, "here's Mr. Hart! Here's William Smith!"

They made way for these two men, who ran rapidly along, and found that the hotel had just caught fire.

"Where's Margaret? Where's Philip?" cried Mr. Hart, with anxious glances around.

At that moment he cared not one pin for the destruction of his property; he saw the flames begging him, but he paid no heed to them. Time to think of that afterwards. All that he cared for now was the safety of Margaret and Philip.

"Where's Margaret? Where's Philip?" he cried.

Some man among the crowd answered, that Margaret had last been seen going into the hotel before the fire had reached it, and that she had not come out.

"Good God!" groaned Mr. Hart, and would have plunged into the flames but that they held him back.

At that moment Philip, who had been working half a mile away, saving life and property with the strength of a young Hercules, was running towards the hotel. Amidst the excitement of rushing into the blazing stores, and pulling sleeping children and weak women out of the jaws of death, he had not thought of his own property, and did not know that it was on fire. Indeed, no man would have conceived it possible that the flames could have reached the hotel in so short a time. Now, Philip said to himself, he must get to his own place, and see what was best to be done. He was a little bit concerned about Margaret. "I must get her away from this," he thought. "When I see her in a place of safety, I can come back and do my work." But as he ran towards his hotel, the rumour ran from it that it was burning.

"The Silver Flagon's caught!" shouted the gold-diggers, one to another, and the news was carried along past Philip, who received it as he ran.

"Ah!" he muttered, with a great sigh, "there's an end to that. We are ruined men. Poor Mr. Hart, poor Mr. Hart! And I persuaded him to stop."

The thought that he himself was ruined scarcely disturbed him. Ruined How could he be ruined, when he had Margaret? His heart was almost light as he thought of his darling woman, but in the same moment his hair seemed to rise from his head with horror as he heard some one say:

"The Silver Flagon's down, and Mrs. Rowe's inside!"

"What what!" he muttered, dazed for a moment, and then he screamed:

"O my God!"

And, with a cry so terrible as to startle all who heard it, he plunged madly towards the spot where he had last seen his beloved.

He reached it, hot, black, panting, with his hair streaming to his shoulders, and his blue eyes gleaming wildly.

"Keep him back! Keep him back!" they shouted and laid hands on him.

But he dashed them aside as though they had been so many feathers, and, with knitted brows and lips tightly closed, and breast that heaved as though it would burst, he ran with swift desperation into the flames. A spasm of horror rose to the throat of every looker-on, and kept him silent for a moment. During that brief moment, which seemed an hour, their eyes were strained in the direction of Philip's flying form. They could see him beating the flames away with one hand, while his other arm was raised to save his eyes from the fire. Only for a moment was their attention thus occupied; the sound of a familiar voice fell upon their ears; they turned, and to their amazement, saw Margaret moving among them. Her hair was hanging loose, and she was seeking for Philip's face among the throng of bearded men. She knew all the faces that were about her, but she did not recognise one of them until she saw Mr. Hart's. To him she ran, and asked if he knew where Philip was. The men still had their hands upon Mr. Hart, and the look of horror in his face answered her. Following the direction of his eyes, which were fixed upon the burning hotel, she in her turn saw the outline of her Philip's form struggling through the flames. All this was the work of two moments.

"Philip Philip!" she screamed, and ran towards him.

It was useless now to attempt to hold Mr. Hart; he broke from the prison of their arms as easily as Philip had done, and wound his around Margaret.

"O merciful God!" she screamed, tearing at the air. "Philip! Philip! I am here! Margaret is here!"

All on fire as he was, her voice reached him; he made an effort to escape, and by love's instinct in the direction where Margaret was. But he fell among some falling rafters, and seemed to be of them; and as he fell, a gasp of mingled anguish and joy escaped his bursting heart; it sounded like "Margaret!" Then Mr. Hart, with swift and furious action, resigned Margaret to the arms of the miners, and flew into the flames towards his friend. All the strength and dexterity of his youth came back to him; he had marked the exact spot where Philip had fallen, and he darted to it with an eagle's keen sight, and rushed out of the flames, dragging Philip's insensible form after him. They were both on fire; but fifty blankets were flung over them with lightning rapidity, and a hundred pitying arms were stretched forth to bear them tenderly to a place of safety.

## **CHAPTER XXII.**

**"DEAR OLD FELLOW! GOD BLESS MARGARET AND YOU!"**

THE sun rose next morning upon a sad sight. High Street, Silver Creek, was nothing but a long line of ruins. More than five hundred stores had been burnt to the ground. All over the gold-diggings work was suspended, and the diggers flocked in to see the sight. They did not stand idly by; they tacked up their sleeves, and every European and American there gave a day's work for nothing. William Smith sent orders to the Margaret Range; the William Smith quartz-crushing machine was stopped, and all the workmen came in to lend a helping hand. They did wonders under William Smith's directions; he was to many what sound wine is to enfeebled bodies. He strengthened, sympathised, encouraged, all in a breath, and set a fine example by working as

zealously as the most zealous. It was not with him "Do as I say," but "Do as I do." The first duty of the workers was a solemn one: to find the ashes of those who had been burnt to death in the fire. Five persons were known to have perished--among them Margaret's mother. Strangely enough, no one had thought of her while the fire was raging; in the larger interest that centred around Margaret and Philip this poor little quiet woman had been forgotten. Very tenderly and gently were the remains of the dead gathered from the ruins; they were but blackened cinders, which crumbled almost at the touch; and awe and grief were on the faces of the rough men as they deposited the sad heaps on ground made sacred by its burden, and covered them over with blankets. This duty performed, their thoughts turned to other and more cheerful matters, and they bustled briskly about.

Before noon twenty canvas tents were up, at a little distance from the street--the ground there was as yet too hot to build upon--and twenty burnt-out storekeepers had recommenced business. So great were the bustle and animation, that the sufferers really had no time to be faint-hearted. Every man's example was an encouragement to his neighbour; emulation was excited, and all strove to outvie each other. But we must away from the scene--nearer ties claim our attention. In a week Silver Creek township will seem scarcely the worse for its terrible conflagration. Business will be carried on as usual and the building of new stores will be going on from one end of High Street to the other. None will be put up of canvas. Most of them will be built of wood, and a few of stone. Thus cities are made. Experience teaches.

In a large tent, on the Camp Ground where the Government buildings are erected, are three persons. Mr. Hart, with his left arm in a sling, is standing by the side of a low bed, gazing mournfully down. So rapidly was his noble task accomplished, when he rushed into the flames to save his friend, that he escaped with very little injury. He was scorched and burnt, but not seriously, his left arm being the part of him which had suffered the most. The physical part of him, I should say; for all that was mental in him was quivering with anguish.

At his feet, on the ground, sits Margaret.

Our Margaret? Yes; although you would not have believed, had you only your own eyes to trust for confirmation. Her flesh is so colourless that every drop of blood seems to have left her body; but your imagination will supply a better picture of this hapless broken-hearted young creature than my pen can draw. On the low bed by which she is sitting, with misery and despair in her heart and face, lies a blackened mass which once was Philip, which is Philip still for a few brief hours.

For he was not dead when Mr. Hart dragged him from the flaming walls; the life had not been quite burnt out of him; but he was dying fast now. "Before the sun rises," said the doctors, with sad meaning in their voices. It was most merciful that it should be so; for had he lived the full span of man's life he would never again have seen the light, nor could any person have looked upon his face without a shudder of pain.

They could do nothing for him except to shed upon him the light of their pitiful love; and blackened and burnt as he was, this sweet and divine compassion, in some strange way, reached his senses, and if his lips could be said to smile, they smiled in grateful acknowledgment. "Poor Philip! Poor soul! Dear, dearest love!" they murmured, and their words were not lost. They were to him as water, cold and sweet and clear, is to a parched mouth. Even in the darkness through which he was struggling blind, impotent, helpless, glimpses of delicious light broke upon his suffering soul.

A hundred times Margaret was on the point of giving way, but Mr. Hart whispered to her:

"Be strong, my dear child, be strong! Your voice is to him as the dew to a flower."

"As the dew to a flower!" she murmured. "My flower! The only one! God pity him! God pity me! He was my life, and he is going."

"To another world, dear child," he said to her, in a beautiful soft voice, "where we shall join him in God's good time."

And as though he had a thing to do which was necessary for Philip's comfort, the old man went swiftly out of the tent, and groaned and wept there, where Margaret could not see him. Then raised his eyes from the earth, and mutely prayed that peace might come to Margaret's troubled soul.

She, moistening Philip's lips with pure spring water, never moved from her husband's side, and prayed that she might die with him. "If God is merciful," she thought, "He will take me also."

William Smith came to the tent, but when Margaret saw him she shivered, and held her hands before her eyes to shut him from her sight. The man needed no other sign; straight from the tent he walked and sat outside, talking to Mr. Hart. He was not angry with her; his heart was very tender to her and Philip.

"It is natural that she should not wish to see me," he said to Mr. Hart; "it was in the house that once was mine that Philip met his death. If I had not wanted Philip's claim, they might have lived together happily."

After this touch of sentiment he became practical. "Have you any money?"

"A few shillings."

William Smith put a hundred pounds into Mr. Hart's hands.

"Let him want nothing," he said.

"He will want nothing presently," sighed Mr. Hart, beneath his breath.

You who know what beautiful tenderness lies in human nature can imagine in what ways it was shown to Margaret and Philip. Women came with sweet offerings during all the day. Had fifty men been dying instead of one, there would have been supplies for them all. Milk, honey, flowers, jellies, broths, were sent from all quarters; they were laid aside, for there was no use for them, but they were good tokens to give and to receive.

In the night, about eleven o'clock, Mr. Hart observed Margaret's head move closer to Philip's lips; he knelt on the ground on the other side of Philip's bed, and heard the dying man whisper:

"Margaret, my beloved--my darling--Margaret, my heart! Margaret, I love you--love you--love you!"

For an hour these were the only words he murmured, at intervals, in many different ways.

"Do you know me, dearest?" she asked: "do you hear me? It is Margaret who is speaking. Your Margaret."

"My Margaret!" he whispered. "My soul! My beloved!"

His voice was like the murmurs of the softest breeze. Margaret, with open lips, received his dying words in her mouth. With what pangs of love and anguish did she receive them!

Mr. Hart, during an interval of silence, motioned to Margaret. Might *he* speak to Philip? Margaret's hand crept across the bed to the old man's. Lover and friend were joined above Philip's breast.

"Philip, my dear boy," said Mr. Hart, "do you know my voice?"

"Dear old fellow!" came presently from Philip. "Noble old fellow! I saw you. God bless Margaret and you! Dear friend, were you hurt much?"

"Not at all, my dear lad."

"It delights me to hear that. God is very good!"

All their strength was required for composure; they checked their sobs, so that the sound of them might not disturb him; he could not see the tears that ran down their faces.

Later in the night, as death approached nearer and nearer, Philip's voice grew stronger, and the broken words he sighed denoted that he knew they were by his side, and that he was dying. In a few sobbing words uttered at long intervals, he thanked Mr. Hart for attempting to save him.

"Take care of Margaret," he whispered; "be a father to her." The utterance of the word brought other memories. "Dear old dad! I hoped to see you, and show you my darling. But John Hart will bring her to you. Dear old dad! love Margaret!"

Then his thoughts wandered, and he murmured expressions of affection towards the Silver Flagon--the dear old Silver Flagon--and always in connection with Margaret. All his thoughts clustered about the one supreme image that dwelt in his mind, the image of Margaret.

Mr. Hart whispered to Margaret to ask him the address of his father in the old country, for strange to say he had never told them; but all that they could get from him now were fitful words, in which his darling Margaret, the Silver Flagon, his dear old dad, and his faithful friend, were mentioned without connection.

An hour later, his whispered words denoted that his memory was wandering to the happy hours he had spent behind the scenes with Margaret; then he was riding for flowers for Margaret.

"O, if it's for that!" he murmured, repeating the words of the woman who had sold him the flowers; and then, "An echo stole it, and I heard it singing Margaret as I rode on. I listened to her heart, and she said it beat for me. She loves me! she loves me!"

He murmured these last words, as though in happier days he had been in the habit of whispering them as a charm. Then his memory travelled on to the evening of his wedding-day, when he and his darling were sitting by the banks of the river, talking of the future. "We saw a cloud above us," he whispered, "and it was shaped like an angel. I see it now--I see it now! Shelter Margaret! Daddy! Margaret!" Presently his feeble fingers seemed to be seeking for

something, and Mr. Hart, divining that he was seeking for the flowers he had bought for Margaret, placed near to his face a bunch that had been brought to the tent as a love-offering. A sigh escaped from the poor burnt bosom, and after that Philip did not speak again.

So the night crept on, and silence reigned within and without the tent. They could scarcely hear Philip's breathing; and when the morning's light was trembling below the horizon, and the quivering in the skies denoted that day was awaking, he lay an inanimate mass before them. They did not know it for a long time. William Hart was the first to discover it. With a solemn look, he drew up the white sheet, and softly, tenderly covered the face of his friend. With white lips and bursting pupils, Margaret watched the action, and when the form of what once was Philip was only indicated by the outlines of the white sheet which covered him, her strength gave way, and with a groan of anguish she sank upon the ground. Then it was that Mr. Hart felt the need of woman's help. He went out of the tent to obtain it, and found William Smith sitting on the ground a few yards away. He had sat there throughout the whole of that sad night.

"It is all over," said Mr. Hart, with sighs and sobs.

"Poor Philip! Poor dear lad!" said William Smith, and made no effort to keep back the tears.

They went together to the camp, and brought back a woman with them, who raised Margaret from the ground, and otherwise attended to her. Her state was truly pitiable; and the worst aspect of it was that her grief seemed to have dried up the fountain of her tears.

"If she would only cry!" thought Mr. Hart, as she gazed at him with her despairing, tearless eyes.

He was her sole comfort. She turned from all others with shuddering aversion, and had she been able, she would have refused, and not with gentleness, their kind offices. Truth was, she hated the place in which her love had died, and hated the people who lived in it. It was unreasonable in her, but it was so.

She asked for her mother, and they were compelled to tell her the sad truth. She grasped Mr. Hart's hand convulsively.

"You are my only friend now," she said; "you tried to save my Philip. You were always good to him--ah, yes! he told me all, and was never tired of speaking of you. Do not you desert me, or I shall go mad!"

"I will take care of you, child. I promised Philip."

She kissed his hand with her dry lips.

On the day of Philip's funeral, all the stores in Silver Creek closed their doors, and the storekeepers and the diggers and their wives, to the number or three thousand and more, followed to the grave the body of a man whom all had loved and respected.

In the evening, Mr. Hart sat, sad and alone, outside his tent, and for the first time since the death of his friend, thought of himself. Again he was a beggar, and the image of his daughter seemed to recede in the clouds as he gazed at them mournfully, and a plaintive whisper of Farewell seemed to come to him from over the hills. "I shall never have the heart to commence again," he said to himself, "never, never! My life is over; my hopes, my dreams, have come to an end."

"What are you thinking of?" asked a kind voice.

It was William Smith who spoke. To this man Mr. Hart told his grief.

"Didn't I tell you to come to me if you wanted anything?" cried William Smith in reproachful tones. "And here you are, throwing me over, and saying you haven't a friend in the world! You want to go home and see your little girl--well, it's natural, and I wish I could accompany you and see my old mother. But you shall go and see her instead, and you shall tell her that you came straight from her Billy, and you shall paint before her old eyes a picture of the Margaret Reef and the William Smith quartz-crushing machine, bang-banging away, pounding out the gold for W. S. Here are ten twenty-pound notes; get gold for them, and start for the port to-morrow. O, don't fret! I never give away nothing for nothing. I want a picture of my old mother's face, just as you see it, a day or two after you land in the old country. You're a painter, and can paint it, and here's payment in advance. There aren't many men in the world that William Smith would trust, but you're one of them. No wonder Philip loved you. I love you! As I hope to be saved, I love you! And--there!--I don't intend to say another word. Good-bye, dear old fellow, and God Almighty bless you!"

And William Smith pressed the old man in his arms, and ran down the hill in a stumbling fashion, for he was almost blinded by his tears; while Mr. Hart, like one in a dream, gazed after his retreating figure until it was lost to his sight. Another besides himself watched this man running away:

Margaret, who had heard every word that had passed.

"You're going home," she said, with her hand pressed to her bosom.

"Yes, ah! yes," he replied. "I have waited too many times. Home, dear home!"

"And me?" she asked, in a low supplicating tone. "What is to become of me?"

"You, Margaret You, my dear child! You go with me, of course! What did I promise Philip? I will be a father to you until I place you in his father's arms. Ah, Margaret, let us kneel down and thank God for all His goodness! for He is good, dear child, in the midst of our greatest afflictions. Ah, that's good--that's good!" For her tears were flowing now for the first time since Philip's death, and she lay in his arms, sobbing.

The next day they bade good-bye to Silver Creek; and shortly afterwards they were on board the *Good Harvest*, and the white sails of the ship were spread for England.

## **END OF THE FIRST PART.**

### **Part the Second.**

#### **HOME.**

### **CHAPTER I.**

#### **THE CURTAIN FALLS FOR A BRIEF SPACE.**

For a brief space, let the curtain fall.

The *Good Harvest* made a fine passage home. It was one of those famous clipper ships, at once the glory and the pride of commerce, which occasionally made a run of four hundred knots in the twenty-four hours. On those occasions after the heaving of the log, the skipper rubs his hands joyously, and walks the deck in a state of beaming satisfaction. Then is the time to ask a favour of him.

For a little while after Mr. Hart stepped on board this good ship his spirits were weighed down by melancholy. The tragic death of Philip had affected him powerfully. During their brief acquaintance he had grown to love the young man most deeply and sincerely, and he felt like a father who had lost a darling son. I have already said that Mr. Hart, although he was over sixty years of age, was a young-looking man. He had lines and furrows in his face, but they did not bring a careworn or despondent expression there, as is generally the case. His gait, his voice, his manner, the brightness of his eyes, were those which naturally belong to three decades of years instead of six. What more pleasant sight is there in human nature than to see old age thus borne? For the first few days, however, after the sailing of the *Good Harvest*, Mr. Hart looked his years.

But to stand upon the deck, holding on by spar or rope, while the noble ship rushed bravely onwards through the grand sea, now riding on the white crests of great water ranges, now gliding through the wondrous valleys on the wings of the wind, was enough to make an old man young again. It made Mr. Hart young. The salt spray and the fresh exhilarating breezes drove youth into his pores, and his heart danced within him as day after day passed, and he was drawn



nearer and nearer to the shores of old England. They brought back to him also his natural hopefulness and cheerfulness of heart. The great secret of this change for the better lay in himself. He had faith; he believed in the goodness of God and in a hereafter. He did not love Philip less because he grieved for him less. "I shall see Philip again," he thought; and his heart glowed as he looked at the sea and the heavens, and saw around him the wondrous evidences of a beneficent Creator.

Every soul on board the *Good Harvest*--with the exception of two or three passengers who had made their fortunes in the gold country, and whose natures had been soured in the process--had a smile and a good word for the cheerful and genial old man, who seemed to be always on the look-out to do his neighbours a kindness; he was an exemplification of Macaulay's saying, with reference to a voyage in a passenger ship, "It is every day in the power of an amiable person to confer little services." He was unremitting in his attention to Margaret, whom, however, he could not win to cheerfulness. It was well for her, during this darkened period of her life, that she had by her side such a faithful friend as Mr. Hart; for as the constant dropping of water makes an impression even on a stone, so the unwearied care and constant sympathy of this good friend had a beneficial effect upon Margaret's spirits. At present the effect was shown only in a negative way; while Mr. Hart's efforts failed to brighten her outwardly during the voyage, they prevented her from sinking into the depths of despair. At first she was loth to speak of Philip, and when Mr. Hart mentioned his name, she looked at him reproachfully; but, knowing that it would be best for her, he wooed her gently to speak of her lost love. These efforts were made always at seasonable times: in the evening when all was quiet around them, and they two were sitting alone, looking over the bulwarks at the beautiful water; when the evening star came out; later on in the night, when the heavens were filled with stars; when the moon rose; when the clouds were more than usually lovely. The memory of Philip became, as it were, harmonised with these peaceful influences, and his name, gently uttered, brought no disquiet to her soul. She grew to associate Philip with all that was most beautiful and peaceful in nature; and although she would occasionally in the dead of night awake from her sleep in terror with the sight and sound of furious flames in her mind, and with Philip's form struggling in their midst, these disturbing fancies became less frequent as time wore on. One night she awoke, smiling, for she had dreamt of Philip in association with more soothing influences; she and he had been walking together on a still night, with bright stars about them.

She began to be aware of the selfishness of her grief, and to reproach herself for her ingratitude to Mr. Hart. She expressed her penitence to him.

"Well," he said, kindly and seriously, "that is good in one way. It shows that you are becoming a little more cheerful."

She shook her head.

"I shall never again be cheerful; happiness is gone out of my life for ever."

"Philip does not like to hear you say so, Margaret."

Mr. Hart purposely used the present tense. Margaret pondered over the words. "Philip does not like!" That would imply that Philip heard her.

"He does hear you, my dear," said Mr. Hart. "If I believed that you would never see Philip again I should bid you despair; but you and Philip will meet in a better world than this, and that is why I want you to be cheerful, as he would ask you to be, if you could hear his voice."

In this way Mr. Hart aroused to consciousness the religious principle within her, and it may with truth be said that, although Margaret had lived a pure and sinless life, she had never been a better woman than she was now, notwithstanding the deep sorrow which had fallen upon her.

When the *Good Harvest* had been seventy days out, the skipper said to Mr. Hart that he smelt England. "If all goes well," he said, "we shall be in Victoria Dock in seven days from this."

Mr. Hart immediately went below into his cabin. He mapped out his programme of proceedings. His first task--one of duty--was to see William Smith's old mother. She lived in London, and if he got ashore before midday, he would be able to put Margaret in lodgings, and see the old woman the same day. Then he would draw before her eyes the sketch of the picture which William Smith had paid him to paint, of the Margaret Reef and the William Smith quartz-crushing machine "banging away," and he would delight the old woman's heart by telling her of the grand doings of her son. Mr. Hart calculated that he could accomplish this by the evening, when he would take his sketch away with him and paint the picture from it in the course of the next three or four weeks. His second task was one of love; he would go to see his daughter. Curiously enough, she was in Devonshire, whither he should have to direct his steps in Margaret's interests. Philip's father lived in "dear old Devon," to use Philip's own words; but that and the allusions to the Silver Flagon which had been adopted as the sign of their hotel in Silver Creek, were the only clues which Mr. Hart possessed towards finding old Mr. Rowe. Faint as these clues were (and he had discovered that Margaret could not supply him with any more definite), it was clearly his duty to do his best with them. Margaret, of course, would accompany him to Devonshire, and become acquainted with his daughter Lucy, whose name is now for the first time mentioned. Seated in his cabin, Mr. Hart took out his pocket-book, and wrote in it the

order of his proceedings. This being done, he looked over the contents of the book, and came across a blank envelope with a bulky enclosure in it. At first he did not remember how this envelope came into his possession, but he was only in doubt for a moment or two. It was the packet which Philip had given into his charge on his return from his honeymoon. Mr. Hart recalled the conversation that had taken place between them on the occasion, and the promise Philip had exacted from him that he would not give up the envelope until they met in the old country. He sighed as he thought that that meeting could never take place, and he went into the saloon where Margaret was sitting. He asked her if Philip had spoken to her about this trust; she answered, "No," and that she was in complete ignorance of it.

"Now that poor Philip's wish cannot be fulfilled," said Mr. Hart, "you had better take possession of the packet."

He held it out to her; she refused to accept it.

"It was given into your charge," she said, "by my poor lost darling. Every word he spoke is sacred to me." Her tears began to flow.

"At all events," said Mr. Hart, "we will see what is inside."

He opened the envelope, and found that it enclosed another, well sealed, on the cover of which was written:

*"The Property of Gerald, and to be opened only by him."*

This complicated matters.

"Gerald," thought Mr. Hart; "my name!" and said aloud, "Do you know who Gerald is?"

"My poor darling," replied Margaret, "has spoken to me of a friend he had named Gerald."

"Then this must be he." Mr. Hart replaced the envelope in his pocket-book. "We may have the good fortune to find him. Gerald may have been a college friend."

So that now there was another task, with the slightest of clues, to be fulfilled.

Mr. Hart had noticed, with great inward satisfaction, that during the past two or three weeks Margaret was looking brighter; she had not, it is true, recovered her old animation of speech and manner, but comfort and consolation had come to her in some way. More than once she had seemed to be on the point of confiding something to this dear friend, who was now all in the world she had to cling to, but the words she wished to speak would not come to her tongue. On this night, however, as they stood upon the deck, talking of Philip, of home, of the future, in subdued tones, Mr. Hart learned Margaret's secret. She hoped to become a mother.

"Heaven pray that it may be so," thought Mr. Hart; "it will be a joy and a solace to her bruised heart."

Another day went by, and another. The *Good Harvest* sailed smartly on to England's shores. The sailors sang blithely at their work; the skipper paced the deck in a joyous frame of mind, thinking of his wife and children at home; and almost at the very hour named by him, the long voyage was at an end, and London smoke was curling over the masts.

## **CHAPTER II.**

**"THE WORLD IS FULL OF SWEET AND BEAUTIFUL PLACES."**

On a day in June, when the roses were blooming, there sauntered through one of the sweetest of all the sweet country lanes in England an elderly man, whose hair was white, and whose dress and bearing denoted that he was a gentleman. The lane was a long one, with many windings, and the few persons whom the gentleman met touched their hats and bowed to him as they passed, with varying degrees of deference, according to their station; he, on his part, receiving all these greetings with uniform courtesy, and with the accustomed air of one to whom homage of this kind was familiar. Walking toward him, at a distance of three or four hundred yards, at the

moment his figure first appears upon the scene, was a man of about the same age, whose inquiring looks this way and that proclaimed either that the locality was strange to him, or that he was renewing acquaintance with it after a lapse of years. His dress was composed of much commoner materials than was that of the gentleman he was approaching, and there were a careless freedom and an assertion of independence in his manner which only those exhibit who have travelled about the world.

In the minds of these two men, one holding a high, the other a humble, station in life, there was no thought of each other; but the threads of their lives, which had been so wide apart, and for so long a time as to make it appear almost an impossibility that they should ever again be connected, were approaching closer and closer with each passing moment, and would soon be joined, never more to be unlinked. They knew not of it, thought not of it; but it was most sure. What is it that shapes our lives--chance, or a wise ordination? Say that, invited by a faint smell of lilac or by the fluttering of a butterfly's wings with a rare colour in them which we would behold again, we turn aside but for one moment from our contemplated course--can it be possible that we are such slaves of circumstance that this simple deviation (if it may be so called) may change the current of our lives from good to ill, from bad fortune to prosperity? How often does a breath of air change a comedy into a tragedy! Blindly we walk along, and presently may be struggling in the dark with grim terrors, or may be walking among flowers, surrounded by everything that can make life sweet.

In a very narrow part of the country lane, where the hedgerows were most fragrant, was a stile, upon the top bar of which the stranger rested his foot, and turning, gazed with pleased and grateful eyes over the fair vista of field and wood which the hedgerows shut out from the view of those who walked on the level path. Although he was between sixty and seventy years of age, his eyes were bright, and his face was the face of one who was prone to look upon the best side of things.

"How fair and beautiful it is!" he murmured gratefully. "What is there in the world half so sweet as these dear old English lanes and fields?" He paused to reflect upon his question; and then, with the whimsically-serious air of one who was accustomed to commune with himself, exclaimed, "Nonsense, Gerald, nonsense! The world is full of sweet and beautiful places."

Gentle undulations of land, beautified by various colour, were before him; shadows of light passed over the landscape like waves, and stole from it the sadness which is ever an attribute of still life. There were farmyards in the distance, and sheep, with bells hung to their necks, trudging with patient gait to where the most tempting herbage lay. The sheep were at a great distance from the stranger, and by a curious trick of the fancy he listened to the tinkling of the bells, although it was impossible that the sound could reach him. Other sounds he could hear plainly: the cry of the woodpecker, and the more melodious note of the cuckoo, beautifully clear, notwithstanding its slightly plaintive ring.

"And full of sweet sounds, too," mused the stranger, pursuing the current of his thoughts; and added immediately, with the same whimsically-serious air, and as if in comical defence of a prejudice, "Certainly no birds sing like English birds."

"I beg your pardon."

The threads of their lives had met, never more to be unwoven, and the threads of other lives were presently to be joined to theirs, for weal or woe, as fate might determine. From this chance meeting rare combinations were to spring.

"I was remarking," said the stranger, turning to the gentleman who was standing by the stile, waiting to cross, "and not with justice, that no birds sing like English birds." The gentleman did not answer him, and then he comprehended that the words uttered by the gentleman had been used not in contradiction of his statement, but as a request that he would move aside. He descended from the stile with a courteous smile, and said, "I beg *your* pardon, I am sure, both for blocking up the road-way and for misunderstanding you; but I was so rapt in the beauty of the scene and in my own thoughts, that I misinterpreted the intention of your words. Notwithstanding which, I should like to have your opinion as to whether I am right or not."

The gentleman had bent his head in acknowledgment of the half apology, and when the stranger ceased speaking, was standing on the other side of the stile. The gentleman gazed at the stranger, and recognised at a glance that although he was commonly dressed his manners and speech were not those of a common person. To have proceeded on his way without a word would have been churlish; therefore he said, in a courteous tone:

"Right as to the birds?"

"Yes, as to the birds," replied the stranger, with vivacity.

"I cannot say; I have not travelled. Some of our best woodland singers are migratory. But I should say--although I am not in the least way an authority--that it would be no easy matter to find more melodious woods than our English woods."

"That is true; then I *was* right. Though whether I meant that English birds were or were not better singers than birds of other countries, it would puzzle me to say. But as to the English

woods--they are the sweetest and fairest. There again! I have lain in the Australian woods, and my soul has been thrilled by their beauty. Yes, I was right. The world is full of sweet and beautiful places."

The gentleman smiled at these contradictory utterances, but the stranger's words could not have been more at variance with one another than were his speech and his attire. His words were scholarly, and his clothes were patched.

"You look and speak like an Englishman," said the gentleman.

"I am one."

"From your words I should judge that this part of England is strange to you."

"It is more than thirty years since I was last in Devonshire."

"That is a long time--you must find it changed somewhat."

"Somewhat."

While these words were being exchanged, their observance of each other, which had been slight at first, grew closer and more searching, and into their eyes stole a pondering look so curiously alike that one seemed to be a reflection of the other. But for the influence which this close observance exercised upon him, the gentleman would not have stopped to converse with an unknown man, and with one so far beneath him, from a worldly point of view. The stranger repeated thoughtfully:

"Yes, I find it somewhat changed."

"It is in the nature of things," said the gentleman, "to change as we grow older."

"Not so. I find it changed because *I* have changed. Old eyes and young eyes see the same things differently. Are the clouds less bright than they were when we were young? Are the flowers less beautiful? When Jacob courted Laban's daughters o' nights (how they must have laughed in their sleeves, if they wore them, at the old man's craft!) were the nights less lovely than the nights are now?"

The gentleman passed his hand lightly before his eyes, as if to clear away a vapour.

"I am corrected," he said, with the air of a man whose thoughts were travelling one road, while his words travelled another; "we sometimes say things without consideration."

"Either because they sound well, or because they seem to savour of wisdom. That comes from our vanity. When men grow as old as we are, they often ape the philosopher. The lark changes into an owl. They try to shape their words so that they may sound like proverbs."

"They utter one occasionally, perhaps."

"Perhaps," said the stranger in a tone of dubious assent; "but the odds are heavy against it. Even if they do, what then?"

"Proverbs are good and useful utterances," observed the gentleman, adding, in unconscious illustration of the stranger's words, "nuts of wisdom."

The stranger laughed scornfully. "A proverb on proverbs! Nuts of wisdom indeed!"

"Are they not?"

"No; the proverb holds a false position in language. It is used invariably in a general sense, whereas it has only a special application for the time being; then, having served its purpose, loses its value, and should be laid aside until another special circumstance calls for it."

"It would be difficult to establish that."

"Most easy. I will prove it in a practical way. Repeat a proverb--any one that occurs to you; the more familiar the better--and I will mate it with another, equally familiar, which gives it the lie."

The gentleman might have accepted the challenge, but that a labourer, approaching them from his side of the stile, seemed to remind him that he was losing dignity in conversing with one who wore patched clothes, and who was unknown to him. Bidding the stranger "Good day," and slightly bending his head in acknowledgment of the labourer's deferential bow, he walked slowly away.

### CHAPTER III.

#### CUSTOS ROTULORUM.

As the labourer crossed the stile, the stranger accosted him.

"Hodge!"

"Who be Hodge?" quoth the labourer uncivilly, but disposed for conversation and argument. "You--in a collective sense."

"Then ye've gotten the sow by the wrong ear."

"Supposing I have gotten a sow at all," said the stranger complacently. "Will you present to me the right ear?"

Not understanding the nature of the request, the man continued playing on the same string.

"Hodge bain't my name!"

And grinned with the triumph of a philosopher. "What may be your name, then, my most veracious hair-splitter?"

"I be no splitter. Who be ye a-callin' names? As for my name, that I'll keep to myself." Saying which, the labourer fastened a loose button with an air of determination.

With a chuckle, the stranger replied, "Like yourself, O tiller of the soil!--for such you are, I opine, and, as such, the noblest work of God--like yourself, I am but a poor player, who struts and frets his hour upon the stage."

"Eh! a player I was thinking ye didn't look like a worker! I know en when I see en;" and the labourer grinned again at his own wit.

"But 'tis not of ourselves I wish to speak," said the stranger in a tone which he purposely made grandiloquent; 'tis of another--of the gentleman to whom you doffed your cap, and who has just left us."

"What do you want of en!" demanded the labourer, in a sharp tone, cocking his ears like a terrier.

"His name."

"Eh! More names! D'ye come down here to rob us of en? But there be no harm a-tellin' of ye. It may be a warnin' to ye. 'A's name be Mister Weston."

All the stranger's light manner was gone.

"Weston!" he cried, seizing the man's arm.

The labourer shook himself free, and in a severe tone corrected the stranger.

"Mister Weston, I told ye."

"I ask your and Mr. Weston's pardon. A well-to-do man this Mr. Weston?"

The labourer scanned the stranger's clothes; the mental result was not favourable.

"That be his business, 'a b'lieve," he said suspiciously.

Apparently in an absent mood, the stranger drew from his pocket a handful of articles, among which were a short pipe, a tobacco-pouch, and some money. Somewhat ostentatiously he picked out a few silver and copper pieces, and held them loosely in his left hand. The labourer, who was about to slouch away, altered his mind, and lingered patiently.

"Good cider about here, my man?" asked the stranger.

"That there be," replied the labourer, drawing the back of his hand across his mouth. "The best in the county."

"I passed an old-fashioned hostelry--more like a gentleman's house than an hotel--about half a mile from this spot----" the stranger paused.

"Up along there," said the labourer, pointing with his finger.

"Yes; in that direction."

"With a bit o' garden round en?" volunteered the labourer.

"Ay, with a garden round it."

"And a swing gate before en----"

"'Tis so. And a swing gate opening into the garden. Apple-trees before the house----"

"Standing back from the road the house be?" said the labourer, moving his lips as one might do preparatory to the imbibing of a deep draught of the best cider in the county.

"It *is* warmish," said the stranger, with a look of sly enjoyment. "Yes, standing back from the road the house is."

"That be the Silver Flagon."

The stranger leaped off the stile with a sudden cry.

"A day of wonders!" he exclaimed. "Providence must have led me in this direction." A sad and tender reminiscence brought the tears to his eyes. "The Silver Flagon! The dear, old Silver Flagon. And the proprietor's name is Rowe, an old man and a gentleman!"

"That 'a be--as wold a man as ye, 'a should say. A rare fine place 'tis."

"It looks it." The stranger's eyes glittered with joy.

"Too fine for the likes of----" ("we," he was about to say, but the sight of the stranger's money caused a correction)--"me. 'A can get rare fine cider in another place."

"Doubtless." The stranger could scarcely restrain his excitement. "But to come back to what we were speaking of just now"--(rattling the money in his hand)--"this Mr. Weston---- By the way, though, let us give him his full name; Mr. Richard Weston, of course."

"Ay, that be his name."

The labourer would have used the word "full," but that it stood in his mind for "foolish."

"I was asking--a well-to-do man, Mr. Weston?"

"Well-to-do!" exclaimed the labourer, thirstily. "They say he have no end o' money."

"Highly respected, no doubt?"

"That 'a be," replied the labourer, becoming very parched indeed. "If ye'll stand atop the stile, ye'll see the chimneys of his house. 'Tis a rare fine house."

The stranger stood upon the top bar of the stile, and gazed in the indicated direction. "I see them, and I make my obeisance to them." Saying which he doffed his hat, and bowed with a curiously-fantastic tenderness. He quite forgot the labourer, who was standing by his side, greedily and humbly expectant, but a cough and a kick at the stile recalled him to himself. He turned, and, with a negligent nod and a half smile at the labourer, dropped the money carelessly into his pocket, and proceeded to charge his pipe.

A minute or two passed in silence; then the labourer coughed again, and scraped his foot, and shifted his body restlessly; but the stranger puffed at his pipe calmly, and did not appear to notice him, although really he was enjoying the man's discomfiture. The labourer went through a certain mental process. First, he was mystified, and his mind was clouded; then a glimmer of light broke into the clouds, and a dim suspicion stole upon him that he had been beaten into civility by a trick. With a sense of helplessness, and of submission to the superior cunning by which he had been conquered, he was about to move away, when the passing of his tongue over his lips made him ireful and vindictive. A thought struck him, and he proceeded to give it expression.

"'A say!" he cried, in his uncivillist tone.

The stranger removed his pipe from his lips, and raised his eyes towards the man.

"Ah! you have an idea, evidently. Stand, then, and deliver!"

The man started back, having some notion of the meaning of the words; he clapped his hand on his trousers-pocket, to protect three half-pence and--his idea.

"Don't be alarmed," said the stranger; "nothing of that sort was in my mind. Proceed, my friend."

"No friend o' yours, that 'a know of," retorted the labourer. "You'd best take care!"

"I will endeavour to do so."

The labourer searched his mind for a colloquial stone with which to smite his foe. He found one.

"Ye don't look too respectable."

"You deserve a reward for your perspicacity," said the stranger, much amused--and the labourer, at the unfamiliar word, started again--"if not for your civility. You have a keener scent than our friend--I beg your pardon once more--than Mr. Weston."

"Well, take care, then. He be a justice."

"A little one or a big one, my man? A frog or an ox? For there are justices and justices."

"A big un. Take care!" This iteration appeared to assuage his thirst.

"Custos rotulorum, eh?"

"A thought you was no good--cussin' and swearin'. 'A've a good mind----"

"I hope so, I'm sure. May it long remain uncontaminated!"

"A've a good mind to go and tell en."

"You've a good mind to go and tell him you've a good mind?" queried the stranger, in a quiet bantering tone.

"To tell en ye're up to no good; seeking to know all about en--whether he be rich and where he lives. Danged if I don't b'lieve ye're one o' them London chaps come down along here wi' designs!"

"A peripatetic architect," said the stranger, laughing heartily. "Thank you for the compliment, my rustic sage. I am nothing so dignified as that, believe me. But allow me to correct you. You yourself volunteered the information as to the whereabouts of Mr. Weston's house; the information may be useful to me."

"May en! Danged if I *don't* go and tell en!"

The stranger stood aside to allow the labourer to cross the stile.

"Come after me if ye dare!" cried the labourer.

"I dare do all that may become a man," replied the stranger; and also crossing the stile, he leisurely followed the labourer, who took care to keep at a fair distance.

They had not to walk far. Round another bend in the lane, where it broadened unexpectedly, and where great tufts of feather-grass were swinging their fairy bells over a brook, they came upon Mr. Weston resting himself. He turned towards them at their approach. The labourer took off his cap, and pawed the ground servilely with his left foot; and then found himself in a difficulty. He had not the wit to lead up to the attack gently, and with the consciousness upon him of the stranger's superior flow of speech, he felt himself at a disadvantage. If the stranger would speak first, he could take up his words; but the stranger stood provokingly calm and silent.

"Well," said Mr. Weston.

The sense of injury under which the man laboured gave him courage.

"This chap here," he blurted out, with a back scrape of his right foot, "be up to no good, your honour."

Mr. Weston looked at the stranger, and waited for farther explanation.

"A be a London chap come down along here wi' designs. 'A don't deny en. 'A be cravin' all sorts of questions about your honour. 'A wanted to know whether your honour was rich, where your honour's house be, and how much money your honour keeps in it. I conceived it my duty to come along and tell your honour."

"O most mendacious Hodge!" exclaimed the stranger, shaking his head in sad and smiling reproof.

"That be the way 'a's been talkin' all the time; and swearin' and cussin' as well, and callin' your honour a frog. When 'a'd drawed out o' me that your honour was a justice, 'a cussed and rotted your honour."

"Custos rotulorum," said the stranger.

"They be the words--cussin' and rottin', your honour!"

## CHAPTER IV.

**IT WAS JUST SUCH A DAY AS THIS; AND THE AIR WAS SWEET, AND LIFE WAS SWEET.**

Mr. Weston smiled, and the stranger smiled also. These smiles were like question and answer, and appeared to be given and accepted as a satisfactory defence to the labourer's accusations. At the same time there stole into Mr. Weston's eyes the same curiously pondering look which had dwelt in them when he and the stranger were first conversing.

"It cannot be," he answered.

"Why not?" asked the stranger. "More wonderful things have happened."

Suddenly he cast aside his nonchalant air, and said earnestly:

"Look into the brook."

As though compelled by an influence he had no power to withstand, Mr. Weston gazed into the brook, and saw reflected there his own face and the face of the stranger who was bending over the water by his side. Their backs were turned towards the labourer, who, not doubting the stranger's sinister designs, prepared himself for any emergency by spitting on his hands and smoothing his side-locks. He was aware of the responsible position he occupied, and he settled with himself that in the event of the stranger pushing Mr. Weston into the water, the first thing for him to do would be to run away and cry, "Fire!"

"Take my hand," the stranger said, in a sad sweet tone. They joined hands, and the hand-clasp was reflected in the brook. "Why cannot it be? It is not always that the words which make a friendship are as intangible as the shadowy semblance of it which we see before us. Words are not all air-spoken, forgotten, lost for ever. Why cannot it be? Here we two old men stand, looking into the past; it might really be so. How many years ago was it--forty?--that two young men stood beside a brook as we stand now, looking into the future?" Mr. Weston's hand tightened upon that of his companion. "They loved each other then--do they love each other now! I can answer for one. They were friends in the best meaning of the word--are they friends now? Thirty odd years have past. It was just such a day as this; and the air was sweet and life was sweet. Do you remember?"

They raised their faces to each other; their lips quivered; their eyes were suffused with tears.

"Gerald!"

"Richard!"

"It is like a dream," said Mr. Weston, with his hand to his eyes.

In the meanwhile the labourer stood dumbfounded at the strange turn the scene had taken; the word "Fire" hung upon his tongue, and he swallowed it disgustedly. He had wit enough to perceive that he had made a deplorable mistake, and he was about to slink away, hoping not to be noticed, when the stranger's voice arrested his steps.

"Well, my friend!" he said, with sly twinkles.

The labourer scratched his head penitentially; the expression in his face conveyed an unmistakable appeal to the stranger not to hit a man when he was down.

"Dense is no word to express the condition of the rustic mind," said the stranger, with a full enjoyment of his victory. "There is but one way of imparting intelligence to it." He took a small piece of silver from his pocket, and the labourer's eyes followed the motion of his hand, and the labourer's lips grew parched again. "There, my friend; drink Mr. Weston's health in the best cider in the county."

The labourer took to his heels, and slouched off, rarely mystified.

"Custos rotulorum!" cried the stranger after him; and at those dread words the labourer took to his heels, and was soon out of sight.

Left to themselves, the two old men, who had been friends when they were young, gazed at each other in silent wonder at this strange and unexpected reunion. They said but little at first; words were slow a-coming.



"Did you know I was here?" asked Mr. Weston.

"I had no suspicion of it."

"It will be a long time before I get over the surprise of this meeting, Gerald," said Mr. Weston; "I scarcely thought we should ever meet again in this world."

"We speculated on the after-life when we were boys," answered Gerald; "but whenever I thought of you, you were not dead to me. I believed, as I hoped, that you lived and were prosperous."

"You thought of me, then? I am glad to know that. Gerald, I am truly pleased to see you."

"Not more than I am to see you."

"And you have really thought of me often; but you were always faithful."

"You have obtruded yourself upon me in the midst of the strangest scenes. There have been times, of course, when the affairs of life were most pressing, that you have not been present to my mind; but you have come back to me invariably, and sometimes in strangely-familiar connection with circumstances of which you could not possibly have had any knowledge, not knowing where I was, or what path of life I was pursuing."

"The same old Gerald," said Mr. Weston, pressing his friend's hand with affection; "and the same old way of talking."

"Not quite clear, eh? You used to say, 'Say that again, Gerald;' but you understand me now?"

"Perfectly."

Gerald laughed, and Mr. Weston laughed with him, without apparent cause, as he had often done in the time gone by. But there was something contagious in Gerald's laugh, and, indeed, in his whole manner; especially when he was serious, as he was now, he seemed to possess the power of compelling his friend to be of his humour.

"Perfectly, you say! Well, but I scarcely understand myself. That is so always with me when I generalise."

"It used to be so with you in the old days--or you used to say it was."

"When I specialise, I can make the thing clearer, so I will specialise now. Once being in Australia----"

"Ah, you have much to tell me!"

"I am working with two mates on the goldfields--working from sunrise to sunset, in the hope of catching a golden reef, following a will-o'-the-wisp deeper and deeper into the bowels of the earth, and never catching it, mind you. Being down a hundred and forty feet, we--my mates and I--are misled by a thin vein of quartz that takes a horizontal direction, and we resolve to drive a tunnel in its direction. There is a theory among the miners that these thin veins must lead to the reef itself, bearing the same relation to the prize they work for as the veins in the human body bear to the heart. One day I am alone in this tunnel, where no glimpse of daylight can be seen. Two candles throw a dim light around. I am a hundred and forty feet below the surface of the earth, and but for the human aid at the top of the claim, I am completely cut off from the world, for we are the only workers on this hill. In my eager hunt after gold I have not thought of you for many months. Suddenly, as I am working with my short pick, sitting on the floor of the tunnel--for there is not room to stand upright--a stone drops from above into a little pool of water which has gathered at the bottom of the shaft, and as the sound of the plash falls upon my ear, your image comes to my mind in connection with a time when we stood side by side dropping stones into a stream. Now I have made my meaning clear to myself."

"You have made it very clear to me."

"Tell me: when I have been in your mind, in what way have I presented myself? As I was?"

"Always as you were, Gerald--with your bright eyes and brown curly hair----"

"That is it. Not with white hair, as ours is now. I have thought of you in the same way. Memory does not reason. So that it really is something of a shock to come upon each other after so long an interval, and after so great a change."

They fell into silence. Tender memories were stirred to life, and visions of scenes in which they had played prominent parts rose before them. Old as they were, romance was not dead in their hearts. But suddenly, as they traced the current of their early lives, they gazed at each other with sad meaning. Each knew instinctively that the thoughts of the other had halted at a certain momentous epoch in their careers.

## CHAPTER V.

### A STRANGE STORY.

"Gerald," said Mr. Weston, "you went away very suddenly and strangely; I often wondered as to the cause."

"And never suspected?"

"I think not the right cause. I imagined a hundred things in my endeavours to fathom the mystery, but without success. It is a mystery still to me."

"You imagine such things as----" He paused for Mr. Weston to take up his words.

"As whether you were in any money difficulties, for one."

Mr. Hart shook his head. If my readers have failed to guess that the stranger and he are one and the same person, I have been unskilful in my narration.

"No," he said, "when I left I owed no man a shilling, and I had money in my purse."

"I cannot recall now the various constructions I put upon your disappearance. It must have been a powerful reason that caused you to desert your friend without a word of explanation."

"It was a powerful reason. Would you like to hear it, Richard?"

"Yes, indeed."

"We are old men now," said Mr. Hart, in a musing tone, in which there was a touch of solemnity, "and I can speak of it, and you can hear it, without pain. But tell me first about Clara."

His voice faltered as he uttered the name.

"She is dead," murmured Mr. Weston softly, "many, many years ago."

A cuckoo flew past them, singing as it flew, and seemed to echo plaintively, "Years ago!"

"You loved her, Richard?"

"With my whole soul, Gerald."

"I knew it, and I read, the announcement of your marriage in the papers. You were happy in your marriage?"

"Very, very happy. Our only grief during the first two years was that we had no children. But that blessing, which brought with it also the keenest sorrow of my life, was bestowed upon us after seven years. Clara placed a child in my arms, and died a few hours afterwards."

"It must have been a bitter blow, dear friend."

"I had a consolation, Gerald. Her last words to me, as she placed her arms about my neck, were that she had lived with me in perfect happiness, and that we should meet each other again."

"Her child lives?"

"You shall see him, Gerald. I named him after you; it was Clara's wish before our child was born, that if we were blessed with a boy he should be called Gerald. He is a handsome young fellow--a man now--good, noble, and high-minded." He spoke with the pride of a fond father.

"I am sure he would be."

"My most earnest hope with regard to him is that he may make a good alliance. He may look high, for he will be rich. But to your confession, Gerald; we have wandered away from it."

"You will not say so when you have heard it." Mr. Hart placed his hand upon the hand of his friend. "Have you still no suspicion of it?"

"No, Gerald, I hold no clue."

"I kept my secret well, then. Dear friend, I loved Clara."

Mr. Weston turned to Mr. Hart, with a startled look.

"And I knew," continued Mr. Hart, "that you loved her, and that she looked upon me only as a friend of the man to whom she had given her heart. Fearful lest my secret should, in an unguarded moment, become known to you and her, and knowing that the disclosure would bring an unnecessary grief into your lives, I adopted the only safe course which was open to me. I did not envy you your happiness, Richard, but I felt that I could bear my sorrow more bravely away from you--therefore I deserted you."

"Dear Gerald," said Mr. Weston tenderly, "it was like you. How blind I must have been! but I can see it now. Noble heart! Dear noble friend! I think I never fully valued you till now."

"You would have done the same by me, Richard," said Mr. Hart.

"I do not know--I do not know; I doubt if I should have had the courage to fly. If I had been in your place--you with your higher gifts were the first in everything, Gerald; I was content always to walk behind you--I am afraid that I should have stopped and tried my fortune."

"No, no," said Mr. Hart, in gentle remonstrance; "I know you better than you know yourself. You would have acted as I did. Your friendship was as honest as mine. There could be no rivalry in love between us."

"I honour you more than ever, Gerald."

"It was a sacrifice, Richard, you can understand that; but I said to myself, this sunny spot in life which I laid out for myself, and in which I hoped to bask and lie in happiness--I had that hope, Richard, before I discovered that Clara loved you--is not to be mine; it is my friend's; but I will be revenged upon him; and who knows, dear friend, but that I may yet be!"

His tone was very sweet as he uttered these words, the deep significance of which was not comprehended by either of them. The time was soon to come when they bore strange fruit.

"I bless her memory," Mr. Hart continued. "Her goodness and purity made many things sweet to me. That I loved her and left her--conscious that it was imperative upon me to do so for the sake both of love and friendship--did not make me a despairing man. In course of time my grief was softened; I formed other ties, one of which remains to me now, thank God; and through all my wanderings I never lost faith in woman or woman's purity. If, in a cynical mood, it ever came upon me to doubt, I thought of her, and the doubt was dissolved. It may be, Richard, that in the wise ordination of things, her spirit can see us now!"

In the silence that followed, the thoughts of both these men dwelt in tenderness on the memory of the gentle girl who had parted them. Mr. Hart was the first to break the silence.

"Where is she buried, Richard?"

"I will take you to her grave."

They walked hand-in-hand, as boys might have done, beguiling the way with conversation.

"Clara and I often spoke of you," said Mr. Weston, "and always with affection you may be sure. And not long after you disappeared, a singular thing happened. Clara received notice from a lawyer that a legacy had been left to her--it was not a very large one, some fourteen hundred pounds."

"There is nothing singular in that," said Mr. Hart, calmly.

"No, but in the manner of it. We never knew the name of the person who left the money. It was expressly stipulated that the name of the legator should not be revealed. I went to the lawyer on Clara's behalf, being curious to ascertain the name of her generous friend--and mine, I may say--but the lawyer was steadfast. His instructions were definite, he said, and he could not go beyond them. The only information he was empowered to make--if any inquiry was made--was that the legacy was a legacy of love. It puzzled us a great deal."

A peculiar smile passed over the face of Mr. Hart, which his friend did not perceive.

"You must have been fortunate in other ways, Richard, to have prospered as you have prospered: For you are a prosperous man."

"Thank God, yes. I am a rich man, Gerald."

"Rich! Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Hart, wistfully and almost hungrily.

"I owe much of my good fortune to luck, and not to my deservings. A legacy was also left to me, in a very wonderful way; but in this case I knew the name of the person, who died in a foreign country, and who made me his executor. It is a strange story."

He looked over his shoulder with an air of fear. Mr. Hart noticed the motion with surprise.

"You used not to be nervous," observed Mr. Hart. "Why do you say that?" asked Mr. Weston.

"You looked over your shoulder just now so strangely and nervously. Almost as though you expected to see a ghost."

Mr. Weston shuddered. "I can tell you the story as we walk on. It will take but a short time, although it commences more than twenty years ago. A relative whom I had seen but once in my childhood died in a distant land, and made me his executor. He was a very wealthy man, and his will was a singular one. I was the only relative to whom he left a legacy, and indeed I believe the only relative who was living. He divided his money between me and twelve other persons. All these others were strangers to him, and he became acquainted with their names in the following manner. It seems that he loved his mother with a very deep affection; when she died, he discovered that she had left a diary, and in its pages he learnt that she had suffered much in her early days, before her son was born. She had led a wandering life in her youth, every particular of which was set down in her diary, and in it she mentioned the names of persons who had been kind to her in her wanderings; in one page of her diary occurred the words: 'It would render me very happy to be able to repay them for their great goodness to me. What did the son do when he grew rich but place himself in communication with a London lawyer, who was instructed to trace all these persons, and to ascertain the fullest particulars of themselves and their circumstances? Some had died and left no issue; some had died and left children; he kept himself acquainted with all their careers, and shortly before his death he made a will, devising the whole of his wealth to these persons, and naming me as his executor. You must remember, Gerald, that he had never seen one of these persons, and that he was totally unacquainted with their characters; when, by-and-by, you hear the full particulars, you will know why I mention this; I will only say here that two young persons, a young lady and a young gentleman, were left in the guardianship of a man whom I cannot think of without a shudder. They fell in love with each other; but their guardian, to whom their share of the money left would revert in case of their death, set himself resolutely against their union; he held absolute control over them, and the result of his conduct was that they met with a tragic end; they drowned themselves, and were found dead, clasped in each other's arms. But I am wandering from the thread of the story. This will came home to me, and all the persons interested in it were summoned together. The place of meeting was a principal room in the Silver Flagon; and at the appointed time we met. It was a strange gathering; we were all strangers to one another; yet you can understand that the circumstance of our being brought together made us friends at once. When the will was read every person present found that he had become rich, in a strange and wonderful manner. There were in all thirteen of us. Exhilarated by the pleasantness of the occasion, and excited by its novelty, we ordered dinner at the Silver Flagon, and sat down to dinner--thirteen in number. Upon this number being ascertained, the usual theme was started: one of the thirteen was sure to die before twelve months had passed. Said one, a Merry fellow, Reuben Thorne by name, 'Let us prove the falseness of this old-time absurdity. Here we are made rich and comfortable for all our lives; here we are brought together by an extraordinary circumstance, and forced into friendship by the gratitude of a man whose money we are going to spend in the enjoyment of the good things of this life. One of the best things in life is a good dinner; another of the best things in life is good companionship. Let us enter into a compact to dine here all together in this very room in the jolly Silver Flagon, every year, on the anniversary of this happy day.' Now, in the will there was a sentence to the effect that the legator would be glad if those to whom he bequeathed his money would become friends; and this proposal of Reuben Thorne's seemed to open a way to this consummation. Elated and excited, we there and then entered into a solemn compact, drawn up and signed by every one of us, to meet regularly every year, and dine together as we were doing on that day. And furthermore we solemnly pledged ourselves to have no more than thirteen at the table, and that, as one and another died, his chair and place at the table should be kept for him, and that the vacant chair should receive all the attention which would be given to it if a living person occupied the seat. This compact, solemnly made, was solemnly kept. Year after year we met; one died, another died; the young lovers I have mentioned were found dead in the river; chair after chair became vacant; and still every year the dinner for thirteen was served in the old room in the Silver Flagon. Gerald, I have outlived them all; for two years I have dined alone. Of all those thirteen I am the only one left."

"A strange story indeed," remarked Mr. Hart; and respecting his companion's evident desire not to speak further on the subject, he preserved silence--a silence broken presently by Mr. Weston saying:

"A little while ago, Gerald, you made a remark which surprised me. You spoke of your eager hunt after gold. If I have grown somewhat nervous, you also are changed in this respect, supposing you meant what you said."

"I did mean it. All my body and soul, all my pulses were wrapt up in the hunt. Ah! you little know what the gold fever is."

"But that *you* should have it, Gerald! You of all men in the world--you who once despised money, and set it at naught!"

"As I despise it and set it at naught now, in comparison with other and better things. Truly, I believe that there was a fair excuse for my giving way to the fever. I wanted money, Richard--not for myself, for another. Yes, no purely selfish motive influenced me. But you shall hear all by-and-by--that is, if---"

"Speak, Gerald."

"If you are not changed--if you are the same Weston as of old. If you are changed, but nod your head at me, and I will shake you by the hand once more, and go my way."

"Gerald! Gerald!" expostulated Mr. Weston.

"Nay, I mean what I say. It would be human nature. I should be sorry that I had met you again, but I should fling the memory of this meeting from me with all the force of my will, and would strive my hardest to reinstate you, unsullied, in my heart."

He spoke with earnest vehemence, and if an uneasy impression was in Mr. Weston's mind as to the manifest difference in their stations in life--judging from outward appearances--it vanished for the time at Mr. Hart's words.

"Recall for me," he said, "some words I spoke to you once when we were opening our hearts to one another."

"Special words?"

"Special words, with reference to our friendship," replied Mr. Weston, in a tone of anxiety lest his friend should fail to remember them.

"So many," pondered Mr. Hart; "but I can speak the words that are in your mind, I think. 'Once my friend, always my friend; remember that, Gerald.'"

"Those are the words, and I say to you now, 'Once my friend, always my friend; remember that, Gerald.'"

They clasped hands again.

"Well said, and well remembered. Yet you are a magistrate, *custos rotulorum*"--Mr. Hart laughed at the remembrance of the labourer--"and I--well, I am something very like a vagabond. Look at my patched clothes--see my wealth." He pulled out of his pocket all the money he had in the world, amounting to less than twenty pounds, and counted it over half merrily and half wistfully. "If you knew how precious these bits of gold are to me, Richard, you would wonder."

"I wonder as it is, Gerald."

"Well you may. Do you think I care for this dross for my own sake? Thank God, no! But lately--only within these last few weeks--I have grown to know the pitiless power of money, and to thirst for it!"

"I will help you, Gerald," said Mr. Weston, strongly moved by his friend's passion; "I will help you."

"It is for my daughter," murmured Mr. Hart, "not for myself; for my daughter, dearer to me than my blood, than my life! Let me but see her happy, and and sheltered from storms, and I can say good-bye to the world with a smile on my lips."

They were standing now by the side of the grave with fresh flowers about it. A plain tombstone was raised above it, with the simple inscription:

### **To the Memory of**

**CLARA.**

Love sweetens all,  
Love levels all.

"A good creed," said Mr. Hart, gazing with moistened eyes upon the inscription; "truly, love sweetens life, and love, like death, makes all men equal."

And over the grave of the woman whom they both had loved the friends again joined hands.

### **CHAPTER VI.**

**MR. LEWIS NATHAN INTRODUCES HIMSELF.**

A few words are necessary to fill up the gap in our story. Directly Mr. Hart arrived home, he sought out William Smith's mother, and executed his friend's commission. This done, to the extravagant delight of the old woman (you may be sure that Mr. Hart was not sparing in his praises of William Smith), Mr. Hart and Margaret set off for Devonshire. Years ago, when his darling Lucy was a little child, he had confided her to the care of friends, so called, who had promised to look after her as a daughter. How they had fulfilled their trust may be judged by the circumstance that when, after his long absence, her father was announced, the gentle girl ran into his arms, sobbing, and begged him never again to leave her. He then discovered that she had for the last two years led an unhappy life in the house, and that she was nothing less than a dependent there. He chid her gently for allowing him to remain in ignorance of the true state of affairs, and he released her at once from her bondage.

"We will never be parted again, my darling," he said, with fond caresses; "your father will protect you now."

She clung to him affectionately. The old man was proud of his daughter, and already she was proud of him.

"I will make you happy, child," he said.

"Will you, papa?" she asked, with a little sob; but seeing that this made him look sorrowful, she dried her tears, and gazed into his face with a smile on her lips.

"That's right, my darling," he said; "be brave, be brave."

She shook her head seriously.

"Ah! but I am not brave," she replied; "not a bit--not a little tiny bit! That is why I am so glad you have come home to take care of me."

He took her at once to Margaret, and told her that Lucy was his pride, his heart, the flower of his life. Before they were in each other's company an hour, these two girls--for Margaret, although a woman in sorrow, was but a girl in years--were like sisters. Mr. Hart's face was radiant as he saw them sitting together, and observed their affectionate demeanour. Their natures, however, were different. Margaret, as you have seen in her happier days, was sparkling, vivacious, restless; Lucy was timid, yielding, more passive. The passions that agitated Margaret's breast were at once seen on the surface, in all their strength; those by which Lucy was moved were unrevealed except to the eyes of love in their quieter aspect, whether of joy or sorrow. These two girls fell immediately into their natural positions. Margaret assumed the office of protector, and Lucy, to whom dependence was a pleasure, accepted with gratefulness the shield which her new friend threw before her. Each, in her way, thanked Mr. Hart for giving her such a friend.

They had lodgings in the heart of Plymouth. Margaret and Mr. Hart, setting out in quest of them, saw in a shop-window the announcement that rooms were to be let in that house. The shop was a clothes-shop of not the best kind, and at the door stood a man of Jewish aspect, who was evidently attracted by Margaret's face.

"Did you notice how that man stared at you, Margaret?" asked Mr. Hart.

"No," was the reply, in an indifferent tone.

She turned, and saw the man still staring at her. He was loosely and somewhat slovenly dressed, but his eyes were so wonderfully sparkling, and his handsome face (although he was at least fifty years of age) wore such a cheerful and almost philanthropic expression, that the chances were if your eyes rested once upon him you would turn again to look.

The man came forward.

"I beg your pardon," he said, in a slightly guttural tone, "but you are strangers in Plymouth?"

He did not look at Mr. Hart.

"We are strangers," replied Mr. Hart.

"I thought so--I thought so. Can I do anything for you?"

"No, thank you," said Mr. Hart, "we don't want any clothes."

"That's a pity; I could have served you cheap. But I didn't mean in that way, though I'm always ready for business--always ready. I know a customer when I see one. I'm an old resident here, and there is something you might want to know."

"We are looking for lodgings."

The shopkeeper replied eagerly, "I have the very thing you want, the very thing. Two rooms or

four--made for you, made for you."

"You sell all your things ready-made," observed Mr. Hart, with a humorous look.

"Yes, yes," said the shopkeeper, with a good-humoured smile, rubbing his hands slowly over one another, as though he were washing them with invisible soap; "all ready-made, all ready-made."

What most attracted you towards this man were his eyes. They fairly sparkled with humour. But for their remarkable brightness Mr. Hart would have passed on, had he been allowed to do so; for the matter of that, however, the shopkeeper might have barred his way, being, as are all of his race, singularly tenacious in the negotiation of a bargain. And here there was a bargain in question; the strangers wanted lodgings; he had lodgings to let. To hesitate with such a man is to be lost. Mr. Hart hesitated.

"Come and see them," said the shopkeeper, and did not wait for acquiescence in words, but led the way.

They followed him, like sheep. There was magnetism in the man. He would make you buy a thing if you did not want it. That you did not want it did not matter to him; he had it to sell. To sell it was his business; and in his business he, as a representative man, beat the world.

Mr. Hart and Margaret walked through the shop, the shelves of which bent beneath the weight of ready-made clothes, up a flight of stairs to the first floor. There were four rooms on the floor comfortably furnished.

The shopkeeper revelled in his description of the rooms; to have heard him you would have believed the house was a palace. "Look at the view," said he, pointing to the dingy other side of the way, and making it bright by a magic wave of his hands; "look at the furniture; look at the couch--sit on it, it won't hurt you; real horsehair. Now just oblige me, and sit in this arm-chair--just to oblige me! What do you think of it? Is it easy, is it comfortable? Look at the pictures; look at the piano--run your fingers over it; look at the carpet. Here! sound the walls" (as though there was music in them); "look at the loftiness" (as though there was magic in the ceiling); "look at the ornaments; look at the fireplace."

And all the while he dilated upon the excellences of the apartments he washed his hands with invisible soap, and his face beamed with geniality. Such capital fellows at a bargain as he never betray anxiety.

"They are really very comfortable," said Mr. Hart, apart, to Margaret; "what do you say to them?"

"If you are satisfied, I am," she replied listlessly.

She could not be roused to take interest in anything.

"I am afraid he is a Jew," said Mr. Hart in a confidential whisper.

The shopkeeper heard the remark, and he smiled--a superior smile.

"Don't be afraid," he said good-humouredly, showing a fine set of white teeth. "I *am* a Jew, but I shan't bite you."

Mr. Hart was remorseful; he had no wish to hurt the man's feelings.

"I beg your pardon," he said, flushing up.

"For what?" asked the shopkeeper. "For saying you were afraid I was a Jew? My dear sir, I'm proud of it, proud of it." And then he made this singular statement: "If I hadn't been a Jew, I shouldn't have spoken to this young lady."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Hart, in a tone which invited an explanation.

"You wouldn't take me for a Jew from my appearance," continued the shopkeeper, thus giving utterance to a strange hallucination indulged in by many of the race, for the speaker's Jewish cast of features was unmistakable; "but perhaps my name over the shop-door was enough for you?"

"No," said Mr. Hart; "I did not observe your name."

"The letters are big enough any way; every man and woman in Plymouth knows Lewis Nathan."

Margaret looked up with a sudden exclamation of surprise, and advanced a step towards Mr. Nathan.

"What name did you say?" she asked, with a strange fluttering at her breast.

"Lewis Nathan, my dear," he replied, in an earnest fatherly tone; and then, more earnestly

still, "Have you heard it before, my dear?"

She did not reply to him, but drew Mr. Hart aside, and whispered a few words to him in an agitated manner. His countenance expressed surprise.

"We will take the rooms," he said to Mr. Nathan, "if the terms are suitable; we are bound to consider our circumstances, for we are not rich. We have only been in England a few days, and we don't know how long we may stop; so we cannot take them for any definite time."

"The terms will suit you; I'll make them suit you," said Mr. Nathan, with a strange obliviousness of self-interest. "You can take possession at once--you and your daughter."

"This lady is not my daughter. I have a daughter who will live with us; I will bring her here to-day."

"And is that all--only three?"

"Only three of us. You seem disappointed that there are no more."

"I thought--I thought," said Mr. Nathan, hesitating, "that this young lady had a mother."

"She he is dead, poor soul!" murmured Margaret, with tears.

Mr. Nathan turned aside, trembling somewhat, and when he addressed them again, his voice was softer and his eyes were dim.

"Don't think me impertinent, my dear," he said drawing closer to Margaret, "but was your mother--God rest her soul!--ever in Plymouth?"

"She lived here for a long time."

"I have lived here all my life; I thought I recognised your face, though you are taller, but not prettier. No, my dear, not prettier. Did she--forgive me if I am wrong--did she have anything to do with the stage?"

"She was an actress, sir, and I have often heard her mention your name."

"Kindly, my dear?"

"Always kindly, always."

Mr. Nathan sat down, and hid his face. Margaret approached him, and placed her hand on his shoulder; he looked up with tears in his eyes.

"And you're her daughter," he said, taking her hand and kissing it. "She was a good creature, rest her soul! What is your name?"

"You must call me Margaret."

"So I will, my dear, so I will. Why, it's like old times come again What a piece of luck it is that you passed my shop! I'm as pleased as if I'd done a fine day's business."

\* \* \* \* \*

It was in this way that Margaret came to the house of her mother's Jewish lover; and there they lived together, she and Lucy and Lucy's father, for many weeks before the day on which Mr. Hart discovered where the sign of the Silver Flagon was hung, and on which he met with the old friend of his youth. Those few weeks were full of anxieties. Margaret was still very despondent; his daughter Lucy was growing thin and pale, and his own funds were running short. The prospect was not a cheerful one, and he scarcely knew which way to turn. Fortunately for all of them, at this juncture an unexpected friend presented himself in the person of Mr. Lewis Nathan. When he had possessed himself of the true state of affairs, he offered to lend Mr. Hart money to go on with, and offered it without interest, be it stated.

"Suppose I am not able to pay you?" asked the old man.

"It wouldn't break my heart," was the reply.

"No," said Mr. Hart, without any expression of surprise at the offer, for he had already learned to estimate Mr. Nathan at his proper worth, "I'll not borrow money from you yet awhile. I am able to earn it--or should be."

"In what way?"

"I am an actor," replied Mr. Hart; and thereupon, to Mr. Nathan's great delight, related to him



the history of Hart's Star Dramatic Company.

"I know the proprietor of the theatre here," then said Mr. Nathan; "I often lend him costumes. Margaret's mother played on his stage. I'll get an engagement for you."

He was as good as his word, and once more Mr. Hart was on the boards, playing old men this time; while Mr. Nathan sat in front and led the applause. He played under the assumed name of Hunter, and kept it as long as he could from Lucy and Margaret. One night he found them both waiting outside the theatre. Mr. Nathan was with him.

"I've a good mind never to forgive you," said Margaret to Mr. Nathan.

Mr. Nathan would have meekly borne the blame, but that Mr. Hart told Margaret the real state of affairs. "My purse was almost empty, Margaret, and Mr. Nathan wanted to fill it. But I couldn't accept his money while I was able to work. And really the engagement is not a bad one, and I am already a great favourite with the audience and the company."

"I should think you were," she cried; "who could help loving you?"

"Nay, nay, my dear child----"

She interrupted him impetuously. "I mean it! I mean it! You are always doing noble things--always! Do you think I shall ever forget how you risked your own life to save that of my darling Philip? In vain, alas! in vain. And before that too! Did you not save him from being stung to death? But if you are strong enough to work, how much stronger am I? I will go on the stage again, and earn money for us. I will! I will!"

He would scarcely listen to the proposition; but she was so determined that he could only pacify her by promising her that if they could not find Philip's father before the end of three months, she should be allowed to have her own way. When the contest was over, she went to Mr. Nathan, and took his face between her pretty hands and kissed him.

"I don't wonder my poor dear mother was fond of you," she said. "And now tell me why you have never married."

"I never saw any one but your mother that I cared for, my dear," replied Mr. Nathan; "she would have married me if I had turned Christian."

"And you would have married her if she had turned Jewess?"

"Yes, it is so."

"You are as good a man as any Christian," cried Margaret.

"I hope so, my dear," said Lewis Nathan, with outward meekness; believing in his heart, I have no doubt, that he was much better. But that's none of our business.

And here I must say some special words. Very few, if any one, of my readers would have supposed that Mr. Nathan was a Jew, if the fact had not been disclosed to them in the preceding lines. They would not have supposed so, simply because he speaks in fairly good English, and because it has hitherto been the invariable rule in English fiction to represent a Jew as speaking a kind of jargon, which has its source only in the imagination of the writers, who are either prejudiced or not well informed upon the matter. It is time the fallacy was exploded. The "S'help me's!" the "Ma tear's!" and the "Vell! vell! vell's!" which in English fiction and on the English stage are set down as indispensable in the portrayal of an English Jew are ridiculous perversions of fact. They do not belong even to the lowest class of English Jews, who, as a rule, speak their language pretty correctly. The English complain, with justice, that they are never properly represented upon the French stage; the English Jews may, with equal justice, and equal truth, assert that their position in English fiction is as much a caricature as is the representation of the typical Englishman in a French theatre.

Now, our Mr. Lewis Nathan spoke exceedingly good English, and small as is the part he plays in this fiction, it is quite worth while that he should be faithfully represented.

## CHAPTER VII.

### MARGARET TAKES THE HELM.

We now come to the day when Mr. Hart discovered the Silver Flagon, and met once more his old friend, Mr. Weston.

Mr. Hart rushed into the room where Lucy and Margaret were sitting, and blurted out the news most interesting to Margaret. He had found the Silver Flagon; he had been to the house, and had seen Philip's father, without, however, saying a word of Philip or Margaret.

"That can be done to-morrow or the next day," he said; "it is a matter that requires delicate handling."

"I think," said Margaret slowly, "that we will wait a little while before we go to him."

"No, no," exclaimed Mr. Hart, "we will go to-morrow. My child, it is for your good. Delays are dangerous. Ah, I know well how dangerous they are!"

This with a tender look at his daughter.

"We don't know how he will receive us," persisted Margaret.

"In what other way can he receive you, my dear child, than with open arms?"

"Still," said Margaret firmly, "I think we will wait for a little while. You will not turn me away, will you?"

"Child! child! I love you. Have I not two daughters?"

"And I love you," she said softly, "and I cannot bear the idea of separation."

She opened her arms to Lucy, who threw hers around her friend's neck, and rested her head on Margaret's shoulder.

"I'll not allow it! I'll not allow it!" cried Mr. Hart, pacing the room with agitated steps. "Duty--duty, before all!"

"No," responded Margaret; "love--love, before all! Lucy, go away; I must speak to this obstinate hard-hearted father alone."

"Ah! no," murmured Lucy, taking shelter now in her father's arms, who folded her to his heart, and held her there, and kissed her sad face many times "I have no hard-hearted father."

"Go out--go out!" exclaimed Margaret impetuously. "I'll not have two to one against me."

She pushed Lucy out of the room with affectionate force, kissing her first very, very tenderly. Then she began to cry, not quietly, but stormily; Mr. Hart was no less agitated than she, but he suppressed his emotion and observed her in silence.

"Now," she said, when she was sufficiently calm, "I am better, and can talk to you."

"What is the meaning of this?" questioned Mr. Hart, in a tone so low that he might have been speaking to himself.

"Dear friend," she said, drawing him to a seat by her side, and holding his hands in hers, "let me have my wilful way; I have a reason for it, a strong reason."

"Yes, yes," he muttered somewhat impatiently, "a woman's reason."

"A woman's reason, if you like," she said, humouring him; at another time she would have fired up, and have given him a Roland for his Oliver. "But apart from that, I love Lucy--and cannot you see that Lucy loves me?"

"I know, I know," he replied; "but I must not lose sight of your welfare. I am poor; I can place you at once in comfort; a plain duty is before me."

"Do you remember how my darling Philip, with his dying breath, asked you to be a father to me? And do you want now to drive me from you?"

"I do remember. I do not want to drive you from me. But our dear Philip, with his dying breath, bade me take you to his father. That was his charge to me, and I shall obey it."

"And you *shall* obey it--by-and-by; not now; not now!"

"At once--without delay! I paltered with my own happiness by delaying; I will not palter with yours in the same way."

He spoke in a tone so firm and decided that she was driven almost to despair.

"Obstinate, obstinate!" she murmured: "hard and unkind!"

"Margaret--Margaret!" he cried, "do you want to break my heart?"

"No," she replied, with sudden vehemence; the words seemed to come from her without any will of her own; "I want to save it from breaking!"

Terror and doubt were expressed in his face.

"Speak plainly," he said, breathing quickly; "it is about Lucy?"

"It is about her. What is your dearest wish?"

"Her happiness."

"Drive me from her, and I'll not answer for the consequences. O, this is no piece of cunning on my part, so that I may have my own way! It is the truth. Do you not see that she is growing paler and thinner every day?"

"I have seen it--I have tried to believe it was a trick played upon me by my fears; but I see it now that it is as you say. It must be the confinement in this narrow street, in this close town----"

"It is not the confinement," interrupted Margaret; "Lucy would thrive in a cage if her heart were not disturbed. A secret sorrow is wearing her away--a sorrow that she keeps to herself, and which only one person in the world has the power to wean from her. No, that person is not you--it is I, Margaret! She has not told me yet, but she will! I want but to know the name of the man!"

"The name of the man!" echoed Mr. Hart in a bewildered tone. "In Heaven's name, what man?"

"The man she loves, and who has led her to believe that he loves her."

"You know all this?"

"By instinct only--a fine teacher; better than reason." (He had not the heart to play with her words, or he would have said, "None but a woman can utter them;" but this new grief was too deep for light thought.) "She is a woman, and wants a woman's heart to rest upon in this crisis. She has no mother or sister. Dear friend, that I love with all my strength! that I honour with all my soul! let me be sister and mother to your Lucy! You cannot deny me this! It may be in my power to repay you, in some small way, for your fatherly care of me, for your love and devotion to my darling Philip, and you will not rob me of the opportunity. If I can bring back the smile to your Lucy's lips, the roses to her cheek--if I can bring joy to her heart, I shall again taste happiness which I thought I had lost for ever."

If his stake had been smaller in her matter, he could not have resisted her pleading; as it was, he yielded without another word of remonstrance. He was so broken down by this disclosure that Margaret was compelled to entreat him to hide his sorrow from Lucy's eyes.

"She must not know or suspect that we have been speaking of her," said Margaret; "this sensitive flower that we both love so dearly must be dealt with very tenderly--and wisely too, and cunningly, if needs be."

His words in the conversation that followed showed that he had lost faith in himself, and that he placed his hope solely in this affectionate woman, to whom sorrow had come so early. Up to this point he had not told her of the strange meeting with his boyfriend, Richard Weston, and presently, when he was more composed, he related the incident to her.

"We are to go to his house to-morrow," he said, "Lucy and I."

"And I go with you of course," said Margaret. "I shall contrive to make myself welcome. Tell me. When you took Lucy away from the house of the person with whom she lived for so many years, did you let them know your present address?"

"No; I was anxious to sever all possible connection in the future with such false friends."

"Then," said Margaret, with a wise look, "how could *he* (Lucy's *he*, I mean) come to see her, when you as good as hid her from him? There is hope--there is hope--I see hope already!" She kissed him blithely. "Another thing--about myself this time. Mr. Weston's son is named Gerald! Does not that strike you as strange?"

"It was a mark of affectionate remembrance of an old friend, my dear."

"I know that; but strange in another way. Have you forgotten the packet which my darling Philip confided to your care? The property of Gerald, and to be opened only by him. What if your Mr. Weston's Gerald should be Philip's Gerald? It isn't so very unlikely. Mr. Weston's house is not very far from the Silver Flagon, and my Philip was the equal of any man. This Gerald must be nearly Philip's age--a little younger perhaps. And my poor darling went to college. Do you not see?"

She spoke very excitedly, and Mr. Hart gazed at her in admiration.

"There is reason in what you say, Margaret. These broken links may form a chain."

"So now all is settled," she said, "and I am to have my own way in everything."

"Yes, my dear," he replied; "you are more fit to take the helm than I. I am breaking down fast-- I feel it."

"Lucy, Lucy," cried Margaret, going to the door. "Here is our father threatening to become melancholy. Come and help me to cheer him up. Ah! I know what we'll do. First we'll have a kiss all round, and then I'll ask Mr. Nathan to take us out for a drive. He'll do it." She held up her little finger. "I can twist him round this, my dear."

## **CHAPTER VII.**

### **"SHE NEVER TOLD HER LOVE."**

Old Mr. Weston, a great magnate in his neighbourhood, a wealthy man, the owner of a fine estate, a justice of the peace, and what not, had been surprised out of himself by the sudden meeting of his friend, Gerald Hart, from whom he had been separated when they were almost boys, or at all events before either of them had experienced those trials and temptations, the reception and handling of which give the true stamp to a man's character. Our dear friend, Mr. Hart, had passed through the fire unscathed. His fine, honest nature shone steadily in the midst of every temptation; it never flickered or wavered when brought into contact with opportunity which by dishonesty or trickery could be turned to his advantage at another person's expense. His conscience was a touchstone, and he was guided by it; rogue could never be written on the sleeve of his jacket. That he was occasionally worsted by knaves distressed him, but did not embitter him; nor did it cause him to swerve. He was--to use a phrase I once heard from an American, who was speaking of a person he admired--emphatically a straight man.

To all outward appearance, Mr. Weston, when he was a young man, bade fair to rival his friend in genuineness and honesty of character; but the result falsified the promise. Money had spoiled him, as it spoils many a thousand men and women every year of our lives, and it is strictly true to state that he would have been a better man had he been less prosperous. I sometimes think what a dreadful world this would be if every person in it had more money than was needed for his requirements. Great prosperity is a heavy burden, and one can keep one's moral balance much better amid the storms of misfortune than when all his worldly desires are satisfied. More men are wrecked upon golden sands than upon sterile rocks of stone. So, in course of time, the young man who had won the love and esteem of Gerald Hart became over-weighted by prosperity, and over all the finest qualities of his nature crept a crust of worldliness which hardened and grew firmer with his years. These changes in character are common enough. I have in my eye now a young man whom I have known for a few years; a meek, quiet lad he was, with a mild and gentle face, advancing his opinions, when he could muster sufficient confidence, with a timid and unassuming air, which seemed to be the natural outcome of a kind and modest soul. This young man, having had a start in life, is fast developing beneath my observation into a solemn humbug, and he is already, with a seriousness which would be laughable if it were not lamentable, dealing very largely in a certain kind of stereotyped milk-and-water religious sentiment, which he parades (having the opportunity) with a long, sedate, and melancholy face, with all the authority of a Solon, before men and women who have grown grey in the service of the years. If I have the good fortune to live a dozen years, and then to meet this wretched prig (for I know exactly what he will grow into) dealing out his milk-and-water platitudes, I dare say I shall wonder what has become of the meek, modest lad whose gentle face first attracted my notice and won my favour.

As, in the same way, shall Mr. Hart presently wonder what has become of the frank and generous friend he knew in his youth, and whom he had cherished in his heart for so many, many years.

How, then, to account for the part Mr. Weston played in the interview which took place in the sweet Devonshire lane, where the fairy bells of the feather-grass were swinging to and fro in the clear waters of the brook? As I have said at the commencement of this chapter, he was surprised out of himself by the strange and sudden meeting; old memories had penetrated the crust of worldliness which now overlaid the better part of his nature, and for a little while the present was forgotten, and unconsciously set aside. He found it, indeed, a pleasant sensation to yield to the sweet waves of youthful remembrance which the appearance of Gerald Hart had conjured up, and worldly as he was, he honestly resolved to help his friend a little. Still when, in the latter part of the day, he thought over the interview, he confessed to himself that it would have been much more agreeable to him if his friend had been well-dressed and well-to-do.

Nevertheless, he gave Mr. Hart a cordial welcome to his house, a great part of his cordiality arising from a sense of satisfaction at being able to show his friend how well he had got on in the world.

"And this is your daughter?" he said, taking Lucy's hand; "I may use an old man's privilege."

When he took her hand, Lucy gave a little start of surprise, which only one person noticed.

Then he turned to Margaret, and shook hands with her. At her own request, she was introduced to him by her maiden name. "I don't want to be known yet as Mrs. Rowe," she had said.

It did not occur to Mr. Hart that there was any change in the nature of his old friend, as they stood gazing into each other's face, where lines and wrinkles were. It was one of his tricks to judge others by himself.

"You look ten years younger than I," observed Mr. Weston.

"I have not been harassed by the cares of property," replied Mr. Hart, with a smile, in which there was no envy.

Mr. Weston sighed--an eloquent sigh, which expressed, "Ah, you little know how harassing those cares are!" and at the same time a proud sigh at the possession of them.

Then said Margaret, the tactician, after a few minutes chat, during which she had been acting a part towards the old gentleman:

"You old friends must have a great deal to say to each other, and the presence of two foolish women will not help you."

"I would not hear your enemy say so," said Mr. Hart.

"Say what?"

"That you are a foolish woman."

"Well quoted, Gerald, well quoted," acquiesced Mr. Weston gaily.

Margaret made a demure curtsy, and continued, addressing Mr. Weston:

"As we are to spend the day in your beautiful house----"

"Nay," he interrupted, "you are to spend a week or two at least with me."

"Ah!" rejoined the wily Margaret, to make her ground sure, "but you did not count upon an additional incumbrance in the shape of Me."

"An incumbrance, my dear young lady!" exclaimed Mr. Weston, completely won over, as she intended he should be--she hadn't been an actress for nothing. "Have at her with another quotation, Gerald!"

"Thou shalt have five thousand welcomes," said Mr. Hart, readily "without the fivepence, Margaret."

"Bravo! bravo!" cried Mr. Weston. "My friend's friends are mine. I shall be delighted with your society."

Indeed, he was unexpectedly pleased with the two girls; they were well dressed, and bore themselves like ladies--as they were--and this gratified the old worldling.

"Very well, then," said Margaret, with a bewitching smile; "I could not say No on less persuasion. So I propose that you two gentlemen run way and chat, and leave Lucy and me to amuse ourselves, if you are not afraid to trust us."

Mr. Weston, thinking to himself, "Really a very charming creature!" made a gallant reply, and taking his friend's arm, walked with him into the garden.

Margaret and Lucy sat or strolled in the balcony which fringed the windows of the first floor of the house. Margaret, in her tender watchfulness of Lucy, had observed the little start of surprise which Lucy had given on seeing Mr. Weston, and she found a difficulty in accounting for it.

"Lucy," she said, "have you met Mr. Weston before to-day?"

"No, Margaret," was Lucy's answer. "What makes you ask?"

"Something in your face--that's all."

There was something in Lucy's face while these few words were being uttered--a blush, which quickly died out, leaving her paler than before. Margaret instantly began putting two and two

together. An easy task, some of you may think. You are much mistaken. It is a task which requires, and often defies, abstruse calculation, and where a man will succeed in it once, a woman will succeed a hundred times. There are three great discoveries yet to be made in the world--perpetual motion, how to square the circle, and how many beans make five. Depend upon it, if they ever are discovered, they will be placed to the credit of women.

Less difficult, certainly, than any of these, was the task upon which Margaret was at present engaged. But shrewd as she was, she was far from seeing her way clearly. The sum was not completely set before her. There was a figure wanting.

"I don't quite know, Lucy," she said, "whether I like Mr. Weston."

Lucy looked at Margaret reproachfully. Not like her father's old friend! Why, what could Margaret be thinking about? But Margaret, had she pleased, could have justified herself. She had, or fancied she had, observed an expression of uneasiness and dissatisfaction on Mr. Weston's face when his eyes rested on his friend's clothes. They were decent, but not new; and if they had been new, they would not have been fine. This uneasy glance lasted only for an instant, but it had made an impression on Margaret's mind not easily to be effaced. "Trifles light as air are to the jealous confirmation strong as proofs of holy writ;" and Margaret was a woman who judged by trifles. It is strange that this should be rare when the waving of a straw proclaims how the wind blows.

It was a lovely summer's day, and the beautiful grounds which surrounded Mr. Weston's house were bright with colour. Every material comfort that could make life enjoyable was to be found within this pretty estate. The house was luxuriantly furnished; the gardens were carefully tended; and evidences of good taste met the eye on every side. Noticing these substantial signs of comfort and refinement, Margaret noticed, also, that Mr. Weston was directing the attention of his friend to the beauty of the place. To her eyes there was ostentation in his manner. "He is proud of his wealth," she said, and fell again to the study of her sum of two and two. While thus employed, her eyes wandered to Lucy's face. It was very sad and pitiful. Margaret had played the part of Maria in "Twelfth Night," and Viola's word came to her mind:

She never told her love,  
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,  
Feed on her damask cheek; she pined in thought.

As Lucy was pining now. Margaret, from her woman's instinct, knew full well that a secret sorrow born of love was preying on the heart of this tender girl, and she was striving to find a way into her friend's confidence, when, at that very moment, chance befriended her, and the clue for which she was seeking was put into her hands. A sudden flame in Lucy's face, a sudden glad light in her eyes, a sudden exclamation of pleasure in which her misery seemed to die, a sudden uprising of the girl's form towards the framework of the balcony, and the secret was revealed, and the sum was done.

## CHAPTER IX.

### **LUCY'S PRINCE APPEARS ON THE SCENE.**

Following the direction of Lucy's eyes, Margaret saw a young gentleman walking towards the two old men in the grounds below. He paused, and Mr. Weston spoke some words; the next moment Mr. Hart and the young gentleman shook hands warmly.

"Ah!" thought Margaret, with secret satisfaction, "here is our prince. Now all the rest is easy." She was vainly confident of her powers. "So, my dear," she said aloud to Lucy, "we have discovered the grand secret."

The flame in Lucy's cheek grew stronger, and she hid her blushes on Margaret's shoulder.

"You will not tell?" she whispered.

"Not I," replied Margaret, with tender caresses; "but do you know, my dear, you have been making me very unhappy? Keeping a secret, and such a secret, from me!"

"Why, Margaret? You did not suspect me?"

"Oh! no, of course I suspected nothing, being naturally dull-witted, and not being a woman. Well, but now it is all right. I shall know everything--I must know everything, from A to Z. If you keep a single letter of the alphabet from me, I shall run and tell them all about it."

There was but little to tell. Chance had taken the young gentleman, Gerald Weston, to the house in which Lucy lived before, her father's return home, and having seen Lucy, something more than chance had afterwards directed his steps thither very frequently. I am afraid there had been secret meetings out of the house; girls and young men *will* do these things now-a-days. Ah, nonsense! What do I mean by now-a-days? Have they not done them from time immemorial? Think of the delicious secret meetings that must have taken place between Jacob and Laban's daughters in the old patriarchal times! And you, my dear lady, whose eyes may haply light upon these lines, cannot you look back upon such-like stolen minutes? So these two young persons met and met again, and Cupid led the way with his torch. Gerald Weston's love for Lucy was an honest love, and it was long before he confessed it, and received in return a confession of love from her lips. The simplest of stories.

"But since my dear father has been home," said Lucy, "I have never seen Gerald." And then her joy at beholding her hero vanished, and with sad sighs she said, "He has forgotten me, Margaret."

"That is a discovery r must make for myself, Lucy. I'll wait till I see him closer; then I shall be able to judge. I can tell the signs, and I can read honesty. As for your not having seen him, you darling! how was that possible except by some strange accident, when our dear stupid father never told the persons you were living with where he was taking you to?"

Lucy's face grew bright again.

"Are you sure of that--sure?"

"Sure, you little simpleton!" exclaimed Margaret affectionately. "Am I sure that I am speaking to you now? Am I sure that everything will come right and that my darling Lucy will be a happy wife before long--as I was once, alas! But never mind me; I've something else to think of, and I must put my sorrow by for a time. Lucy, Lucy! he's coming this way, not knowing that you are here, of course! Well, I declare he is a handsome young fellow! Shall I go away?"

"No, no, Margaret; don't leave me!"

For all that, Margaret contrived to slip out of the room the moment before Gerald Weston entered it. Her intention was to keep guard outside, and to prevent either of the fathers entering and disturbing the lovers. With this design, she stationed herself at the door of the house which led to the grounds, and presently Lucy's father came towards her. Mr. Weston was not with him.

"Where is he? where is he?" inquired Margaret eagerly.

"He!" echoed Mr. Hart, smiling at her eagerness. "Which he are you anxious about? The young he must have passed you on the staircase. Did you notice him, Margaret? A fine young fellow."

"Yes, yes," cried Margaret impatiently; "but I mean the old he. Is there a back way by which he can get in?" Margaret really had the idea of running to the back of the house and taking old Mr. Weston captive. She was a faithful tiler--a word I use not with reference to building tiles, but in the Freemason sense. Ladies who do not understand it had best ask a Freemason friend for an explanation.

"You enigma!" exclaimed Mr. Hart. "My old friend has been carried off by a man of business. He is overwhelmed, my dear, by the cares of property. By the way, Margaret, I have accepted an invitation to stay here a month. It will do Lucy good."

"That it will," said Margaret, with a quiet little laugh to herself. "Am I included in the invitation?"

"Of course, my dear. Mr. Weston is charmed with you. You've a trick of winning hearts, Margaret, old and young. But I shall have to run away every night to the theatre."

"Have you told him that?"

"No, but I shall presently."

"Will you be guided by me? But what a question to ask! You must be. There cannot be two captains in one ship, and I am captain here--absolute captain, mind you."

"Very well, my dear."

"Therefore you will not inform Mr. Weston that you are an actor, and are engaged at the theatre. You will invent some other excuse for your absence every night; or if you are not equal to it, I will invent one for you. No remonstrance! I am captain, and I *will* be obeyed. I have my reasons, and you will approve of them when you hear them--which you will not do till I think fit."

"Tyrant!" he cried. "I *must* obey you, then. Now we will join Lucy."

"We'll do nothing of the sort. Don't bother your head about her; she is quite safe and comfortable. I accept all responsibility." (Which sounded very like Greek to Mr. Hart, but he had full confidence in Margaret, and his anxiety about Lucy was lulled by her gay tone.) "Now tell me everything you two old fogies have been talking about."

"Chiefly of old times. I have heard some strange things from him. He has had at least one very strange incident in his life; and he has--incline your head, my dear--a Bluebeard's room in the house, a room that no one enters but himself. Now, don't you wish you had the key?"

"No; Bluebeard's room can wait. I want to hear something more. You talked of yourselves and your prospects."

"Naturally, my dear; and each dilated upon the subject nearest to his heart."

"You upon Lucy."

"And he upon Gerald, his son. My old friend has great views for that young gentleman, who has been giving him deep cause for anxiety lately. Ah, these children, these children! how they vex and gladden our old foolish hearts!"

"Deep cause for anxiety! Dear me! In what way, now?"

"Well, it isn't a secret, Margaret. No, I am wrong there. It must be a secret, for it is almost a family matter; so I'll not mention it."

"But you will! You will!" cried Margaret vehemently. "I'll not have any secrets kept from me. Now promise me, conceal nothing from me. I am prudence itself, though I am a woman. I must know everything--everything! Have you not yet learned to trust me?"

Startled by her earnestness and vehemence, for which he could find no cause, he replied that he *had* trusted her with what was most dear to him. Had he not, in a measure, placed his daughter's happiness in her hands?

"You have," she replied, "and I hope you will live to bless the day that you put such trust in me. There, now; you called me an enigma a moment ago. Think me one, if you like, but you will know better by-and-by, and you will find there's method in my madness. I tell you that as you value what you have intrusted me with, you must hide nothing from me." Seeing still some signs of irresolution in him, she stamped her foot impatiently, and said, "I should not expect even Mr. Nathan to treat me as you are treating me, and there would be an excuse for him, while there's none for you; for he belongs to a stiff-necked race. You are a thousand times worse than he. I ask you again--can't you trust a woman who loves you as I do?"

He was overcome by her torrent of words. "You will have your way, I see. I yield."

"Now you are sensible again. Well, then, as you were saying--the young gentleman has been giving his father deep cause for anxiety lately. A love affair, of course!"

"You are a witch, Margaret," said Mr. Hart admiringly.

"You see, I know things without being told. Go on."

"It seems, my dear, that young Gerald has entangled himself in some way; that is to say, he has entertained some sort of a fancy for a young girl far below him in station----"

"Stop! Are these your words, or your friend's?"

"My friend's."

"I am glad to hear that. Some sort of a fancy, indeed, for a girl below him in station! Oh, if I--- But go on, go on!"

"--And in every way unworthy of our Gerald----"

"His words again?"

"His words again."

"Wait a moment--let me get my breath."

Margaret, indeed, required time to cool herself. Had Mr. Weston witnessed her condition, he would have said, "This young person I thought so charming has certainly an ungovernable temper." She turned presently to Mr. Hart, and bade him proceed.

"But, fortunately," continued Mr. Hart, much perplexed by Margaret's proceedings, "the little affair has come to an end by the sudden disappearance of the young lady?"

"Indeed! The little affair has come to an end, has it? Pray did your friend mention the name of



the young lady?"

"He doesn't know it, Margaret. In consequence of some warm words used by his father, the young scapegrace wouldn't disclose her name. They had a bit of a quarrel over it. 'Let me bring her to you,' said young Gerald, 'and you will see that she is goodness and modesty itself.' The father flatly refused to see her. 'In that case,' said Gerald, 'I will not even I mention her name to you unless you consent to receive her here as your daughter.'"

"Bravo, young Gerald!" cried Margaret, with nods of approval. "Bravo! I begin to like you. If you were here, I would throw my arms round your neck and kiss you."

Mr. Hart stared at her; Margaret laughed at him.

"You think I am going out of my senses, I dare say. But your story isn't finished yet."

"Yes, it is; the sudden disappearance of the young lady finishes it."

"It isn't finished, I say," said Margaret gaily; "it is only the end of the first chapter, and is to be continued in our next. Shall I turn over the page?"

"Well, you are right, Margaret; it isn't finished. There's the other young lady to be brought into the story."

"The other young lady?" exclaimed Margaret. "Oh, the Don Juan!"

"You don't understand. I mean the young lady the father intends Gerald to marry. A young lady of fortune, with great family influence, and I don't know what all. But putting her out of the question----"

"Put her out, by all means. I'll see to that! young lady of fortune, indeed!"

"There is something still I have not told you. My old friend asked for my opinion as to whether he had acted rightly."

"Which opinion," interrupted Margaret eagerly and vivaciously, "you didn't give."

"I did, in one way. He put it to me in this fashion: 'Gerald,' he said, 'say that it was your daughter'--he was only putting a supposititious case, Margaret--'say it was your daughter my boy had fallen in love with or taken a fancy to, I am sure you would not allow her to receive his attentions against the wishes of his father; I am sure you would not allow her to marry him unless he obtained his father's consent.' Well, Margaret, knowing that all my old friend's hopes and aspirations are bound up in his boy, and knowing that my Lucy's happiness was not involved in this imaginary case (see how selfish we old fathers are, my dear!) I said that I certainly would not allow my daughter to marry his son without his consent."

Margaret threw up her arms in dismay. "You said that!" she cried.

"Yes, my dear. He rather pressed me for an answer, and I gave it in decided terms, to soothe him, for he was much agitated. What is the meaning of that expression in your face, Margaret? For Heaven's sake, don't torture me any longer with mystery!"

He turned from her with quivering lips and moistened eyes as he made this appeal.

"I don't want to torture you," exclaimed Margaret; "but I can't help my face telling what is in my heart--that is, when I am taken off my guard, as I am at this moment. Why, oh! why did you give that promise? Why did I let you out of my sight? No man is fit to be trusted alone--no man, no man! If I hadn't left my Philip's side on that fatal night, we should have been together to-day. My darling! my darling!" Her tears began to flow here, but she checked them sternly, and said, "I mustn't wander. I have something else to think of--something else to do. I have to repay you for all your goodness to me and him, and if a living woman can do it, I will. Courage, Margaret, courage! Set your wits to work, and prove yourself a match for the wily old worldling."

She paced to and fro in her excitement, and Mr. Hart waited with gnawing impatience for an explanation. She gave it him presently.

"Listen. This girl for whom your old friend's son entertains some sort of a fancy----"

"Yes, yes, Margaret."

"And who is far below him in station, and in every way unworthy of him----"

"Yes, yes; go on."

"Is your daughter Lucy. Is our darling girl Lucy, whose heart has been very nearly broken because she feared her lover had deserted her."

## CHAPTER X.

### THE THEORY OF FRIENDSHIP.

Margaret was not prepared for the manner in which her words were received by Mr. Hart. She thought he would have been dismayed and staggered at the disclosure, and she was ready to comfort him, and instil courage into him. But the radiant face that met her eyes astonished her.

"Why then," cried Mr. Hart, with bright looks and in a blithe tone, "all is well--all is well! If your news is true----"

"It is true," she said, in calm wonderment; "they are together now. I came to the door to keep guard, so that no one should disturb them."

"Then I am the happiest man and the happiest father in Christendom! Why, Margaret, if I had been asked which man in all the wide world I should wish my daughter to marry, I should select the very man who has won her heart! God bless them! Now, indeed, my mind is at rest, and I care not what happens to me. My business with the world is over. All is well with Lucy. We shall see the roses on her cheeks again, my dear--we shall! Kiss me, Margaret, and wish me joy."

She kept him back with her hand, and in her eyes dwelt a look in which pity and admiration were equally blended.

"It is my turn now," she said, "to ask for an explanation."

"An explanation of what, my dear? Is not everything as clear as the noonday sun, as bright as this beautiful day? Ah, it is a good world, a good world! Thank God for it, and for the happiness this day has brought to me!"

"It would be ungenerous to pretend to misunderstand you," said Margaret, in a gentle tone. "You think there are no difficulties in the way of Lucy's union with Gerald."

"Think!" he exclaimed, in a reproachful tone. "Nay, am I not sure that matters could not have turned out more happily? Difficulties, my dear child! What difficulties? Here are we, two old men, who pledged our faith to each other when we were young--who exchanged vows--who were and are the most faithful of friends--who, if circumstances had not parted us, would have walked hand in hand through life, cheering, consoling, encouraging each other. There is no envy in our friendship, and no selfish feeling mars it. How often in my wanderings have I thought of him? How often have I lived the old days over again, and recalled the memories of the happy times we spent together? Margaret, I think that even love pales before the beauty of a faithful friendship. There is something holy in it; it is a pure sentiment, fit for the hearts of angels. You cannot conceive what comfort and consolation the mere memory of the friendship between me and Richard Weston has brought to me; it has brightened hours which otherwise would have been very dark. And now, when we are old men, and, after so long a parting, are so strangely reunited, our children fall in love with each other! One might almost say it is the reward of faithfulness."

So spoke this old man, whom the world's trials and disappointments had been unable to sour. And Margaret felt humbled and abashed as she listened to the noble outburst, and even as she listened she debated within herself whether she should plunge the dagger of doubt into his heart.

"We should change places," she said; "you are younger than I. I am old, calculating, unbelieving; you are young and trustful. Ah, if men and women were all like you, how much better and happier the world would be! Where you see cause for joy, I see cause for sorrow. Where you believe, I doubt. Your heart is like a bank of sweet moss where fresh flowers are always growing; mine is a heart of flint. Dear friend, I love you more every day that I know you."

"Pleasant words to hear, dear child, but you shall not do yourself an injustice. I will not have you speak in such terms of yourself. You must work yourself out of this sad humour, for my sake, for Lucy's sake. Believe me there is sweetness in life for you yet, notwithstanding your great sorrow. All is clear sailing before us now. Lucy and Gerald will marry. You will go to the Silver Flagon, and take your proper place as Mr. Rowe's daughter, and we shall all live pleasantly together."

"How happy I should be if things turned out in that way!" exclaimed Margaret, having now resolved upon her course of action. "But in the meantime you will not take the helm out of my hands. I am still captain, and I'll have no mutineering. So I give you this order. Not a word of what we have said must pass your lips, nor must you speak upon this subject to any person but me for at least a fortnight from this day."

"But why, my dear, why?"

"I will not be questioned; I want to make sure; the stake is a serious one, and we must not run the risk of losing by acting rashly. Least of all must you whisper a word to old Mr. Weston."

"You mistrust him, Margaret; I can see that clearly; but you are mistaken in him."

"I fervently hope I may be. At all events, I have made up my mind to be obeyed in this matter. Let things work their way naturally."

"But if Gerald or his father speaks to me about Lucy?"

"That will alter the case entirely; then you will act according to your judgment."

It required, however, a great deal of coaxing from Margaret before Mr. Hart would agree to her stipulation. But in the end she had her way, as most women have when they are resolved upon it.

Later in the day, Margaret said to Mr. Weston:

"You do not know, I suppose, that we met an old friend almost on the first day of our arrival in Plymouth."

"No," he replied, "I have not heard of it."

"We did; and Mr. Hart has business with him every night for two or three weeks, which will deprive us of his society from seven o'clock every evening. That is a pity, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Weston, "but your presence will be some compensation."

"That is a very gallant speech. Upon my word, I think only old gentlemen know how to pay a graceful compliment to a lady."

In this way she tickled Mr. Weston's vanity, and contrived to account for Mr. Hart's absence during the night without disclosing the cause.

Margaret, indeed, was in her element, and every moment of her time was busily occupied, now in wheedling Mr. Weston, now in screening the proceedings of Lucy and Gerald from the old gentleman's observation. "I am the watchdog," she said to herself. She waited for a fitting opportunity to speak to Gerald privately about Lucy, and also concerning another matter; the letter which poor Philip had given to the charge of Mr. Hart, and which she had requested him to give her.

An hour with Gerald had made a wonderful change in Lucy; all her sadness was gone, and the joy of her heart was reflected in her face. She introduced Gerald to Margaret, and said:

"You must love her, Gerald. She is my dearest friend."

"Do you hear, sir!" cried Margaret merrily; "you are to love me."

"It will not be difficult to do that," he replied, "after what Lucy has told me about you. But how wonderful all this is! I have not yet recovered from my astonishment."

"Lucy," said Margaret, "will you spare Gerald for half an hour? I have something very particular to say to him."

Lucy smiled an assent, and Margaret, taking Gerald's arm, bade him lead her somewhere where they could flirt undisturbed. He led her to a retired part of the gardens.

"No one will disturb us here," he said, wondering what this strange young lady could have to say to him. If he had entertained any idea that she was serious in asking him to flirt with her, he was soon undeceived. They were no sooner alone than all her light manner vanished, and a sad expression came into her face.

"I am going to confide a secret to you," she said; "I may, with confidence, may I not? What I say to you now you will not speak of without my permission?"

"Certainly not, if you wish it," he replied, wondering more and more.

She paused for a moment, to master the emotion she experienced at the very thought of Philip, of whom she was about to speak.

"Don't think my questions strange," she said, "you will soon understand them. You have been to college?"

"Yes."

"At Cambridge?"

"Yes."

"You had friends there?"

"Yes."

"Among those friends was there one who left suddenly----"

He caught her hand. "Of whom do you speak? I had a friend who went from us suddenly--a friend whom I loved more than all others."

"Oh, my heart! Nay, do not mind me. Speak his name."

"Philip Rowe--good heavens! what have I said?"

He caught her sinking form, and, amidst her tears and grief at the sound of that beloved name, she kept fast hold of Gerald's hand, fearful that he might leave her and call for assistance.

"I shall be better presently. Ah, Philip, my darling! He was my husband, Gerald, and often spoke of you with love and affection." She could not proceed for her tears.

"*Was your husband!*" he echoed.

"He is dead--my darling, your friend, is dead! Keep close to me; I shall soon be well. And you loved him more than all the others! Bless you for saying it. But who could help loving that noble heart? I will tell you all by-and-by; these words between us are in sacred confidence until I unseal your lips."

They were both too affected to speak for several minutes, and then Margaret placed in Gerald's hand the letter which Philip had given into Mr. Hart's charge. He opened it in her presence. Hungering to see her Philip's writing, she looked over his shoulder. There was no writing inside; Gerald drew out a packet of bank-notes, which he held in his hand with a bewildered air. They looked at each other for an explanation.

"Nay, it is you that must unriddle it," said Margaret.

He counted the notes; they amounted to a large sum, four hundred pounds. Margaret saw, by a sudden flash in Gerald's eyes, that he could explain the mystery. After much persuasion he told her briefly that when he and Philip were at college together he had signed bills for Philip for four hundred pounds, which he had to pay.

"My Philip repays you now," said Margaret, in a grateful tone. "And yet when I spoke of him you used no word of reproach towards him; others to whom he might have owed the money would not have been so forbearing."

"He was my friend," said Gerald, "and I loved him. Poor dear Philip!"

She took his hand and kissed it; then she thought of Lucy.

"And now I want to speak to you about Lucy," she said. "If your father knew that it was the daughter of his oldest friend you loved, would he give his consent to your engagement?"

The words in which he answered her were a sufficient confirmation of her fears.

"I can marry without my father's consent."

The voice of Mr. Weston himself, who had approached them unseen, suddenly broke up their conference.

"Ah! you have made the acquaintance of this big boy of mine," said the old gentleman to Margaret; "don't lose your heart to him; he is the most desperate deceiver in the world. See how the rascal blushes!"

"I *was* making love to him," said Margaret archly; "but as you tell me it is of no use, I had better employ my time more profitably."

And she took the old gentleman's arm, and straightway commenced to flirt with him in the most outrageous manner.

## **CHAPTER XI.**

Thanks to Margaret's tact, everything went on smoothly for a little while. No person but herself knew how hard she worked during this time. She was for ever on the alert, and she managed so skilfully that Mr. Weston did not even suspect that Gerald and Lucy were lovers. These young persons would have betrayed themselves a dozen times a day to Gerald's father had it not been for Margaret's vigilance: she took the old gentleman in hand, as she termed it, and entertained him so admirably that he found real pleasure in her society. She afterwards declared that she had never played so difficult a part, and had never played any part half so well. But Margaret, as we know, had a great idea of her own capabilities.

With womanly cunning, she sounded Mr. Weston to the very bottom of his nature, and she was compelled to admit to herself that there was not the slightest probability of his ever, with his eyes open, giving his consent to Gerald's union with a girl who had neither wealth nor position. He had set his mind upon a certain worldly position for his son, and he was not to be diverted from it by sentimental feelings. Gerald was to marry money, was to enter Parliament, and to make a name in society. The old gentleman respected nothing but position; he felt a glow of pride when people touched their hats to him in the streets, and without a suspicion that this mark of outward respect was paid to his wealth and not to himself, he was convinced that it was worth living for and worth working for. But notwithstanding that he was emphatically a purse-proud man, and that when he sat upon the bench as a magistrate his bosom swelled with false pride, he had one estimable quality, which better men than he often do not possess. He was a man of his word, and had never been known to depart from it. What he pledged himself to, he performed. His promise was better than any other man's bond. Now this would cut both ways, as Margaret knew, and it was with dismay she thought that if the old gentleman once refused in plain words to sanction an engagement between Gerald and Lucy, it would take a greater power than she imagined she could ever possess to induce him to revoke his decision. If, on the other hand, she could manage, insidiously or by straightforward dealing, to induce him to sanction such an engagement, she believed she could compel him to stand by his word. But she saw no way to arrive at so desirable a consummation.

Every day she confessed to herself that her task was becoming more difficult. The fortnight during which she had extracted a promise from Lucy's father to keep his lips sealed was fast drawing to a close, and no one but herself knew that a storm was approaching which would bring a deathless grief to those she loved. She knew that she could obtain no assistance, even in the shape of advice, from any of the friends around her. Mr. Hart was too trustful of his friend; he would listen to nothing against him. Lucy was too simple! Gerald was too rash and sanguine. These reflections were perplexing her as she stood before the glass one morning, and when she came to the end of them she frowned and stamped her foot.

"My dear," she said, nodding her head violently to herself in the glass, "all these people are too guileless and innocent to be of the slightest use to you. You are the only wicked one among them."

And then she thought she would go and consult her mother's old lover, Mr. Lewis Nathan, the clothes-seller. But she was frightened to leave the house with Mr. Weston in it, and no watchdog over him. Fortune befriended her, however, for over the breakfast-table Mr. Weston mentioned that business would take him away from them until the evening. Margaret's eyes sparkled.

"We shall be quite dull without you," she said.

She had so ingratiated herself into the old gentleman's good graces that he really believed her. Little did he suspect that he was nursing a serpent in his bosom. Margaret saw him safely off, and then, telling Lucy that she had business in town, put on her bonnet and shawl.

"What business, Maggy?" asked Lucy.

"I am going shopping," replied Margaret, with face of most unblushing innocence.

"Oh! I'll come with you," cried Lucy eagerly.

(I take the opportunity of parenthetically stating my belief that women like "shopping," even better than love-making.)

"I don't want you, my pet," said Margaret demurely; "I am going to meet my beau, and two is company, you know."

Away she posted to Mr. Lewis Nathan, who welcomed her right gladly.

"I was afraid I was going to lose you, my dear," he said; "I thought you had forgotten me."

"I never forget a friend," replied Margaret; "I am like my poor mother, Mr. Nathan. Did she ever forget you?"

She chattered about odd things for a few minutes before she came to the point. She even took a customer out of Mr. Nathan's hands, and sold the man a coat and a Waistcoat for half as much again as Mr. Nathan would have obtained for them; true, she sweetened the articles with smiles

and flattering words, and sent the customer away, dazed and entranced. Mr. Nathan looked on with undisguised admiration.

"What a saleswoman you would have made!" he exclaimed, raising his hands. "You talked to the man as though you had been born in the business, my dear--born in the business."

"The fact is, Mr. Nathan," said Margaret, with brazen audacity, "I am a very clever woman; and, besides, I am an actress, and know how to wheedle the men." She sighed pensively and added, "But I am a fool with it all. I can sell a coat, but I can't serve my dearest friends. Oh, that I were a man and had the brains of a man!"

With a humorous look Mr. Lewis Nathan placed his hands to his head.

"Here is a man's head," said he, "and a man's brains, very much at your service, my dear."

"Come along, then," she cried. "It is hard if you and I can't win when we go into partnership. What do you say, now? *Shall* we become partners?"

"My dear," said the old rascal, "I should like to take you as a partner for life."

"It is a good job for me," said Margaret archly, "that you are not thirty years younger. As it is I have almost lost my heart to you."

This incorrigible creature could no more help flirting than she could help talking--and she had a woman's tongue to do the latter.

Binding him over to secrecy, she told him the whole story; he listened attentively.

"As I was doing my hair this morning," said Margaret in conclusion, "and looking into the glass----"

"I wish I had been behind you, my dear," interrupted Mr. Nathan.

"Be quiet, Lothario! As I looked into the glass this morning I said to myself, 'Margaret, there is only one person among your acquaintance who is clever enough to assist you; that person is Mr. Nathan.' But before I flew to you, I had a good look at the crow's feet which this trouble is bringing into my eyes. I am growing quite careworn."

"I should like to see those crow's feet."

"Well, look at them;" and she placed her face close to his.

Mr. Nathan gazed into her sparkling eyes, which flashed their brightest glances at him, and then laughed at her outright.

"You're a barbarian," cried Margaret.

"You had better call me an unbelieving Jew at once," said Mr. Nathan rubbing his hands. "You're thrown away as a Christian, my dear, completely thrown away! You ought to have been one of the chosen people."

She rose and made him a mocking curtsy.

"Thank you, I am quite contented as I am. But let us be serious. Say something to the point. You have heard the story."

"It is an old story," he observed; "love against money. Here is money; here is love." He held out his two hands to represent a pair of scales, one hand raised considerably above the other. "See, my dear, how money weighs down love."

"I see. Your hand with love in it is nearest to heaven; your hand with money in it is nearest to the--other place."

"Perhaps so; perhaps so; but the plot of this play is to be played out on earth, my dear, isn't it? I have seen it a hundred times on the stage, and so have you."

"And love always wins," she said vivaciously. "Yes," rejoined Mr. Nathan drily, "on the stage, always. In real life, never."

"I won't have never!" she cried impetuously. "It does sometimes win, even in this sordid world. And if it never has done so before, it must win now. Why, if your cunning and my wit are not a match for a greedy, worldly, hard-hearted old man, I would as lief have been born without brains as with them!"

"Hush, hush, my dear. Let me think a bit."

He pondered for a little while.

"There was a mathematician--what was his name?--ah! Archimedes--who said he would move

the world if he could find a crevice for his lever. My dear, we have neither lever nor crevice. We must get the lever first, and find the crevice. Now where does this old gentleman keep his skeleton?"

She stared at him in amazement. "His skeleton!" she exclaimed.

"His skeleton, my dear; that's what we want. He keeps it somewhere. I've got mine, and I keep it where no eye but my own can see it. We've all got one. If we could get hold of this old gentleman's we might do something. It is in his house, depend upon it."

"If it is, I've not heard of it. Oh! yes," she cried excitedly, contradicting herself; "Bluebeard's room! He has a Bluebeard's room in the house. Mr. Hart told me of it."

Mr. Nathan chuckled. "What is in that room, Margaret?"

"How should I know? I have never been in it."

He gave her a reproachful look.

"If you hadn't told me so yourself I should not have believed it. A Bluebeard's room in the house and you've never seen it A clever woman like you! You'll tell me next, I shouldn't wonder, that you have never peeped through the keyhole."

"I do tell you so; I never have peeped through the keyhole."

It was evident from Mr. Nathan's tone that Margaret had fallen several degrees in his estimation.

"My dear," he said, "that room may contain the very thing we want--the lever."

"But suppose he keeps it locked up?"

"Then locks, bolts, and bars must fly asunder." Mr. Nathan sang these words in a fine bass voice, and rising with a brisk air said, "You must get me into that room, Margaret."

"I must first get you into the house."

"I am coming with you now. The old gentleman is away, you say; no time like the present. We'll strike the iron while it's hot, my dear. I constitute myself your friend Gerald's tailor, and I am going to take his measure. As you have never peeped through the keyhole, I suppose you have never tried the handle of the door?"

"Never."

"I will take long odds it is unlocked. Come along, my dear."

At another time Margaret might have had scruples, but her interest in the stake she was playing for was so great that she was determined to leave no stone unturned to win the day. So she accompanied Mr. Nathan to Mr. Weston's house, where they found only Lucy--Gerald, for a wonder, being absent from her. Acting under Mr. Nathan's instruction, Margaret got rid of Lucy, so that the two conspirators might be said to have had the house to themselves.

"Now, my dear," said Mr. Nathan, "take me to the room. Of course you know where it is."

"Not for a certainty," replied Margaret, "but I suspect."

She led Mr. Nathan to a door at the end of a passage, the last room but one in which was Mr. Weston's study. She tried the handle of the door, and it turned within her hand; the door was unlocked.

"I told you so," said Mr. Nathan, with a quiet chuckle. "Sister Ann, Sister Ann, do you see any one coming?"

"I am frightened to go in," said Margaret, shrinking back.

"Nonsense, my dear, nonsense; we shan't have our heads cut off."

She followed him into the room, but saw nothing to alarm her. There was but little furniture; two chairs, a table, and a desk, all in a very dusty condition. The windows had not been cleaned for some time, and it was evident that no use was made of the room. Mr. Nathan opened a cupboard--it was empty; tried a desk--it was locked. If it was a Bluebeard's room, the secret was well hidden; the only thing to excite comment was that a number of pictures were hanging with their faces turned to the wall.

"To preserve them from the dust, I should say," observed Mr. Nathan; "one--two--three--thirteen of 'em, my dear. We'll have a peep at them at all events."

They were all portraits, and were all painted by the same hand. Mr. Nathan seemed to find some cause for curiosity in this circumstance. One of the portraits, Margaret said, was like Mr.

Weston when he was a young man.

"Taken a good many years ago," said Mr. Nathan, placing the pictures in their original position. "There is something in it, my dear. If the old gentleman has a secret, it lies in those pictures."

"What is to be done now?" asked Margaret in despair.

"Well, my dear, it's a puzzle. But we'll try and work it out. We must put our heads together, and use stratagem. Don't be downcast; nothing is done without courage. We won't be beaten if we can help it. Come and see me to-morrow, and in the meantime get at the story of these pictures if you can. I dare say the old gentleman has told Mr. Hart something about them."

They left Bluebeard's room in not a very hopeful frame of mind.

## CHAPTER XII.

### **MR. HART DECLARES THAT HONESTY HAS DIED OUT OF THE WORLD.**

Events, however, were brought to a climax somewhat suddenly, without Margaret's intervention. On the day following the peep into Bluebeard's room Mr. Weston announced that he intended giving an evening party, and that he had already invited his friends. The party would take the form of an early dance.

"Really early," said Mr. Weston, "for I don't like late hours. They have all promised to be here by half-past eight o'clock."

He told Gerald privately that Miss Forester and her family would be among the guests. Miss Forester was the young lady whom he wished his son to marry, and he requested Gerald to pay her particular attention. The young fellow listened in silence.

"You will not leave us this evening," said Mr. Weston to Mr. Hart.

But Mr. Hart was compelled to go to the theatre. It happened, however, that he had but a small part to play, and that he could attend the party by ten o'clock. Mr. Weston had been very curious to know the nature of the business that took his friend away every evening, and Mr. Hart had found it difficult to parry the questions.

Margaret knew beforehand that some great magnates of the county would be present, with their wives and daughters, and she determined that Lucy should not be eclipsed by any she in Devonshire. She dressed Lucy with exquisite taste, and no fairer flower was ever seen. Lucy had improved wonderfully during the past fortnight; love had brought the roses to her cheeks. It was strange that the affectionate bearing of the young lovers towards each other should have hitherto escaped Mr. Weston's notice; but this was partly owing to the fact of the old gentleman being exceedingly short-sighted. On many occasions, when Lucy and Gerald were together in the grounds, he perhaps with his arm around her waist, Mr. Weston seeing them from a distance, had said, "That must be Lucy and Gerald;" and when he fussed about for his glasses, and prepared to fix them on his nose, Margaret, who was invariably by his side, turned his attention adroitly, blessing the circumstance that he could not see a dozen yards before him. I am afraid that she had been guilty more than once of secreting his glasses, to the old gentleman's infinite annoyance; she did not mind his pettishness; as you know, she was thoroughly unscrupulous. Once, when Lucy and Gerald were within twenty yards of them in the garden, suspiciously close together, Margaret unblushingly took Mr. Weston's glasses--which he was rubbing with his bandana preparatory to putting them to use--from his hand, and the ribbon from his neck, and saying, "Really, now, can one see with these things!" fixed them on her own nose, and looked about like an old grandmother, making so pretty a picture that the old gentleman was absorbed in admiration; during which little piece of comedy Lucy and Gerald escaped. At other times, Margaret twitted him with wearing his glasses constantly.

"They make you look so old," she expostulated.

"I *am* old, my dear," he replied.

"You old! Nonsense! You're a young man yet."

And although Mr. Weston deprecated the assertion, he was not displeased with it, and suffered much by frequently depriving himself of the artificial aids to sight. What he was ignorant of was clear to the eyes of every other person in the house. All the servants talked of the love-making that was going on between Gerald and Lucy, and, as the old gentleman seemed to



sanction it, the servants decided that it would be a match. They thoroughly sympathised with their young master and their mistress that was to be, for Cupid was as busy in the kitchen as in the drawing-room. A most impartial young god. I have seen him busily at work, in rooms high and low, with fine ladies and common kitchen wenches, bestowing his attentions equally upon silk and cotton; I have seen him where silk and cotton are not appreciated, at the other end of the world, walking saucily by the side of dusky savages in grand old woods. If I had the time I would write a chapter on this theme; it is a temptation, because the subject is so new and novel; but space will not permit of it.

Mr. Weston, however, was not short-sighted on the evening of his party. The guests arrived, and the rooms were very brilliant. Lucy was the loveliest girl among them. Margaret ranked second, although she was dressed very simply in black. But she had the art of "putting on things" becomingly, an art which not all the members of her sex possess. Miss Forester was present, with her mamma, beautifully dressed, and very stately. Miss Forester's mamma was aware of Mr. Weston's wish, and approved of it. Gerald was in every way a suitable match for her daughter, and she was prepared to be exceedingly gracious to the young gentleman. Not so Miss Forester; she had an attachment elsewhere of which her mamma was ignorant, and being a young lady of spirit and determination, she had quite made up her mind that she would not mate with Gerald Weston; but she kept her sentiments to herself. So, when the music struck up for the first dance, these little wheels were in full motion, and gradually produced an unexpected result. In the opening dance, Mr. Weston saw Gerald walking to the set with Lucy on his arm. Now Mr. Weston had particularly wished Gerald to dance this first set with Miss Forester; it would have looked significant. Mrs. Forester was also a close observer, and was disappointed by Gerald's conduct. Miss Forester was perfectly satisfied with it. Gerald and Lucy, quite unconscious of the working of these small wheels, enjoyed the dance to its full; they were in a heaven of delight, and the persons around them might have been so many dummies, they were so lost in their feelings for each other. Mr. Weston consoled himself by the reflection that Gerald might have deemed it proper to pay his first attentions to this lady-guest in his father's house and the daughter of an old friend. He waited for the second dance. Gerald danced with Margaret. Mrs. Forester bit her lips, and calm agitation stirred her breast. This lady was never violent in her emotions.

"Your father is watching us," said Margaret to Gerald.

Gerald made no reply; he was dancing with Margaret, but his thoughts were with Lucy, and his eyes were upon her. Margaret repeated her observation.

"Ah! yes," he then said, detecting no meaning in it.

"I think," said our shrewd conspirator, "that he would have preferred you to dance with Miss Forester."

"I prefer to dance with Lucy--and you." The last two words were added as an afterthought.

Margaret was not offended; she was alarmed; she did not like Mr. Weston's looks.

"You must ask Miss Forester to dance immediately," she said to Gerald.

Gerald obeyed her. He asked Miss Forester to dance. Miss Forester was engaged. Very contented, Gerald strolled away to Lucy, and the next moment the lovers were again in sentimental labyrinths. Margaret understood the task of soothing and amusing Mr. Weston, and she succeeded for a time. Then she devoted herself, for a certain purpose, to Miss Forester; she wished to discover the state of that young lady's affections. But she met her match; after a quarter of an hour's confidential small-talk conversation, Margaret was no wiser then before. At ten o' clock Mr. Hart came, and for a little while Mr. Weston lost sight of his disturbance. But he planted a thorn in the breast of his friend. He introduced him to Miss Forester, and said privately to Mr. Hart, a few minutes afterwards:

"That is the young lady Gerald will marry."

Every trace of colour left Mr. Hart's face. He turned to see how Lucy and Gerald were engaged. They were not together. Gerald was now dancing with Miss Forester; their faces were very bright and animated; indeed, to tell you a secret known only at this time to those two, they had come to a little private understanding, arrived at without direct words, I assure you, which had given satisfaction to both. If words *had* been spoken, they would have run something in this way:

*Miss Forester.* "I love another person, and notwithstanding my mamma's wishes, I shall not marry you."

*Gerald.* "I love another person, and, notwithstanding my father's wishes, I shall not make love to you."

Not one word of this dialogue was spoken, but nothing could have been more plainly expressed. Thereupon Gerald and Miss Forester immediately became greater friends than they had ever been, and were absolutely--in the judgment of outsiders--flirting together most conspicuously. In Mr. Hart's eyes it was not flirtation, it was love-making. But Lucy's face was bright also; there was not a cloud on it. He turned to Margaret; their eyes met, but he could not

read the expression in her face. Truth to tell, she was anxious and nervous, and was beginning to lose confidence in herself.

All this while we have left Mr. Weston, with the words hanging on his lips:

"That is the young lady Gerald will marry."

"Is it settled, then?" inquired Mr. Hart, striving, and striving in vain, to master his agitation.

"Quite settled," replied Mr. Weston, without a twinge.

Mr. Hart was bewildered. Could Gerald have been playing his girl false? It looked like it. There was only one thing that would give the lie to this--the possibility that Margaret was mistaken when she declared Gerald and Lucy to be lovers. He groaned involuntarily as he thought that all evidence was against this possibility. He was awakening from a bitterly beautiful dream, a dream which had clothed his daughter's life with happiness; again was the future dark before him. Mr. Weston told the lie intentionally; he had heard remarks during the evening upon the open attentions which Gerald was bestowing upon Lucy, and he did not choose that his old friend should remain in doubt of his opinion upon such proceedings.

"When you and I were talking about my son's prospects, I told you that he had entangled himself in some way with a girl far below him--you remember, Gerald?"

"I remember very well."

"That fancy is over, I am glad to say; he has evidently forgotten all about it. The fact is, my boy is impressionable, and cannot resist a pretty face. Why, some people might fancy he was making love to Lucy! But I know him, I know him! It is his way. If he saw a new and pretty face to-morrow, he would begin admiring it immediately; he couldn't help it; it is in his nature. He will cool down presently; when he is married I shall indeed be a happy man. You will come to the wedding, Gerald--you, and Lucy, and Margaret. Then we must get Lucy married. Do you know"--and here he peered, not without anxiety, into his friend's face--"that many another father would have been disturbed by what I have heard to-night. One or two foolish persons have said--you'll not mind my repeating the words!--that it looked as though Gerald were making love to Lucy. But we know better, eh, old friend? we know better. He means nothing by it--absolutely nothing--and Lucy, of course, understands that. A girl easily sees, and instinctively judges between earnestness and lightness. And then I remember what you said when we were talking upon this matter; you would not allow your daughter to receive Gerald's attentions without my consent; you would not allow her to marry him without my consent. Those were your words, Gerald?"

"Those were my words," said Mr. Hart coldly and mechanically.

"And you never broke a promise--never, old friend?"

"Never."

"And you would not break this?"

"Not if it broke my heart," replied Mr. Hart, with a shudder of pain.

"And my consent is given elsewhere," proceeded Mr. Weston, with nervous satisfaction; "given elsewhere, as I told you. As for your bright little Lucy--you noticed how she has improved during the last fortnight, Gerald? I really think the visit has done her good--as for her, we will get her comfortably settled presently; and for yourself, Gerald, anything in the way of money----"

"For God's sake," cried Mr. Hart, almost blind with grief, "don't talk to me about money! I must go and speak to Lucy."

He looked about for his darling, but he could not see her. Indeed, she had left the room with Gerald, and the two were now in the garden, little dreaming of the storm that was gathering. Mr. Weston was somewhat shaken by his friend's agitation, but deemed it prudent not to comment upon it. A diversion occurred, and Mr. Weston gladly seized the opportunity of changing the subject. A tall gentleman, very red in the face and very pompous in his manner, approached them.

"Ah," said Mr. Weston, "Mr. Majendie! Delighted to see you. Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Hart."

The gentlemen bowed to each other.

"I intended to be here earlier," said Mr. Majendie, "but there was a benefit at the theatre, and, as my patronage had been obtained, I thought the people would expect to see me."

"No doubt, no doubt," observed Mr. Weston.

"The benefit was for the hospital, and I was compelled to put in an appearance. Not that I approve of such places, but one must make sacrifices."

Here he turned his attention to Mr. Hart, and regarded him with a look of doubt and surprise.

"I beg your pardon; I did not catch this gentleman's name."

"Mr. Hart--one of my oldest friends."

"Hart! Hart Not Hunter?"

He put this in the form of a question, and it had the effect of a cold shower-bath upon Mr. Hart; it dispelled all vapours for a time.

"What if it be?" he asked proudly, returning Mr. Majendie's now steadfast gaze.

A word as to Mr. Majendie. A bag of clothes stuffed with money. The richest man in the district, and the meanest souled and narrowest-minded; a man who wore frills to his shirts, and strutted along with his head in the air like a turkey-cock, and looked down with profound contempt upon the "lower orders." The pride of money oozed out of the corner of his eyes, out of his thick-lipped mouth, out of his voice, out of his manners. Policemen, parochial beadles, female paupers, and charity children regarded him with awe. Altogether he was one of the most contemptible embodiments of money among a crowd of such.

"In that case," replied Mr. Majendie, with his loftiest air, "I should inquire if there was any connection between you and the Plymouth Theatre, and I should express my surprise at Mr. Weston asking my wife and daughters--leaving me out of the question--to meet a common actor on terms of equality!"

"No, no, Mr. Majendie!" said Mr. Weston very warmly. "I assure you, you are wrong; you are mistaking my friend, Gerald Hart--my old and dear friend, Mr. Majendie--for another person."

"Pardon me," said Mr. Hart gently and proudly, and smiling sadly on Margaret, who, observing that something stirring was taking place, had hurried to his side, "Mr. Majendie has made no mistake. If any has been made, it is I who am in fault. Your surmise is a correct one, sir; I am an actor, and am acting under the name of Hunter at the Plymouth Theatre. But Mr. Weston was not aware of it until this moment."

Mr. Majendie turned on his heel, and in his most stately manner left the room with Mrs. and the Misses Majendie, who were all tainted with his disease.

Mr. Weston was hurt in a very tender point; truly it was a most unpleasant incident. Only for one moment did Mr. Hart look into Mr. Weston's face; he saw sufficient in that brief glance to shatter the hope and belief of a life.

His friend was false to him, unworthy of him.

In that moment, also, his own nature seemed to undergo a change.

"Where is Lucy?" he asked, loudly and sternly, of Margaret.

Margaret, without answering him, led him from the room, and he supposed she was about to lead him to his daughter. But Margaret's first intention was to remove him from the observation of the guests, who were already beginning to talk of the incident. That girl the daughter of an actor! they said to one another. Well, it was, no wonder she was so pretty! They know how to make themselves up, my dear! As for Gerald Weston, his attentions to her were now easily to be understood. But they were astonished at old Mr. Weston introducing such people. The girl and her friend had been living in the house for a fortnight. Indeed! And so on, and so on.

Fortunately for them, and for Mr. Hart also, he was out of hearing of this gossip. Margaret led him into the air, and the first persons they saw were Lucy and Gerald strolling toward the house. Mr. Hart's mind was thrown off its balance by grief and passion. He tore Lucy from Gerald's arm, and cried:

"Gerald Weston, are you a coward or a villain?"

"Mr. Hart!" exclaimed Gerald, confounded by this startling address.

"Dear friend," entreated Margaret, "be calm."

Lucy looked imploringly from one to the other.

"No more fair words," cried Mr. Hart; "I have had enough of them! Honesty has died out of the world."

He turned to Mr. Weston, who, fearing a scene, had followed his old friend into the garden, and said in a bitter, passionate tone:

"Never more will I hold out the hand of friendship to you, never more will I set foot beneath your roof, until you have atoned for the wrong you have done me and mine! Go you to your wife's grave, and erase the words you have written on her tomb; they are a mockery there, and rise up

in judgment against you. Come, my child, this is no place for us. We must look elsewhere for truth and faithfulness!"

## **END OF THE SECOND PART.**

### **Part the Third.**

#### **THE DINNER OF THIRTEEN.**

### **CHAPTER I.**

#### **STRANGE PREPARATIONS FOR THE DINNER.**

In one of the prettiest nooks in Devonshire, the garden of England, where the hedges and hill-slopes are filled with apple-trees, stands, where has stood beyond the memory of living man, the Silver Flagon, an old-fashioned, delightful hotel, irregular in shape, as all pleasant hostelries should be, and so embellished with quaint turrets and gables and mullioned windows, as to make it appear more like the retreat of a wealthy gentleman than a house of public entertainment. The principal entrance stands fully thirty yards away from the public road or path, and to reach it you have to pass through an antique wooden gate, and a carefully-attended garden, as delightfully irregular as the house to which it is attached. There is not a square room in the entire establishment, and although from time to time additions have been made to it in the shape of a wing here and a wing there, modern innovations and modern ideas of comfort have not been allowed to spoil its character. Imbedded in the midst of its own grounds, in the rich soil of which flowers and fruit-trees are abundant and beautifully luxuriant, the Silver Flagon is a standing reproach to those Tower of Babel hotels, which it is the fashion now to build.

Fortunately for those to whom it is known, and who enjoy and appreciate its comforts, its proprietor, Gideon Rowe, was, in his ideas, as old-fashioned as his hotel. The Silver Flagon had been in the family of the Rowes for many generations, and had been handed down from father to son for more than a century; and the various members regarded it with so much pride and affection that it had grown to be looked upon more in the light of an heir-loom than a speculation. Gideon Rowe, at sixty-five years of age, was a pleasant, even-tempered, good-looking gentleman, straight as an arrow, with a clear eye and a wholesome colour in his face--caught, mayhap, from some of his famous apples--and with every probability of twenty more good years before him. He was a man of independent property, and he carried on the business of the Silver Flagon as much for pleasure and occupation as for profit. It was probably for this reason that the majority of those who frequented it were gentlemen, who were fond of drinking their old ale and cider, and sometimes their wine, out of the old-fashioned silver flagons, which it was the whim of Gideon Rowe's great-grandfather to have made, and of which there were no fewer than one hundred and twenty in the hotel.

It was seldom that any signs of bustle were to be noticed in the Silver Flagon; but on a certain Wednesday in the middle of August--some few weeks after the occurrence of the incidents heretofore narrated--there were signs of unusual activity in the lower story of the hotel. The cooks were busy, and there was much hurrying to and fro; it was evident that there was a larger number of attendants than usual in the hotel, and that something important was going on. The principal room of the Silver Flagon, which was in shape of an irregular oblong, and sufficiently commodious to accommodate a large number of guests, was situated on the ground-floor, and at six o'clock on the evening of this Wednesday in August presented an appearance

which it is necessary to describe.

The table was laid for a distinguished dinner-party. That it was to be a dinner of the best kind was evident from the furnishing of the table, which comprised the finest plate of the Silver Flagon and a brilliant display of glass. A number of attendants, dressed in court suits of black, were perfecting the details, under the direction of their chief, before the arrival of the guests.

Although it was still daylight the candles in the handsome candelabra were already lighted, the effect of which was not only to darken the room, but to throw corners almost completely into shade. Pictures hung upon the walls--not landscapes, nor scenes of rural or domestic life: the subjects were neither historical nor allegorical; every picture was a portrait. Counting them, you would find that there were exactly thirteen portraits, all of the same size and all handsomely and uniformly framed. That they were painted by one hand was not to be doubted, and being so, and being of a uniform size and uniformly framed, it might reasonably have been supposed that they represented members of the same family; but it was clear that this was not the case. With here and there an exception, they bore no likeness to each other, and in some instances the contrast in the faces and general character of the individuals, as indicated by outlines and expression, was very remarkable. The originals were of various ages, from eighteen or nineteen to sixty mayhap. Casting your eyes around the walls, you would instinctively have paused at the picture of a stern-looking man, the lines in whose face spoke of invincible determination; his dress was pretentiously plain and sombre; one hand, which grasped the back of a chair, grasped it so firmly that the veins were seen to stand out; his lips were set, and there was a frown in his eyes. Whether by accident or design, his picture was so hung as to cause his cruel eyes to bear directly on two faces of a very opposite character from his. They were the portraits of a young lady and a young gentleman--she probably not more than nineteen years of age, he some three or four years older. The girl was in the full flush of youthful beauty, a rose whose leaves were opening to the sunlight of life, delicately nurtured evidently, and whose face was almost spiritualised from its extreme sensitiveness. In this respect the young man, who was also handsome and well-formed, singularly resembled her, and yet there was no likeness between them. These young persons were smiling on each other. Your eyes would also have dwelt with interest upon the portrait of a man about thirty years of age, with a kind and even benevolent face, fair, and with bright blue eyes. Then there was the portrait of one whom you would instantly set down as an old maid, from the precise and severely-demure fashion of her clothes, from the set of her poke-bonnet, and from the sharp but not ill-natured expression on her face. Beside her was a portrait of a very different character--that of a rakish, genial, full-blooded man, with the pleasantest of mouths, and the merriest of eyes, out of which joviality beamed; his hat was set on one side of his head, and between his fingers dangled a cane with a dandy tassel. All these persons were attired in the fashion of a bygone generation.

The room was well supplied with choice flowers. Two folding windows which faced the west opened upon a veranda-terrace, the steps of which led into the gardens by which the Silver Flagon was surrounded. This terrace was also freely and beautifully decorated with flowers, and being comfortably furnished with easy and other chairs and convenient small tables, and a couple of fur rugs spread on the ground, formed the most luxurious and delicious after-dinner lounge it is possible to imagine.

Exactly as a quarter past six o'clock was proclaimed in thin, silvery notes, by the black marble clock on the sideboard, Gideon Rowe, the landlord and proprietor of the Silver Flagon, entered the room. He was in evening dress, and there was a natural dignity in his bearing which proclaimed him master. There was an air upon him which betokened the approach of an event of a grave nature. With attentive eyes--and yet, with something of a sad abstraction in his manner--he examined the appointments of the room, and saw that everything was in its place. With his eyes he made the circuit of the table, and counted the chairs which were placed for the guests.

"One--two--three--four--five--six--seven--eight--nine--ten--eleven --twelve--thirteen."

Therefore it was clear that thirteen persons were expected to dine. Then he ran his eyes over the attendants, and counted them, from one to thirteen. One of these was the chief, and addressing him by the name of Steele, Gideon Rowe called him to his side.

"Your arrangements seem to be perfect, Mr. Steele."

"I think you will find them so, sir," replied Mr. Steele.

"This is--let me see--the eighth year you have officiated."

"This makes the eighth year, sir."

"We have seen some changes, Mr. Steele."

"We have, sir."

"I know I can depend upon you to carry out the affair with discretion, whatever happens."

"Thank you, sir."

There was the slightest tinge of surprise in Mr. Steele's tone, which did not escape Mr. Rowe's

observation. Mr. Rowe made no remark upon it, however, but repeated:

"Whatever happens. After all, it is an exceedingly simple affair, and I shall be glad to see everything well and discreetly done. You have the entire superintendence. Even if I wished, I could not undertake the management, being, as it were, one of them."

This with a glance at the portraits on the wall.

"You shall have no reason to complain, sir."

"The dinner will be served at seven precisely. There must be no mistake about that especially. When the clock strikes, we will commence."

"It shall be done, sir."

"Have the men been instructed in their duties?"

"Yes, sir."

But Mr. Rowe deemed it necessary to address a few words to them collectively. He called them together.

"Mr. Steele has explained to you what your duties are. You all of you understand them?"

"We do, sir."

"There is something for you to understand more necessary than the mere detail of your duties, and that is the manner of their performance. What is required of you is implicit silence and attention. At whatever occurs you will exhibit no wonder or astonishment, but you will steadily and decorously follow out the instructions given to you by Mr. Steele. It is a simple matter, but I wish to impress it strongly upon your minds. You understand me, I dare say."

"Yes, sir."

"Then I need say nothing more to you."

Gideon Rowe did not consider that his manner of addressing the attendants, no less than his words, was sufficient to arouse within them a curiosity which they otherwise would not have felt.

He turned his attention again to Mr. Steele, and asked about the wine. Mr. Steele pointed to the iced pails, liberally supplied with bottles, and to other bottles which did not require icing; these were placed behind a screen at the extreme end of the room. There were, besides the folding windows which opened on to the terrace and the gardens, three entrances to the room. One door, at the south end where the screen was, led to the kitchen and the adjoining apartments where the dinner was being prepared; another, at the north end, immediately behind the chair at the head of the table, could be approached, on the outside, only by way of the veranda, so that any person who wished to enter by this door must of necessity pass the folding windows; the third and last door opened on the general passage of the Silver Flagon. This door Gideon Rowe locked, putting the key into his pocket. As he did so, the silver tongue of the black marble clock proclaimed half-past six.

"Is the doorkeeper here?" asked Mr. Rowe.

"He is without, sir."

"Let me see him."

Mr. Steele hesitated a moment.

"I have been disappointed in the man I wished to engage for the service."

"But you have another?" said Mr. Rowe quickly.

"Oh! yes."

"And a dependable man?"

"Quite dependable, to all appearance, and from his credentials."

"That is all that is necessary. His duties are onerous, but not burdensome. Let me see him."

Mr. Steele went out by the door behind the screen, and returned with an elderly man, dressed like the others. His hair, almost white, was cropped close to his head, and there was a forced composure in his face, as though he had been schooling himself for his task. Gideon Rowe scrutinised him keenly.

"Your name is----"

"Michael Lee."

"You answer promptly, like a soldier."

"I am not one, sir."

"You are an elderly man--about my own age, I should say. Is your eyesight good?"

"Fairly good for my age."

"I ask because in the place where you will stand the light is rather dim. I must test you."

He looked around for a newspaper or other printed matter, and finding none, drew a letter from his pocket. It was in a man's writing, and a spasm came into his face as he gazed at it. He held it open at a little distance from Michael Lee.

"Are your eyes good enough to read this?" Michael Lee changed colour, and his lips trembled as his eyes fell upon the writing.

"You can read it?"

"I can read it quite well," replied Michael Lee, and continued, in a gentle, sad tone, reading from the letter: "So now, my dear old dad, good-bye, and God bless you. With fondest love, your affectionate scapegrace of a son, Philip Rowe."

Gideon Rowe paused before he spoke again.

"That is a good credential for your eyes."

"The letter is from your son," observed Michael Lee respectfully.

"Yes, from my poor boy. Written a long time ago. He is dead. Thank you for that mark of your sympathy."

"I also am a father."

"You can understand then the kind of grief that oppresses a man when he loses an only child, whom he loved very dearly. But we are wandering from the point. For the business before us, you are all the better for not being too young."

Michael Lee made an effort to shake off his sad humour, and answered somewhat briskly:

"So that some good comes to one for being old. Though I should rather say that I should be all the better for being a little younger. I should have no objection to my ripening time coming over again. But time that ripens us, withers us; time that withers us, kills us."

"Ah, well," said Gideon Rowe, with reflective nods, and gazing in surprise at Michael Lee, "we must drop away and make room for others." He cast a strangely-serious look at the thirteen chairs arranged round the table. "You are a superior man, I perceive."

Still striving to rally his spirits, Michael Lee said:

"One other man besides yourself, sir, has sometimes thought so."

"Any one whom I know?"

"Yes, sir; you know him slightly."

"Who may he be?"

"I, myself."

Gideon Rowe smiled.

"Mr. Steele did well to select you. Now pay careful heed to what I am about to say. Your duties to-night are not heavy. You are to stand as doorkeeper, and all you have to do is to act strictly in accordance with the instructions I give you. Your position will be there"--pointing to the door at the north end of the room, which led on to the veranda. "You will stand outside that door, and admit only those who establish their right to enter. And only those have the right of entrance whose names are written on this paper."

Michael Lee received the paper from Gideon Rowe, and read the names aloud:

Reuben Thorne.  
James Blanchard.  
Henry Holmes.  
Rachel Holmes.  
Thomas Chatterton.  
Ephraim Goldberg.

Dinah Dim.  
Stephen Viner.  
Caroline Miller.  
Edward Blair.  
Clarence Coveney.  
Frederick Fairfax.  
Richard Weston.

"You will keep the paper as a guide," said Gideon Rowe, over whose countenance shades of varying expression had passed as the names were read, the most noticeable being one of sad pity at the name of Caroline Miller. "Not another person but those whose names are set down there must be allowed to pass in under any pretence. But you may still be liable to make a mistake, as you have never seen these ladies and gentlemen. That contingency is provided for; examine this."

He placed in the hands of Michael Lee a small piece of ivory in the shape of a heart. Michael Lee examined it with curiosity. Gideon Rowe continued:

"You will neither admit nor announce any lady or gentleman who does not produce a heart shaped like this in ivory, with his or her name written upon it in red letters."

"That is lucky," observed Michael Lee.

"What is lucky?"

Michael Lee quickly answered: "My grandmother wore an ivory charm, with signs upon it, which was given to her by a gipsy woman; she had a superstitious regard for it."

Gideon Rowe considered for a few moments whether Michael Lee's words were intended to be taken in jest or earnest, but he could not resolve the point.

"Very well," he said, "now you can go to your post. Here is a seat, you see. You may find your work somewhat dull, but you will contrive not to fall asleep."

"When all the persons," said Michael Lee, "whose names are set down here have arrived, will it be necessary for me to keep to my post?"

"No," replied Gideon Rowe, with another strange look; "when all the persons whose names are on that paper have arrived, your duties are at an end."

## CHAPTER II.

### **ARRIVAL OF BUT ONE GUEST AT A DINNER FOR THIRTEEN.**

Leaving Michael Lee at his post outside the door, Gideon Rowe went to the folding windows, and drew the curtains over them. He lingered at the window to inhale the faint perfume of lavender which the breeze brought into the room.

"Summer is dying," he murmured.

Beautiful as was the evening, there was something inexpressibly sad in the appearance of this room, with its dim light, and the black clothing of the attendants, who moved about like shadows.

"Mr. Steele," said Gideon Rowe, "you understand that the first guest who arrives will preside at the head of the table. I will wait upon him myself."

"As heretofore, sir?"

"As heretofore."

All the arrangements being completed, the attendants stood in silence behind the chairs, forming a black hedge around the table. Gideon Rowe glanced anxiously at the clock. The hands indicated eighteen minutes to seven. That he was singularly and powerfully agitated was evident, but he controlled his excitement by a strong effort. Another minute passed and another. The clock struck three-quarters past six, steps were heard on the veranda, and almost immediately afterwards Michael Lee opened the door by which he was stationed, and advancing a step, called out:

"Mr. Richard Weston."



The sound of Michael Lee's voice afforded relief to every person in the room, for all were beginning to be oppressed by the gloom and silence which prevailed. Mr. Weston, as he entered, glanced before him with a shrinking, air, and, grasping Gideon Rowe's hand firmly, as though he derived comfort from the contact, shaded his eyes with his left hand, and peered timidly at the attendants, whose faces he could not see in the uncertain light.

"Only the servants," observed Mr. Rowe, answering the look; "I am glad to welcome you."

"Thank you, Mr. Rowe, thank you," said Mr. Weston. "I am the first then?"

"You are the first," replied Mr. Rowe gravely.

"I am almost ashamed to confess it," said Mr. Weston, "though I don't know why I *should* be ashamed to confess it to you, for we are old cronies, eh, Rowe? old cronies--but before I entered the room, and indeed for many days past, I have had a fearful and unreasonable fancy that, that--"

Gideon Rowe, with a serious smile, supplied the words which Mr. Weston was at a loss to utter. "That some one might have been before you, and deprived you of your position at the head of the table."

"It was so, I assure you," assented Mr. Weston; "but I have been much upset lately--crossed and thwarted on all sides, and where I had the best right to expect obedience."

"I have heard something--rumour is many-tongued, you know."

"Yes, yes; and tells lies, and invents, and makes black white. I can speak to you as an old friend. Tell me what you have heard."

"It is an impertinence for people to speak of these things, for they are family matters; and, indeed, it is difficult to bring vague rumours into definite words. Briefly as I understand it, Gerald---"

"My son--yes."

--"Refuses to marry the lady you have chosen for him, loving another lady, and having pledged himself to her. That much has reached my understanding, through the rumours I have heard. Is it true? Has Gerald really pledged himself to a lady of whom you disapprove, and does he really love her?"

"Love her! No. It is a fancy which will be gone in a few weeks. The boy doesn't know his own mind."

"That is not the impression I have formed of Gerald. He is somewhat obstinate in his likes and dislikes. And he really has pledged himself to this lady, and she really is a lady?"

"She is the daughter of an old friend of mine," replied Mr. Weston, with nervous hesitation; "of an old friend who has inflicted great pain upon me. She is a good girl--a good girl, I do believe--but not the wife for Gerald."

"Why not? Because she is poor?"

"Ah! you have heard, then. Can you not see that Gerald has a position to maintain, and there are duties which society exacts from us? Classes must be kept apart. But do not speak any further of this now; it is not the time. On the anniversary of this night my mind is occupied by but one subject." He glanced at the table. "It might be but yesterday! The same old silver--the same old service--and some of the same old wine, eh, Mr. Rowe? the same old wine."

"The same, Mr. Weston: there is but little of it left. But it will last our time, and then will come new wine, new fashions, new men and women, new everything, to grow old as we have grown old, and to make way for other fashions and other men and women, as our fashions and ourselves are making way for them."

"There are some things that do not seem to change," said Mr. Weston, looking towards the clock, and feeling in his pockets. "The same old clock, too. But I cannot see the hands. Ah, here they are!" He had been searching his pockets for his spectacles, and he now produced the case. "Looking at my eyes now, you wouldn't think that I am growing more short-sighted every day, eh, Mr. Rowe?"

"Your eyes are as bright as they were thirty years ago."

"So they may appear, but they deceive me--as everything else does. Bless my soul! they are gone!"

He referred to his spectacles; his spectacle-case was empty.

"Shall I send for them?" asked Gideon Rowe.

"No, no; they would not be found, perhaps. I must do without my eyes to-night. The clock is right, eh? What does it mark now?"

"Thirteen minutes to seven."

"Thank you. As I was saying, there are some things that do not change. The Silver Flagon, for instance--there is no change in that."

"There is no change in it from my first remembrance of it. I should like it never to change. I used to wish that it might be carried on in exactly the same way, and in the same old fashion, as it has been carried on during this last hundred years. But it is in the nature of things to change, and my wish will not be fulfilled. Had other things turned out as I hoped, my desire would almost certainly have been frustrated by the new scheme for the branch railway that is being talked about. I am told that its course is designed immediately in the rear of the garden." He looked regretfully towards the folding windows, through the transparent curtains of which the western sky could be seen reddening in the light of the declining sun. "One might fancy one's self almost out of the world here; but if the railway scheme be carried out, good-bye to the charm of perfect peacefulness which rests upon the Silver Flagon. Good-bye, perhaps, to the Silver Flagon itself. The thought hurts me, but not as much as it would have done had my dear boy been alive."

"Rowe!" exclaimed Mr. Weston, in a sympathising, wondering tone, "you have had news of Philip, then?"

"He is dead, poor lad! You know how I loved the boy, and how my heart was bound up in him. I cherished the hope that, when his wild fit was over, he would come and take my place here. The dear lad was working to bring home a hatful of money to repay me for what I had done for him. As though I needed repaying! Shame drove him away, and kept him away while he was poor. He did not know his father's heart."

"How did the news come?" asked Mr. Weston softly.

"His wife brought it--a dear good girl. She is in the house now, and will remain here as my daughter. You shall see her in good time, and hear the sad story from her own lips. I think the news would have killed me but for her."

"My Gerald and your Philip were good friends," murmured Mr. Weston. "Gerald will grieve, indeed, when he hears the news."

"Life is full of disappointment, full of changes. Man proposes, God disposes. I hope that I should die with my Philip by my bedside in this peaceful spot, and he dies at the other end of the world, sixteen thousand miles away, while I am still a hale old man. I have the comfort of knowing that his heart was beating with love for me--the dear lad!" He paused for a moment. "Notwithstanding this grief, I still have something to be grateful for, and I bow with submission to the Divine will. I have a new daughter, such a girl as I would have chosen for him, and mayhap a great blessing will be bestowed upon me in the course of a couple of months, and my Philip may live again in his son. And have I not still the dear old Silver Flagon? I look upon it almost as part of my own flesh and blood. My life is wedded to it by sweet and solemn memories. Why, I remember these old flagons when I could scarcely toddle! I used to look at my face in them when I was a boy; there was one with a long dent in it--here it is now on the sideboard--which seemed to split my face in two." He gazed wistfully into its polished surface. "It isn't the same face as it was then."

"What does the clock mark now?"

"Eight minutes to seven."

"How slowly the time passes! The moments are clogged with lead."

"It is only the years that fly," said Gideon Rowe. "We watch the minutes and the days, and the years slip by without our heeding them. But all at once we wake to the fact, and a sudden shock comes upon us. Truly 'we are such stuff as dreams are made of, and our little life is rounded with a sleep.'"

There was nothing singular in the perfect familiarity that existed between the speakers. Gideon Rowe came of an old family (though if he had come from a new family--a phrase I cannot quite understand--it would have been all the same) who had acquired their money honestly, and he had lived a blameless life. Such a man is the equal of a king. It was to be especially noted that the present conversation was carried on with a careful avoidance--by Mr. Weston most certainly--of a subject which must have been uppermost in their minds, and that directly one paused, the other took up the cue, as though they were desirous that not a moment should pass in silence. Another thing to be noted was, that frequently in the middle of a sentence, Mr. Weston--whether he or his companion was speaking--turned his head over his shoulder toward the door by which Michael Lee was stationed, with a timid, nervous, frightened look, as if expecting to see an apparition there. Still more conspicuous was his studied avoidance of the pictures that were hanging on the walls. If in an unwitting moment he happened to raise his eyes towards the portraits, he turned them away again with visible agitation. The attendants in the room preserved silence while their superiors were conversing. They stood in their places like statues.

"And we fret ourselves so unwisely," continued Mr. Rowe, with something of a wary look towards Mr. Weston. "We torture ourselves so unnecessarily. Instead of enjoying the opportunities which good fortune has placed in our hands, we bring unhappiness upon ourselves by setting our minds upon the accomplishment of certain wishes which we deem to be good, notwithstanding that they distinctly clash with the hopes of those who are dearest to us. We forget that life is short. Let me give you a bit of my philosophy, and apply it to ourselves. Here we stand, having grown from youth to manhood, from manhood to old age, marching from our very cradles into our graves. The changes that come naturally upon us we bear, if we are wise, with patience and resignation; with hope, also, that carries us in our lives to the contemplation of other spheres beyond the grave. There is a wonderful amount of goodness and sweetness in life, with all its sad changes. What best rewards us--what brings us the most pleasure and satisfaction--is to enjoy this good, in so far as it affects ourselves and others, and to make the very best use of it which lies in our power. You cannot deny that this is a sensible philosophy."

"It sounds so."

"It is not only a sensible, it is a wise philosophy. Let me apply it. Say that I have a child whom I love"--the memory of his Philip brought a touching sadness into his tone--"say that this blessing, which I have unhappily lost, is mine. If by any action of mine I can make that child happy, it is surely good and wise in me to do so, and adds to my enjoyment of life. Say that this child, having grown to manhood, with a man's intelligence and a man's hopes, has set his heart upon a certain thing--say, plainly, that he loves a girl who is both virtuous and good, whom he wishes to make his wife, and that I constitute it my business to thwart him--it is surely unwise in itself, if only in the fact that it brings discomfort to me, that it fills my days with uneasiness, and makes my home unhappy. Now, this is a selfish view, but it is one which occurs to me by way of illustration."

"But say, for the sake of argument," said Mr. Weston, somewhat uneasily, "only for the sake of argument, mind----"

"Very well, for the sake of argument."

"That this child's fancy was a foolish one, and unwise in every sense."

"I don't admit that; but we are only arguing. Pray proceed."

"And that you, his father, saw another and a better way of bringing happiness into his life."

"Who judges that my way is the better way?" demanded Mr. Rowe.

"Yourself."

Mr. Rowe shook his head, and taking a pair of spectacles from his pocket, asked Mr. Weston to use them. Mr. Weston put them on gladly, but they did not suit his sight; all was dim before him. He returned the spectacles to Mr. Rowe.

"I cannot see through them," he said.

"Nonsense, nonsense," replied Mr. Rowe; "you are mistaken. You can."

"I tell you I cannot."

"Yet that is just what you insist others can do. You insist that they can see through *your* spectacles."

"I say nonsense, nonsense to you! I understand your trick, but it does not apply in this case. I say that in the difference of opinion between you and your son which you have spoken of you are the better judge. You are the older of the two by forty years. You know the world; you have experienced its trials, its temptations, its disappointments; you have seen its follies, its delusions. Therefore you have a perfect right to say to your son, 'My boy, you are wrong! you must conquer your idea--your fancy. Be patient, and time will show you its folly; and one day you will thank me for opposing your wishes.' Why," exclaimed Mr. Weston, raising his voice slightly in his excitement, "do you not love your son?"

"That it is not to be doubted."

"And what you do in this matter, is it not for his good?"

"Ah, my friend, my friend! I may think so, in my obstinacy, but it is I who am wrong. Let us speak plainly. You know it is of your Gerald we are speaking----"

"Of course I know it."

"What more can you desire than his happiness? The girl he loves, and has pledged himself to, is poor, it is true; but she is a lady, and is in every way worthy of him. Why embitter your life and his by standing in his way?"

"One moment, Mr. Rowe," interrupted Mr. Weston; "how do you know all this? Have you seen the girl?"

"I have."

"And her father, have you seen him?"

"No, but I hope soon to do so. From what I have heard, he is a man whom it would be a proud privilege to call friend."

Mr. Weston made a movement of uneasiness.

"The subject annoys me," he said, "let us cease discussing it."

"We have no time to continue it," said Gideon Rowe, glancing at the clock, "or, despite your wish, I should not allow it to drop. We ourselves were young once, and looked at things with different eyes from those with which we view them now."

"How near to the time is it?"

"But one minute."

During this minute there was silence in the room. Michael Lee's voice was not heard. Mr. Weston moved slowly to the head of the table. The attendants stood in silence behind the empty chairs. Presently the clock struck the hour of seven. As the sound of the last stroke was dying away, Gideon Rowe said to Mr. Steele:

"Serve the dinner."

Mr. Richard Weston was the only guest.

### **CHAPTER III.**

#### **ARRIVAL OF UNEXPECTED GUESTS.**

Standing behind the twelve empty chairs, the attendants performed their duties with as much ceremony as could have been expected from them had they been waiting on the most exacting and punctilious guests; but it was not difficult to see that they did not like the service in which they were engaged. From time to time they gazed furtively at each other, and according to the susceptibility of their temperaments, were more or less disturbed by the strangeness of the scene. There was something so ghostlike in this silent dinner, that when the attendants moved they stepped lightly, as though they were fearful of raising the dead. The only persons who were not dismayed at the sight of the empty chairs were Mr. Weston, Mr. Steele, and the proprietor of the Silver Flagon. Indeed, that the chairs were empty appeared to afford satisfaction to at least one of the party--Mr. Weston.

"What has become of your unreasonable fancy?" asked Mr. Rowe.

"Gone, thank God!" replied Mr. Weston, with a sigh of relief, draining his glass. "But I had it very strong upon me. We cannot help these superstitious feelings, and in my case there is a distinct cause for them, in words once uttered by Reuben Thorne."

"Poor Reuben! He was the merriest soul I ever met."

"A careless, ne'er-do-well!" exclaimed Mr. Weston.

"No man's enemy but his own," added Mr. Rowe quickly. "The merriest part of the table was always where he sat, during the few years he was with us. What words do you refer to?"

"It was on the fourth anniversary of this day, and all the thirteen were present. Death had not taken one of our party. I was sitting next to Reuben, and the conversation was loud and jovial. All were in high spirits with the exception of three--Caroline Miller, Edward Blair, and Stephen Viner. But that it is incumbent upon us to speak gently of the dead, I could find it in my mind to couple the name of Stephen Winer with bitter words."

"You couple his memory with bitter thoughts. Why spare the words? He was a cruel man, with an unfeeling heart."

"Hush! hush! He has gone where he will be judged."

"And where," said Mr. Rowe, in no way softened, "the spirits of Caroline and Edward rise in

judgment against him. I am glad you feel as I do toward the man who destroyed the happiness of two young persons whose only fault was that they loved each other too well."

"You have made me," said Mr. Weston, with a heightened colour, "wander from my theme."

"You wandered from it yourself," retorted Mr. Rowe, "by mentioning the name of Stephen Viner."

"Were it not," said Mr. Weston, with marks of agitation in his face, "that we are old friends, I should think you had a design to irritate me."

"I have a design to speak plainly. If we can learn a lesson from the dead which it would be good to learn, it is worse than folly to reject it. The parallel is a strange one. Caroline Miller and Edward Blair are not the only young lovers who have been parted----"

"Stop, Rowe," interrupted Mr. Weston, in a tone of suppressed passion. "I desire that you will not continue the subject. It is unkind, cruel of you, and the conclusions you draw do me great injustice."

He again emptied his glass, and the next few moments were passed in silence.

"I beg your pardon," then said Mr. Rowe, more gently; "I was betrayed out of myself. You were speaking of Reuben Thorne."

"All at the table were conversing loudly together," said Mr. Weston, continuing his reminiscence with visible effort: it was evident that silence was oppressive to him, "when my attention was called to Reuben by several voices crying, 'What was that you said, Mr. Thorne--what was that you said?' 'I said,' he replied, 'that if I happen not to be myself the last survivor of this party--and I hope not to be, for the duty he will have to perform will be a dismal one--I promise to visit him, whoever he may be, and drink wine with him once more. Will any others join me?' Unthinkingly, those at the table responded, 'I will,' and 'I will!' I raised my hand for silence. 'It is,' I said, 'too grave a subject to jest upon.' But Reuben was not to be diverted from his light humour. 'I have promised,' he said; and there was an end of the matter. Little did I think, when those words were exchanged, that I should be the last survivor, and that Reuben Thorne's promise would make such an impression upon me."

Mr. Weston ate very little, but he drank a great deal of wine, and pushed his plate from him with nervous haste, wishful to bring the solid part of the dinner quickly to an end. There were many courses, however, and the serving and removing of them occupied some time. The colours of the sunset could be seen through the folds of the curtains which hung before the windows, changing from a clear rose-red, like the blush on the face of a fair woman, to the deeper glow which mantles the face of a brunette; from that to purple, fringed by darkest blue; thence by delicate and sadder tints, melting one in the other, into quieter shades, until the fiery sky grew calm, and heralded a lovely and peaceful night. As daylight disappeared, additional candles were lighted, and the room would have presented a cheerful aspect but for the empty chairs and the serious faces of the attendants. Then, for the first time, Mr. Weston purposely raised his eyes to the portraits which hung upon the walls.

"Ah, me!" he sighed. "And this is all that remains of them--painted canvas! I cannot distinguish their faces without my spectacles, but I can see them in my mind's eye. All dead, all dead, but ourselves!"

"Few lived to our age," remarked Mr. Rowe.

"How many--how many? Let me see. One--two--three; no more. You were right when you said 'tis only the years that fly. And some died very young. Whether was it for good or ill, Rowe, that we, strangers to one another, should have been brought together by one unknown to all of us?"

"It can scarcely have been for good," replied Mr. Rowe. "Looking back, as we can look back, upon the lives of those to whom the money was left, to what one of all those who are dead can it be said to have brought happiness? To some it brought a curse. Too well do we know the story of those two hapless ones, Caroline and Edward, whom it drove to an early grave. Left to the absolute guardianship of a man whose heart was stone, those orphans met and loved. In all human calculation, no lot in life could be happier than that of these lovers would have been had they married. But to marry without Stephen Viner's consent entailed upon them, according to the provisions of the will, absolute beggary; and this consent their guardian refused to give. He cast a strange spell upon his delicate, susceptible ward. His strong mind and will dominated her sensitive nature absolutely. He won from her a solemn promise that she would not wed without his consent. Dinah Dim, that kindly old maid, told me that Viner made Caroline swear this upon the Bible. Edward and Caroline were but boy and girl when they were first given into the guardianship of this man--what wonder that they loved as they grew to man's and woman's estate? We all knew of their love, and interceded for them, vainly. Prayers, entreaties, remonstrance--all were useless. You yourself were one of the most earnest in your entreaties, but Stephen Viner turned a deaf ear, and so arranged that the lovers were to be parted. Edward was to be sent to India, 'where he would get over his foolish passion,' Stephen Viner said. Of my own knowledge I am aware that Edward wanted Caroline to marry him and defy her guardian. But her oath, which she was never allowed to forget, was of too solemn a nature to permit of this; and

besides, she had a clear and painful remembrance of privations endured by her parents when she was a child, and, knowing that they had married for love against the wish of their friends, she refused to bring a similar suffering as her dowry to Edward. You know the sad ending. Driven to despair, the young lovers drowned themselves--at least, so it was supposed, when their bodies were found in the river. You remember the gloom the news cast over our party when we met, and the savage looks and words which were cast at Stephen Viner. Who that is acquainted with this sad story can doubt that the money left so strangely brought a curse to these two innocent young souls?"

By this time it was night. The dessert was now on the table, which required but guests around it to make a very charming scene. Mr. Weston had drunk a good deal of wine, and was in a feverish, excited condition. Michael Lee still kept watch outside the door. The only voices that were heard were the voices of Mr. Weston and Mr. Rowe. This latter person was evidently determined not to lose sight of the principal object in his mind, and almost every word he uttered had reference to it.

"At such a time as this," he said, "it is but natural that our thoughts should revert to those who are gone. I am thinking now of my dead Philip, with reference to worldly things. Do you know, friend, that I would cheerfully live the rest of my days in poverty if the sacrifice of my worldly goods could bring my son to life?"

"They are the natural feelings of a father," responded Mr. Weston. "Were I in your place, I would surely feel the same."

"And yet how strangely do we regulate our actions with reference to those we love! While they live, we thwart their dearest hopes; when they are gone, we are ready to make the extremest sacrifice upon the altar of our affections. But then it is too late."

He would have proceeded further but that a sudden spasm from Mr. Weston diverted his attention. Following the direction of Mr. Weston's eyes, he turned toward the folding windows.

"Did you hear nothing?" asked Mr. Weston in a low tone.

"No."

"I fancied," murmured Mr. Weston, in explanation, "that I heard a step upon the veranda."

Mr. Rowe went to the window, and partly drew the curtains aside. The moon was rising, and the soft light could be seen through the opening.

"There is no one there," said Mr. Rowe, returning to Mr. Weston's side. "As I was saying, when we have lost those whom we loved best in the world, and whose natural and innocent desires we thwarted while they lived, we beat our breasts and reproach ourselves----"

Again he was interrupted. Michael Lee, the doorkeeper, entered the room, and following Mr. Rowe's last word, came Michael Lee's announcement:

"Mr. Reuben Thorne."

Mr. Weston's face grew white as the person announced approached and bowed.

"I am late," said the new-comer, dropping into a chair; "but better late than never, they say."

He poured out a glass of claret, and rising, said, with another bow to Mr. Weston: "Your health;" and again resumed his seat.

"Am I dreaming?" asked Mr. Weston, in a low tone of fear, addressing himself to Mr. Rowe.

Reuben Thorne heard the words, and before Mr. Rowe could speak, himself replied:

"No, faith; it is I who have been dreaming--dreaming for many years. Life is a dream; and death!--but we will not speak of that. Live and learn, they say. Let us correct the maxim. Die and learn, is infinitely truer, as all men will find. If we could live and unlearn, it would be better for us. 'Tis a conflict, from the cradle to the grave--heart against head. And head wins, the rule is. Men would be happier were it otherwise. Better for us to go back, and play at children over again."

He was so exactly the counterpart of one of the portraits on the wall, in every detail of dress and personal appearance, that he could not have been more like had he actually been the living presentment of the picture. But the portrait was there and the man was there, and the man looked up at the painted likeness of himself with some kind of satisfaction.

"If my memory serves me," he continued, still addressing Mr. Weston, "it was a good old fashion for the chairman to welcome his guests as they arrived. You have not addressed to me one word of welcome. At all events, we will drink wine together."

He raised his glass, and Mr. Weston mechanically raised his. Bowing to each other, they emptied their glasses simultaneously. Then Mr. Weston spoke for the first time, in a hushed, awe-

struck tone.

"I remember the words you uttered on the anniversary of our fourth gathering. I recalled them before you entered. You promised to visit the last of the thirteen who was left and take wine with him. You asked if the others would join you; all, or nearly all, promised to do so." He shuddered as he spoke.

"The promise will be redeemed by our friends," said Reuben Thorne, "as it is redeemed by me. But I have another purpose in coming to-night."

"What purpose?"

"A purpose in which I am not the only one engaged. Others are with me. You will know more presently. Do you see any change in me?"

"None. You are to me the same as when I last saw you. Not a day older--not a day." He, also, glanced at the portrait for confirmation.

"That is many years ago now. I see a change in you. Your hair is white; you are an old man. Perhaps in another year you, too, will have passed away from among men. It will be well for you if you have sown no seeds of unhappiness, which may grow into life-miseries when you have gone. Even I, with no human ties, even I, who had no wife or child, would, if I could, live my time over again."

"Yet you were the merriest of all our company," said Mr. Weston, nerving himself by a strong effort to sustain his part in the conversation, gaining courage to do so from the wine, which he drank freely; "you can have no regrets."

"I have one." He looked toward the portrait of Stephen Viner with anger. "If I had known what was to occur through that man's villainy--if I had known the end of those two young lives, the melancholy fate of Caroline Miller and Edward Blair, I would have saved them despite the penalty I would have had to pay."

"How would you have saved them?"

"I would have killed the man," said Reuben Thorne, quietly, "who by his cruelty destroyed two innocent lives. I would have killed one to save two."

Mr. Weston scarcely heard these last words; a step upon the veranda drew his attention from Reuben Thorne. Again Michael Lee's voice was heard:

"Clarence Coveney."

A man fifty years of age entered, dressed as Reuben Thorne was dressed, in the fashion of a bygone generation. He bowed to Mr. Weston and took his seat.

"Once more," he said, nodding to Reuben Thorne.

"Once more," responded Reuben Thorne. "We were speaking of Stephen Viner."

"He is not here."

"No; but he will come."

Other steps upon the veranda, and Michael Lee's voice again:

"Henry Holmes. Rachel Holmes."

Two, whose names only proclaimed them brother and sister, entered with the same ceremony, and took their seats. They were unlike each other in appearance, and the lady, who was young, was the more composed of the two.

"It is so long since we met," she said in a soft tone to Mr. Weston, "that Henry was doubtful of the welcome we should receive."

"Why should he be doubtful?" said Reuben Thorne. "Every one here has a claim to be present. Is it not so?" he asked, addressing himself to Mr. Weston.

"It is so," replied Mr. Weston.

"And all are welcome," continued Reuben Thorne.

"And all are welcome," continued Mr. Weston mechanically. The words seemed to be forced from him.

"Whether the proposition," said Reuben Thorne, "to meet once in every year, as we did for many years--each more or less according to the tenor of his life--was or was not a wise one, it was accepted by all without demur. Let us, then, now that we have met once again, banish all ideas of strangeness from our minds; let us be cordial and friendly to one another, as we once were. This

meeting will be the last. Let us be merry; and let only those be sad who have no regrets."

"Were that really exemplified in life," said Rachel Holmes, "there would be less sorrow in it."

"Somewhat of a philosophical paradox, that," observed the landlord of the Silver Flagon.

The circumstance of Mr. Rowe taking part in the conversation brought relief to Mr. Weston. The scene in which he was playing a part appeared to be less unreal, and he was less startled by the voice of Michael Lee, the doorkeeper, who announced, in quick succession:

"James Blanchard. Thomas Chatterton. Ephraim Goldberg."

Mr. Weston, white and trembling, rose and bowed to them as they entered.

"There are eight of us now," said Reuben Thorne, in a cheerful tone; "but five more remain. I remember well the occasion and the motive that first brought us together."

Another guest joined the party in the midst of the speech.

"Frederick Fairfax."

"Nine," continued Reuben Thorne. "If this meeting is less pleasant than the first, it is not a whit less strange. Surely that is Dinah Dim's step upon the veranda."

They all turned turned their faces to the door. "Dinah Dim," called out Michael Lee.

An old woman, with snow-white hair, tall and bent, entered the room with a light step, and looked briskly around. Her likeness to her picture on the wall was something marvellous. Not a hair was out of its place; of this there were five rows of curls on either side of her head; mittens on her hands and wrists; her gown of old-fashioned brocade; a scarf across her shoulders; eyes very bright; hands small and white; a complexion like a peach.

"So you are all before me," she said, in quick, silvery tones--"that scamp, Reuben Thorne--how are you, my child?--and the Holmes's, and Mr. Blanchard, and Coveney, and Fairfax, and Chatterton, and Goldberg. Is that all? Ah, no; here is my child, Richard Weston." She curtsied to him, and held out her hand; he took it in his. "Why, child, you forget what to do with it, you used to kiss it when you were younger." He kissed her fingers. "Your hair is as white as mine, child; when I first knew you it was bright and curly. I shall take my seat next to you. And there is my friend, Mr. Rowe--as straight as an arrow. Now, my dears, why do we want the attendants about us? We can help ourselves and chat more freely. Send them away, Mr. Rowe, send them away."

At the sign from Mr. Rowe, the attendants, nothing loth, left the room, and did not enter again. The old lady continued:

"Now we can breathe. How many chairs are empty? One, two, three. Stephen Viner, the monster, is not here; and those two poor children--ah, me! Give me something to drink. No, not wine; water. I hope none of you will drink too much. Reuben Thorne, put down that glass! Drink is your ruin, and you know it. Who was speaking before I entered?"

"I," replied Reuben Thorne.

"You always had plenty to say. Go on, then; I dare say I interrupted you."

"The subject was about our first meeting not being more strange than this. Let me thank you for your presence here. You do not forget that it was I who first proposed this gathering."

"You have nothing to thank us for," said Rachel Holmes; "we are controlled by independent forces."

"Rachel Holmes," cried Dinah Dim, "your words were always intelligible to sensible ears. Go on, Reuben."

"I have nothing to go on with particularly, and nothing very particular to say. My mind is filled, by but one subject just now."

"What subject?"

"The absent ones--two whom we loved, one whom we hated. Say--am I right?"

"We all share your feelings," said Dinah Dim.

"I would prefer to hear each speak for himself," said Reuben Thorne, his eyes travelling from one to the other of the strange company.

One after another expressed their adherence to his sentiments with reference to the three who were absent.

"All but Mr. Weston have spoken," said Reuben Thorne.



"If I know anything of Richard Weston," said Dinah Dim, "he agrees with us with all his soul. Why, of all our company, he is the man who was ever the most eloquent on the beauty of love! He married for love, my children. I call upon you to drink to the memory of his wife."

The guests rose and drank the toast, bowing to Mr. Weston as they did so. He raised his glass, and drank with them.

"Who," continued Dinah Dim, with vivacity, "has the best claim to speak with authority upon this subject? It is not unknown to us that in his married life he tasted the sweet happiness that springs from mutual love. And when he lost his wife, did he not write upon her tombstone, 'Love sweetens all; love levels all?' Honour to the man who, not in theory but in practice, carried out this noblest of all the creeds. It is fit that he should be the last survivor, and that he should preside to-night. Dear children, you know I was the oldest of the thirteen, and you always treated me with kindness. Well, it was right that it should be so, for I might have been the grandmother of some, when we first met. But it was my sad fate to dream only of the happiness which I once fondly hoped would be mine. I do not remember that I ever told you my story." She turned to Mr. Weston for confirmation or correction.

"I never heard it," he said.

"It is soon told. The man I loved was drowned at sea before we were married. That is the history of my life. Brief enough, is it not? He was drowned, and I lost him. That is how I grew into an old maid, living upon the memory of love. I found my consolation as all find it who are faithful. Though," said Dinah Dim, her tones becoming lighter, "I think that Reuben Thorne would have tried to tempt me to change my name had I been ten years younger."

"I might," assented Reuben Thorne, "had I not suspected that you were Constancy."

A shade of grief rested for a moment on Dinah Dim's face.

"I had that word used to me once when my heart was beating with the anticipation of a happy future."

"By your lover?"

"By my lover, lost to me for many years; lost when I loved him most."

A heavy step was heard upon the veranda, and there was silence in the room until the voice of Michael Lee was heard:

"Stephen Viner."

Almost before the words had passed his lips, the new comer had made his way to the table, and without a motion or word of salutation dropped into a chair.

## **CHAPTER IV.**

### **MARGARET'S TRIUMPH.**

A dead silence reigned for many moments after the appearance of the last comer. All eyes were turned upon him in anger and displeasure, but he did not raise his face to meet their gaze. It was a cruel face, with hard lines in it, a face which ordinarily was devoid of any expression of kindness; but, although sternness was native to it, irresolution and some signs of remorse were visible on this occasion. That he heard no word of welcome was evidently--if one might judge from appearances--distressing to him, and he sat in silence, with hands tightly clenched beneath the table.

It was now ten o'clock, and the moon was at its full. The curtains of the window had been drawn aside by one of the guests, and the light of a lovely moon added to the peacefulness and beauty of the night. The landlord of the Silver Flagon regarded the guests watchfully and warily, and with uneasiness; but his attention was principally directed to Mr. Richard Weston. The old gentleman's face was flushed with wine and excitement; after the first feelings of fear and dismay at the appearance of these unexpected visitors, he had striven hard to nerve himself, so that he might play his part in this strange scene in a befitting manner; that his nerves, however, were highly strung was shown by an occasional convulsive twining of the fingers, and by his placing his hands before his eyes and then removing them, as though to prove to the evidence of his senses that he was not dreaming. Dinah Dim, who sat next to him, was also very attentive in her

observance of him, and now and again placed her hand on his, and took away the wine glass which he would have raised to his lips.

She was the first to speak.

"The presence of this man," she cried, in an agitated tone, "is contamination. Why is he here on this last night of our ever meeting?"

Stephen Viner, with his eyes fixed still upon the table, waited in expectation of some other person speaking. As no one answered Dinah Dim's question, he did so.

"I was constrained to come," he said.

"For what reason?" she retorted. "For your own pleasure or ours? Friends, I appeal to you. Did this man's presence ever bring one smile to our lips, or engender one kindly thought or feeling?"

"Never," answered Reuben Thorne; and "Never," answered the others.

"His life was a curse to him, and to those whom a sad fortune placed in his power. I ask again, why is he here?"

"Your words are harsh," said Stephen Viner, raising his hand as if for mercy. "Your tone is pitiless."

Dinah Dim laughed scornfully. "This man talks of pity," she exclaimed, "in whose cruel breast no spark of it ever dwelt. A pretty preacher, truly!"

"I have told you," he said, in a low tone, "that I was constrained to come to-night. Say that I am here for judgment."

"What kind of judgment," demanded Dinah Dim, "can you expect from those who know you? Has not your own heart punished you sufficiently?"

"It has," he replied, placing his hand to his breast with a gasp of passion. "Can I not make atonement?"

"What atonement, after all these years?"

"I can ask their forgiveness; I can tell them, as I tell you, that I repent of my cruelty, and that if the years could roll back--alas for me that they cannot! I would act differently."

"See you now, my children," said Dinah Dim, rising--"see you now, Richard Weston, who have tasted the priceless blessing of pure devoted love--this man who deliberately destroyed the happiness of two young lovers, comes before us when it is too late, and repents when it is too late. A pretty atonement truly is this that he proposes to make by asking the forgiveness of two innocent young creatures whom he drove to their death, and whose only crime was that they loved. What judgment should we pass upon him--what judgment does he deserve? As you sow, you shall reap. Let this man reap as he has sown. Would any one here hold out to him the hand of friendship?"

"Not one," answered Reuben Thorne, and every person echoed his words.

Even Mr. Weston, towards whom Dinah Dim looked for assent, was compelled to say:--

"Not one."

"Shall the curse of money," proceeded Dinah Dim, "for ever outweigh love--love that humanises the world? The man who, for money's sake, deliberately drags two loving souls asunder--the man who, for money's sake, deliberately poisons the lives of two young creatures whose hearts are drawn together by the holiest sentiment which sweetens life--brings desolation upon his soul here and hereafter. Who among us has done this?"

"Stephen Viner," said Reuben Thorne, and again they all echoed his words. All but Mr. Weston, over whose face a convulsive shudder passed.

Dinah Dim looked at him for a moment, and observing his agitation did not press him to join in the general condemnation.

"Let Stephen Viner, then," said Dinah Dim sternly, "go from among us. His presence brings shame upon us."

The man thus judged and condemned gazed appealingly around, but saw no pitying sign. As he rose to go, Dinah Dim held up a warning hand, and Michael Lee's voice was heard for the last time:

"Caroline Miller. Edward Blair."

The lovers entered, side by side. Dinah Dim moved from her place, and passed her arm round the waist of the young girl, who appeared to need support. They approached with slow and

hesitating steps, and Mr. Weston turned towards them; but he did not see their faces. The excitement of the scene had completely overpowered him, and, with a wild motion of his hands, he sank to the ground in a state of insensibility.

\* \* \* \* \*

When he recovered he was lying on the veranda, and Gideon Rowe was kneeling by his side. Uncertain whether he was awake or asleep, he closed his eyes, and seemed to fall naturally into a quiet dream--but a dream in which he was conscious of though not actually interested in, all that passed around him. It was as he lay thus, with his eyes closed, that he felt the influence of a womanly presence, in soft touches and murmured words, and a tenderness of action not to be expressed. Opening his eyes he saw no woman, but only his friend, Gideon Rowe, the landlord of the Silver Flagon by his side.

"That is well, that is well," said Gideon Rowe gently. "You are better now."

Mr. Weston held his hands for a little while before he spoke.

"I do not feel ill. Why am I here? What has occurred? Ah," he cried, with a shudder, as his eyes fell upon the folding windows of the room, "I remember. Are they still there?"

"They! Who?"

"They! Who?" echoed Mr. Weston, wonderingly and weakly. "Can you ask?--you were by my side?"

"Come, come," said Gideon Rowe, in a soothing tone, "you must not distress yourself with fancies. Why do you look so strangely toward the room? No person is in it. You were overcome, and you fainted. But you are strong now. Come, let us see if you can walk a bit. That's right, that's right."

He assisted Mr. Weston to rise, and they paced the veranda slowly, Gideon Rowe purposely pausing by the window which led to the room, to give Mr. Weston assurance and to dispel his fears.

"Will you go in?"

"No, no," cried Mr. Weston, "we will sit here; the night is very beautiful. Rowe, do you believe in omens?"

"Has any serious one ever occurred to you?"

"None, in my remembrance."

"Were you not telling me of poor Philip's death some time to-night?"

"Yes," replied Gideon Rowe, with a heavy sigh.

"How did he die? What was the cause of his death?"

"Poor lad! he died by fire. It is a dreadful story."

The father's voice was shaken by grief.

"If it will not distress you too much to tell me," said Mr. Weston, taking Gideon Rowe's hand, "I should like to hear more about him. Do not think me unkind, but I am in a strange mood. I feel like a child. What o'clock is it?"

"Past midnight."

"About Philip, now; indulge me. I loved the boy myself."

"Your Gerald loved him; they were true friends. Had Philip lived, they would have found much joy in their friendship, but fate willed it otherwise. Poor Philip died in the goldfields, in Australia--but I promised that you should hear the story from the lips of the widow. Will you see her? She is very near."

"I fancied just now, when I awoke, that a woman was near me."

"It was Margaret."

"Margaret!" echoed Mr. Weston.

The name brought with it reproachful remembrances.

"That is the name of the girl Philip married."

"Yes, I will see her. One moment; I must not miss saying what was in my mind. I was speaking of omens. You had no foreshadowing of Philip's death?"

"None; the poor lad was dead many months before I heard the news."

"But omens come occasionally to some persons."

"I have read and heard so."

"Gideon, one has come to me; it may foreshadow my death. I have seen the dead."

Gideon Rowe made no comment upon this, but went to the end of the veranda, and called "Margaret!"

Margaret--*our* Margaret--herself appeared, simply dressed. She approached Mr. Weston, with a serious expression on her beautiful face.

"It *is* you," he exclaimed, gazing at her in wonder.

"Yes," she said, "poor Philip was my husband."

"Why did you not tell me this before, Margaret?"

"I had my reasons. I was not sure that I could trust you."

"Margaret," interposed Gideon Rowe, "Mr. Weston wishes to hear the particulars of our poor boy's death; I promised that you should tell him."

Margaret turned her head; her lips trembled; tears rushed to her eyes.

"Nay, nay," said Mr. Weston; needing sympathy, he was in the mood to give it; "another time. It will pain her too much."

But Margaret had a purpose in telling the story, and she related the particulars of Philip's death in simple language and in feeling tones. She felt every word she spoke; she was not acting now, and natural pathos it was that drew tears from Mr. Weston.

"I saw my devoted darling in the flames," said Margaret, between her sobs, "looking for me with blind eyes. I tried to get to him, but they held their arms round me, and I could not escape from them. But there was one--ah, there was one!--who, seeing my despair and Philip's peril, rushed into the flames to save his friend. Too late, alas! He dragged my darling out of the burning house, but could not save his life; yet he gave my Philip to me for a few blessed hours."

Overcome by her emotion, Margaret paused.

"A noble action!" said Mr. Weston. "A noble man!"

Margaret nerved herself to proceed. "He and I nursed Philip, and watched the life die out of him. Every word my darling uttered is graven on my heart. 'Dear old fellow!' he said, with feeble gasps, to this dearest of friends. 'Noble old fellow! God bless Margaret and you!'"

"Indeed, indeed," said Mr. Weston, "a blessing should fall upon such a man!"

"Take care of Margaret," whispered my Philip; "be a father to her. Dear old dad I hoped to see you, and show you my darling. But he will bring her to you.' He uttered but few words after that," continued Margaret, who standing now between Mr. Weston and Philip's father, held a hand of each, "but they all referred to his noble friend and to me, and you, sir" (to Gideon Rowe), "whom he loved most tenderly. So my Philip died. Perhaps he hears me tell the sad story of our love on this solemn, beautiful night. Philip, my darling!" she murmured softly, raising her tearful eyes to the bright heavens; "if you can help me bring the blessing you invoked on our dear friend's head, you will bring a blessing also to your Margaret, in whose heart you will live till she joins you in a better world than this!"

"Is this friend, then, unhappy?" asked Mr. Weston.

"Most unhappy--most undeservedly unhappy. Ah, sir, if you had it in your power, would you not help him--would you not be proud to bring joy into the life of such a man? You were right in calling him noble. Such a nature as his ennobles the world! And yet at this moment he is stricken down by grief."

"He is here, then--in England?"

"He is here, in England, in Devonshire, within sound of my voice."

"What is his name?"

"I must relate an accident of his early life before I tell you, in proof that this act of devotion

toward my Philip was not the only act of sacrifice and devotion he has performed. Not the only one, did I say? His life is full of noble deeds. When he was young he had a friend--nay, do not take your hand away; he and his friend loved the same girl. He saw that the girl's heart was given to his friend, whom he had kept in ignorance of the state of his affections, out of consideration for him. Listen, now, to what this man did when he fully learned the truth. Loving this girl, he could not remain near her without betraying himself. Knowing that the revelation of his love would bring distress both to his friend and the girl he loved, he went from them suddenly. He did more than this; his friend at that time was not rich. He himself had some little store of money--between one and two thousand pounds, as near as I can learn; he placed this money--the whole of his fortune--in the hands of a lawyer, to be given to the girl, with strict instructions that neither she nor his friend should know from whom it came. It is now for the first time that his friend hears of this act of sacrifice and unselfishness. Why do you turn from me?"

"Let me be, child, for a few moments," said Mr. Weston, in broken tones; "I might have guessed--I might have guessed! Where in the world could I find another such noble heart as Gerald's? I have wronged him--deeply wronged him."

"A fault confessed is half atoned for," said Margaret, pursuing her advantage. "Complete the atonement. You can do so."

"Child, my promise is given elsewhere. You do not know what strange things have happened this night, Margaret, that, apart from what you have told me, would induce me to complete the atonement. Margaret, I have been visited by the spirits of the dead--by men and women who passed out of the world years and years ago, and whose faces I have seen only in my dreams. *They* came to warn me, as it seems--but I cannot speak of it."

Margaret assisted him to a chair, and knelt by his side, Gideon Rowe standing a few paces away.

"Do not disregard their warning," she said sweetly, "if you disregard my pleading--for I do plead, and you know for whom."

"I know--I know; but my promise stands in the way."

"What promise?"

"Gerald is promised to another--I cannot depart from my word."

Margaret smiled tenderly.

"What is the name of the young lady?"

"Miss Forester. You saw her on the unhappy night on which my friend left my house with his daughter."

"It was an unhappy night for all of us. Did this promise not bind you----"

He took up her words.

"Did this promise not bind me, I would, if I could find the courage to do so, and were I assured that Gerald and Lucy truly loved each other, go to my friend--of whose goodness every time that I speak of him brings fresh proof--and ask the hand of his daughter for my son."

Such happiness stirred Margaret's heart at these words that he felt her warm tears upon his hand as she kissed it again and again.

"I cannot express my joy," she said, "for I know that you never yet forfeited a promise. Father," she called Gideon Rowe to her side, and whispered a few words of instruction in his ear. He nodded smilingly, and left her. "Dear Mr. Weston, if such a sentiment as pure loves exists--and we know it does--it exists in the hearts of Lucy and Gerald. As for Miss Forester, here she is to speak for herself."

If Miss Forester and Rachel Holmes were one and the same person, then Mr. Weston might have believed that Miss Forester was there to speak for herself; for the lady who came now upon the scene was dressed in the old-fashioned garments worn by Rachel Holmes when she made her appearance at the dinner, an unexpected and certainly unwelcome guest. Finding no clue to the enigma, and sorely disturbed by the late occurrence, Mr. Weston grasped Margaret's hand in deep agitation.

"She is no phantom," said Margaret, with a smile; "she is really and truly flesh and blood, as you and I are. I see that you are filled with wonder, and if you will say, Margaret, I forgive you,' I will explain what is now a mystery to you, and will relieve your mind of the fears which oppress you."

"Could you do that," he responded, "I would say freely 'Margaret, I forgive you,' whatever it is that you have done."

Again Margaret called Gideon Rowe to her side, and again, with a few whispered words,

despatched him to do her bidding.

"I have played the part of a scheming woman to-night. The truest friend I ever had or ever shall have, the noblest soul I have ever known, is *your* friend, Gerald Hart. He has rendered me such services as no man or woman could possibly forget; he risked his life for me and mine, and my heart is filled with gratitude towards him. At Silver Creek, where I first met my poor Philip, I learned that Mr. Hart had a daughter whom he loved with a tender and beautiful love. She was the pulse of his life; as she suffered and enjoyed, he suffered and enjoyed, and her happiness was nearest and dearest to his heart. You have heard the story of our lives at Silver Creek, and of my darling Philip's death, and you can understand with what feelings of true regard and veneration I look up to this steadfast friend. We came home, and he had the happiness of embracing his Lucy, whom he had left a child, and who was now grown into a beautiful woman. And as good and as pure, sir, as she is beautiful. But I discovered that Lucy had a secret grief which would soon send her to her grave, unless it were dispelled. Ah, sir, you do not know the truth, the constancy, the depth of tenderness which dwell in that dear girl's soul! We came to your house as visitors. I was the first who saw that your Gerald and my Lucy were lovers--that they had been lovers before her father's return home--and I did my best to aid them. We had to keep this secret from you, for you were bent upon other views for Gerald, and I learned to my dismay that certain words which passed between you and Mr. Hart would cause him to sacrifice his own and Lucy's happiness rather than that she should marry your son without your consent. Then came that unhappy night when your friend went from your house, with his heart almost broken by the belief that he had been deceived where most he trusted. Now, sir, I had pledged myself to bring Lucy and Gerald together, and to obtain--what I have already (see, sir, how bold I am!)--your consent to their union. In the face of all the difficulties, how was I to accomplish this? I flew to a friend, by name Lewis Nathan, an old sweetheart of my mother's. I had heard that you had a Bluebeard's room in your house, and acting upon Mr. Nathan's suggestion, we entered the room during your absence, and discovered thirteen portraits hanging on the walls--nothing more. When Mr. Hart and Lucy left your house I was in despair, for I saw no way of accomplishing my desire. I made myself known to Philip's father in this dear old Silver Flagon, and I won my way to his affection.

"I had not been in the Silver Flagon a week before I found myself in a room hung round with portraits--thirteen of them--exact duplicates of those which line your Bluebeard's room. Curious to know, I coaxed the story of these pictures out of Mr. Rowe, and then I thought I saw a way to win your consent. I consulted Mr. Nathan, and we planned the scheme. It was a desperate expedient, dear sir, but I am a bold creature, as you know, and I alone am responsible for all that has occurred to-night. I am an actress, and some of those who presented themselves to you at the dinner are actors whom I engaged from the theatre. All your guests were not professionals, sir. This lady, Miss Forester--who is Miss Forester no longer, for, determined not to be forced into a distasteful union, she was privately married to the gentleman to whom her heart is given--entered with fervour into my scheme, and personated Rachel Holmes; her husband personated Henry Holmes. See, sir, some of your late guests are in the garden. Here are your spectacles; I could not afford that you should wear them before; I was fearful lest your sight should be too sharp for me. Did we play our parts well, sir? Reuben Thorne was enacted by my trusty friend, Mr. Lewis Nathan. And I, sir, am Dinah Dim, very much at your service."

Mr. Weston revolved this explanation in his mind during many moments of silence. I am not disposed to follow the current of his thoughts; he was a worldly man, and an analysis might detract from the grace of the act which he presently performed. He was compelled to confess that he had been conquered, and he found some consolation in the inexpressible relief he experienced in being relieved of his fears. He had a question or two to ask, however.

"Who was Stephen Viner?"

"An actor."

"And Caroline Miller and Edward Blair?"

"Lucy and your son, sir. I was doubtful of them from the first, afraid that their feelings might betray them."

"Rowe," said Mr. Weston to the landlord of the Silver Flagon, "you had a doorkeeper?"

"Yes--Michael Lee by name."

"Where is he?"

Margaret interposed. "That is one of my secrets, sir. My father had not seen your friend, Gerald Hart, until he introduced himself to-night."

"Until he introduced himself to-night!" exclaimed Gideon Rowe. "Nay, I have never yet seen Mr. Hart."

"You have," replied Margaret, with a smile; "he is Michael Lee."

Thus, by this strange and bold device, our Margaret won the day. Truly, it was a triumph of love. As Richard Weston and Gerald Hart stood face to face clasping hands once more, and as they turned towards their children, who were radiant with joy, Margaret murmured to herself the name of "Philip," and looked up to heaven, not unhappily. They remained together until morning broke. As the wondrous colours came into the sky, Margaret said to Mr. Hart:

"Do you remember the night of the storm in Silver Creek, when you were robbed of your money, and when you and Philip and I stood at the window watching the day break?"

"I do, dear Margaret--dear daughter!"

"God bless you!" she said, with a sob.

"And you, my dear," he softly answered. "You have accomplished the supreme happiness of my life."

**THE END.**

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