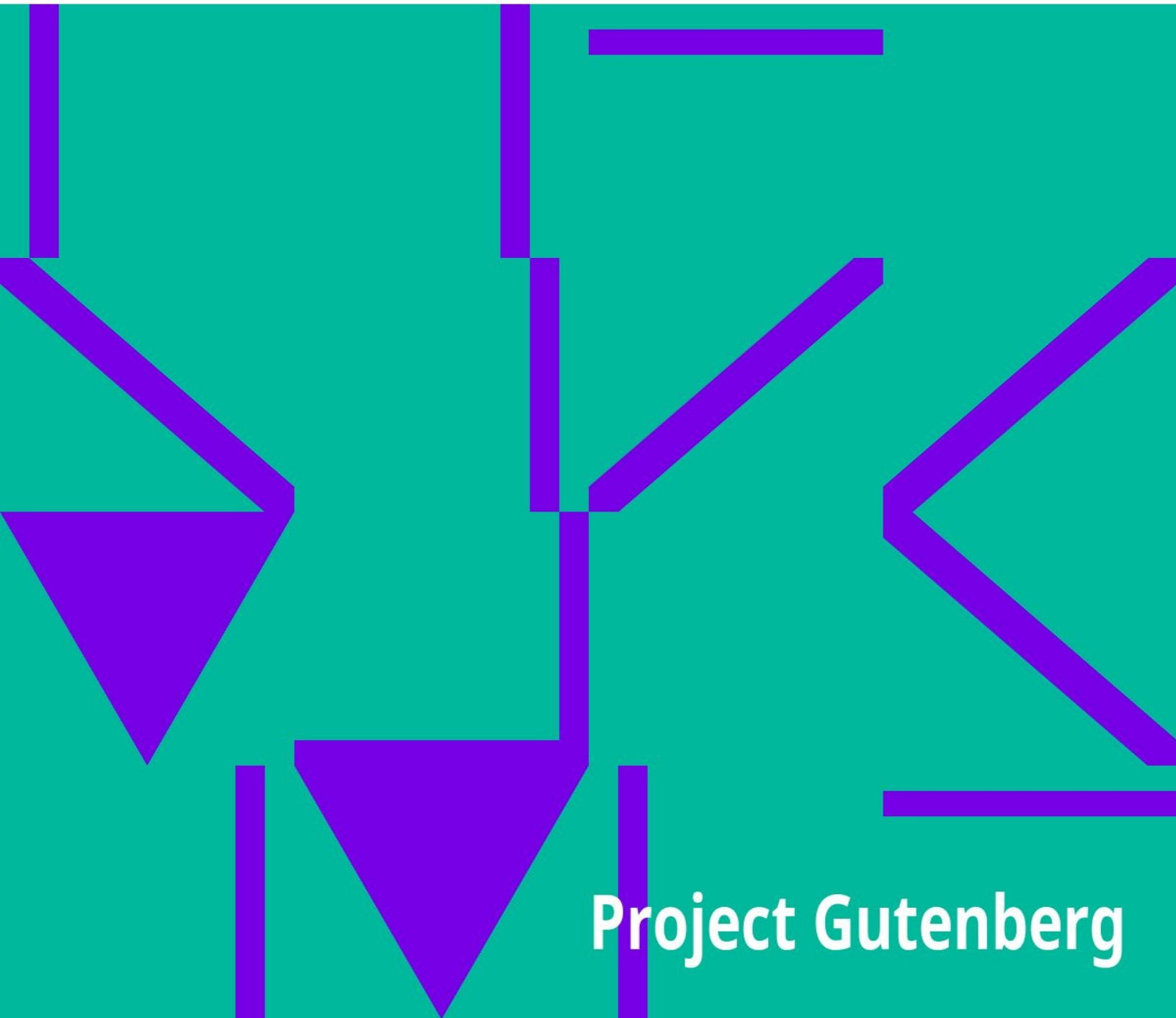
The Mynns' Mystery

George Manville Fenn



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"The Mynns' Mystery"

Chapter One.

A Rough Suitor.

“Be quiet! What a silly little fluttering dove it is, struggling like this, ruffling all your plumes, and making your face so red. But how it becomes you!”

“Mr Saul Harrington, how dare you!”

“Because I love you so, you little beauty. There—and there—and there!”

The kisses were given in spite of the frightened looks and struggles; but at each kiss there was a faint cry of shame, dislike, and indignation mingled.

“You know I love you, and I know you love me.”

“It is not true, sir. Let me go!”

“It is true, or you would have screamed the house down.”

“If I do not scream for help, it is because I would not alarm your uncle. I tell you he is dying.”

“Gammon, Gertie! The old tyrant—he is too tough. No such luck for us. There, don’t struggle any more. You are going to be my darling little wife.”

“Mr Saul. Pray, pray let me go.”

“Directly you have given me your word, Gertie. There, it is your fault that I was so rough. You do love me?”

“I hate you, sir, with all my heart, and you force me to say it. This is a cruel outrage. What have I done that you should dare to treat me so? Is there no one to help me? Bruno! Bruno!”

There was a short yelp, a sound as of a dog leaping to the floor, the rattle of nails in the hall, and a plump up against the door, accompanied by an impatient bark.

Saul Harrington, a good-looking man of five-and-thirty, started, and involuntarily loosed his hold of his captive, just as there was a sharp peal of a bell, and the slight, dark-eyed, trembling girl he had held in his arms slipped away, darted to the door of the sombre-looking dining-room, threw it open, and ran out, just as a great black Gordon-setter bounded in, set up the frill of hair about his neck, and uttered a low fierce growl, as he stood glaring at the occupant of the room.

“Lie down, you beast!” was the savage retort. “Oh, that’s it, is it? Well, the time may come, my fine fellow, when I can do as I like here, and, if it does, why, then—well, I’m sorry for you.”

But the dog did not lie down, and when requested to give his paw, turned his back upon the visitor, and slowly walked out of the room.

“A beast! All her coyness. A bit frightened, perhaps. Don’t suppose she was ever kissed before. She liked it, though, a pretty little jade. Well, what are you staring at, you old curmudgeon?” he continued, standing apostrophising a portrait hung over the sideboard—that of a stern-looking, fierce-eyed old man, the said eyes seeming to follow him, go where he would. “I’ll kiss her, and as soon as you are dead I’ll marry her, and we’ll spend your rusty coin, you miserable old usurer. I wish you were out of the world.”

He threw himself in a great morocco-covered easy-chair and bit his nails carefully all round, pulled off his left-hand glove, and treated the fingers there to the same trimming, as he looked furtively about from the rich thick Turkey carpet to the solid furniture, and the great silver salver on the sideboard; ending by trying to appraise the two fine paintings at the side of the room.

“Yes,” he muttered, “one ought to do pretty well. I’m tired of being poor—and in debt.”

“George!” he said softly, after gazing thoughtfully before him. “No, he’ll never leave him a penny. The father killed that. Gertie will get all. I shall get Gertie, and the silly little jade will not struggle then.”

He rose, laughing in an unpleasant way, and began walking up and down the room. Then, growing weary and impatient, he crossed to the door,

opened it gently, looked out into the dull hall, with its black and white marble floor, and listened.

Tick-tack! tick-tack! the slowly beating off seconds measured by a tall, old-fashioned clock. Not another sound; and Saul Harrington drew back into the room and closed the door.

“She’ll come down again,” he muttered, with the same, unpleasant laugh. “Trust her woman’s nature. All latent yet, but it’s there, and opportunity will bring it out. All her pretence. She knows that she will be my wife and girls like a little rough courting, or I’m no judge.”

An hour, that seemed like two, passed slowly away, and then Saul Harrington rang the bell.

At the end of a minute a quiet, very old-looking woman in black, with white cap and old-fashioned muslin cross-over, came to the door.

“Go and tell Miss Gertrude I am waiting to see her again.”

“She is with master, sir.”

“Well, go and tell her, Mrs Denton.”

The woman shook her head.

“I dare not, sir. It would send master into a fit of fury.”

“Pish! Never mind; I’ll wait. How is he?”

The woman shook her head, lifted her white apron, and applied a corner to her eyes.

“None of that, Mrs Denton,” said Saul Harrington, with a sneering laugh. “So fond of him, eh?”

“Yes, sir. Dear old master.”

“Ha, ha! Dear old master! Won’t do, Denton, I’m too old. Don’t wait.”

“If it would please God to spare him for a score of years,” said the old

servant piously, as she left the room. “A bit harsh and a bit of a temper; but I know—I know.”

“I’ll wait and see her again, if I have to wait all night,” said Saul Harrington to himself. “Hang this grim old house! It’s almost as gloomy as a tomb.”

Chapter Two.

Uncle James' Plan.

"That you, Gertie?"

"Yes, uncle, dear," and the girl, who had made a brave effort to grow calm, approached the side of a great four-post bedstead, where a large, thin, yellow hand lay upon the white coverlet.

"That's right, my dear, don't leave me long. It's getting very near the end, my darling."

"Oh, uncle, dearest, don't—don't talk like that," cried the girl, throwing herself upon her knees, and passionately kissing the yellow hand.

"Ah, that's nice, my pet—that's real. You couldn't have acted that."

"Uncle, dear," whispered the girl, as she raised herself, and gently passed her arm beneath the neck of the gaunt, withered old man whose head lay upon the white pillow, "it doesn't sound like you to talk so bitterly."

"Oh, yes, it does, my dear. Why shouldn't I tell you I know you are a dear, good, patient little darling, true as steel to the disagreeable, miserly old hunks whom everybody hates and wishes dead. But who was that downstairs?"

"Mr Saul Harrington, uncle."

"Damn him!"

"Uncle, dear!"

"Well, he deserves it. Do you know, Gertie, that man only says one prayer, and that is for my death."

"Oh, uncle, you misjudge him."

“Eh? What? Has he been trying to court you again?”

Gertrude inclined her head.

“Eh? What?” cried the old man excitedly, and his deeply sunken eyes seemed to glow. “You—you are not beginning to like him?”

“Oh! uncle, dear,” sobbed the girl, “I detest him, and he frightens me.”

“Ah!” ejaculated the old man, with a sigh of content followed by a low chuckle. “A fox, that’s what he is Gertie. Thinks I shall leave you all my money, and that he’ll marry you and get it to spend—a mean, despicable, cunning fox. But I haven’t left you a penny, my pet.”

“No, uncle.”

“But don’t tell him so. I want him to be punished. He deserves it. I helped him a dozen times, but he always turned out badly. Not left you a penny, Gertie. Ain’t you bitter against me?”

“Bitter against you who have always been like a dear father!”

“Eh? Well, tried to be, little one,” said the old man as he toyed with the girl’s long, wavy dark hair. “Poor little fatherless, motherless thing! why, of course I did. But now look here, Gertie. I’m wasting time, and there’s so little left.”

“Don’t say that, dear.”

“But I must, my pet. And don’t cry; nothing to cry for. An old man of eighty-six going to sleep and rest, Gertie—that’s all. I’m not sorry, only to leave you, my dear. I want to live till George comes home and marries you. You—you will marry him, Gertie?”

“If he is the good, true man you say, uncle, and he will love me, and wish me to be his wife, I will pray God to make me a true, dutiful companion to him for life.”

“But—but you don’t speak out, my child,” said the old man suspiciously.

“It is because I can’t, uncle, dear. The words sees to choke me. It is such a promise to make.”

“But you never cared for any one else?”

“Oh no, uncle dear. I never hardly thought of such a thing.”

“No; always shut up here in the dingy old Mynns with me.”

“Where I have been very happy, uncle.”

“And Heaven knows I tried to make you so, my child. And you will be happy when I’m gone—with George. For he is all I say—a true, noble fellow. But—but,” he cried, peering into the girl’s eyes from under his shaggy brows, “suppose he is ugly?”

“Well, uncle dear,” said the girl with a little laugh, “what does that matter?”

“Ay, what does that matter? But he can’t be ugly, Gertie. Such a handsome little fellow as he was when I saw him last. And he’ll be a rich man, Gertie. He shall have The Mynns and everything, for the injury and wrong I did his father—my poor, poor boy!”

“Uncle, dear, don’t reproach yourself,” cried the girl, kissing the withered forehead, as the old man’s voice broke into a whimper, and his hands trembled. “It was all a mistake.”

“No, Gertie, my dear; I was a hard, bitter, passionate man, and made no allowances for him. He would not stick to business, and he would marry one woman when I wanted him to marry another, and I told him he’d be a beggar all his life, and we quarrelled. Yes, he defied me, Gertie, when I told him he would come cringing upon his knees for money, and he said he would sooner starve. Only like yesterday,” continued the old man after a pause, “and I never saw him but once more, he came to say good-bye, with his wife, before they sailed for what he called the Golden West, and we quarrelled again because he disobeyed me and would not stay. I was ready to forgive him, Gertie, if he would have stayed and taken to business, but he wouldn’t stop with the arbitrary old tyrant, and they went and took their boy.”

The old man lay silent for some minutes, raising the girl's soft little hand to his lips from time to time. Then he startled her by bursting into a long low laugh.

"Uncle, dear!"

"Eh? Only laughing at him, my pet—that boy George. Such a determined little tyrant. Did what he liked with the old man. Wasn't afraid of me a bit. A little curly-headed rascal, and as sturdy as could be. Such eyes. Gertie; looked through you. 'I don't like you, grandpa,' he said. 'You make my mamma cry.' Bless him! that he did. Ha, ha, ha! I saw him when he was washed—a little, chubby, pink cupid of a fellow, splashing in his tub; and there, on his little white breast, was a blue heart with an arrow stuck in it. His father's doing after he came back from the West—he went out first, leaving his wife. And I asked the little chap about it. 'Did it hurt much, my man?' I said. 'Yeees,' he said. 'And did you cry, George?' I said. 'Pa said I was to be a man and not cry,' said the little fellow sturdily, 'but I did a little, and to did my mamma.' 'Have you no feeling for your child?' I said to his father. 'Yes,' he said, 'but I want to teach him how to bear pain. It will come easier to him, father; for he will have to bear it as I have had in my time.' Yes, Gertie, I recollect it all. That's twenty-five years ago, and I've never seen George since. But perhaps I shall now, for he's coming back, Gertie."

"Yes, uncle."

"Fetch me the second drawer; the keys have worked right behind."

She thrust her hand beneath the pillow, and drew out a bunch of very bright-worn keys, before crossing the room to a tall, black oak cabinet in the corner near the bed's head. Unlocking the glass door, she unlocked also and took out a small shallow drawer which, evidently according to custom, she placed across the old man's knees, afterwards assisting him to rise, and propping him with pillows, so that he could examine the contents.

"There," he said eagerly, as he took a handsome gold watch from its case, the chain and seal pendant being curiously formed of natural nuggets of gold.

The watch was of American make, and looked as new as if it had only just left the maker's hands.

The old man's eyes looked on eagerly as the girl took and opened the watch, the peculiar sound emitted, as she carefully re-wound it, seeming to afford the invalid the greatest satisfaction.

"Not lost, has it, Gertie?" he said quickly.

"No, uncle, dear," said Gertie, comparing her hands with those of her own watch.

"Nor likely to. A splendid watch, Gertie. No trashy present, that. My boy's made of too good stuff to mar his future. But I was blind in those days, Gertie—blind. Now read it again."

As if well accustomed to the task, the girl held the open case to the light, and read on its glistening concave, where it was deeply engraved with many a flourish and scroll:

James Harrington, Esq,
from his grandson.
Pure gold from the golden west.

"Pure gold from the Golden West!" said the old man, as he stretched out his hands eagerly and ran the nugget chain through his fingers. "And I mocked at his poor father, and told him it was all a myth. Put it away, Gertie. George is to wear that always, my dear. I've saved it for him. You know I've only worn it on his birthdays since."

"Yes, uncle, dear," said the girl gravely, as she replaced the watch in its case.

"And now look here, my dear," said the old man, taking up a small pocket-ledger and handing it to Gertie; "open at page six."

"Yes, uncle," said the girl wonderingly; and then looking at him for further instructions.

"Do you see that?"

“Yes, uncle—entries of money, twenty-five pounds, over and over again.”

“Do you know what that means?”

“No, uncle; but you are tiring yourself.”

“Ay, but I shall have plenty of time to rest, Gertie, by-and-bye.”

“Uncle, dear!”

“Ah, don’t you cry. Listen, Gertie. I wanted to try him—George. I’m a suspicious old man, and I said when he sent me that watch, a year after his father and mother died, ‘It’s a sprat to catch a herring!’ Ha, ha, ha! and I waited and wrote to him—such a lie, Gertie—such a lie, my dear.”

“Uncle!”

“Yes, the biggest lie I ever told. I wrote and told him that things had gone wrong with me—so they had, for I had lost two hundred and fifty pounds by a man who turned out a rogue—and I begged George to try and help his poor old grandfather in England for his father’s sake, and might I sell the watch.”

“And what did he say, uncle?” cried Gertrude eagerly.

“He sent me a hundred pounds, Gertie, in an order on a London bank; and he said if I ever sold that watch he would never forgive me, for it was his father’s wish that he should send it as a specimen of the gold I had disbelieved in. A hundred pounds, Gertie, and ever since, for four years now, he has sent me twenty-five pounds every quarter.”

“Then he thinks you are poor?”

“Yes, he did till I sent to him to come home. But I invested every penny, Gertie, and there is the interest; and now what do you say? Is he a true man—good enough to love?”

“Oh, uncle—yes!” cried the girl, with the tears glittering in her eyes.

“Yes, my darling, a worthy husband for you; one who will love and protect

you when I’m gone.”

“But, uncle, dear—” faltered the girl.

“Yes—yes?”

“Does—does he know?”

“That he is to marry you? Yes. He knows by now that he is a rich man, or will be when I’m gone, and that he has the sweetest, truest little wife waiting for him here. Put the book away; you and Mr Hampton know everything. Lock up the cabinet and put the keys under the pillow again; and some morning, when you find I’m too fast asleep to wake again, take the keys and keep them for my dear boy.”

“Oh, uncle, dearest!” sobbed the girl.

“God bless you, my pet! But I put it off too long. I may not see my boy again. That’s right; quite under the pillow, dear. Thank you. Kiss me, not as your uncle, but as James Harrington, the grim old man who told your father and mother he would protect their little girl, and has tried to do his duty by her.”

Gertrude raised the withered hand, and held it to her lips, as, after removing the pillow, the old man lay back, tired out, and slept calmly and peacefully. And, as she watched him, she thought of her position there in that great house a dozen miles from town. How she had grown up with no young companions save those she had encountered at school, and how the time had glided away. How of late the old man who had adopted her had begun to talk of his approaching end, and chilled her at first with horror till she grew accustomed to his conversation; but never chilling her so much as when Saul Harrington, the old man’s nephew, had begun to make advances to her—advances which filled her with disgust and dread.

She shivered as she thought of the scene in the dining-room that day; and, like a black cloud, the idea arose as to what her fate would be if the old man, hanging, as it were, on the brink of eternity, should pass away, leaving her alone.

There was Mrs Denton, the old housekeeper, and there were Mr and Mrs Hampton, old Harrington's confidential solicitor and his wife, friends both —Mrs Hampton, in her harsh, snappish way, always meaning to be most kind. And then there was the doctor. Yes; and Bruno. But still, she would soon be alone, and at the mercy of Saul Harrington, a man whom she had always dreaded when he came to pester his uncle for money.

Then came a change in her musings, and she began to picture the man who had been selected for her husband, and the warm blood came and went in her cheeks as she found herself wondering what he would be like, what he would think of her, and whether, under the circumstances, her future would be happy.

She bent down and covered her face with her hands, as she sat listening to the old man's faint, regular breathing, and seemed to see the bright-eyed, sharp-witted child who had made so great an impression on her guardian. Then the blue tattooed heart upon his little white skin stood out before her mind's eye, and she half shuddered as she thought of the pain the brave child must have suffered under his sea-going father's whim.

And, as she thought and thought, wondering what her future would be, she was so intent that she did not hear the door open, and a footstep cross the carpet, the first suggestion of another presence being a hand laid lightly upon her shoulder, and she started into wakefulness to encounter the mocking countenance of Saul.

Chapter Three.

Out West.

Dan Portway sat in the shade cast by a large hemlock, an extinct pipe between his lips, and his chin resting upon his hands, gazing down upon his companion, whose head and breast alone were in the shade, for the sun seemed to have veered farther round since they ate their meal together, and then lay down to rest until the heat had grown less. They were upon the steep slope of one of the mountains which shot up rugged and bare on all sides, and sank down in dangerous gulches, like rocky crevices in the earth, their precipitous sides sometimes going down sheer to where water gushed, and roared, and sprang from rock to rock, hundreds of feet below. Wherever a sheltered spot offered itself for foothold, the pines and hemlocks had risen, like dark green cones, towards the deep blue skies, their heads glistening in the sunshine, and exhaling a perfume that floated upon the mountain breezes far and wide. It was one of Nature's solitudes in the Far West, and the two men, as their rifles and accoutrements showed, had climbed up there in search of the game which found a home in these wilds.

They had had a long tramp and climb that day, but neither bear nor mountain sheep had fallen before their bullets, and they found themselves at last miles away from the pine grove where they had set up their tent, with the sombre boughs above and the pine-needles forming a thick bed below. The surroundings were glorious. It was the ideal haunt of a mountain hunter, and here a month before, on a farewell excursion, before obeying the recall he had received, George Harrington had revisited the neighbourhood which he had discovered far up in the mountains years before, when prospecting for gold.

The days had glided by, and evening after evening he had come to the determination that after the next day he would begin to move in the direction of civilisation, and hunt and shoot as he went; but, in spite of the fact that they had come twice over upon Indian signs there was so much fascination in the place that he always determined upon leaving in another day or two.

When George Harrington started upon his trip it was in company with an experienced guide, but the man had fallen ill and gone back to one of the towns, and just as Harrington was in despair, he had come suddenly upon a man whom he had twice before encountered and with whom he had hunted. Hearing from George the quandary in which he was placed, Dan Portway, a man of good birth and education, who had emigrated to the West a couple of years before and found the hunting life in the mountains more to his taste than straightforward labour, at once volunteered to accompany him. The offer was eagerly accepted, for it seemed suicidal to go alone, and as Dan had proved himself to be companionable, a clever shot, and well versed in hunting craft, the time had glided pleasantly away without their once encountering a soul.

Two men with a similarity of tastes cannot chum together in a little tent here and there in the mountains without becoming confidential, hence it was that before long George Harrington pretty well knew his companion's impecunious history—that is, as much as he chose to tell, and on the other hand, not only had Portway, apparently without pumping, learned Harrington's position, but had received an invitation to accompany him to England.

"Have another day," Portway would say laughingly; "at present you are free. Who can say when you will enjoy such another succession of climbs as you have out here."

"True," Harrington said thoughtfully.

"When you get back, of course, it will be pleasant to inherit the money; but what about the wife?"

"Well," said Harrington sternly, "what about her?"

"I mean," said Portway hastily, "how do you know what she may be like? Take another view of the case—pass me the tobacco pouch—I am a selfish man as well as a poor one. You are giving me a delightful trip, finding me in food, a horse, rifle and ammunition, everything I could wish for, including a glass of prime old Bourbon whiskey. So I say, let's keep it on as long as we can. By the way, how long have we been out here?"

"Going on for six weeks."

“Which are like six days.”

“Ah, well,” said Harrington over and over again, “we will not give up yet.”

This conversation, or one very similar, occurred again and again before the day waned.

Dan Portway sat with his chin in his hands gazing down at the sleeping figure in the shade.

When Dan Portway smiled, his was a pleasant though rather a coarse face, and his changeful life had made him a man full of information, but when he did not smile his face was not a pleasant one, vice in more than one form having left its mark. When he looked at Harrington waking, he invariably smiled; but Harrington was sleeping, and Dan Portway did not smile now.

But he sat thinking of his companion’s prospects—wealth, a handsome wife, a life of luxury—and compared these prospects with his own. As he watched the sleeper’s frank, sun-browned face, he recalled everything he had told him about home, his father and grandfather. He noted the ring upon his finger—a heavy gold circle roughly beaten out of a piece of virgin gold. He took in his lineaments, and compared their ages, and he thought of the letters Harrington had among his traps in the tent miles away beneath the pines.

There were other little things, too, there in the saddlebags, all of which seemed to fit in with a misty chaotic set of ideas which floated through his brain. Lastly, his eyes seemed to be fascinated by his companion’s breast as he lay there with his head thrown back, his flannel shirt all open at the collar and chest, and as he gazed a ray of sunlight shot between the boughs, and fell right upon the white skin.

Dan Portway leaned a little more forward, and his gaze grew more intent, till all at once he let himself fall sidewise on the soft pine-needles.

For Harrington had made a restless motion, and then suddenly sprung up.

“Oh, hang it!” he cried. “Hi! Dan—bears!”

“Eh? Where?” cried Portway, in an excited whisper, as he rose to his knees and grasped the rifle at his side.

“In Noah’s ark, for aught I know,” cried Harrington, laughing. “Don’t seem as if we’re to find a grizzly. I just woke up in time to spoil your dinner.”

“What do you mean?”

“Cannibal dinner. I was being roasted. Sun is hot.”

As he spoke he gave his breast a vicious rub and buttoned the collar of his shirt.

“Come along. We’ll go round the other side of the hill and get back to camp. No bear to-day, but we may get a sheep.”

“All right,” was the reply; and Dan Portway’s countenance seemed to have been transformed; “will you lead?”

“Yes,” said the other, as he carefully examined his rifle, while Portway’s eyes contracted, and he glanced at his own rifle as if he were calculating odds.

“Come along, old chap, we’ve a long road to go,” said Harrington, as he led the way.

“Yes,” said Portway beneath his breath, as, instead of walking boldly and uprightly, he seemed to slouch along behind his companion.

The climb was so stiff, and in places so dangerous, that for some time after no word was spoken. But at last they reached a shelf on the mountain, running along by a profound ravine, down to the bottom of which it was possible to climb, but the task was risky.

“Bad to tumble here, Dan,” said Harrington suddenly.

“Yes,” said the other, with an involuntary shiver, and he drew nearer to his companion, who suddenly stopped at a projecting portion of the shelf, and, shading his eyes, began to scan the prospect toward where, in a perfect chaos of rocks, the sinking sun was gilding the glorious scene.

“We can easily get round to camp this way,” said Harrington, after a few moments, and he took a step or two onward. “Mind how you come, Dan. Hist! No gammon. Bears, by Jove?”

He pointed to a spot not a dozen yards away, where there were unmistakable traces of a grizzly having made his lair, and dragging round the little glass which hung from his shoulder, he adjusted it as he rested his rifle against the rock, raised it to his eyes, and began to search the hills and hollows for the game they sought.

He was leaning quite over the gulch, which fell almost perpendicularly beneath them, his back to Portway, who was behind, and who, acting upon the sudden impulse born of his cogitations while the other slept, suddenly raised his rifle with both hands back over his head, and drove the plated butt with all his force crash upon his companion’s head.

There was a wild cry, and the next moment Portway was leaning forward at the very edge of the precipice gazing down at the fallen body, which plunged and rolled, and then stopped upon a mass of rock, two hundred feet below, motionless.

Portway seemed as if turned to stone for the moment, then, rifle in hand, he ran back a dozen yards, and began to descend, slipping, leaping, and displaying wondrous activity in the perilous descent, till he reached the spot where George Harrington lay, and examined the inanimate form, seeing that the eyes were closed and that the blood was welling from a terrible gash over the eyes.

Portway raised his rifle, lowered it, shook his head, and glanced round, before standing the piece against the side of the precipice, as he saw that below them the gulch went down sheer at least five hundred feet.

Then, bending over his victim, he tore open his breast, gazed for a few moments at the blue stain, which stood out plainly on the white skin, and then rapidly emptied the pockets of his trousers. As he did so his eyes fell again on the glittering plain gold ring upon Harrington’s finger. This he hurriedly transferred to his own, seeing as he did so that a name was roughly scratched within, and then, setting his teeth, he gave a glance round, a heedless precaution in that solitary place, caught the poor fellow

by arm and waistband, raised him, and in another moment would have thrust him over into the gulf, when a smile full of cunning crossed his face.

Dropping the body he drew his bowie-knife, he muttered the one word “Indian,” and taking the crisp curling hair with his left hand, he prepared to give the last refined piece of diabolism to his deed by contriving that if the body were found the first wandering tribe in the neighbourhood should get the blame.

There was no sign of compunction, no quiver of muscle or nerve; the head was dragged up, and the next moment the point of the keen hunting-knife divided the skin of the scalp, and the bright steel shone red in the soft western glow.

Chapter Four.

Dan Portway Thinks and Acts.

“It will make assurance doubly sure,” Dan Portway thought, and, quick as lightning, he recalled the discovery of a murdered family of settlers he had seen on the plains, where, after death had been dealt with arrow and tomahawk, each poor creature had been scalped.

Dan Portway had exchanged friendly grips of the hand with his victim scores of times, had shared luxuries with him in hours of plenty, and the last scrap in those of famine. More than that, upon one occasion, during their hunting-trip, when he had slipped, fallen, and hung in deadly peril over a terrible chasm, George Harrington had risked his own life to save that of his companion by descending and grasping his wrists just as his strength was failing and he was about to drop. But there was wealth in the way—a chance of gaining possession of position in another land, and at that time the sphere of the scoundrel’s actions was growing limited, for in several districts a vigilance committee had hunted him with dire intentions connected with a lariat and the nearest tree.

And now his opportunity had come, and he seized it with the coolness of the hardened villain, free from all remorse.

“Dead or not quite dead, he can’t feel,” he muttered, as the point of his knife pierced George Harrington’s scalp, and then the poor fellow’s head dropped with a heavy thud upon the rocks, while, bending down, the ruffian seemed as if turned to stone, and gazed before him at the animal which had silently approached to within half-a-dozen yards, and then uttered a low sound like a heavy sigh.

They had seen sign of bear up above: here was the bear himself—a huge brute of the variety known to hunters as the cinnamon, at home here in his native wilds, glaring red-eyed and savage at the intruder upon his domains, and ready to make him pay dearly for his audacity.

Portway held his keen knife in his hand, but he could not stir; his rifle, ready charged, was almost within reach of his hand, but he did not try to

seize it, and for fully a minute the huge beast and the hunter remained perfectly motionless.

Then the paralysis of mind and muscle passed away, and Portway stretched out his hand slowly towards where he had placed his rifle but without moving his eyes from the bear. On his right was the steep rocky wall that he had descended, on his left the terrible precipice, behind him a narrow shelf, and, in front the bear, with George Harrington between.

“If I can get the rifle?” thought Portway; and his hand searched for it, but in his heart he felt that it would be better to try and retreat slowly, while the bear would stop and wreak his anger upon the fallen man. Dan Portway knew better as regards the nature of the beast, but he could not think coolly and clearly then—he could not recall in the least that the grizzly and his relatives preferred to attack an active enemy when brought face to face with him, and that, at such a time, the recumbent body was no more to it than the rocks around—till he saw it rear up on its hind legs, a monster fully seven feet in height, its little eyes red with rage, its fangs bared, and its huge paws raised with the great claws spread.

There was a tremendous roar, full-throated, from the creature’s jaws, a rush as it leaped over George Harrington; the rifle was falling down the gulch, crashing from stone to stone; and, knife in hand, and uttering a hoarse shriek of horror, Dan Portway was bounding from rock to rock, striving to mount the steep side of the rugged place, and with the bear in full pursuit.

They were moments of agony, such as add years to a man’s life, and, listening to the panting breath of his pursuer, and his low snuffling snarl, Portway climbed on, expecting, moment by moment, to feel the monster’s huge claws upon his shoulder, and his half-inanimate body snatched back into the creature’s grasp. There was no chance of escape, for there, in its natural haunts, the bear could shuffle along at double the rate of a man, but still, for what seemed like an eternity of horror—really, but a fraction of a minute—Portway climbed on, till in struggling round a projecting rock, he slipped, and fell some twenty feet, to be caught up by a gnarled and distorted pine-trunk, which, with its roots in a crevice of the mountain side, projected almost at right angles over the gulch.

Half maddened by fear, the wretched man instinctively clung to the boughs, and saved himself from falling farther, and then, with his eyes fixed and staring up at his enemy steadily descending in pursuit, he crept along the bending stem, seating himself astride the tree, and getting farther and farther from the side of the gulch, till a warning crack told him of danger, while the swaying motion of the little trunk showed that he had reached the farthest point which the tree would bear.

“Grizzlies can’t climb trees,” he thought, and he watched his enemy as it came on, deliberately and cautiously, until it reached the spot from whence the fir-tree sprang. Here it paused, snuffed the ground, and stretched out its neck toward the trembling man, who shifted his position a little, so as to be ready to use his knife with effect.

The bear’s movements were as cautious and deliberate as it is possible to conceive; it placed one paw on the trunk, and then, reaching out the other with its terrible array of hooked talons, made as if to claw Portway from where he sat, and to draw him to the rocks.

As the bear strained to reach him, Portway backed slowly towards the branches, shuddering as he glanced downward into the gulf, and realised that the thin elastic trunk was all that he had to depend upon to save him from the two terrible forms of death so close at hand. At any moment he felt that the weight upon the tree might act as a lever of sufficient power to tear the roots out of the crevice in which they grew, and this kept him from moving another inch, though the bear was cautiously trying the tree, and while keeping its hind-quarters well upon the substantial rocks, stretching out farther and farther with its huge length of reach, till the terrible claws came within a foot or two of his breast.

And now a curious feeling, akin to nightmare, came over the man, and he sat astride that frail trunk, gazing wildly at the red glaring eyes of the animal, but closing his own each time the huge paw swept toward him, and he saw himself, in imagination, swept from his hold.

But the bear uttered a strange gasping growl, full of disappointment, and with an action that seemed eminently human, it altered its position, creeping more over the precipice, and clasping the tree with its hind paws, so that the next time it stretched itself out, Portway saw that he

would be within its reach.

Still he could not move; only sit there, watching every deliberate act of the determined creature till it had finished its preparations, and was about to make its final stroke; the paw was even in motion, when, with a yell of horror, Portway threw himself back among the boughs.

The effect was immediate. The weight placed upon the trunk was the full extent of that which it would bear; the extra leverage produced by Portway's action did the rest. There was a sharp, snapping, cracking noise, the tree was torn out by the roots, and in company with an avalanche of stones and earth, man, tree, and bear plunged crashing down into the great chasm yawning beneath.

The effect was varied.

The bear, whose hind paws clung to the root and rock, went down head first, and its fore paws touched the bushes beneath, clung to them, and held on, while, following the tree, its hind-quarters went right over, making the animal turn an involuntary somersault. Then its fore paws were snatched from their hold by its weight, and it fell some twenty feet, from tree to tree, where they bristled from the side before it could check its downward course, after which the huge beast coolly began to climb diagonally upward, till it reached the shelf from which it had fallen, and, after shaking itself, began slowly to retrace its steps upward, when it came upon the rifle Portway had dropped, stopped to snuffle round it for a few moments, and then proceeded toward where the encounter had first taken place, and where lay ready for him a feast such as did not often come in his generally vegetarian way.

Meanwhile, with a terrible rush, the tree, with its occupant, had gone down into the gulf, plunging from rock to bush and clump of pine, Portway clinging to it desperately, till it fell athwart a couple more trunks, and there lodged, but with such a jerk that the man was thrown from where he clung, to continue his descent alone crashing through tree and bush, till he was brought up suddenly and lay stunned and insensible to what had been going on.

At the end of a few minutes Portway unclosed his eyes and lay staring up

at the sky, through the thick, ragged growth which sprang everywhere from the sides of the chasm. Then by degrees he realised that he had escaped, so far, from a terrible death, but it was some time longer before he dared to move.

When he did venture he uttered a cry of agony, and lay perfectly still again, for an acute pain had shot through his side, telling him plainly that he had not escaped free. At last though the cold sweat seemed to dry upon his brow, and he began to look round and upward so as thoroughly to grasp his position.

The side of the gulch projected where he lay, and quite a clump of pines had found sustenance, sufficient to grow into a bushy patch, among whose boughs Portway had fallen, the tops proving sufficiently elastic and dense to break his descent, though he had torn off enough to form quite a bed, upon which he rested.

He listened and looked about him, but he could neither see nor hear anything of his enemy, and at last, with his confidence returning, he drew himself into a sitting posture in spite of the pain, took a flask from his breast, drank a dram of whiskey, and began once more to look around.

His first shuddering gaze was upward, and something like a feeling of satisfaction gave him encouragement to proceed, as he grasped the fact that to climb back was impossible, for if the bear had escaped falling with him, the beast was probably waiting his return.

“No, it must be downward,” he muttered; and in spite of his agony, he set about the task of descent, at once finding it less difficult than he had anticipated; for the tough roots and bushes, which projected everywhere, gave him foot and hand hold, as he let himself down, lower and lower.

But there was a fresh difficulty awaiting him, for the lower he went the darker it seemed to grow. The sun had sunk behind the mountains, and in half an hour it would be perfectly black where he hung, and any attempt to continue the descent so much madness.

It was, then, with a sense of relief that he reached a sharp slope where, among the bushes and creepers that tangled the side of the gulch, he was able to find a resting-place where there was no danger of falling, and

as he lay down here, hot, exhausted, and in pain, he saw the twilight fade into darkness, and thought of the body of his companion lying somewhere above.

A shudder ran through him at the thought—a shudder of dread—but it was only compounded of fear lest he should not have effectually completed his deadly work, and with the full determination of revisiting the spot, so as to secure Harrington's rifle and make perfectly sure of his death, providing he could avoid the bear, he dropped off into a heavy sleep which lasted till the soft grey light was beginning to fill the valley once again.

He was so stiff, and suffered such agony from the injury to his side, that for some time he did not care to stir; but at last, bringing all his energies to bear, he rose carefully, looked round, and began to descend, reaching the bottom with no very great difficulty, and then pausing to consider as to what course he should pursue.

His desire was to make for the camp at once, but he felt that he must see the spot where he had left George Harrington; and to do this he doggedly set forth, making his way to the mouth of the gulch, and then spending half the day in getting round and back to the ledge, along which he and his companion had passed the day before.

It was nearly midday when he passed the spot where they had lain down and slept, and he would have given anything to have rested, but he contented himself with slaking his thirst at a trickling spring and doggedly went on.

"I must see him, and get his rifle," he muttered, as he trudged on, till at last, peering cautiously about the while, he reached the place where Harrington had stood gazing down, and he had delivered that cowardly blow.

For a moment or two he hesitated and stood panting, with his hand to his side. Then, taking a step forward, he peered down to gaze upon his ghastly work, and stood there, as if fascinated, before he made a terrible effort, and turned and fled.

For there below him, and interposed between him and that he wished to

see, was his huge enemy of the previous day, bending down, and evidently licking the rock; till, divining danger, it looked up suddenly, uttered a low fierce growl, and began to climb.

But by the time it reached the rocky path, Dan Portway was out of sight, and he did not pause till he reached the little camp, from which he took the few things he sought, refreshed himself, made ready a pack of necessaries, set fire to the rest, and mounting the horse left hobbled in a grassy hollow, rode slowly away.

“To seek my fortune,” he said with a curious laugh; and then, with bent head and thoughtful brow, he let the reins drop on the horse’s neck, took a pin from out of his knife, and began to make experiments by pricking the skin of his wrist till it bled, and rubbing in gunpowder.

“Easy enough,” he said, with a laugh. “Now we shall see what change of scene will do. Nothing like a removal when a place grows too hot.”

Chapter Five.

Mr Hampton is Too Late.

“Old boy asleep, Gertie?”

“Mr Saul, why have you come?” cried the frightened girl.

“Because I wanted to see you again; because I was tired of waiting down in that dreary old dining-room. Why, what a little tease you are.”

Gertrude made a step to get on the other side of the bed, so as to place the old man between them; but Saul caught her wrist, and laughingly swung her round.

“Won’t do, my coy little beauty,” he whispered. “I want to settle that little matter.”

“Uncle!”

“Ha!” ejaculated Saul in a fierce whisper. “Wake him if you dare! If you do I’ll swear you asked me to come up and sit with you. Now look here—tell me, Gertie, the old man has left you all his money?”

“No, no, no,” she cried eagerly, “nothing at all.”

“Don’t believe it, darling. Trick to throw me off the scent; but I’m on it safe, and I’m not going to be tricked.”

“Then ask uncle when he wakes,” cried the girl, flushing up angrily, as she snatched her hand away.

“No, thanks; don’t want a bottle or jug thrown at my head. But I don’t believe you, you artful little jade. It’s all your cunning way to lead me on. He has left you all his money, darling, and you’ve played your cards splendidly; but it would not make any difference to me if you hadn’t a penny. You are going to be my little wife.”

“Never!” cried Gertrude, with a hurried glance at the sunken features on

the pillow.

They both spoke in a low, quick, subdued whisper, and as if under the influence of the same dread lest the old man should awake.

“Don’t talk stuff, my darling. Think of your position.”

“I tell you I am penniless,” cried Gertrude excitedly, as she felt that Saul’s advances were mainly due to his belief in her future wealth.

“All the more need for you to listen to me, darling,” whispered Saul, as he threw his arm round the girl’s waist, and held her in spite of her struggles. “When the old man dies, if you are as you say, what’s to become of you?”

“I shall not tell you,” cried Gertrude, striving to escape.

“Then I’ll tell you. There’s that nice little idea in your head that my beloved cousin—that Yankee vagabond—is coming back to marry you, so that all is to be happy ever after. But suppose he does not come?”

“He will come; your uncle has sent for him.”

“Ah, he may have sent, but the fellow may not come. He may be drowned if he did; and even if he does come, that’s no reason why he should marry you.”

Gertrude, finding her efforts vain, ceased struggling, but stood there, panting heavily, and waiting her opportunity to free herself from the intruder’s grasp.

“Better come to an understanding, Gertie, and let’s begin to be friends at once. George Harrington must be a Wild West ruffian, not fit to make you a husband, so don’t think any more of that. I know, as well as can be, that he will never come back here; and if anything happens to him, as something is sure to happen, seeing what sort of a character he is. I shall be master here.”

“You?” cried Gertrude, with dilating eyes, as she again tried to get free.

“Yes, I; master of the houses, and lands, tenements, messuages, and all

the rest of it; above all, my little struggling pet, master of you."

"Ha!"

They both turned sharply, and Saul Harrington started back, for that hoarsely-sounding ejaculation came from the bed, and there, with the lamp shining full upon his cavernous eyes, sat the old man, glaring wildly at his nephew, and pointing towards the fireplace with outstretched hand.

"Uncle, dearest," cried Gertrude, running to his side, and clinging to him; but he did not heed her, only remained pointing towards the fireplace.

"Why is he here?" panted the old man.

"Only a little visit, uncle. Don't be cross."

"A lie?" panted the old man hoarsely. "Money—always money," and he still pointed excitedly towards the fireplace, forgetful of the fact that he had a bell-rope close by his hand.

"Not very polite to your nephew, uncle," said Saul coolly.

"I heard—all," he said. "If you would marry him—because you will have my money. That's why—I wouldn't leave it to you—strong and fierce—frighten you into accepting him—when I'm gone. But I knew better. No lie, Saul Harrington; she hasn't a penny. But you'll be master, eh? If George does not come—if George dies—eh, Saul? Yes, I had forgotten—next-of-kin, I suppose, and you would seize everything, eh? Yes, I know you; but no, Saul Harrington, no, no, no! I'll take care of that. You did wrong in coming here to-night. Ring, Gertie, ring."

"Yes, uncle, dear."

"My solicitor—I want Hampton directly, he is to be fetched. No, no, my dear nephew, if George Harrington does not come home you shall not be master here, next-of-kin though you be. Hampton, Gertie—send for Hampton. I did not think of that. Ring—ring!"

"Yes, uncle, dearest, I have rung," whispered Gertrude, as she vainly tried to calm the old man. "Lie down now and rest, and Mr Saul

Harrington will go. Don't—pray don't talk like this."

"No, no—don't go, Saul. Stop and see my solicitor—stop and hear the codicil to my will. I'll have it made right directly. Never be master here, Saul—no, not if George dies—never be master here. Scoundrel, robbed me living, now you would rob me dead; but—but—you shall—Ha!"

"Uncle! Help!" cried Gertrude excitedly, as the old man's head dropped suddenly upon her shoulder, for he had been working himself up into a terrible pitch of excitement; his eyes flashed, the veins on his brow seemed to be knotted, and stood out in a thick network; and his hands clawed and gesticulated as his words came more broken and huskily, till all at once, and without warning, his head fell, and Gertrude let him sink motionless upon the pillow.

At that moment the door opened, and in answer to the bell, the housekeeper entered.

"Mrs Denton, quick—uncle!" cried Gertrude.

"Your master wants his solicitor, Mrs Denton," said Saul, coolly walking to the bedside and taking one of the old man's hands. "No," he said huskily, "a doctor."

"Yes, yes; the doctor, Mrs Denton—quick!" cried Gertrude excitedly, and the old woman ran out.

As the door closed behind her, Saul let the hand fall heavily and inert upon the counterpane.

"Uncle, dearest, speak—pray speak to me!" cried Gertrude passionately.

"Never again, my girl," said Saul quietly. "The fit has done its work. Too late."

"What do you mean?" cried Gertrude, staring all aghast.

"That the old man is dead," said Saul coldly; and he added softly to himself: "If George Harrington dies. I am master here."

Chapter Six.

How the Money was Left.

“A singularly quiet funeral, Mr Hampton,” said Doctor Lawrence as he rode back in the same carriage with the solicitor.

“The wish of the deceased, sir. He had a great dislike to wasting money.”

“Bit miserly, Mr Hampton.”

“No, sir, no. On the whole a generous man, but if he spent money, as he used to say to me. He liked to have something substantial in return.”

“Well, I must say for him, that he was always prompt in his payments.”

“Always,” said the lawyer.

“But with his wealth it seems strange that we have not got a host of needy relatives. We can talk about it, Hampton, not being relatives. Wish I was. A slice of the poor old boy’s cake would have been a nice help to a family man like me.”

“Humph, yes, I suppose so. Money’s nice. Very sudden at last, doctor.”

“Ye-es, and no,” said the doctor. “When a man gets to eighty-five you may say his life hangs by a cobweb. Any little excitement may bring it to an end.”

“Humph! Hah! And I’ve a shrewd suspicion that he had an angry interview with Mr Harrington—the nephew.”

“And heir?” said the doctor.

“My dear Lawrence,” said the old lawyer, smiling, “never try to pump one of our profession. In a very short time I shall be reading the will, so curb your impatience.”

“Of course, my dear sir, of course; only a little natural curiosity. Between

ourselves I think it will be a pity if he marries our charming young friend, Gertrude."

"Thousand pities," said the old lawyer drily. "Sooner marry her myself—if I could."

The carriage drew up at the outer gates as he spoke, and the ugly old brick house, known as "The Mynns," seemed a little more cheerful now that the blinds, which had been down for days, were raised and the sun allowed to light up the gloomy rooms, in one of which—the dining-room—the little party assembled after a while to hear the reading of the will; Saul's enemy, the dog, taking up his position or the hearthrug.

The party consisted of Gertrude, who came in attended by Bruno; Mrs Hampton, a stiff, stern old lady, who looked like a black dress with a face on the top; Saul Harrington, and the servants. Mr Hampton was there officially, and the doctor was retiring to see a patient in town, when the lawyer took him by the coat.

"Don't go, Lawrence," he said; "you forget you are an executor."

"Oh, yes, of course, so I did."

"It's a long time since the will was executed, and I have some recollection of a snuff-box left to you."

"Indeed," said the doctor, with his face lighting up as he rubbed his hands; "then he has left me the old engine turned silver snuff-box. I took a fancy to it years ago, and he laughed and said he would leave it to me in his will. Now that's very pleasant of him to remember me. Eh Miss Gertrude? Yes, I'm very glad."

The doctor drew out a holly-root box, took snuff loudly, and looking up at the portrait of the old man, gave it a friendly nod, while the eyes seemed to be gazing into his is they did into those of all present.

Then the last will and testament was read, and Saul Harrington listened impatiently to the minor bequests to the under-servants, no one being forgotten; and to the comfortable legacy left to Mrs Denton with the wish that she would always remain housekeeper at The Mynns, so long as her

health permitted. Then came a fairly large amount for the maintenance of “my old and faithful servant Bruno,” with the addition that if “my heir” did not feel inclined keep the dog, Mrs Denton was to have him in charge and care for him till his death.

“Lucky dog!” said the doctor to himself; and he glanced at Gertrude, who was holding Mrs Hampton’s hand while crying gently, and, as if not to intrude on her sorrow, he again looked up at the portrait, gave it a friendly nod, and then chirruped softly to the dog, which came and laid its head upon his knee, after turning its eyes apologetically to Gertrude.

Then the doctor’s attention was excited by the next clause in the will which bequeathed “to my old friend and adviser, Phineas Hampton, five thousand pounds clear of legacy duty.”

“Another lucky dog,” muttered the doctor, who then drew in his breath with a hiss as he heard the lawyer’s words:

“To my very old friend, Edward Lawrence, MD, my old silver snuff-box which he once admired.”

“Hah! I’m very glad,” said the doctor, meeting Gertrude’s eyes now, as the lawyer paused to look up and repeat from the will the next words:

“And ten thousand pounds free of legacy duty.”

“No!” ejaculated the doctor, half rising. Then sitting down again he exclaimed, “Well!” took out his pocket-handkerchief, blew his nose loudly, and then, without disguise, sat quietly wiping away the tears.

“To my nephew, Saul Harrington, one hundred pounds a year, raised as hereinafter specified by a Government annuity.”

Saul frowned and looked down at the carpet, though it was all he had dared to expect, and he listened eagerly to the next clause which left an annuity of one hundred per annum to the testator’s dear adopted child, Gertrude Bellwood, with the hope that she would fulfil his wishes. In conclusion, as Saul was trying to recover from the shock of knowing that Gertrude had spoken the truth, came the clauses dealing with the remainder of the old man’s wealth, which was left unconditionally with

certain sums and their interest, sums remitted from the United States, “to my grandson, George Harrington, in the hope that he will dutifully fulfil my wishes expressed to him in the last letter I sent to America.”

The other parts of the will, with its appointment of “my old friends, Doctor Lawrence and Phineas Hampton, to be my sole executors,” seemed to consist of the ringing of bells in Saul Harrington’s ears as he still sat gazing down at the carpet when all was over.

“My congratulations, Lawrence,” said the old lawyer, smiling.

“My dear Hampton, I don’t know how to be sufficiently grateful. And, my dear Miss Gertrude, I cannot take this. Ten thousand pounds, and you only left with a hundred a year. Look here, Hampton. Now, no nonsense. I shall only take some of this money—half. The other I insist upon making over to Miss Gertrude here as her dowry.”

“Can’t be done. Shan’t be done,” said the old lawyer gruffly. “Lawrence, we’ve known each other twenty years.”

“Yes, we have.”

“Then don’t be a fool.”

“And not at his side when he died,” said the doctor, nodding his head. “My dear Miss Gertrude, I feel as if I am robbing you.”

“You don’t know how glad I am, Doctor Lawrence,” cried Gertrude, laying her hands in his. “Dear uncle always liked you, and I felt sure he would leave you something handsome in his will.”

“Hah!”

It was a long, low expiration of the breath from Saul Harrington, who was too deep in thought to hear what was going on, as, with hands down in his pockets, he gazed down fixedly at the carpet.

“And if George Harrington dies, I succeed to everything. Yes,” he said to himself, “I should be master here. Get out! Beast!”

He said these last words aloud, for the dog was sniffing at his legs, and all the time it seemed as if the portrait of old James Harrington was the old man himself, gazing down sternly from the wall at his plotting nephew.

“Yes, if he dies—if he dies—I shall be master here.”

Chapter Seven.

Ready for the Heir.

“There, Miss Gertrude,” said Mrs Denton, carefully pinning the white apron she had rolled up to guard against its falling open—the apron she had been wearing for a fortnight, “I don’t like to boast, but I think I may say that The Mynns never looked cleaner since it was a house.”

“Never, Denton.”

“And I’ve had my work to do, my dear, for servants will be servants. They’re paid so much a year, and they reckon how much they ought to do for the money, and when they’ve done that it’s hard to get them to move.”

“Well, Denton,” said Gertrude, smiling, “is it not natural?”

“Natural enough, my dear, if you’ll excuse me calling you so now you’re a grown young lady; but we don’t go by nature in service. I like to see servants take a pride in their work, and the place they’re in. I do, and I always try to make the place look better when there’s no one to watch me.”

“You’re a dear, good old soul, Denton, and I hope we may never part.”

“Till the last, miss, and the last comes to us all as it did to poor dear master. Forty years was I with him, my dear; and it don’t seem like forty weeks. Any news, my dear?”

“No, Denton,” said Gertrude, flushing slightly now.

“Well, he might have written if he has got the news, and said when you might expect him. It isn’t as if Mr Hampton hadn’t telegraphed out. And it does seem so strange. Six weeks since poor master died, and no letter. You’d be glad to hear, miss, wouldn’t you?”

“I—I—yes—I don’t know, Denton.”

“Ah well, natural enough, my dear, when you don’t know what he’s like, and he’s to be your husband. I hope he’ll turn out all poor master said about him, and make you very happy, my dear. I remember well when his poor father and mother brought him here before they sailed for America. Sad, restless gentleman, his poor father, wanting to go to foreign countries, to find gold when master used to tell him that there was more gold to be dug out of people’s pockets than ever he’d find out there. Don’t you think, my dear, that we might begin putting flowers now in young master’s room?”

“Yes, Denton, do,” cried Gertrude quickly. “He may not come for days yet, but you could renew them.”

“I mean for you to put them, my dear.”

“I?”

“Yes. There, don’t blush, my pretty,” said the old woman, smiling affectionately. “He’s to be your husband, you know, and I can see what you mean; you don’t want him to think you forward and pressing for it. Quite right, my child, but this is a particular case as we may say.”

There was a double-knock and a sharp ring, and Bruno gave token of his presence by starting out from under the table and uttering a fierce bay.

“Down, Bruno, down!” cried Gertrude, colouring deeply and then turning pale.

“That’s a strange knock, Miss Gertrude. Perhaps it’s Mr George.”

They stood listening in the drawing-room; the old woman, in her white crape cap, looking flushed and excited, and Gertrude, in her unrelieved black dress, white—even sallow—with excitement.

“What will he think of poor little insignificant me?” she said to herself; and her heart beat more and more heavily as steps were heard in the hall; then their dull sound on the carpet, the door handle rattled, and Saul Harrington marched in unannounced.

“Ah, Gertie,” he cried with boisterous familiarity. “How do, Denton? Here,

keep that dog back or I shall kill him."

"Lie down, Bruno?" said Gertrude.

"Send him out of the room."

"He will be quite quiet now," replied Gertrude, who longed to tell the old housekeeper to stop in the room, but dared not make so great a confession of her dread of the visitor.

"Oh, very well," said Saul carelessly. "As long as he does not try to eat me, I don't mind. Hah! gone," he continued with a satisfied smile; "now we can have a chat."

"You wished to speak to me, Mr Harrington?" said Gertrude, trying hard not to show her agitation.

"Only dropped in to see how you were, and to ask the news. Well, is my beloved relative on his way yet? When do you expect him?"

"We have not heard from Mr George Harrington yet."

"You will open his letter, I suppose, when it comes for the old man?"

"I shall pass it on to the executors."

"Pooh! we could read it. I say we, as I am so near a relative; but mark my words, Gertie, he'll never come back. There, don't cry. You never knew him, and don't want to know him I'll be sworn. Gertie, it's as good as certain that he is dead, for the old man had not heard from him for quite a year, I know, and out there a man's life isn't worth much. Come, let's see if you and I can't have a little sensible talk."

Gertrude glanced uneasily at the door, and wondered whether Mrs Denton was near. Then she heard a sigh come from beneath the table, and felt comforted, for there was help at hand.

Saul laughed as he interpreted her looks rightly.

"What a silly little bird it is," he said banteringly, "pretending to be afraid of

me on purpose to lead me on. There, I apologise for being so rough that day. I ought to have approached you more gently, but it is your fault—you are so pretty and enticing. Why, what a terrible look!”

“I have no right to forbid you this house, Mr Harrington,” said Gertrude coldly, “but I must beg of you not to refer to that terrible day again. I cannot bear it.”

“Stuff!”

“I cannot keep back the feeling that your presence shortened my poor uncle’s life.”

“You’re a little goose, Gertie,” said Saul contemptuously. “The old man threw himself into a passion about nothing, and he paid the penalty.”

Gertrude shook her head as she took up some work so as to avoid looking at the man lolling before her in an easy-chair.

“Why, you little sceptic,” cried Saul laughingly. “It was a foregone conclusion that he would pop off some day in a fit of temper—because there were no coals in the scuttle, or his beef-tea was too hot. I happened to be there, and you blame me. That’s all.”

“Pray say no more.”

“All light, I will not. Always ready to obey you, Gertie, because I want to show you that I really love you very dearly.”

Gertrude gave a hurried glance at the door, remembered the dog, and grew calm.

“I’m not going to frighten you, Gertie,” continued Saul, “but I want for us to understand our position. Never mind what the executors or any one else says, George Harrington is not coming back. He’s dead or he would have been here.”

“He has not had time yet. He was in the West—Far West, last time my uncle heard.”

“I don’t care if he was in the much farther West. Letters would have reached him, and he would have known that his grandfather was dead, and if he had known it, do you think the man is living who would not have rushed over to secure this property?”

Gertrude felt her heart sink. Not many minutes before she had felt a dread of meeting George Harrington; now that there was a possibility of Saul’s words being true, a curious feeling of sorrow attacked her, and she felt that she would give anything for the man, whose praises the old man had sung, to take her by the hand.

“Well, you might talk,” continued Saul. “I’m not going to bother you, nor to hurry things. I know I’m right. There is no George Harrington, and you are going to be my wife.”

“No, no,” cried Gertrude hastily.

“And I say yes, yes, so don’t be silly. Better than being married to a man you have never seen—some whiskey-drinking, loafing rowdy from the States, who would have ill-used you, degraded you, spent every penny the old man left, and then gone back to America, and left you to starve, if you were not already dead of a broken heart.”

Gertrude listened in silence, wondering at the strange feeling of indignation within her, and the desire to take up the cudgels on George Harrington’s behalf.

“There, I’m speaking strongly,” said Saul, changing his tone, “because, of course, I feel strongly. You have always hung back from me, Gertie, because you did not thoroughly know me. But you are beginning to know me better, and I am going to wait patiently till you lay your hand in mine, and say, ‘Saul, dear, I am yours.’”

Gertie started, and looked at her visitor with lips apart, dazed at the confident way in which he prophesied of the future.

Saul noted it, and smiled to himself.

“It’s easy enough,” he said to himself. “Only got to let ’em feel the curb, and they give in directly.”

“Patience is the thing, Gertie, dear,” he continued aloud. “I suppose it will have to be a year first. There’s all that executor business to go through, and the law will be precious slow, of course, about giving up the property to the rightful heir. I’m the rightful heir, Gertie, there’s no mistake about that, and I think I’m behaving very fairly about you. It’s plain enough, now, that I didn’t come after you on account of your prospects, isn’t it?”

He rose as he spoke with a peculiar smile on his face, and made two quick steps across to where Gertrude was seated.

Her first thought was to spring up and make for the door, but, by a strong effort of will, she mastered herself and sat perfectly rigid in her seat, meeting his eyes without flinching, with the effect of disconcerting him, for he stopped short, and began tapping the crown of his hat. Had she tried to escape, he would have caught her in his arms.

“That’s better,” he said, after an awkward pause. “I like that. You’re getting used to me, Gertie, and I tell you what, my girl, it will be a fine thing for you. Do you now what you ought to do if you are the clever girl I think you to be?”

She shook her head. She dared not trust herself to speak, lest he should note the tremble in her voice.

“Make sure of me while you can. Not many girls have the chance of such a rich husband.”

“If he would only go,” thought Gertrude, fighting hard with the hysterical feeling which threatened to break forth in a fit of sobbing.

For she was moved more than she knew. She had grown to expect, as a part of her life, that she should marry the frank-hearted man whose praise her guardian had constantly sung. She did not love him, but there was the germ of love in her breast waiting to be warmed into life and burst forth as a blossom, while now, speaking quite with the voice of authority, Saul Harrington had come at the end of her weeks of patient watching and expectation, to announce brutally his full conviction of her betrothed’s death. Her heart sank lower and lower, as she felt how probable his words were, and how likely it was that George Harrington had fallen a victim to climate or accident, or in some encounter, leaving

her helpless and alone, at the mercy of a man who would lord it in his place, and who openly avowed his intention of making her his wife—another name for what would prove to be his slave.

“Well, Gertie,” he said at last, after terrifying the poor girl by his manner, “I sha’n’t ask you to keep me to dinner to-day. Next time I come you will, won’t you?”

She looked up in his face with her eyes wild with horror and perplexity. What should she do—what could she say? She felt now that she must end her position at The Mynns by making an appeal to Doctor Lawrence or Mr Hampton, and she blamed herself for not doing so sooner. But these thoughts did not help her now, and she remained silent.

“Silence gives consent,” said Saul, laughing meaningly, as he passed his stick into the hand which held his hat, and held out his right. “I must be going now. Good-bye, Gertie.”

She rose at this, and, with a feeling of relief, held out her hand.

“Ah, that’s better,” he said, as he took it; and before the poor girl could realise her position, he had snatched her to his breast, dropping hat and stick to have both hands free.

“Mr Saul!”

“My darling little girl! The devil!”

The last words were accompanied by a yell of pain and horror, as he literally flung Gertrude from him, and made for the door.

For there had been no warning. Unknown to Saul, and forgotten in her agitation by Gertrude, Bruno had been lying beneath the table unseen, but seeing all, till what had seemed to his dumb brute mind a cowardly attack upon his mistress, when, with one quick swing round of his head, he caught Saul by the ankle, held on for a moment, and then stood before Gertrude, uttering a low fierce growl.

“That settles it,” said Saul, trying to recover his equanimity, but speaking in a low voice full of fury. “I don’t want to be hard on you, Gertie, but if

that dog is here next time I come, I'll poison him, as sure as he is alive. I'm master now, and—"

He stopped short, for the old housekeeper entered the room with a card, the ring at the front door and the answering footsteps having passed unnoticed in the drawing-room.

"For me, Denton?" cried Gertie, eagerly running to the old woman, and clinging to her arm.

"He asked for master, miss," whispered the old woman. "He did not know. In the dining-room, miss. It's Master George."

A mist seemed to float before Gertrude's eyes, but not before she had read upon the card the name:

"Mr George Harrington."

Chapter Eight.

“Mr George Harrington.”

“Who’s that? What’s that?” cried Saul Harrington sharply, as he saw by Gertrude’s agitation that there was something particular on the way.

“It’s Master George come, sir,” said the old housekeeper.

“What?” he roared; and his face turned sallow. “Impossible!”

Gertrude stood trembling, with the card in her hand, the name thereon seeming to play strange tricks, and growing larger and then dying away, till it seemed to be hidden in a mist, while a chaos of thoughts ran confusedly through her brain. At one moment she looked upon the coming of this stranger with dread, for a stranger he was to her; the next her heart began to beat, and her cheeks flushed, as she recalled that he was her affianced husband, and that he had come to protect her from this man, and that henceforth she would be safe.

She was brought back to the present by the old housekeeper, who, for the second time, touched her arm.

“Miss Gertrude, ma’am, don’t you hear me?” she said. “What shall I tell him?”

“I—I—”

“Stop!” cried Saul sharply. “You are a young unprotected girl, and as the executors are not here, Gertie, I look upon it as my duty to see after your welfare. How do we know that this is George Harrington? Let me look at that card.”

He snatched the card from the trembling girl’s fingers, and scowled as he read the inscription, though he could gather nothing from that.

“Here, I’ll go down and see what he’s like. It may be some impostor.”

He had reached the door when Gertrude flushed up, and seemed in her decisive action to have changed from girl to woman.

“Stop, Mr Harrington!” she said; “this would not be the way to welcome my poor dead guardian’s grandson, and I think it is due to me that you should refrain.”

“What!” he cried, staggered for the moment by her manner and bearing, as she crossed to a writing-table. “Nonsense, girl; you know nothing of the ways of the world. I’ll meet this man, and see what he is like.”

Gertrude took no notice, but wrote two telegrams, and handed them to the housekeeper.

“Send them at once,” she whispered, and she turned to the door, where Saul’s hand was raised to stop her, but there was a low growl from close at hand, Saul started and shrank away, leaving the door free; but before Gertrude was half way to the room, with the dog close at her heels, Saul had followed, and entered the dining-room just as the keen-looking, sun-browned, and well-dressed man, who had stood gazing at old Harrington’s portrait, turned quickly and advanced to meet the agitated girl.

“How do you do?” he said, in a sharp decisive way, as he held out both hands, Gertrude placing hers within them, to be retained, as the stranger looked at her searchingly, and evidently with satisfaction. “There you need not tell me,” he continued, “you’re Gertrude, I know. I say, quite a shock to me to come back too late. That’s the old man, I suppose?”

He nodded towards the portrait as, without moving her eyes from his, Gertrude replied:

“Yes, that is uncle’s—I mean dear guardian’s portrait.”

“Like him?”

“Oh, so very like,” replied Gertrude, “I can almost fancy sometimes he is looking down at me from the wall.”

“Ah,” exclaimed the other, giving a quick glance up at the picture and

back to Gertrude, whose hands he still held, and pressed warmly. “Of course I don’t remember. Quite a little shaver when I went over yonder.”

Saul, who stood glowering at the pair, half mad with rage and disappointment, winced at these words, but setting his teeth hard, he said quietly:

“Have you just arrived?”

“Reached Liverpool last night. Came on this morning. Very rough passage. Who are you?”

“I,” said Saul, forcing a smile—“well, I am—here is my card.”

He did not finish his sentence, but drew a card from his case.

“Mr Saul Harrington,” read the stranger. “Let’s see, I think I have heard of you?”

“Well, I should presume so,” replied Saul stiffly.

“I was right up the country when grandfather’s last letter came,” said the new-comer hastily, “but I got back to ’Frisco, and then across to New York, and took boat soon as I could, and here I am. Didn’t stop about much luggage, so as to be quick. Can I stay here?”

“Stay here?” said Gertrude, withdrawing her hands. “Oh, yes, it is your own house.”

“Ah, to be sure, I suppose so,” cried the young man sharply; and as he spoke his dark eyes were running from one to the other, and then to the dog, which kept on sniffing at him uneasily. “Won’t bite, will he?”

“Oh no. Lie down, Bruno,” cried Gertrude hastily.

“Don’t know so much about that,” said Saul; “he can bite sometimes.”

“Well, he’d better keep his fangs out of me,” said the young man, with an involuntary movement of the hand beneath the back of his morning coat.

“You’ll excuse me,” interposed Saul, taking a step forward, “but you are a perfect stranger to us, sir.”

“Natural-lee,” said the young man. “Never met before, of course.”

“Then will you be good enough to give me some proofs that you are the gentleman whose card you sent up.”

“Eh? Proofs? Oh, yes. No, I won’t. Look here, sir, this is a curious welcome; pray, who are you?”

“I gave you my card, sir.”

“Yes, of course, Saul Harrington—Mr Saul Harrington. But that don’t explain—yes, it does, you’re a cousin. The old man said something about you in his last letter.”

“And in the others,” said Saul sharply.

“Of course.”

“Have you the letters?”

“I told you I had, didn’t I? Am I to show them to you?”

“Stop,” cried Gertrude quietly.

“Eh? Stop!” cried Saul fiercely. “How do we know that this is not an impostor?”

“A what,” roared the young man fiercely.

“Stop, if you please,” said Gertrude. “Mr Saul Harrington is only a visitor here, Mr George, and has no right to make such a demand of you.”

“Mind what you are saying,” cried Saul angrily.

“I am minding what I am saying, sir. You have no right to ask such questions.”

“What? Not in your behalf?”

“No, sir,” interposed their visitor sharply, as he took his cue from Gertrude; “no right at all.”

“I was not speaking to you,” said Saul roughly; and the two men stood glowering at each other, Saul having rather the best of it, till Gertrude spoke hastily, in dread of a quarrel:

“If there is any need for Mr George Harrington to prove his identity, it should be to Mr Hampton and Doctor Lawrence.”

“Who are they?” said the young man sharply.

“My dear guardians,” replied Gertrude.

“Seems rather a strange thing,” said the young man, giving Gertrude a reproachful look, and then metaphorically setting up his hackles as he turned defiantly upon Saul, “that I come back to England, at my grandfather’s invitation, to my own place, and find some one, who has no right, beginning to dictate to me as to what I am to do.”

“I don’t know about dictating,” said Saul, who grew more calm as the stranger became excited; “but you don’t suppose, sir, that I, as my uncle’s representative, am going to stand by and let a perfect stranger enter upon the place, and take possession. What proof have I that you are George Harrington?”

“Proof? Didn’t I send up my card?”

“Card!” cried Saul contemptuously.

“Oh, if that isn’t enough I can give you plenty more proofs,” cried the young man quickly.

“Stop, Mr George Harrington,” said Gertrude, warmly espousing his cause. “Mr Saul Harrington assumes too much. I am my guardian’s representative at The Mynns till his grandson comes and takes possession. I decline, then, to let you be treated in this uncalled-for way.”

“Thank you, my dear, thank you,” cried the young fellow sharply. “Now, Mr Saul Harrington, what have you got to say to that?”

“Gertrude, you’ll repent this,” cried Saul, whose jealous rage and disappointment swept away the calm manner he had assumed.

“Perhaps so. But if she does, I suppose it’s no business of yours, sir. He has no right to bully you, has he, my dear?”

Gertrude flinched a little at this over-friendly, familiar way; but she thought to herself that George Harrington had led a rough life out in the West, and it was well meant. She could not help leaning, too, towards the man who had, she felt, a right to champion her, and he had come now to protect her and defend her against one whom now she literally loathed.

She replied then eagerly:

“None whatever, Mr George. This is your home, too, and he has no right to interfere upon your taking possession.”

She held out her hand to him, and looked him frankly in the eyes, as she said quickly:

“I’m very glad you have come.”

“Thank ye, my dear, thank ye. I’m rather rough, but you must not mind that. Been hunting, and gold-digging, and living in camp. Soon rub off the corners. It’s very nice and kind of you to speak so well as you have.”

He took the hand she held out, drew it through his arm, and kept it in quiet possession, as he turned with an insolent look of triumph upon Saul.

“Now, Mr What’s-your-name, do you live here?”

“No,” said Saul sharply, and he returned the other’s defiant look, and felt hard pressed to keep back his jealous rage as he saw Gertrude rest calmly, with her hand in that of the new-comer. “No—not yet,” he added to himself.

“Well, then, my dear sir, as I do—in future—and as I have come a very long journey, and am tired and hungry, and want to talk to miss here, perhaps you’ll be good enough to take your hat and get out.”

Saul's eyes flashed, and his cheeks became of an uglier pallor, as he listened to this speech, which bore a strong resemblance to that of one of the late Mr Chucks, the boatswain, of "Peter Simple" fame. For it was all refinement at the beginning, and wandered off into argot that was the very reverse.

"I am not accustomed to be ordered out of this house, sir," said Saul in a low voice, full of suppressed rage; "and I refuse to go until I have seen your credentials."

"What!"

"And I'm not going to be bullied," said Saul. "Your cowboy manners don't frighten me; and if it wasn't for the lady here, whom, in spite of her preference for an utter stranger, I am bound to protect, I'd just take you and show you how to behave in an English house."

"Would you, sir? Then look here. Out in the West, from where I came, we have no policemen and magistrates at every corner, ready to do all our dirty work. We do it ourselves, and carry with us all that is ready and necessary for the job."

He advanced menacingly towards Saul; and as he took his first step, his hand dropped Gertrude's, and he put it behind him.

"George Harrington! For Heaven's sake?"

"Yes, yes, of course," he cried laughingly, taking her hand, laying it upon his arm, and stroking it gently. "I forgot. He riled me, and I felt as if I was back among the roughs out yonder. There, I don't want to quarrel, Mr Saul Harrington. I suppose we are uncles and cousins or something of the kind. Shake hands, and let's have a glass of something to show we are not bad friends. I suppose there is something in the house—eh, my dear?"

"Yes, but—"

"Look here, sir," cried Saul, ignoring the proffered hand, "I am not frightened by your Yankee, bullying ways, and I tell you what it is—"

Saul Harrington did not tell the new-comer what it was, for the door opened, and Doctor Lawrence came in hastily.

“What’s the matter?” he cried. “Some one ill?”

“Yes, old gentleman,” said the stranger banteringly. “This chap—Mr Saul Harrington I think he calls himself—has got a fit.”

Doctor Lawrence gazed sharply at the speaker, and then placed his glasses upon his nose, as Gertrude withdrew her arm and hurriedly crossed to the doctor’s side.

“Yes, sir,” cried Saul fiercely, “a fit of indignation. I refused to—”

“Oh, look here, let’s have an end of this. I don’t know who you are, old gentleman.”

“My name is Lawrence.”

“Well, then, Mr Lawrence—Oh, I know; you are my grandfather’s executor.”

“One of them, sir.”

“Well, I’ve come home at my grandfather’s wish, and I find he’s dead, and this man ready here to bully, and order, and insist upon my showing my papers.”

“Hum, my dear, don’t be alarmed,” said the doctor quietly; and then he turned to the last speaker. “You come as a stranger, sir, and it will be quite necessary for you to give ample proof that you are Mr George Harrington.”

“Of course, old gentleman, of course.”

“To me and my colleague, Mr Hampton; but I think Mr Saul Harrington might have waited till those who have a right to question come upon the spot. Lucky I came down.”

“You got my telegram?” said Gertrude.

“Telegram? No, my dear. I left home two hours ago. Now, Mr Saul, what have you to say?”

“Oh, I do not want to interfere,” said Saul quickly. “But there was no one here to protect Miss Bellwood.”

“Surely she needed no protection?” said the doctor, looking from one to the other.

“How do you know that, sir, when a man comes here assuming to be my cousin.”

“Assuming!” cried the new-comer very fiercely.

“Yes, assuming, sir. You refused to show any credentials.”

“Oh, no, I didn’t, and I don’t. But when a fellow begins to bully me, and to come the high-handed, I hit back. Look here, Mr Lawrence, has this Mr Saul Harrington any right to insist upon my clearing up to him?”

“None whatever, sir.”

“That’s enough. As to my refusing—not such a fool. Only we learn too much out in the West to begin opening out to every one who says, ‘I’m the proper moral custom-house officer: give up your keys.’”

“I only interfered as the executors were not present,” said Saul Harrington. “If this gentleman is what he professes to be, I shall only be too glad to give him the hand of welcome.”

“Thank ye for nothing. Now then, I’m hungry, so don’t let’s have any more jaw.”

Chapter Nine.

Proofs of Identity.

The new-comer was furnished with refreshment, and at the end of a couple of hours, after a long talk between Saul and Doctor Lawrence, the visitor rejoined them, just as there was a loud ring, steps, and, to Gertrude's great delight, the lawyer entered the room.

"Who's this?" said the young man sharply. "My fellow executor—Mr Hampton," said the doctor. "Hampton, this is Mr George Harrington."

"Oh, indeed," said the old lawyer, setting down a very glossy silk hat, and depositing a new pair of black kid gloves therein. "Good-morning, my dear Miss Gertrude. Sit down, sir, pray."

"Thank ye."

"Mr Saul Harrington, are you going to stay to this little conference?"

"Certainly, sir. You know it concerns me very closely."

"Ye-es," said the lawyer, "true. Mr George Harrington?"

"Yes, sir. Mr Hampton, I am George Harrington."

"You will excuse me, I am sure."

"Oh, yes, old gentleman, go ahead."

"You see Doctor Lawrence and I are the late Mr Harrington's executors, and we have a duty to perform. In the pursuit of that duty we shall have to ask questions that may seem impertinent."

"Oh, I don't mind. Quite right. I'll answer, only let's get it done. Here! I like dogs," he said softly to Gertrude, as he patted his leg, chirruped, and Bruno wagged his tail, trotted toward him, and then turned off, and went to the other side of where Gertrude was seated. "Ha, ha, ha! Dog wants to hear first whether I am the genuine article."

Saul watched him closely, and the doctor and lawyer exchanged glances, as if satisfied by the bluff nonchalant manner of the claimant, who raised his eyes now, and looked long and searchingly at the portrait whose eyes met his.

“Will you be good enough, sir, to tell me whose son you are?”

“Eh? George and Isabel Harrington’s.”

“And when you were born?”

“No! Hang it all, sir, that’s a poser. Can’t recollect being born.”

The lawyer raised his eyebrows.

“Somewhere about five-and-twenty years ago, I believe; but I’ve led such a rough life out there, that you mustn’t ask me any questions about dates or books.”

“Can you tell me anything about your childhood?”

“Oh, yes. Father had a ranche, and he went gold-digging, and prospecting, and we had an old nigger servant, who used to wash and cook and do everything; and a half-breed chap, half Indian, half Englishman, who used to take me out in the woods; and old Jake, that was the nigger, used to give me rides on his back.”

“But I mean about your earlier life.”

“No; can’t go back any farther than that.”

“You remember your grandfather, of course?”

“Eh? No, how should I remember a man I never saw?”

There was a pause here, and the young man looked sharply from one to the other, as the old lawyer cleared his throat.

“Will you be good enough to tell us any little act that you can recall.”

“Well, I haven’t a very good memory, gentlemen, but I’ve got a few notes

and letters in my pocket-book."

"Ha! documentary evidence," said the lawyer, brightening up, as the young man took a well-worn letter-case from his pocket.

"Here's the old man's letter to me about a watch I sent him."

Gertrude's face, which had seemed pained and full of anxious care brightened at this, and Saul bit his lip.

"To be sure—yes," said the lawyer, passing the letter to Doctor Lawrence, who smiled and nodded.

"Then here are a few notes I made about some remittances I sent home."

"To be sure—yes," said the lawyer, eagerly scanning the pencilled entries in the book. "Anything else, my dear sir?"

"There are some letters in one of the pockets, and the last one I received is there, telling me to come back, and what I was to do. But don't read that aloud," he said, smiling, as he fixed his eyes meaningly upon Gertrude's, making her lower her lids and turn scarlet, while Saul, who missed nothing, ground his teeth. "Private, that letter is, gentlemen, please."

"Yes, yes, yes," said the doctor, nodding pleasantly at Gertrude; who felt at the moment as if she would have given anything to have had with her an elderly woman friend.

"All very satisfactory, Mr George Harrington," said the old lawyer gravely; "but, unpleasant as it may seem, we must go a little further, please."

"Come," said the young man, smiling, "you acknowledge me as George Harrington, then?"

"A *lapsus lingua*—a mere slip of the tongue. Now, sir, can you give us any other proof. Have you brought any letters of introduction from well-known people in the States?"

"I have brought you a letter of introduction from my grandfather,

gentlemen—several."

"Yes, yes. Quite right. But any others?"

"Good Heavens, gentlemen, I have been for months hunting in the wildest parts of the North West, fighting bears; always on the watch to save myself from Indians; and when at last I got your letter at Laramie City, I came home. Letters from people in the States! Why, I never thought of such a thing."

"No, he would not," said the doctor quietly.

"By the way, gentlemen, as I am to come into some property now, I ought to make a will."

"A most wise proceeding, sir," assented the old lawyer.

"Then will you two gentlemen agree to be my executors?"

"Really, sir, I—"

"Because no man could have a more careful pair."

"You are complimentary, sir. Doctor Lawrence and I are only doing our duty."

"Of course, of course. Well, gentlemen, I've shown you my grandfather's letters, etcetera, and I am George Harrington. That's all I have got to say."

"But—you'll excuse me. We are rather awkwardly placed. We ought to have some other proof of your identity. My dear Miss Gertrude, have we any of Mr George Harrington's letters?"

"I think there are some among my guardian's papers."

"Stop a moment—I forgot. Here's my watch, with my initials engraved upon the case, and to be sure—why, what a dunderhead I am!"

Saul, who had been undergoing a torture of change—doubt and hope—

watched the young man's actions as he passed his hands behind his neck, and for a few moments seemed to be trying to unfasten something.

"That's it," he said, as he undid the clasp of a thin gold chain, and drew out chain and locket, both gold, and pressing a spring at either end, the locket flew open back and front, to display two daguerreotype heads. "Know them Mr—Mr—"

"Hampton," said the old lawyer, taking the locket, and examining it carefully, and looking long at the two faces before handing them to Doctor Lawrence. "What do you say to those?"

The Doctor examined the locket as carefully as his colleague, while Saul looked on with an intense interest as he waited for the next remark, and the claimant of the estate chirruped carelessly to the dog.

"As far as I can recollect them," said Doctor Lawrence, at length, "I should say these are the miniatures of Mr and Mrs George Harrington, but I only saw them once."

"Well," said the young man, smiling, as he held out his hand for the locket, "satisfactory?"

"Quite, sir," said the old lawyer, handing back the locket.

"Looks girlish," said its recipient, "but I always wear it round my neck. Shouldn't like to lose that. Now, gentlemen, any more questions to ask?"

"One more, sir," said the old lawyer. "My dear Gertrude Bellwood, may I ask you to leave us for a few minutes. You may have some orders to give."

Gertrude started to her feet, and was making for the door, when Saul rose to open it, but his rival was quicker, darting before him, and smiling at the girl as she passed out, more agitated and excited than she had ever felt before.

"Now, gentlemen, what's the next piece of cross-examination which this culprit is to bear?"

“I have—we have—but one more question to ask, sir,” said the old lawyer. “It is in our instructions, drawn out by my old and esteemed client, a year before his death. If you can answer that to our satisfaction, I for one shall be perfectly satisfied.”

“And I,” said the doctor; then to himself, “as far as your being the right man is concerned.”

“Very good, gentlemen,” was the smiling reply; “let’s see if I can oblige you.”

The words were light, but there was a peculiar intensity in the speaker’s eyes, and a slight twitching about the corners of his lips, which a close observer would have detected.

“Have you not some birth-mark about you?” said Doctor Lawrence.

“No, sir, as far as I am aware—none.”

“No peculiar marks about your person?”

“I have the scar of a bullet-wound in the shoulder—the entrance and exit. I believe it went through my scalp.”

“Scapular,” said the doctor, smiling.

“Yes—the blade-bone.”

“Anything else?”

“An ugly seam or ridge on the skull where I had a chop from an Indian axe; and a knot here in my right arm, where it was broken and mended again.”

“Is that all, sir?”

“No; one other mark—a trifle done some time or another—here on my breast. Like to see it, gentlemen?”

“Ha!” ejaculated the old lawyer. “If you are Mr George Harrington, sir, you

have the figure of a heart tattooed upon your breast—a heart transfixed by an arrow."

"That anything like it, gentlemen?" said the young man, unbuttoning his vest, and throwing open the flannel shirt he wore, to show, plainly marked upon his white skin, the figure described.

"Like it, sir?—yes," said the old lawyer. "Mr George Harrington, welcome home, sir, and I hope we may be the best of friends."

"And I add my congratulations, and the same wish, Mr George Harrington," said the doctor, shaking one hand as his colleague shook the other; "but," he added to himself, "as to the friendship, I have my doubts."

"And now it is my turn, Cousin George," said Saul Harrington, advancing with extended hand. "I apologise for playing the British bulldog to you, but you were a stranger, and you will be the last to blame me for showing a bold front in defence of your patrimony."

"To be sure, Cousin Saul. How are you, old fellow? Stop and let's all dine together. No more business to-day, I hope. Let's have a glass of wine—champagne—and, Cousin Saul, suppose you and I have a good long talk over a cigar."

"We will," said Saul, as they stood hand in hand, eye gazing into eye, and, singularly enough, with similar thoughts agitating each breast.

For the successor to the estate left by the original of the picture on the wall said to himself:

"If we were out in some parts of the West, Saul Harrington, any office would find it a bad spec to insure your life."

And Saul thought:

"If this man had not come back, I was master here—of the house, of the money, and of—"

He stopped and gazed hard across the room, for at that moment, looking

flushed and handsome, Gertrude stood hesitating at the doorway, as if asking if she might come in.

“Yes,” said Saul to himself, and as if in conclusion of his unfinished thought, “and of you, too.”

Chapter Ten.

Two Warnings.

Time soon slips by.

“Nonsense, my dear! why should we study the world? You know what my grandfather said.”

“Yes, George,” said Gertrude, with a peculiarly troubled look in her eyes.

“And very wisely; and as soon as you like to say you are ready, why, I am, and the world may go and hang itself.”

The troubled look in Gertrude’s eyes deepened, for the free and easy manner of her betrothed shocked her.

“You don’t dislike me, Gertie?” he said, laughing.

“No; oh, no,” she replied, looking at him wistfully.

“I know,” he cried, taking her hand. “You have only, as we may say, known me a month, and you think me too rough and ready to show so much of the American camp-life; but that will soon wear off. You are such a good, gentle little thing, you’ll soften me, and it will be all right.”

“Going out, George?”

“Yes; I promised to run down to Greenwich with Saul Harrington. Not a bad fellow when you know him better. I say, how long are Mr and Mrs Hampton going to stay here?”

“I don’t know, George.”

“It’s to play propriety, I suppose.”

“Mrs Hampton has always been very kind to me, and I know it inconveniences her to be here.”

“Then let her go.”

“She has asked me to go and stay with her, George.”

“Then don’t go. I see: let her stay here. I’m rather sick of all this prudery, though. Better name the day, Gertie, and let’s get it over.”

“No, no; not yet, George. Give me a little time.”

“Well, well, I won’t be hard upon you, and I do want to see a little London life before that comes off.”

He left the room, and Mrs Hampton, a tall, severe-looking lady in black silk, came slowly in, gazing at the dreamy-eyed girl, who did not seem to note her presence, as she took up some work, sat down in an easy-chair, and began to knit.

“Young, an enormous fortune, but I pity her,” said the elderly lady to herself.

At the same moment Gertrude was pitying herself, and struggling against her own wishes.

“I have read too much, I suppose,” she said to herself, “and have formed romantic ideas, and consequently George seems so different from what I pictured him to be. He is so rough and common in his ways; but what could I have expected, after the life he has led? But don’t be afraid, uncle, dearest,” she murmured. “I am going to be your dutiful child—I am going to be his wife; and I shall try so hard to wean him from anything that is not nice, and we shall be very happy, I am sure. Does he love me?”

Gertrude had a hard riddle to solve there, and she sat gazing thoughtfully before her for some time.

“I think so. He is always very gentle and kind to me, and he seems to wish for our marriage to take place soon; but somehow or other he cares more for Saul Harrington’s company than mine. It seems strange—very strange,” he said thoughtfully. “Saul Harrington is always coming here, too, now, and it does not seem as if he were attracted by me, but to be

always with George; and I mistrust him—I mistrust him."

Gertrude's thoughts were interrupted by her companion, who, after watching her in a fidgety manner for some time, suddenly dropped her work in her lap, raised a great knitting-pin in a menacing way as if to defend herself against attack, and said, in a harsh, strident voice:

"And he told me I was an old goose."

"Mrs Hampton! Who did?"

"Mr Hampton, my dear; last night, when we went to bed."

"Mr Hampton!"

"Ah, you don't understand, my dear; but I have been thinking it all over, and it's my duty and I will. Mr Hampton said I was not to interfere—that I was to stay here as long as you wished, and then that you had better come and stay with us."

"It is very kind of you, Mrs Hampton," faltered Gertrude.

"Nonsense, child—only civility; and, of course, I want to do what's right by you. As I told Hampton, it wasn't right for you to be alone here in the house, and only Denton with you. A very good old woman, but only Mrs Denton; so of course we came, and I know you've always looked upon me as an incubus."

"Indeed, you do not think so."

"Well, p'r'aps not, my dear; but I'm a very pernickerty body, and not always pleasant to deal with. However, that's neither here nor there. Like Doctor Lawrence does, Mr Hampton and I feel a kind of parental interest in you, my dear, and we want to see you happy."

"I am sure you do," said Gertrude, kissing the acid-looking old lady.

"Thank you, my dear," said Mrs Hampton, beaming, as she threw her gaunt arms about Gertrude, and gave her two sounding kisses. "And now, my dear, goose or no goose, I've watched everything, and I'm going

to speak out."

"You alarm me, Mrs Hampton."

"Yes, that's my way. I always do alarm people most when I want to be kindest. Now look at me: I'm a very unpleasant-looking body, ain't I? and I've got a terrible temper, but do you know Hampton and I have been married forty-three years, and never had an angry word?"

"I always knew you were a very happy pair, Mrs Hampton."

"And we are, my dear; but, Gertie Bellwood, are you two going to be a happy pair?"

"I hope so—oh, I'm sure so!" cried Gertrude, with the tears in her eyes. "I shall try so hard to make him happy."

"That settles it."

"Mrs Hampton!"

"Yes, my dear; that settles it. If you've got to force yourself to be happy, and will have to try so hard, why, it will all be a failure, so give it up."

"But Mr Harrington's wishes!"

"Bother Mr Harrington's wishes! He was a good eccentric old man, but he didn't know everything. He quarrelled with his son because they were both obstinate, and when he grew older he repented, and made up his mind to do to his grandson what he had omitted to do to his son. He has made him rich, and to make him happy he told you to marry him: but it will not do, my dear—it will not do."

"Mrs Hampton!"

"I can't help it, my child. Marry in haste and repent at leisure; but you shan't run headlong into misery without Rachel Hampton saying a word of warning."

"I feel that it is my duty to the dead," cried Gertrude.

“Duty! Ha! Then you love some one else—not that dreadful Saul Harrington?”

“Oh, no, Mrs Hampton.”

“Thank goodness! You gave me quite a turn. Then it’s some other young man?”

“Indeed, no.”

“Are you sure? Don’t be afraid to confess to me. Yes, you are sure. I can read you like a book. My dear, you don’t love anyone else, and you don’t love George Harrington.”

“But I shall—I am sure I shall.”

“No. You can’t grow that plant, my dear. It comes up of itself, like mushrooms. You may get spawn from the best seedsmen, and make a bed and grow some leathery, tasteless things that look like mushrooms, but they’re no more like the real thing than your grown love is like the genuine article. No, my dear, it won’t do, so take my advice, give up your rich man, and come and live with us till the right one comes.”

“No, no; I cannot, George Harrington expects me to be his wife, and I shall pray to God to make me all that is true and loving to the man chosen for my husband.”

“Then I’ve done my duty that way, so I’m at rest. Now, about something else.”

“Yes, Mrs Hampton?” said Gertrude in alarm.

“Take him in hand, my dear, and try and mould him into a better shape.”

“Oh, a little mixing with decent society will soon soften all that you notice.”

“No, it will not, my dear. He drinks too much.”

Gertrude sighed.

“He gambles.”

Gertrude started.

“And he seems to have found a congenial spirit in that Mr Saul Harrington.”

Gertrude shook her head sadly.

“I’m a matter-of-fact woman, my dear, and I speak out sometimes, and I’m going to speak out now. I hate Mr Saul Harrington, and you’d better take a few lessons from me, and hate him too.”

Gertrude looked at her in a bewildered way.

“Oh, come, that won’t do; you are going to marry Mr George?”

“Yes, Mrs Hampton.”

“And you are going to devote yourself to making him a good young man?”

“Yes.”

“Then you must put your hand to the plough with a will; and the first thing to do is to wean him away from Saul Harrington.”

“But how?”

“Woman’s wit, my dear. Make him love you, and think there’s no happiness to be found anywhere in the world except by your side.”

A rosy flush came into Gertrude’s cheeks, but it faded away, and left them pale, while the sad look of perplexity that was growing there became more pronounced.

“Do you understand?”

“Yes, Mrs Hampton,” said Gertrude, with a sigh.

“That’s what I did with Mr Hampton, and I don’t look the sort of woman,

do I?”

“Pray don’t ask me such questions. But surely Mr Hampton was never at all—”

“Wild, my dear? No, but he was growing too fond of his whist, and I—”

“Yes, Mrs Hampton; you—”

“Well, my dear,” said the old lady, kissing her affectionately, “I played a trump card. There, I’m going for my walk now. Will you come?”

“Not to-day. Mrs Denton here wants to see me.”

“Yes, if you please, Miss Gertrude,” said the old woman, who had tapped at the door and entered.

“Well, I’ll go and get on my things, and if you have done when I’ve dressed, I’ll wait for you. You ought to have your walk.”

“Yes, Denton?” said Gertrude, as soon as they were alone.

“I’ve come to ask you, my dear, if I may speak out.”

“Of course.”

“Then I will, for I’ve had charge of you ever since you were such a little dot. Miss Gertrude, my dear, it won’t do.”

“Denton?”

“I’m seeing too much, my dear, and if poor master was alive he’d say what I say, ‘It won’t do.’”

“What do you mean?” cried Gertrude, with her heart beating wildly.

“Master George is no husband for you, my dear, no more than Mr Saul is. Drink, and smoke, and cards, and bets. No, no, no, my dear, darling child; never mind the money, and the purple, and the fine linen. You’ve got your hundred a year, and I’ve got my annuity, as shall be yours, so let’s go and take a cottage and live together; for if I stay here much

longer, and see what’s going on, it will break my heart.”

And in proof of her earnestness the old lady sank upon her knees and covered her face with her apron, sobbing violently in spite of comforting words, till there was the rustle of silk upon the stairs, when she rose from her knees, kissed Gertrude quickly, and hurried out of the room.

Gertrude did not go for a walk, but sat alone thinking about her future life, and the clouds grew darker and seemed to close her in.

Chapter Eleven.

Attached Friends.

“Odd, isn’t it, George, old boy?”

“More than odd, Saul, old man.”

“When I first saw you I said to myself, ‘This fellow’s an impostor,’ and I felt savage—there, I can give it no better word.”

“And when I clapped eyes on you, I said to myself, ‘This chap will do anything he can to rob me of my rights, and is as jealous as a Turk because that little girl smiled at me.’”

“And I haven’t done all I could to keep you out of your rights?”

“Not you, Saul.”

“I’ve done all I could to help you get them, haven’t I?”

“That you have, old man.”

“And as to being jealous about you and Gertie, why, the thing’s absurd.”

“Of course it is. Take some more whiskey. Plenty more where that came from.”

“Glad to hear it,” said Saul, taking up bottle and glass, as they sat together in the handsomely furnished old study at The Mynns. “Jealous? Ridiculous, when the old man had settled beforehand that you were to marry her. I say, old chap,” continued Saul, resting the neck of the bottle on the rim of the glass, and looking across the table with a leer, “how are you getting on with her?”

“What’s that to you? Take some whiskey and another cigar,” said the other roughly.

“Oh, beg pardon. Didn’t know I was touching on dangerous ground,” said

Saul. “I’m mum.”

They had both been drinking far more than they could bear sensibly, for Saul had dined there that night, and the wine had been pretty abundant both during and after the dinner. Then they had adjourned to the study to smoke, have coffee and brandy, and then the whiskey had become the order of the night.

“Well,” said the host, “why don’t you help yourself and pass the bottle?”

“Because it’s empty,” said Saul, pushing the bottle from him.

“Oh, we’ll soon cure that,” said the young man, rising and going to a cabinet, out of one of whose drawers he took a couple of large keys. “Been down in the cellar, I suppose?”

“I? Never,” said Saul.

“Then you shall come now. It will surprise you.”

“Oh, no, it will not,” said Saul, rising. “Nothing here surprises me. You’re a lucky dog, George; but there, I don’t envy you, old fellow, for you deserve to have it. You’re so generous and true.”

“That’s right, old chap,” cried Saul’s host, clapping him on the shoulder. “I want to be generous; what’s the use of having plenty and keeping it all locked up?”

There was a tap at the door.

“Come in.”

The old housekeeper entered timidly.

“I only came to see if you wanted anything, sir, before I go to bed.”

“Eh? Why, what time is it?” said her master, pulling out his magnificent gold watch by its nugget chain. “Half-past ten. All right; go to bed, Denton, old girl. I don’t want anything else. I’ll lock the door when Mr Saul goes. Yes, I do; I want a candle.”

“Candle? Yes, sir.”

The old woman hurried out, and returned directly with a lighted chamber candle, which she set down, looked uneasily from one to the other, and left the room, shaking her head as she crossed the hall.

“I say, George, what a watch!” cried Saul. “You are going it.”

“Going it be hanged! That’s the watch I had made in New York and sent over for a present to the old man, and he never used it, but saved it up for me. I only got it the other day, after all the confounded legal business was at an end. I seemed to be kept out of my rights till all that was done. Now come and let’s get the whiskey.”

He led the way out into the hall, and through a swing door to the top of a flight of steps, at the bottom of which, in a recess, was an ordinary door of dark oak.

This he unlocked, and threw back to admit the pair to a square entry, beyond which was another door, of iron, painted stone colour, and this rattled and creaked as it was unlocked and pushed back against the wall.

“There! Something like cellars, eh? Hold up the light.”

Saul obeyed, and as the damp odour of sawdust fell upon his sense of smell, he saw that he had, right and left, bin after bin, formed in brickwork, whitewashed, and all nearly full of bottles, over each bin being the kind and age of the wine in black letters upon a white earthenware label.

“Why, I had no conception that you had such a cellar, old fellow.”

“S’pose not. It isn’t everybody who has. Needn’t stint, eh? Cellar after cellar, all through beneath the house.”

“But not all stocked?”

“Every one, and with the best of wine. Here we are.”

He stopped before a bin, and took down a bottle of whiskey. “Don’t want

to see any more I suppose?”

“Oh yes, I do. Let’s see it all.”

“See it and taste too if you like. What shall it be?”

“Nothing,” said Saul grimly, as he looked intently about him. “I shall have another drop of that whiskey when we get upstairs, and then go home.”

“Good boy,” was the bantering remark. “Capital whiskey, though. Like milk. You should taste some of the stuff they sell us out in the West. Paraffin is honey to it!”

“No wish to try it, my dear sir,” said Saul, as he followed his host from cellar to cellar, the feeble light of the candle casting curious shadows on the damp, whitewashed walls, and glinting from the round bottle ends which protruded from their sawdust beds.

“I’m astounded,” said Saul, as they went on and on. “I’d no idea the old man had such a cellar of wine. He scarcely ever touched anything but a liqueur of brandy.”

“Saving it all up for me, I suppose,” said the other laughingly.

“Bring many people down here?”

“Here? Nobody. You’re the first who has been down. Place had been sealed up for years. Look at that?”

They were in the farthest cellar now, a small, low-arched, and groined place, with bins on two sides, the other being blank brick wall, whitewashed.

“Well, what is there to look at?”

“Wait till we get upstairs and I’ll show you. Had enough of it?”

“Yes,” said Saul, as he curiously scanned the liquid wealth about him, and noticed the various catacomb-like openings in which the rich amber, topaz, and ruby wine was stored.

“Come along, then. Can always give a friend a good glass of wine when he comes.”

Saul followed, noting how silent and tomb-like the place was, and how his footsteps made not the slightest sound in the thick coating of sawdust on the stone floor. Then he remarked how grotesque and strange his companion looked in the darkness, with the light sending his shadow here and there, and a strange sensation attacked Saul Harrington,—the blood flew to his head, and he saw dimly, as through a mist in which various scenes were being enacted, and all connected with the man before him—the man who stood in his way, and without whom he would have been a rich man, perhaps a happy one.

“I could have made her love me,” he muttered. “Eh?”

“I did not speak. Cleared my throat.”

“Oh, I say! what’s the matter? You look ghastly.”

“The darkness and your candle,” said Saul, smiling. “I don’t know, though; I do feel a bit giddy. Is it the smell of the wine?”

“Perhaps. Come and have the whiskey. That will soon set you right.”

The doors were carefully locked, and Saul Harrington shuddered, his brow contracted, and he seemed to be looking far away into futurity as he followed his host upstairs into the study, where the cork was drawn, fresh cigars lit, and, after placing the keys in the cabinet drawer, another was opened, and an oblong book taken out.

“Look at that, my lad. Cellar book. There you are—age and quantity of all the wines, and when laid down.”

“Wonderful care he took of all these things.”

“The old man was a trump. But look here, Saul, my lad: ‘Cellar number seven entered by bricked-up archway from number six.’ Remember number six?”

“No.”

“Yes, you do; where I spoke when you were staring at the blank wall. That’s the way into number seven. And read here: ‘Eight bins, four on each side. Three on the right, port; four on the left, sherry. The fourth bin on the right I shall fill with Madeira when I come across a good vintage. Bricked up, JH.’”

“Yes, my uncle’s writing,” said Saul, looking eagerly, and greatly attracted by the book. “That’s a bricked-up cellar, then, beyond the others?”

“Yes, with the bins also bricked-up. We’ll break through some day, Saul, and taste them.”

“We will,” said the latter, rising hastily, and giving his head a shake, as if to clear away some mist. “What, going?”

“Yes,” said Saul huskily. “I must be off. Good-night, old fellow.”

“Good-night, Saul, old chap. I’ll let you out and lock up. Quite early. Only eleven. Better stop and have another glass.”

“No, no,” said Saul hurriedly. “Not to-night.”

“Won’t you come up and say good-night to Gertie and Mrs Hampton?”

“No. Say good-night for me.”

Saul caught up his hat and hurried away out into the gloomy suburban road.

“If you miss your train, come back,” shouted the young man.

“Yes, yes, all right,” came back out of the darkness, and then, with bent head, Saul Harrington hurried on, making his way more by instinct than sight toward the station, as he kept on muttering to himself:

“It half maddens me to see them together. Him, the wretched, coarse, drunken savage, wallowing in all that wealth. Will she marry him? I suppose so. No, no. I dared not stay. I felt as if—”

Saul Harrington looked stealthily round, and then shuddered, as he

thought of the loneliness of the place, the hours they spent together, and then walked rapidly on to try and chase away the thoughts which seemed to be hunting him through the darkness of the night.

Meanwhile, George Harrington, Esq, of The Mynns, went back into the study, poured himself out another glass of the whiskey, tossed it off, and walked up into the drawing-room, where he met Gertrude, candle in hand, crossing to the door.

“Ah, Gertie, going to bed?”

“Yes, George. Good-night.”

“Good-night, pet.”

Before she could avoid the embrace, he had taken her in his arms, and kissed her, sending the blood flushing to her temples as she ran out and upstairs, fighting hard to keep back the sobs which struggled for utterance.

As she reached her own room she ran to the washstand to bathe her lips and burning cheeks, seeking to get rid of the foul odour of tobacco and spirits which seemed to cling to them. Then she flung herself upon her knees by her bedside, and buried her face in her hands, sobbing wildly for the sweet illusions of her life, in which a brave, frank young hero from the West had stood out so prominently, seemed to be fading away slowly, one by one.

Chapter Twelve.

Late for Dinner.

“Ah, Mrs Denton! What have we here?”

It was Mr Hampton who asked the question as he returned one afternoon from town, to find a van in the yard at The Mynns, and some workmen about to leave.

“The men brought down a billiard-table, sir, and have been putting it up in the west room.”

“Oh!”

The old lawyer hung up his hat and coat, and then turned to find the old lady looking at him very piteously.

“Well, Mrs Denton, what is it?”

“Nothing, sir, nothing,” said the old lady; and she sighed as she smothered down her feelings and went away.

“Humph!” ejaculated the lawyer. “Don’t like it, poor old soul.”

He went into the drawing-room, where he found Gertrude seated with his wife.

“Ah, my dear, I was afraid I was late. Not dressed for dinner?”

“No, Mr Hampton; George wished it to be an hour later.”

“Oh! Lawrence is coming, is he not?”

“Yes; and George said he should bring back Mr Saul Harrington. I think I’ll go now and dress.”

She smiled at him as he took and patted her little hand, and he followed her to the door before returning to where Mrs Hampton was seated bolt

upright.

“Well?” he said.

“Well?”

“My lord out, then?”

“Yes; gone to some races or something with that beautiful Saul Harrington. He’ll make ducks and drakes of all this money.”

“He has a perfect right to it, my dear. It is his own.”

“Now, Phineas, don’t talk in that cold-blooded way. I am getting terribly uncomfortable.”

“My dear wife, I have already grown terribly uncomfortable, and I want to get back home.”

“He’s going on shockingly, Phineas. Drinks heavily, and Saul encourages him. Don’t you think we ought to do something?”

“No. Impossible.”

“About him, perhaps; but about dear Gertrude.”

“What can we do?”

“Get her away from here. I am so sick of it. It’s terrible the way he goes on. Really, I think sometimes the old man would have done better to have left his money to Saul.”

“Oh, hang it, no, my dear. We’re in for it, though. Can’t we go home?”

“Decidedly not—without Gertrude.”

“But she isn’t our child.”

“Now, if you are going to talk rubbish, Phineas, I’ve done. I know she is not our child, but is that any reason why we should shut our bowels of compassion against her?”

“No, my dear.”

“I like the girl very much, and so do you, and we’re going to do our duty.”

“Of course, my dear.”

“Then we must get her away to our place.”

“Delighted to have her.”

“She must not stay here—that’s certain; and if we get her away, perhaps she’ll escape this odious engagement.”

“To a young man with a large fortune.”

“Don’t talk rubbish, Phineas! What’s the good of a large fortune to a tipsy man? He’ll pour it all down the sink.”

“Humph! His own.”

“And break her heart in a year.”

“Poor child!”

“I know. Why, he’s bordering on delirium tremens now.”

“My dear Rachel, how can you know anything about DT?”

“Do you think I’m a fool, Phineas?”

“No, my dear, I certainly don’t.”

“Then give me credit for having eyes in my head. I’d give anything to have that cellar bricked-up.”

“I should like a few dozen of that choice port and the old East Indian sherry first.”

“Pish! You’re better without.”

“I don’t know, Rachel. And there’s a fine old Madeira, too.”

“He is quite transforming the place. Why, he’s having a horrible gaming-table set up in the west room.”

“My dear, prejudiced old wife, you have one at home, so why should not he?”

“For shame, Phineas! Nothing of the kind.”

“Why, there’s a card-table in the drawing-room, where you play rubbers of whist.”

“Well, that’s not a gambling-table. This is a—”

“Billiard-table, Rachel. Don’t talk such nonsense. I’d rather see him play billiards all day than sit drinking with Saul Harrington.”

“Oh, don’t tell me. I know better. And now mind this, we must get Gertrude away, and I shall not be happy till we do.”

“Well, I’ll think about it; but it’s a serious thing, my dear. If we get her away the marriage will not come off, and it was the old man’s wish.”

“Because he did not know what his beautiful grandson was like. There, it’s growing late, and I’ve got to change my frock.”

Mrs Hampton, who looked very nettled and upset, was half way to the door when the gate-bell rang.

“Here’s Lawrence,” said the old lawyer, going to the window, an announcement which sent Mrs Hampton off with a loud whishing sound of silk over the carpet and against the door-post, as she hurried out. “Ah, Hampton! how are you?”

“Don’t want any pills or any other medicine,” said the dry old lawyer grimly, as the doctor entered the room.

“Well, shake hands,” said the fresh comer, as he finished making a neat packet of his gloves by stuffing one in the other.

“Hands clean?”

“Bless my soul, man, yes!”

“Not been handling any contagious patients?”

“Get out! Of course not. How are things looking?” said the doctor, after a long conversation on things in general.

“Horribly.”

“You don’t say so. Well, I’m very, very sorry.”

“For little Gertrude’s sake? So am I.”

“You’ve heard something.” The lawyer nodded.

“Well, as brother executor, speak out.” The lawyer drew a long breath, screwed up his face, and half shut his eye.

“You know that there was a good balance at the bank.”

“Yes, excellent.”

“All gone.”

“The devil!”

“Yes; and he came to me three days ago about raising some more before the rents came in.”

“And you refused him, of course?”

“Refused, of course! Lawrence, you’re mad.”

“Not I, my dear sir. What do you mean?”

“If he came to you to doctor him after some long course of dissipation, would you refuse to prescribe, and drive him to some quack?”

“Why, of course not.”

“Well, then, is it likely that I should refuse to raise him money, when I can

do it for four per cent, and send him post haste to some confounded gang of scoundrels who would charge him sixty, and make him take half the money in bad wine and cigars."

"No, no, of course not. I was wrong."

"Hist! Here's Gertrude."

"Ah, my dear child," cried the doctor, kissing her affectionately. "Why, hullo! Here's checks! Dark marks under the eyes, too! This won't do. Here, Hampton, you'll have to turn out, and I must come into residence."

"Oh, I'm quite well," said Gertrude laughingly. "I'm so glad you've come."

"Are you? That's right. Where's Mr George?"

"Not come back yet. He said the dinner was to be kept back an hour."

"Well, well, better appetites. And where is Mrs Hampton?"

"Here," said that lady's sharp, decisive voice, as, after making a hurried change of costume, she returned to the drawing-room.

"That the new fashion, Rachel?" said the lawyer drily.

"Eh? What do you mean?" and Mrs Hampton turned to one of the glasses, "Why, bless me?"

She ran out of the room, for, in her hurry, she had come down without her cap—a very stately edifice of lace and wire; and Mrs Hampton's natural coiffure was—

Well, she was long past sixty.

The lawyer chuckled, Gertrude coloured, and began hurriedly to talk upon something irrelevant, which was kept up till Mrs Hampton returned, looking very severe, and ready to snub her husband at the first chance.

Then the conversation flagged, and at last Mrs Denton came in upon a secret mission to her young mistress, which was prefaced by the words:

“Cook says.”

For it was long past the time arranged for the dinner.

An hour passed, and then another, during which space of time Mrs Denton appeared four times. But at the last Mrs Hampton spoke out.

“I’m quite sure, Gertrude, dear, that Mr Harrington would not wish us to wait longer. It’s nine o’clock, and Doctor Lawrence has to go back to town.”

“Yes, you lucky sojourners here—I have.”

“And I am famished,” continued Mrs Hampton. “Depend upon it, Harrington and Mr Saul have forgotten us, and are dining together somewhere else.”

“Would you have the dinner up, then?” faltered Gertrude, whose countenance plainly told of the shame and annoyance she felt.

“If you don’t, my dear, Lawrence and I are going out to have a debauch on buns,” said the lawyer merrily.

“And cook says, Miss Gertrude, that—”

“Yes, yes, Denton; have the dinner up directly.”

Five minutes later they were in the severe-looking dining-room, partaking of burnt soup, dried fish, overdone entrées, and roast joints that were completely spoiled, while all the time the stern countenance of the old man gazed down from the canvas on the wall.

The dinner was naturally a failure, and her elders noted how Gertrude struggled to keep up appearances, but with ear attent and eyes constantly turning towards the door.

“Well,” said the doctor, in the course of conversation, “it is late, certainly, but I don’t know but what I like it. It seems going back to the pleasant old times.”

“Ah, when the day’s work was done, and one settled down to a comfortable supper.”

“Like to have been a lawyer; a doctor’s work is never done.”

“Pray don’t fidget so, my dear,” said Mrs Hampton, as they left the gentlemen to their wine.

“Do you think there is anything the matter, Mrs Hampton?”

“No, my dear, of course not,” was the quick reply, while to herself the stern-looking old lady said, “Yes, and far too much.”

In due time, after a chat over the slate of affairs, the gentlemen rose to go to the drawing-room.

“Yes, Hampton,” said the doctor, “I agree with you; she ought to leave here at once; and—By George! I did not know it was so late. I must be getting back.”

“Eleven o’clock?” exclaimed the lawyer, referring to his watch.

“And if I don’t mind I shall miss my train. Come to say good-night, my dear. Later than I thought.”

“Going, Doctor Lawrence?” said Gertrude uneasily; and she looked at him with her eyes full of trouble.

“Yes; time and trains, you see. Hullo!”

There was the stopping of some vehicle at the gate, a loud ring of the great bell, and Bruno shot from beneath one of the couches, to utter a loud bark.

“Hark!” exclaimed Gertrude, who was pale and trembling, as voices were heard shouting hurriedly, some one calling loudly as the front door was opened.

“He’s pretty late,” said the doctor jocosely. “By George! I shouldn’t wonder if he has come in the station-fly. It shall take me bark.”

“Oh, Doctor Lawrence!” said Gertrude, running to the door; “there has been some accident. I am so glad you are here.”

“Your plan won’t work, Hampton,” said the doctor to himself. “She’s fond of him, after all;” and he followed the others into the hall.

Chapter Thirteen.

George Harrington's Accident.

"Don't be alarmed," said Saul Harrington, confronting them. "Perhaps you ladies had better go back to the drawing-room."

"What is the matter?" said Gertrude quickly.

"Oh, nothing much. Harrington was taken ill, and I got him to lie down, but he didn't seem to get any better, so I thought it better to order a fly and have him driven home. But, my dear Miss Bellwood, you had better retire."

There was a tone in his voice which seemed to say, "For goodness sake don't," and he hugged himself as Mrs Hampton said shortly:

"I always thought women were most useful when anyone was ill."

"Here! Hi! Somebody! Curse you! Let go, will you!" came from down by the gate.

"He's a little delirious, I think," said Saul hastily. "The fly-man is holding him back on the seat. Mr Hampton, are there any men about? We want help."

"Yes, two old men and a young man, Mr Saul. Come along, Lawrence; let's get him in."

Gertrude gave the doctor a piteous look.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear," he said kindly. "I'll soon bring him round. Leave him to us."

He followed the lawyer down to the gate, as Saul lingered for a moment to whisper to Gertrude:

"He's right, don't be alarmed. It is not serious," and he smiled to himself as he hurried after the others.

“What a kind, considerate man Mr Saul is,” said Mrs Hampton sarcastically. “Humph!”

She stopped to listen, as quite a disturbance came from the gate.

“Is—is it an accident, Mrs Hampton?” whispered Gertrude.

“Yes, my dear. I don’t think there is any doubt about that.”

“Look sharp, please,” came in a voice full of remonstrance, as the gentlemen hurried down to the gate, to find a desperate struggle going on in the fly, where the driver was seated with his head tucked down upon his chest to avoid blows, while he held his fare tightly round the waist. “Ah, that’s better. Take hold of his fisties, somebody. He’s reg’lar mad.”

“Poor fellow!” exclaimed Saul, seizing one of the struggling man’s arms, while Doctor Lawrence got hold of the other, and between them they drew the sufferer out of the fly on to his knees by the gate.

“That’s better,” said the fly-man. “Lucky I’ve got my quiet old mare. He gave such a jump once, he startled even her.”

“Here, lend a hand,” said the doctor sharply, as his patient began to struggle furiously, and tried to fling them off, “all of you. We’re four. We’ll take a wrist each, Hampton. You two young men take an ankle apiece.”

“Why, that’s same as they does the sojers when they’re a bit on,” said the fly-man.

“No, no,” cried the doctor. “The other way. Not face downwards.”

The patient was in a sitting position on the gravel, laughing idiotically, and trying to troll out portions of a song, but as he felt himself seized and lifted from the ground his whole manner changed: he struggled furiously, his face became distorted, and he burst forth into a tirade of oaths and curses directed at all in turn.

“Steady, guv’nor!” said the fly-man, as he held on tightly to one leg. “Steady, you ain’t a swimming. Kicks out like a frog.”

“Don’t let go, whatever you do,” said the doctor.

“Not I, sir. I’ll hold on. My! he have had his whack. We can do a bit of a swear here in England, but these American gents could give any of us fifty out of a hundred.”

“Be silent, man!” said the lawyer sternly, as they neared the flight of stone steps leading up to the front door. Then aloud, “Rachel, take Miss Bellwood to the dining-room and stay there.”

Mrs Hampton took Gertrude’s hand, but she was quietly repulsed, and the girl stood just inside the hall, as the sick man was carried up the stone steps, and then into the study, where they placed him on a couch, from which he tried to struggle up, cursing and blaspheming all the time.

“Had you not better go, Gertrude?” whispered Saul, as he left the other three holding his companion down.

She paid no heed to his words, but stood holding Mrs Hampton’s wrist, gazing down at the struggling brute.

“Here you, Mr Saul, get something—a table cover will do, or a rope. We must tie him down. Better go, Miss Gertrude. I’ll get him calm after a bit.”

Gertrude made no reply even to this, but stood gazing as if fascinated, and shuddering slightly as she heard the coarse, ruffianly language and blasphemies directed at all in turn.

“This settles it,” said Mrs Hampton to herself, as, in obedience to a summons, Mrs Denton brought in a couple of sheets, and then stood weeping silently and wringing her hands, as she saw the doctor deftly fold the sheets, and passing one across the struggling man’s chest, give place to Saul, who knelt upon his friend, while the broad bandage was tightly secured right under the couch.

A second band was fastened across his legs, and then Mr Hampton turned to the fly-man, who stood smiling at the scene.

“Thankye, sir,” he said, touching his forehead. “Like such a job every day. Lor’,” he said to himself, as he went down the gravel path to the iron

gates, “when gents does go it, they does go it and no mistake. That must be champagne, that must; beer and gin wouldn’t never make me like him.”

“Now,” said the doctor, as soon as the fly-man had driven off, “I must have this got from the nearest chemist’s. Under the circumstances, Mr Saul, I must ask you to go and fetch it. They’ll be shut up for the night, but I must have the drugs.”

“I don’t know what you mean, Doctor Lawrence, by ‘under the circumstances.’ If you think I am to blame for my friend, George Harrington’s illness, you are sadly mistaken. It is an attack of Western or swamp fever, I presume.”

“Undoubtedly,” said the doctor drily.

“Bring the whiskey,” shouted the prisoner, in a hoarse yell.

“May I ask you to fetch this medicine, Mr Saul?” said the doctor again.

“Certainly,” replied Saul; and as he took the paper, he gave Gertrude an imploring look, that changed to one of sympathy as he passed out.

The look was lost upon Gertrude, whose eyes were fixed upon the struggling, blaspheming man bound on the couch, and who could only be kept in his place by Mr Hampton sitting upon him. She had been entreated, again and again, to leave the room, but had refused as if determined to see all.

“Nasty fit,” said the doctor coolly, as he gave the lawyer a peculiar look.

“Yes. I never saw a worse.”

“Here,” cried the patient, with a hoarse roar. “Get some whisk’. Throat’s like—like—what you call it. Hullo, old mother ’Ampton, you there! Where’s old Saul?”

He burst out into an idiotic fit of laughter, and looked from one to the other.

“Where’s Gertie?” he cried at last; “where’s little lassie? Fesh her here. Got t’headache. She’s good f’readache. Curse you, what are you doing. Let’s get up.”

There was another fierce struggle, but the bandages held firm, and he lay panting for a time.

“Man must joy self sometimes. Ah, there you are, little one. It’s all right—it’s all right.”

His eyes closed, and he lay passive for quite a quarter of an hour, the doctor watching every change, and at last joining his entreaties to those of Mrs Hampton.

“You had better go, Gertrude, my dear. You can do no good. I shall stay here by him—perhaps all night. He’ll be better in the morning.”

“Never better to me,” thought Gertrude, as she looked wistfully in the doctor’s eyes. But she shook her head and intimated that she should stay.

“But it is not a fit scene for you, my child,” whispered Mrs Hampton tenderly.

“I cannot help it, I may be of use. Doctor Lawrence,” she said aloud, piteously, as with a faint hope that she might be deceived, and that she was unjust in attributing the trouble to drink, “are such fits likely to return?”

“Eh? Hum! Well, really, my dear, it all depends upon the patient himself. Ah! here’s Mr Saul.”

“Eh? Saul?” yelled the patient. “Where’s old Saul? More whiskey. Ah, would you!”

He burst out into such a torrent of tall swearing as is said to be peculiar to the mule-drivers of the Far West, and Gertrude shuddered as the hot words came pouring forth.

“That’s right, Mr Saul. Now, Mrs Denton, a wine-glass, and a little cold

water, please."

These were obtained, and as the chink of bottle against glass was heard, the patient shouted aloud, and strained to sit up and reach the glass held out to him, and whose contents he swallowed instantly.

"What's that?" he shouted; "not whisk— That you, Saul boy. Come here —come—"

He stopped short, uttered a furious oath, and made a bound to set himself free, but sank back inert and lay staring in a ghastly manner at the ceiling.

The doctor laid his hand upon his patient's heart, felt his pulse, and then bent down over him anxiously.

"Here," he said quickly, "where is that prescription, Mr Saul?"

"The prescription, sir? Here," was the reply; and Saul took it from his breast-pocket.

Doctor Lawrence glanced at it quickly, and seemed satisfied, but turned to his patient again, as if the effects of his dose made him uneasy.

"He'll be better soon, Gertrude, dear," whispered Mrs Hampton, as she drew her away to the embayed window, and stood with her half hidden by the curtains, but with Saul Harrington's eyes watching them keenly. "Don't be alarmed, my dear, at the violence of the attack."

"I am not alarmed," said Gertrude slowly, and in a deep, sad voice, "and I am not deceived, Mrs Hampton."

"What do you mean, my dear?"

"That I never saw any one behave like that before. Mrs Hampton, dear, I am not the child you think me. Do you suppose I do not know that this is the effect of drink?"

There was a dead silence for a few moments, broken only by the stertorous breathing of the man upon the couch.

“I wished to spare you pain, my poor darling,” said Mrs Hampton affectionately, as she drew the weeping girl to her breast. “But you see now it is impossible for you to wed this man. Gertrude, my child, you must come home with me, and give up all thoughts of poor old Mr Harrington’s wishes. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“And you will not be tempted by the money to sacrifice yourself like this.”

“No,” said Gertrude gently. “No money would tempt me, but it was my poor guardian’s great wish that I should be the wife of the boy he worshipped.”

“But, my—”

“Hush, Mrs Hampton. He was not always like this, but generous, chivalrous, and true. Mrs Hampton, I can see my duty here. It will be no sacrifice, but a labour of love.”

“What? You will not stay here?”

“Yes, and will be his wife.”

“What? You love him, then?”

“No, I think not yet; but I shall bring him patiently back to that which he was when he used to help my poor guardian—win him back to a truer life.”

“Gertrude?”

“If I can do that, I shall fulfil the wishes of the dead.”

“Rachel, take Miss Gertrude away. Hampton, Mr Saul, I must have more help here,” said the doctor in a low, stern voice, as he bent over the man upon the couch, and then in a hoarse, excited whisper he exclaimed:

“Good God! He’s dying!”

Chapter Fourteen.

Doctors Agree.

The anxiety was terrible for a short time, during which the sick man seemed to be suffering from acute spasms, which made his limbs contract, and drew the muscles of his features in a way that was painful to behold.

Mr Hampton had started off at once for assistance, and Saul placed himself at Doctor Lawrence's disposal, holding or supporting the patient as his convulsions took the form of a desire to throw himself upon the floor, or of sinking back off the couch.

"You must have given him too strong a dose, doctor," said Saul at last, as the sufferer lay ghastly-looking, and, for the moment, still.

His eyes were closed, his teeth set, and his fingers tightly clenched, while the sunken eyes and hollowed cheeks seemed to be those of one suffering from a long and painful illness, and not of a young man but a few hours before in the full tide of health.

"No," said the doctor thoughtfully, "it was the correct quantity. The only thing I can see is that the chemist must have made some terrible mistake. Ha!" he ejaculated at last, as he sat holding his patient's hand, "that's better. The paroxysms of pain have passed away, and—"

He was speaking too soon, for the sufferer suddenly uttered a wild cry, and began to writhe and struggle upon the couch, groaning and kicking with pain, and apparently unconscious of the fact that Gertrude was kneeling at his side, holding one of his cold, damp hands.

The pain passed off, though, after a time, and, livid-looking, and with eyelids and fingers twitching, he lay once more apparently exhausted, till finally his breathing grew regular and faint in the calm sleep of exhaustion.

About this time the second doctor arrived with Mr Hampton, and the room

was cleared for the two medicoes to have their consultation.

The great dining-room looked gloomy in the extreme, lit by a hand-candlestick, which had been brought in from the hall; and its occupants stood listening, Mr Hampton and Saul apart, Mrs Hampton and Gertrude together, waiting eagerly for permission to re-enter the study, where, as Gertrude walked to the dining-room door from time to time, all seemed to be terribly still.

It was when returning agitatedly from one of these visits to the open door that she happened to glance upward to where her old guardian's portrait hung upon the wall, and it was as if the whole of the feeble light from the candle had become focussed upon the grim features of the stern old man, whose eyes met hers in a questioning manner, and to Gertrude it seemed as if they asked her to do her duty by the erring man.

At last the opening of the study door was heard, followed by hushed voices in the hall, and the local doctor took his departure.

"Well?" said Saul eagerly.

"Mr Herbert agrees with me, Mr Saul. Of course, under the circumstances, I submitted my prescription to him. He agreed that it was correct, and he joins with me in my opinion as to the cause."

Saul looked at him inquiringly, and it fell to Gertrude's lot to ask the question as to the cause of the terrible suffering.

"The chemist must have made some grievous mistake, my dear, through being disturbed so late at night."

"But he will be better soon?"

"He is better now, my child; and it will, perhaps, be a lesson to him," he added to the lawyer, as they returned to the study, where the patient had sunk into the deep sleep produced by the drug the doctor had administered; the terribly potent chemical he had also taken having exhausted its strength.

"Nothing can be better than this," said Doctor Lawrence. "And now, if you

people will all go to bed, it will be the kindest thing for my patient."

"But he must not be left," said Gertrude in a quiet, decided tone.

"He is not going to be left," replied the doctor. "I shall stop with him, and if anybody is needed I will soon call some one."

"But you must have some one to sit up with you, Mr Lawrence," said Mrs Hampton.

"Yes; I will sit up with him," cried Saul eagerly. "It was not my fault, but I feel a little guilty about his being so ill; and it is too late to go back to town."

"Very well," said the doctor quietly, "you can sit up with me;" and they kept vigil by the young man's side.

Chapter Fifteen.

Friendly Advice.

It was a fortnight before the sufferer was about again, and during that period Gertrude had begun to look more hopefully upon her future, for, though peevish and fretful to a degree, Mr George Harrington, so Mrs Hampton said, showed the better side of his character.

Saul came twice a week to see the invalid, and at the end of the fortnight was down at The Mynns and out in the garden with him.

“If that confounded, meddling old doctor had left me alone, Saul, old fellow, I should have been all right after a good sleep.”

“Doubtful,” said Saul, smiling.

“Well, nearly all right. I suppose I had been having a little too much.”

“Little! I should have been sorry to have taken half.”

“Ah, well, never mind that. I’m all right again now, only I feel as if I should like to prosecute that chemist for his blunder.”

“He deserves it,” said Saul; “but you couldn’t do anything. It was an accident, that’s all.”

“But, confound the man! he swears, so Lawrence says, that he made the prescription up quite correctly.”

“Perhaps your system will not bear the particular drug he prescribed.”

“My system won’t bear molten lead poured into it,” said the young man tartly. “Hang it! I felt as if I was being burned up.”

“You recollect the sensations, then?”

“Recollect! Why, it sobered me in an instant, and I felt all the time as if the end had come.”

“But it had not, my dear old fellow,” cried Saul enthusiastically. “And as soon as the doctor gives you leave, we’ll have a snug, quiet little dinner together somewhere, and forget all the past.”

“No,” said the other quietly, “I must settle down now, and drop all this fast life. I’ve got to mend and marry little Gertrude.”

Saul’s countenance changed.

“Hallo! what’s the matter? You haven’t taken a dose of the doctor’s medicine, have you?”

“I? No; absurd!”

“Why, you look as white as chalk.”

“Reflection of your sickly face, I suppose,” said Saul, with a forced laugh, “or else I turned pale at the idea of your marrying.”

“Why?”

“Such a loss to bachelors’ society.”

“Don’t be alarmed; I may break out again now and then; but if I do, don’t let old Lawrence touch me.”

“No; that was unfortunate. But look here, George, have you thought any more about that investment?”

“No, how could I—upset like this? Here, I’m faint. Ring that bell.”

Saul touched the hand-bell, and Mrs Denton came hurrying down.

“Here, old girl, bring some whiskey-and-soda.”

Mrs Denton lifted the corner of her apron, and began to pleat it.

“I beg your pardon, sir; the doctor said—”

“Hang the doctor! He didn’t say my friends were to choke with thirst. Bring the brandy, and be quick. Strange thing one can’t do what one likes

in one’s own place. What were you saying, Saul?”

“About that investment.”

“What do I want with investments?” said the convalescent shortly. “I’ve plenty of money.”

“I should have thought you were the very man who did want investments, only getting three per cent, for your money.”

“Think about yourself,” was the gruff rejoinder.

“Well, I was not thinking about myself over that, or I should have asked you to lend me the coin.”

“No, I say, don’t,” cried the other, laughing. “We are such good friends, Saul, and I should offend you if you did ask.”

“Don’t be alarmed. I’ve enough for my wants,” said Saul gruffly.

“Glad to hear it. Then on a little more generous over paying your share when we are out.”

Saul winced.

“Turn for turn, you know.”

“If I’m so mean you shouldn’t go out with me; and next time I suggest an investment to you, tell me of it.”

“There, don’t cut up rough, man. That’s right, old girl; put it down here.”

“Please don’t let master drink, Mr Saul, sir,” whispered the old housekeeper.

Saul gave her a meaning nod and look, and the old lady went back to the house satisfied, while Saul drew his chair from the shadow of the great lilac to get nearer the table.

“I suppose I may,” he said.

“May! Of course; open a bottle for me, too, and don’t be stingy with the whiskey.”

“But are you sure that it will not hurt you?”

“Hurt! No; it does me good.”

He lay back watching Saul, who poured out a very liberal quantity of whiskey into a tall glass.

“That enough?” he said.

“Well, no—little drop more.”

Saul tilted a half wine-glass more into the tumbler before proceeding to open a bottle of soda-water, and pretending to be too intent to note that the convalescent took a goodly sip of the raw spirit in the glass.

“There,” said Saul, as the cork he set free flew out with a loud and he trickled the effervescent water into the tumbler, “that ought to do you good, old fellow.”

“It will,” said his companion, taking a deep draught with the more enjoyment because it was forbidden.

“And if you like to alter your mind, and invest that money—two thousand—I’ll still see that you have the chance, in spite of your sneers.”

“Ah, just you be bad as I have been, Saul, my lad, and perhaps you’ll be snaggy and sneery. By George! that seems to send life through your veins. What did you say the company was?”

“Company be hanged! Am I the sort of fellow to persuade a man to invest in some visionary company with dividends *in futuro*? Solid mercantile affair, as you can find out for yourself in the city.”

“Ah, well, we’ll see about it. Pass that decanter.”

Saul pushed the little cut-glass vessel across the table, and the convalescent was in the act of taking it, when a hand was laid upon his

and held it fast.

Chapter Sixteen.

For Gertrude’s Sake.

“Beg pardon, Miss Gertrude, could I speak to you for a minute?”

“You will excuse me a moment, Mrs Hampton?”

“Oh, of course, my dear. Don’t stand upon ceremony with me.”

Gertrude rose with an anxious expression of countenance, and followed the old housekeeper from the room.

“Is anything the matter, Denton?”

“No, my dear, only that Master George rang for the spirits, and I’ve taken ’em down the garden where they’re sitting under the big cedar.”

“They?”

“Yes, my dear, Mr Saul’s there. He saw him in the garden, I s’pose, and didn’t come up to the house. And I thought, perhaps, a word from you might keep him out of temptation, my dear; for them spirits do tempt him.”

“Yes, yes, I’ll go, Denton,” said Gertrude quickly; and she hurried down the garden, her steps inaudible on the closely shorn lawn, and came round behind the bushes in time to lay her hand upon that of the would-be suicide.

“What the dev—”

“George, dear.”

“Oh, it’s you, Gertie. Well, what’s the matter?”

“Mr Saul Harrington,” said the girl, flushing, as she turned upon the visitor, “have you forgotten Doctor Lawrence’s words?”

“I? Oh, no,” said Saul uneasily, “but doctors exaggerate, and dear

George here is all the better for a refreshing draught."

"It is not true," she retorted angrily. "George, dear, indeed, indeed it is not good for you."

"Nonsense, my darling," he cried, drawing her to him so that she stood close to his chair, and he placed his arm about her waist. "You are too particular. Here, just a little more."

"No, no," said Gertrude fiercely. "You are so much better now. Don't, don't! for my sake, don't?"

"Hang it! I want only one glass," he began angrily, with his brow growing knotty with a network of veins. "Don't be so confoundedly—"

"George, dear, for my sake," she whispered.

The change was magical.

"Ah, well, then, I will not, pet. But it would not have hurt me."

Saul Harrington's countenance was a study during this colloquy; his face grew more sallow, and a peculiar nervous twitching set in about the corners of his eyes. At one time he seemed to be suffering intense agony, but by an effort he preserved his calmness, and a faint, sardonic smile played about his lips, as his companion assumed the manner of one betrothed toward Gertrude, but those lips looked white all the same.

"Don't—for my sake, don't," he said to himself, unconsciously repeating the girl's words. "It makes me feel half mad."

"All right," said the convalescent. "I'll take care, then, Gertie. Do you hear, Saul? Spirit except in homoeopathic doses is tabooed, so tempt me not."

"I tempt you," said Saul, laughing merrily, but with the vocal chords horribly out of tune; "I like that. My dear Gertrude, here is a man from the States, who has been in the habit of taking whiskey as we take milk; he has been leading me into all kinds of excesses, playing Mephistopheles to me till I have had hard work to keep out of trouble, and then he turns upon me and says, 'tempt me not.'"

“Don’t talk about it, please,” said Gertrude imploringly.

“Not I, you happy pair,” said Saul, rising, and again laughing unpleasantly as he took up his glass.

“Here’s a speedy and a happy union to you both.”

He drained his glass, and set it down in silence, as Gertrude’s face crimsoned, and then grew pale, while the master of The Mynns frowned.

“Isn’t that what you English people call bad taste?” he said sourly.

“Surely not, my dear boy. I am only Cousin Saul, and have a right to banter a little. There, I’m off back to town.”

“I thought you were going to stay and have a hand at cards, and I want to have a game at billiards on the new table.”

“Cards, billiards? For shame, man, when the lovely Thais sits beside you. Why don’t you take the good the gods provide you?”

“Eh? What do you mean. Hang it all, don’t begin quoting poetry to a fellow. What does he mean, Gertie? Oh, I see. Very good. But that’s all right. She and I understand one another, and we shall have plenty of time to court after we’re married. Eh, Gertie?”

“I must go back to Mrs Hampton now,” said Gertrude gravely.

“Hang Mrs Hampton! How glad I shall be to see her back. But don’t tell her, Gertie.”

She gave him a sad look, and bent down to whisper:

“Remember.”

“Yes, I’ll remember,” was the reply, as her hand was caught and held for a few moments before she could withdraw it.

Saul Harrington’s teeth gritted together as he drew in his breath hard.

“The jade!” he said to himself. “Womanlike. It means diamonds and

carriages, does it, my cunning little schemer? Well, we shall see."

He watched her furtively as she went off slowly; but he could not see the tears welling up to her eyes and brimming over, as with bended head she returned to the house, and in place of going upstairs directly, went into the dining-room, to stand for a few minutes with hands clasped gazing up at the searching eyes of the picture; and her lips moved as she whispered softly:

"It is so—so hard, dear; but for your sake I will, and bring him back to what you wish him to be."

"Bless her little heart!" said the master of The Mynns, with a sneering laugh, which made Saul start. "Nice little lassie, isn't she? Do you know, old fellow, I believe you wish you were in my shoes."

"Bah!"

"There, you look it again. But it's no good, Saul, my son. It was the old man's wish, and that's sacred to her, and, besides, she has taken to me wonderfully. I'm sorry for you, but it's fate, my boy, fate."

"Your fate?"

"Yes. But never mind, old boy. I'll stand by you, and it's something to make up for your disappointment."

"Disappointment, man! What disappointment?"

"Yours," said the other mockingly. "That settles it. You're a clever fellow, Saul Harrington, but a wretched failure at hiding your feelings."

"Or else you are a little too clever at divining," retorted Saul.

"Perhaps so, old fellow. But never mind that. I've made up my mind about that investment."

"And you decline."

"No; I shall sell out or raise, or do something; and you may tell your

friends to do what is necessary."

"You mean it, George?"

"Of course, I mean it. You have not known me long, but you ought to have seen by now that I never play over money matters. By the way, shall you bring some one here to settle the business?"

"No, I shall take you to the city."

"When?"

"Oh, not for a week or so. There will be papers to prepare—a sort of transfer."

"Well, hadn't I better do it all through old Hampton?"

"If you do, the business will never come off."

"Because it is too risky."

"Hampton will say it is."

"Ah, well, we shall see about that."

They stayed talking for long enough in the garden, and then went into the house to play billiards till dinner time, when Saul proposed leaving, but was overruled, and he stayed to keep up the principal part of the conversation, and in spite of all that his friend had said, he masked his own feelings so admirably as to throw whoever suspected him off guard.

"I'm going to persuade George to come up soon," he said; "and I'm going to beg for a little music, Gertie."

He said this as he held the door open for the ladies to pass out. But he did not keep his word, for the gentlemen sat long over their coffee, and then adjourned to the study.

"Don't fidget, my dear," said Mrs Hampton, over their tea. "Mr Hampton is going to stay down to the last, and he'll speak out if George attempts to

take too much."

Gertrude felt pleased, and yet hurt for her betrothed's sake, but she said nothing, only felt that all was going on as she could wish, while down in the study the two young men exchanged glances which seemed in each case to say:

"Old Hampton's down here on guard over the whiskey-bottle."

"I may smoke," said the young host, aloud.

"Of course, my dear sir," said the old lawyer placidly, "of course; but you must not indulge in what Mr Saul Harrington here is taking with impunity."

"Never mind. I shall be quite right soon, and then I can set you all at defiance. Oh, by the way, Mr Hampton, my funds at the bank are low. I want you to place two thousand pounds more to my credit."

The old lawyer knit his brows a little, but received his orders calmly enough.

"Am I to dispose of those A Shares, Mr Harrington?"

"Yes, that will do; they bring in no interest worth having."

"It shall be done, sir. But it will be nearly a fortnight before the transfer can be made."

"That will do. There is no hurry. Shall we join the ladies now?"

"By all means."

About an hour later Saul Harrington took his leave, looking friendliness personified, as he promised to be down again soon.

"And disabuse your mind of those fancies, George," he said, as they walked down to the gate.

"What fancies?"

"About Gertie. Had it been as you say, I had a couple of years for my

siege. To show you that you are wrong, I want you to make me a promise."

"What is it?"

"Let me be best man at your wedding."

"I was going to ask you."

"Then that's settled. Good-night. I'll put matters in train for the investment."

"Thanks, do; you see I am in earnest."

"It takes some thinking out," said Saul, as he walked slowly toward the station, cigar in mouth, "but it's worth working for. Poor miserable idiot! And he believes he's cleverness refined."

"I don't quite see through Master Saul's game," said the object of his thoughts, as he lit a fresh cigar, and after walking up and down the path a few times, went into the study, where he threw himself upon a couch, and lay looking through the soft wreaths of smoke.

"He's as jealous as a Turk, and he'd do anything to come between me and little Gertie. But, poor little lass, she's caught—limed. That's safe enough. The brute! He led me on and on that night, over that bad champagne, and hardly touched it himself. Wanted to show me up here; and it only made the little darling fonder of me. He's plotting, but he's a shallow-brained ass, and one of these days I shall come down upon him a crusher. Now, what does he mean about that money. I don't want to lose two thousand, but would with pleasure to get him out of the way, for he's like a lion in one's path, and I never feel sure. Next heir, eh? Next heir. And my coming kept him out of the cake."

"Well, Master Saul Harrington," he said, after a pause, "you may be very clever, but one gets one's brains edged up a bit out in the West, and if you mean mischief over that money, pray, for your own sake, be careful, for two can play at that game."

He rose slowly and marched across to the cabinet, one of whose drawers

he unlocked; and as he stood with his back to the window, a dimly-seen face appeared at a short distance from one of the panes, and was made more indistinct by a tuft of the evergreen which grew at the side, and half behind which the owner of the face was concealed.

The watcher gazed eagerly in, but was unable to make out whether the occupant of the room was examining letters or counting over money—the latter suggested itself as correct.

But he was wrong, for the possessor of The Mynns was slowly and carefully thrusting cartridge after cartridge into the chambers of a large revolver, one which had been his companion far away in the West.

“‘A friend in need is a friend indeed,’” he said, as he closed the drawer. “It may be imagination, but when one has a fortune, a goodly home, and a pretty girl waiting to call one ‘hub,’ a fellow wants to live as long as he can. If it’s fancy, why, there’s no harm done.”

As he spoke, the face at the window was still watching, but so far from the pane as to be invisible from within.

Chapter Seventeen.

Legal Advice.

“Hullo! What do you want? Never sent for you.”

“No,” said Doctor Lawrence gruffly, “I came without,” and he seated himself in one of the old, worn, leather covered chairs in the lawyer’s private room at Lincoln’s Inn.

“But I’m right as a trivet, Lawrence, and if I was not, I should not consult you.”

“I know that. You never did.”

“Well, you never came to me about your legal affairs.”

“Of course I did not. If I had we should never have remained friends.”

“Humph! Then you think I should have ruined you.”

“Well, you think I should have poisoned you.”

“There! get out. What’s the matter, Lawrence?”

“I’ve come to consult you.”

“You have? Then hang it all, old chap, I’ll have jaundice or gout next week.”

“About The Mynns’ affairs.”

“Oh! Then I’ll keep quite well. What’s the matter now?”

“Sit down, Hampton, and let’s talk quietly, old fellow, as friends.”

The old lawyer sat down, took a penknife from a drawer, and throwing himself back in his chair, began to pare his nails.

“Well, what is it?” he said.

“I’m very uncomfortable about the state of affairs down yonder.”

“So am I, and I get no peace of my life.”

“How’s that?”

“The wife!”

“Oh! Shouldn’t have married.”

“Too late to alter that now.”

“But what do you mean?”

“Mean? Why, of course, situated as we were, the wife agreed to poor little Gertrude’s wishes, and stayed at The Mynns to play propriety till those two were married; and now I want to get home to my own fireside, but we seem regularly stuck, and the worst of it is, we are unwelcome visitors.”

“Yes, I saw that.”

“Then can you imagine a more unpleasant position for a well-to-do old chap like myself; staying at a house where your host always shows you that you are not wanted?”

“No. It is hard; and for unselfish reasons.”

“I wouldn’t stop another hour with the rowdy Yankee scoundrel, only Mrs Hampton says I must.”

“For Gertrude’s sake, of course.”

“Oh, hang your of ‘course,’” cried the lawyer angrily.

“Call yourself a friend! Why don’t you advise me to go?”

“Can’t,” said the doctor, putting his hat upon the top of his cane, and spinning it slowly round.

“Don’t do that, man. It fidgets me.”

The doctor took his hat off the cane meekly, and set it on the table, after which he laid his cane across his knees, and began to roll it slowly to and fro, as if he were making paste.

“I say, Lawrence,” cried the old lawyer querulously, “don’t do that. You give me the creeps.”

The doctor meekly laid his stick beside his hat, and put his hands in his pockets.

“Look here,” he said, “what about that poor girl?”

“Well, what about her?”

“Are we to standstill and see her throw herself away upon this wretched man?”

“Can you show me a way out of the difficulty? If so, for goodness’ sake speak out.”

“Your wife! Cannot she influence her?”

“No. She has done everything. The poor girl looks upon it as a duty to the old man, and to his grandson; and she has made up her mind.”

“Tut—tut—tut—tut—tut!”

“She believes that she can bring the fellow round to a better way of life.”

“I don’t, Hampton.”

“No more do I.”

“Think she loves him?”

“No. Not a bit. She doesn’t dislike him though, for he can make himself agreeable when he chooses.”

“Then she will marry him?”

“Not a doubt about it, doctor.”

There was a pause, broken by the lawyer doubling his fist and striking the table so heavy a blow that there was a cloud of pungent dust directly after in the doctor’s nostrils, and he sneezed violently again and again.

“Oh, you old fool!” cried the lawyer.

“I beg your pardon,” said the doctor, blowing his nose upon a great yellow silk handkerchief. “It was your dust.”

“I don’t mean that. I mean for not letting the brute die when you had him in your hands. It would have been a blessing for everybody.”

“Saul Harrington included, eh? I wonder what he would have given me to have let him die.”

“Five thousand at least!”

“Don’t talk nonsense, man. Let’s see if we cannot do something.”

“We can do nothing, sir. The wedding-day is fixed, and the poor little girl is going to swear she will love, honour, and obey a scoundrel, who will break her pretty little heart while she sees him squander away that magnificent estate.”

“It’s very, very terrible,” said Doctor Lawrence thoughtfully; “and I came here this morning in the hope that as co-executors we might do something to save the girl, even if we cannot save the estate.”

“There’ll be nothing to save in half-a-dozen years, if he goes on as he’s going now. In the past three months there are ten thousand pounds gone spang!”

“Spent?”

“Heaven knows! Gambled away, I suppose. I have to keep on selling stock, regardless of losses, and I do the best I can for him. If the applications were made to some shady firm, they’d plunder him wholesale.”

“It’s very sad,” said the doctor, meekly.

“Sad, sir! It’s criminal. I don’t know what he does with it all, but, between ourselves, Lawrence, I’ve a shrewd suspicion that he is remitting a good deal to the States.”

“What for?”

“How should I know, sir? To pay old debts, perhaps. Ah, it’s a sorry business.”

“But surely we can do something.”

“Bah!”

“Now, don’t be angry, Hampton. If it was a leg or a wing diseased, I should know what to do, but in these legal matters I am a perfect child.”

“You are, Lawrence, you are.”

“Well,” said the doctor tartly, “knowing that, I came to you, as a legal light, to give me your opinion. Do you mean to tell me that we, as old Harrington’s executors, cannot interfere to stop this man from wasting his substance and wrecking the life of that poor girl?”

“Yes, sir, I do, plump and plain. Our duties were limited to seeing that, after all bequests were paid, this gentlemanly young fellow from the Far West had all the money his old lunatic of a grandfather left him.”

“But—”

“There, butt away till you break your skull, if you like, against the stone wall of the law. I, as a lawyer, can do nothing, but perhaps you can—as a doctor.”

“In heaven’s name, then, tell me what, for I feel heartbroken to see the way things are going.”

“Kill him.”

“What?”

“I mean as you nearly did before, and blamed the chemist.”

“My dear Hampton, surely you acquit me of that business.”

“Oh, yes, if you like, but if I were you I’d get him into such an awful state of health that he should not want to spend money, and, as to wedding, that’s the last thing he should think of.”

“Absurd! absurd!” cried Doctor Lawrence angrily. “You non-professional men get the maddest notions into your heads.”

“Very well, then, try that.”

“Try what?”

“That which you were hinting about—madness.”

“What?”

“Can’t you contrive to make it appear that the man is *non compos mentis*. Then we lawyers could come in and get some one appointed to administer the estate—I mean a judge would do that.”

“My dear Hampton, I came to you for good advice, and you talk trash to me.”

“I’ve told you—trash or not—the only way of getting out of the difficulty, and I can do no more,” said the lawyer pettishly. “There, Lawrence, old fellow, we will not quarrel over this unfortunate affair. We can do nothing but look on and advise. George Harrington will tell us to go to Jericho if we say a word; and as to the lady, when a good, pure-minded young girl takes it into her head that it is her duty to do something or another, the more you preach at her, and try to get her to think as you do, the more she looks upon you as a worldly-minded old sinner, and persists in going her own gait. I can only see one thing to do.”

“Yes? What is it?” cried the doctor.

“Ram a lot of legal jargon into the scoundrel, and frighten him into making ample settlements on the poor girl, tying it down so that he can’t touch it, nor she neither, except as payments fall due. Then she’ll be safe when he dies of *delirium tremens*, or gets killed in some drunken brawl.”

“You think you can manage that, Hampton?” cried the doctor eagerly.

“Yes, I fancy I can contrive that, but if he proves to be obstinate, you must help me.”

“In any way I can.”

“That’s right. Well, then, you’ll have to bring him nearly to death’s door.”

“What?”

“Not near enough to make your conscience uneasy, but just enough to make him soft and workable. Sick men are the ones to make their wills, I can tell you. A hale, hearty man is as obstinate as a bull.”

“Look here, Hampton, if you expect me to degrade my noble profession by aiding and abetting in any dishonourable act, you are confoundedly mistaken, sir, and I wish you a very good morning.”

The doctor seized his hat and stick, put on the former with a bang which threatened injury to the skin of his forehead, and was going out of the room when he received a slap on the back, and faced round fiercely, to find the lawyer smiling as he held out his hand.

“What a confounded old pepper-box you are, Lawrence! Hang it, man! who wants to do anything dishonourable? Do you think I do? Now, after knowing me all these years, do you think it likely?”

“No,” cried the doctor, slapping his hand loudly into that of his friend; “but you shouldn’t look so serious when you are cracking a joke.”

“That’s the perfection of joking, my dear boy. Seriously, though, I shall try and force him into making heavy settlements upon that poor girl.”

“By all means do; and I’d give something if we could break off the match.”

“What do you say to forging a new will, forbidding the banns—eh?”

The doctor looked into the dry and mirthful countenance before him, shook his head, and went to the door.

“See you at dinner at The Mynns on Wednesday, I suppose?”

“Oh, yes,” said the lawyer, “for certain. We live there now, and if it was not for poor little Gertrude, I should be very glad when emancipation day came.”

Chapter Eighteen.

Saul’s Invitation.

Mr Hampton was quite right; Gertrude had nerved herself to the sacrifice, and looked forward to the wedding-day, although with apprehension, still with something akin to eagerness.

“But you don’t love him, my dear,” said Mrs Hampton, “and is it right for you to go to the altar like that?”

Gertrude was silent and thoughtful for some minutes before she raised her large clear eyes, and gazed full in the old lady’s face.

“Yes,” she said, “I think it is right. I shall have influence over him which will grow, and I shall then have the right to speak with authority—as his wife.”

Mrs Hampton sighed and shook her head.

“You have no faith,” said Gertrude, smiling, “I have. The real nature of which my dear guardian spoke is only hidden away, crusted over by the rough life George has led. Once we are married, he will think of his duties toward me, and he will change back to what he was.”

“Well, I hope so, my dear, for your sake, and you must forgive me because I am not so sanguine as I was at your age. I tell you what I would do first, though, if I were you.”

“Yes?”

“Get rid of Saul Harrington.”

“Yes, I should be glad to do that, and I shall try it,” said Gertrude, with a dreamy look in her eyes which changed to one of dislike and dread as a step was heard outside upon the gravel walk, and the two women looked at each other curiously.

“Talk of some one—” said Mrs Hampton at last.

At that moment the door was opened, and Saul Harrington ushered in.

“Ah, ladies,” he said cheerily, “both indoors upon a day like this. Well, I’m glad to find you at home. Come to say good-bye.”

“Good-bye?” said Gertrude.

“Yes. I am going to the Continent for a month, and I have come down to try and persuade George to go with me. Do him no end of good. Where is he?”

“I think he is in the study,” said Gertrude.

“What do you say to my scheme? Can you spare him for a fortnight?”

“Spare who for a fortnight?” said the object of their debate, entering.

“You, old fellow. I’m going to Paris, and then on to Switzerland, and back by the Rhine and Amsterdam. Come with me.”

“What, and do all the paying?”

Saul flushed up, snatched his pocket-book from his breast and tore it open.

“Well, I shan’t ask you to pay for my circular ticket anyhow,” he said, taking out a tiny book; “and here are my hotel coupons. Hang it all! how fond you men with coin are of insulting those without.”

“Well, we’re cousins,” said the other, with a sneering laugh. “All right, little one; I’ll apologise before he goes,” he continued, as Gertrude looked at him appealingly; and Saul winced as if it was painful to him to have Gertrude interfere on his behalf.

“Then you will not come?” said Saul, leaning forward to show Gertrude the tickets.

“No, thanks; I’m going to spend my last bachelor fortnight here.”

“Just as you like. Better have spent it with me. I’m sure Gertie does not want you with all her dresses to see to—what do you call it, Mrs Hampton —a *trousseau*?”

“I believe so, Mr Saul,” said the old lady dryly; “but when I was married, I had to do without.”

“You will not come, then,” said Saul, at last, rising.

“No, thanks; but you’ll stop to dinner.”

“No; too many little preparations to make; letters to write, and that sort of thing. If I stay, will you alter your mind?”

“No, no. In me behold a converted reprobate. I’m in training for a married man.”

“Oh, very well, then; I must be off. I’ll write to you from Paris and let you know how I’m getting on, and where I stay in case you would like to join me.”

“No fear.”

“You may alter your mind, my lad. Good-bye, Gertie. Be an obedient girl. Good-bye, Mrs Hampton. Hang it all, George! you might ask a fellow to have a drink.”

“Oh, of course. Beg pardon. I’m such a teetotaller now, that I forget other people’s wants. Eh, Gertie?”

“I am sure you have been much better lately.”

“Oh, certainly! I shall not dispute it. Come along, Saul; you are case-hardened.”

He led the way to the study, and opened the closet where he kept spirit-stand and a syphon. These and glasses he placed upon the table, while Saul watched him keenly.

“There, poison yourself, my lad,” he said laughingly.

“Oh, thanks! Pleasant way of poisoning oneself though. You’ll have a drop?”

“I? No. I’ll stick to my faith now, for Gertie’s sake.”

“Just as you like,” said Saul, pouring out a portion of whiskey, and holding the glass beneath the syphon tap, to press the handle and send a bubbling stream of mineral water into the spirit.

“Your health, old fellow!” cried Saul.

“Thanks.”

Then there was a long draught, and, as he drank, Saul stood with his right hand in his pocket.

“Splendid drink. Hah! Feel all the better for it. I say, you might give me a cigar.”

“To be sure.”

Saul watched his host as he turned toward the cabinet, and quick as thought his hand was drawn from his pocket, and what seemed to be a tiny white lozenge was dropped into the whiskey decanter.

“Ah, that looks a good weed,” said Saul, taking the cigar offered to him.

“Have any more whiskey?”

“Thanks, no,” said Saul; and he proceeded to cut off the end of the cigar, while his companion took up and replaced the decanter stopper.

“Smell gets into my nose,” he said. “Tempts one.”

Saul laughed, lit his cigar, shook hands very warmly, as he raised his eyes from the decanter, after seeing that the lozenge had melted. Then looking his companion full in the eyes, he bade him “good-bye” and was gone.

The party at dinner that night was quiet and pleasant, for the host was in

his best form. Doctor Lawrence came down and exchanged glances with Hampton consequent upon the alteration they perceived; and when at last the ladies left the table there was very little drinking, the host turning from the table as if in disgust.

“A good sign, Hampton,” Doctor Lawrence whispered, as he took his leave about ten. “Patience, and all may be right yet.”

“Doubt it,” muttered the lawyer, as he returned to the drawing-room, to stand chattering till the ladies said “good-night” to him, and Gertrude crossed to where her betrothed stood with his back to the fireplace.

“Going?” he said. “Good-night, little woman—good-night.”

He bent down smiling and kissed her, and this time she did not dash upstairs to her bedroom to bathe her cheek, but walked up slowly and thoughtfully, oppressed as it were by a strange sadness which made her look hurriedly round as if in search of some trouble or danger hovering near, and in place of sobbing wildly with horror and disgust, she sank upon her knees at her bedside to pray that strength might be given her to carry out her desires, and in that attitude she unwittingly dropped asleep.

Chapter Nineteen.

A Business Interview.

As the ladies left, the old lawyer glanced at his companion, and then drew his watch from his pocket and began to wind it up.

“Example is better than precept,” said his companion, drawing the handsome gold presentation-watch from his pocket, and winding it in turn.

“Don’t you ever feel afraid of being robbed of that watch, Mr Harrington?” said the old lawyer. “It must have cost a hundred.”

“The sum exactly with the nugget chain,” said the young man sharply. “No, I never feel afraid of being robbed. I could afford it, though, if I were.”

“Yes, yes; of course—of course.”

“Come into the study. I want a chat with you.”

“About more money,” muttered the lawyer, as he followed the young man down the passage to the library-like room opening upon the garden.

Here the first thing the host did was to open the window, look out for a few moments at the soft dark night, and then draw to and fasten the outer shutters, after which he closed the window.

“You know what I want, of course,” he said shortly.

“Yes, sir; I presume it is money.”

“Well, it’s my money, isn’t it?”

“Yes, yes; of course; but if you would allow me—”

“I don’t allow you,” was the sharp reply. “I want three thousand pounds within a week. You understand—within a week.”

“Consols are very low just now, Mr Harrington; would it not be advisable to wait till they go up?”

“No, sir, it would not. You understand; I want that money within a week, and the day I am married, fifteen days from this, I shall require another thousand.”

“Certainly, Mr Harrington,” said the old lawyer. “You have nothing more to say to me to-night?”

“No, sir, nothing. That’s an end to business. Now we can be sociable and friendly. Will you have a little whiskey and a cigar?”

“No, sir, thanks. I had a busy day in town and shall be glad to get to bed. Good-night.”

“Good-night, Mr Hampton, and I suppose you will not be sorry when our relations are always of a business character.”

“For some reasons, no, Mr George Harrington—for some reasons, yes,” said the old lawyer. “Good-night.”

He left the study and began to ascend the stairs, but for some reason went down again and entered the dining-room, and in the dim light given by the turned-down lamp, the portrait of his own client seemed to be gazing down at him searchingly.

With a half shiver he went back, and again began to ascend, to feel the cool night air blowing in upon him from the open staircase window.

This he closed, but did not fasten, the clasp being too high, and the window far above the ground.

“I shall be glad when I am back home,” he muttered. “What can he do with all this money? I should like to know. Who’s that?”

He started and exclaimed aloud, for he had heard a rustling sound.

“Only me, sir. I was coming down to close that window.”

“You startled me, Denton, going about like a ghost. Good-night.”

“Good-night, sir.”

Then first one door closed, then another, and one door opened, that of the study, from which the occupant’s face appeared for a few moments with an intent listening air upon the stern features.

Then the door was closed again, the cabinet opened, and the cash-box taken from one of the drawers, over which the young man sat for quite half an hour, counting notes and calculating, before replacing the contents.

“I don’t like to leave it here,” he said thoughtfully. “It has been safe so far, but thieves might break through and steal, and that would be awkward. Let’s think it out over a cigar.”

He took the spirit-stand from the closet again, poured out a goodly portion of whiskey into a Venice glass, and after mildly lowering its strength with water, took a deep draught before lighting a choice cigar, whose pleasant perfume soon pervaded the room.

“Notes, notes. Gold so much better, but awkward to carry,” he muttered, and then burst into an unpleasant laugh.

“Shall I—shan’t I? Ten thousand safe, better than a hundred thousand doubtful, and who knows what Master Saul might do.”

A strange silence fell upon the place—a silence which seemed painful, for as a rule the low hollow rumble of market-wagons echoed from the high brick wall of The Mynns the night through.

That silence was broken by the smoker’s voice, as he said in a low, angry whisper:

“Saul Harrington is a coward and a cur. He dares nothing—nothing. A snarling dog who fears to bite. Why, if I had been in his place—

“Well, never mind,” he said after a pause. “But about this money—a bird in the hand is worth too in the bush, even if one is Gertrude—a pretty

little innocent. Yes, that will be the best plan after all.”

He rose hastily, took a Bradshaw from the shelf, and rapidly turned over the leaves; but as he did so the lamp went out.

Chapter Twenty.

The Master is Late.

“Hadn’t we better begin breakfast. Mr Hampton?” said Gertrude.

“Oh, don’t hurry, my dear. Mr Hampton is not going to town by the early train. What a lovely morning! Perhaps he has gone for a walk.” The ladies walked to the window and Mr Hampton turned his newspaper and coughed loudly, as he glanced at the breakfast-table, afterwards making a wry face as he felt sundry twinges suggestive of Nature’s demands for food.

A quarter of an hour slipped by, and then the old housekeeper, who kept to the same simple old fashion adopted by her late master, whose household had consisted of Denton, a housemaid, cook, and gardener, entered the dining-room.

“Shall I bring up the ham, Miss Gertrude?”

“Perhaps you had better go and knock at Mr Harrington’s door. He may have dropped asleep again.”

The old woman went out, and at the end of five minutes she came back, looking pale and scared.

“I—I can’t make him hear, miss,” she said. “Do you think he is ill?”

“Gone for a walk,” said the old lawyer sharply.

“I—I don’t think he has gone out, sir,” faltered the old lady. “Perhaps you wouldn’t mind going up to his room.”

“And be told to mind my own business—eh? Thanks; no.”

He gave the newspaper a vicious shake, and a blow in the middle to double it up for a fresh reading.

“Shall I go up, Gertrude, my dear?” said Mrs Hampton.

“If you would not mind. He may, perhaps, be a little unwell.”

“To be sure, my dear. I’ll go.”

The lawyer’s wife left the room, and without a moment’s hesitation walked along the passage to the study, entered and looked round.

“Yes,” she said to herself, as she took up the whiskey decanter, and held it at arm’s length. “How temperate and self-denying we are. Essence of sick headache, and he has drunk every drop.”

To give colour to Mrs Hampton’s theory, besides the empty condition of the decanter, a peculiar odour of spirits filled the room, causing the old lady’s nostrils to dilate, and the corners of her lips to go down as she hurried out.

“And they hardly ever will open a window,” she muttered, as she stood in the hall, hesitating. “But I said I would go up,” she continued, and ascending quickly she paused before the door of the bedroom she sought.

“Mr Harrington!” she cried, as she gave a few sharp raps with her bony knuckles.

No answer.

“Mr Harrington!”

The taps were louder, but there was no reply.

“I thought as much,” she muttered. “Broken out again, and in a regular drunkard’s sleep. No; it’s an insult to sober people’s rest to call it sleep—stupor. Oh, my poor girl, my poor girl! If I could only save you from being this dreadful man’s wife.”

“Mr Harrington!” she cried again, after a pause; but all was still. Then the taps she had previously given upon the door became heavy thumps. “Mr Harrington, are you coming down to breakfast?”

“Is anything the matter, ma’am?” said the old housekeeper coming slowly

up the stairs.

“Yes, Mrs Denton; no, Mrs Denton; yes, Mrs Denton. I mean nothing serious, but it’s very dreadful.”

The old housekeeper shook her head; and the tears stood in her eyes as she walked to the end of the wide passage, and descended to the embayed window looking upon the garden, where she used her apron to flick off some white powdery dust from the sill.

“Yes, ma’am,” she said, “it is very dreadful. I know what you mean. Poor dear master liked his two or three glasses of port after his dinner, but that was all. Unless any one was ill you never saw a drop of spirits about the place, while now it’s brandy and whiskey, and soda and seltzer, as is a pair of shams, not to make the spirits weaker, but to coax people on to drink more.”

“You think the same as I do then, Denton?” whispered Mrs Hampton.

“It don’t take any thinking, ma’am. Look at his nose and his cheeks. People don’t have those public-house signs on their fronts without going very often into the cellar. Oh, my dear ma’am; you’re a woman—I mean a lady.”

“Only a woman like yourself, Denton.”

“Then don’t—pray don’t stand by with your hands crossed and see that poor darling child sold into such a bondage as this.”

“What do you mean, Denton?”

“Well, there, ma’am, if you’re offended, you must be, but I shall speak the honest truth.”

“Go on, Denton.”

“I mean letting poor Miss Gertrude be married to such a man as Master George.”

“What am I to do, Denton?”

“I don’t know, ma’am. I’ve been down upon my bended knees to her, but she turns away. She don’t like him—that’s the wonder of it—and yet she will have him.”

“Yes, Denton; that’s the wonder of it. She’s little and weak, and yet she’s stronger than all of us put together with poor old Mr Harrington’s wishes at her back.”

“But you, ma’am—she believes in and likes you. Many a time she’s come to me, years ago, and told me how you’ve scolded and found fault with her about her manners, and when I’ve said you were very cantankerous —”

“Oh, you said that of me, did you, Denton?”

“Yes, ma’am, to speak the truth, I have said so; but she always spoke up for you, and said you talked to her like a mother.”

“Yes, Denton; I tried to.”

“Then,” cried the old woman fiercely, “why don’t you talk to her like a mother now, and save the poor child from such a terrible fate.”

“You think it will be a terrible fate, Denton?”

“Do you believe in young men who can’t keep from the drink now, and who make the poor old house smell of whiskey from top to bottom, mending because they’ve got pretty young wives?”

“I want to be charitable, Denton.”

“Then prove it, ma’am, by saving my poor dear young lady from being the wife of a sot.”

“Is anything the matter, Mrs Hampton?” said Gertrude.

“No, my dear, only that wicked, idle man is so fast asleep that we cannot wake him.”

“Never mind,” said the old lawyer, who had followed Gertrude out into the

hall. “Better let him have his sleep out. Come, my dear, and have pity on me.”

“Yes, Mr Hampton, we will not wait any longer. Denton, pray see that some fresh breakfast is ready on a tray, to bring up directly your master comes down.”

“Yes, miss, I will,” said the old woman; and then in an undertone to Mrs Hampton, as the old lawyer said something to Gertrude: “Do, do, pray, ma’am, try and stop it. I’d sooner help to lay the poor dear out for her last sleep than help to dress her to go to church with Master George.”

Mrs Hampton went down the flight of stairs to the breakfast-table, looking exceedingly comic.

Hers was a peculiar face at the best of times; and now it was at its worst, for her spirit was greatly troubled on Gertrude’s behalf, and she was trying to smile and look cheerful.

Her husband saw it and made matters worse.

“Gertrude, my dear,” he said in a whisper his wife could hear, “for goodness’ sake give her a cup of tea; she’s bubbling over with acidity.”

“No, I am not, Hampton, and don’t be absurd.”

“Certainly not, my dear. Excuse me, Miss Gertie, may I begin?”

He was already placing a slice of ham upon his plate with a delicately cooked egg reposing in its midst, but he recollected himself and passed it across to his wife.

“Thanks, no,” she said with quite a hoarse croak. “Dry toast.”

Gertrude was of the same way of thinking. Only the lawyer made a hearty breakfast hastily, and then started for town.

“No, no, don’t you ladies move,” he said. “Finish your breakfasts. Apologise to George Harrington for me. Back in good time.”

He did not realise that the other occupants of the breakfast-table had been forcing themselves to swallow a few morsels, so as to keep up appearances; and as the door closed their eyes met, and Gertrude could contain herself no longer, but burst into a passion of tears.

“Hush, hush, my darling?” whispered Mrs Hampton, taking her to her breast. “Don’t take on about it. There, there, there; I want to play a mother’s part to you, and I’m only a clumsy imitation; but, indeed, Gertie, I want to advise you for the best.”

“Yes, I know you do,” whispered the poor girl, as she struggled hard to be composed. “But tell me you don’t think there is any reason for George being so late.”

For answer Mrs Hampton kissed her on the brow.

“You do not speak. It is cruel of you to be silent.”

“Do you wish me to speak out?”

“Yes, even if I do not agree with you,” cried Gertrude, flushing up as if ready to defend her betrothed.

“Then, my dear, I do.”

“Tell me—what?”

“I am George Harrington’s guest, Gertrude; then I am the trusty friend of the girl I have known and loved ever since she was a child.”

“Yes, yes, indeed you are; I know that; only you are so bitter against George.”

“Gertie, my dear,” said the old lady, leading her to the couch and sitting down with old Harrington’s face seeming to smile down upon them, “if I feel bitter against George Harrington it is from love for you.”

“Yes, yes; but try not to be unjust. Think of the life he has been forced to lead.”

“I can think only of my little girl’s life that she will have to lead.”

“Why do you speak like this?” panted Gertrude, who looked like some frightened bird, ready to struggle to escape.

“I may be hard and unjust, my child, but I judge by what I see.”

“See! What have you seen this morning?”

“I have been in the study. It smells as a room does where men have passed the night drinking.”

“But after the change—after the promises.”

“The whiskey decanter was empty. I know it was full yesterday morning, for I saw Mrs Denton carry it in.”

“Ah!” sighed Gertrude.

“And this morning the man you have promised to marry is lying in a drunken sleep.”

“You do not know that,” cried Gertrude excitedly.

“I know enough to make me say once more—Gertrude, I am a childless old woman, and I love you as Mr Hampton loves you in his peculiar way, which is a good deal like mine—rough and clumsy, but very honest and true.”

“Dearest Mrs Hampton!” cried Gertrude, throwing her arms about the old lady’s neck; “as if I did not know how good, and kind, and loving you have always been.”

“Then listen to me once more, my darling, before it is too late. I do not look like the sort of woman who can talk about love, but I can, and I know what love is.”

“Yes, yes, of course,” faltered Gertrude.

“And I know that you do not love George Harrington.”

A pause.

“And George Harrington does not love you.”

“He told me he did—very dearly, Mrs Hampton, and if—if—I do not love him as I ought to do, I shall try so very, very hard to make him a true and loving wife.”

“Trying is no use, my dear. Love comes and goes of itself. You may make yourself friends with any one, but you cannot make yourself love.”

“Not when he loves me?” cried Gertrude.

“So much, my child, that only a short time before he is married to you, he goes and plays the swine.”

“Mrs Hampton!” cried Gertrude indignantly.

“Very well, then, my dear, I will not speak like that. It is too blunt and strong. He goes then—after promising everybody, and in disobedience to Doctor Lawrence’s orders, and quite soon after a dangerous attack of *delirium tremens*, brought on by drink—and takes that which has compelled him to keep his bed this morning.”

“But he may be ill, Mrs Hampton.”

“He is ill, my dear, and with an illness which brings on a craving he cannot control.”

“Oh?” sighed Gertrude, covering her face with her hands.

“He madly goes and makes himself the slave of a terrible master, who will ruin health, and pocket—destroy him utterly.”

“You are too severe, Mrs Hampton,” faltered Gertrude.

“Not a bit, my dear.”

“He said he would not take more than Mr Hampton might, or you.”

“That will not do, my dear,” said the old lady calmly. “My husband treats

wine and spirits as his slaves, and makes them obey him. I do the same. George Harrington sets what the teetotallers call the great God Alcohol up on a pedestal, and grovels before it in his insane worship."

"But he is growing so much better, Mrs Hampton."

"No, my dear. He is only professing to do so. He is the slave and he will go lower and lower. I say then, even with the great wealth he has inherited, is this man the suitable partner of your future?"

"I want to defend him," sighed Gertrude to herself, "but she masters me—she masters me."

"Then listen to me, my dear, before it is too late. Do one of two things—come to us, where you shall be as our child, or, if you prefer it, set up a little simple home of your own, with poor old Denton, who would gladly accept this plan; you will not be well off, but you will be happy—yes, I say happy," cried the old lady, looking up defiantly at the portrait, which had caught her eye, and seemed to be gazing searchingly at her. "Ah, you may look, but you are only canvas and paint; and if you were alive you would not throw this poor child into the arms of a drunken man."

"Mrs Hampton, what are you saying?" cried Gertrude, looking up and shivering, as she realised that the old lady was addressing the picture on the wall.

"The plain, honest, simple truth, my dear. Come, come, be advised by me."

"No, no; it is impossible," murmured Gertrude.

"Not a bit of it, my child. Think of your future. He will not reform."

"He will—he will."

"He will not. He can't. He hasn't it in him. Gertie, my dear, you may fight for him, but he is a shifty bad man, and I don't believe in him a bit."

"This is too cruel."

“It is kindness though it gives you pain, my dear. Some men might repent and alter, but I have studied George Harrington from the day he came to the house, and I cannot find the stuff in him to make a better man.”

“I should make him a better man, Mrs Hampton,” said Gertrude proudly.

“You would worry yourself into your grave, Gertrude, and if you marry him, I shall order my mourning at once, for you do not, and never will love him.”

“Now you are laughing at me,” said Gertrude, brightening up, and taking the old lady’s withered hands in her soft, plump little palms. “It is impossible to follow out your proposal, and I shall marry George Harrington for my dear uncle’s sake.”

“And be a wretched woman for life.”

“No, Mrs Hampton; even at the worst, I shall have the happy consciousness of having done my duty; but there will be no worse. I shall win.”

Mrs Hampton shook her head.

“Yes,” repeated Gertrude; “I shall win, and bring him to the right way. He cannot refuse to listen to me. Surely a weak trusting woman has power over even the strongest man.”

“In novels, and poems, and plays, my dear, more than in real life, I am afraid,” said Mrs Hampton, with a sigh of resignation; “but remember this, my dear, when in the future you recall all I have said—No, no, no, my darling; I can’t stoop to talk to you like that. Gertie, my child, I am very sorry, but I am going to help you carry out your noble resolve with all my heart.”

“Mrs Hampton?” cried Gertrude joyously.

“Yes, my dear; and if women can win, we’ll make a hero of George Harrington—good Heavens! what’s that?”

The two women started from the sofa, and gazed in a startled way toward

the hall.

Chapter Twenty One.

Bruno Gets into a Scrape.

The sound that startled them was a faint scratching noise at the door, and Gertrude hurried across the room to open and admit the dog Bruno, who was lying on the sheepskin mat, and who raised his head, gazed in his mistress's face, uttered a low whine, and then dropped his head between his paws.

"Why, Bruno, Bruno? what's the matter?"

"Shall I go up and knock at master's door again, Miss Gertie?" said the housekeeper, who came along the passage just then. "Why, what's the matter with the dog?"

"I don't know, Denton; he seems ill. Oh! His head is covered with blood."

"Ugh! So it is," cried the old woman. "I haven't seen him before this morning, miss. He has been fighting. Go down, sir, directly. Bad dog!"

Bruno did not move, but lay blinking at his mistress, and whined uneasily.

"He has been fighting with some one who had a big stick then," said Mrs Hampton shortly. "Look the poor dog's head is all swollen up, and there's a great cut here."

"My poor old Bruno?" cried Gertrude, going on her knees beside the dog, and taking one of his paws, when the brute whined feebly, and made a faint effort to lick her hand.

"Yes, he has a bad cut upon his head," said Denton, as she closely examined the place; "and it has been bleeding terribly. Poor fellow! I'll call cook to help carry him away, and we'll bathe it."

"No," said Gertrude decisively; "he was dear uncle's favourite, and he shall be treated as a friend. Let him stop here, Denton. Draw the mat into this corner, and put another thick mat beside it."

This was done, the mat slipping easily over the smooth floor, with its load; and after submitting patiently to the domestic surgery of his mistress and the old housekeeper, Bruno once more tried to lick the former's hand and closed his eyes in sleep.

"There," said Gertrude, with business-like cheerfulness, as the basin, sponge, and towels used were removed. "Now, Denton, I think you really ought to go and waken your master."

"Yes, miss," said the old lady, after giving Mrs Hampton an inquiring look, responded to by a shake of the head.

The old housekeeper seemed to catch that shake of the head, and she went upstairs while Gertrude led the way back to the dining-room, and looked carefully over the table to see that the maid had removed all that was untidy, and left the place attractive-looking for her master, when he should come down.

"Labour in vain, my dear," said Mrs Hampton, with a quaint smile. "He'll want nothing but a cup of the strongest tea; and don't let him have any spirits in it if he asks."

"Miss Gertrude? Miss Gertrude?" came from the stairs; and upon their going to the door, it was to see the old housekeeper hurrying down. "Master's not in his room, my dear."

"What?"

"I knocked till I grew nervous, thinking he might be in a fit, and then I turned the handle, and went in."

"And he is not there," cried Gertrude. "Now, Mrs Hampton," she added, as she turned triumphantly on her old friend, "now what have you to say for yourself. Yes! Look!" she cried, as she ran to the hat stand. "We might have known—hat and stick not here. I felt sure he must have gone for a long morning stroll."

"Well, I'm glad I am wrong," said Mrs Hampton sharply. "Then we have been fidgeting ourselves for nothing. Eh, Denton? Yes? What is it?"

She had suddenly caught sight of the old housekeeper making signs to her, and screwing up her face in a most mysterious way!

“Yes, Denton, what is it? Why don’t you speak?” cried Gertrude, as she caught sight of the old woman’s action.

“I—I—nothing, my dear, only he is not there,” said Denton hesitatingly.

“What are you keeping back?” said Gertrude firmly.

“N-othing, my dear.”

“Denton!”

“Don’t ask me, my dear, please,” faltered the old woman.

“I desire you to speak,” cried Gertrude imperatively.

“Then I will, my dear, for it’s only another reason why you should not go and do what you are thinking about doing,” cried the old woman angrily. “I don’t care, you may send me away if you like, but I shall have done my duty by you, and I shan’t have that on my mind.”

“Have the goodness to remember what you are, Denton,” said Gertrude, speaking coldly, and turning very pale.

“Yes, miss, only your poor old servant, but I can’t see you going headlong to destruction without trying to stop you. I say you oughtn’t to marry a gentleman who can’t keep from the drink, and goes out spending the night after everybody else has gone to bed.”

“What do you mean, Denton?”

“That we’ve been wherritting ourselves about him all the morning, and he’s never been to bed all night.”

“Denton!”

“Well, miss, come up and look. The bed’s just as I turned it down, and the pillows all of a puff.”

“That will do,” said Gertrude gravely. “Your master is not bound to consult anybody if he chooses to go out.”

“No, miss.”

“Mrs Hampton, shall we go into the drawing-room?” said Gertrude quietly, “or would you like a walk?”

“I think we will stay in, my dear,” was the reply; and they went into the drawing-room, where after closing the door they stood looking in each other’s eyes.

“Gertie,” said Mrs Hampton at last, and she took her young companion’s hand.

“No, no,” said Gertrude, shrinking.

“I was not going to preach, my dear—only help,” said Mrs Hampton, smiling cheerfully. “Are you thinking what I am?”

“I feel that I must be,” cried Gertrude. “You think that George has repented of what he said to Saul Harrington, and has joined him, or followed him to Paris.”

“Exactly. That is what I do think.”

“Well,” said Gertrude slowly, “he might have told us. Stop,” she added quickly, “he must have left a note for us in the study.”

“Of course,” cried Mrs Hampton; and they went quickly into the little library, which the new master had affected as soon as he took possession of the place.

A particular odour of spirits and some drug attacked their nostrils as soon as they entered the little room, and their eyes met in an anxious look, but only to be averted as each sought for a letter.

“No,” said Gertrude sadly, “he has not written.”

“It was a sudden thought, my dear, and we shall have one, or a telegram,

before long. He is sure to send."

"He is sure to send," said Gertrude involuntarily, as a curious chill ran through her, and she turned ghastly pale; for at that moment there came the long, low howl of a dog as if from a great distance, though they felt and knew that it was the faint cry of the wounded beast, and from close at hand—the mournfully strange howl uttered by a dog when it displays that mysterious knowledge of impending or neighbouring death.

Chapter Twenty Two.

Kitchen Opinions.

The cry was so peculiar, and impressed its hearers so painfully, that they stood looking at each other, Gertrude with blanched cheeks, and Mrs Hampton, who had not outgrown the superstitious dread common to most natures suffering from a nervous tremor that she had not felt for years.

She was the first to speak with assumed cheerfulness.

“Why, it’s that dog,” she said. “I declare for the moment it quite startled me?”

“Yes,” said Gertrude, with her voice sounding husky and strange, “it was the dog.”

But neither moved to do what was most natural under the circumstances: to go and pat and pacify the poor animal, neither did they discuss the possibility of how it was injured, but stood listening for its next cry, and both started violently as the door was opened and Mrs Denton, white and trembling, hurried into the room.

“Did—did you hear that, Miss Gertrude?” she said in an awe-stricken whisper.

“Do you mean poor Bruno’s howl?”

“Yes, miss,” said the old woman in the same low tone of voice.

“The poor thing is in pain, I suppose.”

“No, miss, it isn’t that,” said Denton slowly. “If he was hurt, he would yelp sharply. He has got something on his mind.”

“Don’t be such a ridiculous old woman, Denton!” cried Mrs Hampton impatiently, to cover her own dread. “Dogs have no minds. They howl sometimes because it’s their nature to.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said the old housekeeper respectfully, but speaking in a very slow, impressive tone; “because it is their nature to howl when they know there’s death on the way.”

“Gertrude, my dear, for goodness’ sake don’t you be superstitious. It’s absurd. It is what you have just heard—an old woman’s tale. Why, if dogs howled because there was death about, they’d pass their days doing nothing else, and wouldn’t have time even to wag their tails.”

“Denton, you are old enough to know better.”

“Yes, ma’am, I’m seventy years and three months old, and I suppose I ought to know better, but I don’t.”

“There is nothing to mind, Denton,” said Gertrude gently. “Poor Bruno quite startled me for the moment, but he has settled down now, and—”

She stopped short, for the dog again uttered the same long, low howl—a cry which sounded more impressive than the one they had heard before.

Gertrude’s face looked ghastly, and for a moment she reeled and caught at Mrs Hampton’s trembling hand, while the old housekeeper sank upon her knees and buried her face in her apron.

Gertrude was the first to recover her presence of mind.

“How childish!” she said, as she crossed to the old woman where she knelt. “Denton, dear, don’t think so seriously of such a trifle. There is no truth in these old superstitious ideas.”

“No truth, my dear?” said the old woman, taking and kissing the hand laid upon her shoulder. “Was there no truth in my shutting poor Bruno up in the shed, and his getting out by tearing his way under the side, and howling in the garden the night poor dear master died? I know what you will both say to me, that I am a silly old woman; but I have seen and heard strange things in my time, and I hope, with all my heart, that this is not a sign of ill having come to some one we know, whether it’s to young master or Mr Saul. But, mark my words, we shall hear something terrible, and before long.”

“Yes, we shall all hear bad news, Denton, if we live long enough,” said Mrs Hampton, who was quite herself again. “Let’s go and see how your patient is, Gertrude, my dear.”

She crossed to the door, and Gertrude followed her quickly, leaving the old housekeeper hesitating as to whether to go or stay, and ending by slowly following the others into the hall.

Bruno had not moved from where he had been left, but lay with his head between his paws, and eyes closed, apparently asleep, till Gertrude stood over him, when he half opened his eyes and looked up at her.

“Poor old dog, then!” she said gently, as she went down on one knee and softly stroked his neck.

The dog closed his eyes and responded to her caress by giving a few raps upon the floor with his tail, after which he lay perfectly still, as if asleep.

“I wonder how he was hurt,” said Gertrude gently.

“Some brute must have struck him, and he ought to be punished.”

“Bruno would not hurt anyone except those he hates,” said Mrs Denton slowly, as she came and stood close by them.

“Poor thing!” said Mrs Hampton. “Well, we can do no more. He will soon get better. Come, Gertrude.”

The girl was giving the dog a final pat on the neck, when it suddenly raised its head, opened its eyes wildly and stared right away, uttering a long, low howl, ending in a mournful whine.

“Really,” exclaimed Mrs Hampton, “he must not do that or you must have him moved, Gertrude.”

The dog seemed to sink into an uneasy sleep, and Gertrude followed Mrs Hampton into the drawing-room.

“Ought we to take any steps about George?” said Gertrude, after a

pause; “to find out whether he has gone with Saul Harrington?”

“No, my dear, certainly not. He has a perfect right to do as he pleases. He will, as I said before, no doubt write.”

Gertrude was silent, and crossed to a writing-table to busy herself over sundry domestic accounts, while Mrs Hampton took out her knitting and glanced at her from time to time, as her needles clicked and flashed in their rapid plying.

“And a good thing if he has gone,” she said to herself. “If I could do as I liked, he’d have his money and go to Jericho or any other place, so long as he did not come and worry her.”

By this time Gertrude’s attention was taken up by her accounts, and her countenance looked comparatively calm and peaceful.

“Love him?” said Mrs Hampton. “She does not even like him, only fights hard to do what she has been told.”

The day passed quietly enough in the drawing-room, but the sudden departure of the owner of The Mynns formed a topic of conversation among the servants. John Season, the gardener, came in for what he called “just a snack” about twelve o’clock, the said snack being termed lunch; but as John, a dry-looking gentleman with a countenance like a piece of ruddy bark, did not dine at quality hours, the snack served as dinner and saved him from going home, beside being an economy, as cook was not particular about his making a sandwich to wrap in his red cotton pocket-handkerchief “again he felt a bit peckish.” Not that he ever did feel a bit peckish after the hearty snack, for his sandwich was pecked by the four young Seasons at home.

John’s making of that sandwich was artistic and exact, for the slices of cold beef were always fitted on to the bottom slice of bread with the regularity to be expected of a man who kept a garden tidy. The top slice, as if from absence of mind, was also covered with slices to the same degree of exactness, and then after a liberal sprinkling of the sanitary salt, and spreading of the mordant mustard, these two slices were placed close together at the cut edge.

Now, to some unpractised hands a difficulty would here have arisen—how to get those two slices together without letting the beef get out of place.

But John Season was not unpractised.

Some people would have solved the problem by cutting two more slices of bread, and clapping them on the top. But that would have looked grasping. John was allowed by cook to cut himself a sandwich. That would have looked like cutting two sandwiches. True, there was the beef for two sandwiches there; but then it did not appear to be so to the casual observer, and as bread was fairly plentiful at home, while beef was not, John got over the difficulty in a way which salved his conscience and the cook's.

On this particular morning, John had been very busy eating, with his mouth so full that he did not care to talk. The beef was sirloin, and the prime thick, streaked, juicy undercut, with its marrowy fat, had been untouched. The knife was sharp, and John had eaten and carved his sandwich till he had laid down the keen blade with a sigh, gazing at his work, and then at the glass of beer freshly drawn for his use.

"Yes?" he said to the cook and housemaid, to take up a thread of conversation which had been lying untouched for twenty minutes; "he came home with his head queer, did he?"

"Yes, and bleeding," said the housemaid. "I dunno where he'd been."

"I do," said John, altering the position of one of his beef-laden slices, so that it should be exactly parallel with the other, and one inch away.

"You do, John?" said the cook, with her eyes wide open.

"Yes. Under the laurels half asleep. I see him."

"But he hadn't been out?" said the housemaid.

"Not he."

"Then how did he get that cut on the head?" said the housemaid.

“I know,” cried cook triumphantly.

“How?”

“Climbing the wall after a cat, and then he tumbled off on to the bricks.”

“Oh!” ejaculated the housemaid, snatching at the explanation.

“Wrong,” said John Season, untying and retying his blue serge apron, as a necessity after his hearty meal.

“Then, pray how was it, Mr Clever?” said cook.

“He’d been interfering with master in the dark. Didn’t know him, I s’pose; and master give him a polt with a stick.”

“Oh!” ejaculated the housemaid.

“But why should he interfere with master?” said cook, who felt annoyed at her solution being so ruthlessly set aside.

“Because he was a good dog,” said John, taking a sip from his glass, and moving his chair a little, as he thought, with a sigh, about the big piece of lawn he had to sweep in the hot sun.

“A good dog to fly at his master!” exclaimed cook, rolling her arms in her apron.

“He’s only a new master that he don’t know well, and don’t much like,” said John sententiously; “and he sees him coming out of the window in the middle of the night.”

“Oh!” ejaculated the housemaid again.

“‘Burglars!’ says Bruno. If you remember, his bark always sounds like saying burglars.”

“Yes; I’ve always noticed that,” said the housemaid, emphasising the last word.

“Fiddle!” said cook contemptuously.

“Ah, you may say fiddle,” said John, taking out his red handkerchief, and slowly spreading it upon his knees, “but that’s it. Sees him coming down from the stairkiss window, and goes at him; master gives him one on the head, and Bruno feels sick, and goes and lies down among the laurels.”

“And who says master went out of the stairkiss window,” said cook with a snort, “when there’s a front door to the house as well as a back?”

“I did, my dear, and you needn’t be cross.”

“Enough to make any one cross to hear folks talk rubbidge. Pray, how do you know he went out that way?”

“Ah!” exclaimed the housemaid, as much as to say “that’s a poser.”

“Because I had to take the rake and smooth out the footmarks, as was a eyesore to a gardener who takes a pride in his place,” said John with a satisfied smile.

“You did, John?” said cook, giving way directly, and lowering her voice as she drew nearer the speaker, and poured him out another glass of ale.

“Thankye, my dear. Yes; same as I’ve done before.”

“But why should he get out of the window on the sly like that?”

“Larks!” said John Season, giving one eye a peculiar cock. “Why do young men get out of other windows o’ nights, eh?”

“Well, of all!” exclaimed the housemaid.

“Then he ought to be ashamed of himself,” exclaimed cook; “and for two pins I’d go and tell Miss Gertrude myself.”

No one offered the two pins, and as the reward was not forthcoming, cook seemed to consider her proposition off.

“It’s no business of our’n, cook,” said John Season, slowly extending his hands on either side of the waiting sandwich; then with one sudden and dexterous movement he shut it up, as any one might have closed an

open book, and so quickly that not so much as a bit of fat had time to fall.

The next moment it was folded in the handkerchief and thrust in John Season's pocket.

"There were footprints under the stairkiss window, then," whispered cook.

"That's so, under the stairkiss window," said the gardener.

"Under the stairkiss window!" said the housemaid. "My?"

Then John Season rose and took a basket from the floor,

"But how could he get up and down from the stairkiss window?" said cook excitedly.

"Oh, it's easy enough to any one as knows what he's about," said the gardener. "Off course he'd drop down."

"And no bars to the window," exclaimed cook indignantly. "Well, I always said so; we shall all be murdered in our beds some night."

"Not you, cook. Burglars don't know," said John, "and higgerance is stronger than iron bars."

"But shan't you tell Miss Gertrude?" said the housemaid.

"What! that master likes to do as he pleases; and upset her, poor little lass? Not likely."

"No," said cook, who seemed to have repented of her own proposition; "a still tongue maketh a wise head."

This shot proverbial was fired at the gardener, cook looking at him fixedly, as if to let him know that he did not possess all the wisdom at The Mynns.

"Well, here's luck," said John Season, before tossing off the remaining half glass of ale; and thrusting his arm under the handle of the basket, he went off, repeating his orders to himself, as given by cook for the late

dinner: “Onions, taters, beans, peas, parsley, lettuce, and a beet.”

Chapter Twenty Three.

A Visit to the Wine Bins.

Punctual to his time Mr Hampton came down the road from the station, with the *Globe* in his hand, the *Pall Mall* under his arm, and the *Evening Standard* in his pocket.

As he came in sight of the house, he was aware of the tall, gaunt figure of Mrs Hampton standing at the drawing-room window, forming a kit-cat picture in a frame, which, as he drew nearer, and the high brick wall interposed, gradually became a half length, then a quarter, then a head, the lace of a cap, and nothing at all.

The old lady was at the top of the steps, sour-looking and frowning, as he neared the entrance, but full of interest in him and sympathy.

“You look tired, dear,” she said.

“Eh? No. Pretty comfortable. How’s Gertrude?”

“In trouble.”

“Eh? What about?”

“George Harrington went out last night on the sly, and hasn’t come back.”

The old lawyer uttered a grunt.

“Not been near you?”

“No, no!”

“Nor written?”

“Not he!”

“Nor sent a telegram?”

“No, my dear, no.”

“Then, all I can say is that it’s very disgraceful.”

“Out all night, and of course poor Gertrude as anxious—”

“As if she was his wife,” added the lawyer, hanging up his hat and light overcoat.

“More,” said Mrs Hampton. “You would not find a wife so anxious if a husband behaved like that.”

“No, my dear, of course not. There, I’ll go up and dress. I say, you will not wait dinner for him, as you would breakfast?” said the old lawyer, who looked upon his dinner as the most important event of the twenty-four hours.

“Indeed, if I have any influence with Gertrude we shall not,” said Mrs Hampton sternly. “I have hardly had a morsel to-day.”

“Where’s Gertrude?”

“Gone up to her room to dress,” said Mrs Hampton; and as soon as they were in their own apartment, she related the whole of the day’s discoveries, and her theory about George Harrington having gone off to join Saul.

“Humph! hardly likely,” said the old man thoughtfully. “So you waited all that time, and then found out that he had not been to bed?”

“Yes.”

“How does Gertrude take it?”

“Like a lamb apparently. Ready to defend him quite indignantly if I say a word.”

“Then don’t say one. I’m very glad he has gone out.”

“Glad?”

“Yes. The more he shows the cloven hoof the better.”

“My dear?”

“For Gertrude. She may have her eyes so opened that she will refuse to marry him, throw him over completely, and then, my dear, we shall once more get home to peace and quietness.”

“If it would turn out like that,” said Mrs Hampton thoughtfully, “I would not mind. But come now, speak out.”

No answer.

“What are you thinking about, Hampton?”

“I was thinking, my dear, that this accounts for the way the money goes. I’m glad I’ve got a clue to that, not that it matters to us.”

“What do you think it is—gambling?”

“May be.”

“Then you don’t think so, Hampton? Now speak out.”

“No, my dear, you don’t need telling. Not surprising after the life he has led in the West.”

“Yes, sir, it is very surprising, when he is engaged to the sweetest girl in the world.”

“Yes. Did the dog howl much?”

“Not a great deal, but very strangely; and don’t turn from one subject to another so abruptly.”

“Enough to make him, with his head cut open, poor brute!”

Ten minutes after they descended to the drawing-room, where, in spite of her cheerful looks and animated manner of addressing the old lawyer, it was plain to see that Gertrude had been crying, and the tears rose to her eyes again as she noted the tenderly sympathetic manner towards her of

her two friends.

“I have ordered the dinner to be taken in at the usual time,” she said eagerly.

“Oh, no, my dear, not for us,” said Mrs Hampton after a desperate effort to master herself.

“Yes, I am sure that George—who, I feel sure, has gone to join Saul Harrington—would wish us to go on as usual. Yes, Denton? Dinner?”

“No, miss; I only came to say that there is no wine up.”

“No wine, Denton?”

“No, miss; but if you get out the keys I could go down and fetch it from the cellar.”

“Yes, yes; of course,” said Gertrude. “I’ll go with you.”

“No, no, my dear,” cried Mrs Hampton; “we take so little, and I am sure Mr Hampton will not mind to-day.”

The old lawyer’s face was a study, and he took out his handkerchief and blew quite a blast.

“My beloved wife,” he said, “I am quite willing to forego a good many things, but my glass of sherry with my dinner, and my glass of port afterwards, are little matters which have grown so customary that—”

“Now, I’m sure, Hampton,” began the old lady.

“Yes, my love, and so am I,” he said decisively. “Gertrude, my dear, if you will give Denton the keys, I’ll go myself, and get the wine, and—Bless me, what a howl!”

The dog, which had been silent for hours, suddenly sent forth one of its long, low, mournful cries, which seemed to fill the place with the doleful sound.

Mrs Denton shook her head, and gazed inquiringly at the old lawyer, but beyond looking upon the cry as a temporary nuisance, whose effect only lasted the length of the sound, it seemed to make not the slightest impression upon him.

Gertrude led the way to the study, and, opening the glass door of the cabinet, took from the little drawer the cellar keys; everyone connected with the important parts of the house having, for many years past, had its resting-place in one of those drawers.

“Are you coming, too?” said Mr Hampton, smiling.

“Oh, yes,” replied Gertrude; “I used often to go with dear uncle and carry the basket when I was quite a little child. I know the different bins well, and can show you which port and which sherry he used to get out for you and Dr Lawrence.”

“Yes, and splendid wines they were,” said the old lawyer, smiling. “No, no, Gertie, my dear, you must not cut off my glass of wine.”

“I have the basket and a light, sir,” said the old housekeeper, appearing at the door.

“Thank you, Denton. You need not come. I’ll carry—”

“The light,” said the old lawyer, smiling. “Give me the basket, Mrs Denton. Now then, Gertie, my dear; if a stranger came and saw me now, he’d say: ‘What a shabby-looking old butler they have at The Mynns.’”

Gertrude took the candle and led the way to the cellar door, which the old lawyer opened, and the girl went first. Then the second door was opened, and they went on over the sawdust-covered floor, inhaling the mingled odour of damp wood, mildew, and wine.

“Ha!” sighed the old man, as he looked to right and left at the stacked-up bottles: “It’s a weakness and a vain longing, no doubt, Gertrude, my dear; but there is one thing at The Mynns I do look upon with envy, and that is the cellar. Bless my heart! is that dog going to howl like that all night?”

“No, no,” said Gertrude, with an involuntary shiver, as the low mournful

cry penetrated to where they stood. “Poor Bruno! he has been sadly hurt. There, Mr Hampton, that is the sherry,” she continued, pointing to a bin which had only been lowered about a fourth.

“Then we’ll have a bottle of you,” said the old man, carefully taking one by the neck from its sawdust bed.

“And that is the port,” continued Gertrude, holding up the light, to point to the other side of the cellar.

“Ha!” ejaculated the old man, with all the enjoyment of a connoisseur, as he again carefully lifted a bottle with its lime-wash mark across the end. “No, no, Mrs Hampton, you must not have it all your own way. Gertie, my dear, if I stand that up I shall spoil it. Would you mind carrying this bottle by the neck?”

“Oh, no; I’ll carry it,” she said hastily, as if eager to get out of the crypt-like place. “I have it. Oh, Bruno, Bruno!” she exclaimed, as another low, deep howl, from apparently close at hand, reached their ears. “You had better take a bottle of the old Burgundy, too, Mr Hampton.”

“Well, yes; perhaps I might as well, Gertie; but I shall use you as a buttress against Mrs Hampton’s wrath.”

“Oh, yes,” cried Gertrude laughingly, “I’ll defend you. That’s the bin—the Chambertin.”

“Prince of wines,” muttered the old man, crossing to the bin his companion had pointed out, while his shadow cast by the candle she held was thrown upon ceiling and wall in a peculiarly grotesque fashion, as if he were the goblin of the cave.

“Now,” he said, as he carefully placed the bottle in the basket, “we shall be all right, even if George comes back. Bless my soul! what’s that?”

For Gertrude uttered a wild shriek, there was a crash, and they were in utter darkness.

Chapter Twenty Four.

A Gentleman to See Gertrude.

“Great Heavens! my child, what is the matter?”

“Nothing, nothing, Mr Hampton,” cried Gertrude. “Something touched my hand. Oh, Bruno, you bad dog, how you frightened me!”

The cry brought Mrs Denton to the door, and she hurried away directly to return with a light, just as the dog set up another mournful howl which echoed dismally in the gloomy ranges of cellars.

As the light shone in, the old woman holding it high above her head, Gertrude was clinging to the old lawyer’s arm, and the dog was crouched in the sawdust close to the broken bottle of port, whose rich contents had made a broad stain upon the floor.

“Well,” said the old man, “I must not scold you, my dear, for being startled, but you made me jump. Come along.”

“No, no,” said Gertrude hastily. “You must reach down another bottle of port.”

“What, after we have wasted one!” Gertrude responded by taking the candle from Mrs Denton’s hand, and fetching another bottle from the bin, the dog following her uneasily, whining and tottering on his legs, and showing great unwillingness to follow, till Gertrude coaxed him back to his bed in the corner of the hall, after the cellar had been duly locked up, and the keys replaced in the cabinet drawer.

“I suppose we must blame George Harrington for upsetting us, and making us so nervous,” said Mrs Hampton, with a forced laugh, as Gertrude re-entered the drawing-room; “but, good gracious, child! there’s a dress! You look as if you had been committing a murder.”

Gertrude turned ghastly pale, and looked down at her soft, light dress, which was splashed and stained in great patches with the wine.

“Mrs Hampton!”

“What a stupid thing to say, my dear,” cried the old lady excitedly. “Don’t take any notice of it. There, let’s go to dinner.”

That meal was not a success, for every one seemed troubled and nervous, one infecting the other, but no allusion was made to the absentee, till they were seated alone over dessert, when, as the old lawyer sipped his claret, he said suddenly:

“You are right. I’ve been thinking it over. Saul Harrington’s invitation was too much for him. He repented of his refusal, and has gone off after him.”

“Yes,” said Mrs Hampton, “that’s it.”

Gertrude was silent. Her thoughts seemed to enchain the power of speech.

“Don’t look so troubled about it, my dear. He is a bachelor yet, and is making use of his last few days or weeks of freedom. We shall be having a letter from him soon. Con—bless that dog! Are you going to keep him in the house all night, my dear?”

“I did mean to, Mr Hampton,” said Gertrude, as a low, piteous, moan-like howl came from the hall.

“Like my impudence to speak,” muttered the old lawyer; “seemed to think I was at home.”

“He shall be taken to the stables, poor fellow,” said Gertrude, rising. “Mrs Hampton, shall we go to the drawing-room?”

“To be sure, my dear. And Hampton, don’t stop long.”

“No, my love,” said the old man gallantly, holding open the door; “and when I come up I hope we are to have some music.”

This was promised, and the lawyer returned to his seat, filled his glass, held it up brow high, looked full at the portrait of his old client, and nodded gravely.

“Your health, Harrington, old friend,” he said; and he half emptied his glass, and set it down.

“Absurd thing to wish a dead man health,” he continued, as he gazed full at the portrait. “Ought to have said welfare. Hallo! What’s that?”

He turned his face to the door, and sat listening to a faint whining, and the pattering of claw-armed feet on the floor.

“Humph! Poor brute, getting him to the stables, I suppose. Better there.”

Then, as silence once more reigned in the place, he sat back, and gazed up at the portrait.

“You meant well, old friend,” he said, “but you understood the care of money better than the workings of human nature. James Harrington, you understood laying down good wine, too; but, between ourselves, you made as bad a will as ever I helped to draw up.”

“Ah,” he continued, after a pause, “you may look as stern as you please; you know I’m telling the truth, and I shall do everything I can to upset your plans.”

He nodded, and sat sipping his wine.

“A scamp!” he said. “But one might have expected some good in him, perhaps, such as tempted him to send the old man money, but an utter, reckless scoundrel at heart. I loathe him, and he must not be allowed to marry our poor little girl. It would be too cruel.”

There was another sip or two of wine taken, as the old man gazed thoughtfully before him.

“No; he has not gone with Saul Harrington, but on some expedition of his own. Well, I can do nothing in that direction—I wish I could; but the money is his, and he has a right to spend it as he pleases. A pity, though —a pity. Eh?”

“Coffee, sir.”

“Oh, I beg your pardon, Denton. Yes; thank you.”

The old man helped himself to sugar and milk, before taking the cup from the tray, when he found the housekeeper’s eyes fixed upon him pleadingly.

“Yes, Denton; you wanted to say something.”

“Oh, yes, sir—so much. You knew master so well and he trusted in you.”

“Not so much as I could have wished, Denton, but what is it?”

“Can’t you do something, sir?”

“Something, Denton?”

“Something to persuade my poor dear young mistress; to alter her mind. There, sir,” cried the old woman, changing her tone from one of pleading to one of anger and dislike, “I’d sooner see the poor child in her grave than Master George’s wife.”

The old lawyer looked at her gravely for a few moments, and was about to speak out as he felt, but directly after, with the cultivated caution of his profession, he said slowly: “We must see, Mrs Denton—we must see.”

Then, swallowing his coffee at a draught, he set down the cup, and placing his hands behind him, as if to preserve his balance, he left the room.

Denton stood looking after him till he was gone, and then turned, and gazed up at the portrait.

“Oh, master,” she half sobbed, “you ought to have known better—you ought to have known better. She’ll marry him unless something is done, and all to please you.”

Tea was on the way soon after, and, forgetful of the coffee he had just swallowed, the old lawyer took a cup, and wandered all over the room with it, pausing thoughtfully to stir it in different corners, his brain busy the while.

At last he laid the spoon in the saucer, and was raising the cup to sip the half-cold contents, when there was a sharp ring at the great gate-bell.

“A letter,” said Mrs Hampton sharply.

“Or a telegram,” said the old lawyer.

Then there was a pause, in the midst of which the iron gate was heard to clang, and footsteps sounded on the gravel.

“A visitor—so late!” said Gertrude in a trembling voice.

“George Harrington come back,” said the old lawyer shortly.

His words had a strange effect upon Gertrude, who sank back in her seat, and half closed her eyes, while a faint shudder ran through her.

“Not much like a lover,” muttered Mrs Hampton, watching her in a sidelong way, as her eyes closed more and more, and a long-drawn sigh escaped her breast.

Meanwhile, the front door was heard to close, and there were steps in the hall, as if some one was being shown into the study.

“It is not Mr Harrington,” said Gertrude, starting up; and, as the remembrance of the old housekeeper’s ominous declarations came back, she caught at Mrs Hampton’s outstretched hand.

“Be calm, my dear.”

“But it is some bad news,” whispered Gertrude; and the feeling gained strength as the old housekeeper tapped at the door, and entered, looking wild and scared.

The old lawyer grasped in an instant that something was wrong, and he came forward.

“Leave it to me, my dear,” he said with quick firmness. “Now, Mrs Denton, what is it?”

“A gentleman, sir.”

“To see me?”

“No, sir; he asked to see Miss Gertrude.”

“Well, what does he want? Did he send in a card?”

“No, sir.”

“Then who is he?”

“If you please, sir,” stammered the old woman, “he said he was Master George.”

Chapter Twenty Five.

A Difficult Mission.

Every one in the room uttered an ejaculation at the housekeeper's announcement, but the old lawyer remained calm.

"I'll come and speak to him," he said. "Don't be alarmed," he turned and whispered to Mrs Hampton. "Some mistake of the old woman's. Try and keep her calm. A messenger, I think."

As he reached the door, the old woman laid her hand upon his arm, and whispered to him: "But it is not Mr George, sir."

"No, of course not, woman. A message from him. Where is the gentleman?"

"The dining-room things were not all cleared away, sir, and I showed him into the study."

Mr Hampton nodded, and in a quiet, business-like way went out, and crossed the hall to the study, where the visitor, a tall, deeply sun-browned, frank-looking young man, who looked hollow-cheeked, as if from some long illness, rose from his seat.

The lawyer bowed.

"I want to see Miss Gertrude Bellwood," said the visitor.

"I am her nearest friend, sir; and, I may say, I am deputed to hear your business. You come from Mr George Harrington, I presume?"

"Well, no, sir. I only reached Liverpool yesterday, London this afternoon. I am George Harrington."

"What?"

"You seem surprised. I received letters from my grandfather, asking me, urgently, to return to England. I had made my preparations for returning,

when I met with—an accident, and I have been dangerously ill. When I recovered and reached San Francisco, I found another letter announcing my grandfather's death, and I came on at once."

The old man looked at his visitor curiously.

"May I ask to whom I am speaking?" continued the young man.

"My name is Hampton, sir. I was the late Mr Harrington's confidential legal adviser and executor."

"Oh, indeed. Then that makes matters easy for me. You know everything, then?"

"Yes, I know everything," said the lawyer, with a very searching look.

"Then my cousin, sir—she has always been spoken of in letters as my cousin, though no relation."

The lawyer raised his eyebrows a little.

"I am, of course, under the circumstances, anxious to meet her."

"May I ask under what circumstances, sir?"

"I understood you to say you knew everything, sir. We are betrothed—Miss Gertrude Bellwood is to be my wife."

Both started, for at that moment Gertrude, whom Mrs Hampton had been unable to restrain, stood in the doorway, with the old lady at her elbow.

She took a couple of steps forward, gazing wildly in the frank, handsome face before her—a face which lit up with satisfaction as it encountered the earnest gaze of the young girl.

"Are you Gertrude?" he exclaimed, advancing with extended hands.

"Stop?" said the old lawyer, interposing, as he tried to master the difficulties of his position. "You will excuse me, sir, but you come here an utter stranger. You are, you say, Mr George Harrington."

“Certainly. Who doubts it?”

“We will not discuss that matter now, sir. Recollect we live in days when impositions are practised.”

“Oh, I see. Of course. Quite right, my dear sir. As my grandfather’s executor, you are bound to be careful. Pray go on.”

“Mrs Hampton,” faltered Gertrude.

“Hush, my child; be calm,” whispered the old lady.

“Then, perhaps, sir, you will give me some proof that you are the gentleman you say.”

“Proofs? Are any needed?” said the young man laughingly, as if it was absurd that his word should be doubted. “Oh, well, then, first and foremost here I am, George Harrington, my father’s son, happily in the flesh, though I have had a very narrow escape from death.”

“Very good, sir; now some other proof. Gertrude, my child, had you not better retire?”

“No, Mr Hampton,” said Gertrude firmly.

“That’s quite right,” said the young man, giving her a keen, earnest look, so full of pleased admiration that Gertrude trembled, and her eyes fell. There was something so new in that look. “If any one ought to stay here, Miss Bellwood, it should be you. Well, Mr Hampton, you want proofs?”

“Yes, sir—the letters, for instance.”

“I have only the one I received. The others were stolen from me.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes, sir, with everything of value that I possessed. Hang it all, man, don’t look so sceptical.”

“I beg pardon, sir. Go on. Of course you see I must have proof that you

are the gentleman you represent yourself to be.”

“Well, let me see. I disposed of everything I had before I went upon a hunting expedition, all but a few necessaries, and bought other things suitable for my expedition. These, I regret to say, I have lost, and but for the kindness of some people in the West, I should not have been able to get here.”

“Then you have nothing you can show?” said the old lawyer.

Gertrude looked wildly and inquiringly at their visitor, for vaguely it seemed as if some one had been holding out to her a hand to save her from a fate from which she shrank more and more as the hours glided by, but that, after all, this stretched-out hand was only a delusion and a snare.

“Well, no,” said their visitor, with his broad brow puckering up with perplexity. “You see,”—and he gave all a frank, half-smiling look, which won upon Mrs Hampton, though she received it in the most stony way—“I came here to-night all eager, and expecting to be received with open arms, and you all look like ice, and treat me as if I were an impostor. No, sir, I have no proofs; and, for the moment, I don’t know how to establish my identity. Of course it will be all right. I can only say now that I am George Harrington.”

Gertrude, in spite of herself, gave him a pitying glance, to which he responded by one so bold and masterful that he felt for the moment as if held, and the colour, which had been absent from her cheeks for weeks, slowly began to mantle there.

“Here, stop a bit, sir. This is The Mynns. I came and stayed here once.”

“Ah!” said the lawyer slowly; “then you recollect all about the place?”

“No,” said the young man thoughtfully, “I was such a little kidling. No; I don’t recollect anything. I don’t know, though; have you any portrait of the old man? I might remember him.”

“Was that anything like him?” said the lawyer, pointing to an oil painting of Gertrude’s father, which was over the mantelpiece.

“No; not a bit,” said the young man shortly. “Not a bit.”

Gertrude’s spirits rose a little, as in secret she began to wish that their visitor’s words were true, though she did not doubt it herself.

“Shall we walk into the dining-room?” said the lawyer; “there are several portraits there.”

“By all means. I want to clear my character, ladies. Rather hard on a man to be taken for a trickster and a cheat.”

“No one accuses you, sir, of being either,” said the old lawyer gravely. “I am one of the executors of Mr Harrington’s will, and I have a duty, greater than you realise, to perform.”

He led the way to the dining-room, where their visitor immediately fixed his eyes on the portrait of the late owner of The Mynns, to the exclusion of three other portraits on the walls.

“That’s more like what I should have taken the old man to be; but no, no, no. It would be a contemptible sham for me to pretend to recognise him, so I give that up at once. Look here, sir, can’t you—or can’t you, Miss Gertrude, cross-examine me a bit about my father and mother, and our family history?”

“Yes,” said the old lawyer; and he put a series of questions, all of which were instantly answered.

“This is all very satisfactory, sir, but I want more proof. Let me see; the late Mr Harrington gave you a watch, did he not?”

The question was asked in a slow, peculiar way, and Gertrude darted a searching look at the unmoved countenance before her.

“A watch? Gave me a watch, sir? No. The boot was on the other foot.”

Gertrude’s face lighted up again. She hardly dared to confess it, but she wanted, more and more, for this one to prove that he was the true George Harrington whom she was to love and honour.

“Oh! You gave him a watch, I am to understand?”

“Yes, with a chain made out of nuggets. The case was made of gold I found. I sent it because the old man always girded at my father for gold-hunting, and it was to show him what we could do. But will you not sit down, ladies?” he added, with a rather rough, but natural courtesy.

“Perhaps you will take a seat, too, sir,” said the old lawyer, who was impressed favourably by his visitor’s manner, and felt a lingering hope that his tale might be true, though all the while upon his guard against imposition.

“I will with pleasure, for I am tired. Stop a moment?” he cried excitedly; “I recollect that old girl. She used to take lumps of sugar, melt them in a wax-candle, and let yellow drops of the sweet fall on a piece of writing-paper. You ask her presently. By Jove!” he cried laughingly, “think of my remembering that.”

Gertrude’s heart gave a great throb, and she dared not meet the frank, merry eyes directed at her.

“Humph?” ejaculated the lawyer, scanning the face before him narrowly, and always to be met by a frank, manly look. “I find I am supposed to be wrong, then, about the watch?”

“Oh, yes, sir, you were wrong there. Why, by Jove! the old man wrote and told me he should leave me that watch.”

“There was the series of remittances then, sir,” continued the lawyer. “You will allow, then, that the late Mr Harrington made you an allowance?”

“I agree that this is a trap, Mr Lawyer,” said the young man; “but that was a thoroughly confidential matter, upon which we will not speak. Yes; have it your way if you like—the old man used to keep me.”

“Humph! I wish my co-executor was here,” said the lawyer, after a pause.

“So do I, sir, if it would simplify matters. All this is very unpleasant, of course.”

“More so, sir, than you imagine.”

“Well, pray tell me what to do. Here have I come to claim my heritage and my—I beg pardon,” he said quickly, with an admiring look at Gertrude, “my wife and my heritage, and the lady does not so much as shake hands with me.”

Gertrude, in spite of herself, gave him an apologetic look.

“And you treat me as if I were a scoundrel.”

“I am compelled to look upon your claim, sir, with suspicion.”

“Well, sir, you are a lawyer; perhaps you will let me retain your services on my behalf.”

“Certainly not, sir. You are attacking, I am for the defence.”

“Very well then, sir, I must get another advocate, I suppose, and oust you from your position.”

He paused for a few moments, and looked fixedly at Gertrude, and his gaze intensified, not in boldness, but in respectful ardour, as he slowly rose, and, with a sigh of satisfaction, held out his hand to her.

“Gertrude Bellwood,” he said, “I am a rough man; I have lived a wild pioneering life where, for the most part, I have rarely seen woman, but I inherited from my sweet, dear mother’s teaching a feeling of veneration for her, as one whom it is our duty to look upon with chivalrous respect. Frankly, I came here to-night, ready to claim the property my grandfather has bequeathed me, and to set the lady he wished me to wed quite free to follow her own bent. I feel it is my duty to do this, but I shall wait a while; meantime, I venture to think that you do not look upon me as an impostor. I am George Harrington, and though I now offer you my hand, it is only for the first friendly clasp. You will shake hands with me?”

Gertrude’s eyes were fixed on his, and held there as if fascinated. She did not speak, but looked at him wildly. But at last slowly, and in the midst of an utter silence, she said faintly:

“I don’t know what to think—you do not know. Mr Hampton, why do you not explain?”

Then gathering strength and firmness, she raised her hand and placed it in the firm, strong palm which closed upon it with a pressure that was painful, though it sent a thrill of pleasure through her, such as she had never felt before.

“No,” she said; “no one who was an impostor could look and speak like this.”

“God bless you, my darling!” he cried warmly, as the tears started to his eyes; “and none but a true, sweet woman would have spoken like this.”

“Stop!” said the old lawyer, coming between them, and holding them apart. “You have, sir, to make your pretensions good. Mr George Harrington is here in England, has claimed his own, and is this young lady’s betrothed.”

“What? Then where is he? Bring us face to face.”

Chapter Twenty Six.

A Thrilling Narrative.

“Oh, this is absurd!” cried the new-comer as soon as he had recovered somewhat from his surprise. “I am George Harrington. What does it mean —some subterfuge on your part, sir, to make me take fresh steps to prove my identity? If so, pray speak out.”

The lawyer made a deprecatory movement.

“I beg your pardon, ladies, for speaking out so abruptly, but it was a natural feeling of indignation.”

“It is quite excusable, sir, and this is no subterfuge.”

“But in Heaven’s name give me some explanation.”

“My dear Gertrude, Mrs Hampton,” said the lawyer with dignity, “perhaps it would be better for you to leave us. This gentleman and I will discuss the matter together.”

Gertrude looked at him almost resentfully, and then there was quite an air of sympathy in her manner, as she turned to their visitor, who said gravely:

“Yes, Miss Bellwood, I quite agree with this gentleman, it would, perhaps, be better that we should discuss the question alone. Indeed, till I have proved that I am no impostor, I am no fit company for ladies.”

He crossed to the door, held it open, and bowed gravely, as without a word they passed out, and then as soon as they were gone, he turned fiercely upon the old man.

“Now, sir, if you please, I am waiting for an explanation,” he said in a low, angry voice.

“Yet,” said Mr Hampton, throwing himself back in his chair, thrusting up

his glasses, and fixing his calm, cold eyes upon the visitor as he continued, “I do not grant that you have any right, sir, to demand this explanation. Your position should be that, if you consider you have a just claim, you should instruct a solicitor, and he would place himself in communication with me.”

“Hang all solicitors, sir!” cried the young man angrily, and his eyes seemed to flash with indignation.

The old man made a gesture.

“I beg your pardon, Mr Hampton. I believe you said you were a solicitor,” he added quickly.

“Go on, sir; I am not offended. On the contrary I rather like your display of anger. It makes me feel that you may be honest instead of an extremely clever pretender.”

“Honest, sir! Good Heavens! Put yourself in my place. Now, between man and man what does this mean?”

“Simply what I have told you; but sit down, sir. This is a question for calm consideration, and you are walking up and down like—”

“A wild beast in a cage. Yes, I know it; but who can be calm at a time like this? Pray excuse me and go on.”

“I have very little to tell you, sir. Perhaps, as the solicitor of the party in possession, I ought to make no admissions. I can merely tell you that nearly four months ago Mr George Harrington came over from America with indubitable proofs of his identity, and, as soon as the proper legal forms could be gone though, took possession.”

“Nearly four months ago? Here, stop a moment, sir. Was he a man about my height?”

“Yes.”

“Rather darker?”

The old lawyer bowed, and scrutinised the speaker carefully.

“He had a quick, sharp way of speaking, and a habit of looking behind him as if in search of danger.”

“Exactly. You are describing Mr George Harrington most carefully.”

“The villain! The hound! And I thought it was for robbery only. Well, one knows how to treat a man like that when we meet.”

He showed his regular white teeth, as his brow puckered up, and there was a look of fierce determination in his eyes as startling as his next act, which was to slip his hand behind him, and draw a small heavy-looking revolver from his pocket. This he examined quickly as he tried the lock.

“Put that away, sir,” cried Mr Hampton sternly. “You are not in the Far West now but in civilised England. Give me that pistol instantly.”

The young man handed the weapon without a moment’s hesitation.

“I beg your pardon, Mr Hampton,” he said. “Temper, got the better of me.”

He threw himself into a chair.

“Will you let me speak out quietly and calmly?”

“Go on, sir,” said the lawyer.

There was a pause, during which the young man seemed to be collecting himself, and then he said in a deep, clear voice:

“You are quite right, sir. This is a question for calm settlement, and as I have right on my side I can afford to wait.”

“That’s talking like a reasonable man, sir.”

“You must excuse me. Much of my life has been passed on ranches and upon the mountains, among desperadoes and rough fellows, who do not place much value upon a man’s life. Then I have had long dealings with Indians and bears, and altogether I am not much of a drawing-room

man.”

The lawyer bowed and glanced at the pistol on the table at his side.

“During my last year in the West, I picked up for companion a clever, shrewd fellow, named Portway—Daniel Portway. He was in terribly low water, and as it seemed to me undeservedly. He had been gold-prospecting, he told me, and had made some good finds; but ill-luck had dogged his steps. He was robbed by his companions twice over. He was attacked by Indians three or four times, and when I came upon him in Denver the poor wretch was down with fever. Well, to make the story short, I did what one Englishman would do by another if he found him out in a wild place dying. I couldn’t get a woman to attend him for love or money, so I had to do it myself, and a long and tedious job I had. I don’t know that I liked him, but I found he was a clever hunter, and knew the way about the mountains well, so we became companions, and I took him on my hunting expeditions. There, sir, honestly, I don’t think I could have behaved better to him if he had been a brother.”

There was a pause, and then in a voice husky with emotion he exclaimed:

“Hang it all! how can a man be such a brute? Well, sir, I suppose in chatting with him I let him know all my affairs, and at last read him my letters. He knew that I was coming to England as soon as I had ended that last expedition. There, I’m a frank sort of fellow, who would trust any man till I found out that he was a rogue. I suppose I began talking about my affairs, like a fool, to relieve the tedium of his illness. Thus it went on till he must have known all I knew.”

“This is a very plausible story, Mr Daniel Portway,” said the lawyer quietly; but he started, and laid his hand upon the revolver, so fierce was the bound the young man made to his feet.

But he sat down again directly.

“No, no; you don’t think that, sir. May I go on?”

“By all means.”

“Shall I take the cartridges out of the revolver, sir?” said the young man drily, “in case, I make a snatch at it.”

“No, no, no. Go on, sir; go on.”

There was a meaning smile on the young man’s lips as he went on again, and began telling of his last hunting-trip; but the smile soon died out, and he looked stern and relentless as he spoke of the weary tramp they had had, the midday sleep, and their journey afterwards till they were beside the great cañon, where he stepped forward to look about him.

“And then—I suppose it was a sudden temptation—the brute took a step or two forward, came close behind me, and before I could turn, for I felt paralysed with the horror of my position, he raised his rifle as high as he could reach, and struck me a crashing blow upon the back of the head.”

“How do you know if you were looking in another direction?”

“Because the evening sun cast his shadow upon the side of the cañon, where it seemed to me in that momentary flash that one giant was smiting down another. Then I fell headlong down, and for a few moments all was darkness.”

“Go on, sir,” said the old lawyer, who was deeply interested, for his *vis-à-vis* was talking in a slow, laboured way, as if the recollection of the terrible scene was more than he could bear and choked him with emotion.

“Then I came to myself, to lie helpless as if in a dream. I could not stir or make a sound; but I could hear distinctly, as I lay low down where I had fallen, the sounds made by some one lowering himself down the side of the cañon. Now twigs were breaking, and now stones kept falling; and after what seemed to be a long time, full of a dull sense of pain and drowsiness, I was conscious of a heavy breathing as of a wild beast.”

“A bear,” said the old lawyer involuntarily.

“No,” said the young man with a bitter smile; “a worse kind of wild beast than that: a man, sir—mine own familiar friend—Dan Portway.”

“Ah!”

“He was searching my pockets, and taking everything about me; my roughly-made, plain gold ring—pure gold from a pocket in the mountains—what letters I had; everything. Of course I had not much with me; nearly all I possessed was at my tent in the saddlebags miles away.”

“You felt all this?”

“And saw, though my eyes were nearly closed. And at last, as it seemed to me, he was about to finish his work by casting me down headlong into the profound depths of the great chasm, when a devilish thought entered his mind and seemed to flash into mine as he held me.”

There was another pause, and the young man’s voice sounded very husky, and he seemed to be suffering the bygone horror over again as he recommenced:

“I tell you I could not stir, but I could think, and feel, and see that devil’s satisfied grin as he must have said to himself:—

“‘Some day, perhaps, his body may be found, and then they will say he was last seen in my company, and it might prove awkward. They shall think he was killed by the Indians.’”

During the earlier part of this narrative the old lawyer had leaned back in his chair; but as he grew interested he sat up, then leaned forward, and now rested his hands upon the arms of his chair, and gazed full in the speaker’s face, so as not to lose a gesture, the slightest play of his countenance, or a word.

“Yes,” he continued; “go on.”

“It was as I thought, and for a moment I tried to shut out the horror, and to ask God to forgive all I had done wrong, and spare me the horrible agony I was to feel before I died.

“But I could only think a few of the words I wished to say, and then, as if every other sense grew more capable of taking in all that passed, I saw him draw his keen hunting-knife from his belt. He seized my hair, and the next moment the point was dividing the skin of my forehead, and I felt the resistance offered by the bone, the sharp pain, and the blood start and

begin to trickle over my temples. Then there was a hideous yell; he let me fall, and fled."

"Repentant?" said the old lawyer in an excited whisper.

"You shall hear, sir. As my head struck the rock there was a heavy breathing, a rustling sound of undergrowth being thrust aside, and a heavy foot was planted upon my chest, as a huge bear rushed over me in full pursuit of my would-be murderer, and then I lay listening to the crackling of twigs and the falling of stones. By degrees this died away, and for a long time all was still, and I must have glided into a state of insensibility from which I was roused by a low, snuffling noise, and I felt hot breath upon my face, and the wet tongue of the great bear licking my forehead. Then I felt him paw at me, and turn me over on to my face.

"Then all was blank.

"When I could see again I was lying chest downward, perfectly helpless, but with my head so turned that I could see, a dozen yards away, the great grizzly bear busy feeding upon the fruit of one of the low shrubs which grew on the side of the cañon. Sometimes he crawled leisurely down, sometimes up, as the fruit was most abundant; and this seemed to satisfy him; for though during the next two days he came near me again and again, he never so much as snuffed about me.

"But it all seems, after I awoke that morning, dreamlike and strange. I told you it was two days, but I am not sure about that. I have a dim recollection of the sun burning me, and seeming to scorch my brain, of its being light and dark, and of a horrible sensation of thirst, and then of all being blank. Rather a ghastly tale for ladies' ears, sir?"

"Yes, yes," said the old lawyer. "And afterwards?"

"Afterwards, sir? Yes; the next thing I remember is lying upon a bison-skin in an Indian's skin lodge, and of the dark, dirty, wild face of a squaw looking down into mine. Then of being held up while my head was bandaged, and then for a long period all seemed misty and wild. I was hunting and shooting in the Rockies. Then I was galloping after bison with which the plain seemed to be black. Then I was prospecting for gold, and finding rifts in the rocks full and waiting to be torn out, but I could

never get the gold, never succeed in hunting or shooting. There was always something to interfere, till at last I found that I was as weak as a child, and with almost the thought and action of a helpless babe, living in the lodge of a roving party of Indians who camped just where it seemed to be good in their own eyes. They are savages, whom the white man has ousted from nearly all their own hunting grounds; they are filthy and abominable in their ways, false and treacherous, all that is bad some have learned, but they nursed me through a long fever and delirium into a sort of imbecile childhood, from which I slowly gained my manhood's reason and strength, and then they gave me my rifle, and set me at liberty to join a party of gold-seekers across whom we came."

"They found you there, lying half dead by the bear."

"I suppose so, sir. All I know I found out by thinking the matter over. I recollect standing my rifle against a rock close to the track; and as my companion fled, I suppose they must have seen it in passing, hunted about for the owner and found me. I do not know for I could not understand the Indians, and they could not understand me.

"I have nearly done, sir," said the young man speaking more briskly now. "I made my way to my old camping-place, but there was nothing there, and I was wondering whether Dan Portway had carried everything off, till I remembered seeing the bear charge him, and I went to the place, expecting, perhaps, to find his bones. But I made no discovery; and knowing what a hopeless task it would be to try and find the villain, I determined to come on here in obedience to the letter I had received before I went for my last trip, made my way to San Francisco, and there I learned of my grandfather's death."

"You made no effort then to find your assailant?" said the lawyer.

"No, sir, and it has proved to be the correct thing to do, for in coming here I have run him to earth."

They sat gazing at each other for some moments in silence. Then Mr Hampton spoke.

"You have the scar, then, made by your enemy's knife?"

“Yes, sir, here,” said the young man, slightly pressing back his hair, and bending forward so that the light of the shaded lamp fell upon a red line about half an inch from the roots.

“And the injury to your head?”

“Rather an ugly place still, sir. The skull was slightly fractured. Do you wish for that proof of my identity?”

“I should like that proof of the truth of your story, sir. I am a lawyer.”

“Give me your hand, then.”

He took the old man’s index finger, bent lower, and pressed it upon the back of his head.

The old man shuddered and drew back.

“And if you want any further proof that I am the man I say, I have one here that I had forgotten. When I was a child, for some freak, my father tattooed a heart and dart upon my breast. There they are.”

He tore open the flannel shirt he wore, and displayed the blue marks upon his clear white skin.

“There, sir; that is all I can tell you now. The next thing is to confront Mr Dan Portway.”

“You think, then, that your old companion—I mean you wish me to believe that your old companion took everything he could to prove his identity, and has come here, and traded upon the knowledge he won?”

“And come here and laid claim to the estate, sir. Yes, I could lay my life that is the case.”

At that moment there was a tap at the door.

Chapter Twenty Seven.

“It’s him; it’s him!”

“Come in.”

Mrs Denton entered timidly, looking nervously at the stranger, and then said deprecatingly:

“Mrs Hampton sent me, sir, to say she should be glad to speak to you, sir.”

“Yes, yes, of course. Well, sir, I have heard all you wanted to say?”

“No, not yet,” cried the young man excitedly. “I say, old lady, you remember me?”

The old woman looked at him wistfully, and shook her head.

“No, sir, no,” she said.

“Oh, yes, you do,” he cried merrily. “Don’t you remember washing me when I was a little chap in a sort of tin bath with spots on it, red spots, and the inside was white, with shiny places, where the paint had come off.”

The old woman gazed at him wildly.

“You remember? The bottom curved up and as I stood on it, gave way, and then came up again with a loud bump.”

She still gazed at him silently, while he seemed to be trying to evoke old memories.

“Yes, to be sure, and you put me to bed in a great four-post affair, with heavy tassels and bobs round the top, and they swung to and fro, and—to be sure, yes, you set a great night-shade full of round holes on the floor, with a tin cup of water in it, and a long thin rushlight in the middle. Oh, yes, I remember seeing those holes reflected on the wall.”

“Yes, my dear,” cried the old woman excitedly, “and it has never been used since. No, Mr Hampton, sir, there are no long rushlights now.”

“Come, sir,” cried the young man excitedly, “we are beginning to feel bottom after all.”

“But—but—” faltered the old woman, and then stopped.

“Why, my dear old lady,” cried the young man, taking her withered hands, “I can remember you holding my little palms together as I knelt on the bed, and teaching me to say a kind of prayer. Let me see, what was it—I’ve never heard it since—yes, that’s it:

“Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
God bless the bed that I lay on,
Four corners to my bed,
Six angels round me spread,
Two at head, two at feet,
And two to guard me while I sleep.”

The poor old woman’s jaw dropped, her eyes dilated, and her hands went up, as the speaker went on, and as he ended the simple, pious old doggerel, she burst into a hysterical fit of sobbing as she cried:

“Yes, yes, yes, it is—it is him, sir. Oh, my dear, dear boy; and you growed to be such a fine young man. It is you, Master George. Thank God! Thank God!”

She flung her arms about his neck, and he held her to his breast, kissing her withered old brow as he patted her cheek gently, ignorant of the fact that Mrs Hampton and Gertrude had followed to the open door, and were waiting impatiently for the old woman’s return.

“Come, old granny,” cried the young man, “this is more like coming home. Heaven bless all memories, say I.”

“Yes, my dear,” sobbed the old woman, looking at him proudly, as she laid her hands on his breast, and gazed in his face.

“And—Ha, ha, ha! The sugar drops you made me, and—by Jove, yes.

What’s become of the old fruit-knife, and the white needle-case, and that bit of sweet root you used to keep in that big old pocket. Don’t you remember? You gave them to me to play with.”

The old woman uttered a little laugh full of childish delight as she bent sidewise, thrust one arm through an opening, raked about, and, as playfully as if she were dealing with a child, brought out by degrees the articles he had named, all preserved as old folk do preserve such things, and in addition a little square tin box, with grotesque heads stamped thereon.

“But you don’t recollect that?” she said playfully.

“Yes, I do,” he cried eagerly; “it’s the one out of which I spilt all the pins.”

“May we come in?” said Mrs Hampton, in her stern, harsh voice.

“Yes, yes, ma’am,” cried the old woman excitedly. “Miss Gertrude, my dear, oh, be quick! It’s him; it’s him; and me not to have known him directly I saw his face.”

A short, dry cough from the lawyer checked her, as, flushed and trembling with excitement, Gertrude stood once more in the room.

“Yes, yes, Denton,” said the old lawyer; “this is all very good evidence, but—”

“Oh, it’s him, sir! it’s him! Miss Gertrude, we’ve all been dreadfully cheated. It’s him; it’s him!”

“Mrs Denton, have the goodness to be silent,” said Mr Hampton sternly.

“Yes, yes, granny,” said the young man, laying his arm caressingly on her shoulder; “be quiet now and wait. By-and-bye I hope to convince all here as strongly as I have convinced you.”

“You shall have fair play, sir,” said the lawyer gravely. “I regret to be compelled to treat you as I do; and I regret also that I must withhold all confidence in what you have said. I can only say, sir, that you have impressed me most favourably.”

“And I’m sure *you* never drink, my dear?” cried Denton.

“Mrs Denton?”

“I beg pardon, sir; it’s only that I’m so glad to see his bonny face again.”

“I shall,” continued the old lawyer—

“Excuse me for interposing, sir,” said the young man excitedly, for he had flushed as he met Gertrude’s eyes fixed wonderingly, and yet with a pleased expression upon his. “You are a lawyer, and the ways of the law are said to be slow. The case is this—”

He spoke at the old lawyer, but he looked at Gertrude the while.

“I’m George Harrington, and during my illness the man I trusted has, believing me dead, come over and robbed me of my birthright. The first thing to be done is to bring us face to face.”

“Yes,” assented Mrs Hampton; “to bring them face to face.”

Gertrude drew a long breath, and it seemed as if a terrible load had been lifted from her breast.

“Without confronting the man who, I say, has imposed upon you all, and whom I believe to be Dan Portway, I have no means of proving who I am —save by the tattooed marks.”

“Which he possesses, too,” said the lawyer gravely.

“What! Oh, there must be an end to this. He claims to be George Harrington. I, George Harrington, say that he is a liar and impostor. Now, then, I am ready to confront him. Where is this man?”

There was a dead silence in the room.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

Mr Hampton is Uneasy.

Mr Hampton was the first to break the silence.

“Mr George Harrington is at present absent from home.”

“I beg your pardon,” was the retort, in firm, convincing tones; “Mr George Harrington is here present, and eager to be confronted with this man.”

“As soon as he returns, sir, you and he will doubtless meet; and, as a matter of course, I presume you will lay claim to the estate?”

“I am not thinking of the estate now, sir. I want to meet this man—I want to be brought face to face with him. I’ll soon bring him to his knees, and make him confess. The villain!—the murderous wretch! I—I beg pardon, ladies. You do not know the truth. This man, Dan Portway, struck me down, and, believing me dead, has imposed upon you all.”

“There! I knew it all the time,” cried Mrs Hampton emphatically.

“My dear Rachel!”

“Oh, don’t talk to me, Phineas. I knew he couldn’t be our George Harrington. A nasty, low-minded, drinking wretch, whose presence I would not have tolerated for a minute if it had not been for Gertrude here. I knew it all the time; something seemed to say to me, as soon as I set eyes upon him, ‘This man is a cheat.’”

“My dear madam,” cried their visitor, smiling, “now you have set eyes on me I hope there is no such whisper to your inner self.”

“Indeed there is not, sir.”

“My dear Rachel?” cried the lawyer firmly, “this is extremely indiscreet. We are face to face with a very great difficulty.”

“No difficulty at all. Wait till the wretched man comes back, and then send

him about his business."

"You are talking like an inconsistent child, Rachel," said the lawyer sternly. "Mr George Harrington—"

"The assumed Mr George Harrington," interposed the new-comer.

"I beg your pardon, sir; until we have the most incontrovertible proofs of the truth of what you advance, this is Mr George Harrington to us; and you seem to forget the old adage: 'Possession is nine points of the law.'"

"Oh, no, I do not," said the young man quickly; "and I do not forget that, little as I know of the law, I have you and the other executor to call to account for improperly disposing of my estate."

With a wholesome horror of the legal tedium of the profession to which he belonged, and startled at the prospect a lawsuit opened out, the old man sank back in his chair, and, for the moment completely taken aback, stared at his verbal assailant.

"Pray do not misjudge Mr Hampton," said Gertrude coming to his help. "He was my grandfather's most trusted friend, and he has acted throughout with the strictest impartiality. If he has been mistaken—which we do not know yet," she said, colouring deeply beneath the young man's admiring gaze, "he will, I am sure, do everything that is right."

"I am sure he will, quite sure."

"This is a terrible position in which we are all placed," continued Gertrude, with quiet, matter-of-fact courtesy.

"Yes, a very terrible position, my dear," said the old lawyer, full of gratitude for the way in which she had come to his help when, to his annoyance, he had been completely nonplussed; "and this gentleman must do nothing rash."

"Will it be rash to seize this scoundrel, and break his neck?"

"Certainly, sir," said the old man, with the comic gravity of one who takes everything as the French say, *au pied de la lettre*. "You are in England

now and not in the Far West, where your most famous Justice is Judge Lynch."

"I wish he had hold of this man."

"Yes, exactly, my dear sir; but listen to simple, matter-of-fact reason. You see, of course, how the executors are placed."

"Oh, yes, I see," said the young man, who was watching Gertrude all the time.

"Prove your position then, my dear sir, and rely upon it you shall have justice."

"Am I to understand by these words that the executors will offer no opposition?"

"I am sorry to say, sir, that the executors are powerless. They have, as they believed, done their duty conscientiously and well. Your actions for the moment, it seems to me, will be two. One for ejectment against Mr George Harrington."

"Against the impostor, sir."

The lawyer made a deprecatory motion.

"The other against the unfortunate executors. Perhaps I am wrong, but all this is so sudden that I must confess to being a little off my regular balance."

"Look here, sir," cried the young man bluffly. "I have passed my life among tough, lawless men; but there are plenty out West who are true, rough nature's gentlemen. My father was one of these, and I've tried to follow out his teachings. I suppose I shall have to do what you say—go to law; but if it is made plain to me that you and your fellow executor have done your duty as gentlemen, and have unwittingly been imposed upon, why I'd sooner give up everything than come down upon you."

"Thank you, sir, thank you," said the old man in a low tone; "thank you for myself and for Doctor Lawrence."

“Doctor Lawrence!” cried the young man with animation; “ah, I know him by name.”

“And I say thank you, too, Mr George Harrington,” began Mrs Hampton.

“My dear Rachel,” said the old lawyer reprovingly, “you are making an admission.”

“Of course I am. I said Mr George Harrington, because I believe firmly that we have been imposed upon. I am glad to see you back again, George,” she continued, holding out her hand; “and you may depend upon having my help. There, there, there, Phineas, don’t look at me like that,” she continued, as the young man grasped her hand. “You feel the same as I do in your human heart, though you cannot in your legal mind. My making an admission does not injure your position behind your books. I say we have been tricked, and the sooner we repent in sackcloth and ashes the better.”

“Come,” cried the young man, “here’s sunshine through the clouds. I have your support, madam, and that of our dear old granny here.”

“Yes, yes,” said the old housekeeper, who had wept herself nearly blind, and quite dry. “It’s him, Mr Hampton. Oh, I’m sure it’s him.”

“That’s right, old lady; and now I want to enlist another’s sympathy in my cause. Miss Bellwood—Gertrude—I came here to-night to claim my heritage, and to see the lady who would, in all probability, be my wife. You will shake hands?”

He held out his brown, sinewy hand and gazed in the troubled eyes before his, as the poor girl stood trembling by Mrs Hampton’s side, while the rest looked on curiously.

For one moment she shrank and hesitated, then, as if unable to resist the influence of the eyes which held hers, she slowly raised her hand, to have it clenched with a firm, strong pressure, before it was raised to the holder’s lips to be reverently kissed and then let fall.

“This is really very much out of order,” said Mr

Hampton querulously. “I ought not to sit here and—”

“Allow it, sir? Well, perhaps not. There, it is growing late. I will not inflict my presence upon you longer; and you may rely upon it, ladies, that everything shall be done so as to cause you as little anxiety as possible.”

“I am glad to hear you say that,” cried Mr Hampton. “When can I meet this man, sir?”

“Really, I cannot say. At present I am under the impression that he has gone to Paris, and he may not be back for some days.”

“Then why should I not turn the tables on him, and take possession here?”

“It cannot be done, sir,” said the old man firmly.

“But suppose I insist.”

“If you are the true George Harrington, sir, you will act as a gentleman should, and take proper steps to make good your claim.”

“Ah! now you disarm me. There: I will go now. Miss Bellwood, Mrs Hampton, whatever happens in the future you may believe in me. Good-night.”

He shooks hands again.

“Mr Hampton, I shall come in the morning and have a long talk with you.”

“You are staying in town?”

“I shall stay in town at Jay’s Hotel, Surrey Street.”

“Then you will be close to my chambers in Lincoln’s Inn. I will be there, and expect you at twelve.”

“And when shall I see Doctor Lawrence?”

“At twelve to-morrow, at my place.”

“Good-night, then; you, too, will shake hands.”

“As soon as you prove yourself to be George Harrington.”

“Quite right, sir. Good-night. You will show me the way out, granny.”

“And with a sorrowful heart, my dear,” said the old woman. “To think of my having to turn you away from your own old home.”

“Only for a while, old lady,” said the young man; and passing his arm round her he left the room.

No one moved till the gate had been heard to clang, when, without word or look, Gertrude turned and hurried up to her chamber, to fling herself upon her knees, sobbing violently.

“And I have promised to be his wife,” she moaned. “What shall I do? What shall I do?”

“Well, Phineas,” said Mrs Hampton, after she had stood looking frowningly at her husband for some time as he sat tapping the table, “what have you to say to all this?”

“Eh? Nothing.”

“But you see that was the real man.”

“No, I don’t. He must prove it.”

“But this other one.”

“Is to us Mr George Harrington.”

“But when he comes back from Paris what will he say?”

“I’m beginning to think, Rachel, that he has gone.”

“Well, we know he has gone.”

“But I mean for good.”

“He couldn’t. It’s not in him. Gone for bad, you mean.”

“I mean gone, never to come back.”

“Good gracious, Phineas! Do you think he knows?”

“It is impossible to say; but he has had ten thousand pounds in hard cash.”

“The wretch!”

“And I suppose I shall have to be answerable for the amount to the rightful heir.”

“Why, Phineas, it would half ruin you if you had to pay.”

“Yes,” said the old man dolefully.

“But you think this is the right man?”

“Yes, Rachel; and I’m afraid I have got myself in a dreadful mess.”

Chapter Twenty Nine.

“There it is Again.”

“My dear Gertrude, I did not oppose you after you had made up your mind to carry out your guardian’s wishes; but I’m so pleased with the way in which things have turned out that I hardly know what to say.”

“But you forget, Mrs Hampton; you forget that I have promised to be that man’s wife.”

“Well, what of that, my dear?”

“What of that?”

“Yes; you are a woman, aren’t you?”

“Of course, but—”

“Well, say you won’t have him. Nobody can force you to. What’s the good of being a woman if you can’t have your own way about the man you marry?”

“Hark!” cried Gertrude, “the bell!” and she turned quite pale. “It must be he.”

“Which he?” cried the old woman shortly. “Can’t be our Mr George Harrington, because he was to go to Lincoln’s Inn about this time. And I don’t believe it is likely to be the other. He’ll never come back at all. Oh, the pest?”

Mrs Denton looked from one to the other with a satisfied air, as she handed the letter she brought in to Gertrude, her air suggesting that she expected to be spoken to; but as nothing was said, she shrugged her shoulders and left the room.

“From Saul Harrington,” said Gertrude, opening the letter with trembling hands.

It was dated the previous day from a well-known hotel in Paris, and very brief.

He hoped his dear little cousin would be glad to hear he had reached Paris all right, and was having lovely weather. He said that the gay city was full of temptations, but he was going to resist them all, and leave in forty-eight hours for Chamounix, which he should make his headquarters till he went on to the Tyrol.

“Tell George,” he continued, “that I consider he has lost his manliness in pinning himself to your apron till the happy day. He had far better join me out here for a good tramp. If he likes to alter his mind he can easily catch up to me, and I faithfully promise to send him bark in ample time for a certain event. Under the circumstances I shall probably not return till after you are married, so forgive my absence. I wish you every happiness.”

“Then that man has not joined him yet, my dear.”

“No, Mrs Hampton. Is it not very strange?”

“Very, my dear.”

“Why do you speak like that? It is as if you had some hidden meaning.”

“I only think that he did not go and join him.”

Gertrude looked at her rather curiously, and then said in an eager way:

“It would be easy to find out if he has joined him since.”

“By telegraphing. Are you going to do this?”

Gertrude shook her head.

“Would you like me to send a message?”

“Yes—no—I hardly know what to say.”

Mrs Hampton stuck her ball of wool on the point of the shining knitting-pin she held, and spun it round for a few times.

“It would be satisfactory for everybody to know,” she said at last. “Ring the bell, my dear, and I’ll send a message.”

The message was despatched, and after a long discussion as to the probabilities of reaching Saul Harrington before he left for Switzerland, and how soon an answer might be expected, they settled down to the daily routine of their lives. One duty now was Gertrude’s nursing of the injured dog, who seemed, as he lay on the soft hay bed in the stable, very near his end. He lay for hours together without stirring, till he heard his mistress’ step, and then he uttered a low whine, and feebly raised his head as his eyes sought hers before he lowered his muzzle again, as if it was too heavy for the strength he had left.

Gertrude let many a tear fall upon the poor brute’s head as she patted it gently and bandaged the wound, the dog submitting to what must have been a painful operation without so much as a whine, till the time came when he could get his head in his mistress’ lap, and sink into a kind of stupor more than sleep.

That day wore by, and there was no answer to the telegram. Then came the dinner hour, and with it the old lawyer, but not alone, Doctor Lawrence having once more accompanied him down to The Mynns.

Their looks spoke volumes, but little was said till they were seated over the dessert; when, in response to one of Gertrude’s inquiring looks, the Doctor leaned towards her, took her hand, and said gravely:

“My dear child, I have said nothing, because I seem to have nothing to say.”

“But tell me what you think,” said Gertrude imploringly.

“Well, my dear, I think—but it must not influence us in any degree—that this young man really is George Harrington.”

Gertrude tried to stifle the emotion she felt, as the doctor went on:

“It is a puzzling business, my dear. We have had a very long interview at Hampton’s chambers, and he certainly has impressed me strangely. Our friend here is like a rock, and he has been piling on to my head stories of

impostures, and cases where pretenders have come forward, till I am completely bewildered."

"Then if he is not the true George Harrington, let George Harrington himself come forward and say so. Why doesn't he come back, instead of running off in this mysterious way?"

Mrs Hampton looked quite fiercely to right and left as she delivered herself of this speech.

The old lawyer seemed to decline to take up the cudgels; he only tapped softly on the table. But Mrs Hampton's tongue was unloosed, and she turned the flow of her eloquence upon the doctor.

"I say this is the right man," she cried; "everything goes to prove it. I have not said anything about this before, but I have noticed a great deal since I have been here, and I kept my lips sealed because I felt that I might be doing wrong in speaking, and, besides, I had no right."

"What have you observed, then?" said the lawyer, turning upon her sharply.

"That time after time, while he was professing to be so sober, our Mr George Harrington sat drinking with Saul half, and sometimes all the night. Three times over did old Mrs Denton come to me, pretending it was to help her about some domestic matter, over which she did not want to trouble Gertrude here, and it was to show me Mr George Harrington asleep in the study, where he had been all night. Ah! here she is. Mrs Denton, how many times did you find the gentleman—bah!—the man who came and said he was Mr Harrington—asleep in his chair in the study."

"Six, ma'am," said the old housekeeper. "No: it was eight."

"Now, don't exaggerate, Denton. It was only three."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am; I only came to you three times. There were five other times when I woke him, and got him up to bed myself, so stupid and confused that he could only ask where Mr Saul was. They had been sitting in the study together when I went to bed, and he must have let Mr

Saul out himself and then gone back and fallen asleep in his chair. A telegram, miss."

Gertrude eagerly took the message, tore open the envelope, read, and passed it to Mrs Hampton who also read it anxiously.

"*What do you mean? George did not come with me. He refused in your presence. Just off to Switzerland. Wire to Glacier Hotel, Chamounix*."

"You need not wait, Denton," said Gertrude.

"No, miss; but might I make so bold: is there any news of—of the gentleman who said he was Mr George?"

"No, Denton; none at all."

"And might I ask when Mr George is coming again?"

Gertrude looked at the old lawyer, who only looked close as one of his own tin boxes, so she transferred her gaze to the doctor, who fidgeted about beneath the inquiring eyes.

Gertrude rose from the table, laid her hand upon the old woman's arm, and led her from the room.

"Denton—dear old nurse," she said affectionately, "you must be patient and wait. We are all in a terrible state of perplexity; do not increase it by asking questions."

The old woman caught her hand and kissed it affectionately.

"Not another word will I say, my dear, till you speak to me. But, Miss Gertie, I know I'm right. This last one is Master George. Why, my darling, you can see it in his eyes and in his fine manly way to me—the poor old woman who nursed him as a child."

"Yes, yes, Denton; but please say no more now."

"Only one word, my dear, and it's about you. If the other comes back and wants you to side with him, and be his wife, don't listen to him. You shall

not. I'd sooner kill him than he should ever take you in his arms."

"Denton!"

"I've done, my dear. It was only my love for the little girl I helped to bring up that made me speak. Don't be angry with me, dear. I forget sometimes that I'm only a servant. That's right. If you only smile at me like that you make me feel so happy again."

Gertrude returned to the dining-room, to find that a discussion was going on, and the doctor speaking.

"Then you feel it is our duty to remain silent?"

"Most decidedly. Whatever your feelings may be you must recollect that we have accepted this gentleman as James Harrington's heir. The pretender—"

"Pretender!" echoed Mrs Hampton.

"Yes. I must call him so, my dear. The pretender must make good his claim."

"Then we can do nothing till Mr George Harrington Number one comes back?"

"Nothing."

"And you have a latent feeling that we shall not see him again?"

"A feeling that the telegram has strengthened. It seems to me that if—mind, I say if—he is an impostor, he may have had a hint that the genuine George Harrington was, after all, alive and coming back. He had foresight enough to possess himself of a large sum of money, and with this he has escaped. Good Heavens! There it is again."

Dr Lawrence had started from his seat, as once more a long, low howl seemed to come from close at hand.

"It is only Bruno," said Gertrude. "Poor fellow! he must have made his

way out of the stable. Don’t stir, I’ll send him back.”

She ran out of the room, to find Denton coming to meet her.

“Bruno, my dear. He has managed to get over into the house.”

“Where is he?”

“I don’t know, my dear; I only heard him howl.”

A short search was sufficient, and the dog was found in the study, standing on the hearthrug, though his legs seemed hardly able to bear his weight, and sniffing and looking about in a curiously uneasy way.

Gertrude’s coming was sufficient to take his attention directly, and he suffered himself to be led back to his quarters.

“I seem very rude,” was on Gertrude’s lips as she reached the dining-room door, but the words were not spoken, for she stood, chained, as it were, to the spot, listening to the doctor’s words.

“No, Hampton,” he said, “we medical men know too much of nature to be superstitious; but I have known cases where a dog has seemed to have a strange presage of death.”

A sudden giddiness seized upon the trembling girl, as the thought occurred to her: Suppose these two young men should meet. What would be the consequence? Would it mean death, and to which?

Gertrude’s heart seemed to stand still.

Chapter Thirty.

Why Saul Came Back.

Saul Harrington went down one day from his chambers, and walked up to The Mynns from the station with his arm in a sling.

“You, Mr Saul!” said Denton.

“Yes, old lady. Who did you think it was? Anybody at home?”

“Yes, sir, Miss Gertrude is upstairs. But what’s the matter with your arm?”

“Mere nothing; slipped on the ice inflamed. The Hamptons still here?”

“Oh, yes, sir.”

“Shall I fasten the gate? There you are. One moment, though: Master Bruno was never very fond of me. Dog had his teeth in me twice. Is he chained up?”

“Poor Bruno,” sighed Denton. “I dare say it was only in play.”

“*Poor* Bruno! What do you mean? Not dead, is he.”

“Oh, dear no, sir. Getting quite strong again.”

“Indeed,” said Saul drily.

“Yes, sir; somebody tried to kill him, but Miss Gertrude has nursed him back to life.”

“Poor dog! Somebody tried to kill him. What for? Biting?”

“I don’t know, sir. He crawled in one morning half dead; and, for a long time, I thought he wouldn’t get over it. But he’s nearly well now.”

“And chained up?”

“No, sir; but shut up in the stable. We can’t have him in the house, he howls so.”

Saul Harrington made no answer, for they were at the top of the steps; and directly after he was shown into the drawing-room, where every eye was fixed upon his arm.

“Ah, Gertrude! my dear,” he cried, shaking hands. “Mrs Hampton, too. Glad to see you.”

“It’s a big story,” said the old lady below her breath, as she shook hands in the most cold and limp manner ever perpetrated by woman. “Is your arm bad?” she said aloud.

“Slipped on a glacier. Nothing very much. Got your letter, Mr Hampton, and came on at once. Nothing wrong, is there?”

The old lawyer coughed.

“Rather a mysterious document. ‘Come on at once; important business.’ Why, hang it all, sir, you haven’t found a later will, have you?”

“No, sir,” said the lawyer coldly, “it is not that.”

“Well, I am on the tip-toe of expectation. What is it? But where’s George?”

There was no reply, and Saul looked from one to the other wonderingly.

“Not been up to his games, has he? Another touch of DT?”

“No, sir; there has been nothing of that kind, unless it was unknown to us, and it prompted him to behave as he did.”

“Great Heavens, man, what is it? He has not injured anyone in a mad fit, has he?”

“Neither am I aware of that,” said the lawyer gravely. “The fact is, Mr Harrington, your cousin has disappeared.”

“My cousin has what?” cried Saul, laughing aloud.

“There is no cause for mirth, sir. I sent for you because the day after you were here your cousin George went away.”

“What, for a day or two?”

“And he has not been seen since.”

“Good heavens! But, by Jove, that’s too bad. Had he any money?”

“Yes, sir; I believe he had quite a large sum.”

“Then that’s why he would not go with me. He had some plan in his head. Oh, it’s nothing. He’ll soon be back. Just a farewell bachelor trip, Gertie. Don’t take any notice of it.”

“We thought he had joined you,” said Mrs Hampton sharply.

“Oh, dear no; I haven’t so much as heard from him. But he’ll be back soon.”

“It is a long time now since he disappeared.”

“Went out,” said Saul, with a peculiar laugh.

“Have it that way if you like, Mr Harrington,” said the lawyer coldly—“went out; and has not returned.”

“Well, he is not a child, sir. George Harrington is a young man, full of life and energy; he has just come in for a large fortune, and we all know he likes to enjoy life. Besides, his ways have not been as ours. Those from the Far West do not study the conventionalities. He’ll soon settle down. Well?”

“Well, sir.”

“Is that all?”

“No, Mr Saul, that is not all. There are several little matters into which I will not enter.”

“But surely you have not fetched me back from Switzerland, sir, because my cousin has gone off somewhere on the spree?”

“There are very grave considerations in connection with this matter, Mr Saul,” said the old lawyer; “and I deemed it my duty, seeing how near a relative you are, to send for you back.”

“But surely you will explain; give some stronger reason for dragging me here?”

“Well, sir, I will; and, as everything is known to Miss Bellwood, here, and my wife, I will speak out at once.”

“Then for heaven’s sake do, sir; and pray don’t dole out your words as if they were those of a letter, at a shilling a line.”

The old lawyer took no notice of the last words, but said quietly:

“There has been a suggestion, sir, that the missing man had collected together a large sum, and has gone off with no intention of returning.”

“For the present,” said Saul, with a quick glance at Gertrude.

“At all, sir.”

“Oh, rubbish. Who has dared to insinuate that? Bah! preposterous. Collect a few hundreds, and leave behind this fine estate. My dear Mr Hampton, are you serious?”

“Ideas, these, sir, which sound strange; but to which colour is given by the assertion now made that the person in question is not the true George Harrington, but an impostor.”

Saul Harrington leaped from his seat with a horrified and startled look in his eyes, and then sank back, grasping the arms and staring wildly at the old man, his jaw dropping, but no words coming from his lips.

“Yes, I surprise you, of course,” continued the old lawyer, in his calm, unruffled, legal manner.

Saul Harrington uttered a gasp, as he seemed to make a tremendous effort to master his emotion.

“Yes, yes, of course,” he cried, “you surprise me terribly. Then—then—if he is an impostor the property would naturally fall to me.”

“No,” said the lawyer, as Saul sat back in his chair, with his teeth set and a peculiarly rigid aspect in his face, “the property only comes to you in the event of George Harrington’s death without issue.”

“Yes,” said Saul, in a hoarse whisper.

“And we do not know that George Harrington dead.”

“No, no; of course not,” said Saul hastily. “I begin to see now why you summoned me back. But—impostor—my cousin—the man I left here, accepted by you all?”

“Yourself included, Mr Saul,” said the lawyer gravely.

“Yes, of course—of course—his proofs of identity—of course.”

“They were very strong, Mr Saul, and upon the strength of them he has obtained from the estate ten thousand pounds in hard cash, and he has disappeared.”

“But it is impossible! An impostor?” said Saul hoarsely. “No, no, no; you do not think so.”

“My position forbids me to offer an opinion. At least, I consider it does, sir.”

“But what proofs have you?” cried Saul, who seemed to be recovering himself. “You are keeping something back. Who says that George Harrington is an impostor?”

“I say the man who called himself George Harrington is a rank impostor, sir,” said a firm voice at the doorway; and all turned to see the speaker standing there, a little in advance of Doctor Lawrence.

“You!” cried Saul, springing up, and looking so ghastly pale and drawn of countenance, that he seemed to have aged ten years.

“Yes, I do, sir.”

“And—may I ask—who—you are?” said Saul, speaking with terrible effort.

“Yes! I am George Harrington, come here to claim my rights.”

Chapter Thirty One.

An Invitation Declined.

“Come, Mr Saul, sir, drink a little more of this,” said Doctor Lawrence; and he held a glass to the young man’s lips, as he lay back on the sofa, where he had been lifted, for the words he had heard uttered had so strange an effect upon him that he had stood staring wildly for a few moments, and then uttered a sudden, low cry, and fallen heavily upon the carpet.

“Better now,” he said, drinking with avidity; and then sitting up quite calm and connected. “A sudden fit of giddiness. I have been travelling night and day. I have not eaten; and the suddenness of this news completely overset me. Very absurd, of course.”

“No, sir; quite natural,” said the doctor quietly.

“Yes,” said Saul, with a peculiar laugh, “in a girl; but not in a strong man.”

“And now, if you will take my advice,” said the doctor, “you will partake of some refreshment, and leave all further discussion of this business till another day.”

“No,” said Saul hoarsely, “I must have all this cleared up before I go.”

“Well, we can arrange that,” said Gertrude smiling. “I will tell Denton to see that you have a room made ready; sleep here to-night.”

“Sleep? here?” cried Saul quickly. “No, thank you; I shall get back to town.”

“Far wiser to stay, sir,” said the doctor quietly.

“No. You will be going back; I’ll go with you.”

“As you like,” said the doctor; and at that moment Mrs Hampton whispered to Gertrude as they stood apart.

“You asked him—to stay!”

“Yes,” said Gertrude, with her eyes full of perplexity. “I cannot tell how it was, but I do not feel afraid of him now.”

She started almost as she spoke, for an angry voice behind exclaimed:

“Well, sir, why are you looking at me like that?”

“For the simple fact that I was eager to see what kind of man my cousin Saul might be.”

“Your cousin, sir. You have to prove that yet,” cried Saul excitedly.

“Of course; of course! Don’t be put out about it, or I shall begin to think you did not want me to come back.”

“Gentlemen, gentlemen?” cried Mr Hampton, “pray let us have calmness and discretion; there are ladies here.”

“Yes; I am quite cool; and I beg their pardon.”

“But may I ask why you are here this evening, sir,” said the lawyer. “I thought, after our last meeting, it was decided that you should wait patiently.”

“Yes, sir; I promised against myself. Self has mastered me. I called on Doctor Lawrence; found he was coming down. I could not keep away. I beg pardon all the same.”

All this while Saul was glaring at the speakers in a curiously excited manner, which took the doctor’s attention, and he crossed to his side.

“I don’t want to alarm you, Saul Harrington,” he whispered; “but if you do not control yourself, you will have another fit. Besides, all this will fly to your bad arm.”

“Oh, I’m calm enough now,” was the impatient reply; but as Saul spoke the veins were beginning to stand out in knots about his temples, for the visitor had crossed to Gertrude and shaken hands, while her peaceful,

gratified look, and the smile she gave, as she looked up in his eyes, seemed to madden him.

“Come away,” whispered the doctor.

“What! and leave that man, that impostor, here?”

“Who said impostor?” cried the new pretender, turning sharply round. “You, sir? All right, Gertrude, I will not quarrel with him. I dare say it is natural, but not a pleasant thing for me to bear.”

“Get them both away, or we shall be having terrible trouble,” whispered Mrs Hampton in her husband’s ear.

“Yes. Gentlemen, everything connected with this matter must be left to the law of your country. The use of language tending to anger is not likely to settle matters. Mr Saul Harrington, I have explained the state of affairs to you, and you grasp all that is necessary for you to know at present.”

“You sent for me,” cried Saul fiercely, “and I decline to go and leave Miss Bellwood in company with this strange man, whose claims are preposterous.”

“Then I must appeal to you, sir,” said the lawyer. “You came down unasked; your presence is likely to cause unpleasantry; trust me that you shall have justice done, so please to go.”

“I, George Harrington, feel that I have a perfect right to be here, Mr Hampton; and I cannot help resenting the overbearing manner of my cousin.”

“George,” said Gertrude softly, as she laid her hand in his; “I believe in you.”

“Ah!” he cried, in a low, eager tone.

“Be content, and go.”

“I could not exist without seeing you,” he whispered; and the colour came warmly into her cheeks at his words. “You wish me to go?”

“Yes.”

There was a pleading look in her eyes which disarmed all resistance; and, pressing her hand, he turned to Mrs Hampton.

“Good-night,” he said; “I know I have an advocate in you. Gentlemen, good-evening. I will call at your office in the morning, Mr Hampton.”

He left the room, and, as soon as the gate was heard to clang, Gertrude signed to Mrs Hampton and they left the room, for Saul’s manner betokened another storm.

Too truly, for the next minute it broke out with uncontrolled violence—words he did not mean to utter pouring from his lips.

“It is a lie! A fraud! A base piece of cozening?” he cried. “The man is an impostor, who has come forward to rob me of my rights.”

“Your rights, Mr Saul,” said the lawyer slowly; “what are they?”

“I mean my rights as next-of-kin. Where is my cousin George? He must be found: he shall be found!”

“Stop, sir!” cried Doctor Lawrence, in a stern voice, as he caught the speaker by the shoulder. “As a physician, I know your condition better than you know it yourself. I have given you fair warning of the danger of giving way to anger like this. You will not heed my remonstrances, so now I insist upon your being calm.”

“Calm! How can a man be calm?”

“When he is goading himself on to an apoplectic fit? I don’t know, sir; but you have to be calm, or I must give you some drug that will make you.”

“No, no,” cried the young man, with a gesture full of horror.

“Then obey me. Your conduct is suicidal, and I feel as if I were assisting at a murder. You had better sleep here to-night.”

Saul turned upon him with so fierce a gesture that the doctor gave way.

“Very well; I will see you to your apartments in town. Good-night, Hampton. No fresh clue, I suppose?”

The lawyer shook his head as he walked down towards the gate with them.

“None whatever. It is a very mysterious affair; and I feel now as if we ought to place the matter in the hands of the police.”

“Feel giddy, Mr Saul?” said the doctor, for his companion had suddenly struck against his arm.

“I beg pardon, no; I nearly fell. The worst of these country places. I trod on a slug or toad, and only having one arm at liberty, I—”

“Committed murder—involuntarily, of course,” said the doctor with a chucks. “Well, things that are in one’s way should get out of one’s way.”

Saul made no reply, but he breathed hard, went silently down the station road, and then to himself:

“Or be put out of one’s way,” and he started again as if fearful that his words had been heard.

Chapter Thirty Two.

“Down, Bruno! Down!”

“No, Denton; he does not seem to get better,” said Gertrude, as she knelt beside Bruno in the stable, the dog resting his muzzle in her hand, while he blinked patiently; and, from time to time, uttered a very human sigh.

“Oh, but he is better, my dear, and gradually growing stronger. He ate quite a big basin of bread and milk this morning.”

“So cruel to injure a poor dumb beast like that.”

“Yes, my dear; but I’ll be bound to say Bruno left his mark upon whoever it was, and serve him right.”

The dog whined uneasily, and opened his eyes to stare about him, as if he had been half dreaming, and imagined there was something near.

“Poor Bruno, then?” said Gertrude caressingly. “Denton, doesn’t all this seem very strange to you about—about—”

“Master George, my dear? Well, yes; but I can hardly forgive myself for thinking that other was the darling little fellow I was so proud to have in the house. But there, we are all right now.”

Gertrude signed.

“Why, my dear, you oughtn’t to do that. Now, if it was the other, with his dreadful ways of sitting up with Mr Saul over the whiskey, and the finding him asleep in his chair at seven o’clock in the morning, you might sigh.”

“Hush, Denton,” said Gertrude colouring, as she softly laid down the dog’s heavy head, with the effect that the poor beast whined.

“Now, I tell you what I should do if I were you, Miss Gertie,” continued the old woman. “Dogs are a deal like human beings when they’re ill.”

“What do you mean, Denton?”

“Why, poor Bruno has been shut up in this dark stable and wants fresh air. If I were you, I should go and get a book, and then lead the dog right down to the bottom of the garden, to the old seat under the yew hedge, and you could read in the shade while he lies down in the sun.”

“Denton, you ought to have been a duchess,” cried Gertrude; “you dear, clever old thing. Lie still, Bruno, and I’ll be back directly.”

Full of her idea, Gertrude ran into the drawing-room for a book; told Mrs Hampton, who was writing letters, what she was about to do; and, catching a sunshade from the hall-stand, she was back in the stable before five minutes had elapsed.

It was no easy task, though, to get the dog down to the bottom lawn. The poor beast, evidently in a drowsy way, approved of the change; but at the end of every few yards he lowered his head, and stood as if going to sleep on his outstretched legs. At such times Gertrude felt disposed to give up; but invariably as she came to this determination the dog seemed to revive, and slowly followed her again.

The old rustic chair was reached at last, and Bruno lay down, in the full sunshine, upon the soft turf; while his mistress settled herself in a well-clipped nook of the great yew hedge, which separated the bottom of the garden from the meadows, across which ran a footpath, forming a short cut to the station.

The flies troubled the dog a little, but he was soon apparently sleeping, basking in the sun; though the opening of one eye every time a leaf was turned over by his mistress told that he never lost consciousness.

Gertrude read a page or two of her book, and then began reading page after page of her life; and there was a curious feeling of wonderment as she went on, thinking of Saul’s advances, and the horror with which they had inspired her; then of the coming of him who called himself George Harrington, the man she had tutored herself that it was her duty to love, with the result that the chivalrous being she had expected to see had completely disillusionised her; and her duty had become a pain.

She wondered, as she thought of his embraces, of the drink-poisoned breath, and the horror of his self-inflicted illness, and what followed. It

was all oppressive and strange. It had seemed as if her life was to be one long act of self-devotion, with clouds surrounding her, and her heart aching painfully over the fate from which there seemed to be no escape.

Then, all at once, in a way that seemed to frighten her, the sunshine had burst the clouds, and dazzled her with its effulgence. She felt a strange kind of joy, that the hero she had painted in her heart could not even compare with the frank, manly, chivalrous fellow who had come and boldly declared the other to be an impostor.

“Was this the first dawning of love?” she asked herself, as the warm blood mantled in her cheeks; and she wondered whether it was unmaidenly and strange to think so warmly of the man who had been selected to be her husband.

She had just come to the conclusion that it would be possible to love such a one as this, when there was a faint rustling sound beyond the hedge, as of a footstep in the grass, and a voice said thoughtfully:

“I wonder whether she ever comes down here.” A low, deep growl from Bruno followed; and, without thinking that her words might be heard, Gertrude cried:

“Down, Bruno! down!”

Chapter Thirty Three.

Master’s Stick.

“I beg your pardon. Really, Miss Bellwood, I did not expect to find you here.”

“Mr—”

“Harrington,” he said, as she paused. “You need not be afraid to call me by that name; and George. They are mine, indeed.”

“I beg your pardon, Mr Harrington.”

Bruno uttered a low, ominous growl.

“Your dog does not like me,” he said.

“You are a stranger.”

“At present; but not for long, I hope.”

“Quiet, Bruno!” she said, to hide her confusion. “He has been hurt very much. I brought him out here for a change.”

“Lucky dog,” he said; and then in dread lest it might be considered an impertinence: “How was he hurt? Run over—a kick?”

“No, poor fellow; somebody must have struck him a terrible blow on the head.”

“Indeed! That’s bad. Let me look at him. I understand a good deal about dogs.”

“You do?” cried Gertrude eagerly.

“Oh, yes. I have been in the wilds, sometimes for months, with no other companion than a dog. May I come through? There is quite a gap here.”

“A gap? Then let me bring Bruno to you,” she said hastily.

He smiled as he said to himself, “this is a strange position;” and he appreciated the maiden delicacy which prompted the words, and stood religiously on the field side of the hedge as Gertrude coaxed the dog to follow her.

Bruno rose painfully and walked to the gap, where he suddenly seemed to revive, for he growled fiercely, set up his ruff, and began to look eagerly about, snuffling loudly the while.

“Down, Bruno!” cried Gertrude excitedly. “He does not like you. He might bite.”

“He had better not,” cried the young man merrily. “Dogs must not bite friends—his mistress’ friends,” he added meaningly; and, as through the slightly broken opening in the yews he saw Gertrude shrink, he continued hurriedly: “no, it is not at me, but at something about the grass. Oh, I see, he has found a broken stick.”

For as he spoke, the dog had ferreted out of the long grass, at the foot of the hedge, a broken walking-stick—the upper part of a strong oaken cudgel, whose top was a heavy root knob, over which he growled savagely.

“Why, Bruno, what’s the matter?” cried Gertrude. “Perhaps you had better go.”

“Oh, no; I don’t like to be afraid of a dog; and, besides, I think they have *nous* enough to know when you mean well by them. Here, old chap, let’s look at your head.”

Bruno ceased growling, and raised his muzzle with the stick across his mouth, as the young man parted the yew bushes and knelt down.

“Yes, Bruno—good dog—friends,” said Gertrude nervously.

“He does not quite believe it yet,” said the young man. “Suppose you shake hands with me.”

She hesitated a moment as she looked in his eyes, but they were so frank and pleasant to gaze upon that she halted no longer, but placed her hand in his, and then tried to snatch it back in alarm, but it was pinioned tightly in a warm, firm pressure.

“There Bruno,” he said, “your mistress and I are friends, and she will never have one more faithful and true. Now, old fellow,” he added, loosing the hand, “let’s have that stick. Good dog. What are you growling at?”

He took the stick from the dog, threw it down, and then quietly laid his hand upon his head; then placed the other on the side, and the dog whimpered softly.

“Hurt you, old fellow? well, I’ll be more gentle, but I must examine you. Poor lad, then. Why, you have been in the wars. You ought to be dead.”

“Oh!” ejaculated Gertrude.

“I only meant the blow was bad enough to have killed him. Do you know how serious it is?”

“I know it was a dreadful cut, but it is healing now.”

“Cut? The poor dog’s skull is fractured. A regular crack. Has he seemed stupid and dull?”

Gertrude could not answer for a few moments for the sob that choked her; and, as the impromptu surgeon looked up in her eyes he saw that they were brimming over.

“Oh, if they would only weep like that for me,” he thought; and directly after, “no, I should be very sorry.”

“I—I did not know he was so bad,” she faltered.

“But it is mending all right. Yes. Hold still, old fellow; I won’t hurt you much. That’s right. Oh, yes, he’s mending capitally; but it would be better if the hair were cut away a little from the wound. Knife? No. I suppose you could fetch me a pair of scissors?”

“I have a pair,” cried Gertrude eagerly, producing a tiny embroidery pair from a case.

“Capital! but, I say, my great ugly thumb and finger would not go into those holes. Could you—? No, it would be such a nasty task.”

“I should not consider it a nasty task to do anything to help my poor dog,” she said quickly.

“Then you shall do it. There, cut boldly between my fingers. Don’t be afraid. That nasty, matted hair frets the wound. That’s right; capital! Now, there again, and there. Hurt, Bruno? Never mind, old chap; don’t flinch. That will do.”

They were busy together, kneeling on either side of the dog for quite five minutes, before they raised their eyes and looked at each other, their faces only separated by a dog’s width, and Gertrude’s eyes fell beneath the admiring glance which seemed to thrill her.

“I am very grateful to you for what you have done.”

“Don’t name it. I am very glad.”

“But will he get well?”

“Oh, yes. It will take some little time, of course, but animals have a wonderful faculty for healing up. There, old chap, your case is attended to. No fees and no bills, thank you. Do you know, I believe he understands all about it. Hardly flinched, and I know I must have hurt him a good deal.”

“He has always been so patient while I bathed his head, and bandaged the cut.”

“Yes; he knows. There, old chap, you’ll know me again, eh?”

Bruno licked the hand which took hold of his muzzle, and whined softly.

“See that, Miss Bellwood?”

“Yes, it is his way of thanking you for what you have done.”

“No, I think not. It is his way of showing you that I am not an impostor. No dog would make such friends with a rogue.”

“Are we not giving him the credit of having too much sense?” said Gertrude archly.

“Ah, well, perhaps so; but I thank him for giving me this interview. I thought I should like a look round the old place—that is why I came down; and—yes, I can’t be a sham—I did hope that I might catch a glimpse of you. Good-bye.”

He held out his hand again.

“Good-bye,” she said slowly and sadly; and she once more timidly placed her hand in his, when he raised it to his lips.

The next moment he was gone, and Bruno uttered a growl, picked up the stick once more, and carried it to the house, Gertrude walking meditatively before him, and asking herself whether she had done right in talking as she had with such a comparative stranger. Her meditations were broken by the voice of Mrs Denton.

“Why, Bruno, good dog, where did you get that stick? Broken too. I’ve missed that for weeks; it’s the one poor dear master used to use when he walked round the garden. Oh, dear, and broken, too. How it does seem to bring him back.”

But Bruno refused to part with the broken stick, and carried it with him into the stable, where he laid it in the straw beneath his muzzle.

Someone felt worse and yet better for that walk down the garden.

Perhaps more than one.

Chapter Thirty Four.

Mr Blank's Theory.

Mr Hampton was seated in his dingy office in Lincoln's Inn one morning, when the clerk announced Doctor Lawrence and another gentleman, who were shown in, the old lawyer frowning as he found who the other gentleman was.

"You, sir?" he said rather shortly.

"Yes, my dear executor," said the young man laughing. "I am sorry to be such a nuisance to you, but I am growing impatient."

"Very well, sir; very well; and so am I; and as you have called this morning, let me tell you that you have rewarded my friendly disposition towards you by taking a mean advantage and going down to The Mynns, again and again, like a spy upon the camp."

"Gently, my dear sir, gently. I confess to going down to The Mynns partly by design, but it was by accident I met Miss Bellwood."

"Accident?" exclaimed the old lawyer.

"Yes, sir, accident; and even if it had not been, please have a little mercy. Put yourself in my place. I came over here eager to succeed to my estate, and to see the lady I was to marry. I saw her and I need not say was charmed with my grandfather's choice. There, I say it openly, I love her as the sweetest, most innocent girl I ever met; but instead of all going well, I am greeted as an impostor, and told that the young lady betrothed to me is engaged to another gentleman, my *alter ego*."

"Yes, yes, yes; we know all that, sir, *ad nauseum*," cried the old lawyer.

"Humph! quotation for quotation," muttered Doctor Lawrence.

"You must wait, sir. You must wait."

“My dear Hampton,” said the doctor, “don’t you think that we might sympathise a little more with our young friend?”

“I do not acknowledge that this gentleman is our friend,” said the lawyer sternly.

“No, sir; and it does not seem to me that you are in any hurry to acknowledge me,” said the young man laughing.

“Indeed, sir,” said the lawyer tartly. “I can only repeat my words—you must wait.”

“Can’t wait any longer, sir. You could not if you were in my case.”

“I only ask you to wait till Mr George—”

“Till this man comes back,” interposed the other. “He will not come back.”

“What authority have you for saying that?”

“Never mind, sir. I have been having a chat with Doctor Lawrence this morning, and he agrees with me.”

“I am not going to allow myself to be influenced by what you and Doctor Lawrence have agreed to,” said the lawyer sharply.

“Don’t be angry with me, old chap.”

“But you make me angry, sir. Once more, you must wait.”

“I cannot afford to.”

“Then I shall consult with Doctor Lawrence and take steps which will be very unpleasant for all parties, especially for you, sir, if your story is not genuine.”

“You mean call in police aid?”

“I do, sir.”

“Detectives,” said the young man thoughtfully. “Well, they would, or

should, run this man down, and put an end to the uncertainty. But it would be terribly unpleasant for Gertrude."

"You mean Miss Bellwood, sir."

"No, I do not. I mean for Gertrude Bellwood, my affianced wife. No; I don't like the detective proposition, with its publicity."

"Indeed!" said the lawyer, looking at him searchingly.

"Not on my own account, old gentleman. I am not at all afraid of being imprisoned as a rogue and a vagabond for making impudent pretensions; but you know how unpleasant police interference would be, and the matter getting into the papers."

"Quite right," said the doctor.

"I know all that, sir," replied the lawyer; "and therefore I advocated waiting."

"And I tell you I must act. Look here, sir, I'm in a very awkward predicament. I have had back this morning a refusal from San Francisco to honour a draft. The way in which this man has forestalled me makes me seem to my agents an impostor."

"Hum!"

"A hum?" said the young man laughing. "Well, call it so if you like."

"I never make jokes, sir. That was an ejaculation."

"Good. Then here is what I propose. I will be my own detective, and see if I cannot run this man down. I want to stand face to face with him."

"That is quite right," said the doctor, who was fidgeting about like one who feels himself out of the conversation.

"And to do this I want a sufficient sum of money placed in my hands for current expenses."

“I could not for a moment tolerate such a proposal, sir,” said the lawyer shortly.

“I will place the necessary funds in your hands,” said the doctor.

“Thank you. And if I turn out to be a swindler?”

“Well,” said the doctor, shrugging his shoulders, “I shall lose.”

“No, you shall not, sir,” cried the young man warmly, as he held out his hand. “You know that I am no cheat, Doctor Lawrence.”

“Well, if you are,” said the cheery old doctor, wringing the proffered hand, “you are the cleverest one I ever met. Now, tell Mr Hampton what you mean to do.”

“One moment,” said the lawyer quickly. “Look here. I have been speaking so far as James Harrington’s executor. Not one penny will I consent to advance out of the estate; but if you will allow me, Mr Blank—”

“Mr George Harrington, sir.”

“Mr Blank,” persisted the lawyer.

“George Harrington, sir.”

“When you have proved yourself to be he. You are to me now Mr Blank; and I say that I shall not allow my old friend Lawrence to bear this expense alone. As a lawyer and executor I will not stir a step, but as a friend, who has some slight belief in your story, I shall share with him.”

The young man laughed.

“You’re a rum old fellow, Mr Hampton, and some of these days we three will have some hearty laughs across the walnuts and the wine over all this worry.”

“Yes, that we will,” said Doctor Lawrence. “Over a glass of port.”

“You see, gentlemen, I must get to work; for I find that, besides the

pseudo George Harrington, I have another enemy to fight."

"Another?"

"Yes, gentlemen. Mr Saul Harrington—the next heir."

"I do not quite understand you," said the lawyer.

"I am sorry to say I do," said the doctor. "Saul Harrington is next heir, and there can be no doubt about his being strongly attached to our young friend Gertrude."

"Even if this be so," said the lawyer, "it does not strengthen your case, Mr Blank."

"Well, for the present, agreed then," said the young man smiling. "Mr Blank be it so. But it does strengthen my case. Now, gentlemen, I am going to be my own detective and I am fighting for a large stake."

"Yes, it is a big estate," said the lawyer drily.

"Hang the estate, sir. I was happy enough as a man without it, and I could be again. But I am fighting for my honour; and there is a greater stake still," he added with his eyes flashing, as he recalled his last interview with Gertrude.

"Well, sir, what do you propose doing?"

"I am in the enemy's camp, sir. Why should I reveal my plans?"

"No, you are not in the enemy's camp, sir," said the old lawyer sharply. "You are with those friends who are going to find you in the sinews of war to carry on your campaign."

"True. Well, then, I'll speak out: I am going to run down this man who called himself George Harrington. We must meet."

"Good."

"He has disappeared for one of two reasons."

“Yes, sir; go on.”

“He is an impostor.”

“Not proven,” said the doctor.

“Not yet. But his actions show it. He has disappeared with all the money he could get together, because, by some means, he heard that I was alive.”

“Yes, that seems probable,” said the doctor, as Mr Hampton turned the table into a piano and played upon it dumb tunes.

“Probable, but only my first idea, and I don’t think it is the true solution.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t believe he could have had a suspicion that I was alive.”

“Then why did he go away?” said the lawyer sharply.

“That we must find out through Saul Harrington.”

“Mr Saul Harrington is seriously ill,” said Doctor Lawrence. “I saw him this morning at his request.”

“What’s the matter?”

“The injury to his arm. It seems he had a nasty fall upon one of the ice slopes in Switzerland, and the doctors there treated it wrongly. It’s a nasty case, and is giving me a deal of anxiety.”

“He’ll get well soon enough,” said the lawyer roughly. “Go on, Mr Blank. Let’s have the rest of your theory.”

“My theory is, sir, that during one or other of the drinking bouts they had together the pseudo George Harrington let his tongue run rather fast, and Saul Harrington was too clever for him; he nailed him at once.”

“He would have denounced him.”

“He either would had I not come forward, or he has some reason for keeping it back.”

“Not plausible, Mr Blank,” said the lawyer shortly. “You are spoiling your own case.”

“Perhaps so, sir, but I shall work it out my own way. What I feel sure of is this: my impersonator has gone never to return. Saul knew of his departure—of that I feel sure; and he was satisfied that he was all right as successor to the estate, when, to his dismay, he found me in the field.”

“Humph?” ejaculated Doctor Lawrence, patting the young man on the arm. “I don’t think we shall want a detective.”

“Don’t flatter him, Lawrence,” said the lawyer tartly. “It’s all moonshine. I don’t like Saul Harrington; never did. But he would not have acted as our young frien— as young Mr Blank suggests.”

“Perhaps not, sir. But I can say no more. My ideas are in a state of chaos at present. Still I am sure the case is somewhere in his tangle, and I mean to find it out.”

“When do you begin?” said the doctor.

“I have begun, sir; and I am going on now.”

“Down to The Mynns?”

“Perhaps. But I shall not try to see Miss Bellwood. I devote myself from this hour to the discovery of the mystery which means so much to me.”

“Then you want money. How much do you require?” said the lawyer, the corners of whose mouth dropped as he spoke—“a hundred?”

“A hundred! No. I only want ten or fifteen pounds for the present. If that is not enough, I can ask for more. Give me ten.”

The old man’s mouth assumed its natural curve as he unlocked his table-drawer, exchanging glances with the doctor before taking out a little canvas bag, part of whose contents he counted into his hand.

“This is not the lawyer acting,” he said drily; “but the—no I won’t say friend—the seeker for justice. I would not do such a thing as this from the legal point of view, for the world. There, sir, twenty-five pounds in sovereigns. If you want more when that is gone come, or write.”

“Thanks,” said the young man, rising and taking the money, which he carefully counted as far as ten, returned the fifteen pounds, and took up his hat. “I’ll send if I want more. Good-day, gentlemen; I shall wire or write.”

The door closed; they saw him pass the window, and then the eyes of the two old men met.

“That’s the man, Lawrence,” said the lawyer, replacing the fifteen pounds.

“I haven’t a doubt about it,” was the reply.

“But he has only found a mare’s nest yet.”

“Humph! I don’t quite know,” said the doctor. “Well, I’ll be off.”

“Going?”

“Yes, to see Saul Harrington again. I don’t like his condition.”

“I never liked anything about him, Lawrence. But this is the man.”

Chapter Thirty Five.

A Late Arrival.

The same questions were asked day by day, on either side, when Mr Hampton returned to The Mynns from his daily visits to town.

“Any news?”

“No.”

“Any news?”

“No.”

But, somehow, it was observed that Gertrude did not appear at all low-spirited. In fact, as each day glided by she seemed to become more hopeful and buoyant. There was a new light in her eyes, and as Mrs Hampton watched she often caught sight of a pleasant, satisfied smile playing about the girl’s lips which had never appeared before.

Every now and then her voice rang through the old house, as she sang some ballad; but her happiest moments seemed to be those when she daily took Bruno down the garden for his bask on the lawn, and a dreamy look stole over the girl’s face as she knelt down by the dog, and laid her hand on his damaged head just in the same way as she had seen other hands laid one day, that seemed now long ago.

She could kneel thus and dream happy day-dreams, again and again—dreams of which she never tired, and all the time the sun shone down and glorified her luxuriant hair, gave beauty to her graceful form, and made the dark yew hedge glisten as if frosted with silver, the velvet lawn seem of golden green, and the great, red brick wall, that lay between her and the road, glow and show up the neatly-trained trees.

A new life seemed to have dawned for her, and the sunshine brightened her darkened heart as she bent over and caressed the dog—lifting playfully first one and then the other of his long, soft, hairy ears to

whisper with girlish glee:

“Yes, some day, Bruno—some day he will come again.” Then she looked round, almost with a guilty start, but only for the former restful look of happiness to come back.

“Such a change, ma’am; such a change. Poor darling! If that other business had gone on, it would have broken her poor, dear heart.”

“Yes, Denton,” said Mrs Hampton, as she went on knitting. And then to herself: “Well, somehow, it’s very pleasant to be down here in the quaint old place.”

“What does the doctor say about Mr Saul, ma’am?” asked Denton another time, for there was nothing she enjoyed better than respectfully asking a few questions, and leading the lady guest of the place into a long chat.

“That he is very bad, Denton.”

“Poor young man! Do you think I ought to go and nurse him, ma’am?”

“No, Denton,” said the old lady so decidedly, that the housekeeper started, and looked at her wonderingly.

Their further conversation was stopped by the sound of Gertrude’s voice singing as she came in from the garden, and the old housekeeper stood with her hands clasped, gazing towards the door.

“Like a bird,” she said softly—“like a bird. It does my old heart good to hear her sing again. Its just like old times, ma’am; while lately, since poor, dear old master’s death and those marriage troubles came upon her, she has not been like the same.”

“She seems merry enough now, Denton.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said the old woman, pausing at the door as she opened it, “she’s merry enough now. And I know why—and I know why,” she added to herself, with a pleasant little laugh. “Poor darling! If she marries now, it will be the man who has stolen away her heart.”

There was no news that evening when the lawyer came from town, seeming quite to have settled down now to the place, and making but rare references to his departure. Gertrude had just come in from a visit to Bruno, who had altered wonderfully during the past few days; and as she came in, it was plain to see the heart was light which animated her step, telling the thoughtful of the calm and satisfied waiting of the heart for that which was to be.

“I thought Doctor Lawrence was coming down with you, Mr Hampton?” she cried.

“Eh? Yes, my dear; but he preferred going and seeing a patient first. He said he’d catch the next train, and ought to be here as—There he is.”

Gertrude ran to the window to wave her hand to the amiable old man, but shrank back covered with confusion, and looking suspiciously from one to the other.

“Anything the matter, my dear?” said Mrs Hampton wonderingly.

“Matter? No,” said the lawyer, glancing towards the window. “Why, hang it all! he has brought down Mr Blank.”

“And, pray, who is Mr Blank?” said the old lady, adjusting her glasses. “Why, Phineas, what do you mean? It’s Mr George Harrington.”

“Good-evening, ladies. There, you need not look so severe, Hampton; I brought our young friend down, and if the ladies consider that I have exceeded my rights, we’ll go back again.”

“Such nonsense!” said Mrs Hampton sharply.

“I hope you will forgive my coming,” the doctor’s companion was saying to Gertrude, as she shook hands.

Silence is said to give consent. That must have been the interpretation placed upon Gertrude’s silence, for her heart was too full to speak, and their visitor stayed and dined.

“No,” he said, in the course of the conversation, as to his proceedings, for

imperceptibly he had won so upon all present that they seemed now to accept his words as those of the truth: “I have worked very hard and traced our friend to all his haunts, where he is well-known, but I cannot find that he has been there since the night he left here. I have been over to Paris, and on to Switzerland.”

“With ten pounds?” said the old lawyer sharply.

“No. I wrote to Doctor Lawrence when that sum was expended. Did he not tell you?”

“No; I’ve been so busy and anxious over Saul Harrington’s case that I forgot to name it, Hampton.”

The lawyer grunted.

“I have traced Mr Saul Harrington’s course over on the Continent as easily as could be, but I did not hear a word about his accident.”

“That’s strange,” said Mrs Hampton.

“Neither could I find that mine enemy had been with him. He was alone all through; and, after spending a lot of money, time, and thought, I am forced to come back and say to you that I must seem in your eyes a greater impostor than ever.”

“You must try again,” said the doctor cheerfully. “The position remains the same.”

“Yes, I must try again,” said the young man thoughtfully. “But I begin to fancy that I have been working from the wrong end. We shall see.”

The dinner passed off without further allusion to the search for the missing man; but it was plain enough that the visitor’s every movement was being critically scanned, the three elders unconsciously seeking for suspicious movements, or words that might indicate their visitor was playing a part, but with the result that they grew greater partisans than ever.

“You’ll join us in the drawing-room?” said Mrs Hampton, as the ladies

rose from the table; and she looked direct at the visitor.

“You are very kind,” he replied, “but I was going to talk business with these gentlemen for a few minutes, and then go back to town.”

“You will have plenty of time for both,” said the old lady; and then as they left the room: “I look your place then, Gertie, and acted as your mouthpiece,” she whispered. “Did I play my part correctly?”

Gertrude tried to answer, but the words would not come; and, escaping from her companion in dread lest she would break down, she ran off to the stable to make Bruno her confidant, and ended by bringing him with her to let him lie down upon the grass just outside the drawing-room window.

Meanwhile, the gentlemen were discussing the topic uppermost in their minds, and the result of the conversation was a declaration from the visitor that Saul Harrington must be made to speak out.

“Must?” said the old lawyer. “Easily said, sir; but suppose it is against Saul Harrington’s interest to speak. A cross-examining barrister might do a great deal, but you could do nothing.”

“I don’t know; so much depends upon accident. At all events I shall see him at once.”

“That would be useless just now,” said the doctor. “He is seriously ill, and half delirious at times. You could do no good by seeing him now.”

“Let’s join the ladies,” said the lawyer. “I wish you would not come down here, sir. It seems to me that you place me in a very peculiar position.”

“One for which you will be grateful some day, Mr Hampton,” said the young man laughing. “How hard it is to get elderly people to do their duty.”

They were on the way to the drawing-room, and the doctor had just opened the door.

There was a loud bark, and the sound of something being overturned.

“Bruno! Bruno!” cried Gertrude, as she caught the dog by his collar.

“Bless us and save us, my dear!” cried Mrs Hampton. “Do have that dog locked up.”

“What’s that? My patient!” said the young man, as he entered the drawing-room.

Gertrude’s ears tingled, for this was all new to those present.

There was a volley of barks and the dog stood panting and listening.

“Well, Bruno, old fellow; how’s the head?”

The dog gave a joyful whine, ran to him, and tried to raise himself up so as to place his paws upon the speaker’s breast, but failed.

“Come, you are ten times better than when I saw you last—ever so much stronger, too. Why, the head’s getting all right again.”

“When did he see him last?” thought Mrs Hampton.

“Why, you seem old friends,” said Doctor Lawrence.

“Yes,” said Gertrude quickly. “Mr George Harrington saw me when I was down the garden one day with the dog.”

The lawyer coughed.

“No, sir, don’t do that,” said the young man laughing, as he sat with the dog resting his heavy head upon his knee.

“Do what, sir?”

“Cough in that meaning way. It is a reflection upon the lady.”

“Oh, indeed!”

“Either upon her seeing me one day by accident, or upon her calling me Mr George Harrington. Come, Mr Hampton it is of no use your holding back. Never mind the lawyer. The man believes I am George Harrington,

and surely there can be no harm in two affianced folk having half an hour’s chat about a dog.”

The position was most painful for Gertrude, but there was a sudden diversion, for the gate-bell rang, and Mrs Hampton came to her help.

“Visitors! and to-night. Why, my dear, whom do you expect?”

A pause ensued as steps were heard, and directly after the old housekeeper entered quickly to whisper to Gertrude:

“Mr Saul, miss, and he does seem so strange.”

Saul Harrington had entered close behind her, a strange, ghastly-looking object, the more strange in aspect from his hair clinging above his dark brow, and his dress consisting mainly of an overcoat tightly-buttoned about his throat.

“My dear sir!” cried the doctor, as he hurried to his side; but at that moment there was an ominous sound, and Saul seized a chair and whirled it above his head.

Chapter Thirty Six.

What Mr Blank Thought.

“Quick! Pray! Oh, Bruno, Bruno!” shrieked Gertrude, as she dashed forward to seize the dog—a vain attempt, for stronger hands had already failed to hold the furious beast, who had pricked up his ears at Mrs Denton’s mention of the name, and then, as Saul entered the room, given vent to a deep-toned roar, and, as if once more in possession of his full strength, leaped at his old enemy’s throat.

The attempt made by George Harrington to hold him was vain, but his second attempt was more successful, though it was made after receiving a heavy blow from the chair with which Saul struck at the dog, falling in the effort, to lie prone with Bruno’s teeth fixed in the tightly-buttoned collar of his coat.

“Let go, dog! Let go!” roared George, seizing Bruno’s collar with both hands, and by the exercise of his great strength wrenching him away with the collar of the coat in his teeth.

Then ensued a tremendous struggle, the dog making furious plunges to get at the prostrate figure, growling and barking the while, with the accompanying worrying sound made by a dog half mad with rage.

“It’s no good, my lad,” cried George excitedly. “I’ve got you. Hold still!”

For response the dog threw his head from side to side, making frantic plunges, and ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have let him go, but, after a desperate fight, Bruno was thrown and held securely, his opponent pressing him to the carpet by the help of his bended knee.

“He’s done,” panted the young man. “Do you give in, sir?”

The dog uttered a low whine, that sounded like a remonstrance, and lay quite still.

“Get that gentleman out of the room quickly. Or no. Here, Gertrude, show

me where I can lock up the dog. A room, outhouse—anywhere."

"Better shoot him. The dog's mad," cried Mr Hampton excitedly.

"Oh!" ejaculated Gertrude.

"The dog's not mad," panted George. "You lead the way."

"Yes, yes," cried Gertrude.

"I think I can hold him. Stand on one side, and be ready to shut the window to as soon as I get him outside."

"I'm ready," said Gertrude, with a calm display of courage which brought forth an admiring glance.

"Then stand clear."

Removing his knee, George Harrington dragged the dog quickly along the carpet, and out on to the lawn. The window was closed, and Gertrude ran to his side.

"This way," she cried; and running to the side of the house she drew open a door in the wall, through which, after another fierce struggle, the dog was dragged, the door banged to, and then Gertrude ran across the yard and opened the stable door.

"Pray, pray, mind he doesn't bite you," she cried in agony.

"No fear; I've got him too tightly; besides he hasn't tried. By Jove! he has got his strength again, and no mistake. There, sir, you're mastered."

As he spoke, he gave his captive a swing forward, dashed back, and closed the door, just as the dog bounded at it, and tore at the panel, baying furiously.

"Well, I'm in a nice state. But that Saul Harrington! He and the dog must be bad friends."

"Yes," said Gertrude, with her voice trembling and deep from agitation,

“but you—you are hurt.”

“Not in the least,” he said, catching the hands extended to him in an imploring way. “No, not hurt. So full of happiness to hear you speak like that.”

“Mr Harrington!” she faltered.

“Yes, George Harrington, indeed, indeed,” he cried, with his voice sounding deep and emotional.

“Let us make haste back,” she cried, hurriedly opened the door in the wall, trembling, troubled, pleased—she could not define her sensations; and it was with a sense of relief that she found Mrs Hampton coming toward them.

“Is that dreadful dog locked up safely?” she cried.

“Yes, quite safe; but I had a terrible fight with his lordship,” said George Harrington, coming to his companion’s help. “No fear of his getting well now.”

“He must have gone mad.”

“No; only towards Mr Saul Harrington, I’m afraid.”

They hurried back to the drawing-room, to become conscious of a hoarse, panting sound, and a low angry muttering from the couch, where the two old men were feebly struggling with Saul Harrington.

“Quick! Help here!” said the old lawyer.

George Harrington sprang to them, and pinned Saul down to the couch, from which he vainly struggled to rise.

“You had better go, ladies,” cried the young man.

“Can I be of any use?” said Gertrude calmly. “Doctor Lawrence knows how I can help.”

“Yes, help me,” said the old man. “Can you hold him?”

“Oh, yes; I have him fast for the present.”

Doctor Lawrence hurried to a table, took out his pocket-book, and wrote a prescription, tore out the pencilled leaf, and gave it to Gertrude.

“Send and get that made up for me,” he said hastily.

Gertrude flew from the room, and the doctor hastened to help keep the patient within bounds.

“It was utter madness to leave his bed,” he said.

“Perhaps he came in search of you.”

“Impossible. He could not have known I was coming down here. Great heavens! what a state he is in.”

For at that moment, as the sick man struggled in his delirium, he heaved himself till his body formed an arch, and it was all that the three men could do to keep him upon the couch.

“Like anyone suffering from a powerful dose of strychnia,” muttered the doctor.

“What are you going to do, Lawrence?” whispered the lawyer. “Can’t you give him some narcotic that will last till you get him back to his chambers?”

“What I have sent for,” said the doctor, in a quiet, business-like way. “Mrs Hampton, we want something to form a long broad band to hold him down to the couch, without doing any harm.”

“Why not one of those long curtains?” said George Harrington, pointing to an alcove full of books.

“Yes, the very thing,” cried the doctor, looking in the indicated direction.

George Harrington waited until a paroxysm was over, and the patient had

for the moment ceased to struggle, before leaping upon a table and rapidly unhooking the piece of drapery, which was formed into a broad band, and tightly secured across the patient's chest before being fastened below the couch.

"Half an hour to wait before we can get the medicine, I'm afraid," said the doctor. "I want to get him composed, and then we might put him in a fly and drive up to his chambers."

"You'll never get him away to-night," said George Harrington bluntly. "Rather hard on the ladies; but he is a relative, and it seems to me that you ought to keep him here."

"I'm afraid he is right, Hampton," said the doctor. "Good heavens! what a paroxysm."

There was a long struggle, during which the delirious man made desperate efforts to get free.

"Down, beast!" he literally growled; and in his terrible fit he seemed to be struggling with the dog. "Down, brute! I'll dash your brains out! Curse him! how strong he is?"

There was a few moments' cessation, and Mrs Hampton, who had been wringing her hands by the window, and trying hard to master her emotion, came up to say calmly:

"Can I do anything?"

"Yes. Go and see whom Gertrude has sent," cried the doctor impatiently. "If that old woman has gone, it will be an hour before she is back."

Mrs Hampton hurried out, and the sound made by the closing door seemed to startle the sick man into action again.

"Ah, would you?" he growled. "Beast! Devil! What! Bite! Ah!"

He uttered a yell of pain, and clapped his hand upon his injured arm.

"Curse you! take that, and that. Now then! Yes, yelp and snarl. You'll

never bite again. Ah! It's like red-hot irons going into my flesh; but kill your mad dog, they say, and there's no harm done."

"That miserable dog's attack seems to have quite overset him," whispered the lawyer. "Good heavens! what a terrible position for us all."

George Harrington said nothing, but stood at the head of the couch, ready to seize and hold the sufferer the moment the next paroxysm occurred.

He had not long to wait, for with a howl that did not seem human, Saul Harrington made such a start that the couch cracked as if it was being wrenched apart.

"Ah, you here! Watching! But you can't speak—you can't tell tales. If I'd known, I'd have silenced you. Lie down, brute! Do you hear—lie down! Hey, Bruno, then; good dog. Lie down, old man," he said, laughing softly, and talking in a low cajoling tone. "You know me, Bruno. Good dog, then. Lie down, old fellow. Friends, do you hear—friends. Good dog, then."

He extended a hand toward the dog he imagined that he saw, smiling unpleasantly the while, and then once more he started and yelled horribly.

"Down, you beast! Curse you! Bitten me, have you. I'll have your life, if I die for it. Beast! Devil! Curse you! Strong, are you? Yes, and I am strong too. Oh, if I had a knife!"

He panted out these words in a series of hoarse cries; and all he while, as far as his hands would allow, he went through the movements of one having a desperate struggle with a great dog—fending off its efforts to get at his throat. Again clapping his hand to his arm with a moan of pain, and ending by striking at the animal which had attacked him blow after blow, to sink back looking hideously ghastly and perfectly exhausted by his efforts.

"Poor fellow!" said the lawyer, as the sick man lay with his eyes half closed. "How unlucky for the dog to spring at him. Seems to have completely shattered his brain."

“Yes,” said the doctor gravely, as he held his patient’s wrist.

“Terrible work, sir,” continued the lawyer, looking at George Harrington, but the young man made no reply. He was staring thoughtfully at the wretched man, apparently waiting the moment when he must lean over the head of the sofa, and hold him down; but all the while following up a clue which his active imagination painted before him in vivid colours.

For, as he stood there, the wanderings of the delirious man’s brain evoked a chain of ideas, and he saw farther than his two companions, who attributed the violence of the paroxysms to the shock caused by the dog’s attack.

“The trouble must be farther back than that,” he thought. “The dog had dashed at him as if for some former cause,” and the incoherent panting words which he heard better than his companions at the feet could, he read as by the key suggested to his mind. Once started upon this track, all came very easily.

“There must have been some old encounter when the dog had attacked him. His words suggested it all, even to the effect of the encounter. He had been bitten and—then—to be sure, there was that broken walking-stick!—he had retaliated with a blow of such savage violence that he believed he had killed the dog; and, of course, it was perfectly clear—the next time they met, and the poor brute had sufficiently recovered, it had dashed at him.”

Saul Harrington’s breath came in a low, stertorous way, as Mrs Hampton just then re-entered the room, and crept to her husband’s side on tip-toe to whisper:

“Gertrude has gone herself. I’ll go back and wait till she returns.”

George Harrington felt a pang of disappointment as he asked himself why he had not gone, but the reason came to remind him, for as Mrs Hampton stole back to the door, Saul uttered a savage cry, and they had hard work to keep him down, as he threw his head from side to side, gnashing his teeth, snapping, and making a hideous, worrying sound, such as might come from a dog. For some moments no coherent words left his lips—nothing but these terrible, low, hoarse cries, and the doctor

whispered from where he stood to George Harrington:

“For heaven’s sake take care. If he bit you now, the consequences might be serious.”

A shudder ran through the young man; but he forgot his own peril in the excitement of hearing the words which now came distinctly to strengthen his theory; as, with convulsed features, and eyes seeming to start as they watched something which the diseased brain had conjure: up, Saul panted savagely:

“Yes, you beast! I see you tracking and watching me. But keep off! I’ll kill you as I would a rat. Hah! Take him off—take him off! My arm! My arm! Don’t you see! His teeth have met and he has torn a piece out. Ah! Down, beast, down! Hah! You had it that time! Curse you! You’ll never do that again. Dead—dead—dead!”

He sank back once more in utter exhaustion, but his lips kept moving feebly, and a curious jerk from time to time sent a spasmodic action through his limbs.

“Yes, that must be it,” thought George Harrington; “the dog had attacked him, and fastened upon his arm, and this injury, which he attributed to a fall on the Alps, was from the bite of the dog, which for some reason—of course so as not to hurt Gertrude’s feelings—he wished to keep quiet. The reason was simple enough. He had struck and nearly killed the dog.”

His musings were interrupted by a fresh paroxysm, so horrible that those who held the delirious man shuddered, and George Harrington felt a strange dread of the doctor’s patient, as it seemed to him probable that this might be all the result of that bite—a form of hydrophobia—that horrible incurable disease which sets medicine knowledge at defiance, and laughs all remedies to scorn.

Saul Harrington’s cries, curses and writhings once more subsided just as the great iron gate was heard to clang.

“Go, and fetch the medicine, Hampton,” whispered the doctor, “and tell them it is impossible to take him away. A bed must be made up on the floor of the study.”

“Yes. Quite right.”

“And they must not come in here again. It is too horrible. Really it is not safe.”

A fierce cry rang out at that moment, and Saul’s strength seemed to be so superhuman that the broad fold of curtain which helped to keep him down parted, and, tossing aside the hands which tried to restrain him, he made for the door, which Gertrude opened.

George Harrington uttered a low cry, which sounded like a quick, sharp expiration of the breath, and leaped across the room to seize the wretched maniac as he was in the act of springing upon Gertrude, who shrank back against the door appalled by the hideous look upon his face.

Then began a terrific struggle, in which, for some time, no aid could be rendered.

No sound escaped Gertrude’s lips, but she stood there white and trembling, as if fascinated by the horror of the scene, while Mrs Hampton held her by the arm with the intention of dragging her away, but only to be so paralysed by terror that she could not stir.

For a good five minutes nothing was heard in the room but the overturning and breaking of furniture, mingled with the hoarse panting animal cries of Saul, who seemed to see in George Harrington the dog he sought to destroy.

In spite of all the others could do, matters went hard with George; but the dexterity of a man used to wild life stood him in good stead, and just as in the midst of a savage, snarling sound Gertrude felt the room swimming round her, and as if insensibility was coming on, there was a heavy crash, and the shock brought her back to life.

George Harrington was seated upon Saul’s chest, as he said in a panting voice:

“Now, doctor, quick! Give him what you have. I can’t hold him long. About beat out.”

The next minute the doctor was on his knees beside the wretched man, seizing any opportunity to trickle a few drops of the strong sedative between the gnashing teeth—a dangerous and difficult task—till a goodly portion had been swallowed as well as scattered over the carpet, and then Saul lay staring and muttering something about the dog.

“I’ve exhibited a tremendous dose,” whispered Doctor Lawrence, as he recorked the bottle. “That must calm him for a time.”

But quite a quarter of an hour passed before Saul sank into a state of stupor; and then after he had been replaced upon the couch, it was wheeled into the study, a more secure bandage placed across his heaving chest; and the exhausted party sat down to watch.

Chapter Thirty Seven.

Mr Hampton’s Recipe.

Doctor Lawrence’s first action on getting his patient quieted down, was to telegraph off to town for a colleague, and an attendant from the asylum of a friend; but it was too late to expect assistance that night, and so as to be prepared in case of another terrible scene, the gardener’s aid was called in, the man willingly offering to help and sit up with the doctor, to watch.

“You will stay, too, Mr Harrington?” said Mrs Hampton. “Gertrude, my dear, why do you not speak?”

The poor girl gave her old friend a reproachful look, which spoke volumes.

“I should have offered to stay,” said George, “but I felt a delicacy about so doing, and it seemed as if I should be forcing my presence here.”

“If in this time of terrible distress and anxiety,” said Gertrude with quiet dignity, “Mr George Harrington will stay and help us, we shall be most grateful.”

“I can’t make a pretty speech in return for that, Miss Bellwood,” he replied, “but you know how much more comfortable I shall be to know that you are all safe.”

“It will be trespassing sadly upon you,” said Gertrude, in formal tones.

“Yes, terribly,” he said drily. “But it suits me exactly, for I want to sit down and think.”

He had plenty of time for thought during the long hours of that painful night. The ladies ostensibly went off to bed, while the gentlemen occupied the dining-room, the doctor rising from time to time to go in to see his patient, who lay in a complete stupor—overcome for the time being by the potency of the medicine which had been administered.

It was a slow, dreary watch, for all were more or less exhausted by the struggle which they had had, but no one complained, and three o'clock had arrived when, on going once more into the study, the doctor found that the gardener was nodding.

"You will have to go and lie down, my man," said the doctor coldly.

"Beg pardon, sir; very sorry," said the man apologetically. "Bit drowsy, but if you'd stop here a quarter of an hour while I go and walk round the yard and garden, kill a few slugs, and have a quiet pipe, I shall come back as fresh as a daisy."

"Very well, my man, go; but tell the gentlemen in the dining-room first."

The gardener went out into the kitchen, filled his pipe, took the matches from the chimney-piece, and went out, telling himself that this were the rummest start he knew, and wondering what master would say if he came back and found Mr Saul ill there.

Meanwhile George Harrington sat in the dining-room thinking over the problem he had set himself to solve, till he felt perfectly convinced that Saul had, for some reason, had an encounter with the dog, been severely bitten, and had then nearly killed his assailant, leaving him for dead.

He was just hard at work, trying whether it was possible to connect this with his enemy's disappearance, when he became aware of the fact that after nodding very peacefully, as if bowing to the counterfeit resemblance of his old friend on the wall, the lawyer suddenly sat up with a jerk.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said confusedly; "I am not used to this sort of thing."

"Then lie down on the sofa and have a nap, sir," said the young man quietly.

"No, I am not going to give in; but do you know, Mr Blank, I think a cigar and a good glass of toddy would be pleasant, soothing, stimulating and everything good one could say of it."

"Yes, it would be pleasant," said George Harrington smiling.

“Then I shall take the liberty, as executor, and poor old James Harrington’s friend, of helping myself.”

“Easier to propose than to perform,” said the old lawyer, after an examination. “Sideboard, cupboards, cellarettes and sarcophagus all locked up. Can’t rouse the ladies; it would be brutal. But I tell you what; I know. Come with me.”

He led the way into the hall, lit a candle, and, leaving it on the slab, went softly into the study, followed by George.

“Still asleep?” he whispered.

“Yes, and calmer,” was the reply.

“Look here, Lawrence, I’ve been thinking that a glass of toddy and one of the old Partagas apiece would be good medicine, eh? Excusable under the circumstances?”

“My dear Hampton, you ought to have been a physician,” said the doctor smiling.

“There, Mr Blank,” whispered the old lawyer, rubbing his hands; “indorsed by the faculty. Here are the cigars,” he said, opening the cabinet and taking out a box; “and here is a spirit-stand, but it is empty, I know; but I thought of going to the cellar and getting a bottle of that old Cognac from the far bin. Would you mind letting me reach to that drawer? Bless my heart, I seem to be quite at home in the old place.”

He opened the drawer, took out the cellar keys softly, nodded to the doctor, and, followed by George Harrington, went out, closed the door carefully, and then descended the passage and the few steps leading to the cellar door.

“Now, I do not hold, Mr Blank,” said the old man, pausing, candle in one hand, keys in the other, before the door, “that you are the rightful heir here; but I do say this, that the real Simon Pure will own as fine a cellar of wine as any man in the country.”

“Many a good bottle of which, my dear sir, I hope we shall discuss.”

“Ah, that remains to be proved. Would you mind holding the candle? Thanks. Look like burglars or debauchees, opening cellars at this time of the night; but my poor old friend had some very choice Cognac. Come along. Now, the other door. Hold up the light. Bin number twenty-four. Bless my soul, what’s that?”

A long, low, dismal howl close behind them nearly made the lawyer drop the long-necked bottle.

“That dog escaped?” cried George Harrington excitedly; and as there was a panting noise, he caught at the collar of the dimly-seen dog as it came by him; but instead of struggling, the great beast rose upon its hind legs, planted its paws upon his breast, threw up its head again, and uttered its dismal howl.

“The gardener must have let him out,” said George quickly.

“And Saul Harrington must be dead,” said the old lawyer, in a solemn whisper, which seemed to run along the roof of the gloomy, crypt-like place.

Chapter Thirty Eight.

New Mortar.

They hurried to the door as soon as they had recovered from the first shock.

“Look here, sir,” said George, “what shall we do about the dog?”

“Ah, I forgot him. It would be too horrible to let him get into the room where the poor fellow is. Yes, poor fellow! *De mortuis, et cetera*. Come along, Mr Blank, and we’ll lock the dog in here for a few hours.”

“Good idea,” was the reply; and the outer door of the cellar was locked upon Bruno, who made no attempt to follow; but when they reached the study door, all was perfectly still, and upon George’s turning the handle softly, the doctor quickly raised his head and gave them a nod.

“Got it?” he said. “I’ll have mine here.”

“How is Mr Saul?” said the old lawyer in a trembling voice.

“Unchanged. He will have another paroxysm, though, when the effects of the medicine pass off.”

“Doctor Lawrence,” said George quickly, as he gazed searchingly in the old man’s eyes, “are not these symptoms very similar to those which would occur if a man had been bitten by a savage or mad dog?”

“Almost identical, sir,” said the old doctor. “But Mr Saul assured me that the wound was not a bite, but an abrasure that had gone bad, consequent upon ignorant treatment by a foreign doctor, and was poisoning the blood.”

“Thank you, sir,” said the young man gravely; and as soon as the lawyer had replaced the keys, they quietly left the room, and were on their way to prepare the hot spirit and water, when they stopped short, and Mr Hampton grasped his companion’s arm, as from the cellar, sounding

smothered and strange, there came the low howl of the dog.

“We must stop that,” said the lawyer excitedly. “I don’t think I’m at all superstitious, but when you know a patient is in a dangerous state, it is too horrible to have a dog uttering those blood-curdling howls.”

“It does not sound pleasant,” said George thoughtfully.

“Stop a moment; I know,” whispered Mr Hampton; and he went down the passage, and unhooked a baize door fastened back against the wall, the effect being that the sound was deadened, though not destroyed.

“That must do for the present,” he said. “I dread our having another scene with that brute.”

“Is he always as savage and fierce as I saw him?” asked George.

“Oh, dear, no. As a rule the quietest and most docile of animals, but he never seems to have liked Saul Harrington.”

“Is anything the matter?” said a voice in a low whisper, and they found that Gertrude had come softly down the stairs, and that Mrs Hampton was looking over the balustrade.

“No, nothing is wrong,” said George hastily.

“But I heard Bruno howling. Yes: there it is again.”

George explained the reason, and after a few moments’ conversation they were about to return upstairs when, in spite of the closed doors, the dog’s howl came in a deep, low, thrilling tone, and directly after he began to bark in a deep utterance that seemed to vibrate through the house.

“He’ll set that young fellow off again,” said George Harrington sharply. “I’ll try and get him back to the stable.”

“I’ll come and help you,” said Gertrude quietly.

“No; the animal developed such strange ferocity that I don’t think it is safe.”

“Safe? Bruno would not hurt me,” said Gertrude, with a smile.

“Not intentionally, perhaps; but leave him to me.”

There was so much decision in the request—a request which almost sounded like an order, that Gertrude, hardly knowing why, gave way at once, and returned with Mrs Hampton to their room, while in company with the lawyer, George Harrington went back to the cellar door, just within which they could hear the dog snuffing, and every now and then uttering his uneasy whine, followed by a howl.

“What is it, my lad?” said George, with his mouth to the key-hole.

The effect was magical, for the dog seemed to raise himself up against the door, barking wildly, and then they could hear him scratching away the sawdust.

“Lie down, old chap! Lie down, Bruno!” cried George.

There was at this another sharp burst of barking, as if the dog was excitedly striving to get out.

“Shut that baize door, sir,” said George; “and then we must get him out, and back to the stable. He’ll worry the doctor’s patient to death.”

The key was brought forth, and George proceeded to open the door.

“Do you think there’s any danger?” whispered the old lawyer.

“Not a bit.”

“But he seems so savage.”

“Not with me,” said George, as he threw open the door. “Here, Bruno!” he cried.

The dog bounced out, and for the moment it seemed to Mr Hampton that he was about to attack the young man, for he rose on his hind legs, and placed his paws breast-high, barking furiously.

“Come, come; what’s the matter?” said George, seizing him with both hands by the collar. “Don’t you like to be shut up there. Some folks would; eh, sir?”

“I don’t think the brute is safe,” said Mr Hampton. “Pray get him out.”

“Yes, I’ll take him to the stable. Now, Bruno, old chap. Will you lock that door, sir?”

George Harrington had to speak loudly, for the dog was keeping up his excited bark, and mingling it with whines; but the moment the old lawyer moved towards the door the animal dropped down on all fours, shook himself free, and dashed back into the wine-cellar.

“Come out, sir!” cried the lawyer. “I thought he didn’t like the place?”

“Here—Bruno, Bruno!”

The dog responded with a sharp, angry bark, evidently from some distance.

“Oh, I see what it is; he can smell rats.”

“But we can’t have him making that noise in the middle of the night.”

“Come out, sir!” cried George, entering the cellar and calling the dog, who came bounding towards him; but as an effort was made to seize his collar, he sprang round and dashed back.

“Give me the candle, Mr Hampton.”

“No,” said the old man; “you’ll want both hands to him. I’ll light you, or you’ll think I’m a terrible coward. I’m not used to dogs.”

He looked smilingly in his companion’s face, and went to the front.

“I know the cellar better than you do, sir. Good heavens, dog?”

The lawyer and the light were both nearly upset, for as he moved forward Bruno literally rushed at him, but only to turn again and run back right into

the depths of the cellar.

“Here, Bruno! Come here, sir!” cried George sternly. “We don’t want to go ratting now.”

But the dog paid no heed to the call, and went on barking furiously, while the next minute they reached the spot where he stood with his head outstretched, making the place echo.

“Come here, you old stupid!” said George good-humouredly; and, taking hold of the dog’s collar with one hand, he patted his head with the other. “Now, then, we don’t want to find rats. Come along.”

The dog looked up in his face, whined, and then swung round and going to the blank patch of whitewashed wall, threw up his head and howled.

“Yes, it must be rats,” said the old lawyer, “behind that bricked-up part. Try and drive him out.”

George Harrington turned sharply on the lawyer.

“Bricked-up part?” he said.

“Yes, there’s another cellar there through that arch, where old Mr Harrington laid down a quantity of wine for his grandson. Well, what is it? Yes; that’s the place.”

George had snatched the candle, and gone to the wall to hold the light close to the whitewashed bricks.

As he did so the dog grew more uneasy and excited, looking from one to the other, and barking at the wall.

“Well?” said the old lawyer, as his companion turned sharply and looked him full in the eyes.

“You said you did not understand dogs, Mr Hampton?”

“No, not a bit; but I think we ought to get this noisy brute out of the house.”

“I do understand them a little,” said George excitedly. “Mr Hampton, there’s something wrong here.”

“What do you mean?”

“You say that is a bricked-up part of the cellar?”

“Yes; the old man did it for his heir.”

“And it has never been opened since?”

“Of course not.”

George looked at the brickwork again, scanning it very narrowly with the candle close to the wall.

“Yes, it has,” he said, taking out his knife, and trying the mortar between the bricks, and then the other parts. “This mortar is comparatively soft.”

“Dampness of the place.”

“Newness of the mortar, sir. That dog, by his wonderful instinct, knows that something is wrong behind here.”

“Then he’s a precious clever dog if he does, that’s all I can say, because if you are right that inner cellar has been robbed and carefully built up again.”

“This cellar has certainly been opened, sir, and built up again,” said George, drawing his breath with a peculiar hiss as a curious suspicion seemed to flash through the dark parts of his brain.

Meanwhile the dog had watched every movement in silence, but only to grow excited again and stand barking.

“I’m of opinion,” said the old lawyer dogmatically, “that Bruno smells a rat, and that you have discovered a mare’s nest. Why, hang it, man, don’t look at me in that ghastly manner. What’s the matter?”

“I don’t know, sir, but I have a horrible suspicion.”

“Good heavens! My dear young friend, what do you mean?”

“I may be wrong, sir, but look at that dog.”

“Yes, I believe he is going mad.”

“I do not, sir. He has made a discovery.”

“Yes, of rats,” said the lawyer pettishly.

“I tell you once more, sir, I may be wrong; but Bruno seems to have found the clue I sought in vain.”

“Clue?—what clue?”

“We have been searching for the man who called himself George Harrington.”

“You have, sir. I have not.”

“Well, I have. It may sound romantic and strange, but at the present moment I have a horrible dread that we have found him at last.”

“What do you mean—where?”

For answer George Harrington pointed to the wall.

“What?” ejaculated the old man, in a hoarse whisper, and he caught at and held tightly by his companion’s arm.

“I have had suspicions flashing about in a vague way in my brain, sir, but I could not arrange them. Now they begin to assume shape.”

“Great heavens!”

“Look here, sir. This dog has been lying half dead ever since the disappearance of that man.”

“Yes.”

“What does he do as soon as he encounters Saul Harrington?”

“Fly at him.”

“Yes. Why should he? Surely he has not been in the habit of trying to get at the throat of a relative and visitor of the house.”

“That’s quite true; certainly.”

“You see the dog is as gentle with us as can be. Go to him yourself, and pat him.”

“I hardly—Yes, I will,” said the old man, mastering his dislike and dread; and, taking a couple of steps forward, he patted the dog’s head. “Why, Bruno, old dog, what’s the matter?” he said in an awe-stricken whisper.

The dog swung round, looked at him, barked loudly, then rose up at him, placing his paws on his shoulders, and howled mournfully.

“There, you see,” said George, laying his hand on the dog’s head. “Mad? No more than we are.”

“But—but what has that to do with your theory of the man’s disappearance?”

“Mr Hampton, I am not going to place it before you in words. My suspicion is that there has been foul play, and unless I am wrong, that man lies murdered behind yonder wall.”

The old lawyer caught him by the arm, and looked in his face with his own turning quite white.

“You horrify me,” he whispered in awe-stricken tones. “Surely it is impossible. Then you think that Mr Saul—”

“Never mind what I think,” cried George Harrington sharply. “I only say that I have a horrible suspicion that there has been foul play.”

“Then—then,” cried the lawyer with trembling voice, “you—Oh, it is impossible!”

“No, sir; we have heard of such things before.”

“Yes. Then, of course, we must have a search—the police.”

“No, sir; we may be wrong.”

“Yes, yes—of course,” cried the old man eagerly—“Yes; you must be wrong.”

“Look at that dog,” whispered George.

The old man turned to see that the dog was snuffing about the wall, and ended by beginning to tear away the sawdust at the bottom.

“This is too horrible,” whispered the old man, wiping his damp brow. “What would you advise?”

“Finding out the truth, sir; and at once.”

“But how. Whom would you trust?”

“Ourselves,” said George sternly. “Let me see: the gardener is in the house. He must be got rid of, and we must not let the ladies or anyone know what we are going to do.”

“But what we are going to do?”

“You are going to hold the light, sir, while I tear down that wall.”

The lawyer gazed at him in speechless horror, but seemed to yield at once to the stronger mind.

“Bruno!” cried George sharply.

The dog bounded to him.

“Lie down! Watch! Watch!”

The dog uttered a low growl, and followed him as he pointed to the wall, crouched directly, and remained silent and motionless as they left the cellar, and closed and locked the door.

Chapter Thirty Nine.

Following the Clue.

Just as they reached the hall a door opened upstairs and Gertrude came out, candle in hand.

“Bruno is quiet now,” said George, looking up to her. “I’ll see how Mr Harrington is, and tell you.”

He went quickly to the study, and looked in.

“Quite unchanged,” said the doctor, nodding his head.

“Do you want to be relieved?”

“Oh, no; but you might have remembered me with the spirits and water.”

“I beg your pardon,” said George, and hastily supplying the lapse he had made, he went and reported progress to Gertrude, who smiled her thanks, and returned to where Mrs Hampton was nodding on a couch.

“Had we not better wait?” said the lawyer, in a trembling voice.

“Wait, sir? Impossible. Come with me.”

They went into the kitchen where they were saluted by a heavy snore, and found the gardener fast asleep by the fireside.

He was roused and sent home as not being again necessary; and as soon as the door was closed upon him, George turned upon the lawyer.

“Now, sir, where can I find tools: a hammer and chisel?”

“Tools? Oh, yes. There are some, I believe, in the little room by the garden door.”

He led the way to a little cupboard-like ante-room where garden implements, seeds, and odds and ends were stored; and here the

necessary implements were soon found. Armed with these and a fresh candle they returned to the cellar, where the dog was evidently patiently watching their return.

“Stop a moment, my dear young friend,” said the old lawyer, whose face was damp with perspiration, and he laid his hand upon the young man’s arm.

“What for, sir?”

“Don’t you think our proceedings will be a little rash. Suppose the gentleman whom I am bound to look to as the owner of this place returns, and finds how great a liberty we have taken with his place. What am I to say?”

“Mr Hampton, we are going to find him—here.”

“What!”

“And unable to reproach you for what you have done.”

“But surely you do not really believe—”

“I believe, sir, that I shall find means here of proving to you that I am the man I profess to be—the man whom, in your legal fashion, you refuse to acknowledge; but whom in your heart as a gentleman you know to be your old friend’s grandson.”

The lawyer looked wistfully in the young man’s eyes, and then as he unlocked and took out the cellar door-key, after carefully closing the baize door, he followed him into the mouldy, damp place; saw that he locked inner and outer door, and then as they went to the farther portion found the dog as they had left him in the darkness, crouching by the blank wall.

Mr Hampton drew a long breath but he made no further protest, merely holding the candle as George Harrington threw off coat and vest, rolled up his shirt sleeves, and then taking hammer and chisel proceeded to force the latter between two of the bricks.

There was no need to make any noise by striking with the hammer, for

after the first tap the iron chisel was used as a lever, and the first brick soon prized out to show that though the whitewash had dried the mortar was soft enough to give way easily, and before long brick after brick was loosened, thrown into a heap, and a hole was made large enough to admit the passage of a man.

“Lie still!” cried George sharply to the dog, who exhibited a great desire to get through; and kneeling down the young man passed his candle into the inner cellar, crept through, and to his surprise found that the old lawyer did not hesitate to follow him.

“There, sir,” he cried half angrily, as the candle was held up, and they found they were standing in a moderate-sized cellar with a row of bricked-up bins on either side, all neatly whitewashed over and labelled with the name of the wine within, the vintage, and quantity.

George Harrington made no reply, but candle in hand walked over the carefully smoothed sawdust from end to end, peering eagerly at the different bins.

“Well, sir, are you satisfied?” said the lawyer.

“Satisfied, sir? No. Here, Bruno?”

The dog leaped through the hole and uttered a low bark, as he began to snuff about uneasily.

“Good dog! Seek!”

The dog ran excitedly here and there for a few moments, now with his nose in the air, now snuffing at the sawdust, and then he stopped short before the bricked-up bottom bin at the far left-hand corner of the cellar, and uttered an eager bark.

George Harrington drew forth and opened his knife again, tried the blade on the joints of two of the bins, to find that the mortar was hard. Then going to the one where the dog stood watching him, he plunged the point in easily between the bricks.

“Look, sir,” he said hoarsely; “and you can see the whitewash is hardly

dry. The proofs of all I have said are in there.”

Chapter Forty.

Self-Condemned.

Mr Hampton caught George Harrington by the arm, and his voice was low and husky with emotion as he said:

“No, no; in heaven’s name, no. It is too horrible.”

“Horrible enough, sir. Down, Bruno! Watch!”

The dog couched directly, growling low the while.

“Think of Gertrude—my wife. No, no; it is impossible.”

George pointed at the dog.

“I’ve more faith in him, sir, than in our ideas.”

“Then, if it is true, we must have in the police. Let them make the discovery.”

“No,” said George shortly. “If there is a discovery to be made, I’ll be the first to make it; and then we must have in the police at once.”

As he spoke, he attacked the brickwork with the chisel, easily removed one brick, and the others came more easily still.

“These bricks have not been untouched for years, Mr Hampton.”

“No, sir, no,” said the old man feebly, as he wiped his face. “But it may mean a robbery by some old servant—of the wine.”

“Yes, sir, it may,” said George hoarsely, as he worked away hastily, the dog growing more excited as brick after brick was thrown down into the growing heap, his hair about his neck bristling and his hind-quarters all on the move, as if he were gathering himself up for a spring.

The bricks were all laid endwise so as to form nine-inch work, and as

they were taken out it was plain to see that some were whitewashed on both ends, others only on one end, and here both ends were whitened; one end was hard and dry, the other, or outer end, had a coating of moist wash. A trifle, but pregnant with meaning to him who worked.

“You have enough out now,” said the old man, holding forward the light. “There: it is a mistake, thank heaven! Look: bottles.”

The light glanced upon the concave bottoms of rows of bottles with laths between, but George Harrington toiled on.

“My dear sir, this is madness,” said the lawyer petulantly.

“Yes, sir: with a method,” said George, working away. “Look; the whole of the brick-laying is fresh. We must have them all out.”

“But what for?”

“Wait,” cried the young man fiercely; and he worked with furious energy till the last brick was removed, and the bin laid bare.

“Now, are you satisfied?” said the old man.

“No.”

The bottles rose from the floor to the iron supported division which formed the place into two, and the top row was drawn out and set on end, first one at a time, then, as there was more room, two by two, till a couple of layers were standing in the sawdust.

Then George Harrington paused and wiped his own brow.

“Now, Mr Hampton,” he said, “if my suspicions are right, there are no bottles behind there, but—what we seek.”

“Then, in heaven’s name, sir, satisfy yourself, and let’s end—Good God!”

He started back, clapping the handkerchief he held to his nose and mouth, as George Harrington thrust his arm through the opening, and drew back a handful of lime, while the dog uttered a hoarse, low growl,

and a horrible odour slowly made its way into the cellar where they stood.

Then they started towards the door, for the dog leaped up, barking furiously, as distant cries were heard, sounding muffled and strange, and they could distinguish their names.

By the time they reached the opening George Harrington had first made, the dog was through, and George followed, thrusting his hand back to take the candle.

“Come along, sir, quick!” he said, “and mind the ladies are not told—yet.”

The old lawyer crept through trembling, the cries being plain now those of appeals for help, the dog’s loud barking adding to the excitement, as he stood by the inner door.

But George Harrington did not lose his head. He threw open the inner door, and passed through the first.

“Now close and lock that, sir,” he said, as he laid his hand on the key in the outer door. “Down, Bruno!” he cried in a deep, threatening tone, as the inner door was locked. “Watch, sir. Watch!”

The dog responded with a threatening growl, and tore at the outer door.

“Be ready to slip out, sir. I’ll follow, but this brute must not come. He must be locked in this place.”

“Yes; I understand,” groaned the old man, who was trembling, and looked a pitiable spectacle, with his white face, and his evening dress covered with lime and whitewash.

“Down, Bruno! Watch?” roared George, as he unlocked the outer door and drew out the key.

The dog growled but obeyed, the door was opened enough to let the lawyer pass through, and as he did the cries without sounded terrible, and nearly maddened the dog, who once more sprang at the door. But George seized him by the collar, dragged him back, there was a brief struggle, and he managed to hurl him into a corner, and slip through the

door, locking it as he banged it to, and then placing the key in his pocket, he ran through the baize door to where a terrible struggle was going on between Saul Harrington and the doctor, while Mrs Hampton and Gertrude were making the place echo with their appeals for help.

Stirred to the heart by the position in which he saw his old friend, Mr Hampton had rushed to his assistance, but Saul Harrington in his wild fit of delirium made naught of their joint efforts, and was in the act of dashing them off as George Harrington appeared at the study door, and confronted the wretched maniac, who leaped at him with a howl that did not seem human.

There was a desperate struggle for a minute, during which George strove hard to throw Saul Harrington, who fixed his teeth in George's collar as he grasped him like a vice; and it was only by a sudden wrench that the young man saved his throat. He leaped here and there, and at last, in a despairing effort, George threw all his strength into the lifting of his adversary, but overbalancing himself in the act, they both fell with a crash, and Saul leaped up and darted through the door.

Sick and giddy, George Harrington rose painfully to his feet, and staggered to the door, for a wild cry rang through the house.

"Gertrude!" he groaned, and he made for the passage, only to be driven back by Saul, who passed him and tore through the baize door, which banged to behind him.

"Can you help?" said George hoarsely. "We must master him somehow."

"Yes, yes," came from the two old men; and together they followed him as he laid his hand upon the door, panting heavily for breath.

"One moment," he said, and then in a loud voice, "Gertrude—Mrs Hampton, for heaven's sake lock yourselves in one of the rooms till this man is secured."

A low wail came back in answer, but it was followed by the banging of a door.

"Now, gentlemen—and together," whispered George. "The moment I

seize him try your best to throw him down. Never mind me. He must be thrown."

Nerving himself for the coming struggle, George Harrington flung back the door, and leaped at the maniac, but paused as he saw him striving wildly to get through the cellar door—going through the motion of unlocking it, and impatiently stamping again and again, as the dog bayed furiously within.

"Curse him! He has found it," he cried hoarsely. "It would have killed any other dog. What's the matter with this key—now then—beast—devil—must I kill you again? Down, brute! Hush! Curse him, they'll hear. Ah! has that silenced you? Bite, would you? How sharp his teeth are! But that finished him!"

As he spoke in a low, hoarse, muttering tone he went through the motion of a struggle with some animal, striking at it with an imaginary stick; and then, blind to the presence of those who crept nearer to him to catch him unawares, he seemed to be binding up his injured arm.

"Only mad dogs do harm," he said with a curious laugh, as he gazed wildly round. "Only mad dogs. Yes, but you're dead now, brute. Only mad dogs do harm, and you were not mad, you savage beast! There! now what next—what next? Can I—can I think of anything more—the money—the watch and chain—the ring? There's plenty without them, and some day, perhaps, some day—when he's forgotten—Yes—George Harrington, I'm—master now. Ah!"

He uttered a wild yell, twisted completely round as if struck by a bullet, and fell face downwards upon the floor.

George Harrington was in the act of springing upon him to secure him, but the doctor caught his arm.

"No need," he whispered; and stepping forward, he went down on one knee, the light from the guttering candle left upon a side table shining down faintly upon a distorted face, quivering in the last throes of death.

Chapter Forty One.

Home!

A double inquest and a long inquiry, too, in which an intelligent British jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against Saul Harrington—the most satisfactory of circumstantial evidence going to prove that he had, by a deep-laid scheme slowly insinuated himself into the good graces of the man he believed to be the cousin, who stood between him and fortune and the woman he loved. He had drugged him night after night during their drinking bouts while in the study; and during his victim's insensibility, with diabolical ingenuity, prepared his tomb—the keys thereof being within his reach, and being replaced when he had done. Then when all was ripe on the night following his supposed start for the Continent, the victim disappeared. Saul returning and entering the house by the staircase window to find that the whiskey he had left well drugged had thoroughly done its work.

He might have let it seem to be that his victim had died of poison, but that would have meant ugly inquiries, and their intercourse and his position as heir have thrown suspicion upon him. He thought his own plan the better, and the pseudo George Harrington disappeared—his going off appearing the more natural from the fact that he had been drawing large sums of money from the estate.

The work was cunningly done, and to Saul Harrington's brain so sure that he thought the safer way was to bury with his victim the money he had drawn; watch, chain, everything. But murderers' brains are generally clever up to a certain point, and then shallow as that of a child.

So Saul Harrington did his work cleverly and completely, toiling at the completion of his task in the cellar with the skill of one to the manner trained; and then just before daybreak escaped down the garden to encounter an old enemy in the shape of the dog.

"It was a mere bite that would soon heal," Saul said laughingly as he made his way to Paris, and then on to Switzerland; but it did not heal; and then came the fiction of the accident on the ice slope, then the news

of something wrong at The Mynns; and he returned to play his part—a desperate one—but with a tremendous prize as reward for having helped a worthless man to a rather earlier end, when, like a thunder clap, it came upon him that his labour had been in vain. He had slain the would-be murderer of his cousin—the impostor who had struck George Harrington down, robbed him, and taken his place with sufficient ability to be received as the acknowledged heir.

Doctors argued over the question of its being genuine hydrophobia from which Saul died. A bad wound, combined with mental disturbance, certainly did cause his end; and there were those who said it was better so than through the vengeance of the law.

There is no need to dwell upon the horrors of the discovery completed by the police—of the lime and its effect, and the points by which George Harrington proved at the inquest that these were the remains of his old treacherous companion, Dan Portway.

For without seeing them he swore to there being a peculiar ridge upon the skull, the result of a tomahawk wound, and to there being either a hole or the trace of a hole in the scapula, where Nature had covered the passage through of a revolver bullet. He swore, too, that the watch found on the murdered man was made in a particular way, contained a certain inscription, and that the ring upon his finger was roughly beaten out of virgin gold, and contained his initials “GH,” and the date when he had idly formed it with a hammer and a chisel, out of a Rocky Mountain nugget.

He proved then, and afterwards by means of communication from the States, enough to satisfy the most sceptical, that he was the real George Harrington; while now the gardener could come forward with divers little bits of evidence to add to the certainty of Saul Harrington’s guilt.

“Why didn’t I say so afore?” the gardener said in the kitchen, in answer to a question, “’cause I didn’t think it was no consequence. If I see larks going on, with footmarks under windows, and holes in yew hedges, why, I thinks to myself, ‘young men will be young men, and if young gardeners goes to see young housemaids and cooks that way, it’s only nat’ral as gents with lots of money should do likewise.’ ’Cause I find a lot of my lime as I uses for the gardens been took, and my whitewash brush as I uses

to do out the greenus, is it nat'ral as I should go and holler murder? No."

Time glided on. For a whole year The Mynns had been closed, passing people stopping to gaze at the shuttered windows as seen through the open work of the great ornamental gates, and talk about the horrible murder, and the body found buried in lime in the bin of the old cellar; but after the first few weeks the faces seen peering in by old Denton grew fewer. For, asked if she would mind staying on in the house she looked up inquiringly, and said simply:

"Why? Didn't I stop in the house when poor old master died?"

It was a little different, though, with the other servants, who held a consultation, and had nearly decided upon going, cook heading the parliament by declaring that she "couldn't abear ghosts, though she had a slight weakness for spirits." The gardener, however, who was present, gave it as his opinion dogmatically, that even if there were such things as ghosts, he never knew them do anyone any harm; and them as threw up good places for such "rubbidge" as that might think themselves very clever, but he was going to stay.

Hence it was that there was plenty of busy excitement and preparations at The Mynns one bright summer's day about a year after the discovery. The shutters were open, windows clean, gravel paths freshened up with red sand, and all giving the place a cheery aspect, which had been long absent, when Mrs Hampton alighted with her husband from the station-fly, and the big bell clanged.

"Yes, Denton; I know they will not be here till seven, but I thought I'd come down and chat with you, and ask you if you had not forgotten any of my instructions."

"You shall see, ma'am, if you'll come in; and then, perhaps, you'll like a bit of lunch; and why, if there isn't Doctor Lawrence?"

"Ah. Denton; how do! Well, I call it pride—and after all these years."

"Pride? What is?" said the old lawyer.

"You two trotting off in your station flies, and passing an old friend on the

road without offering him a lift."

"Why, how did you come down?"

"Same train, second-class. I'm not a first-class person. I only wanted to see that all was right for the young folks."

Mrs Hampton bridled a little, and then smiled.

It was a pleasant social little lunch the old friends had together, the old lawyer praising the sherry highly.

"So much body in it," he said, holding it up to the light.

"I hope not," said the doctor drily, and Mrs Hampton looked horrified.

And so it was that there was plenty of familiar faces to welcome the happy pair, as they drove up to the gate at seven, Gertrude being kissed roundly by all, and George Harrington's hand shaken, as pleasant allusions were made to the honeymoon.

Then there was an interruption in the shape of a peal of dog thunder, and Bruno, who had been let loose by Mrs Denton, dashed into the hall, upset the umbrella stand, knocked over a chair with one sweep of his tail, and then seemed to go mad with joy to see his young mistress and new master once more; his way of showing his affection for the former being by pawing at her and licking her gloves, and for the latter by butting at him ram-fashion, as if to show how sound the damaged head had grown.

He grew so boisterous at last that orders were given for his removal, but at the first intimation he uttered a doleful howl.

"Then lie down, Bruno! Watch!" cried George Harrington.

The result was that Bruno turned himself into a noble-looking ornament on the hall mat.

"Well, impostor," said the old lawyer chuckling, "I suppose we must acknowledge you now?"

“Yes, and you, too, you wicked little impostress,” cried Doctor Lawrence. “Eh? What? Drink their healths? To be sure. Come, Mrs Hampton, let me fill your glass.”

“No, no—I couldn’t,” said the old lady. “Well, then, half full. God bless you both, my dears; and I wish the world was full of such impostors.”

“Amen,” said the two old men in a breath.

“Here’s old Denton,” cried Doctor Lawrence, seizing the decanter and a fresh glass. “Come, old lady: a glass of James Harrington’s port. Drink every drop to the health of the happy pair.”

The old lady slowly and tearfully drained, her glass, and then tried to kiss Gertrude’s hand, but it was hastily withdrawn, and the young wife’s lips were proffered in its place.

“Home, my darling,” said George, when at last they were alone. “There is no mystery about The Mynns now. Do you know, I was sorely pressed to sell it by a speculative builder, and I hesitated, feeling that it would be as well, for that you would have a repugnance to the place.”

“Oh, George!”

“Ah, I was right, then. My little wife has too much good sense to be set against it for that. The world is full of horrors.”

“Yes,” said Gertrude, laying her head upon his breast; “and yet it is full of joys.”

The End.

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