# BLACKTHORN FARM

Title: Blackthorn Farm

Author: Arthur Applin

Release Date: April 12, 2013 [eBook #42519]
Reposted: May 30, 2015 [- text corrections]

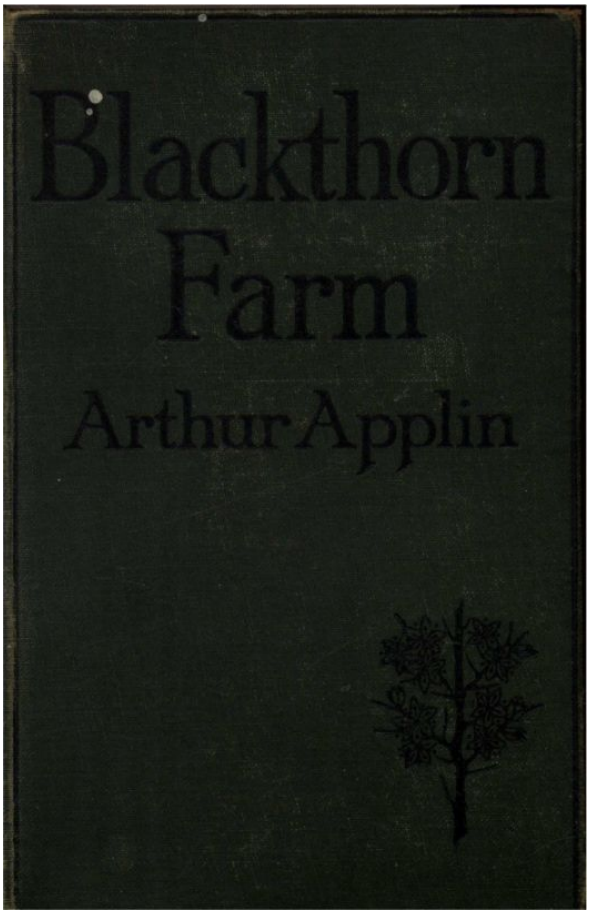
Language: English

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BLACKTHORN FARM ***

Produced by Al Haines.

# BLACKTHORN FARM

BY
ARTHUR APPLIN




*Cover*


"The next moment her eyes had seen the tell-tale broad-arrow on the boot and trousers." (Chapter XIX.)

*Blackthorn Farm*] [*Frontispiece*

*"The next moment her eyes had seen the tell-tale broad-arrow on the boot and trousers." (Chapter XIX.)*

*Author of "Her Sacrifice," "Love Conquers All Things,"*
*"The Chorus Girl," "The Pearl Necklace," etc., etc.*

WARD, LOCK& CO., LIMITED
LONDON. MELBOURNE AND TORONTO

First published in 1915.

# CONTENTS.

# BLACKTHORN FARM.

## CHAPTER I.

### RUINED!

Rupert Dale sat at the writing-table before the open windows of his sitting-room in Clanton Street, Westminster. It was a glorious summer morning. The sun had torn aside the grey mantle from the face of London. The roofs and spires of the city shone. The trees rustled their leaves in the warm breeze. The roar of traffic echoed in his ears.

Rupert stretched himself, sighed, and leant back in his chair. His table was littered with papers. There were letters, bills, advertisements—principally from tipsters and bookmakers—and the examination papers which had been set him at his third attempt to pass the final examination of the School of Mining Engineers.

The result was due to-day, and Rupert had intended going down to the hall to find out whether he had passed or not.

But he was afraid. He had failed twice already. He could not afford to fail a third time. If he failed ruin faced him, and disgrace. His father had warned him that the money he had saved for his education had come to an end. Ruin for his father and his little sister!

He had no idea how deeply Rupert was in debt. Rupert himself had only just realised it. And in desperation he had gambled to save himself.

He had backed a horse on the big race to be run that day for more money

than he possessed. He had staked honour and love on a horse he had never even seen. If it won he was saved. He could face his father, pay his debts, and, supposing he had failed, go up yet once again for his final examination.

If it lost——?

On the table a letter lay from his father in Devonshire enclosing a cheque—the last he would be able to send him.

There was also a letter from Ruby Strode, reminding him that he had promised to take her to see the big race that day.

Rupert picked up his father's letter and looked at the cheque. For five pounds only. It was drawn by Reginald Crichton, of Post Bridge Hall, made payable to John Allen Dale. His father had endorsed it.

Rupert smiled and fingered the cheque thoughtfully. Five pounds! Quite a lot of money—to his father; probably he did not spend as much in a month. And Rupert's conscience pricked him.

He set his teeth and swept aside the accumulation of unanswered letters and bills.

Ruin! An ugly word. He repeated it aloud—and laughed. It savoured of the melodramatic. Yet here was ruin facing him. He looked up and saw it blotting out the sunshine.

It had come upon him stealthily, like a thief in the night. And at the same time Love had come, too!

Again Rupert laughed.

He had only known Miss Strode seven months, but six weeks after their meeting outside the stage-door of the Ingenue Theatre they had been engaged to be married. As Miss Strode's income—including two matinees—was exactly the same as Rupert's, marriage was out of the question. Being young and light-hearted and having no idea of the value of time, money or life, they had taken all the gods offered them, living for the day, careless of the morrow.

But the to-morrow and the day of reckoning had unexpectedly arrived. For himself Rupert did not care. He could face poverty, failure, even disgrace. But it was of his father he was thinking, and of his sister Marjorie. His father, the old yeoman farmer who had pinched and scraped for seven years now, denying himself and even his daughter the ordinary necessities of life that he might give this only son a good education and make a man and a gentleman of him.

As he stood before the dressing-table in his bedroom and commenced to shave it was not the reflection of his own face he saw in the mirror. A vision rose before his eyes of Blackthorn Farm, his humble home in the middle of the wild moorlands, of his father, aged and worn with toil and poverty; of his sister, a girl on the eve of beautiful womanhood.

For centuries the Dales had lived at Blackthorn Farm, and when with the

passage of time the homestead decayed and threatened to crumble to dust and disappear, so, in the same way, the family of Dales dwindled and decayed, too.

For there was no money in Blackthorn Farm. It was difficult enough to grow pasture to feed the few cattle. And so John Allen Dale had determined to make a gentleman of his only son. He had been studying now for over three years in London—ever since he had left Taunton Grammar School. It was two years since John Dale had even seen his first-born, and his heart thrilled with pride and expectation when he thought of the homecoming. It would make up for all the years of grinding and scraping. He had been even forced to mortgage a small part of the unproductive land in which an old tin mine was situated, unworked for many years now and valueless—though once it had promised to retrieve the fortunes of the Dales.

It had hurt his pride at the time, and he had not told Rupert. For the mortgagee was Sir Reginald Crichton, of Post Bridge Hall, who had gradually bought up all the land lying in the valley; a rich man and influential, yet a stranger to Dartmoor and therefore unwelcome.

But John Dale consoled himself with the thought that when his son was a gentleman he would have no use for the old homestead of Blackthorn. It would just sink into oblivion and disappear, and there would be nothing left but memory—and the everlasting morass and moorlands. But the grand old name of Dale would rise phoenix-like from the ashes and be handed down to future generations by his son.

Just as Rupert finished dressing there was a knock at the outer door and Ruby Strode burst into the sitting-room bringing with her the sunshine and the breath of summer. The vision that had been conjured before Rupert's eyes disappeared: he was glad enough to dismiss the thoughts and memories that it had brought.

Ruin! He looked at Ruby, and advanced to meet her with open arms.

"Be careful, you mustn't crush me," she laughed. "What do you think of my new frock?—and isn't this a duck of a hat, straight from Paris?"

Rupert stepped back and gazed at her. "By Jove, how beautiful you are," he whispered. "You look simply——" He searched for an adjective in vain.

Ruby gave a satisfied smile. She was really in love with Rupert, and she valued his opinion as much or more than she would have valued the opinion of a woman friend—or enemy.

Remarkably good-looking, of a type of beauty rather unusual, she had found the stage an excellent matrimonial market. But life had taught her that love was to be given, not sold. Unfortunately, she had given it to a penniless young man whose heritage was as unstable as the bog on which his house was built. But he was strong, he was clean, he was young. And he had won her.

"We shall have to hurry up or we shall miss the train," she cried. "I wish we could motor down, but I suppose that's impossible."

Rupert laughed light-heartedly and emptied the contents of his pockets on to the table.

"Every penny I possess in the world is on Paulus. I've backed it at 'sevens' already, you know. It'll cost a couple of pounds to get on to the stand. We shall have to train it, my dear, and walk down the course."

Ruby glanced ruefully at her long narrow shoes and silk stockings. "Right ho! I believe I'd walk through your Devonshire bogs if you asked me. But I say, Rupert, suppose Paulus doesn't win? What on earth are we going to do?"

Rupert shrugged his shoulders. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. If I pass my final—well, I suppose I shall get a job somewhere and the old man will be so pleased that he'll forgive me.... I'll manage somehow. Find tin in an old disused mine we've got on our property, and float a company."

He spoke lightly, but a shadow crossed his face. He looked at Ruby again and found himself wondering how much her clothes had cost, how much money they had managed to waste together during the happy months they had known one another. And then, again, he saw the queer eerie little farmhouse lying tucked between the granite tors: on one side of it the Dart purred to the sea; stretching away to the left a few fields surrounded by stone walls and the cattle standing in the green grass. And beyond, the vast peat bogs with the rushes flinging their white seed to the wind, and creeping up the hills the purple heather with patches of wild gorse; and little Marjorie milking the cows, scalding the cream, and making the butter.

If he had failed in his final examination? His body grew suddenly cold, he shuddered. He could not face his father then.

"What's the matter?" Ruby stepped forward and took Rupert's hand.

"I was wondering, if Paulus didn't win?" he stammered. "But, of course it will. Come along, or we shall miss the train!"

Rupert slung his race-glasses over his shoulder, put on his hat, and together they ran downstairs. At the front door the landlady of the lodgings met him. She drew Rupert aside and reminded him that his bill was three weeks overdue.

"You said you would let me have something to-day, sir. I'm sorry to trouble you, but——"

"Of course, I forgot. I'll pay you to-night without fail," he cried cheerfully.

Then, slamming the front door behind him, he slipped his arm through Ruby's. Hailing a passing taxi-cab they drove to Waterloo Station.

* * * * *

Epsom Downs looked like a vast ant-hill. The very air seemed to shake and quiver with the cries of the multitude. The great race of the day was due to start. Paulus was a hot favourite. It was difficult to get bookmakers to lay two to one against it.

"By gad, it can't lose," Rupert kept on saying. "I shall win enough, Ruby, to pay my debts, with a little to spare."

Ruby slipped her hand into his. She looked into his face a trifle uneasily: "You mean if it were to win? Would it be very serious for you if Paulus were to lose?"

Rupert forced a laugh. Again, at this moment of tense excitement, he realised what it would mean if the horse lost.

Ruin! Not just for himself, that was nothing. But disgrace! That was something his father would never face. The blasting of the old man's hopes. All that he had lived for and dreamed of. Unsteadily Rupert counted out five sovereigns.

"I'd better stick this on the brute as well, it's all or nothing," he said, forcing a smile. And he began to fight his way to the rails where the bookmakers shouted the odds.

Ruby laid her hand on his arm. "Give it to me, I'll do it. You always say I'm lucky to you—and I may get better odds."

Rupert nodded and made a passage for her. "All right. If you smile at the beggar like that he'll lay you fives, I should think."

The crowd swallowed her up. She forced her way to the rails at Tattersall's Ring. Rupert saw the long black plume of her French hat nodding in the breeze. He saw her hand the money to a bookmaker and receive a ticket in exchange.

Then a cry like a great chorus rent the air. "They're off!"

Rupert leapt to his position on the stand and putting up his glass watched the race.

A good start, though one horse was left. It was not Paulus, so he did not care. One horse out of the way!

He watched the horses climb the hill, the colours of the jockeys made brilliant blots against the blue sky. The great human ant-hill was still now, silent, too. The whole thing looked like a cinematograph picture; the horses like clockwork animals.

They neared Tattenham Corner. Rupert held his breath. The vast crowd began to murmur now. A strange sound as if emanating from the lips of one man. The sound rose and fell like distant thunder.

Presently he heard the thunder of the horses' hoofs. They had rounded the corner and were coming down the straight. He took a deep breath, and for a moment the scene was blotted from his eyes. And again he saw the black Devon moorlands, neither purple heather nor golden gorse now, just granite tors

and bogland; and an old man standing at the entrance of a thatched-roofed little farmhouse staring out over the grey hills—as if waiting for one who never came.

"Nimbo wins! A monkey to a pea-nut on Nimbo!"

The storm broke now. First the name of one horse was shouted, then another. The field had strung out, but there were half a dozen horses locked together.

"Paulus wins! I'll back Paulus!"

Rupert took a deep breath, and for the moment put down his glasses. Then he heard his own voice shrieking hysterically, "Paulus! Paulus!"

A sudden silence fell, more terrifying than the thunder of ten thousand voices. The leading bunch of horses was within a hundred yards of the winning post now. Paulus led, then fell back suddenly challenged by a rank outsider, Ambuscade. Neck and neck they ran, first one, then the other, getting the advantage. Rupert was conscious of Ruby clinging to his arm. He was conscious of the great crowd on the hill, of the crowd surrounding him, swaying to and fro; of the perfume of the girl's hair—the girl he loved; the colours of the jockeys as they lay almost flat on the horses' backs.

The race was over now. The winning-post was reached. Thunder-clap after thunder-clap of human voices.

"Paulus wins! ... Paulus! Paulus! Paulus!"

Rupert was shouting at the top of his voice as he was carried by the crowd he knew not whither, Ruby clinging to his arm. He waved his hat in the air and he laughed as he shouted. He was saved, and for a moment he forgot all he had learned. He could not control himself, he just shouted with the crowd, his crowd.

Still the excitement was not over. There were a few moments more of tension until the numbers went up and they saw on the telegraph board that Paulus had won by a short head.

Rupert found himself standing alone at the bottom of the enclosure. He wiped the perspiration from his face. Ruby had disappeared—yet a moment ago she had been hanging on his arm. He heard the "All right" called and he realised she had gone to draw the money from the bookmaker. After a while he saw her hemmed in by the crowd near the rails. He fought his way to her and in answer to his queries she showed him her purse.

"Come along, let's go back," he whispered. "There's nothing else to wait for now."

Once clear of the crowd they walked up the hill to the railway station, caught the first train returning to London, and drove straight to Rupert's rooms.

A telegram was waiting for him on the table. He picked it up and gave it to Ruby.

"Open it, you always bring me luck," he laughed. "It's the result of the

exam. I told one of my pals to wire me. Still, I don't care twopence now——"

He broke off as Ruby tore open the little buff envelope and looked at the message. The next moment she had dropped it and taken him in her arms, heedless now of the damage to her French toilet. Her black, sweetly-scented hair brushed his face, her soft cheek was pressed against his own. She mothered him as if he were her child instead of her lover.

He had failed.

"What does it matter?" he cried with bravado. "I'm rich now. I can pay my bills; we can have a jolly good time before I go home."

"But your father, Rupert?" she whispered. "Don't you remember—all you told me about him, his dreams, his ambitions for you? Oh! don't think I'm a prig, but he'll be disappointed, so disappointed. I think I'd rather you had passed your exam, and lost your money——"

He broke away from her angrily. "You don't know what you're saying. If Paulus hadn't won!"

The raucous cries of a newsboy from the street interrupted him. They both listened, then Rupert smiled.

"Forgive me, it's ripping of you to think of father and all that. I know it'll knock the old man sideways: he'll be awfully sick about it. But I've got one more chance, and now I can afford to take it. If I hadn't won this money I couldn't have. I should have had to go home and stop there, shut up in that crumbling hole in the midst of those beastly moors. But I'll try again and, by gad! I'll win. I swear I'll pass next 'go.' It was the worry of thinking of the beastly money which upset me this time."

Another newsboy ran shrieking down the street.

"Result of the great race. Sensational result! All the winners—Sensation——"

Rupert moved towards the door. "Let's get a paper and see the starting price."

Ruby followed him. "Wait a moment, Rupert. Tell me honestly, how much you would have owed if Paulus hadn't won?"

"Oh, I don't know. What does it matter now?" he cried carelessly. "A hundred or two, I think. What does it matter now? I can go on working until I pass. And I'll send the guv'nor that last fiver he posted me, old Crichton's cheque. Those brutes at Post Bridge Hall are absolutely rolling in money, but, by gad! they shall see we've got some, too. Come on, let's get a paper."

Smiling at his excitement Ruby followed him out of the room. From the doorstep they beckoned to a passing newsboy, who thrust a paper into Rupert's hands. Chucking him sixpence Rupert made his way upstairs again. He opened the paper in the sitting-room, and Ruby bent over his shoulder.

"Well?" she said.

Then she heard Rupert catch his breath, she saw his face change colour, grow deadly white. The paper began to shiver and tremble between his hands. She looked at the stop press news. She saw the result:

Paulus first, Ambuscade second—then in huge black type underneath: OBJECTION!

"The stewards objected to the winner for bumping and not keeping a straight course. An enquiry was held and Paulus was disqualified. The outsider, Ambuscade, is therefore the winner. The starting price is a hundred to one."

Rupert crunched the paper in his hands, and staggering forward fell into the chair in front of the writing-table. He stretched his arms out, sweeping off the litter of papers, and his head fell forward between his hands.

Ruby bent over him and tried to raise him. "Rupert—perhaps it's not true. Rupert!"

She lifted him up, but he fell back into the chair half fainting. Putting her arms around him she dragged him into the bedroom, and laying him on the bed loosened his collar. She found some brandy and forced a little between his lips. Then she sat beside him, holding his hand tightly. Presently the colour returned to his cheeks, his eyes opened. He lay quite still, staring at the ceiling.

"It'll be all right," she whispered. "It'll all come right, Rupert. I—I love you, dear, I'll help you. It'll all come right."

The muscles of his face twitched convulsively. "Leave me," he whispered. "For pity's sake leave me for a little while."

Drawing down the blind, she crept out of the room and shut the door behind her. She heard someone coming up the stairs—the landlady bringing tea. Stooping down she commenced to pick up the papers scattered on the floor. Among them she found the cheque Rupert had received that morning from his father, the cheque drawn by Reginald Crichton. She looked at it curiously, a sudden instinct telling her how much that little sum meant to the old father who had sent it.

Five pounds! Scarcely the value of the hat she wore. Folding it up she slipped it into her gloved hand, then sat down at the writing-table waiting until the landlady left the room. She had a few pounds in her purse which she had drawn over Paulus before the objection was made. A few pounds in the Post Office Savings-bank. Between them they might collect twenty or thirty pounds: and Rupert confessed to owing a hundred or two. That might mean five hundred—the price of his father's honour and happiness, his little sister, the house, everything.

And she loved Rupert Dale. Now that ruin faced him she knew how much she loved him. She would give her life to save him.

She poured herself out a cup of tea and drank it. The little sitting-room felt hot and stuffy, her brain felt numb, she wanted air. She crept downstairs and

commenced to walk to and fro up and down the pavement trying to think what she would do. Twelve pounds in her purse and a cheque for five pounds in her gloved hand. How lightly Rupert had thrown aside that cheque a few hours ago. Probably he did not know what he had done with it; would think he had lost it.

Scarcely thinking what she was doing she took it out and looked at it closely. And she remembered Reginald Crichton's name. She had heard men at the theatre speak of him in connection with mining investments.

The clock struck the hour—six—and she made her way back to the lodging-house, and very quietly opened the door of the sitting-room. Then she stopped short, frozen with terror. Rupert was standing at the writing-table. The blinds were drawn down. In his hand he held a revolver. She saw him slowly turn it until the muzzle was pointing at his breast.

## CHAPTER II.

### FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS.

"Rupert!" Ruby's voice scarcely rose above a whisper.

Slowly Rupert turned the revolver from his breast. Very slowly his arm dropped until it hung limply by his side. His grip relaxed and the revolver fell to the floor. Ruby crossed to his side, and, stooping down, picked it up.

Extricating the cartridges, she put the revolver away in a drawer of the writing-table and locked it up. Then she drew a chair forward and sat down, facing the man whose life she had just saved, the man she loved.

It was a long time before either of them spoke. Rupert Dale had meant to kill himself. Ruby had arrived at the critical moment. Thirty seconds more and she would have been too late. The crisis had passed now, but the shock had left the woman unnerved and weak.

Rupert merely felt vaguely surprised that he was still alive. The idea of suicide was horrible to him because normally he was a healthy, sane young man, but the news of his failure for the third time in his final examination, coming upon the victory and subsequent disqualification of Paulus, had made him see the hopelessness of his position. It was a lightning flash; illuminating the horizon of Hope. The instant's flash had shown him himself, his career ruined before it had started, and his father beggared—not merely of his home and his money, but of his dreams: of all that was left him.

Ruby watching him, holding his cold hand in hers, saw what was passing, and what had passed, in his mind. Of a sudden she felt her responsibility.

She had never considered the word before in her life. She understood it now because she loved.

Rupert was the first to speak. "It's no use, old girl; it's the only way out—the only way."

She shook her head. "A coward's way."

Rupert gave a dry laugh. "I'm not afraid to live, not afraid to face the music; not afraid to take off my coat and work in the gutters, if need be. But I've ruined and disgraced my father. The shame will fall on him. I'm his only son, and he was going to turn me into a gentleman. Well, when a gentleman has done a shameful thing, a thing that prevents him from meeting his friends, his relatives, he just goes out ... as I'm going.... They'll get on better without me, father and Marjorie."

Ruby's hands tightened their grip. She had aged in an hour; changed. The little, light actress had become merged, as it were, in the woman. Mother instinct had taken the place of the lover instinct.

She was fighting for the life of some other woman's son, and for the moment he was her son.

"You can't do it!"

"My mind is made up."

Ruby closed her eyes for a moment. He spoke quietly and calmly. She knew it had not been a sudden resolve, but that his mind had been made up.

There was a long silence between them. Outside the newsboys still shouted the sensational result.

At last Ruby rose. She crossed the room and stood with her back to Rupert for a little while. When she turned she was smiling, and she looked more like her old self—as if she had not a care in the world.

"Rupert," she whispered, and her voice, though a little unsteady, had a glad ring in it.

He picked up a letter lying on the table. The ink was scarcely dry on it. It was lying on a sheet of clean white blotting-paper. It was to his father—saying good-bye.

"The old man sent me a cheque," he mumbled. "I can't find it anywhere. Must have lost it this afternoon. I suppose some beggar will cash it. Don't much matter now, but it would have been useful to the old man: five pounds——" Again he laughed.

"Rupert!"

He turned then and looked at her. Perhaps something in her voice attracted him.

"You remember giving me five pounds to put on Paulus? Well, I didn't do

it."

He shook his head to and fro. "It doesn't make any difference. I owe hundreds."

"I put it on Ambuscade."

He turned right round now staring at her, frowning. He did not understand.

"Ambuscade started at a hundred to one." Ruby was laughing now. She moved toward him unsteadily.

"Don't play the fool," he said unsteadily. "It's no use trying to—hoodwink me."

"I put the five pounds on Ambuscade at a hundred to one. I didn't dare tell you, dear—in fact, when the news of the objection came I couldn't realise it. I've—I've got the ticket in my purse."

The frown on Rupert's face deepened. "I saw you draw some money—you had it in your purse."

"I put a couple of my own sovereigns on Paulus. I backed Ambuscade with Barrett. They have an office in Piccadilly, London. If I go down to-morrow morning they'll pay me five hundred pounds."

Rupert rose and tottered towards her. His legs gave way at the knees like a drunken man.

"Five hundred pounds!"

He kept muttering to himself over and over again. "Five hundred pounds!" He poured himself out a glass of water from the sideboard and tossed it down his throat. Then he seized Ruby roughly by the shoulders.

"You're not fooling me. You swear it. If it was with Barrett they'll pay up all right. They're a big firm, they'll pay up to-morrow."

She managed to assure him she was speaking the truth.

He began to laugh, then checked himself with an effort. "Why the devil didn't you tell me before?" he cried savagely. "I might have——"

He seized his hat and put it on. "I must get out of this. I must think it over. I want air. I can't realise it.... My God, five hundred pounds! I'm saved." He opened the door. "Wait until I come back. I shan't be long. Wait there until I come back."

She listened to his footsteps descending the staircase. She heard the front door bang. She stood at the window and watched him walk down the street. He held himself erect, his face turned to the sky now.

Ruby closed the window and drew down the blind. Then she sat down at the writing-table, and taking off her gloves picked up a pen.

The cheque drawn by Reginald Crichton lay just inside one of the long white gloves. Picking it up she unfolded it and laid it on the white sheet of blotting paper.

Five hundred pounds!

## CHAPTER III.
### SALVATION.

There was a ring at the front door bell followed by a loud double knock. But Ruby Strode did not hear. She was still seated at the writing-table bending over the large pad of white blotting-paper, in the fingers of one hand a pen. She sat very still, scarcely seeming to breathe. It looked as though she were writing: not a sound disturbed the silence of the little room. The blinds were still drawn down.

Presently, outside, footsteps could be heard ascending the staircase. Somebody knocked on the door, which was instantly opened, and the landlady put her head into the room.

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

She stopped abruptly, as, gazing round the room, she saw only Ruby Strode bending over the writing-table.

"Beg pardon, I thought Mr. Dale was here. There's a gentleman to see him."

Ruby started and jumped to her feet. She laid her pen down. In her hand she held a slip of paper which she had just blotted. She folded it up with unsteady fingers.

"Mr. Dale went out just now—for a few minutes—he won't be long."

She spoke rapidly in jerks, and turning round faced the door, her hands clasped behind her back.

"Oh, it doesn't matter! I suppose I can wait." And the visitor entered the room. "That sounds like Miss Strode's voice."

Robert Despard crossed to Ruby's side and held out his hand. He was a dark, well-set-up man, some years Ruby's senior. He was faultlessly dressed in a brown lounge suit, a light-coloured bowler placed jauntily on the back of his head, a pair of race glasses slung across his shoulders, and he wore a pair of highly-polished tan boots.

"I thought I might find you here," he continued, looking at Ruby with a familiar smile and giving a nervous twirl to his black moustache when she did not take his hand. "I saw you both at the races, but I couldn't get near you for the crowd. Thought I would look in and see how Rupert had done. I bet he came a

nasty cropper over that disqualification. Can't say you're looking exactly jolly."

Ruby stepped back and forced a smile to her lips.

"Oh, we're all right!" she said unsteadily, commencing to fold up the slip of paper she had been holding in her hand behind her back. "We won."

Despard raised his eyebrows and gave a dry laugh. "I don't think! Rupert told me he plunged, on Paulus. As a matter of fact, I came round to condole with him. I knew he was pretty hard hit and all that sort of thing."

"Well, you are wrong! He doesn't want your sympathy, as it happens."

Ruby spoke almost defiantly. The colour had returned to her cheeks now. They were scarlet and her eyes were bright. There was defiance in them, too.

Despard watched her closely, and the expression on his face gradually changed. A cynical smile still played about his lips.

"You're a loyal little devil!" he said between his teeth. "By gad! I admire you for it. But let me tell you that poor old Rupert Dale is ruined. Broke to the world, and he's failed in his final, too. I'm awfully sorry for him—and all that, but there you are."

"Yes, you sound as if you were sorry," Ruby replied sarcastically. She commenced to pull on one of her gloves, then slipped the strip of folded paper underneath the glove into the palm of her hand. Despard was watching her with his small, bright eyes.

"Is that your winnings you're hiding away?" he sneered.

He threw his hat on to the table and seated himself on the arm of a chair close to Ruby.

"I wanted to see you more than I did Rupert," he said, lowering his voice. "Of course, it's all over between you two now? You wouldn't be mad enough to marry a pauper, even if he were cad enough to want you to. So don't forget that I'm just as keen on you as ever." He stretched out his arm and pulled Ruby towards him. "I knew my turn would come if I waited long enough."

Quietly but firmly Ruby released her arm, and, moving away, stood with her back to the window so that her face was in shadow. Though she despised Robert Despard, she feared him.

"You call yourself Rupert's friend, and yet you choose the very moment when you believe he is ruined to make love to the woman to whom he was engaged to be married, and under his own roof, too."

"Dash it all, it's only a lodging house!" Despard replied brutally. "But, go on, I love you when you get angry. You look as if you were a leading lady earning a hundred pounds a week instead of a show girl walking on at a couple of guineas."

"A show girl has a heart and a conscience, which is more than you've got, anyway," Ruby replied fiercely; "and Mr. Dale shall know the kind of friend he's got in you."

Despard shrugged his shoulders and suppressed a yawn. "So that's all the thanks I get. Dash it all, isn't it proof that I love you, when, directly I know your man has got the kick, I hurry down to tell you I'll take his place—look after you, pay your bills—make you my wife, anything you like in the world! I loved you long before he ever met you. I told you I didn't mean to give you up. I told you no one else should take you from me. Rupert is all right, of course; I am fond of him, but he isn't the right man for you. Now that he's come a cropper and failed in his exam., he'll have to go back to his Devonshire bog and leave me to look after you."

Ruby tried to speak, but she could not trust herself for some seconds. Despard watched her with an amused smile. Suddenly she crossed the room and opened the sitting-room door.

"I'll go out and find Rupert. You had better say to his face what you've just said to me," she cried.

She hurried downstairs out into the street. She saw Rupert coming slowly towards her and she ran to meet him.

Meanwhile, Despard left alone in the sitting-room, lit a cigarette, and rising from his chair glanced casually at the evening newspaper lying on the writing-table. Ruby had left the letter Rupert had written to his father lying on the white sheet of blotting-paper. Almost unconsciously, Despard commenced to read it. Then he picked it up and glanced hurriedly towards the door; he read it through from beginning to end. He gave a long, low whistle of astonishment, and carefully replaced the letter.

He noticed the place where the first page had been blotted on the new sheet of white blotting-paper. And just below it his quick eyes saw one small word, underneath it a couple of naughts. There was nothing particularly strange or remarkable about this. He would probably never have noticed it if the blotting-paper had not been clean. But, gradually, as he stared at the one undecipherable word with the two naughts he began to feel as if there were significance about them. They stood out on the white sheet of blotting-paper.

There was a small mirror standing on the mantel-piece. He took it up and held it over the blotting-pad. And he read reflected the single word between the two naughts. It was "hundred." A little way beyond it he noticed a single letter "s."

Replacing the mirror he stood with his back to the fireplace, his hands deep in his trousers pockets, thinking.

"Hundred," "s," and two naughts. He had seen that the slip of paper which Ruby tucked into her glove was a cheque. He was quite sure that neither she nor Rupert Dale had a hundred pounds in the world. Indeed, he knew the state of the latter's finances better than the girl did. For only a few months ago, he had

lent Rupert twenty-five pounds. He stroked his black moustache thoughtfully. Before he could solve the little problem Dale himself entered the room, followed a few minutes later by Ruby.

"I came to tell you how devilish sorry I was that you had backed a loser and got plucked," Despard said; "but, hang it all, you look cheerful enough!"

"So would you," Rupert cried, slapping him on the back, "if you had had a fiver on Ambuscade at a hundred to one."

The frown deepened on Robert Despard's forehead.

"Look here, is this a joke or what?"

"It's no joke," Rupert laughed hysterically. "Ask Ruby, she did it for me! I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll all go out and have a bit of dinner together and break a bottle of wine on the strength of it."

As Rupert spoke he caught sight of the letter to his father lying on the writing-table. Picking it up quickly he tore it into a dozen fragments and threw them into the waste-paper basket.

Despard watched him, and his frown deepened. "You mean to say you backed Ambuscade at a hundred to one and got paid!"

"We didn't know the result until we left the course," Rupert replied lightly. "Luckily, Ruby kept the ticket. We're going to draw the money to-morrow. By gad, she's saved my life! I've had a narrow squeak."

"Who did you do the bet with?" Despard asked.

"I forgot the man's name. I've got the ticket safely in my pocket. We shall get the money all right to-morrow."

Ruby spoke quickly. She could not conceal her nervousness and anxiety. She, who had been so calm a little while ago when Rupert, believing that ruin had overtaken him, had been on the point of committing suicide.

He noticed that she seemed flustered and ill at ease, but he put it down to the sudden reaction. For himself he had forgotten all his troubles. They no longer existed. Death had stood at his elbow less than an hour ago. Now life was beckoning him to join in her revels. Curiously enough, he did not seem to realise the debt he owed to Ruby Strode: yet he would never have thought of backing Ambuscade himself.

As a matter of fact, he was too excited to think of anything. He only knew that he could pay his debts, go down to Devonshire for his holidays and face his father with a light heart. In due time he would have another fling at the examination, pass it, obtain an appointment somewhere, and then he would be able to marry Ruby and they would live happily ever after.

But for the moment he just wanted to enjoy his good fortune; to dance, to sing, to feast, to love.

"Come on, if you're both ready to start!" he cried excitedly. "Where shall

we dine? Trocadero, Café Royal, Savoy? We'll make a night of it."

"The Savoy's good enough for me," Despard laughed over his shoulder. "Do you mind if I wash my hands and make myself look a bit presentable in your room, Rupert?"

Ruby waited until the bedroom door had closed on Despard. Then she put her arms around Rupert's neck. "Do you mind very much if I don't come with you to-night?" she whispered. "I'm feeling so tired. I think the excitement has been too much for me."

Rupert looked at her with amazement. "Why, it will be no fun without you. I don't want Despard! Rather wish he hadn't come down to see me. You'll feel as fit as a fiddle when you've had a glass of wine."

But she shook her head, and held him tightly. He felt her arms trembling. He saw tears swimming in her eyes.

"My dear, my dear, what a selfish brute I've been!" he cried with a sudden revulsion of feeling. "Good heavens, you've saved my life—you've done more than that—and I've not even thanked you."

Ruby stepped back and put her fingers over his mouth. "Not another word," she whispered. "I'm so happy, really. It's just nerves. I want to be quite alone. I want to realise our good fortune."

"Of course, if you would really not come," Rupert said; "or shall I tell Despard we don't want him? I know you're not keen on him."

Ruby longed to tell Rupert what had taken place between them a few moments ago. But fear of the man she loved and wanted sealed her lips. She knew that the two men were friends. She knew that Despard had it in his power to injure her. He had some influence with the manager of the Ingenue Theatre, and there were other reasons. So she said nothing.

Despard rejoined them and they all went out together.

"We'll drive you home first," Rupert said to Ruby.

"I would rather you dropped me at the Tube," she replied. "I have nearly two hours before I need go to the theatre. I'm not on until the second act."

Despard pretended to be bitterly disappointed that Miss Strode was deserting them. Ruby surreptitiously handed Rupert the money she had in her purse and whispered to him that she would get their winnings in the morning and bring them round to his rooms. She had no reason for secrecy, and so he asked her to give him the ticket she had received from the bookmaker when she had backed Ambuscade.

"I don't like the idea of your going round to the bookmaker's offices. It's possible they'll dispute it, or make a fuss," he said.

Despard agreed and suggested that they should meet at ten o'clock in the morning and all go round in a body. But Ruby was obstinate and refused to give

up the ticket.

"I backed the horse myself. I am going to get the money and bring it round to Rupert!"

She got quickly out of the cab as it stopped at the Piccadilly Tube Station and, blowing a kiss to Rupert, she disappeared in the crowd.

The two men drove to the grillroom of the Savoy.

"You are a lucky devil," Despard said, "if there's no mistake, and Miss Strode really backed Ambuscade."

"Why should there be a mistake?" Rupert asked curtly.

"Oh, I don't know!"—Despard shrugged his shoulders—"but she seemed rather mysterious about it. Perhaps that's a woman's way. They are queer cattle."

"Ruby is one in a thousand," Rupert said quietly. "Look here, I'm off to Devonshire to-morrow evening. I don't want the old man to hear I've been plucked. I must tell him myself. I shall have to find some reason, too, for my sudden wealth."

"One of the old-fashioned sort, eh?—don't approve of betting or pretty girls. Will you keep Miss Strode dark, too?"

Rupert frowned. He did not reply at once. "I thought you knew we were engaged to be married," he said at last. "I shan't tell the guv'nor until I've passed my final, so if you come down you needn't mention her."

Rupert suddenly found himself regretting the invitation he had given to Despard some time ago to spend his holidays at Blackthorn Farm. Too late, instinct warned him that he was not quite the sort of man he would like to introduce to his sister.

"So you're really coming?" he said.

"Rather! I want to throw a fly for those trout you've spoken about, and pot the rabbits. I'm a bit fed-up with town. If it's quite convenient I'll meet you at Paddington Station to-morrow afternoon."

Rupert nodded. "The train leaves at eight-thirty. I must wire in the morning and tell the guv'nor we're coming. I expect Marjorie will meet us at Moreton with the trap."

"How old is she?" Despard asked.

Rupert did not reply, and the cab drew up outside the Savoy.

Dawn was beginning to break over the City before he returned to his rooms. He switched on the electric lights. Curiously enough, he felt wide-awake and not in the least tired. Yet the day had been a long and eventful one, every hour filled with excitement.

Lighting a pipe, Rupert sat down at the writing-table, and went through the bills and letters that lay in a heap beneath the paper-weight. Including the money he had borrowed, he owed close on three hundred pounds. He felt a shudder run

through his body. In the morning when he had gaily set out to the races he had not known it was as bad as that.

But for the inspiration which had made Ruby back Ambuscade where would he have been now? And again a shiver passed through his body.

He saw himself sitting in that very chair holding a revolver to his breast, his finger on the trigger. How near he had been to disgrace and death!

A photograph of his father stood in a little silver frame near a vase of flowers. He picked it up and looked at it, a mist rising before his eyes.

"He trusted you, he believed in you," his conscience whispered. "Trusted you to bear the old name bravely and proudly; trusted you to retrieve the fallen fortunes of the family. How nearly you failed him!"

A cold sweat broke out on his forehead. If Ruby had made a mistake? Supposing she had only told him she had backed Ambuscade in order to save him from taking his life? Or, if she had backed the horse, what guarantee had they that the bookmaker would pay up?

He rose to his feet, and walking to the windows opened them wide. A cold breeze swept his face. A peculiar light grey outlined the trees and houses. The street lamps glittered dimly before the coming dawn. London was very still, and almost silent. Rupert raised his eyes to the sky. It was grey and the stars had all disappeared; half unconsciously he prayed as he had done when he was a boy. And he swore that if his prayer were answered and he was able to discharge his debts, he would remember his responsibilities in the future, and live his life according to his father's wishes.

Switching off the lights he went to bed.

When he awoke the sun was high in the sky. It was past ten o'clock. Hurriedly dressing and without waiting for breakfast, he drove to the flat Ruby shared in Baker Street with another girl. But the housekeeper told him that she had gone out nearly an hour previously. In spite of the late night, Rupert felt strangely elated and excited. The sunshine of the new day made him optimistic. He knew she had gone down to the bookmakers to draw the money they had won. He waited a little while thinking she might return. Then he remembered she had told him that she would bring him the money to his rooms. He hurried back to Westminster.

But she was not there, and he felt a thrill of apprehension. He rang for a cup of tea; when his landlady brought it she again reminded him of his bill.

"I'm just waiting for some money to come from the bank," he said with exaggerated carelessness. "I'm leaving town to-night for a week or two, but I shall keep my rooms on. I'll pay for them in advance."

He swallowed his tea and smoked a cigarette. He could not eat. Ruby had had plenty of time to draw the money and reach his rooms! Perhaps the

bookmaker was away, or refused to settle until Monday.

He heard Big Ben chime the hour—twelve o'clock. He lit another cigarette and stood on the balcony outside the window waiting.

At last he saw a taxi-cab draw up outside his front door and Ruby Strode alight. He ran down the staircase to meet her.

"Is it all right, have you got it?" he cried. His only thought was the money now. The money that meant salvation.

She did not reply, but brushed past him upstairs and he followed her. He heard her breath coming in quick, hard gasps, and following her into the sitting-room he locked the door.

"Tell me, is it all right, have you got it?"

Rupert stretched out his hands imploringly.

## CHAPTER IV.

### RADIUM.

Ruby Stroke threw aside the heavy veil she wore and placed her bag on the table. Rupert heard the clink of coins.

"Of course, I've got it," she stammered. "Look! Five hundred pounds. I've brought fifty in gold. I thought, perhaps, it would be more useful than—than notes."

He staggered to her side and looked at the two little bags of gold she had placed on the table. She showed him a roll of notes. He pushed them aside, and pouring the gold out on the table he commenced to count it. It fascinated him. He could not speak.

Presently he began to laugh hysterically. "You are sure there's no mistake?"

"Count it again."

Again he laughed. "I didn't mean that—I mean, it's all right—I can't believe it—that this is ours—all ours." He dropped on to his knees beside her and put his arms around her waist. "Oh, my dear!" he cried, "my dear!"

Ruby smiled. She sat staring at the money with hard, dry eyes. "It was rather stupid to bring so much gold perhaps," she said in an unsteady voice. "But I thought you could pay some of your bills with it. And—you are so careless. You might lose notes just as you lost that cheque yesterday."

She picked up the crisp bundle of notes on the table. "I'm going to take

charge of these, and later on pay them into your bank. So that when you return from Devonshire, you'll find quite a nice little nest-egg.... Now, give me a cup of tea, and then I'll pack for you. You've only got about three hours."

It did not take Ruby long to pack. Rupert watched her and gave instructions as to what he would take, but to which, woman like, she paid no attention.

"I've got lots of old clothes at the farm," Rupert said. "We shall spend all our time fishing and shooting. Gad! I'll take old Despard down our tin-mine. Probably, it's little better than a swimming-bath now!"

Rupert was in high spirits. Ruby encouraged him to talk, and smiled as she listened.

"Is Mr. Despard going down with you?" she asked.

Rupert nodded.

"Then you won't mind if I don't see you off at Paddington?" She glanced at the watch on her wrist. "I've got an appointment at half-past one, so it would be difficult anyway."

"You don't like Despard, do you?" Rupert said; "yet he's very fond of you."

"Yes, I know he is. I wish he wasn't."

But Rupert only pinched her cheek playfully. He did not understand. Ruby wanted to tell him that Despard had made love to her, to put him on his guard, but she was afraid to speak more clearly. She did not want to make him jealous, and she was afraid lest the two men should quarrel. So no more was said. They bade one another good-bye in the little sitting-room where so many happy hours had been spent—and where such great events had happened.

"I shall not be away more than a week or two," Rupert said as he kissed her. "I suppose you will be in town all the summer?"

"Probably," she answered evasively. "Anyway, I shall be here when you return. Enjoy yourself and don't worry."

She kissed him again and again, clinging tightly to him, unable to tear herself away now that the hour had come.

"Why, there are tears on your cheek!" Rupert whispered, brushing them away. "You mustn't be sad: our future never looked so rosy. Look here, I shall tell my father I'm engaged to be married. I didn't mean to do so until I'd passed my examination, but it's only fair to you. And we can afford to get married now! You've got those notes safely?"

She nodded, and smiled through her tears. "I can pay them into the bank to-morrow."

And then, giving him a final embrace, she hurried away. Rupert stood at the front door and watched her out of sight. He wondered why she did not turn round and wave him farewell again as she always had when they parted.

A few hours later as he was borne rapidly in the direction of Devon-

shire with his friend, Robert Despard, he had temporarily forgotten Ruby Strode. When the train on the branch line from Newton Abbott stopped at Moreton he saw his sister waiting for him on the platform. A wave of boyish pride swept over him as he introduced Marjorie to Robert Despard. Two years had changed her considerably. She was a woman now, and beautiful. At the same time he was conscious of the humble dress she wore, the thick cotton stockings, and rather ungainly boots. Conscience pricked him again, and he felt a touch of remorse.

The money she should have spent in pretty clothes he had been wasting in London! He felt he wanted to apologise, too, for the old-fashioned dog-cart waiting outside and the sturdy, rough-haired Dartmoor pony harnessed to the shafts. But Despard had no eyes for anything but Marjorie Dale's beauty. He was unable to take his eyes off her, and Rupert noticed the colour rushing to her cheeks as they drove along.

Despard had a certain way with women. He treated them with a queer mixture of deference and gallantry. He knew how to pay a compliment with subtlety. For the first time Rupert realised there were two distinct sides to his character. And before the long drive across the moorland was over—still blazing with yellow gorse and bloom—he again wished he had not asked Despard to stay with them.

Old John Allen Dale was waiting at the door of the queer, tumble-down, thatched-roofed building which had been the home of the Dales for generations. He took Rupert in his arms and held him closely, then, with an apology, turned to greet Robert Despard. His manner had all the old-world courtesy of the yeoman farmer.

"By Jove, you live off the map, and no mistake!" Despard cried looking round him.

He gazed at the strange, almost forbidding-looking farmhouse, at the great tors surrounding it on all sides. He listened to the river Dart as it sang its wild way to the sea, the only song among those rugged hills.

"Don't you feel jolly lonely sometimes?" he said to Marjorie.

She shook her head. "I haven't time. And I've known nothing better."

She took his kit-bag from the dog-cart, and before he could stop her she had carried it upstairs to his room.

"There is nothing better," John Dale said dreamily. And he linked his arm affectionately through Rupert's. "Well, my boy, you needn't say anything, I see by your face that you've passed your examination. The world is at your feet now to conquer. You're going to do great things, eh?"

Rupert gave a quick glance at Despard. But the latter merely winked, then, turning on his heel, entered the farm. Rupert heard him mount the stairs in search of Marjorie.

Rupert squared his shoulders and looked his father full in the face. "I'm sorry, guv'nor, but you must have the truth. I've failed again."

John Allen Dale winced as if some one had struck him a blow. The strong, determined jaws met tightly, but he said nothing.

"I'm going up again in November," Rupert continued. "And I know I shall pass. It's not an idle boast, guv'nor. I can, and I will."

The old man laid his hands on the young man's shoulders. He spoke bravely and proudly, yet there was a tremor in his voice:

"Rupert, lad, I know you've done your best, and I'm not blaming you. It's a severe blow because—well, you'd better know now—the money's come to an end! I've pinched and screwed, gladly; but the savings of the last fifty years have all gone. They were little enough. The farm doesn't raise enough to keep us in food and clothes. I've even had to raise money and mortgage the old place. I couldn't pay your fees for the examination again, much less your board and lodging in London."

"I know," Rupert replied gently, though he had not dreamed it was as bad as that. And once again remorse seized him. Once again he wondered what he would have done if it had not been for Ruby Strode.

He would have died a coward's death and left his father and sister to suffer shame and dishonour.

It was some little time before he could find his voice and tell his father that he need not worry about the money.

"I don't want you to question me, guv'nor, but I've had a bit of luck and made enough to keep myself for another year or two in London. I can let you have plenty to go on with, too."

"Not borrowed money, not made by gambling?" John Dale asked. "But I needn't ask you, Rupert. It was money honestly earned, I know."

Rupert dared not confess how he had obtained it. "It came through a friend," he said unsteadily. "I can't tell you more now, father, but I will one day. I only want you to know that you needn't worry. I shan't fail you. I promise."

Dale took his son's hand in his great, horny fist and pressed it tightly. "I know that, I know that, my boy."

The first thing Rupert did with the money Ruby had given him was to repay Despard the twenty-five pounds he owed him. The second was to hand Marjorie fifteen pounds—ten for housekeeping expenses, and five for herself. She was overwhelmed, and at first refused to take it. To her it seemed like a fortune.

"You needn't tell the guv'nor," Rupert said, "though he knows I've made a bit. But if he's in want of anything just buy it for him—say it's a present from me. Get yourself a nice frock and some pretty shoes."

Rupert felt afraid that the rough fare and humble life at Blackthorn Farm

would bore or disgust his friend, but he soon found that he was wrong. Despard settled down to the new mode of life as if he had been thoroughly used to it. He was up soon after daybreak helping Marjorie to milk the cows; watching her scald the cream and make the butter, and he insisted on being taught how to do these things himself. He made himself useful about the farm, too, and quite won John Dale's heart. He proved himself nearly as good a shot at the rabbits as Rupert, though he quite failed to catch the cunning Devonshire trout, and frankly admitted that it bored him to throw a fly.

"I want to look at this old tin-mine of yours," he announced one day; and he asked Dale for particulars about it, as to how long it had been worked, why it had failed, and the state it was now in.

"It has failed because there wasn't enough tin to make it worth while working," Dale told him. "We thought we were going to make a fortune out of it, but it turned out the other way."

Despard nodded and stroked his black moustache thoughtfully. "I know something about the Cornish mines, and I've got a bit of money in one or two of them. As you know, they restarted working a year or two ago, and they're doing well now. There might still be money in yours, Mr. Dale."

"You're welcome to all you can find," the old man laughed.

Rupert and Robert Despard spent the whole of one afternoon exploring the mine. The examination was not made without danger and difficulty. To Rupert's surprise very little water had penetrated the main shaft, and Despard pointed out that the river and the surrounding bog-land probably acted as drainage. It was easy to find traces of tin in the tunnel right up to where the working had ceased.

"It ought to have paid to follow this up," Despard said thoughtfully. "A case of too much capital or too little. Or else the engineer was a duffer."

"You don't think it would pay to erect a new plant and start operations again, do you?" Rupert said eagerly.

Despard shrugged his shoulders. "The risk would be too great. If it were a gold mine, now, people would fall over one another to put money into it. Or the magic word, radium!"

Despard stopped suddenly, and raising the light he carried glanced into Rupert's face. He had been scraping and poking about in the bed of the tunnel while he talked, using a short, pick-like instrument he had commandeered from the farm.

He held out a small piece of black substance having something of the colour and consistency of tar. He told Rupert to examine it closely. The latter did so.

"Well?" Despard cried sharply. There was a trace of nervous excitement in his voice which Rupert had never heard before.

"Well?" the latter said.

"Good Lord! no wonder you've been plucked three times!" Despard cried. "Don't you know what this stuff is?"

Rupert examined it again. "Rather like pitch-blende."

"Yes—something," Despard sneered.

A sharp cry escaped Rupert's lips. He bent down and examined the black, sticky substance more carefully.

"It is pitch-blende!"

"Extinguish the light," Despard said sharply.

Rupert obeyed. A long time they stood in the darkness. Presently Despard commenced to dig and scrape the surface and sides of the tunnel. After a little while he struck a match and re-lit the lantern.

"That was expecting rather too much," he whispered.

They collected the pitch-blende they had found, and putting it into his handkerchief Despard dropped it into his pocket.

"I'll examine this and test it to-night. But don't say anything about it, not even to your father. Just because we've found pitch-blende it doesn't mean there's radium. But—they have found traces in some of the Cornish mines, you know."

Marjorie was waiting for them at the surface of the mine. She gave a shriek as she saw them, for their clothes were torn and discoloured, and they were wet through.

"Well, how much tin did you find?" she asked jokingly. "Are you going to make our fortunes?"

Despard looked at her. "Supposing I were to make a fortune for you, what reward should I get?"

"Oh, fifty per cent. of the profits," she laughed, lowering her eyes.

"I shouldn't ask that," he whispered. "I should want something money couldn't buy."

When they reached the farmhouse supper was waiting. It was growing dark, and work was over for the day. John Dale had not returned home.

"We had better wait," Marjorie suggested, "He's never late. Probably he has gone up to Post Bridge Hall to see Sir Reginald Crichton on business."

The mention of Reginald Crichton's name reminded Rupert of what his father had told him about having to mortgage the property. Supposing there was anything in their discovery that afternoon the mortgage would have to be paid off before anything else was done. He went up to Despard's room and suggested that while they were waiting for supper they should examine the sample of pitch-blende they had taken from the mine.

Despard locked the door and laid the mass of putty-like substance on the table. "To get a proper test we ought to take or send it up to town," he said. "But there's one simple method——"

He was interrupted by Marjorie calling to Rupert. "You're wanted at Post Bridge Hall at once," she told him. "Father is there, and they've sent a servant over to ask you to go up."

Rupert swore under his breath. "What on earth can the matter be? You don't think anything has happened to—the old man?"

Marjorie shook her head. "I don't think so. The message is simply that you're wanted."

Rupert put on his hat and hurried down the path which led to the main road. Crossing Post Bridge he turned to the right and soon found himself in the avenue that led to the Hall. It was situated fairly high up under the shadow of the tors and surrounded by trees. Lights shone cheerfully from all the windows. Before he could ring the front-door bell Sir Reginald Crichton stepped out and met him.

"Sorry to trouble you," he said curtly; "but the matter is rather important. Do you mind coming up to my study?"

Rupert followed, wondering what had happened. To his relief he saw his father standing with his back to the fireplace.

Sir Reginald shut the door, then sitting down an old oak bureau motioned Rupert to a seat. But the latter remained standing.

"Perhaps you will explain," said Sir Reginald, looking at John Dale.

Rupert looked from one man to the other, and he noticed that his father's face was pale, the features drawn. Before speaking Dale cleared his throat nervously.

"It's about that cheque I sent you eight days ago. Just before you left London. A cheque for five pounds which Sir Reginald drew and made payable to me. It wasn't crossed, so I endorsed it and sent it to you."

Rupert nodded. "Yes, I received it."

"And cashed it?" Sir Reginald spoke.

Rupert started. "No, I——" Again he looked from one man to the other. He felt suddenly guilty. "As a matter of fact, I'm sorry to say I lost it."

"Lost it? You never told me." Dale spoke. "Of course you wrote to the bank?"

Rupert bit his lip. "I forgot all about it—in the excitement of packing up and coming home."

John Dale was about to speak, but Crichton held up his hand. "Did the loss of five pounds mean so little to you, then?" he asked Rupert.

The latter moistened his lips. His sense of guilt increased, though he had only been guilty of gross carelessness. Yet, how could he explain the situation?

"I was fearfully rushed and worried at the time," he said, fumbling for words. "As a matter of fact, the morning I received it I went to the races, and

I only discovered the loss when I got back. I must have pulled it out of my bag with some letters and papers. I hope—nothing is wrong?"

Sir Reginald leant forward and stretched out his hand. "Look at this, sir."

Rupert took the slip of paper he held out. It was a cheque. He saw written across the back of it his father's name. He looked at the face of the cheque.

"*Pay John Allen Dale or bearer the sum of five hundred pounds.*" Then underneath in figures "*£500 0s. 0d.*"

"Exactly," Crichton said. Rising to his feet he stood in front of Rupert and looked at him searchingly. "Your father sent you a cheque for five pounds. Since it left your possession the pounds have been changed to five hundred. That sum was paid out by my bankers. Naturally, I want an explanation. Your father sent it to you. You admit having received it, and say you lost it. I'm afraid that explanation doesn't satisfy me."

"You don't mean to say you think——"

Rupert flared up, then stopped.

Five hundred pounds! The significance of the amount suddenly struck him. The amount Ruby Strode had won for him over Ambuscade. Once again he saw himself sitting in his rooms in Westminster facing ruin; he saw himself take his revolver from the drawer and hold it to his breast. Then he felt the arms of the woman he loved round him; he heard her voice telling him it was a coward's way. And when he told her it was the only way, she confessed that she had secretly backed the outsider and won him five hundred pounds.

He began to tremble. His body became wet with perspiration. He heard his father's voice raised apprehensively.

"Rupert, my boy. Speak, for God's sake, speak! Say you know nothing about it."

Rupert raised his face and tried to look at his father. He did not see him; he only saw the face of the woman he loved. She had confessed she loved him better than life itself.

"Speak!" John Dale cried, his voice rising. "Speak!"

"Speak!" Sir Reginald Crichton echoed. "Confess that you are either guilty—or not guilty."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE ACCUSATION.

Rupert pulled himself together and looked at Sir Reginald. "I have nothing to say, sir."

"Nothing to say!" Clenching his fists Dale strode towards his son as if intending to strike him.

With a gesture Sir Reginald stopped the old man and waved him back. "Gently, gently! You must keep calm, Mr. Dale. I am sure, on consideration, your son will see the advisability of making a clean breast of this affair."

Old John Dale controlled himself and stood quite still, folding his arms across his chest. Until now he had scarcely taken his eyes off his son's face. He was afraid to look any longer lest instead of the boy he had loved and for whom he had worked and made so many sacrifices—he saw a thief, a criminal.

There followed a silence. To each man present it seemed interminably long, but neither father nor son dared break it. They were standing almost opposite one another. The younger man held himself very erect, his head thrown back; he was looking straight at Sir Reginald Crichton, resentment in his eyes. Sir Reginald, seated at his bureau, was obviously embarrassed and ill at ease. Judging from appearances their positions should have been reversed.

"Come, won't you speak?" the latter said in a more kindly voice. "For your father's sake, Mr. Rupert, and your sister's—as well as for your own."

"I have told you I have nothing more to say. I know nothing about it."

Sir Reginald raised his eyebrows, and picking up a pencil commenced to tap it thoughtfully on the edge of the bureau.

There was another long silence. Twice Dale tried to speak and failed. His great frame was shaken. He took a couple of steps towards his son and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"I know you didn't do it, my boy," he said in a voice that was no longer under control. "Maybe, you're ashamed of yourself for having lost it; or, more like, you had it stolen, and perhaps you have a feeling you might be able to point out the thief, only you don't like to speak for fear of making a mistake.... Unjust accusation...." His voice faltered. "I know you're innocent, Rupert, thank God, I know that."

Rupert turned his head and looked at his father for one moment. For the first time in his life he saw tears in the old man's eyes. He turned his back on him as the blood rushed to his face. It was almost more than he could bear.

Of course, he was innocent, and it was impossible to conceive anyone, least of all his father, believing him guilty of such a mean and dastardly trick. A crime worse than theft or robbery.

He experienced a revulsion of feeling. He knew if he had spoken out at once and confessed exactly what had happened the morning he had received the cheque, both Sir Reginald and his father would have believed him. But, in spite of

the brave words old Dale had just spoken, and in spite of Sir Reginald's patience, Rupert knew that already they mistrusted him. At the back of the heart of one was suspicion amounting perhaps to certainty. At the back of the heart of the other was fear.

"Do you believe I altered the amount on the cheque?" he asked Sir Reginald.

"I have asked you what you know about it. Until you give me a direct reply I must naturally suspend judgment. I should certainly find it very hard to believe you guilty of such a crime."

"It was I who sent for you," Dale whispered, "directly Sir Reginald told me what had happened and showed me the cheque."

Rupert looked from one man to the other. There was fear in his heart, too. A nameless fear. He had only to say outright what he knew about the matter, tell them exactly what had occurred the day he received his father's letter containing the cheque, and they would believe him.

They would believe him, but their suspicions would naturally be shifted to another quarter. He would have to confess that he had been in debt, that he had gone to the races, that he had won a large sum of money, exactly five hundred pounds—exactly the amount to which the cheque he had just seen had been altered.

Sir Reginald was still drumming with the end of his pencil on the edge of the bureau. "I'm sure you'll answer me a few questions, Mr. Rupert. They'll be brief and to the point, and I hope your answers will be the same."

Rupert nodded. "I've already told you I've nothing to say. If you believe me to be innocent why do you want to question me?"

Sir Reginald shrugged his shoulders. Drawing forward a sheet of paper he picked up a pen and dipped it in the ink.

"On what date did you receive this cheque?"

Rupert told him. He answered sharply in a high-pitched tone of voice. He felt he was on the defensive, and he resented the feeling.

"I presume you looked at it?" Rupert nodded. "You saw the amount for which it was drawn? What was the amount?"

"Five pounds."

"What did you do with it?"

"I can't remember. I think I left it on the table with my father's letter."

"What were your movements that morning?"

"I don't see what these questions have got to do with——"

Again he felt his father's hand on his shoulder gripping it tightly. "Answer Sir Reginald, my boy, no matter what he asks you. You can have nothing to hide from him. Tell him frankly everything you did that day, no matter what it was.... We are men, we were young once; we shall understand."

Rupert stared across the dimly-lit room. The curtains had not been drawn across the windows, and outside he could see a cluster of fir-trees silhouetted against the sky, a glimpse of the white road bounded on either side by stone walls, and, beyond, the line of moorlands. The twilight had almost gone, and the stars were shining in the sky. He was conscious of a great silence surrounding the house, the silence which always brooded over the hills.

Not so many hours ago the roar of London had echoed in his ears, and he had sat in the windows of the lodging-house in Westminster and watched the river of life rushing torrent-like at his feet. Like a swimmer eager to test his strength, he had flung himself into it and been swept away.

"We are waiting," Sir Reginald Crichton said.

"I don't know that I did anything in particular," Rupert replied. "I was awaiting the result of my examination. I was out most of the day: it was when I came back that I missed the cheque."

"I suppose you had plenty of money to pay the bill at your lodgings and fare down here, or you would have cashed it immediately?" Sir Reginald suggested.

"In the last letter you wrote me, Rupert, you told me you were rather hard up. That's why I sent you the whole of Sir Reginald's cheque, though I was rather pressed for money myself."

Dale spoke under his breath, almost in a whisper. He knew he was not helping his son by what he said, but the truth was dearer to him than anything else. And only by truth could his son be cleared and the mystery surrounding the cheque solved.

"I had been lucky," Rupert stammered. "I had made a little bit—at racing."

Sir Reginald dropped his pen and moved his chair back. "Oh, so you go in for racing! Forgive me for being interfering, but I shouldn't have thought you could have afforded that. You must be aware that some time ago your father was forced to mortgage most of the land surrounding his farm, and that I am the mortgagee?"

"I told you I had been lucky."

"And that's the reason you treated the cheque your father sent you so carelessly—for, you knew in sending it that he and your sister were depriving themselves of many of the necessities of life."

Rupert lost his temper. Sir Reginald was making him feel a cur, making suggestions which he had no right to make; poisoning his father's mind against him.

"If you want to know everything, it was the day the cheque arrived that I made a bit," he blurted out. "I'd got a few pounds in my pocket, money I'd borrowed from my friend Despard. He's staying with us now. If you want corroborative evidence. I went down to the races and backed the winner. I suppose

in the excitement of the moment I must have pulled the cheque out of my pocket and lost it on the racecourse."

Sir Reginald sighed. It might have been a sigh of satisfaction or of doubt. "Why couldn't you have told us this before? If, as seems very probable, you lost it at the races, it is easy to conceive that some one picked it up, saw his opportunity, and very cleverly altering the figures took it to the bank next morning." He rose to his feet. "Of course, I shall have to go up to London and put it into the hands of the police. I'm afraid I shall need your help. They are sure to want from you the time you travelled to the racecourse and back, the enclosure you patronised, and so forth. I can rely on your giving me all the help in your power, I am sure."

"I have told you I know nothing," Rupert cried, turning on his heel. "I can only tell the police the same thing." He picked up his hat. "Have you finished your examination?"

Sir Reginald bowed. "I'm sorry if it has been unpleasant. But I could not help myself. And it would hardly have been fair to you or your father if I had made enquiries behind your back."

Rupert nodded, and crossing the room unsteadily opened the door. "Are you coming, father?" he asked the old man, without looking at him.

"You can go on, Rupert, I'll follow presently," Dale replied.

Once outside Rupert walked quickly down the drive, past the dark, great clump of fir-trees and along the rough granite-made road until he turned into the main Princetown road and reached Post Bridge. A little way up the hill the lights of the inn twinkled through the darkness. The waters of the East Dart purled beneath him. As they rushed over the rocks the foam glittered in the starshine. A bat swept past his face, its wings humming faintly. He leant his arms on the stone parapet of the bridge and gazed down into the crooning waters.

He was innocent, but he knew that up at Post Bridge Hall there was one man who believed him guilty of a despicable crime, and that one man his own father, who, not knowing what to believe, doubted him. His own father, himself the soul of honour, as proud of his good name as was perhaps the greatest man in the land.

His father, a man of the soil, whose greatest ambition had been to turn his son into a man of the world, a gentleman, to give him a profession, a start in life, an independence. For that he had made many and great sacrifices, even to the mortgaging of the land he owned and which his forefathers had loved and cultivated. And his only other child being a daughter he had expected her to make many, and perhaps as great, sacrifices also.

Was this to be the end? Rupert asked himself. The family name and honour dragged through the mire, their affairs the gossip of the newspapers of the Devon towns and villages, to find himself accused and perhaps forced to defend himself.

Of course, he could prove his innocence—he heard himself laugh. For a moment it all seemed so absurd. He felt he had been behaving like a coward and a fool in not frankly confessing that he had gone the way of nearly all young men in London, got into debt, gambled, fallen in love, and saved himself by one of those strange tricks of fortune which happen once and again in a lifetime. He drew himself up and looked at the sky blazing with stars now, the million eyes of the night.

He had held his peace because he loved. Because if he spoke he would have to drag the name of the woman he loved into the affair. She would be sent for, questioned, and bullied; the police would examine her. They would find out that she had gone to the races with him and put the sum of exactly five pounds on Ambuscade at a hundred to one, winning the fatal amount for which the cheque had been altered—five hundred pounds.

Fortune had smiled on him, but it had kissed the one cheek only to smite the other. Of course, Ruby knew nothing about the missing cheque, and could not help him in any way. It would be contemptible to drag her name into it.

Even if it came to a question—his honour or hers. And his honour meant his father's and sister's.

Presently he heard footsteps approaching, and he moved farther along the bridge down the side of the hill to the water's edge. Every one for miles around knew him, and it was not the moment he wanted to be recognised or asked futile questions about his life in London—how he had enjoyed himself, or whether he had passed his examination.

The people crossed the bridge, walking very slowly. Now and then their voices rose above the sound of the river. He looked over his shoulder; a man and a woman, and as they passed he recognised his sister Marjorie and young Lieutenant James Crichton, Sir Reginald's only son, who was spending his leave at home. They were walking close together, arm in arm, and in Crichton's right hand his sister's left hand was firmly clasped.

He saw their faces for a moment in the starlight, and in that moment he knew they were lovers. He waited until they were out of sight, then he hurried back to the farm.

Sir Reginald Crichton's son was in love with his sister Marjorie. Here was a fresh complication which at first seemed to add to the tragedy which threatened him. "Jim" and he had been old friends as boys. Crichton was his senior, and when he left Woolwich and was eventually attached to the Royal Flying Corps, they lost sight of one another. Presently, Rupert's discovery suggested a loophole of escape—if matters turned out badly for him. If Jim Crichton and Marjorie were engaged to be married Sir Reginald might be persuaded not to push enquiries concerning the altered cheque too far!

There was something not quite pleasant in the thought, and he dismissed it. But before he had reached his home it had returned again. He entered the parlour; the lamp was burning on the table, the peat fire glowed in the grate.

Despard sat in the arm-chair before it, his feet stretched on to the mantelshelf, a pipe between his lips. An old-fashioned photograph album was on his knees. Rupert walked to his side and bent over his shoulders.

"What on earth are you looking at?" he asked with exaggerated carelessness.

Despard pointed to an amateur photograph of Marjorie. She was seated on a stool in one of the fields milking a cow.

"Rather good, isn't it?" Rupert said. "The local parson took it last year."

Despard nodded. "It would make a very fine picture. It's the sort of thing which, if properly done, would create a sensation in our Academy." He knocked his pipe out into the grate. "Do you know your sister's a jolly sight too pretty and too intelligent to be shut up in a wild, God-forsaken place like this? It's criminal, old man. When you go back to London, you ought to take her with you; give her a chance of mixing with decent people and seeing life, eh?"

"She's happy enough here," Rupert said uneasily.

Despard smiled and closed the book. "She would be happier in London. See if you really can't take her back with you, Rupert.... Perhaps I'd better confess at once that I've fallen in love with her! It's sudden, I know, and, of course, I shouldn't dream of breathing a word to her yet. But—one good turn deserves another, and if you get a chance put in a word for me, will you?"

## CHAPTER VI.
### FORGERY.

Before leaving London, Rupert, at Despard's suggestion, had applied for an order to go over the convict prisons at Princetown. It arrived the morning following the interview with Sir Reginald Crichton.

Perhaps because he had lived under the shadow of the prisons all his life, the idea of visiting them (as strangers and tourists from the cities often did) never occurred to him. The great granite building standing on the top of the hill above the West Dart, ugly, ominous, a blot on nature, man's menace to mankind, had never interested him or caused him to think for a moment of the unfortunate

beings who were incarcerated there. It was just a landmark, almost part of the life of the moorlands. He knew that originally, in the days long past, French prisoners of war had been kept there, the men against whom his ancestors had fought. It was some time after the war was over and peace declared that it had been rebuilt and turned into a penal establishment.

Despard wanted to go over it for reasons Rupert could not understand; but he agreed to take him with just the same tolerance with which Despard himself might have shown the Tower of London or Madame Tussaud's to his sister Marjorie.

As a matter of fact, now that the order had come and Despard was anxious to make use of it at once, Rupert felt grateful. It served as an excuse to spend the day away from the farm—and the Crichton family. They made him feel, if not exactly guilty, at least ashamed of himself. He had passed a sleepless night, and during the long, silent hours he had examined his conscience and not found it as clean as it had been the last time he slept in that little room overlooking the valley of the Dart.

Life in London was complex: by his own actions he had made it more complicated, and by his ignorance of men and women and the ways of the world. It seemed as if he had never had time in the city to examine himself or to consider his actions, scarcely time to think.

The only rest for the worker in London is excitement. Down here on the moorlands it was good to be alone—if one had eyes to see, ears to hear, and a soul to understand nature.

In London loneliness was a terrible thing: loneliness of streets that had no end, of walls that could not be scaled, of windows through which one might gaze and find no perspective.

A lonely man in London was very like a convict in Dartmoor prison. For so many hours of the day he was let out to work; for the remainder he could eat or sleep or gaze at the great walls of his prison and listen to the footsteps of those who passed along the apparently unending corridors—the streets of his city.

Rupert had at first found relaxation in seeing London from the top of a penny omnibus, in attending football matches, and occasionally visiting the pits of theatres. And then, as he made friends music halls and card parties became the attraction, with occasionally a race meeting near London, followed, perhaps, by a "burst" at a "night club."

And the harder he studied to pass his examination the more insistently did his brain demand rest, and, failing rest, excitement. Without pausing to think he had fed it, pandered to desires sometimes unnatural, always unhealthy, and generally expensive.

The meeting with Ruby Strode had come too late. At first she appeared in

the guise of another form of excitement. But slowly, as he realised her worth and his own stupidity, and discovered that he loved her, he put on the brake.

But debts had accumulated; though he gave up card parties and wine parties he found that friendship with an actress of the Ingenue Theatre was an expensive luxury. Falling in love made him reckless; and when he knew that it really was love, pride prevented him from telling Ruby the position of his affairs. He left her to find out for herself.

There was one advantage in this. It had proved the sincerity of her affection. She had not realised the seriousness of the situation until the fatal day when Rupert took her down to the races, and laughingly told her that his future life and happiness depended on the favourite winning the big race of the day.

That it meant her future life and happiness, too, perhaps had not occurred to him. Men are inclined to overlook the women's point of view in these matters. He did not think, and not until the race was over and he was back in his lodgings in Westminster did he realise the havoc he had wrought on other lives—his father's, his sister's, and the life of the woman he loved.

Then the miracle happened. He burnt his boats behind him and left London with a light heart, quite certain he would never make a fool of himself again.

And now Sir Reginald Crichton made him realise that his folly might pursue him for some little time. Rupert had made the mistake of thinking that by repentance he could wipe out the past.

The start was made for Princetown shortly after breakfast—for which meal Rupert put in a late appearance. He was afraid to face his father. At the same time a feeling of resentment had grown in his heart, quite unreasonably he knew.

He had hurt the old man, as sometimes he affectionately called him. He had disappointed him. Not one word of blame had escaped John Dale's lips. As yet he had not questioned Rupert as to the manner of his life in London or asked the reasons which had made him run into debt. But Rupert knew what he felt. It was written on the wrinkled, care-worn face. He had aged in the past twelve hours.

Rupert did his best to dismiss Ruby from his thoughts. If his father discovered that he was engaged to be married there would be further complications, and the barrier which had so suddenly risen between them would grow.

And there were other reasons why he did not want to think of her; reasons he would not admit to himself, and yet which continually intruded themselves in his brain.

Absurd fears; doubts; unwarrantable suspicions.

"To look at you, my dear fellow, one would think you were being hauled off to Princetown to do seven years penal servitude. For heaven's sake buck up and say something."

Despard spoke; they were swinging along the moorland road at a good pace, just dropping down the hill to the valley through which the little Cherry Brook rushes to join the Dart.

Marjorie laughed. She was accompanying them as far as the prison, and while they went over it she was going on into the town to do some marketing. She was wearing a short, workman-like little skirt and high lace boots. She carried her hat in her hand and the wind blew through her hair; the sunshine made it gleam like dull gold.

"I believe Rupert's bored," she said, "and he's already longing for the excitement and gaiety of London. You must find it awfully dull here, Mr. Despard. You don't look a bit like the type of man who would enjoy roughing it—for that's what I suppose you call living in a farmhouse on Dartmoor."

"I'm having the time of my life," Despard replied cheerfully. "I was wondering last night whether I could persuade you to take me as a permanent paying guest."

"Like the people who stay at the post office and the inn during the summer months? Do you know," she said, looking at him out of her beautiful grey eyes, "I always feel so sorry for those people; they look unhappy and never seem to have anything to do but to drive about in brakes or motor-cars, or, if the day's wet, wander about holding up an umbrella. If I had to choose between the two, I'd rather be a convict in the prisons than a paying guest."

Despard shrugged his shoulders. "Well, one never knows one's luck. What do you say, Rupert?"

Rupert started. He had not been listening to the conversation. "I can't imagine what pleasure you think you're going to get in looking at a lot of poor brutes, half of whom will probably never know freedom again: thieves, murderers, robbers, and heaven knows what else. The Zoological Gardens in London are depressing enough, heavens knows; this will be worse."

"Not a bit of it," Despard replied. "I believe they're awfully well looked after. Sort of glorified rest-cure. As I said just now, one never knows one's luck. You and I might find ourselves en route to Princetown one day, handcuffed between a couple of warders. I always like to be prepared for eventualities. I believe convicts are allowed to choose the work for which they are best adapted or find themselves suited, so keep your eyes open this morning, Rupert, and pick out the softest job."

They paused for a few moments on Cherry Brook bridge, gazed into the pool on the left and watched the trout sporting. The waters sang as they tumbled over the granite rocks and swirled beneath the bracken and heather which overhung the peat banks. In the distance a sheep bell tinkled. Now and again one of the wild Dartmoor ponies neighed. The air was sweet with the faint smell

of gorse.

Rupert sighed. He almost wished he had never left the moorlands. His father had doubtless sent him to London to make a gentleman of him with the best intentions in the world. But it was a mistake. They were moorland folk. The land belonged to them and they to the land. He was not suited to the city or the ways of the men who dwelt in it.

A mirthless laugh escaped his lips, and Marjorie looked at him and laid her hand on his. "What's the matter, Rupert? You're not worried, are you, dear."

"Oh, he's in love, that's all," Despard grinned. And he looked at Marjorie. "I suppose you've never been in love, Miss Dale, so you can't sympathise with that blessed but unhappy frame of mind."

They watched the course of the Cherry Brook as it wound in and out, to and fro, making a complete circle here, almost a triangle there, finally disappearing behind the ridge of hill. There was a wistful look in Marjorie's eyes.

"I think I've always been in love—in love with life. I suppose that sounds stupid, or sentimental, to you."

"Life will fall in love with you one day, and be revenged."

She shook her head. "For a woman life is love, and love is life. For a man I suppose it consists of fighting.... She gives life, he takes it."

"Rather a queer point of view," Despard laughed.

"But life is queer, isn't it?" she answered gravely. "If all one reads is true. The greatest nations are the most densely populated, where all the men bear arms—and the women bear children that the men who are killed may be replaced! It does seem a waste, but I suppose one day we shall find something better to do."

"Let's get on," Despard suggested. "You've got a pretty stiff hill to tackle. And I'm a town bird, remember, and can't go the pace you can."

He rather wished that Rupert had stayed at home so that he could have had a *tête-à-tête* with Marjorie.

Rupert did not seem inclined to take the hint he had given him the previous evening; possibly he knew his reputation with women too well to trust him.

To Despard, Marjorie Dale was unique, and her beauty refreshing after the faded and painted women he knew in London. She was a strange mixture of innocence and fearlessness which appealed to him strongly. The fact that he could not understand her was an added attraction. Not an easy woman to make love to, and he knew she would be a very difficult woman to win.

For the moment he only wanted to amuse himself, but to do that with any measure of safety or success he knew he would have to superficially play the game. That was why he had hinted to Rupert that he was falling in love with Marjorie.

They reached the prison gates just before mid-day. The town itself lay a

little distance beyond, with a couple of hotels and a little railway station, and quite a good sprinkling of shops. The two men agreed to meet Marjorie an hour later, and Despard insisted on lunching at the principal hotel.

They watched Marjorie out of sight. Ringing the bell outside the great gates, a porter appeared from his lodge, examined the order, and admitted them.

They were kept waiting a little while in the porter's lodge. Eventually a warder appeared and asked them to sign their names in a large book which was kept there for the purpose. They had to fill in their places of residence, their professions, and various other details.

"I almost feel as if I were signing my own warrant," Despard chuckled. He looked at the warder. "I suppose we shall be let out again?"

"We shall be only too happy to let you go, sir," the man replied without moving a muscle of his clean-shaven, emotionless face.

Despard linked his arm through Rupert's as the chief warder led them across the great stone square and put them in charge of a subordinate.

"For heaven's sake smile, man, or they'll really think you've done time here. That's exactly what you look like."

"I can't see that there's anything to smile at. Other people's misfortunes never amuse me."

"Think of your own, then," Despard replied, "that will cheer you up. By the way, have you heard from Ruby since you left town?"

Rupert's cheeks flushed. He was saved the necessity of replying, by the warder halting them outside another gate. It was opened with much jangling of keys.

Though the sun was shining outside it could not penetrate here. The building was almost entirely of granite, cold and grey. There was no relief for the eye anywhere; just harsh granite underfoot, overhead, and on all sides. Rupert, free man though he was, felt a strange sense of repulsion, a childish desire to beat against those granite walls, to try and break them down, to escape.

The whole time he was in the building, anywhere within the surrounding walls of the prison, he felt as if he were a prisoner. Now and then he heard the warder explaining. He found it difficult to pay any attention to him.

Despard, on the other hand, was interested in everything, asking innumerable questions, watching convicts at work and inspecting their work. Almost every kind of trade seemed to be carried on within the prison walls. Tailors, saddlers, shoemakers, basket-makers. The men sat or stood in rows, each one a certain distance apart from his fellows; and in the middle and at the end of each row was a warder.

Absolute silence reigned, a silence that to an imaginative person like Rupert could be felt, almost seen. It seemed to be part of the stone corridors, the

granite walls. And granite appeared to be beaten into the convicts' souls until the expression of it was graven on their faces. Like their walls they were cold, grey, silent. Here and there a few retained traces of humanity; others suggested primeval men of the stone age, though they wore no hair on their faces and their heads had been shaven until nothing but innumerable spikes stood erect from the scalp.

Each man bent over his work as if he were absorbed in it. Rupert, watching closely, noticed their eyes roved here and there, moving quickly, sometimes fearfully; like the eyes of an animal ever on the watch. Sometimes their lips moved, too, though not a sound escaped them.

They passed into the kitchens—here there was blessed warmth again and the smell of newly-baked bread—through innumerable corridors and passages.

They were shown into a cell, A.C. 2061. "Just room enough to die"—as Despard humorously expressed it.

The cells in which the majority of prisoners were confined were built in the middle of a square, the floors rising one above the other, all securely railed off, so that one warder on guard above, could command a view of every cell in the square.

Rupert felt a sense of relief when they reached the porter's lodge again. They had to wait a moment while a gang of convicts marched in through the courtyard. They were accompanied by warders with loaded carbines. They had been at work out on the moorlands, quarrying and farming and digging peat.

"Well, I hope you're satisfied," Rupert said, when they found themselves walking along the road towards Princetown. "I felt a beast all the time. I only wonder the poor brutes didn't get up and go for us."

"Oh, they're happy enough," Despard said carelessly. "But, I confess it's good to be outside again in the air and the sunshine, and, by gad! it has given me an appetite. I hope the local hotel can provide us with something to eat."

They met Marjorie just outside the market-place, and though all she wanted was a little bread and cheese and a glass of milk, Despard insisted on ordering a big luncheon and opening a bottle of champagne.

"We want something to take the taste of the granite out of our mouths," he laughed.

Rupert's spirits rose when they started to walk back to Blackthorn Farm. Marjorie found an opportunity of telling him that she had bought herself some material for a new dress, and made several purchases for her wardrobe out of the money he had given her. Her pride and pleasure in having money to spend made him realise how selfish he had been, and he again made a solemn vow that when he returned to London he would work day and night and not spend a penny more than was necessary.

Ruby would help him in that, he knew, and he would no longer have any shame in appearing before her in his true light.

He had been afraid that when she knew he was a poor man he would lose her. And but for her he would now be ruined!

That evening after supper John Dale drew his son aside. Rupert realised that an interview was inevitable, and though he dreaded it he knew that the moment had come. He expected some kind of a lecture, a warning on the folly of gambling and living beyond his means, and an appeal as to his future conduct. He knew his father would not be angry, probably would not even blame him for what he had done. He almost wished he would. It would be easier than kindness and the pain and disappointment he saw in the old man's eyes whenever he looked at him.

To his surprise Dale made no reference to the past. He simply told him that Sir Reginald had received a letter that morning from his bankers, and he outlined the contents.

The cheque which Rupert had lost and which had since been altered from five to five hundred pounds, had been brought to the bank by a messenger boy, who was given the amount in gold and notes.

On enquiry at the office from which the messenger had been despatched, it had been ascertained that a young man had handed the cheque in to the office in an envelope addressed to the bank, and he had called later on for the money, which had been handed him.

Rupert listened with a sense of relief. "Have they traced the man?" he asked.

Dale shook his head. "Not yet. But, of course, now the affair is in the hands of the police. The manager of the district messenger office where the message was handed in described him as a tall, fair man with a slight moustache, well dressed, and, as far as he remembered, wearing a tall silk hat, and a light overcoat." Dale laid his hand affectionately on his son's shoulder. "Last night, at one dreadful moment, I had a feeling that Sir Reginald suspected you, my boy, so this is a great relief to me."

Rupert laughed a little uneasily. "I suppose it did seem rather queer my losing the beastly cheque and Sir Reginald knowing we were so awfully hard up for money. But you see, father, it arrived at a critical moment, just when I was awaiting the result of my exam., knowing I was dreadfully in debt, and I had made up my mind to risk everything by backing the favourite in the big race. The money I had in hand was borrowed money. I know now it was rotten of me and I'm awfully ashamed. I promise you I shan't make a fool of myself again. I've—I've plenty of money to go on with, and if you want any——"

Dale shook his head. "I'm old-fashioned, I daresay you'll laugh at me. If I

were a rich man I don't say I wouldn't do a bit of gambling myself occasionally. But we're poor, and perhaps that makes me extra proud. Keep your money, my boy; pay all your debts, but don't ask me to take any. I couldn't take money that you had won like that. You had no right to take the risk; therefore, to me it almost seems as if you had no right to the money. But it's too late to go back now, so use what's left, but use it carefully for your own sake."

Rupert bowed his head. He made up his mind to make a clean breast of everything, to tell his father about Ruby Strode and his love for her. But just as he was about to speak Dale interrupted him.

"I'm afraid you'll have to start by going back to town to-morrow morning. Sir Reginald left to-day and he said he was afraid it would be necessary for you to go up. It will only be for a couple of days, I expect, and you'll come straight back here, won't you?"

Rupert nodded. "Of course—I'll go if necessary, but I can't see why I should be wanted. I've told Sir Reginald all I know."

Dale cleared his throat uneasily. "It's not Sir Reginald, it's the officials at the bank and—Scotland Yard has charge of the affair. They want you to give them an exact account of your movements, what you did and where you went on the day you received and lost the cheque. It's the least you can do under the circumstances, my boy. You see, if the money's not recovered, I shall have to make it good."

Rupert nodded and said no more. His heart sank again. Yes, unless the bank recovered the money, whether his father was legally liable or not, Rupert knew that if it meant selling the old homestead and everything he possessed in the world to pay Sir Reginald, he would do so.

After all, perhaps he had won only to lose.

Before going to bed that night he knocked at the door of Marjorie's room, and he sat on the edge of her bed just as he had been accustomed to do in the old days when they were boy and girl together with not a thought in the world to trouble them, happy and contented in the life and work of the moorlands.

At first they talked of little things, things which had lost their importance to Rupert, but still went to make up life for Marjorie. Then she fell to questioning him, asking him about his life in London, and if he were happy.

"Somehow, you've changed," she confessed. "You don't look as well or so jolly as you used to. There's nothing seriously wrong, is there, old boy?"

He shook his head. "I'm all right. I've a secret which I want to tell you soon, but it's one that makes me happy, and I hope it will make you happy, too.... Of course, now you'll guess, but don't say anything. While I'm away I don't want you to be too much alone with Despard. He's all right, but he's a man's man—the sort of fellow who makes love to every pretty woman he sees. He can't help it,

you know."

Marjorie sat up in her bed and laughed. "Is that a man's man?"

Rupert did not reply, but continued: "Last night, as I was coming back from Post Bridge Hall, I saw you and young Crichton pass me on the bridge. I don't want to interfere, dear, but, somehow, I wondered whether—it looked as though you cared for one another, perhaps——"

Marjorie's cheeks grew the colour of red roses. And, looking at her, as she sat up in her little white bed, with her auburn hair falling in wild disorder about her shoulders, her sun-kissed arms and neck warm against the white lace of her nightgown, he realised for the first time with something like a shock how very beautiful she was. Being a brother he had taken her for granted. He had only looked at her with a brother's eyes. Now he saw her as a man sees a woman; young, in the first flush of youth with warm blood in her veins, a body moulded and made for love.

"Yes, we do love one another," she whispered. "He wants me to marry him one day, but I haven't promised yet. Our positions are so different. I'm not good enough for him."

Rupert laughed. "You, not good enough!"

Marjorie nodded. "That's just what he said when I told him. But it's true. I'm only a farmer's daughter; he's the son of a gentleman. Don't say anything more, dear," as Rupert was about to reply. "Time will tell. If we really care for one another we can both wait until we're quite sure."

Bending down Rupert kissed his sister very gently. There were tears in his eyes. He rose from the bed and blew out the candle and the room was in darkness.

"To tell you the truth, I've been a bit of a rotter since I've been in London," he said, finding it easier to speak in the darkness. "Owing to my stupidity and selfishness, I've got to go up to town to-morrow, but it will only be for a couple of days, and when I come back I'll tell you my secret. For I've fallen in love, Marjorie. I'm beginning to feel as you do—that I'm not good enough for her.... She's wonderful."

He groped his way towards the door and opened it.

"I'm glad, dear," Marjorie whispered. "Good-night."

"Good-night," he replied as he shut the door quietly and went to his own room.

Perhaps it was true. Marjorie was only the daughter and he the son of a farmer. That was why he had made such a mess of things in London. But his eyes had been opened just in time. Love had opened them.

A farmer's son. But his father's ambition should be realised. He would

learn to be a man and a gentleman.

## CHAPTER VII.
### THE VISITORS.

It was dark before the West of England express pulled into Paddington Station. Rupert alighted, carrying a suit-case in his hand. He avoided the temptation of taking a taxi-cab, but walked to the underground railway and took a train to Westminster. He was turning over a new leaf, and, though for the moment he had plenty of money, he had made up his mind henceforth not to spend a penny more than was necessary.

He had not warned his landlady that he was coming, so he found that she was out and that nothing was ready for him. His rooms looked dusty and uncared-for, the blinds were drawn, the atmosphere was cold and cheerless.

The servant suggested lighting the fire, but Rupert shook his head. He was going to do without luxuries of any sort. The first thing he did was to write a letter to Sir Reginald at the Imperial Hotel, telling him of his arrival and saying he was at his service during the whole of the next day. Then, after unpacking his suit-case and changing his clothes, he went out and had dinner at a humble restaurant. He would have telephoned to Ruby, but there was not much time, and, again, it would have meant added expense.

It was curious and irritating how important money had suddenly become. It seemed to check him at every turn—though there was gold in his purse and a balance at his bank. A week or two ago when he had been really broke, it scarcely troubled him. Not as it troubled him now.

For the first time in his life he realised its importance. And his father's words continually echoed in his ears.

At eight o'clock he went to the Ingenue Theatre and waited at the stage door for Ruby Strode to arrive. She generally put in an appearance between eight and eight-fifteen. Every minute cabs and motor-cars drew up and members of the company got out and passed through the narrow entrance to the back of the theatre. Some of the girls he recognised, but he kept out of the way, as he did not wish to be seen.

When the hands of the clock in the doorkeeper's office pointed to a quarter-past eight, he began to grow a little anxious. Ruby was late. As a rule she was

careful about time where her work was concerned.

He waited five minutes more, then stepping inside the passage he knocked at the sliding glass-panel of the doorkeeper's office and asked if Miss Strode had arrived.

"I'm sure I couldn't say," the man in charge replied. "The doorkeeper's been called away for a moment, but he'll be back directly. All the chorus and extra people are supposed to be booked in by eight-fifteen."

As Rupert turned away a girl hurrying along the passage nearly ran into him. As she apologised he recognised Iris Colyer, a friend of Ruby's.

"Do you know if Miss Strode has arrived yet? I wish you'd find her for me," he said. "I've just come up to town from the country, and I don't suppose I shall have more than twenty-four hours here. I want her to meet me after the performance to-night."

He noticed a look of surprise on Miss Colyer's face, and she hesitated a moment before replying. "But don't you know she has gone away? She's been absent about a week now."

"Gone away," Rupert echoed blankly.

"Yes; didn't you know? She was a bit run down. Got a chill or something—at least, she said so! Anyway, she wanted a holiday, poor dear! She's been at it hard for the past twelve months."

"Yes—of course, she wanted a holiday," Rupert said mechanically. "Where has she gone?"

Miss Colyer shrugged her shoulders. "I haven't the faintest idea. As you ought to know, Mr. Dale, Ruby was never one of the chatty ones, never gabbled about her own affairs or other people's like the rest of the girls." She held out a neatly-gloved hand. "I must rush away; late as usual. I expect you'll hear from Ruby in a day or two. I remember now she talked about the Continent—Paris, I believe. Said she'd send me picture postcards—of course, the little wretch never has.... So long."

Iris Colyer disappeared with a nod of her head. Rupert remained standing in the passage, pushed about and buffeted to and fro by stage hands and dressers as they passed in and out, until he recovered himself with an effort and made his way into the street and walked slowly along in the direction of Piccadilly Circus. He found it difficult to believe that Ruby had gone away suddenly without a word to him, without even leaving her address. She had not complained of feeling ill the day they parted. He could not believe she had gone away. A sudden fear struck him that perhaps she was seriously ill.

Calling a cab he drove to her flat in Baker Street. He rang the bell three times without receiving an answer, then he went in search of the porter.

The man corroborated what Iris Colyer had told him. Miss Strode had gone

away for a holiday. He did not know where she had gone, but he remembered her telling the driver of the taxi-cab to take her to Victoria Station. She had left about eight o'clock on the evening of the same day Rupert had started for Devonshire. She had said she would send an address to which letters could be forwarded, but up to the present she had not done so.

Rupert was on the point of asking if she had gone alone, then he checked himself, ashamed of the thought. For jealousy had prompted it.

He turned away without a word and walked blindly down the street. The contemptible thought which had entered his heart, prompted by a sudden wave of jealousy, was swept away by the return of the dreadful fear which had assailed him several times during the last forty-eight hours, and against which he had so far fought successfully. But now it would not be denied. It brought with it a horrible suspicion.

Why had she gone away? he asked himself again and again, still not daring to find the answer which fear prompted. When she had said good-bye to him at his rooms in Westminster she must have known she was going and have made her preparations. Yet she had carefully concealed the fact from him. It was not a case of illness. He would have seen it or she would have told him. He knew she had not tired of her work at the Ingenue. She loved the theatre.

Then why had she gone? Why had she suddenly run away from him, from London, from life?

She loved him. Nothing could shake his faith in her love. She had proved it. Her love had saved him from taking his own life.

Rupert found himself standing just inside the gates of the Marble Arch. The roar of traffic echoed dully in his ears; on his left the lights of Oxford Street glared. Facing him was the darkness of the Park, with here and there the red blot of a gas lamp.

She had saved him from the crime of self-destruction. With extraordinary clearness pictures rose before his eyes presenting each incident of the last day they had spent together. They passed before him like the pictures projected by a cinematograph.

She had not told him of his good fortune until she had found him seated in the chair with a revolver clasped in his hand. Yet she had known his position perfectly well: she had known that with the defeat of the favourite in the big race ruin faced him. Yet she had said nothing until she found him face to face with death.

He put his hands up to his face to shut out the pictures which danced before his eyes. He heard himself laugh.

The next moment he was striding through the Park trying to escape from his thoughts and from the fear which now permeated his whole being.

At Hyde Park Corner he got on to an omnibus. He wanted to get back to his rooms again. He might find something there, some proof, that these fears were groundless.

The first thing he did was to light a fire and switch on all the electric lights. He noticed a vase of faded flowers on the bureau. He was about to throw them into the fire when he hesitated. As far as he could remember there were no flowers in the room when he had left.

He rang the bell and told the servant he wished to speak to the landlady. The maid gave him a scared look and said she would ask her to step up.

Mrs. Jones entered the room noiselessly, and, closing the door, stood with her back to it. She gave Rupert one glance, then stooped down to pick up an imaginary hairpin from the floor.

"I've returned rather unexpectedly on business," Rupert said, speaking jerkily.

"Yes, sir. I hope—there ain't no serious trouble, sir?"

Rupert forced a laugh. "Trouble? Why—by the way, are there any letters for me?"

Mrs. Jones struggled for her pocket, and after a few moments produced a crumpled envelope which she straightened out and handed to Rupert.

"Miss Strode left that for you the day she went away, sir. And she put them flowers in that vase on the bureau. I said as how they wouldn't live until you came back. But, there, it was her fancy to have them while you were away, and I was to leave them there."

Rupert nodded. He turned the envelope over, broke the seal, then changed his mind, and put it into his pocket.

"No other letters?" he asked sharply.

The landlady looked over the top of his head, and picking up her apron commenced to twist the corners nervously.

"A gentleman called to see you this afternoon, sir, and not knowing you was returning I told him you had gone away and weren't expected. He said you were probably coming up to London—I didn't take no notice of that. He wouldn't give his name, sir, but he seemed anxious to see you."

Rupert guessed it was Sir Reginald Crichton. Turning his back on Mrs. Jones he took out his key intending to open the bureau. To his surprise he found it was unlocked. The landlady continued to twist her apron, watching him surreptitiously.

"There are no other letters for me?" he repeated.

"Well, sir," the landlady stammered, "there were some letters—and Miss Strode, after you was gone, I think she paid some bills for you. At least, so I understood her to say. But two gentlemen have been here since you arrived this

evening——"

She stopped, and again picked up an imaginary hairpin from the floor.

Rupert swung round. He waited for her to continue.

"Of course, I shouldn't have admitted them, sir—but, I couldn't help myself."

"What do you mean?"

Mrs. Jones hesitated. She was washing her hands in her apron now, and she sniffed suspiciously once or twice as if tears threatened.

"Speak out—speak plainly, for goodness' sake!" Rupert cried fiercely. "What did these men come for? Who were they?"

"Scotland Yard, sir. In order to search the rooms." She raised her apron to her eyes and commenced to sob. "Such a thing ain't never happened to me before, sir, never since my poor husband died and I was forced to take in lodgers. I told them what I thought of them, but it weren't no good, sir. They had a warrant, or whatever it's called.... And they took your letters, sir. What right had they to them, I'd like to know."

"It's all right, Mrs. Jones," Rupert said quietly. "It's a mistake."

"I know that, sir. But it ain't pleasant to have a thing like that happen in one's own house. Police officers they were, sir.... I told them you was a perfectly respectable gentleman.... You'd paid your bills, as they could see——"

"That will do," Rupert interrupted. "Did they take anything else out of my rooms?"

Mrs. Jones wiped her eyes with her apron. "I don't think so, sir. I had a look round after they'd gone. The race card you'd left and which I'd put on the blotting-pad was missing; and they took the blotting-pad, too, the robbers. I'd just filled it up with fresh blotting-paper the very day before you left, as you may remember."

"Yes, I remember." Again Rupert laughed. "You needn't worry, Mrs. Jones. It's a mistake and it will be put right to-morrow. That'll do, you can go now."

The landlady hesitated, fingering the door-handle. "No one knows but me, sir. Fortunately, I answered the door myself, so my servant, she don't know. People will talk, so——"

"I quite understand. But there will be nothing to talk about. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir. Anything I can do I'm sure——" The door closed on the remainder of the sentence.

Rupert waited until her footsteps had died away. He opened the bureau and searched. A few papers were missing, some notes he had made of his examination, and one or two unimportant letters. As far as he could remember that was all, with the exception of the letters which had arrived during his absence and the bills Ruby had paid. It was lucky they had found and taken the race card.

He took Ruby's letter from his pocket and opened it:

"DARLING,—

"In case you return before we meet again, this is just to greet you and to tell you I have paid all the bills I could find, and put a hundred and fifty pounds to your credit in the bank. It is just possible that I may go away for a little holiday, as I have been feeling rather seedy, lately, and the management say that if I give them a doctor's certificate I can take a rest. So don't worry if you return and find me flown. I won't write to Devonshire as you told me it would be better not to. Guard yourself for my sake. I love you better than anything else in the world.

"**Always yours**, "RUBY."

"P.S. I left some flowers on the bureau. I'm afraid they'll die before you see them, but they are my thoughts, which will always be in this room with you."

He looked at the flowers: red roses drooping their heads. Bending down he pressed the letter to his lips. Then slowly and deliberately he tore it up, threw the pieces on to the fire and watched them burn. Drawing a chair forward he sat down and stretched out his hands to the glowing coal. They were icy cold. He was shivering.

It was obvious that the police suspected him of having altered Sir Reginald Crichton's cheque. Their suspicions must have been pretty strong. They must have found some evidence in order to obtain a warrant to search his rooms.

Perhaps there was a warrant out for his arrest. He smiled grimly. But suddenly the expression on his face changed.

If he were arrested and the news reached Devonshire it would break his father's heart, ruin his sister's life.

He jumped to his feet, picked up his hat, intending to go out at once and find Sir Reginald. The clock struck the hour—eleven. It was too late to see him now. Besides, he did not know for certain that the police suspected him!

They had some letters, the contents of which he did not know. Receipts for the bills Ruby had paid.

It was quite possible they might suspect her. He threw his hat aside and examined the bureau again.

Why had the police taken the blotting-pad? He could not remember having written any letters on the day of the race. Yet the blotting-pad must have contained evidence of some sort or the police would not have taken it. If the cheque had been altered in his rooms and blotted on that pad——

His body broke out into a sweat. He dropped back into the chair and sat gazing into the fire.

His suspicions would no longer be stifled. He still fought them, but it was useless. He reasoned with himself, he argued with himself. But the more he reasoned the more firmly did his suspicions take root.

Ruby had never backed Ambuscade for him at all. She had told a lie to save his life!

And, having saved his life, she had had to find the money which, she told him, they had won, and without which he had confessed he dared not face life.

How had she obtained that money?

He heard the question answered again and again, but he dared not listen. He put his hands over his ears and rocked himself to and fro in agony.

To save him Ruby had sacrificed herself. She could not have known what she was doing. She must have been mad at the time.... As mad as he when he had taken his revolver and placed it over his heart intending self-destruction.

Dawn was in the sky before he went to bed. The sun was commencing to rise before he slept. For sleep only came when he had made up his mind what he would do when a few hours later he met Sir Reginald Crichton.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ARRESTED.

Rupert awoke with a start. Some one had been knocking loudly at his door. He turned slowly round, then sat upright. The little maid had drawn back the curtains and pulled up the blind with a noisy jerk.

"It's past nine o'clock, sir. You slept that sound I began to grow scared—though I wouldn't have woke you but for Mrs. Jones—she's got one of her nasty moods on this morning; she says she can't have breakfast kept about the whole morning. Shall I turn the bath water on for you, sir?"

"Yes, I shan't be five minutes," Rupert replied. "She can start cooking the breakfast at once."

Directly the door closed he jumped out of bed, and slipping on his dressing-gown commenced to shave. Every now and then as he lathered his face he stopped and stared at his reflection in the mirror. The action was unconscious, yet, whenever he caught himself doing it he was filled with a vague sense of un-

easiness. On his way to the bathroom he glanced at the breakfast-table to see if there were any letters for him. He half expected one from Sir Reginald. But there was only a postcard.

As he saw and recognised the writing he picked it up eagerly. It was from Ruby. The postmark was Paris, dated the previous morning. He turned it over, but for a few seconds the writing was blurred by the mist which rose before his eyes. He experienced a sudden, blessed sense of relief. The horror which had haunted him all night went away. He read the address at the top of the card—"Hotel de Tournon." He knew it, a little place in the Latin Quarter patronised by artists and students.

Had she been guilty she would never have written to him nor let him know where she was hiding.

The postcard meant that she was not hiding, that she had not run away. He knew that she was safe.

For the moment nothing else mattered. Not even the danger which threatened him, the possibility of his arrest, the shame it would cast on his father and sister.

The maid came into the room carrying the breakfast-tray, so he took the card to the bathroom, and, locking the door, read it there:

"I arrived here about a week ago. Thought I'd let you know where I was in case you returned to town; but I'm moving on to-morrow, so if you get this write by return. Tell me how you are and if everything is going on satisfactorily. I'm anxious to know. On hearing, I'll send you my next address."

She did not sign her name or her initials.

Slowly, the feeling of relief Rupert had experienced faded away. He read the card again as soon as he was seated at the breakfast-table. Her anxiety to know that all was well with him and progressing satisfactorily, caused fear to return. He told himself angrily that he was a fool, he knew his suspicions were groundless. Of course, she would not have written at all, not even on a postcard, if she had been in any way connected with the altered cheque.

She would really have run away and hidden where no one could find her.

And yet.... When men stole or robbed or murdered or committed any crime, they nearly always did so in the belief that their crime would remain undetected and they would escape. In this case she would be the last person anyone would suspect. No one connected with the affair knew of their friendship or of the relations which existed between them. Neither the Crichtons nor his father had

ever heard of her.

There was a knock on the sitting-room door, and Rupert started and hastily hid the postcard in his pocket. It was only the landlady to ask if he had everything he required and to take any orders he might have to give her for luncheon or dinner.

"I shall be out all day," he replied, trying to speak in his normal voice.

"Will you be staying another night or two, or will you be returning to Devonshire at once, sir?" she asked.

"I expect I shall go back to-morrow."

Even as he spoke he had a curious feeling that he would not return home next day. Some dreadful sub-conscious instinct warned him that he would not return home for a long time.

Directly the landlady had gone he looked at the postcard again, then with unsteady hands tore it up and put it into the fire. Under normal conditions, lover-like, he would have kept it.

In every little thing he did now he seemed to have some ulterior motive. He found himself criticising every action and every thought.

He sipped his tea—it was half cold. He had been seated at the table for ten minutes without realising the flight of time. The bacon lay untouched on his plate. He nibbled a piece of bread, then lay back in his chair staring across the room—at nothing.

The clock on the mantelshelf chimed the hour—half-past ten. It was time he started to call on Sir Reginald Crichton. But he did not move. During the night, during the long hours of darkness, he had made up his mind that the woman he loved was guilty of the crime of which obviously he was already suspected. And he had made up his mind what course of action he would pursue.

But by the cold, clear light of day he began to reason again, once more to argue with himself.

In imagination he saw two figures standing by his side; one on the right, the other on the left. Duty and Love.

His duty was to tell the whole truth. To clear himself from any possible shadow of guilt. That was his duty, because his life was not his own any more than his name. Both, in a sense, belonged to his father and sister.

And his sister was loved by the son of the man he was suspected of robbing. But Love, on his left hand, told him that at all costs he must shield and save the woman who loved him. If she had done this terrible thing, she had done it on the inspiration of the moment; love and fear had made her do it. She had found him seated in this very room determined to take his life. She had entered at the critical moment. And when she had tried to show him his folly and sin, he had told her, calmly and quietly, that nothing could alter his determination. He had

told her he was not only thinking of himself, but of his father and Marjorie.

And that was why she had done this thing ... To save him and those he loved. She had not considered herself at all. It was not just because she loved him and wanted to keep him. He remembered everything she had said to him and he had said to her in this little room a week ago.

He put his hands up to his face. They were wet and clammy now.

Love and Duty.

He heard the front door bell ring. He started to his feet, his nerve had gone. Again the clock chimed the hour—eleven. Sir Reginald Crichton would be waiting for him.

He turned towards the bedroom, then stopped. There was a hurried knock on the door and the landlady entered. He noticed that her face looked white, her large, coarse hands were clasped together.

"There are two—two gentlemen to see you, sir. I didn't know what to say. I told them to wait while I saw if you was at home or not."

Rupert pulled himself together. He looked at Mrs. Jones and smiled. "I haven't finished my breakfast yet. Tell them to come up."

As he spoke the men entered the room. Rupert looked at them, and he knew who they were and why they had come.

There was a moment's silence. He glanced at Mrs. Jones and smiled again.

"You can go."

Very slowly she stepped back.

"I hope nothing's wrong," she stammered. "I'm sure the young gentleman's done nothing—nothing to be ashamed of——"

"That's all right, Mrs. Jones.... Shut the door, please."

He sat down again and sipped some tea. Then he told the men to be seated. One stepped forward. From the breast-pocket of his tunic he took out a slip of paper and unfolded it.

"You are Rupert Allen Dale?"

"Yes. You have a warrant——" He checked himself.

The man said something else which he did not hear. There was a buzzing in his ears. The imaginary figures on either side of his chair had grown to an enormous size. They seemed to be hemming him in. He felt stifled.

Now the man was reading. Reading the warrant for Rupert Allen Dale's arrest. He caught words here and there.

"That's all right," he said when the officer had finished. "But it's a mistake. I'm not guilty."

Again the man repeated automatically the official warning. Rupert glanced round the room. His eyes stopped at the vase of faded flowers, the red roses which Ruby had left for him.... Her thoughts, which she said would always be with him,

surrounding him—in the little room where they had first known one another; known and loved one another.

Again a mist rose before his eyes. He set his teeth, telling himself that he must play the man.

For he had made up his mind what he was going to do, and there was nothing for it now but to do it. To do what he felt was right. Or, right or wrong, to do what heart and head prompted.

"Do you mind if I finish my breakfast?" he said steadily.

The officer glanced at his watch. "I can give you five minutes."

Rupert made a pretence of eating. He managed to swallow a little food. He felt he wanted to remain in this room just a few minutes more. Just a common lodging-house room, that was all, but it seemed now as if the greater part of his life had been passed here.

Here he had worked; here he had really lived, learnt just a little of the meaning of life. Here love had come to him for the first time. It was just as much or even more his home than Blackthorn Farm had been. He swept it with his eyes. But he did not see the common cloth nor the lodging-house breakfast service, the framed text on the wall "Home, Sweet Home," the cheap etching of one of Landseer's pictures, or the coloured print from the Christmas number of the *Illustrated London News*. He did not see the hideous wallpaper with its green and gold pattern which had long irritated him, nor the well-worn Early-Victorian furniture. He only saw the Ghost of the Things that Had Been. The photograph of Ruby on the bureau, the vase of dead roses, and through the windows one of the turrets of Westminster Abbey.

The officer cleared his throat. "I'm afraid——"

Rupert rose instantly. "Will you call a cab?"

Then, to his own surprise, as much as to the surprise of the two men waiting, he laughed. For, suddenly, the vision of an old four-wheeled cab, a policeman on the box next the driver, and inside a man sitting very close to a plain-clothes officer, rose before his eyes. He had seen this four-wheeled cab and its occupants on Westminster Bridge the day he and Ruby went to the races.

And they had both laughed then at some foolish joke he had made.

And so he laughed again now. "Get a taxi-cab, if you can," he said.

He put on his hat and coat, drew on a pair of gloves. Then, not out of bravado, but prompted by a sentimental whim, perhaps, he drew one of the roses from the vase and placed it in his button-hole.

"I'm ready," he said. "I don't suppose you'll want to—to handcuff me?"

The officer put his hand on his arm. "I don't think it will be necessary, sir."

They walked downstairs together side by side.

## CHAPTER IX.
### A PROPOSAL.

The news of his son's arrest did not reach John Dale at once. Though Rupert could have written or wired to him he naturally refrained from doing so. The longer his father and sister remained in ignorance of the crime of which he was accused, the better!

Bad news spreads quickly enough, and he wanted Ruby to remain in ignorance, too. It was fortunate he had burnt her postcard as quickly as he did. He had not answered it, and unless she wrote again when she left Paris he would not know her address.

It was from the lips of Sir Reginald Crichton's son that John Dale eventually learnt of Rupert's arrest. In Crichton's mind there was little doubt but that Rupert was guilty of altering the cheque, and he pitied the proud old farmer from the bottom of his heart.

For Sir Reginald also had an only son, one in whom all his hopes were centred; he could enter into John Dale's feelings and he knew how this blow would strike him. So he wrote to his son Jim, who was, fortunately, at Post Bridge Hall on leave, and asked him to break the news as best he could. Though father and son had no secrets from one another, Jim had not yet told his father of his love for Marjorie Dale. He himself knew there were many reasons against a definite announcement of their engagement. He was still young; needless to say, he could not live on his pay, and though his father made him an allowance it barely covered his expenses. Flying was an expensive game, and, like all men attached to the Royal Flying Corps, Jim's energy and keenness knew no bounds. He was always experimenting, trying new engines, building new machines—giving the benefit of his experience to his corps and to his country.

And there was Marjorie's side of the question and her point of view to be considered. Being both so young, having both been brought up in natural healthy surroundings, it was impossible for them to hide their feelings from one another, and before he was aware of it, Jim had confessed his love and read a corresponding confession in Marjorie's eyes.

It was not until afterwards, when quietly and soberly he thought out their

position and considered the question of their marriage, that he realised love was all in all to a woman, but to him, while he had his profession, it would only be part of his life. And that at present his life was not his own. Not only did it belong to his country, but he risked it almost daily. For that reason alone he felt he could not tie Marjorie down to a formal engagement.

Sir Reginald Crichton little knew the effect his letter, telling his son all about the altered cheque and Rupert Dale's arrest, would have on him. Had he guessed he might not have written it.

He asked him to break the news to poor old John Dale, to tell him that he, Sir Reginald, was seeing his son had the best legal advice that could be obtained, and to advise Dale to come up to London immediately.

It was with a heavy heart that Jim Crichton walked over to Blackthorn Farm early in the morning after he received Sir Reginald's letter. It was not an easy or a pleasant job to tell another man's father that his only son had been arrested on a criminal charge. He was rather annoyed with his father for not writing direct to Dale. For, after all, he could only blurt the news out in a way that might hurt more than if it had been conveyed by letter.

Youth must always be a little egotistical and a little selfish, and what troubled Jim most of all was the shock the news would give to the woman he loved—and the effect it might have on their love and their future life.

If Rupert Dale were guilty! Jim Crichton was a soldier, and so could not help being a little conventional and having more respect sometimes for the opinion of others than his own opinion. He had to consider what the world thought and said. He knew he would have to consider his own position as well as his father's. And he knew as he walked along the banks of the purling Dart in which Rupert and he had often fished together as boys, that before seeing Marjorie and telling her, he would have to make up his mind as to the position he would take up in this wretched affair—if her brother were found guilty. He knew it meant that the Dales would be ruined, probably financially as well as socially.

In the West country a social sin is never forgiven, never forgotten. They would have to leave Devonshire and go far away. And he might never see Marjorie again.

He halted, sat down on a giant boulder, and looked across the bleak moorland to Blackthorn Farm not a quarter of a mile away. At that moment he realised for the first time how deeply he loved Marjorie Dale.

Better than anyone else in the world; more than anyone else in the world. She even came before his profession.

It was with a shock he discovered this. But he had to confess it to himself.

He could not give her up. Not even though her brother were convicted of being a criminal and sent to prison.

It was a glorious summer day. The sun was rising in a cloudless blue sky. A gentle wind brought the scent of gorse. Here and there streaks of purple showed in red heather where it had burst into bloom. Now and then a trout leapt with a noisy splash in the pool at his feet.

A long time James Crichton sat on the granite boulder lost in thought, trying to look at the thing from every point of view, arguing and reasoning with himself. No matter what happened, he could not give up Marjorie. If he had only considered his own feelings, it might have been possible, even though it meant a broken heart. But she loved him. He belonged to her; she looked to him for her future life and happiness. She had done no wrong. Why should she, he asked himself, suffer for her brother's sin?

He could save her, even though it meant humbling himself, even though it meant giving up the profession he loved.

He knew the decision to which he had come would hurt his father terribly; but if it came to a choice between him and Marjorie, he knew he should choose the woman who was destined to be his mate; the girl, the whole of whose life lay before her, rather than the man, his own father whose life had been lived.

It was a terrible choice, perhaps a strange one. But Jim instinctively felt he was right.

So deep was his reverie that he did not hear a light step on the grassy ground. A hand was laid on his shoulder and he started, looked up, and found Marjorie smiling into his face.

"My dear!" he cried, jumping to his feet. "My dearest!"

He took her in his arms with a passion she had never felt before and held her so fiercely that she would have cried out with the pain had she not loved him as she did.

"Jim.... You frightened me—and I thought to frighten you," she panted when he released her. "You don't know how strong you are." She glanced at him, her cheeks scarlet, the love and dawn of passion swimming in her eyes. She wore no hat and her hair shone in the golden sunshine. Her neck and arms were bare, and her short, workman-like skirt showed her tiny, well-bred ankles and long, narrow feet. Jim looked at her silently, hungrily.

Slowly her colour fled and she came close to him again, holding out her hands. "Is anything wrong?"

Without replying he put his arm around her and led her away towards Blackthorn Farm.

Some one lounging on Post Bridge might see them. A labourer in the fields, or a farmer on the hills, who would carry the news back to his cottage at night that he had seen the young master of Post Bridge Hall making love to old John Dale's daughter. But he did not care—now. Every one should soon know that

they loved and that Marjorie was to be his affianced wife.

He told her as gently as he could what had happened. Of course, he made as light of it as possible, assuring her that Rupert would be released and the affair cleared up satisfactorily.

"That's why the guv'nor wrote to me instead of your father and asked me to tell him and see him off to London. He was afraid if he wrote Mr. Dale would put the worst construction possible on the affair. It's quite a common thing for a man to be arrested by mistake on some scraps of evidence the police get hold of.... Don't you worry, Marjorie. You've got to leave all the worrying to me in future."

She tried to smile and press his hand, but the happiness had left her eyes and her face was very pale now. "I'm frightened," she whispered. "I can't help it, Jim—if father goes to London I must go with him."

But James Crichton shook his head. "That's just what you mustn't do. That friend of Rupert's I saw the other day will see him safely up to town. Despard was his name, wasn't it? I suppose he's still here?"

Marjorie nodded. "Yes. He and Rupert had made some discovery in the old tin-mine. They were awfully excited about it." She tried to laugh. "They were going to find radium and make a fortune, I believe. I heard them say something about it.... Oh, Jim, we were so happy and everything seemed to be turning out so well. And now this has happened. Rupert—it can't be true. Of course, I know it isn't true. It will kill father."

Jim forced himself to laugh. "My dear, we shall have him back here within a week. You mustn't think anything more about it. There's something else I want to tell you. I'm going to announce our engagement—at once."

She looked at him with unbelieving eyes, almost as if she could not understand. Then she shook her head.

"Not now, Jim. We must wait until—until Rupert's free; this charge against him disproved."

He shook his head, and, stopping, held her in his arms again. "Darling, if by any chance the worst should happen, it would make no difference to our love! Nothing would force me to give you up. That's why I'm going to announce our engagement now. Now, while this thing is hanging over our heads."

Again she would have protested, but he silenced her. "I've made up my mind, nothing can change it."

Holding her hand he led her forward and opened the gate that led into the farmhouse garden. As they entered they saw Despard lounging in a chair on the lawn reading the morning newspaper, a pipe between his lips. He glanced up as they entered, smiled at Marjorie, and without taking the pipe from his lips, or rising, gave Jim Crichton a curt nod.

"Bounder!" was the latter's silent ejaculation. But he saw old John Dale standing in the doorway, so, giving Marjorie's hand a gentle pressure, he left her.

Telling Mr. Dale he had something to say to him in private he entered the dining-room.

"You bring me bad news of my son," Dale said quietly. "I know it."

"How did you?" Jim asked, off his guard. "Surely it hasn't got into the local papers."

Dale stepped forward instantly, then, gripping the back of his chair, sat down. "So, it's true," he said in a broken voice. "It's true." He gave a mirthless laugh. Jim tried to speak, but the words refused to come. He would have done anything to spare the father of the girl he loved. He would have borrowed the money from his father, hushed the affair up, and repaid the bank. He would have done anything.

"It's true he has been arrested," Jim said after he had given the old man time to recover himself. "But I'm quite sure he will be able to prove his innocence. I know my father thinks so, too. Indeed, he himself is employing the best legal advice he can obtain, and will see he is given every chance of defending himself. We want you to come up to town, if you will, sir, and, if possible, to catch the train to-day." He glanced at the grandfather clock in a corner of the room. "There is one that leaves Newton Abbot about two-thirty, I think. I can motor you in. I am sure Mr. Despard will accompany you."

John Dale shook his head slowly to and fro. "Yes, I must go up. I must see him," he whispered. He rose to his feet and held out his hand. "You're too good, Mr. James. I'm afraid—I'm afraid——"

"You needn't be," Jim interrupted quickly. "Rupert's innocent, I'll swear. Anyway, we'll see to him and see that justice is done."

"Yes; that's so. Justice must be done at all costs." John Dale raised his head and looked proudly at Sir Reginald Crichton's son.

The latter took his hand and shook it warmly. "Then I'll be round with the motor in about an hour's time. Perhaps you'll warn Mr. Despard that you want him to go with you. Anyway, under the circumstances, he could not be left here alone with your daughter, could he?"

He walked to the door, then stopped. "There's something else I would like to say, sir, though it may not seem quite the moment. I love your daughter Marjorie: I hope to make her my wife. With your permission I should like to announce our engagement at once."

It was a long time before Dale replied. "That's impossible now. But I thank you, Mr. Crichton.... It is just the sort of thing I—I would have expected—from Sir Reginald's son."

The old man broke down then, and Jim saw tears coursing down the lined

and furrowed cheeks. He bit his lip. "It is not impossible, sir. I want to announce the engagement now; now, at this moment, while this charge is hanging over your son's head. Do you think a thing like that would make any difference to my love for your daughter? It's at this moment she wants my love and the protection of my name. And she shall have it."

Without waiting for a reply he opened the door. Dale stopped him.

"I ought to tell you," he said unsteadily, "that last night Mr. Despard, Rupert's friend, made the same request—told me he loved Marjorie and asked for her hand."

"What did you say?"

"Of course, I refused," Dale replied. "Why, they've only known each other a few days. But, putting that aside, I'm afraid I dislike and distrust the man. I feel he's one of the men who has led my son into bad ways."

He bent over the table and bowed his head between his hands. Again there was a long silence.

"You have no objection to me as a son-in-law, Mr. Dale?"

"Surely that question needs no answer—but, please say no more now. Leave me, Mr. James."

Quietly closing the door behind him Jim walked out of the house into the garden. Taking no notice of Mr. Despard, he drew Marjorie aside and told her what had happened.

"I am driving your father—and Mr. Despard—to Newton Abbot in about an hour's time. When I come back we'll have a little run in the car—tea together at Moretonhampstead, perhaps. Or, better still, we'll go over to Hey Tor and have a picnic on our own. Cheer up, darling, all will be well, I know."

Bending down, he kissed her in full view of Robert Despard. The latter scrunched the *Western Morning News* up between his hands with an oath.

Waving a farewell to Marjorie, Jim swung through the gate and hurried across the moorlands towards Post Bridge Hall.

An hour later he was driving both John Dale and Mr. Robert Despard to Newton Abbot junction. And he could not help feeling some satisfaction when the train carried the latter gentleman away from Devonshire back to London.

## CHAPTER X.

### IN SUSPENSE.

It was Saturday. A week had passed since Rupert's arrest, since he had left the little rooms at Westminster and been driven to the police court. It all seemed to him like a vivid dream, in which he played a passive but unwilling part.

He had seen no one but the prison chaplain since that dreadful day at the Westminster Police Court. The long wait in a bare cell, the sudden hurrying through dark passages, the Court, with the hum of conversation suddenly stifled—and then he found himself standing in the dock and felt rather than saw that every eye was fixed on him.

He had pleaded "Not guilty," in a voice he scarcely recognised as his own. Shame covered him as with a cold mist. He was committed for trial, but bail was offered him, two sureties of £500 each. He had shaken his head as he gulped down the lump in his throat that prevented him speaking. Who would stand bail for him?

He began to realise that he had not a friend; many acquaintances—many pals, yes—but not one friend!

A tear dropped on the open book on his knees—"Barnaby Rudge"—that the chaplain had brought him. He had just finished chapter sixty-two, and the tale of Rudge's prison had strangely softened his troubles. But the uppermost thought in his mind was the woman he loved!

Ruby! Again he felt that icy grip at his heart. How often had he reasoned it all out and fought against the suspicion that at last had become a certainty.

Why had she not been to see him? Why had she sent no word, not even a message?

What a coward he had been. The pistol that he held to his own breast had really been pointed at her heart. She had committed this great crime to save him from a greater.

A crime of murder, for in taking his own life did he not end hers, too? And now it was up to him to play the man and pay the price of his own sins. He began to pace the narrow cell.

The key turned in the lock, the cell door opened, and a warder curtly ordered Rupert to follow him. A second warder walked behind, and, after descending a flight of stairs, he stopped before a door which he opened and motioned Rupert to enter, and at once closed the door from outside.

Rupert found himself in a small, bare room, in the centre of which a table covered with a green, ink-stained cloth and half a dozen wooden chairs were the only furniture. Seated at the table was an elderly man with a closely-trimmed beard, while, standing with his back to the fireplace, was a younger man, whose clean-shaven face and clear-cut features at once arrested Rupert's attention. The man at the table rose and bowed.

"Mr. Dale, I believe! This is Mr. Marshall, who has undertaken your de-

fence. Please be seated!"

Rupert obeyed automatically. He was too surprised to speak, and the man, obviously a lawyer, continued:

"I must explain to you that I represent Messrs. Redway, Wales & Redway, Sir Richard Crichton's solicitors, who have been instructed by him to arrange for your defence. Mr. Marshall has kindly accepted the brief and will defend you. Now, Mr. Dale, I want you to tell us all you know about this unfortunate occurrence. You must understand that whatever you tell us will be treated as strictly confidential, and it is absolutely necessary that you are perfectly frank with us. Mr. Marshall will tell you that to conceal anything from us will greatly prejudice your case—in fact, it might ruin your defence."

Mr. Marshall murmured "Quite so! quite so!" and began to examine the toes of his boots.

"I have nothing to conceal," said Rupert. "I intend to plead guilty; I have no desire to be defended—I am quite prepared to pay the penalty of my folly."

Mr. Marshall coughed.

"That's frank; that's very frank," Mr. Redway exclaimed. "But, my dear young sir, you must allow us to judge the way you should plead. Now, I have here a statement of the case as far as we've been able to obtain it from the proceedings in the police court, and the statements made by the witnesses for the prosecution. What we now require are the exact circumstances under which you—er—altered the amount on the cheque and exactly how you proceeded to cash it. Will you kindly tell us in the first place what caused you to be in want of this large sum?"

"I was in debt. I had been betting, and living beyond my means."

"Just so," said Mr. Redway; "and so you altered the cheque under the pressure of debt—to avoid ruin, in fact?"

Rupert nodded.

"Will you kindly tell us to whom you gave the cheque in the first instance with a view of getting it cashed?"

"What's the use of all this? I have admitted the crime, and I do not wish to make any further statement." Rupert spoke with sudden irritation.

"Now, look here, Mr. Dale—Excuse me, Mr. Redway!" Mr. Marshall interrupted—"I have done an unusual thing in coming here to-day, and I have done it entirely in your interests, to enable me to get a personal insight into this case, which possibly I could not get from my brief alone. The least you can do in return is to answer the questions asked you, and give us as much information as you are able. You must understand that unless I am fully acquainted with the details of your actions in this matter, it will be impossible for me to meet and reply to the evidence which the prosecution will bring against you."

Rupert bit his lip, and, after a few moments' silence, he looked straight into

the barrister's eyes: "I am extremely sorry to put difficulties in your way, and I fully appreciate Sir Reginald's kindness in arranging for my defence. Believe me, I am very grateful to him and to you both; but there are circumstances which render it impossible for me to give you any information regarding the cheque or its subsequent disposal. I hope you will not press me further in the matter."

Redway, who was fidgeting with the papers, looked at Mr. Marshall with raised eyebrows, and the barrister nodded to him as though he understood.

Redway cleared his throat: "We quite understand, Mr. Dale, and your scruples do you honour; but you must remember that in trying to shield your accomplice by refusing to confide in us, you are not only spoiling your own case, but very possibly endangering your friend. Come, now, be reasonable. We must know who gave the cheque, or rather the note containing the cheque, to the messenger-boy."

Rupert looked up, and the surprise he felt must have been clearly reflected on his face, for Mr. Redway exclaimed: "You don't mean to say that it was you who gave the note to the messenger?"

There was a long silence before the lawyer spoke again. "Will you, then, give us Miss Strode's present address? This is really most important, as she has completely disappeared and left no trace, although the police have been searching for her for the past week."

Rupert's heart gave a great bound. Then she was still safe! "I can answer that question, at least. I don't know where she is, and have heard nothing of her since I was arrested." Then, after a moment's hesitation: "I suppose she is utterly disgusted with my crime, and wishes to avoid having her name in any way connected with mine!"

Redway rose and touched the bell on the table. "I am sorry you can give us so little help. I shall see you again before the trial, when I hope you will see your way to place a little more confidence in us, otherwise I fear your defence will suffer gravely."

The door opened, and the warder escorted Rupert back to his cell. As he reached it, he handed him a letter.

The door slammed, and the retreating steps of the warder echoed down the stone-flagged passage.

Rupert glanced at the envelope in his hand, and started as he recognised his father's writing. He sat on the wooden bunk and slowly opened it. The envelope fell to the floor and lay there. He noticed that the post-mark was London, not Princetown.

For a moment Dartmoor and the great convict prisons rose before his eyes, and he shuddered at the bare possibility of his being sent there. He began to read the letter:

"MY DEAR BOY,—I hardly know how to write these few lines. I have had a great struggle, and from my heart tried to believe you innocent—for how could my son commit this horrible crime? Sir Reginald has been more than kind. He asked me plainly if I believed you did this thing, and I looked him in the face and said 'No! It is impossible! He is a true gentleman!' He shook my hand and said: 'Neither do I; and what's more, I'll see he has a fair trial.' He has written to his lawyers and they are to help you, and he has brought me up to London, and I hope to see you to-morrow. For God's sake, my dear boy, clear yourself and our good name! For my sake, and your sister's, help the lawyers to find the man who has put this awful burden upon us. Find him, Rupert, and hunt him down, for unless you do my heart is broken, and I fear ruin faces us—all three. God help you clear our name.

"**Your affectionate father**, "JOHN DALE."

The letter fluttered to the floor beside the envelope and Rupert threw himself on the hard bunk and sobbed aloud. Try as he would, great sobs shook his frame. All his resolutions were shattered by this appeal. How could he destroy his father, ruin his sister, and bring desolation and unending shame to his home?

What was he to do? A word to Mr. Redway, and his innocence would be quickly proved. Nay, he need only give a hint, and the lawyers would do the rest. He need not mention Ruby's name.

Blood was thicker than water, after all; if it had only been himself to sacrifice he would have been too ready to do so for Ruby's sake; but had he any right to sacrifice his father and sister as well? The more he thought of it the more convinced he became that he must save them at all costs.

His eye fell upon the ink-pot on the wooden shelf. As a prisoner awaiting trial he was allowed to send and receive letters.

He found a sheet of paper and wrote to the lawyer.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE TRIAL.

It was the second day of the trial.

The atmosphere of the Court was stifling, and as the counsel for the prosecution sat down a deep buzz of conversation and scuffling of feet instantly succeeded the tense silence which had been maintained during his speech.

The judge left the bench, and every one in Court rose. It was exactly ten minutes to five by the clock over the door. The counsel for the prosecution had spoken for just twenty minutes. The public struggled through the door, intent upon tea.

"Poor devil, not much chance for him after that!" "Oh, he's guilty all right! Did you notice the jury's faces?" "G'on! we ain't 'eard t' other side yet." "Did yer notice the bloomin' judge? What I calls a 'anging face, 'e's got!"

The crowd elbowed and jostled its way into the street, where the newsboys were shouting "Special edition! Great fraud case—full account."

The barristers were collecting their papers, and Mr. Marshall touched John Dale on the shoulder: "Come on, Mr. Dale, we will go and have a cup of tea together at my own special tea-room. It is only just across the road!"

The old man had sat beside his son's counsel throughout the long day, and as witness succeeded witness and the chain of evidence grew stronger, his face became sterner and sterner, and when the eminent K.C., who represented the Crown, had reviewed it, taking each link in turn and cleverly wielding the whole into one perfect piece—there seemed not a flaw in the chain of evidence against the prisoner. He was already condemned, and it seemed to the old man that even he could no longer believe in his innocence.

Mr. Marshall had watched the old man all day, and his kindly heart had been touched by his loneliness and obvious grief. He felt it would be cruel to let him go to his lonely lodgings without doing something to counteract the effect, which the case for the prosecution was bound to leave on the mind of one who was totally ignorant of Law Court methods. So, after removing his wig and gown, he steered the old man across the crowded Strand into the snug little tea-room. When the pretty, ribbon-bedecked Hebe had placed the pot of fragrant *bohé* and plate of hot muffins between them, Mr. Marshall spoke:

"Well, Mr. Dale, what do you think of the prosecution?"

The old man sipped his tea, and carefully put down his cup before he replied: "I'm afraid it looks very black for my poor boy. I hardly know what to think. Do you know, sir, that last speech absolutely shook my faith in Rupert's innocence; what, then, must be its effect on the Judge!"

Mr. Marshall laughed heartily. "Good gracious, Mr. Dale, you must not take anything he said seriously; and, besides, it is the jury, not the Judge, that matters. It will be my turn to-morrow. You have not heard the other side yet."

The old man looked up quickly. "Do you really think there is still hope, sir?"

"Hope, Mr. Dale! I am hoping to-morrow to completely pulverise my learned friend, Mathews. Why, bless me! he entirely ignored the fact that the man who sent the cheque to the bank has not yet been found, while the woman, Ruby Strode, who actually received the money, is also not forthcoming. My dear sir, these two facts alone, when—ahem!—skilfully handled, are quite enough to damn the case for the prosecution! Remember this: In English law a man is innocent until he has been proved guilty. I admit there are many very suspicious circumstances, which our learned friend made the most of; but there has been no direct evidence in proof adduced, and that is our strong point. The evidence to-day, however strong, was purely circumstantial. Mind, I do not say as things stand at present that there is no danger of an adverse verdict; but I do say that we have a good case. I wish we could find that young woman. I feel certain that her evidence would go far to clear your son."

"You have greatly relieved my mind," Dale sighed, "for I was feeling very down about it; and now I must be getting back to my rooms. I wonder if I can get a 'bus to Bloomsbury?"

"You are a stranger to London, and it would be most unsafe for you to try to find your way by 'bus. A taxi will only cost you a shilling. Come along, and I will see you safely off."

As the taxi drove off with John Dale, a boy handed Mr. Marshall a telegram:

"The caretaker sent me across with this, sir, as he thought it might be important."

Mr. Marshall nodded, and tore open the envelope.

"Miss Strode here now; can you come at once? Very important.—REDWAY."

Mr. Marshall's face lit up with excitement. The solicitors were only in Chancery Lane, so he decided to walk. Just as he passed the Griffin he found himself on the edge of a large crowd, and he had some difficulty in forcing his way through; so he did not notice that it was caused by an accident. A taxi-cab and a motor-bus had collided, and apparently some one had been injured, for a police ambulance was arriving. When he got clear of the crowd he hurried on, little thinking who it was being lifted on to the ambulance.

* * * * *

John Dale had never been in a taxi-cab before, and when the kindly barrister had shaken his hand and told the driver the address, he lay back with a sigh

of satisfaction on the luxurious cushions and resigned himself to enjoy his first drive. It was marvellous to him how the cab managed to dodge in and out of the heavy traffic; more than once the driver stopped with a jerk that nearly sent him off his seat, but he supposed this was the usual experience in London.

Presently he saw a policeman ahead put up his hand, but the driver dashed on across the front of a big omnibus that was coming down at right angles from another street. In a moment there was a crash, he felt himself hurled into space and knew no more until he found himself lying in a strange bed, and saw a white-capped woman bending over him.

"Are you feeling better now?" she asked.

His head was aching, and when he raised his hand to it, he found it swathed in bandages: he closed his eyes and asked what had happened.

"You must not talk, but just try and go to sleep," the nurse said. "You have met with an accident, but you will soon be all right."

"Ah! I remember now! The taxi-cab. Yes!" And again he closed his eyes, and the nurse stole softly away.

It was late the next morning when he awoke to find the doctor bending over him.

"Well! You have had a good sleep," he said. "How are you feeling now?"

"I am aching all over, but my head is better, thank you. Where am I?—and what time is it?"

"You are in Charing Cross Hospital, and it is just half-past ten in the morning."

Suddenly he remembered. This was the hour he ought to have been in Court to see his son's honour cleared.

"I must get up," he cried. "I have an important engagement, and am late already."

The doctor smiled. "I am afraid that is impossible. You have broken your leg, and it will be several weeks before you will be able to walk again."

He thought for a few moments, then asked if he could send a telegram. A form was brought him, and with a trembling hand he wrote the message.

* * * * *

The Court was packed from floor to ceiling when Rupert entered the dock between two warders. Not only were most of his fellow students present, but also a number of the chorus ladies from the Ingenue Theatre, who were sprinkled among the crowd, conspicuous by their bizarre hats and ultra-fashionable costumes. He at once noticed that his father was not at the counsels' table, and wondered that he should be late. The jurymen were already in their places, and

immediately, on the judge taking his seat, Mr. Marshall rose and opened the case for the defence.

"My Lord and gentlemen of the jury—yesterday you heard the case for the prosecution, and the long chain of circumstantial evidence that all went to show the guilt of the prisoner at the bar. Had I known yesterday the facts I am about to put before you, I need scarcely say I should have interposed at once, and so saved a wasted day. We now have a complete answer to the charge—the best answer possible—the person who altered the cheque has come forward at the eleventh hour and has made a full confession."

A loud burst of conversation mingled with applause greeted this dramatic announcement, and when the ushers had secured silence the Judge spoke:

"If there is any repetition of this most improper demonstration, I shall clear the Court."

Mr. Mathew was already on his feet. "My Lord, may I ask my learned friend if he proposes to put in a written confession?"

Mr. Marshall signified assent.

"Then, m' Lord, I must object."

Mr. Marshall, who was still standing, replied at once: "It is an affidavit, my Lord, and as such is legal evidence."

"I object, m' Lord!" Mr. Mathew interposed.

"Will you state the grounds of your objection?" the Judge said.

"Certainly, m' Lord; I am instructed that the person who has executed the affidavit is merely an accomplice of the prisoner at the bar, and their relationship is such as to warrant the gravest doubts of its genuine nature. I am instructed, m' Lord, not to accept this confession, and I must insist on my right to cross-examine, if this affidavit is put in."

"Are you prepared to call this witness, Mr. Marshall?"

"I am in your Lordship's hands; if your Lordship rules that I cannot put in this affidavit without, I have no alternative."

A buzz of conversation was instantly suppressed by a loud cry of "Silence in Court!" from the usher.

The Judge replied: "I so rule. Let the witness be called!"

"Ruby Strode!" Mr. Marshall said in a loud voice.

"Ruby Strode!" came the stentorious tones of the usher.

Every eye was turned to the door by which witnesses enter, and the strain of expectancy was intensified by a second loud call, "Ruby Strode!" followed a moment later by sounds of scuffling feet and eager whispers, as a slight figure, wearing a small toque, and thick veil, came through the door, and quickly made her way to the witness-box.

Rupert, who was clutching the rail in front of him, was white to the lips;

and the Judge, noticing his condition, ordered a chair to be given him, and he at once sank on to it gratefully. He was stunned by the course things had taken, for Mr. Marshall had purposely kept the news of Ruby's return from him, fearing the consequences.

Was this the reason his father was absent? But no! surely the joy at the proof of his innocence would overcome any resentment he might feel at his secret engagement.

He dared not meet Ruby's eyes—with every one watching them so intently. He was furious with his counsel, and determined to prevent Ruby convicting herself at all costs. He drank in every word, and his brain was busy endeavouring to see how he could defeat her loving sacrifice, and prevent her confession from being her ruin. She had taken the oath, given her name and calling, and was now listening to the reading of her affidavit by Mr. Marshall. When he had finished he handed it to the Judge, and asked her a few questions, to which she replied in monosyllables.

Presently he asked her: "Did you see Mr. Despard that day?"

"Yes."

"Did he see the cheque in your hand?"

"I object, m' Lord!" said Mr. Mathews.

"I am not leading," replied Mr. Marshall.

"I submit it is a leading question, m' Lord, and, further, that it is not evidence, unless my learned friend intends to call Mr. Despard."

"Will you put your questions in another form, Mr. Marshall?"

"Certainly, my Lord, though I had no intention of leading at all. Did you have anything in your hand when Mr. Despard called?"

"Yes," said Ruby, "the cheque."

"Did he see it?"

"I object!"—from Mr. Mathews.

"Really, my Lord, I must protest at this continual interruption," Mr. Marshall said.

The Judge interposed, and the question was put in another form.

"Do you think he saw the cheque in your hand?"

"Yes, I feel sure he did."

Mr. Marshall at last finished, and Mr. Mathews at once rose and cross-examined. His questions were very searching; he asked about her engagement to Rupert, and she admitted with pride that she loved him devotedly.

"Yes, she was deeply affected by his present position—she knew he was innocent."

"Supposing he had been guilty—she would willingly take his place?"

"Yes."

"There was no sacrifice too great to make for him—her future husband?"

"None."

"She had come to-day with no other object than to save him?"

"Yes," Ruby replied again. "That is why I made the affidavit now before the Court."

Then the counsel's manner, entirely changed, and instead of leading her easily and pleasantly with smiling questions that she had only to agree to with an eager "Yes," he began to ask her questions which she found it difficult to answer at all; and presently he made her contradict herself.

"Now, please be careful, Miss Strode; you distinctly told us just now that you wrote the note to the bank asking them to give the money to the messenger boy, and now you say that it was written by the prisoner. What are we to understand?"

Poor Ruby was by now thoroughly frightened, and hardly knew what she was saying. "I—I mean Mr. Dale wrote it for us, and I sent it. You see, I did not want him to get into trouble!"

"Oh! So you knew he would get into trouble if he was found out?"

"Yes, of course—I mean—that is—Oh, dear, you know he did not do it, and I swear I did it all—all myself. Oh, Rupert, Rupert, they won't believe me after all!" She burst into a storm of tears.

Mr. Mathews sat down with a significant smile at the jury, and Ruby was led sobbing out of Court.

"Robert Despard!"

He stepped into the box—dressed in a dark tweed suit—cut in the newest fashion—the latest thing in ties, and a blue velour hat in his hand. He might have stepped out of a tailor's fashion plate, which accurately described his appearance as "Smart Gents. The latest!"

He looked round the Court quite at his ease, and nodded to a friend whose eye he caught; but he studiously avoided catching Rupert's.

He gave his evidence quietly, and without the slightest hesitation. He admitted visiting his friend's rooms on the day of the races—he came to condone with him on his loss over the big race. Yes, he knew he was heavily involved. He found Miss Strode there alone; he spoke to her of the loss. No, he did not remember her telling him she had won over "Ambuscade." He was certain of this. Yes, he waited till Rupert came in. He sat alone in the room for a few moments after Miss Strode had gone and before Rupert came in.

He did not notice anything in Miss Strode's hand.

"Did you notice a cheque or slip of paper—in her hand?" Mr. Marshall asked.

"I must object to that, m' Lord," interrupted Mr. Mathews.

"I submit the witness is hostile, m' Lord," replied Mr. Marshall.

"I think Mr. Marshall is entitled to treat this witness as hostile," the Judge said. And Mr. Marshall again put the question.

"No, I did not see a cheque or slip of paper in her hand."

"Come, Mr. Despard, think again: did you not remark to Miss Strode that it was a cheque for her winnings?"

"I have no recollection of any such conversation," Despard replied curtly.

"Did you notice the blotter on the writing table, Mr. Despard?"

"Yes."

"Was it much used?"

"No, it was perfectly clean."

"Will you swear that it had never been used?"

"No, I can't swear that; but I thought——"

Mr. Marshall broke in: "Never mind your thoughts; what we want to know is that you will not swear that the blotter was clean? ... Thank you, that is all."

Mr. Marshall sat down.

Mr. Mathews with a smile asked two questions only. "You said that this blotting paper was perfectly clean, but that you could not swear that it had never been used? Will you kindly tell us why you noticed this pad at all, Mr. Despard?"

"I noticed it because the last time I saw it, it was covered with ink—worn out, in fact—and I naturally noticed the clean white sheet."

"And you feel sure it had not been used?"

"Yes—I feel sure I should have noticed it."

"Thank you; you can sit down!" And Mr. Mathews resumed his seat.

Other witnesses followed to prove that Rupert was not the man who sent the note to the bank; that the money was given to Miss Strode; that the word "hundred" on the cheque was not his writing. But here a difficulty arose, because Ruby had tried to copy the writing on the cheque, so that it was not recognisable as her writing either.

When the last witness had stepped down, Mr. Mathews addressed the Court. He pointed out that Ruby was Rupert's sweetheart, that she herself admitted, under cross-examination; that she had made this confession to save her lover.

"While doubtless she had been his accomplice in the crime, and as such received the money," he went on to say, "the letter to the bank was in the prisoner's own handwriting, and bore his signature. This had been admitted by the defence, though they gave a clumsy and wholly unbelievable explanation, namely, that it referred to a bookmaker and a bet that he had apparently never made!

"The evidence of their own witness, Despard, was perhaps the strongest proof of the unreliability of Miss Strode's statements. He distinctly denies seeing

the cheque she states she had in her hand. He says there was no mention made of winning a bet, and he declares that the blotting-pad—that should have been stained as it now appears in Court, was perfectly clean! So careful is this witness as to the accuracy of what he gives in evidence, that he actually declines to positively swear that the blotter had not been used, although sure in his own mind that it was quite clean. Contrast this straightforward evidence with the statements made by Miss Strode herself! Why, she cannot tell her story without contradicting her own evidence, and then when she is asked to say which statement is true, she breaks down and gives up her attempt to save her lover! Gentlemen of the jury, I should be the last to take advantage of a woman's weakness—of the unfortunate position in which she has placed herself; I cannot but admire her heroism, her self-sacrifice in trying to save her lover by taking the crime on herself; but I should not be doing my duty—nay, I should be defeating justice itself, were I to permit this loving woman to condemn herself of a crime, of which she is only the innocent accomplice."

He sat down, and Mr. Marshall rose. He was a young man with his reputation to make, and this was his first big case.

He began quietly by reviewing bit by bit the evidence for the prosecution. He cleverly seized each point in which a witness had said anything indirectly injurious to the prisoner, and pointed out that it was equally true if applied to Ruby Strode. He asked the jury if there was one single piece of direct evidence against his client. And, after a dramatic pause, he answered: "No, gentlemen, there is not! Circumstantial evidence there is in abundance, but nothing—absolutely nothing—that can justify you in finding this man guilty."

Then he took the evidence for the defence. He drew a pathetic picture of the prisoner suffering in silence to screen his sweetheart; of his refusal at first to make any defence; of his determination to plead guilty; and finally, his consent when he believed his sweetheart safe on the Continent, solely because of his aged father's grief at the dishonour and the stigma that would attach to his sister's good name.

He spoke for forty-six minutes, and concluded a clever and eloquent defence with the following words:

"Gentlemen of the jury, were I not convinced myself of the innocence of the prisoner at the bar, I could not stand before you and ask you for a verdict that will place his own sweetheart in the position in which he now stands. But my learned friend who represents the Crown, heard the confession of Ruby Strode as it fell from her lips in the solicitors' office only last night. Had he listened as I did to her ready answers to every question asked—seen her evident sincerity and heard her straightforward account of the whole transaction, he would, I feel certain, never have allowed this case to go on. I only ask you for justice for an

innocent man, and I leave him in your hands, gentlemen, confident that he will receive it."

There was a burst of applause as he sat down—instantly suppressed by the ushers—and then the Judge summed up.

He reviewed the evidence very shortly, and pointed out to the jury that it was for them to consider these statements and to say if they believed the affidavit put up for the defence. If they believed this, then it was their duty to acquit the prisoner. On the other hand, if they did not believe the confession therein to be true, if they believed the contention of the prosecution that it was made under the motive of affection for the prisoner, then they must, on the evidence before them, find the prisoner guilty.

On the point of law there was no difficulty. Fraud had been committed, and it was for them to say if it had been committed by the prisoner or not. He warned them against allowing their sympathies to interfere with their judgment, but at the same time he must remind them that if any uncertainty existed in their minds, they were bound to give the prisoner the benefit of any such doubt.

## CHAPTER XII.

### MARRIAGE IS IMPOSSIBLE.

Directly the Judge had finished his summing-up, the jury rose and left the Court to consider their verdict.

The general opinion was that they would not take much time before coming to a decision, and so quite half the people remained in their places. A subdued hum of conversation arose; women surreptitiously powdered their faces, others fanned themselves. In the corridors outside barristers discussed the case.

"Guilty, right enough!" the majority agreed. A few wiseacres shook their heads. They were not so sure. Certainly Rupert Dale's attitude had been that of a guilty man, so much so that to those who had had a wide experience of criminals he seemed innocent.

It's the guilty man who invariably assumes the mask of innocence to perfection.

It was in vain that both counsel and solicitors tried to persuade Ruby Strode to leave the Court. She was as white as death and looked as if at any moment she might faint. Her friend Iris Colyer sat by her side and did her best to comfort and

console her. But Ruby seemed scarcely conscious of her surroundings. Feeling had almost deserted her.

She was possessed by just one thought. She had failed to save her lover. Twice she had tried to save him. And each time she had failed.

Now she had been prepared to take his place in the dock—to suffer for the crime she had committed. And they would not believe her. The fools would not believe her when she confessed she was guilty. In her own mind she had proved her guilt. She sat huddled up, her hands clasped between her knees, her eyes fixed on the door through which the jury had disappeared. But ever and again she muttered to herself, and those sitting near her caught fragments of what she said:

"*I alone am guilty. I did it.*"

Once Robert Despard strolled across to her side, and the solicitors made way for him. He made a few conventional remarks in the usual strain. Ruby took no notice. But suddenly he said something which caused her to sit upright and look at him with flaming eyes, eyes in which contempt and hatred shone.

"You could have saved him!" she hissed under her breath. "I believe you know I am guilty. You came into his room that afternoon, and you saw the cheque in my hand. I felt then, for the moment, that you had some suspicion."

Despard smiled and laid his hand on hers. "I never suspected you. I never could!"

She snatched her hand away. "I believe you want him to go to prison because——"

She faltered, and for a moment her white cheeks grew scarlet. Despard knew what she was going to say, and he could not resist being brutal.

"Because I loved you?" He shrugged his shoulders. "Yes, I was very fond of you once, Ruby. But you rejected and snubbed me, remember. That's all over now, and I've found some one who will be kinder than you were. No, I shouldn't have much cared if you had gone to prison." He lowered his voice: "Though on the whole it will suit my book better if Rupert is found guilty. As a matter of fact, I suppose you're both in the same boat, and if justice were done, both of you would suffer."

"And you called yourself his friend!" she cried. "If Rupert goes to prison I swear you shall pay; for I know, if you had chosen to speak, you could have saved him, and helped to prove the truth of my confession."

Despard rose, and picking up his velour hat, brushed it carelessly.

"I shouldn't get so excited; if you raise your voice like that you'll be turned out of Court." He bowed mockingly. "In case we don't meet again, Miss Strode, good-bye."

"We shall meet again one day!" she said between her teeth.

Then her head sank forward; she clasped her hands together again between her knees and resumed her former attitude.

Half an hour passed; three-quarters. The tension became unbearable. She heard a man laugh in the corridor. Behind her a couple of barristers were telling a funny story under their breath. In the gallery a woman dropped her fan; and as she happened to be good-looking, there was quite a little commotion to recover it. And her lover's honour, his freedom, his very life, lay in the balance. She swept the Court fearlessly with her eyes; half of these people had come out of curiosity, as they would go to the theatre. Not one of them cared.

She knew what it was to hate, for she hated them now—heartless and selfish. An hour passed. A minute later there was a sudden commotion. People began to flock into the Court. The door on which Ruby's eyes had been fixed opened, and the jury slowly returned to their places. The usher shouted for order, and the Judge resumed his seat.

Silence came. A pin could have been heard fall. Then the Judge leaned slightly forward towards the Foreman of the Jury. The little formalities that took place now seemed needlessly cruel. Ruby scarcely heard what was said—she was waiting for one of two words: Guilty, or Not Guilty!

It seemed a long pause before the Foreman answered the final question addressed to him by the Judge. The answer was what every one expected:

"We find the prisoner guilty, my Lord."

Ruby Strode staggered to her feet; but the solicitors who had been watching her seized her arm and dragged her down. The Judge passed sentence: Five years' penal servitude.

The silence was broken, and straightway the Judge rose. A few people were surprised at the severity; others said that Dale thoroughly deserved it. For the public the excitement was over, the show was finished, and in the hurry to get outside into the fresh air, no one noticed Ruby Strode. She had risen to her feet and stretched out her arms imploringly to the retreating figure of the Judge.

"My Lord, I did it! I swear to God I did it!" Then she swayed, lost consciousness, would have fallen had not Mr. Marshall stepped forward and caught her.

"Poor girl!" he whispered, as with the assistance of one of the ushers he carried her off to another room. "Poor girl! how she must have loved him. By gad! they say women haven't as much pluck as men!"

* * * * *

The result was brought to John Dale in Charing Cross Hospital by Mr. Redway. The kindly solicitor broke the bad news as best he could. He knew it was no use

beating about the bush or trying to deceive the old man. There was nothing he could do, nothing he could say to alleviate the blow. He could only tell him, and in a gentle pressure of the hand try to convey his deep sympathy—and then leave him.

Dale said nothing. He prepared himself for the worst, but the news for the moment was almost more than he could bear. He covered his face, so that none should see it.

Fate could deal him no more crushing blow. His son—his first-born—his only son!

He prayed that death would come and take him, since there was nothing left to live for.

It was so Sir Reginald Crichton a few hours later found him and obtained permission to sit by his side until late into the night. He knew words were useless; but the old man was alone in London, apparently without a friend, and he felt that he could not leave him alone in the great hospital.

"You—why are you here?" John Dale asked at last. "You whom we have wronged so grievously."

"I, too, am a father," Sir Reginald replied, bending over him. "I also have one son who is the apple of my eye. This thing might have happened to him, Mr. Dale—to my boy. That's why I am here. We have got to share this thing together."

Then for the first time tears shone in Dale's eyes and ran down his cheeks. He tried to speak, but the poor lips trembled and quivered.

"Your son—is a—gentleman. He could never do anything—mean, Sir Reginald."

"One never knows," Crichton replied. "Your boy must have been sorely tempted—if he did it."

Dale raised himself in his bed, and dashed the tears from his eyes. "He did it," he cried fiercely, "and he must suffer for his sin. It is just he should pay the penalty. I'm an old man; it won't be easy to hold up my head and face the world now; but I'll do it. I'll fight still!"

"That's right!" Sir Reginald said cheerily. "You still have something to fight for.... There's your daughter, Mr. Dale."

Dale started and dropped back on the pillows, hiding his face again. His daughter Marjorie. Sir Reginald's son loved her—and she loved him.

A great wave of hatred for his son swept over him. Not only had he ruined his father, but he would break his sister's heart and ruin her life.

"I shall have to leave town to-morrow," Sir Reginald said as he took his leave. "But I understand you will be fit to be moved in a few days' time. Mr. Despard wished to be remembered to you, and said he would look in and see you to-morrow; and when you're fit to travel he says he'll take you down to

Devonshire himself. He made a proposal to me directly the trial was over which I must say does him great credit. I am not at liberty to say what this thing was, but I hope you will be able to accept it—if not for your own, then for your daughter's sake. We have got to consider her now, Mr. Dale, before ourselves. She is young, and life is still sweet to her."

Dale shook his head. "Nothing seems to matter now, Sir Reginald. I can't conceive what proposal Mr. Despard has to make. He is my son's friend, not mine. But as you justly say, I must consider Marjorie. For her I must live and fight in spite of the shame that has fallen upon me."

Sir Reginald nodded. "That's right. I think you will find Mr. Despard means well, and sincerely wishes to help you—for Rupert's sake."

He turned to go—then stopped. "Have you written or telegraphed to Marjorie—the result of the trial I mean?"

Dale shook his head: "She's alone. If she were to hear from the lips of strangers——"

Crichton nodded. "I tell you what I'll do; I'll wire to Jim the first thing to-morrow morning and tell him to go over and break the news. They're old friends and playmates. It will be better than if she sees it in the newspapers or gets it from the gossips——"

But Dale started up in his bed and stretched out his hands. "No, you mustn't do that, Sir Reginald. You mustn't do it. Your boy must never see my daughter again—never!"

"Why not?" Sir Reginald asked, laying his hand on the old man's shoulder.

Dale looked at him with haggard eyes. "Don't you know? Your son is in love with Marjorie. He wants to make her his wife!"

Sir Reginald Crichton started and turned away: "My God!" he said under his breath. "I never suspected that! You're right, Dale, I'm afraid they must never meet again. I'm sorry—but it's impossible. Any thought of marriage. Utterly impossible now!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE IRONY OF FATE.

Rupert found that four weeks in prison was a lifetime.

His experience at Holloway before the trial helped him not at all; though

he remembered now, that at the time, it had shocked and horrified him. Yet the cruelty and ugliness had all been on the surface. Looking back on it now, after four weeks of the real thing, with the eyes of a professional, he saw the humorous as well as the dramatic side of it.

If Holloway had been under the direction of the manager of a Drury Lane melodrama it could not have been run on lines better calculated to excite the common mind, and arouse the curiosity and the mirth of the vulgar. It had all been very cheap and dramatic. The great gates, barred and bolted in primeval fashion; the uniformed warders and wardresses, obviously chosen for their stature and their lack of humanity. The clanging of bells and the rattling of great bunches of keys. The herding together of guilty and innocent in pen-like places. The coming and going of numerous officials.

The real thing was very different. It had not got the glamour of Holloway, or its melodramatic atmosphere with a dash of pantomime. There was an atmosphere of "Abandon hope all ye who enter here," about Wormwood Scrubbs, though the interior of the prison was not so depressing as the exterior—the Scrubbs itself.

In about a week's time Rupert began to realise, not only where he was, but what he was. The warders, neither good, bad, nor indifferent, merely machines wrapped up in red tape, did their best to help him in this.

The first thing he realised was that he was no longer a man, but a cypher, number three hundred and eighty-one. He was glad he had not a name any longer. The only drawback was that, though unknown in the prisons, he would remain Rupert Dale to the world outside.

The next thing that dawned upon him was, that he was a criminal. A jury of his fellow-countrymen had found him guilty. There was nothing to grumble at in that!

The difficulty lay in behaving like a guilty man. He had a curious feeling when eventually he was exercised with a batch of other convicts and attended Divine Service, that they resented him. In spite of having his head shaved, in spite of wearing a costume—a cross between a clown's and one beloved by music-hall comedians—he knew he did not look guilty. He was hall-marked with the broad arrow, but it took more than four weeks for the iron of prison life to enter his soul and make him really feel like a criminal; at times wish to be a criminal—until a curious feeling eventually came to him that he really was one—that he only wanted to be free again to prove the fact and show himself in his real colours.

But for the first week or two he found himself without emotions, without feelings. Things had turned out as he wished them to. He was satisfied.

The woman he loved was free! Even though she had accused herself no one believed her. What his father thought or felt he did not know. He did not want to

think—yet. Perhaps nature was kind, and caused the reaction of the excitement and strain of the trial to act as an anæsthetic to his brain.

At the periodical visits of his warders, when his food was brought him, when he had to clean out his cell or make his bed, or when he was taken out to exercise, he found himself quite unconsciously speaking to them, trying to enter into conversation. Silence was the first blow that struck him. After five days he began to wonder how he was going to manage five years of it. If it were enforced it would probably send him mad.

He tried talking to himself, but that frightened him, and the one-sided conversation soon became brainless. He welcomed the visits of the chaplain until he found that that official considered it his duty to do all the talking. And, moreover, he did not want to talk about anything but the salvation of Rupert's soul. And as the unfortunate man had for years been dodging in and out of prison cells like a ferret in and out of rabbit holes trying to catch souls that were not at home, he had lost all real interest in the game and had fallen back on quoting texts in an unconvincing tone of voice. Certainly he called Three-eighty-one his "dear brother," but Rupert did not believe he meant it, and told him so. And so the chaplain's visits were cut short. The doctor was the only cheery human being in the prison.

At first Rupert was exercised alone; as soon as he joined his gang he was slowly initiated into the conversation of eyes, lips, and gestures—the latter by far the most effective and subtle: a movement of a muscle of the face, the slightest elevation or depression of the shoulders, the crook of a finger, or even the pretence of stumbling as a man walked.

The desire to learn this conversation saved him at the critical moment of his incarceration. Hour after hour as he lay alone in his prison cell he thought it out, drew imaginary pictures or diagrams on the floor. Like a dumb man every sense became preternaturally sharpened. He learnt how to speak with his eyes as well as his lips. He learnt, too, how to hide his eyes when he was watched or wished to be dumb.

He took an interest in the most extraordinary or trivial things. A spider spun its web across two bars of the window in his cell. He took more interest in that spider's larder than probably did the spider itself; it was with mingled feelings of joy and horror that he saw the first fly caught—his feelings were so equally divided between the miserable captive and the other hungry insect. Once the spider dropped down with a silken thread right on his foot. Rupert held his breath, not daring to move a muscle, and he experienced the first thrill since he had been in prison when the tiny thing eventually crawled up his leg and ran across his hand!

A day later, when he cleaned out his cell, he was told to wipe away the

spider's web. He nearly refused, and the tears actually swam in his eyes as he obeyed.

Under his breath he cursed the warder. Had the man no feelings; was he indeed a brute in human shape!

For forty-eight hours afterwards he waited for the return of the spider, waited for it to climb down on its silken thread and run across his hand again: but in vain.

One day as he exercised with his gang in the prison yard he noticed a man who once or twice before had been his leader in the dreary round—a young fellow with dark eyes, and protruding jaws that had evidently been broken in a fight. He noticed that he was talking to him. A spasmodic movement of his hands told Rupert that he wanted to say something.

As they turned Rupert caught his eye and signalled that he was ready to receive a message. He was not yet an adept in this new art of conversation, but his senses were alert and his instincts already preternaturally sharpened. He concentrated his whole mind on his fellow convict, and, perhaps unconsciously, he read his thoughts even before he understood the message which hand and foot, head and shoulders sent with lightning-like rapidity.

Translated, it meant that some of them were going to be removed from Wormwood Scrubbs prison.

"Good," Rupert signalled back. He found himself grinning until he read another signal of "Shut up!" from the blue-eyed convict.

The change might be for the worse, but that did not trouble Rupert. There was to be a change! Perhaps a journey somewhere. Outside the prison walls. The silence would be broken.

He wanted to shout aloud with joy. The silence would be broken! They would go out into the streets. The streets where there were cabs and omnibuses, and great drays with horses in them, and men and women hurrying to and fro; and children playing. They might even go a journey; in a train through fields and forests. They would see blue sky and perhaps sunshine.

He thought of nothing else for the rest of the day; he dreamed of it at night. Next morning hope alternately rose and fell in his heart, refusing to die throughout the day's routine. He continually built pictures of the journey he might take. So far, the effect of prison had been to make him like a child again. Time had ceased to exist; he took no count of days, but the news of the change made him wonder how long he had been at Wormwood Scrubbs. A week, a month, a year?——

It was curious how little he had thought of those he loved. At first, when he had been taken away from the Old Bailey, he had been temporarily overcome by remorse. The night after the trial he had suffered agonies. Yet curiously enough

after that night, thoughts of the outside world and those he knew in it had not troubled him much. He had been a coward in so much as he had been afraid to think of his father or his sister—or Ruby.

For he could not speak of them. He could not speak of them to a living soul. He could not write to them. If a letter had been permitted it would have been read and censored. So, not daring to write, he dared not think. Nature had been kind, and for weeks his brain had been anæsthetised by the deadly routine, the bare walls of his prison, the sudden and terrible change of environment.

This happens to some natures. Thoughts are checked, memory sleeps, but there always comes a rude awakening. To other men it is the first few weeks of imprisonment that are the most terrible. A few never survive; their minds are wrecked, morally and spiritually they are ruined; then their suffering comes to an end.

Rupert's awakening came one grey morning when at daybreak he found himself with half a dozen of his fellow convicts paraded in the yard, and, after a breakfast more generous than usual, marched outside the walls of Wormwood Scrubbs and conveyed in a van to an unknown destination—which proved to be Waterloo Station.

The thrill of joy he experienced when he found himself standing on the platform surrounded by familiar sights, hearing familiar sounds, his nostrils inhaling familiar smells, was almost instantly followed by a sickening sense of fear. Fear of the unknown!

He glanced at the men by his side all wearing the convict dress—the badge of shame. It suddenly struck him how funny they looked. He wondered if he cut as ridiculous a figure. Perhaps there might be some one on the platform whom he knew, some one who would recognise him.

He stared with hungry eyes at the few people who passed. Forgetting what he was, he yearned to see a familiar face. And presently he realised that he and the other convicts were being stared at by men who were free.

One man made a ribald jest. Others laughed. A few men looked with dull curiosity. A woman shuddered and turned away.

Rupert bit his lip. It was not nice. Especially when he realised the handcuffs. He squared his shoulders and held up his head. He was not ashamed. There was nothing to be ashamed of.

A newspaper boy passed; on his tray the morning newspapers and the illustrated magazines. Half a dozen pairs of yearning eyes followed him. Probably each convict would have sold his soul for a copy of the *Morning Post* or the *Daily Chronicle*. Opposite to where they were lined up, the station wall was covered with posters and play bills and advertisements.

The first thing Rupert read was the "Ingenue Theatre," a poster staring at

him in six-inch letters. His jaws dropped, and he blinked his eyes to drive away the mist that rose before them.

Then the train backed into the station. The warder in charge gave a sharp order. As Rupert swung round in obedience to the command he saw another poster facing him, the *Financial Times*, and beneath in huge letters one word—"RADIUM."

He started, a frown knitted his brows. For a moment he forgot what he was, where he was. That one word had conjured up the past, swept the fog from his brain.

"Now, 381, what are you about?"

He pulled himself together with an effort and rolled into a third-class compartment of the train with his fellow convicts.

Radium! The word seemed to be burning into his brain. He said it aloud and received a sharp reprimand from the warder seated on his left by the window.

There rose before his eyes a vision of Dartmoor, the disused tin-mine on his father's farm; Robert Despard and he groping in the semi-blackness up to their knees in water.... Their discovery of pitch-blende—and Despard's belief that, in that old worthless mine, there might lie hidden a fortune.

A fortune for his father and his sister. His father whom he had ruined and shamed. And his sister!

Again he blinked his eyes, driving away the mist before them. He found himself staring straight at the convict facing him. The man was talking to him. He saw the fingers of his handcuffed hands moving stealthily. He saw his half-closed eyes contracting and expanding. He answered:

"Yes?"

"Dartmoor! Princetown Prison," was the reply he received.

Rupert lay back and closed his eyes. He might have guessed. It was the irony of fate. They were taking him home, back to his own land, to Dartmoor.

To Princetown Prison. The great monument of granite that broods over the valley of the Dart, from whose barred windows, if a man could gaze, he would see Blackthorn Farm ... and the disused tin-mine with its hidden fortune waiting to be claimed.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE PARTING OF THE WAYS.

The words Sir Reginald had spoken to John Dale when he visited him at Charing Cross hospital after the trial, returned fairly frequently to his mind for many hours afterwards when he reached his own home on Dartmoor.

"This thing might have happened to my boy." He recalled, too, the old yeoman's reply when he reminded Sir Reginald that his son was a gentleman—and therefore could not do a mean thing.

The Dales came of old yeoman stock; they could trace their family back as far, probably further, than the Crichtons. Old Dale was a gentleman right enough, and Crichton knew it would be impossible for him to do anything mean, much less dishonourable. Indeed, he had been the first to warn Sir Reginald that his daughter must never meet the baronet's son again.

Sir Reginald did not find it easy to believe that Jim had fallen in love with Marjorie Dale. He had to presume, like all parents, that he had been blind. His boy had never been in the habit of keeping anything from him.

Since Jim had grown up and become a man, their relationship had been that of brothers or dear comrades rather than father and son. Jim had always bluntly confessed to the few scrapes and peccadilloes into which he had got, and his tendency had been to exaggerate rather than diminish the few mistakes he had made in life.

Probably he had not considered falling in love a mistake. But it is—a grievous one, to the elderly, or to those who have fallen in, been half-drowned, and crawled out again.

Even had this terrible tragedy of the altering of the cheque never occurred, Sir Reginald knew he would have found it very difficult to agree to any engagement between his son and the daughter of John Dale.

First of all, Jim was much too young to think of marriage. Secondly, when he did marry, it would be some one in his own cast, occupying the same rank in life or a higher one than he. For though Crichton kept his youth, he had already forgotten that he married for love, and, *mirabile dictu*, had been happy. Thirdly, Jim had apparently been wedded to his profession. He had already done excellent work in the Flying Corps, and his name was down for early promotion. He had received both public and official recognition for the services he had rendered to aerial navigation.

Sir Reginald had meant to tackle him at once on his return home and tell him, what he felt sure Jim would have already realised, that it would be impossible for him to see Marjorie again, and, in future, they could not even be friends, much less lovers. He thought the task would be quite an easy one. Of course, he would be sorry for the girl, but she was still young, and would easily find a suitable husband later on in her own class; for Crichton was old-fashioned enough to still believe that marriage was the only suitable profession for a respectable female.

But directly he saw Jim he realised that Rupert Dale's conviction had been a serious blow to him. As in duty bound, he walked across to Blackthorn Farm to sympathise with Marjorie, to give her the latest news of her father, and reassure her in case she should be feeling anxious as to his health. He knew as little about women as he did about the Bible. One had brought him into the world, and he believed the other kept him there; but he had never thought it necessary to go deeper into the subject. Both women and Bibles were necessary to the State. The place for both was the home and the church, and he had a good Protestant's profound distrust of the man who had too close an intimacy with, or quoted, either, except in the secret precincts of his own castle or the local cathedral.

So, to his surprise, Marjorie greeted him calmly, with a smile, and gave him a cool, steady hand. He said the conventional thing in a conventional tone of voice, but she showed no signs of hysteria, neither did tears once rise to her eyes.

"I expect your father will be back in two or three days at the latest," he said. "Mr. Despard—one of—er—your brother's friends, is going to bring him down."

He had nearly said one of your late brother's friends, but he checked himself in time. Of course, it would have been far better if Rupert had died, and Sir Reginald secretly hoped he would never live to come out of prison.

"Why is Mr. Despard bringing father home?" Marjorie asked. "Perhaps he was one of Rupert's friends, but he is practically a stranger to us both."

"He has been exceedingly kind," Sir Reginald explained. "He is the only man your father knows in London at present. And I may say that he has given practical proof of his kindness and sympathy. He has done something I should like to have done myself—I won't say anything more about it now, but I will only hint that as long as you choose to remain at Blackthorn Farm no one will disturb you.... The property is your own again—for the mortgage will be redeemed."

Marjorie said nothing, but Sir Reginald noticed that a frown puckered her forehead.

"I think Mr. Despard was very glad of the excuse your father's accident gave him to come down here again." He was trying to be tactful, and failing.

With a woman's quick instinct Marjorie divined the hidden meaning of what he said. "Mr. Despard is not a man whose acquaintance I care to continue. I don't think father was impressed with him, either."

"One can't always judge from appearances. When I first saw him I was certainly not prepossessed in his favour. But he is showing great solicitude for your father in his hour of trial. He is an exceedingly kind-hearted man, and—I know he is looking forward to seeing you again, Miss Dale."

It was a feeble effort, and Sir Reginald felt ashamed of it directly afterwards. He held out his hand.

"If I can be of any service to you please let me know. I'm afraid you may

find your position here a little difficult—but I'm sure we shall do our best to help you to forget the—er—the sorrow that has fallen upon you."

Marjorie took his hand and held it. Then, raising her head, she looked straight into his eyes. "Tell me, please, do you believe my brother guilty?"

Sir Reginald cleared his throat. It was an extraordinary, a stupid question. Had he not felt so sorry for the girl, he would have been irritated.

"Naturally, you haven't read the newspapers—the evidence. I'm afraid his guilt was proved beyond doubt. Of course, he must have been sorely tempted. The jury would not have found him guilty, my dear young lady, if they had not been absolutely certain of the justice of their verdict."

"I'm not asking you what the jury thought. I want to know what you think. For I know that he's innocent. He did not do it."

Sir Reginald pressed her hand tightly. He did not know what to say. That was the worst of women, they were so illogical. Rupert Dale had been found guilty by a jury of his own countrymen, therefore, of course, he was guilty.

"Why do you say you know he's innocent? You can't have proof. If you had——"

A curious smile parted Marjorie's lips. She looked at Sir Reginald with sorrow in her eyes, almost pity.

"How strange men are! They only use their reason, never their instinct. Evidence has hanged many an innocent man, Sir Reginald, hasn't it? Instinct—which for some reason women have cultivated and men have neglected—tells me that my brother is innocent. I know. You will never know."

Sir Reginald shrugged his shoulders. It was impossible to say anything. Argument would be useless and unkind. He pressed her hand again and was turning away when she stopped him.

"I also know why you came over to see me to-day."

Sir Reginald flushed. "I came to——"

"To tell me that you will not allow an engagement between myself and Jim. He has told you, or you have found out, that we love one another."

Sir Reginald dropped her hand. His body stiffened. He looked at her sternly. "Your father told me. My boy has said nothing. This is the first time in his life he has ever had a secret from me. I suppose you wished it kept a secret?"

She shook her head.

"I haven't spoken to him yet," Sir Reginald continued, his voice hardening. "But, of course, as I hope you will realise, it's impossible, utterly impossible, that there can be any engagement between you. You must not see each other again. I'm very sorry, Miss Dale; but leaving this unfortunate affair of your brother's out of the question altogether, I should have looked with strong disapproval on any engagement of marriage, however remote. Jim is much too young——"

"To love?" she interjected quickly. "Surely youth is the time for love!" Then she gave a bitter laugh. "But, of course, you've forgotten."

"My boy has his future to consider, his profession. He has only just started in life. Surely you must see, Miss Dale, that any alliance between you would ruin his career for ever."

She bowed her head. "To be married to a girl whose brother is a convict. To marry the sister of the man who robbed her husband's father. Yes, I quite see it's impossible."

She looked at him proudly and there was defiance in her eyes. "I am sure my father would never permit it, Sir Reginald, and as I am his only daughter and not yet of age, I suppose I should have to obey him. Yet, surely, it's for Jim to say what he'll do. You haven't spoken to him yet?"

"Not yet. I haven't had an opportunity."

Sir Reginald was beginning to feel uncomfortable. "Has he said anything to you—since the result of the trial, I mean?"

"As to our future? Not a word," she replied. "But it's for him to decide. I shall not try to persuade him either way, though if I thought it would be better for him were we never to meet again, I might be persuaded to give way even in opposition to his wishes. I can't say yet. I haven't had time to think.... I've suffered, Sir Reginald. Rupert and I were more to each other than most brothers and sisters, perhaps. But Jim is more to me than father or mother. He's all the world to me."

"Yes, yes, of course. But——"

"It's for he and me to decide," Marjorie said again. "This blow that has fallen, this shame, which I suppose attaches to my name, affects only him and me. Not you nor my father, not you nor anyone else in the world. We two must settle it, no one else."

She bowed gravely, and Sir Reginald turned away without speaking again. There was nothing more to be said. He did not go straight home, he took a long walk. His wishes had never been opposed, and he had not expected opposition now.

What would his son say?

Directly after luncheon he broached the subject by asking when his leave was up.

"In about a week's time, guv'nor! Why, are you in a hurry to get rid of me?"

Sir Reginald stood with his back to the great oak fireplace in the large panel dining-room, and with fingers that were not quite steady lit a cigar.

"When I bid Dale good-bye at Charing Cross Hospital before leaving London he told me your secret, Jim. I was sorry to hear it from a stranger's lips.

You've never kept anything from me before."

Jim nodded. "I'm sorry, sir. It was a secret I'll admit. Love is different—to other things, and I wanted to be sure of myself and sure of her."

"That's all right. But this unfortunate affair has, of course, altered everything. I saw Marjorie this morning. I went over to sympathise with her and see if we could do anything to help her. She broached the subject."

"About our marriage?"

Sir Reginald looked at the end of his cigar. "There can be no question of marriage now."

"Why not?"

"My boy!"

There was a long silence. Father and son looked into one another's eyes. The father was the first to lower his gaze.

"I love her, sir."

"Yes, of course." Sir Reginald coughed. "I'm sorry for you. But you're young. You—you don't know your own mind."

Again a short silence. "Has anything I ever did at school or after I left school, at Sandhurst or at home or since I joined the Flying Corps, suggested to you that I don't know my own mind? That I am fickle or changeable?"

"No." Sir Reginald was not used to being questioned by his son. He was off his guard.

"I've never shown myself a coward in any way, father?"

The old man started, came a step nearer to his boy and looked at him again. And his eyes lighted as he smiled. "Good heavens, Jim, you a coward! My dear boy!"

"I don't mean just physically," Jim continued. "No normal, healthy man's afraid, of course. I suppose it's the danger of my job that gives it a zest. I've never shown myself to be the other sort of coward, either, I hope?"

Sir Reginald just held out his hand.

"Wouldn't it be cowardly, then, to desert the woman I love just at the moment she most wants me? I don't mean that she just wants my love, but she wants my protection. The protection my name can give her. We have a clean record, we Crichtons, haven't we? I shall be smirching it if I desert the woman I promised to marry just because her brother's turned out a bad egg."

"A convict. A felon."

"Yes, yes, but it would make no difference had he been a murderer."

Sir Reginald turned away. His cigar fell into the grate, he leaned his arms on the mantelshelf and buried his face between his hands.

"What do you propose to do?" he asked eventually.

"To announce our engagement at once. Or, if that decision does not meet

with her or your approval, to wait a little while and then announce it. I've given her my word, and I'm going to keep it. I'm sorry, father, if it hurts you, but you must see that I'm right."

"I don't see it!" Sir Reginald cried fiercely. Then, after a few moments' silence, "Do you know what it means if you persist in marrying her? It means your career will be ended. You will have to send in your papers."

"I don't think so."

Sir Reginald turned round. "There can be no question. Do you mean to say if you married a convict's sister you would be tolerated in any regiment, in any decent society?"

Jim sighed. "I don't know. Perhaps you're right. After all, aviation is not confined to the army. I can still do my job. The world's a big place, father."

He stood by Sir Reginald's side and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry if I've hurt you, dad. But, leaving my feelings out of the question, putting aside society, even love, I feel it's my duty to keep my word, my duty to protect the woman who loves me."

Sir Reginald nodded his head. He looked at his son through a mist. "Have you thought of your duty to me? Your duty to society, then—to the State?"

"The fact that I love will not prevent me doing all three. The woman I love is straight, clean, honourable. She has done nothing of which to be ashamed. If because of this woman you and society and the State refuse my services"—he shrugged his shoulders—"as I said, the world is large, father. I'm young, and I can fight."

The old man held out his arms. "You're young and you'll forget. She'll forget, too, Jim. My boy, you don't know what you're doing. Why, she's only a girl. Inside of a year, she'll forget it. There are lots of men——" He stopped, hesitated, and looked at his son again. "Why, that fellow, Mr. Despard, who was down here a little while ago, I know he's in love with her——"

Jim stopped him with a gesture. "Don't say any more, father. I don't think you quite understand. I've made up my mind. I've given my word and I'm going to keep it. I'll do everything in my power not to hurt you. But nothing, no one, will come between the woman I love and me."

Sir Reginald Crichton dropped into a chair and sat huddled up, staring across the room. Jim stood by his side and put his arm around his shoulder. A long time they waited, but neither of them spoke. Each knew there was nothing more to be said.

Youth and age had travelled side by side for a long time, until at last they had reached the inevitable barrier, the place where the road divided.

The parting of the ways. To try to go on together meant destruction, yet the old man would not believe it. The young man, whose sight was clearer and

whose heart was bolder, knew.

## CHAPTER XV.
### ESCAPE.

The great convict prison of Princetown stands on the wildest part of Dartmoor, nearly fifteen hundred feet above the sea, surrounded by wild, rock-strewn tors, whose heather-covered slopes stretch for miles in every direction. Four main roads cross the moor from Plymouth to Moretonhampstead, and Tavistock to Ashburton. These unite at Two Bridges, where they cross the river Dart.

In the triangle formed by the Plymouth and Tavistock roads which divide at Two Bridges lie the prison farms. This land has been reclaimed from the moors with years of heavy toil by the convicts. Only those who by good behaviour have earned a conduct badge are taken for work on the farms, where they have more freedom and even the chance of stolen conversation. Although the rule of silence is not relaxed, it is impossible for the warders, who stand on guard at every vantage point around the field in which the men are working, to hear; and the art of speaking without moving the lips is practised by every convict.

Nearly six months had passed since Rupert had stepped from the train between two warders on to the tiny platform at Princetown, and for six months the prison walls had hidden from his longing eyes the moor that was his home.

But eventually the day came when he was taken outside the prison walls to work in the fields. As he was marched with his gang through the great gates soon after the sunrise of an early summer morning he remembered with a curious tightening of his heart-strings another morning—he had forgotten how long ago—when he had entered those very gates with his friend Robert Despard.

They had come to look over the prison, to stare at the prisoners.

He choked back a laugh, and the convict marching on his left half turned his head and gave him a look of warning. They had reached the cross roads and the next moment halted outside the gate that led to the fields—for the convicts were never marched further along the road than was necessary.

Rupert looked back at the risk of reprimand. It was at this very spot that his sister Marjorie had left them, going on into Princetown to do the week's shopping—and to buy herself a present with the money Rupert had given her!

He stared dry-eyed along the broad highway. Tears never dimmed his eyes

now, as they had done at first.

Reaction had come long ago. He had gone through the fire and had come out hardened. For a little while his sufferings had been unbearable. He had prayed for death. Even his love for Ruby Strode had not been sufficient to give him a hold on life.

In the great convict prison day and night had been merged into one. There had been no break to the dreadful monotony and the everlasting silence. Time had not been composed of days and nights, but of hours; hours of minutes, minutes of seconds—and each second had been an eternity.

Part of his torture had been in thinking of the sufferings of those he loved. Of the woman who had tried to save him, and whose great love had brought him to this pass; of his father and sister, who, perhaps, would never hold up their heads again, ostracised by the so-called decent people.

He did not even know how they managed to live, whether they had enough money to keep body and soul together. And it was that thought that sometimes nearly drove him mad.

The old man who had sacrificed everything for his sake to make a gentleman of him; his beautiful little sister, who had been standing on the threshold of life with the dawn of love in her heart. He had robbed her, too, of life and of love.

Over and over again he had pictured Marjorie and his father sitting in the old kitchen of the little farmhouse alone, afraid even to look at one another, afraid to talk. Shunned by all their neighbours. Poverty facing them, perhaps starvation, the farm going to rot and ruin before their eyes. And yet, had they but known, a fortune waited for them in that old, disused tin-mine. No one knew anything about it but his friend, Robert Despard.

His eyes had been opened too late, and he knew what sort of a friend Despard was. He did not even dare hope that the man who had taken their hospitality would play the game and tell John Dale of the vast possibilities that were hidden in the mine on his property. He would keep the knowledge to himself and take advantage of it ... and of Marjorie!—Rupert's sister—whom he had professed to fall in love with.

The convicts were crossing a patch of moorland towards the fields in which they were to work; the soft turf was beneath Rupert's feet, the blue sky above his head, the scent of gorse, already blossoming, in his nostrils. The sweet sounds and sights and scents stirred his blood. He gazed down into the valley across the Dart. There lay Two Bridges, almost a stone's throw away. Beyond, Post Bridge. He almost fancied he could see Blackthorn Farm! Were they still there, his loved ones, ekeing out a lonely, miserable existence, or had shame driven them away, and had the home they owned been taken? With a fortune lying hidden beneath the land!

Sometimes he had wondered whether the story Despard told him about the traces of radium in the pitch-blende had been an hallucination on his part. But long ago, a month or two after his arrival at Princetown, he had made up his mind and sworn a solemn oath that he would wait for a chance of escape. He knew that no convict had ever succeeded in getting right away, but now and then some unfortunate had hidden on the moors for many days before he was captured.

Knowing the country as he did it would be easy for Rupert, if he could make a dash for freedom, to get to Blackthorn Farm, see his father and tell him what lay hidden in the old mine just outside his very door. The place was mortgaged to Sir Reginald, and in that fact lay the one chance that Despard had been unable to either purchase or lease it. He would have to wait until Sir Reginald foreclosed and then buy it from him.

Every week that passed, every day, meant that the chance of the fortune was slipping away from his father. Rupert knew by the time of the year that more than nine months had passed since he had been tried and sentenced. Unless he escaped within the year it would be too late.

It might be too late now, but it was worth the risk. To get out from the prison cell, or from the great walls that surrounded the prison itself, was practically impossible. His only hope had lain in being sent to work in the quarries or fields.

And now the chance had come. It seemed as if Providence had sent it.

Suddenly the word "Halt!" rang out. Automatically Rupert stopped. The convicts were lined up and their numbers called over. Rupert raised his eyes.

The man on his left was speaking to him again—using his usual signals—a man who had often been his companion in exercise within the prison walls and whose one idea, curiously enough, had also been escape.

Rupert did not look at him. His fists were clenched, every muscle in his body was tight and taut. It required all his self-restraint not to make a dash then and there. He looked up: the blue sky flecked with fleecy clouds was above him, the sweet smell of new-mown hay was everywhere in the air; the soft bleating of sheep and the barking of a dog came faintly down the breeze from Beardown Hill, and along the white dusty road he could see the carrier's cart crawling to Post Bridge.

"No. 381, get on with your work!"

The raucous voice of the warder brought him back to the fact that work was about to commence. As he lifted the hay on his fork he gazed around. The black forms of the warders stood like silhouettes against the sky, their rifles glinting in the sun, a wall as formidable, as impassable, as those of the prison behind him.

By a lucky chance the convict who was raking by him now was his pal, No. 303. He had been plying him with questions of roads, paths, and distances to

the nearest railway stations, and only yesterday had offered to make an attempt with him to escape. He was a small man with flaxen hair, which now stood up in a short, stiff stubble like a closely-mown cornfield, and the blue, dreamy eyes, whose kindly glance belied the broad arrows which covered every portion of his costume, made one wonder how this kindly little gentleman had earned the ten years, four of which had failed to stamp the convict brand upon his face. In all their many opportunities for secret conversation he had never confided in Rupert his crime or his name.

He was a mystery, but his willingness and his ready obedience, his haunting smile and kindly blue eyes, had made him a favourite with the warders, who treated him with a lack of harshness that almost amounted to kindness. And as he worked as though his life depended upon it, and always with the same sad smile, he was allowed more freedom of movement within the limits of the warder's chain than any other convict.

Once or twice during the day, whenever they were close together, No. 303 questioned Rupert as to the part of the moorlands they were on, how far from Princetown or Moretonhampstead.

"Keep your eyes open, the chance may come to-day."

But Rupert shook his head. What chance had they, surrounded by armed men, in the broad light of day? True, there was always the chance of a fog, and though in the spring they were fairly common, as the summer advanced their appearance was rare.

To-day the heat was oppressive, and though the sun shone in a cloudless sky a thin, almost imperceptible, haze hung over the tors, and the peaks shone with a curious light. Rupert noted this, for it sometimes was the precursor of a summer fog, and when these fogs did come they appeared suddenly, without warning—and as suddenly disappeared.

In the afternoon a slight breeze, which now and then had blown from the hills, died down. There was not a breath of air. It was with a sigh of relief that even the warders saw the sun sink beneath the bank of grey cloud that had covered the western sky.

The perspiration poured down the convicts' faces as they worked, and the warders began to throw anxious glances behind them where Great Tor had already disappeared in an ominous cloud-bank, which rolled down its slopes like cotton-wool. The field in which they were working was the furthest one from the prison, and just above Two Bridges, which lay at the bottom of a steep slope of rough grass. The field was separated from the road by another one, and a high wall without any gates ran down the whole length of the road.

The head warder pulled out his watch. It was a quarter to five. He glanced at the low, white clouds which the least puff of wind might at any moment bring

down and blot out the landscape.

He sounded his whistle, and the convicts at once began to form up and the guard to close in. There was a few moments' delay while the rakes and forks were collected and the waggon brought up from the end of the field.

"Stand next me," No. 303 whispered to Rupert. "Our chance has come. You won't fail me!"

Rupert, whose knowledge of the moor told him that escape was impossible for one as ignorant of his surroundings as poor 303, stooped down to tie his shoelace. "For God's sake, don't be a fool! Summer fogs are no good, I can't——"

"No. 381, stand up! All present, chief."

The chief warder immediately gave the order to march, and the whole party moved up the centre of the field towards the prison, the warders marching beside their charges and the armed guard about thirty paces away extended so as to completely surround them.

Further conversation was rendered impossible. A faint breeze began to stir the still air, bringing a damp mist, which beat in their faces. Rupert, with his eyes fixed on the ground, began to pray that the approaching fog might not blow away. A chance had come—for him. His heart went out in tender sympathy to the poor soul who could not face the long dreary years of his punishment yet to come, while his mind was torn in two by an agony of doubt.

He, who knew the moors so well, did not believe for a moment that, alone and unhampered, he could escape; even if they could hide on the moors for a day or two, capture in the end was inevitable. All he wanted was to get to Blackthorn Farm; but 303 wanted to get clear away.

Within a few minutes telephones and telegraphs would inform every town and village in the two counties, every railway station would be watched, every egress barred; every constable in Devon and Cornwall would block all roads.

Suddenly the voice of the chief warder ordering the convicts to close up broke in upon his thoughts, and looking up he saw that the prison had disappeared—nothing but a white sea of fog lay all around, and even the walls of the field a few yards away were almost invisible! They were only two fields now from the prison, and the gang checked for a moment as the last gate but one was reached.

Rupert was almost the centre of the gang, and he noticed that his own warder, who was just in front, was only just visible in spite of his dark uniform.

As he reached the gate 303 gripped him by the arm, dropped on his knees behind the wall and disappeared. At this moment the chief warder gave the order to halt, and his heart flew into his mouth, for he thought 303's action had been seen. But the sound of some one shouting at the horses, and the chief warder's voice raised in angry question, reassured him.

Without thinking of what he was doing he dropped on his face and crawled rapidly down the side of the wall. At the same moment the order to march was given and the noisy beating of his heart was drowned by the creaking of the waggon as it lumbered past.

He lay perfectly still, flattened against the wall. He wondered why he heard no shot or other indication that they had been seen. The rear guards passed within six feet of him, and when their black forms were swallowed up by the white fog, he realised that their absence from the gang would not be discovered until they reached the prison.

Leaping to his feet he ran along the wall, and almost immediately fell over 303, who was crouching against it.

"Quick, for God's sake follow me!" he whispered. "We must make for Beardown. This fog may blow away at any moment."

They ran like hares; scrambling over the walls, falling into holes, stumbling on rocks, Rupert intent only on reaching Wistman's wood before the fog lifted.

He had nothing to guide him but the knowledge of the direction in which he originally started from the wall and the moorman's instinct to prevent him from travelling in a circle, which is the inevitable fate of every one lost in a fog.

They dropped on to a road, Tavistock Road. "Come on, we are right now!" Rupert cried excitedly.

They scrambled over the wall and raced down the steep hillside. Suddenly they saw the gleam of water below them, bushes and stones appeared. They had left the fog behind, the valley was clear.

As they plunged across the river and breasted the steep hill they saw the blessed fog shutting out Beardown Farm and all the tors above it.

"Quick! we must get up with the fog before we are seen. Thank God, there is no one in sight!"

But poor 303 was no moorman, and he was already dropping behind.

"I can't do it, 381; go on without me!"

Rupert turned back and, taking him by the arm, pulled him down into a little hollow behind a huge furze-bush and laid him on his back.

"You're only winded; we have run over a mile; you'll get your second wind in a minute," he whispered. "But we must not wait here a moment longer than absolutely necessary. If the fog should lift now, we are certain to be taken. I am going to make for Hartland Tor, which is close to my father's house; there is an old, disused mine below the tor in which we can hide for the present."

Boom! A dull explosion echoed across the hills.

"What's that?" exclaimed 303.

"The alarm," Rupert replied. "We have not a moment to lose."

## CHAPTER XVI.
### "YOU'VE KILLED HIM."

Again the dull boom echoed over the moorland. In a few minutes the hill would be swarming with warders searching for them.

Rupert felt a thrill of excitement. The first thrill he had experienced for many weeks. Curious thoughts and memories flashed through his brain as he raced along shoulder to shoulder with Convict 303, who kept closely to his side in spite of the steep ascent. He remembered as a boy hunting with a pack of harriers which sometimes met at The Hall; he used to ride a rough moorland pony. This thrill of being hunted was somewhat similar to the thrill of hunting. As a boy he had always had a sneaking sympathy with the quarry, and a vague hope, he was always ashamed to express, that it might escape. He understood now. It was far finer to be hunted than to hunt.

"We'll cheat them, No. 303, never fear!" he cried to his comrade. "Keep your pecker up, man!"

"I'm all right," the convict panted; "but I can't keep this pace up for long."

They had entered the thick pall of fog, and presently Rupert stopped in order to regain his breath. They stood close together, touching one another, listening. At first they heard nothing but the sobbing of their own breath, and the beating of their own hearts. And they could see nothing; the blessed fog shut everything out from sight—rocks, walls, roads, hills, and valleys.

"If this only lasts," Rupert whispered.

"Where shall we make for?" No. 303 asked. "Plymouth ain't far from here, is it; and that's a seaport town?"

Rupert turned and looked into the blue eyes of his comrade. He laid his hand on his shoulder. "Man, you don't expect to get right away, do you? It has never been done and never will be done. I was born on these moorlands. I know every stick and stone and bush on them. Even if I wanted to I couldn't get away."

"Even if you wanted to!" No. 303 hissed. "What do you mean? What sort of game is it you're playing—Hide and Seek, or Puss in the Corner?"

He broke off suddenly, and Rupert's grip tightened on his shoulder. The silence was broken. On the still air they heard the sound of a horse galloping

along the distant road in the valley somewhere below them. They held their breath and listened intently.

The sound grew nearer and nearer; for a few seconds it seemed as if the speed of the horse was checked. Then, to the relief of both men, the sounds became fainter and fainter, gradually dying away.

"A mounted warder galloping to Post Bridge to cut us off in that direction," Rupert said. "We must stick to the tors. While the fog lasts they can't leave the roads or bridle paths."

Again they commenced to struggle up the steep ascent, keeping along the edge of the water course.

"Where are you making for?" No. 303 demanded.

"Wistman's Wood, the other side of the Dart. A good place to hide if the fog lifts."

"Ain't no use hiding," the convict objected. "We must find a farm or a cottage where we can get a change of clothing and food. Then we may get a chance of slipping away. You say you know the moorland—then you must know the folk on it. Ain't there some one who would help us—or somewhere where we could hide ourselves? This is life or death, remember."

Rupert nodded, and once again he slackened speed and stopped. "Listen, 303. I don't want to escape, because I know it's impossible. All I hope is to get on the other side of Post Bridge to Blackthorn Farm—to my home."

His voice faltered a moment at the last word. "There is something I want to say to my father—if he's still alive. Something I must say. It's a matter of life or death to him, perhaps—and to my sister. When I've done that, delivered my message—why then I shall give myself up."

The muscles about 303's face contracted, his blue eyes clouded. For a little while he was silent, turning over in his mind what Rupert had said.

"You're balmy!" he growled eventually. "Crikey, what a chance! Why, if you gets home, they'll hide you, won't they—give you food and clothes and money? And I'll jolly well see that I gets the same too. We're going to see this thing through together."

Rupert sighed and shook his head: "Follow me, if you like; but it's not a bit of good. My father will give us both up."

He looked at 303 sadly. For months, perhaps for years, he knew this convict had only thought of, and planned, escape, dreamed of it day and night. The taste of freedom was sweet in his mouth already; he could not believe that they would not get clear away. It was no use trying to persuade him that he was attempting the impossible.

"I'll stand by you," he replied. "I'll do what I can to help you. But it's no use talking. Come along!"

Presently they came to a high, stone wall, and Rupert uttered an exclamation of joy.

"We're just above Wistman's Wood, and this is the great wall that runs from Beardown to Rough Tor, which is past Post Bridge Hall. It will be easy going now, and if the fog lifts the wall will help to conceal us from anyone on the road below."

They started off again at a good pace. They had not gone for more than half a mile when they both stopped simultaneously.

The sound of a voice had come out of the fog far above them. They listened. It came again—a faint shout. They were straining their ears in the intense silence. Presently they heard a pony's iron-shod hoofs striking on the granite. A moment later another shout, nearer than the first.

"Mounted warders on the tor above us," Rupert whispered. "Quick, get over the wall! We must hide until they're gone."

As they climbed the wall a large stone was displaced and went rolling and bounding down the hill side. Then, just as they jumped to the ground, there was a sudden puff of wind and the cloud of fog rolled away, almost as if it were a great white blanket withdrawn by invisible hands. And there on the tor above them Rupert saw clearly outlined against the sky two horsemen, about three hundred yards apart.

"By God, we're done!" 303 cried.

The mounted warders raised a shout, and jabbing their heels into their ponies' sides, commenced to gallop down the hill.

"We must make a run for it," Rupert said. "There's fog still in the valley."

Before he finished speaking, 303 had torn off like a hare, leaping, stumbling, dashing first one way, then another to avoid obstacles. Rupert followed. Twice 303 fell, and each time Rupert waited to lend him a hand. Once he glanced back and he saw the warders reach the wall; they dismounted, and one commenced to pull the stones off the wall to make a gap for his pony; the other unslung his rifle and shouted to the flying convicts to stop—or he would fire.

Twice the warning came. They were racing side by side now. Rupert heard himself laugh. The sheltering pall of fog was not a hundred yards away now. He set his teeth and flung back his head while he waited for the crack of the warders' carbines and the "ping" of the buckshot.

It came just as the kindly fog was about to envelop them again. Ten seconds more and they would have been safe.

Perhaps the warder had the instincts of a sportsman. Perhaps he had purposely given them a run for their money. But he had to do his duty. He knew that if once they got into the fog again they would be lost.

So he fired. He saw the right-hand man stumble, then roll over and over like a shot rabbit until he lay quite still face downwards on the heather. Before

he could raise his carbine and fire again the other man had disappeared.

Both warders let go their ponies, stumbled over the wall and ran down the hill-side to the fallen convict. The man who had fired the shot stooped down and turned him over. And he started and looked at his companion. The convict's face was white as death; blood was flowing from a wound on his forehead.

"My God Bill, you've done it this time!" the second warder said. "You've killed him!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

### AT POST BRIDGE HALL.

The warders stared into each other's faces.

"It's a bad job. You're sure he's dead——"

"I wouldn't have done it for anything," the man who had fired the shot whispered. "I aimed at his legs, too. Damn the gun!"

He threw it into the heather, and turned away to hide his emotion.

The second warder glanced back over his shoulder. The fog was slipping down the hillside again. The stone wall and the ponies were already lost to view.

"Fire off your gun again; they'll hear it on the road. I'd better go back for the ponies, or we shall lose 'em."

"Which way did the other fellow go?"

"I don't know. You get the ponies—I'll wait here."

The second warder hurried up the hillside towards the stone wall and disappeared into the fog. The one who had fired the fatal shot stooped to pick up his gun. As he did so, the figure of the convict lying on the heather stirred. A second later he was on his feet, running for dear life!

He was gone before the warder could realise what had happened. He swung round and stared open-mouthed at the wall of fog surrounding him on all sides.

"Well, I'm damned!" he ejaculated.

Jamming a cartridge into his gun, he fired it off.

* * * * *

When the fatal shot was fired Rupert was a few yards ahead of 303, and he felt a sharp sting at the point of his shoulder as he heard the shot whiz by. Thinking

that the shot was aimed at him, and feeling himself hit, he swerved to the right and made for a low wall which ran down towards the powder-magazine, intent only on reaching its shelter. The shock of being fired at had put all thought of his comrade for the moment out of his mind, and it was not until he was over the wall and heading for the small clump of trees, through the top of which he could see the ruined chimney of the old powder-mill which instinct told him was his only chance, did he think of 303.

Slackening his pace, he glanced back over his shoulder—but he could see nothing. He turned once more and sped towards the trees which were now only a few hundred yards away, and the fold in the ground hid him from the road and also from the hill above. On reaching the trees, his breath coming in great gasps, worn out with excitement, he threw himself upon a bed of rushes growing beside the Cherry Brook, which flowed within the walls that enclosed the powder mills.

He was consumed with raging thirst, and when he had recovered his breath sufficiently, he crawled to the brook and buried his face in the cool, clear stream. As he sat up he saw his right hand dripping with blood, and for the first time remembered his wound. Taking off his broad-arrowed coat, he felt his throbbing shoulder, and was relieved to find the bullet had but grazed his flesh. He went to the stream and dipped his coat into the water—when he was startled by the dull thud of horses' hoofs approaching.

The powder mill buildings were mere ruined shells. There was no shelter there—but suddenly his eye caught the chimney, a circular stack about thirty feet high. The horseman had reached the wall; he heard him check the horse and dismount. Rupert remembered that he had often swarmed up the inside of the chimney when a boy. The sound of the pony's hoofs striking the stones of the wall as the warder led him through the gap caused Rupert to spring towards the chimney. In a second he was within the ruined furnace, grasping the iron bar which crossed the chimney some six feet above the ground.

He swung himself up, and placing his knees against the round wall in front of him, and with his back against the other side, he slowly worked himself up the narrow shaft until he was some twelve feet up. By jamming his feet in a niche from which the mortar had fallen out, and with his back thrust against the opposite wall, he made himself secure for the moment.

He heard the warder and the pony stumbling over the rubble which strewed the mouth of the ruined chimney; his heart was in his mouth. Pony and man were within the furnace, and the voice of the warder almost beneath him made Rupert look down in momentary expectation of meeting his upturned gaze; he saw his arm and shoulder already beneath the chimney—another moment he would be discovered.

A voice outside hailed the warder, and he stepped back—and disappeared.

For some little time Rupert heard the voice of men talking in the precincts of the powder mill. He strained his ears to try and hear what they said, but only caught odd words. He gathered that they were still searching both for him and Convict 303. He was relieved to know that his friend had not been caught; yet in his heart he realised it was only a matter of time. Once he reached home—if indeed he were lucky enough to succeed in doing so—he would only wait long enough to discover how things were with his father and sister, and to warn them that a fortune might still be lying within their grasp. He did not know how much of the little property had been mortgaged to Sir Reginald Crichton; he almost hoped the disused tin mine was included. As long as the interest was paid, the mortgage would remain undisturbed; and Sir Reginald had proved himself to be not only an upright gentleman, but a kind friend.

It was his one-time friend, Robert Despard, the man who had called himself his pal, whom he feared. Almost the last words the latter had spoken to him echoed ironically in his brain:

"I'll keep the secret about our radium mine, old man, never fear. It's safe with me!"

Various schemes flashed with lightning-like rapidity through Rupert's brain as he clung to his perilous position in the chimney above the furnace. He began to think that the men outside intended to remain there for the night—it seemed so long before they moved away, and he heard the beat of their ponies' hoofs growing fainter and fainter. But at last he knew they were really gone. Even then he waited awhile before he commenced to painfully clamber to the ground.

He was stiff and sore. His shoulder ached and throbbed where the stray buckshot had struck him. There was blood upon his hand, too, where he had cut it.

But he was still free. At first he moved cautiously, examining the country as much as was visible in all directions. The fog had partially cleared away, but it still lay in patches here and there.

There was not a soul in sight. Not a sound to be heard save the purling waters of the little Cherry Brook on his left. He knelt down and washed the blood from his hand, then took a drink. And suddenly he laughed under his breath.

It was good to be alive again—for he had not been living those past months in prison. He had been less alive than a caged animal. He had slept, eaten, worked, and exercised with mechanical-like precision. Even the agonies of mind he had undergone seemed unreal now. They did not even seem to matter—nothing mattered but the fact that he was free!

Free to sit or stand, to walk or run, to laugh or to cry. Free to move as he

liked, look where he liked, do what he liked. He dug his hands into the soft peat and tore it up, and sniffed the sweet scent. He stood upright and stretched out his arms, then laughed aloud.

It was indeed good to be alive again. It was wonderful! The next moment he was trembling from head to foot, and his body broke out in a sweat. He was not to be alive for long. Even if he reached Blackthorn Farm and delivered his message he would have to give himself up and go back to prison. Back to that living grave!

He had told poor 303 that escape was absolutely impossible. Even if a man got outside Dartmoor and reached Tavistock or Exeter or Plymouth he was certain to be detected and brought back. His father would never hide him or help him—he knew that.

Yet if he once succeeded in getting home he could remain there hidden long enough to disguise himself, to grow a beard. And then one day, so altered as to be hardly recognisable, he might ship off to Canada or Australia.

His head swam: he put his hands up before his eyes for a moment. The sudden draught of freedom had intoxicated him.

Once again he gazed round the moorland. It was growing dark, the sun had set, and the western sky was still glowing red. Now and then a faint puff of wind stirred the trees surrounding the powder mill, and he saw stray banks of fog driving here and there, shifting their position. By crossing the stream he could step right into the white bank of mist.

Freedom! The thought of it had become an obsession now. Taking a run he cleared Cherry Brook and plunged into the fog. He knew his way now; he could have found it blindfold. But he went cautiously, for no man can be sure of himself if he once misses his way when a Dartmoor fog is down.

To reach Blackthorn Farm he would have to pass Post Bridge Hall, which lay between him and the East Dart. He kept edging towards the valley, for though it was near the main road, the fog lay more thickly there than in the higher ground.

It was rough going. Rocks and boulders and gorse bushes impeded the progress, invisible in the mist. Now and again he struck a boggy patch of ground and had to make a wide detour to avoid it. He had been walking for upwards of an hour, and he began to fear lest he had missed his way and perhaps been going round in a circle, when suddenly he stepped out into a clear, starlit night. Below him he saw the tiny village of Post Bridge, and almost directly in front of him red lights gleaming through the belt of trees.

Post Bridge Hall! Down on the bridge itself, near the little post office, he saw figures moving to and fro. He dropped on to his hands and knees behind the shelter of a rock. He heard the barking of a sheep dog, the voices of men and

women travelled up to him.

Of course the news of the escape had spread, and the place was alive with people searching.

How eager men and women were to hunt their kind! He remembered how as a boy he had joined in just such a hunt.

He commenced to crawl along on all fours towards Post Bridge Hall. The trees there might shelter him, but it would be useless to try and cross the patch of country on the other side. He climbed a couple of stone walls, crossed a field, scrambled over a fence, and dropped straight into the garden of the Hall itself.

Lights gleamed from the windows. The front door stood wide open, and not a hundred yards away from him he saw the outer door of the glass conservatory which abutted from the drawing-room. He saw with surprise that this was open too.

For a long time he lay waiting, watching, afraid to go on—because he knew the fog would not descend again. The million eyes of the night watched him from a cloudless sky.

Presently from the woods behind him he heard voices and the barking of dogs. A gang of men were beating the spinney, searching for the two convicts.

Within sight of home he would be caught. He rose to his feet, crossed the narrow stretch of turf and walked boldly up the drive.

He stood a moment outside the conservatory door, listening. He heard nothing but the voices of the men in the wood and the barking of the dogs.

He stepped inside the conservatory, closed the door, and then, fumbling for the key, found it. He locked it, and drew the bolts top and bottom which he knew were there. Stooping down he crawled beneath the broad shelf which ran the length of the glass-house. The leaves of a palm and the fronds of a large fern gave him complete shelter.

He stretched himself out full length so as to lie perfectly flat, and as he did so his foot struck a pile of empty flower-pots. They fell over with a crash. He stopped breathing. He thought he detected a woman's voice in the drawing-room. A minute passed, but no one came.

He breathed again. He was safe for the time being. The conservatory door was locked. They would never search Sir Reginald Crichton's house! He was still a free man. And freedom to him now was more than anything else in the world. More than love or honour, or the wealth that might be lying hidden in the tin

mine at home, waiting for his father and sister.

## CHAPTER XVIII.
### ALARMED.

Marjorie Dale only remained at Blackthorn Farm after her father's return from London long enough to nurse him back to health. When he had completely recovered from the effects of his accident she left home, Devonshire, and all she knew and loved. She went away as much in deference to her lover's wishes as to her father's, though so far as her own feelings were concerned she would have preferred to remain at Post Bridge and face public opinion—scandal, cruelty, and calumny. She knew that both she and her father would be social outcasts.

She had connections on her mother's side living at Calais. They were in the lace trade, and had spent the best part of their lives out of England. To them Marjorie was sent—not altogether as a guest. In return for a home and protection she was expected to play the part of nursery governess to their children and help in the housework.

No one was more delighted at this arrangement than Sir Reginald Crichton. Marjorie would be away for at least six months, and during that time much might happen.

Jim would learn to forget; work would help him.

He was so grateful that he made the mistake of thanking Marjorie for the step she was taking. But she read his thoughts as she had done before: she knew what he hoped would come from this parting between Jim and her.

"I'm going away, not for my father's sake, nor for yours, nor my own, but for Jim's sake," she explained. "I know that the parting will only strengthen our love, and his determination to marry me. With him I believe that love is the greatest thing in the world." She smiled when Sir Reginald shrugged his shoulders. "I know it's an unfashionable belief, yet everything in the world depends on love. The greatest men have always been the greatest lovers; even soldiers, sailors, and Empire builders. When I return from abroad Jim is going to announce our engagement. I'm not entirely selfish in agreeing to this; for I know that his happiness and his future lie in my hand."

Sir Reginald had nothing to say. He had proved that argument was useless. His son's attitude was a severe blow to him. For the moment love was stronger

than reason or ambition, but he still believed that by waiting, love would weaken and even Jim would listen to wiser and more worldly counsels.

So Marjorie bade her lover farewell one grey autumn morning and left for France—but not before she had had an unpleasant interview with Robert Despard and taken a very unhappy farewell of her father.

For when Despard brought the old man back from London, he had stayed on at Blackthorn Farm, and he had seized every opportunity of making love to Marjorie—even after she had told him his case was hopeless, that her heart was already given.

Despard had merely laughed and said he intended to win her in spite of all opposition. At first his attitude puzzled her, for she could not conceive why a man of his type should wish to marry into a family whose name was now a byword in the county. Her father encouraged him, moreover, and did everything in his power to make her look kindly on Despard's suit.

It was only the night before she left for Calais that she discovered the reason.

Despard had insisted on paying off the mortgage which Sir Reginald held on Blackthorn Farm, and the homestead was once again her father's property. Crichton, too, had acted very generously in the matter of paying the conveyancing expenses himself.

Instead of being grateful, Marjorie was shocked and horrified. It seemed as if the three men had laid their heads together and planned this thing to put her in their power. It was a trick on Despard's part, and Sir Reginald had helped him—not really for John Dale's sake, but in order to save his own son from what he considered would be a mesalliance.

To a certain extent she was right. But Despard had another and stronger motive for his generosity in paying off the mortgage on the farm and handing the estate back to the man who had, only a month or two ago, been a stranger to him. The reason was to be found in the old tin mine where Rupert and he had suddenly discovered the presence of pitch-blende, firing their imaginations with thoughts of radium—and a fortune.

News of what was happening in the outside world seldom reached Marjorie in Calais. And the only news she received of what was taking place in the wilds of Dartmoor was contained in a weekly letter from her father. He refrained from telling her everything. Jim wrote to her daily. They were very wonderful letters telling her of his work, telling her of his love. But for those letters she would never have remained for half those long, weary months in the conventional Anglo-French family in the sleepy little town of Calais.

But even Jim did not know what was taking place at Blackthorn Farm until the news became public property, and the great boom which Despard cleverly

engineered was burst on a credulous, Tango-dancing world.

By that time Marjorie had returned home to find Despard ensconsed at Blackthorn Farm, the land surrounded and over-run by a small army of men, and Jim Crichton still absent with his corps at Netheravon.

Marjorie hardly recognised her old home. It was over nine months since her brother had been convicted and sentenced. A change had taken place, too, in her, and she knew it. Six months abroad had made a great difference—mentally and physically. She had looked forward to returning to Blackthorn Farm in spite of its loneliness and the bitter memories she knew she would find there.

Her father met her at Newton Abbot station, and it was some minutes before he found her in the crowd of passengers who alighted from the West of England express. To the old man it seemed as if she had grown up suddenly. Grown from a girl into a woman. From a farmer's daughter into a lady.

"Why, how swagger we have become," he smiled. "I almost took you for a Frenchwoman with that smart little hat and dress, and those ridiculous shoes! It's lucky we haven't brought the dogcart, so you won't have to walk up the hills."

Marjorie imagined they would take the train to Moretonhampstead, and from thence by motor omnibus to Post Bridge. When she had collected her luggage, John Dale led her across the bridge and out of the station. And there she saw Robert Despard waiting in a motor-car. He seized the reluctant hand she gave him, and after pressing it warmly, put it to his lips.

"Welcome home!" he cried; then, turning to Dale: "By Jove, what a fine lady she's become! She'll be able to play the part to perfection, eh?"

Marjorie flushed with resentment and disappointment. Despard was the last person in the world she wanted to see.

"Have I got to drive home in that thing?" she cried, pointing disdainfully to the motor-car.

While the luggage was being strapped on, Dale explained that it belonged to Mr. Despard, and that he kindly allowed them to make use of it.

"It belongs to the syndicate," Despard replied. "There have been great happenings at Post Bridge since you went away, Marjorie. I'm afraid you'll find the place changed—not the farmhouse itself, but the surrounding waste land."

"Mr. Despard has discovered that we've been living with a fortune under our feet all these years," Dale explained.

He looked anxiously at his daughter and took her hand; but she made no response. After two or three attempts at conversation when the car had started, Dale relapsed into silence. It was not easy to talk at the pace they went, with the wind singing in their ears. And in his heart, too, he felt a little afraid of Marjorie. A little frightened at the quick march of events since she had been away. And perhaps just a little ashamed.

Marjorie guessed what had happened. When Blackthorn Farm was reached, she knew. But instead of feeling grateful or elated, disgust seized her. Within a few hundred yards of the farm, hideous corrugated iron buildings had sprung up; the land all around the tin mine had been cleared and levelled. Plant was being erected; scattered here and there were temporary dwellings, and offices for the workmen; a miniature railway line had already been laid on the ancient granite track. Tears rose to her eyes as she looked at the desecration that had been done to her moorlands and her home.

"Whose work is this?" she asked. "Mr. Despard's, of course! I suppose Sir Reginald gave permission——"

Dale explained all that had happened, and the generous part Despard had played. "I owe him a debt I can never repay. Ruin stared us in the face, Marjorie, and through him it has been averted. When—when my boy comes out of prison—though I hope I shall not live to see that day—he will at least have the chance of living a decent life, of wiping out the crime he committed, and becoming a useful citizen. He will have the opportunity, for he will be a rich man. God grant that he takes it."

Marjorie shook her head. "Mr. Despard is a stranger to us. It's unlike you, father, to accept so much from a stranger. What does Mr. Despard expect in return?"

The old man turned away. "Nothing. Of course he'll share in our good fortune. He'll take the larger share of whatever money we make. I have insisted on that. A company will be floated—it's in the course of promotion already. It's a gamble, to a certain extent. I believe there's a deal of opposition; there are men who scoff at the idea of traces of radium having been discovered here. Other eminent men have made exhaustive tests, and their report leads us to believe there is no doubt that we shall be able to extract radium from the mine. But I've refused to take a single penny in cash; I'm to be paid entirely in shares."

"And how is Mr. Despard to be paid?"

"I don't believe he has thought of himself," Dale replied. "He'll join the board of directors, of course, and I suppose he'll receive a certain number of shares. He'll become a very famous man, Marjorie. I've seen a lot of him during the past few months, and my respect has grown daily. He has thrown himself heart and soul into this business. At first every one scoffed at him, but lately a change has taken place in public opinion here. Even Sir Reginald is converted. Can't you guess why Mr. Despard has worked so hard and been so generous? I'm sure his love for you, born originally of pity, has been the motive."

"Then I'm sorry," Marjorie said quickly. "Even if I were not engaged to Jim I could never care for Mr. Despard. I dislike and distrust him. The sooner he realises this the better."

John Dale sighed and shook his head. He had forced himself to believe his daughter would forget. He had hoped, he had prayed, that she would have grown to see things in a reasonable way, and that this sudden promise of wealth would entirely change her point of view of life and love.

"Sir Reginald will never consent to his son marrying you," he replied harshly. "Why, Jim is little more than a boy, he doesn't know his own mind. He has already forgotten."

Marjorie smiled and said nothing more. She knew that she would see him in a few days' time, for he had applied for special leave on urgent private affairs, and he had written assuring her that he would be at the Hall again within twelve or fourteen days. He also hinted that he had important work in hand, that he might be doing some long distance flights on a new monoplane containing improvements, which were his own inventions, later on in the year. And he was down for early promotion.

The twelve days of waiting for her lover's return were long and weary ones. Blackthorn Farm was no longer the lonely, forgotten homestead, tucked away in a secluded part of the moorlands it had been formerly. Tourists and trippers thronged to look at the curious old farmhouse and to watch the works being erected a few hundred yards away. The place was over-run by workmen. All day long cars and lorries were rushing to and fro along the main road between Princetown and Post Bridge and Moretonhampstead. Solitude and loneliness, which had been so easy to find in the old days, disappeared. Marjorie had to take long walks before she knew she was safe from intrusion. She dreaded meeting friends and acquaintances more than the strangers who came to stare at her old home. She was not afraid of being cut or shunned. Instinct warned her, that now it was known vast wealth was hidden in the old mine, people would conveniently forget the shame that had fallen on her name. They would no longer think of her as the convict's sister, but as the future heiress. Shame made her want to hide from every one but her lover. Even from her father and the labourers and farm hands on the estate.

She was ashamed—not of herself or her brother, but of them!

At last, one Friday morning, a note arrived from her lover saying that he would reach Post Bridge Hall that evening. Of course the news of the happenings at Blackthorn Farm had been carried to him. He told Marjorie that his father would be absent on Friday evening, and asked her as soon as it was dark to go straight up to the Hall. He did not want anyone to know of his arrival.

So Marjorie said nothing. Her love had become too precious a thing to be talked about. Moreover, she did not want Despard to know of Jim's presence at the Hall. Feeling secure in the knowledge that John Dale approved of his love for Marjorie, Despard had pressed his suit on every available opportunity, giving

her no peace. When he found it was useless to plead, he even threatened her.

But Marjorie laughed in his face.

"You can laugh now," he said savagely. "But I mean to make you my wife. I mean to win you. Not many men would have done for a woman what I've done for you. I've saved you from poverty, I've saved you from disgrace. Perhaps when we're married I can save your brother from prison."

She had always believed in her heart that Despard could have proved Rupert's innocence if he had chosen to speak at the trial. And these words returned to her a few days later with redoubled force.

Soon after the midday meal on Friday she left the farm and walked in the direction of Beardown, intending to pass the rest of the day there reading, until it was time to meet her lover at the Hall. When the fog came down, she had to slightly alter her plans, and she made for the main road as she knew she could not lose her way there. She was terrified lest the fog delayed Jim, and she hovered close to Post Bridge Hall until it began to grow dark. She scarcely heard the boom of the warning signal gun from Princetown, so intent was she on meeting the man she loved. It was just as the fog lifted and she was making her way by the long drive towards the Hall that a motor-car overtook her and pulled up, and Jim jumped to the ground.

They looked at one another, but spoke no word. Telling the chauffeur to take the car on, Jim slipped his arm through Marjorie's, and together they walked up to the house. Not until they had entered the drawing-room, where a cheerful fire was blazing, did Jim Crichton speak. He took Marjorie's hand in his and looked deep into her eyes.

"I can hardly believe that you are really here," he whispered. "It seems too good to be true. The months have been like years. But you have never been absent from me—even in my work you have always been beside me. By day and by night. If I had ever doubted that love was the greatest thing in the world I should know it now."

Marjorie smiled: her red lips parted and she tried to speak, but no words came. He had said just what she wanted him to say. And he had said it quietly, almost coldly.

For a few moments there was silence. Then he released her hands, and opening his arms he took her in them and, holding her tightly, covered her face with kisses. The pent-up passion burst. The months of separation, the obstacles that had been placed in their way, instead of killing their love, had increased it ten-fold.

"My dear, my dear one, what does anything else in the world matter so long as we have one another!" Jim whispered.

"Nothing," she sobbed, unable to keep back her tears—tears of joy.

"Nothing—but I'm a woman. Therefore love is all in all to me. But you're a man, and——"

He silenced her with his lips: "And helpless, useless without his mate."

The darkness increased. The old oak-panelled room was only lit by the dancing flames from the log fire. There was silence in the house, and outside on the moorlands there was silence, too. Presently it was broken by the shouts of men and the baying of dogs. But the lovers did not hear.

They only heard the beating of each other's hearts and the voice of Love calling them to walk fearlessly along the path they had chosen. And the voice of Fate calling them to face the unknown future together.

Twice a servant knocked at the door before Jim heard, and starting up told him to enter.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, striking a match to light the candles, fearful lest his father had returned earlier than he expected.

The servant explained that an official from Princetown Prison wished to see him. "I understand, sir," the man said in an excited voice, "that a couple of convicts escaped this afternoon in the fog. They traced one in this direction. He was wounded by a shot the warder fired. They want permission to search the grounds and out-buildings."

Jim hesitated for a moment. "Of course they can search," he replied. "You know where the keys of the garage, the stables, and the out-buildings are, Perkins. You had better accompany them; and be sure to lock up carefully."

"Very good, sir!"

The servant was about to retire when the burly form of a uniformed warder blocked the doorway. He saluted.

"I understand Sir Reginald is away; can I speak to you a moment, sir?"

Jim glanced over his shoulder at Marjorie. She was hidden from sight, seated in a large armchair.

"Certainly," he replied. He crossed the room and stepped into the hall, closing the drawing-room door behind him.

As he did so a noise from the conservatory on the left of the fireplace startled Marjorie. The sound of a sudden crash. She listened a moment, then rose to her feet.

Very quietly stepping towards the door which led into the hot-house, she

pulled back the curtain and peered through the glass panel.

## CHAPTER XIX.
### "YOU MUST GO BACK!"

Marjorie could see nothing. It was quite dark outside now. She listened, straining her ears, but not another sound could be heard. Whatever had fallen or been knocked down had made a great noise. Obviously, some one was in the conservatory.

She turned the handle of the door; it was unlocked, and it opened. Her first thought was that perhaps one of the dogs had been shut in by mistake. As she stepped down on to the tessellated pavement into the darkness she experienced a sudden little throb of fear. For the thought came that perhaps one of the escaped convicts had made his way into the conservatory and was hiding there. The fear went as quickly as it came. Her eyes, growing accustomed to the gloom, saw dimly outlined the delicate fronds of the ferns and the graceful palms and overhead the green of the clambering vine. The air was heavy with the warm and subtle odour of forced growth.

She made her way to the door leading into the garden, and found it locked and bolted. So no one could have possibly entered that way. She gave a whistle and snapped her fingers, still thinking that one of the dogs might be there. There was no response.

She was turning away when her foot struck a portion of broken pot. Stooping down she saw that a large pile of them had been overturned, and the majority lay in fragments on the ground, behind them a tin bucket from which water was still trickling.

She gave a little laugh—it seemed so mysterious. And then her brow puckered in a frown.... Had some one been listening and spying on them? The idea was ridiculous, and yet—the bucket, obviously half full of water, and the pile of pots could not have fallen there on their own account. It was just possible that a large rat——

She stooped down to peer under the shelf. As she did so she was conscious of footsteps on the gravel outside, and at the same moment a brighter light shone through the door leading into the drawing-room. A servant had brought in the lamp. Then she heard Jim's voice, obviously speaking to one of the warders from

the prison.

The ferns and the drooping tendrils of plants and a bank of moss blocked her view underneath the shelf; the light from the drawing-room fell at the wrong angle. Bending lower she brushed aside a clump of ferns.

And she saw, pressed tightly against the wall, the outline of a foot and leg. Some one was hiding there.

The next moment her eyes had seen the tell-tale broad-arrow on the boot and trousers.

One of the escaped convicts! She caught her breath, and drawing back stood upright, uncertain for the moment what to do. The door was bolted on the inside, and with Jim and the warders a few feet away in the drawing-room he was trapped. There was no escape. She hesitated a moment, not in the least alarmed, only surprised and a little overwhelmed by her discovery. She knew that the moorlands must be alive with men searching; already, probably, the outbuildings and the houses were being ransacked—and here the convict lay, at her feet.

The next thought was that he must have heard her enter and knew that she had discovered him. She wondered why he had not attacked her and tried to bolt.

"Marjorie—where are you?"

She started at the sound of her lover's voice. It brought her back to a sense of her duty. As she turned towards the drawing-room she heard—him saying good-night to the warder to whom he had been talking.

"One moment," she cried, "I want you, Jim."

Something stirred at her feet. A movement from the hunted creature lying hidden beneath the ferns and flowers.

Suddenly, in a flash, she felt as if her soul, her whole being, had changed places with his. She experienced the agony that he was feeling—alternating hope and fear. The desire to live and escape at all costs, and the desire to kill those who stood between him and liberty. She heard herself draw her breath with difficulty, with hard, sharp gasps. Her body broke out into a sweat. She trembled from head to foot.

Then she felt Jim's hand on her arm. "Hello, dear, what are you doing out here in the darkness?"

She turned her back on him, afraid lest the light coming through the open door shone on her face. Again she heard a stealthy movement of feet followed by a shuffling under the shelf. The convict knew the game was up and was coming out.

"Don't move," she cried, scarcely knowing what she said.

With an effort she steadied herself and gained self-control. Against the wall on her right a Maréchal Niel rose-tree had been trained. A yellow bud caught her

eyes just out of reach. Jim Crichton entered the conservatory.

"I wanted to steal that rose," she whispered. "I'm not tall enough. Do pick it for me, Jim."

"Silly child," he laughed. "You gave me quite a fright. I thought something was wrong."

Standing on tip-toe, he picked the rosebud and gave it her. Bending her head she placed her lips to it. Jim kissed the top of her head, then, turning away, tried the outer door.

"That's all right. No one can get in here. Come along back to the drawing-room, Marjorie. Those fellows will have finished searching in a minute and we shall be left in peace again. It's rather serious, you know, a couple of convicts getting away. But, of course, they'll catch them all right—though I'm afraid they'll have to wait until the morning now."

Taking her hand he led her back to the drawing-room. He was closing the conservatory door when she asked him to leave it open.

"It seems rather hot in here."

"Well, it's hotter in there," he laughed.

He put his arms around her and gazed into her eyes. "I'm jealous of every minute that's stolen from us. I shall never let you go away again for such a long period. It's been bad enough for me, and I've had work that I love. It must have been worse for you, darling."

She nodded, and laid her face on his shoulder. "That's all gone, dear. This hour is ours—and there's the future.... Jim, I have a confession to make."

"Well, come and sit down in the arm-chair and make it," he laughed. "Let me hold you in my arms as if you were a child, for that's all you are sometimes."

"Not now. I'm a woman. No," as he made a movement, "listen to me, Jim. While I was away from you I had no doubts about the future. I was certain that I could make you happy, that love was the principal thing in life. I'm not so sure now."

She felt his grip tighten. "Why, just now you confessed——"

"I confessed what *I* felt," she interrupted. "I want you to confess. I want you to look far, far into the future ... and also to remember the past. Remember what I am—and what my brother is."

Against her will her eyes were drawn towards the conservatory where the convict was hiding. An outcast, an outlaw, wearing the shameful uniform of crime. Just such a man was her brother. Wearing just the same uniform, living the same life, thinking the same thoughts. Just as desperate. Her brother: herded with other criminals in one of the great prisons of England. She had been speaking her thoughts, saying just what she felt. She knew that she was speaking them to gain time. She ought not to have wasted one moment before telling Jim

of the man hiding a few yards away from them. Warders were at that moment searching outbuildings and the gardens. She was committing an unlawful act in not giving him up. She was making her lover party to her guilt.

But she could not tell him. For one dreadful moment she had entered into that wretched man's feelings. It was as if she had taken his place in the darkness out there where he was hiding.

She wanted him to escape! She was incapable of reasoning that moment. Perhaps the taint of crime was in her blood. Perhaps her brother really had been guilty of robbing her lover's father.

"My dearest little one, you needn't trouble about my future. I shall really only begin to live when you're my wife. I can't lose my job—if I do I can find another. And your love will make me twice as keen on my work, for you will share in it. We have each got our job to do, and we shall do it better for being together. That's all about it."

She heard his voice, as from a distance off. As he finished speaking she heard footsteps in the hall—the opening of the front door.

Some one knocked at the drawing-room door. It opened, and the servant admitted the chief warder.

"We've searched carefully, sir," he said to Jim, who put Marjorie from him and stood in front of her. "And some of my men have been right through the gardens and shrubberies, but they ain't hiding anywhere here. No doubt you'll see that your men-servants keep a sharp look-out. One man's badly hit—but he was a sharpish one, he was. I'm afraid there ain't much chance of getting them to-night, but we shall have them as soon as day breaks." He saluted. "Good-night, sir. Good-night, ma'am."

The drawing-room door closed, and Marjorie listened to the footsteps crossing the hall. "We shall get them as soon as day breaks." Automatically she repeated the words the warder had spoken.

"Jim, come here quickly. I have something I must tell you before the warders go."

He turned towards her, frowning, a look of amazement on his face. Even then she hesitated. She heard the front door close. The warders had gone. Taking Jim by the arm she led him towards the conservatory.

"There's some one hiding in there," she whispered. "When you left the room to speak to the chief warder I heard a crash from the conservatory. I went in, and under the shelf I saw a man crouched up. His clothes bore the broad arrow. He's one of the convicts who escaped."

Jim looked at her with unbelieving eyes. Then putting her aside, he stepped quickly towards the conservatory. Suddenly he stopped and swung round.

"Marjorie! You're certain of this? Why didn't you speak—before the

warders left?"

Something moved in the darkness of the hothouse. Slowly out of the masses of foliage a head and shoulders emerged. Jim sprang to the bell and rang it.

"What are you going to do?" Marjorie whispered.

"Send Perkins to call the warders back. Give the fellow up," he replied sharply. "You ought to have told me at once, Marjorie. You had better wait in the dining-room."

He stood in the doorway blocking the exit. Marjorie stood in front of him and laid her hands on his arms.

"Jim—you mustn't give him up. It's horrible."

He tried to push her away.

"Jim," her voice rose piercingly. "My brother is a convict.... You needn't hide him, but just let him go—give him a sporting chance. Let him go. No one will ever know. Give him a chance."

"Silence, dear. You don't know what you're saying."

The door opened and Perkins entered the room. For a moment there was silence. Not a sound from the conservatory now. Not a sound from the garden outside. The barking of the dogs and the voices of the men had died away.

"You rang, sir?"

"Bring the glasses, a syphon of soda water, and the whisky," Jim said in a strained voice.

Directly the servant had gone he pointed to the sofa on the other side of the fireplace away from the entrance to the conservatory.

"Marjorie, dear, go and sit down there. I understand, and I'm sorry; but I must do my duty."

She looked at him dry-eyed. All the tenderness had left her face. "It's five-score of men against one. Open the door and let him go. Yes, he's bound to be caught to-morrow, but every hour, every minute, every second of freedom must be as sweet to him as our love is to us, Jim. Give him a run—for his money."

Jim had turned his back on her. He disappeared into the conservatory and the door closed behind him.

Perkins brought the tumblers and the whisky into the room and placed them on a small table.

"Quite exciting, miss, this escape of two convicts. Hasn't been an escape from Princetown for a long time. What with that and this radium mine on Mr. Dale's estate——"

He suddenly stopped and coughed deprecatingly. He, too, in speaking of convicts had forgotten that he was speaking to a convict's sister.

Marjorie waited. For a long time she heard no sound. Then Jim's voice, strained and very stern. Not the voice of a lover now, but the voice of a soldier—

even something more than that, the voice of a man under the strain of great emotion.

Presently she detected an answering voice. She rose to her feet, and standing against the conservatory door peered through the glass.

She could see the outlines of the two men distinctly. One her lover, the other the convict. Jim turned, and as he did so he saw her. She saw him push the convict back, then, mounting the steps, he opened the door.

"Go back!" he cried fiercely. "Go—away—into the dining-room."

"You must tell me what you're going to do."

She looked into his face, but his eyes fell. His mouth looked merely a thin line, his jaws protruded. She put her hand on his arm—it was like a steel band.

"Go away, do you hear! Go away, do you hear! Wait until I come to you." He commanded now.

He tried to push her across the room. She clung to him and stood her ground. She stared into his face, forced his eyes to meet hers.

"You are hiding something from me, Jim.... You are going to give him up——"

Suddenly he seized her wrists in a grip of iron. "You know who's hiding out there," he said between his teeth.

"A convict—that's all I know——"

A sound from the conservatory made Jim turn his head. Marjorie wrenched herself free. Out of the darkness beyond the conservatory door the figure of the convict emerged. Marjorie stopped as she saw him.

"Go back!" Jim cried.

The convict spoke. "It's too late! I'm a coward, I know. But liberty's dearer than life now." He held out his arms to Marjorie. "Hide me, for God's sake, hide me!"

She put out her hands as if to keep him off. Her lips framed his name. The name of her brother! It rattled in her throat. She turned to her lover.

"I didn't know, Jim, I didn't know!"

He nodded. "Speak quietly. Sit down there."

Crossing the room, he locked the drawing-room door. He motioned Rupert to the arm-chair and made him place it so that if he had to open the door no one would see him. Then he poured out a stiff whisky and soda and gave it him to drink. The tumbler rattled between his teeth as he emptied the contents. He laid it on the floor by his side, then he looked at Jim, avoiding his sister's eyes.

"I—I was hunted here. I didn't come purposely. When I broke away it was not to escape.... I had a message. But the taste of liberty has grown so sweet that—that nothing else matters!"

He stopped, and drew the back of his hand across his mouth. "But before it

comes to a question of—of fighting for my freedom—in case I go under, you had better hear what I've got to say. It's for Marjorie and my father I escaped. It was not for you or your father's ears, Mr. Crichton—I want to make sure that swine Despard doesn't cheat us of our rights."

He paused a moment as if expecting an interruption, but neither Jim nor Marjorie spoke. They were as motionless as figures of stone.

"Just before—before I was accused of robbing your father, Mr. Crichton, Despard and I found there was pitch-blende in the old tin mine by Blackthorn Farm. Despard made experiments with it and—he got a report from Vardoff—you may have heard of him—an expert. The report said there were good grounds for supposing that radium might be——"

Then Jim Crichton stopped him. "Save your breath. We know this. Why, already the plant is being erected, a company floated. Mr. Despard has apparently done quite the right thing. Anyway, the property belongs to your father again, and if there's any truth in the report he'll make a fortune. If that's all you came to say, all you wanted to know, you can go back to prison with an easy conscience." He spoke brutally. "You must go back, you know."

"I am innocent."

"That's not the question now. You must go back."

Slowly Rupert turned and looked at his sister. "Marjorie. Help me! Say a word for me. He loves you.... Ask him, and he'll help me to escape. For he can, now. The warders won't come back here. I'm safe for the moment. Marjorie—speak. You are my flesh and blood. Speak! It's my life I'm pleading for."

## CHAPTER XX.

### PLANS FOR ESCAPE.

Marjorie looked at her lover. He met her gaze fairly. But she saw fear in his eyes—a thing she had never seen there before.

She knew he had never known the meaning of fear until now. Then she looked at her brother. Crossing to his side she told him to stand up.

"Look at me, Rupert. Tell me whether you're innocent or guilty—one moment, before you speak. I know, but I want to hear the truth from your lips."

"It can make no difference." Jim Crichton spoke. "He has been found guilty. He has escaped from prison. He must go back to prison."

Brother and sister were standing close together, facing one another fearlessly now. To Jim listening and watching it seemed a long time before Rupert spoke.

"I am innocent," he said at last.

Marjorie put her arms around him, holding him closely and tightly. "I knew it."

Tears filled her eyes, but she forced them back. "Who was the guilty person? Do you know that?"

"Yes. I know that."

"Who was it?" Her voice rose triumphantly.

Again there was a long silence. Jim turned his back. He was fighting against the fear which possessed him. He was afraid of himself. Emotions of which he had never before been conscious filled his heart—war against ideals, principles and faiths to which he had been brought up.

"I shall never say who was guilty."

Marjorie gave vent to a little cry: a cry of joy. She took her brother's hands, both of them, and covered them with kisses. Roughly he snatched them away and stood back.

"I've given you my message—though it has come too late. I don't know what Despard has done for you, but don't trust him, Marjorie. Warn father.... When I said just now that I had had no intention of escaping it was true. But now I have escaped I don't mean to go back. If you won't help me, if the man who loves you does his duty and gives me up, then I shall fight for it."

He backed across the room as he spoke, and gazed around as if seeking for some weapon.

Marjorie stepped towards her lover and held out her arms. "Jim!"

He shook his head, and crossing the room unlocked the door.

"Jim! What are you going to do?"

"I must do my duty."

She followed him. "Your duty to the State? But what of me. Yes, I am pleading for myself now. For the love we bear one another."

The door-handle rattled in his hand. He stood with his back towards her. "Marjorie, don't tempt me."

"I'm not tempting you," she replied quietly. "I'm asking you calmly and coldly to save my brother. I know what I'm asking. I know that if you hide him and if he's discovered you will be ruined. I realise the awful responsibility I'm putting on you. I'm doing a terrible thing, but I'm doing it with my eyes open, conscious of the love I bear you.... Still, I ask it. Save him."

Beads of perspiration stood on Rupert's forehead. He was trembling from head to foot as if with an ague. The muscles of his face worked convulsively.

"Just let me go then. I'll take my chance outside. They'll never know I was here, I'll swear to that. A few hours' more freedom—that's all I want. I might get back home and see my father for a moment.... They won't take me alive. I can't go back to that granite hell at Princetown. Death's easier. I'm not afraid—for I can die fighting ... but to be taken back like a dog on a chain, to be put into a hole where there is neither night nor day, only silence and four narrow walls, and a cup of water and a piece of bread——"

Jim held up his hand. "Silence, Dale. Don't say any more. This rests between Marjorie and me. There is one thing, however, you should know—I am going to marry your sister."

Rupert made a movement forward, then stopped. "I told you just now that I was a coward," he cried fiercely, his voice rising. "I am no longer a man. Prison has done its work quickly.... All I want now is freedom. I don't care how I get it. I was neither a thief nor a liar nor a coward when I was convicted nine months ago, but I am now, and I'll lie, cheat, kill—for freedom. I'm going to get out of this house alive even if they shoot me like a dog outside your garden gate. So now you know."

"Be silent," Jim said again. He turned round and looked at Marjorie. "You have heard. What do you say?"

"Save him. Perhaps I am asking you the greatest thing in the world. If my love is worth the sacrifice—make it."

He took her hands in his then. They were as cold as ice. She scarcely looked beautiful. The agony she was undergoing had distorted her features.

"Wait here. I shall not be long."

He left the room, closing the door behind him. Marjorie stood with her back to it, supporting herself against it. Rupert stared round the room, crossed to the conservatory door and closed it. He pulled the curtain at the window closer. He picked up the decanter of whisky as if to help himself again, but changed his mind and put it down. Twice he tried to speak, but no words issued from his lips.

"Sit down, dear," Marjorie said, striving to regain her normal voice. "You must be very tired."

He nodded his head but remained standing. Jim was absent a long time. Now and then sounds they would not have heard under ordinary circumstances startled the brother and sister waiting in the drawing-room—waiting far apart. Once they had been all in all to one another; now a third person stood between them, and in his hands lay Rupert's life.

At last Rupert spoke. "I can't stand this much longer. Marjorie, open the door and let me go. I'm asking too much. Let me go and take my chance."

She shook her head. "Wait."

At last Jim returned. He left the door open and beckoned to Rupert. "Follow

me."

The convict glanced at him. There was no need to question. He crossed the room on tip-toe, holding his breath. His expression was that of a hunted animal, his movements the same.

The door closed and Marjorie was alone. An hour passed, but now she was unconscious of time. She sat on the Chesterfield staring into space. She was only conscious of Jim's presence when she felt his arms around her.

"Father may return any moment," he said. She heard a sob of fear in his voice, it had changed. She did not recognise it as the voice of her lover. "I'm afraid you must go. Before you go I must tell you what I've done and what I hope to do. Listen, dear—and remember."

"I am listening, Jim."

"You know my workroom at the back of the house, just underneath my bedroom? It was built out for me just before I joined the R.F.C. Underneath it is a cellar where I keep a few things stored—plant, bits of machinery, petrol, and so forth. Some of the plant I want for my experiments is there and a small furnace. The entrance to my workroom is always locked and the way to the cellar bolted and padlocked, too. I've hidden him there, in the cellar. Binks, my bull terrier, always sleeps in the workroom. He knows Rupert, remembered him and made friends at once. He would give warning if anyone approached.... I've given Rupert a change of clothes and food—enough of the latter to last him twenty-four hours in case of need. I spend half the day in my workroom always, so—he won't feel lonely. A fortnight or three weeks at least must pass before we can dream of escape. He can change his appearance in that time, too."

He waited a moment. Marjorie said nothing, but he felt her body tremble. He held her tighter.

"I've thought of a way. It seems the only way, but, at the same time, it means the greatest risk. I'll tell you now in case there's not another opportunity. We may want your help. In about three weeks' time I'm doing a special flight—a long distance flight from Netheravon to Plymouth, carrying a passenger. It isn't long enough to attract public attention. As an experiment I am using a new engine and trying a little invention of my own which the Government may take up. A certain amount of secrecy will, therefore, be observed. I shall be free to make whatever arrangements I like, take whatever course I choose, and so forth. My idea, hazy at present, is that Rupert shall be my passenger. If I can pick him up and land him at Plymouth he'll stand a chance, a fairly good one, perhaps. Luckily, he knows every inch of Dartmoor, so do I. A monoplane doesn't attract as much attention as it used to, and if the public doesn't know anything about the flight or the direction I'm taking, I may manage to pass over the wildest part of Dartmoor, Cranmere Pool, for example, come down there unnoticed, and

pick up Rupert.... Don't say anything, dear, and now go. If you're asked, don't hesitate to say where you've spent this evening. Hide nothing—except the fact that you've seen your brother. Any distress you may show would be perfectly natural. Blackthorn Farm is sure to be watched day and night. You and your father will be watched and followed, probably, but that needn't prevent your coming up here if you want to see me. I won't announce our engagement until Rupert is safe, in case it arouses suspicion." He led her to the door. "Good-night, dear. God bless you."

"God bless you," she stammered. "It is mean to ask now, but tell me one thing more before I go. You don't hate me? I've asked the impossible, and you have done it—you won't hate me when you realise what you've done?"

He forced her eyes to meet his and he smiled bravely. "I realised what I was doing before I did it, dear. It's a big thing. It's like war. That's all now. I love you better than——"

The sentence was unfinished. He kissed her lips, and opening the door led her through the hall out into the garden. There he wished her good-night again, loudly, in a cheery tone of voice, and watched her until she was out of sight.

The fog had quite disappeared. The million eyes of the night shone from a cloudless sky. An owl hooted from a wood on the right. Down in the valley the East Dart sang its way to the sea.

Jim Crichton looked up at the sky. And presently he smiled. It was good to be a soldier and to fight. It was better to be a man, and to love.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### READY FOR FLIGHT.

Marjorie had reason to be grateful now for the sudden fame into which Blackthorn Farm had sprung owing to the discovery of pitch-blende in the tin mine, with the supposition contained in the expert's report that radium would undoubtedly be found. For the county was far too excited—even though still sceptical—over this discovery to have more than a fleeting interest in the escape of two convicts.

No. 303, the man who had been hit and cleverly deceived the warders into believing they had killed him, was, of course, eventually caught, though not until he had enjoyed thirty hours of freedom.

Nearly a fortnight passed and No. 381 was reported to be still at large. The police and warders scoured the county. Plain-clothes detectives were at every seaport town and village on the coast. Nearly every tramp steamer leaving Plymouth was searched. Hotels and common lodging houses were kept under constant surveillance. Occasionally an arrest was reported—but 381 was not found.

The police confessed themselves baffled at last. The authorities at Princetown were at their wits end. That a convict should escape at all was bad enough, but that fourteen days should pass without his being captured was almost without precedent.

At first the moorland dwellers and village folk all strenuously aided in the search, but soon they grew tired, and presently they began to laugh at the futile efforts of the warders and police to capture 381. Public opinion on Dartmoor veered round, and soon a wish was openly expressed that the convict would really make good his escape and never be caught.

"He must be a durned smart chap, and deserves to get off. Dang me! if I came across him now I'm not sure I'd give him up."

The police decided that he had safely got out of the county, probably out of England. Up at Princetown, however, the officials insisted that the man was still hiding somewhere on Dartmoor. And they had good reason for thinking this. The news soon leaked out that 381 was none other than Rupert Dale, of Blackthorn Farm. A moorman, one who knew every inch of the country, born and bred on Dartmoor. Such a one, provided he could get food and drink, might easily play hide and seek with his would-be captors for many weeks.

When the best part of three weeks had passed, when every scrap of country had been searched and no stone left unturned—indeed, there was not a cairn nor a pile of boulders that had escaped examination—then the officials began to look rather ridiculous, and were inclined to confess that Rupert Dale, though he had not left the country, had at least got out of Devonshire.

The moorlands resumed their normal aspect and were no longer dotted about with detectives, constables and armed warders. But the police increased their vigilance in all the neighbouring towns.

Old John Dale had done his best to help in the search and aid the warders. It was only natural that at first he should be suspected of knowing where his son was hiding, in spite of the character he bore for straightforwardness and honesty. A very careful account was kept of the workmen employed in erecting the plant of what was already known as the radium mine at Blackthorn Farm.

Marjorie's sufferings those three weeks were terrible, but she hid her feelings and showed no more anxiety as to her brother's whereabouts and welfare than was to be naturally expected in such a case.

Curiously enough, with each passing day confidence in his ultimate escape

grew until she felt no fear at all that he would be discovered and taken back to Princetown. While he was hidden in Jim's workroom at Post Bridge Hall he was safe. Even the terrible risk her lover had taken for her sake ceased to worry her.

She had to play a part, and she sometimes marvelled herself at the cool, deliberate way in which she played it.

The one, the only person, she feared, was Robert Despard. Before Rupert's escape she had avoided him on every possible occasion. Now, she no longer dared do so. For she felt he suspected her—suspected she had seen Rupert and knew where he was hiding. His work kept him so busy that he had not much time to persecute her. Still, she knew he was at watch—and when he was not watching her, she in turn, was watching him, terrified that whenever he left the farm he would bend his footsteps towards the Hall.

She had only seen Jim once since the night of Rupert's escape, when he had called at the farm with some message from Sir Reginald for her father. They had not been alone for a minute, but a glance at his face told her all was well.

There were moments, of course, when she repented of what she had done. She told herself she was a coward. For repentance meant that she was putting her own happiness and future before that of her brother. Being a woman, she argued that since her brother was innocent it was her duty to help him to escape. It was criminal for an innocent man to suffer for the guilt of another, even though, by speaking, he could have cleared himself. In her eyes, his silence gave him an added nobility. Her soul revolted when she thought of the long years he might still have to endure shut up in the dreadful granite prison on the moors. For the first time in her life she realised what it meant to be a convict, a prisoner, a criminal.

She knew now that these men she had sometimes seen working in the fields and quarries were treated worse than beasts of burden; in harness day and night, knowing not one minute's liberty or freedom; doomed to years of silence, forced to implicit obedience of every order given them. Just enough food and just enough sleep dealt out to keep them alive.

No risk could be too great to save her brother. She knew a chance would never occur again. And if he were caught and sent back until he had served his time, then, when he came out, he would no longer be a man but really and truly a criminal—something distorted, hideous, unnatural. A human being at war with humanity.

It was just at the end of three weeks that Jim Crichton presented himself at the farm to say good-bye before going back to Netheravon to join his corps. Rupert's escape had never been spoken of in the farmhouse. Dale had forbidden his name to be mentioned, and Marjorie sometimes wondered if her father had lost all feeling for his only son. She had a dreadful thought that if he knew of his

hiding-place he would instantly inform the police and give him up.

"I suppose when we meet again you will be millionaires," Crichton said cheerily. "I see a prospectus is being issued next week of The Blackthorn Development Company. I shall apply for a few shares—just for luck."

"I'm afraid you won't get them," Despard answered. "The Company will be subscribed two or three times over. You go back to Netheravon to-morrow?"

Jim nodded.

"Alone?"

There was a moment's silence. Marjorie caught her breath. There seemed to be a challenge in Despard's voice.

"Yes, alone," Jim replied with a laugh. "Unfortunately, I can't take Marjorie with me—yet. Perhaps in a few months' time, though, we shall fly off together, man and wife."

Despard shrugged his shoulders as he left the room. "Perhaps," he murmured under his breath.

Crichton shook hands with Dale, and the old man held his hand a few moments longer than was necessary.

"It's a brave thing you're doing in keeping the promise you gave Marjorie; but if you insist on making her your wife, you'll break your father's heart, Mr. Crichton."

"I hope not. I hope he'll come to see things my way. But if I had to make a choice, Mr. Dale, I'd rather break his than hers."

Dale sighed and nodded his head. "I suppose youth must be served," he whispered. "Perhaps it's just that the old should suffer. My boy has broken my heart—that's why I feel for your father."

"You're convinced of your son's guilt, then?" Jim said.

"Of course I am. Why, he confessed it!"

Jim turned away. "Perhaps one day his innocence may be proved, Mr. Dale. Oh, I don't want to raise false hopes in your breast. But I'm beginning to believe with Marjorie that he was innocent of the crime of which he was convicted. While there's life there's hope, remember."

He took Marjorie's hand: "Walk down as far as Post Bridge with me, will you? We will say good-bye at the place where we first confessed our love."

Once they were alone it was not of love they spoke. They walked side by side, and now and then Marjorie laughed. If anyone had overheard, if anyone had been watching them, they would never have guessed of what these two lovers were talking.

Jim had perfected his plans for Rupert's escape. He outlined them in detail to Marjorie. Her help would be wanted; and her task, he said, would perhaps be the most difficult task.

On Monday evening she would receive a telegram from him telling her of the flight he was going to make from Netheravon to Plymouth. On receipt of the wire she was to go up to Post Bridge Hall, ostensibly at a request the telegram would contain, to show the message to Jim's father. But she would find Sir Reginald out. Jim knew he would be at Moretonhampstead on business. She was to wait for him, and Jim gave her the keys of his workroom and cellar. Rupert already had duplicates. The telegram would contain certain code words, of which Jim gave her the translation. She was to find some way of giving her brother the message they contained—the exact hour he was to leave his hiding-place and make his way across Dartmoor to a certain spot already decided on.

"If he fails it will be bad luck," Jim said. "But as far as is humanly possible he can't fail. No one would recognise in the smart, soldierly-looking young fellow the late Convict 381. If he gets safely away I shall send you a wire from Plymouth—just two words: 'Flight successful,' that's all. There's only one man I fear: the man who would like to be my rival—Despard. Once or twice in the evening lately I've seen him hanging around The Hall. It's impossible he could suspect the plans we've formed. I don't believe for an instant he knows where Rupert's hiding. If he did, he'd speak, and give him up, or only keep silence on condition that you——"

Marjorie stopped him. "You needn't fear, Jim. He suspects something, I know. On Monday night, after I've been to Post Bridge Hall, I'll make it my business to keep Mr. Despard at the farm until I know that Rupert's safely away. I can keep him—I'm a woman."

They reached the bridge, and stood for a few minutes gazing down into the foaming waters. Presently Jim held out his hand:

"Au revoir," he said quietly. And he lowered his voice for a moment. "Next time we meet I hope I shall have a marriage licence in my pocket."

"Au revoir, my lover," she whispered. "Remember, whatever happens, I'm yours and only yours: ready to follow you to the end of the world."

He took off his hat, kissed her hand, then nodding cheerily, he strode away. She watched him out of sight. He was risking his life, his honour, his reputation, for her sake. If he failed, she knew she would never see him again.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### JIM STARTS OFF.

The great plain stretched away in the sunlight, broken only by the silver line of the little Avon river and the Downs—like giant molehills—to the north.

It was early morning, but all was activity and bustle at Netheravon.

The great rows of "hangars" gleaming in the bright sunshine were already open, and groups of men—mechanics and cleaners—were busy on the aeroplanes they contained.

A group of officers of the Royal Flying Corps was gathered around a monoplane that had been run outside, and was being tuned up by a number of mechanics.

The two or three civilians with note-books in their hands were evidently pressmen. Something unusual was afoot, for half a dozen horsemen had just cantered into the aerodrome and, dismounting, approached the little crowd round the monoplane.

Suddenly it opened out and the group of officers saluted the smart, iron-featured, white-haired veteran who approached with a slight limp, his beribboned coat eloquent of hard service to the wealthy citizens of a thankless nation who greedily devour the spoils that they are too lazy in lending a hand in obtaining.

"Good-morning, gentlemen. Is Lieutenant Crichton here?"

Jim stepped forward and saluted. He was in service dress, with a safety helmet in place of the usual forage cap.

"Well, I hope the weather is satisfactory, Crichton?" the Chief said.

"Yes, sir, thank you; it is a perfect day for a flight."

The General then asked several technical questions about the monoplane. "You are taking a passenger with you, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

The General turned away, and Crichton saluted. Quite a number of people were arriving from every direction, and it had evidently become generally known that a special flight was about to be attempted.

Meanwhile the monoplane was ready. Jim climbed into his seat and started the engine. In a few moments he gave the signal to let go, and after running along the ground for a short distance, it gracefully rose in the air and was soon far over the plain. Suddenly it dipped and began to descend.

"By Jove, he's coming down. Something wrong—look! He's hit the ground—see the dust?" And similar exclamations rose from the crowd.

"Take my car, Johnson, and see what's wrong, will you?" said the Flight Commander—and in a moment the car was speeding across the plain.

"Look! Look!" shouted some one. "See the dust he's making!" In another moment the monoplane was seen in the air.

"By Jove, he's up again. Splendid! That's the first time this machine has

left the ground single-handed, I'll bet. He's coming back."

In a minute or two the aeroplane began to descend. It brought up nearly on the spot it had started from.

Jim clambered down, and to the volley of questions from his brother officers merely explained that he had dropped his note-book, and had descended to pick it up.

"Look here, Major," Jim said to the Commandant. "I want to take my servant, Jackson, instead of young Hayward, but I don't like to tell him myself. Will you break it to him gently?"

"Good lord, Crichton, why on earth did you not say so before? Why do you prefer Jackson?"

"I shall have a much better chance with Jackson if I have to descend with engine trouble, because he's a trained mechanic, as you know, while young Hayward would be practically useless. I don't want to be stuck in the middle of Dartmoor, you know!"

"All right, I'll tell him; but it's rather rough on him, all the same."

The Commandant strolled over to where Lieutenant Hayward was talking to a few friends. As soon as he had gone, Crichton beckoned to his servant.

"Jackson, have you put the things I told you in my kit-bag?"

"Yes, sir, and two of everything, sir. Shall I strap the bag on?"

"Yes, and you are to come with me; so get your helmet, quick."

Soon all was bustle and commotion. The crowd of officers and soldiers and few civilians present made a wide semi-circle in the rear of the monoplane.

"Good luck, old chap!" "Don't lose your way!" "Got your maps?" "Wire us time of arrival!"—and a host of other remarks, mingled with chaff, were drowned in the roar of the propeller as Jim started the engine. He raised his hand and the great, bird-like aeroplane rushed forward and almost at once began to rise.

Soon it grew smaller and smaller as the distance increased, and began to curve to West as Jim set his course for Exeter.

The roar made by the engine of an aeroplane renders it impossible to hear one's own voice, much less to speak to another; but all military "two-seaters" are equipped with 'phones to enable the pilot and observer to converse with ease.

Jim now pulled down the receiver and adjusted it over his helmet. "Look here, Jackson! Do you know why I've taken you instead of Mr. Hayward?"

"No, sir."

"I'm going to trust you with a secret which, if you blab, will get me into a big row."

"Very good, sir. I shan't talk, you know that, sir."

"Well, I have promised a great friend at home to give him a flight, and I'm going to take him up to-day in your place—only as it is strictly against the Royal

Flying Corps regulations to take anyone on a Corps machine, you must play up and not give the show away."

"Trust me for that, sir."

"My friend knows that he is to take your place—that is why I've put in a second suit of clothes—and he has asked me to give you a fiver."

"Very much obliged, I am sure, sir."

"All right. That is why I told you to put a suit of your own uniform in my bag. My friend will put on your uniform and will take your place. You will have to be careful not to be seen in Plymouth till he has changed at the hotel. I shall drop you at Exeter and you must go on to Plymouth by train; take two rooms for me at the 'Duke of Cornwall,' which is right against the station, and then hang about the place till I arrive. If anyone questions you—which is unlikely—you must only say that you are my mechanic from Salisbury. But don't you go near Crownhill Barracks till after we have arrived; then you may go to the canteen and 'gas' as much about the flight as you like."

"Very good, sir; I quite understand. I'll slip off quietly at Exeter so as not to be noticed."

For the next hour the steady hum of the great propeller was the only sound heard by the airmen, but just as Crewkerne had been passed a new note sounded—a steady umph! umph! umph! like the distant throbbing of a drum.

"Jackson, do you hear that?"

"Yes, sir—cylinder misfiring?"

"We shall have to come down. What's that ahead?"

"Looks like another railway line, sir; and there is a town there, too—I can make out houses with the glasses."

"That must be Chard. I shall come down when I see a good field."

The monoplane began to drop. Fields and hedges were plainly visible.

"Just put your glasses on to that big, green patch away to the right."

"Racecourse, sir. First-class landing by the looks of it."

The aeroplane banked steeply as Jim swung round to the right and commenced to descend. He stopped the engine and the machine dived down steeply, only to be checked as it neared the ground by a sudden rush of the propeller again, which stopped when it had given the necessary momentum. Now the wheels touched the turf as lightly as a bird, and after running along the ground for a short distance, it stopped nearly opposite the grand stand. Already people were running towards the racecourse from every direction, and Jim realised that the chance of his servant getting away unreported would be small.

"Look here, Jackson, you must go by the South Western to Exeter, then change to the Great Western and book to Millbay station, Plymouth. When I order you to meet me at Exeter, remember that is only a 'blind' for any reporters

who may see you go, so you must stick to the story that you are meeting me there with more petrol. Understand?"

"All right, sir."

People began to arrive and questions were showered on Jim, who replied good-humouredly, and warned each newcomer not to come too near as he was about to start the engine again—a warning which was immediately emphasised by the throb of the engine itself, as Jackson tested the ignition.

"All right, sir."

Jim lit a cigarette, and taking a telegraph form from his pocket, wrote out a message to his Commanding Officer and handed it to Jackson.

"Send this off at once and go on to Exeter by train. Have the petrol ready there for me, and I'll pick you up at the place of which I told you."

Jim said this in a voice which could be heard by every one present. Then he climbed into his seat again.

"Stand back, please!" The crowd scattered, leaving a free run up the course. A minute later the monoplane was speeding away over the tree-tops and was soon lost to sight in the West.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### SUCCESS.

Cranmere Pool! The most desolate spot on Dartmoor. Here rise seven rivers—born in the quaking morass, itself the result of the drainage of the giant tors which shut it in on every hand. A lonely spot encircled by the everlasting hills, without a road or cart-track—inaccessible, isolated. In summer visited by tourists who boast of having made the pilgrimage on the hardy little moorland ponies; in winter as solitary and forsaken as the Great Sahara itself.

Half a mile from the pool is a low, grassy plateau from which the hills slope upwards, and half-way up is the remains of a ruined house—the walls of which are only a few feet high, and are level with the ground in many places.

A strange place for a house until one notices the hummocks and depressions in the rock-strewn heather, and then one realises that once in far-off times this was a primitive tin mine.

The silence is intense—the hillside, save for the heather, bare and lifeless. Suddenly a clump of heather stirs, and a man's head appears thrust out of the

hillside itself—followed by his body—as it emerges from a hole hidden by the heather. He raises a pair of Zeiss glasses and carefully sweeps the country—first the foot hills, then the more distant tors. Then having satisfied himself that he is the sole human being on that wild moorland, he throws himself into the heather—and fills and lights a pipe.

Rupert's waiting place had been well chosen. For anyone but a born moorman it would have been impossible. Dressed in a smart blue suit, his hair of decent length, and a decent moustache, it would have been difficult to recognise in him Convict 381! He lay on his back and nervously blew smoke rings into the blue vault above him. Presently he ceased smoking and sat up. A faint humming greeted his ears!

He rose to his feet and faced the north; his glasses swept round the skyline east and west—then he took them down and gazed slowly round the visible horizon. Nothing in sight, and yet the hum increased.

Now it stopped suddenly. He looked up, and there, right above him, was a monoplane, far up in the blue heavens, circling round and descending in great spiral swoops till he could see the figure of the pilot.

With a strangled cry of joy he ran down the steep hillside to the grassy plain, and presently the monoplane swooped down and bounded along the rough turf.

Rupert raced after it, and as gradually, almost imperceptibly, it slackened speed, he seized hold of it and used his weight to help bring it to a standstill, Crichton eventually jumping from his seat and doing the same.

Then Jim took off his safety helmet and the two men faced one another. Rupert held out his hand. He tried to speak, but he could not trust himself. Jim Crichton understood; he, too, had a queer sensation of choking in his throat.

He turned away and commenced to examine the machine, to see that it had not been damaged in alighting—and to give Rupert a chance of recovering himself. The latter was trembling from head to foot. He had been brave enough when he had been hunted by armed men through the fog, and his nerve had not deserted him when he came out from his place of concealment at Post Bridge Hall and begged to be given a chance to fight for his life. And all the time he had been hidden in the semi-darkness of the cellar adjoining Jim Crichton's workroom at the Hall he had felt confident that he would eventually obtain his freedom. But now that the hour had come, now that he stood on the vast moorland beneath the glorious blue sky, no longer wearing the badge of shame, to all intents and purposes free, his nerve failed him and his courage suddenly oozed through his feet.

He started at every sound—the call of a curlew, a distant sheep bell, the rattle of a stone beneath his boot. Jim unstrapped a parcel from the front seat of

the monoplane and threw it on to the turf.

"Now then, Dale, you've got to be quick," he said brusquely, as if giving orders to one of his own men. "Undo that suit case. You'll find a uniform; take off the suit you're wearing and get into it. You mustn't waste a moment. I may have been seen descending, but I don't think it's likely from the height I was up."

Again Rupert tried to speak, but the words rattled incoherently in his throat. He commenced to change his clothes in a way that would have won the approval of a quick-change music-hall artist. When he had finished he packed up the blue suit of clothes and Jim strapped the case on to the monoplane again. Then he looked at Rupert critically.

"Yes, you'll do. You had better brush your moustache up a bit—so." He gave a little laugh. "Gad, you would make a very good soldier. Let's see you salute."

Rupert cast an anxious eye round the horizon. "You said there wasn't a moment to lose—some one may have seen you descend—this means life or death to me! ... and for you, the risk——"

Jim stepped forward and laid his hand on Rupert's shoulder. "Come, pull yourself together, man. You'll want all your courage in an hour's time when we land at Plymouth. You haven't forgotten what I've told you? ... I started from Netheravon with my soldier servant, Jackson. Dropped him at Chard, and he went on by rail to Exeter, where I picked him up again—you're Jackson!"

"Yes, I remember all that," Rupert replied hastily.

"Now, when we arrive at Plymouth be careful not to speak a word. Yes or no will be quite enough. Go straight to the Duke of Cornwall Hotel, and refuse all invitations to the canteen or mess. You know what to do at the hotel? Now, try that salute again, the first was rotten. It's more important than you think. We mustn't take the slightest risk of failure now."

Eventually Crichton was satisfied. They had some little difficulty in starting the engine. Altogether, scarcely half an hour passed since the monoplane alighted before it was once more in the air making great spirals as it climbed steeply into the clouds. Rupert scanned the moorlands surrounding the pool with his glasses. To his relief no human being was in sight. They had not been observed.

Jim contrived to keep Cranmere Pool as the centre and avoided even sighting Okehampton Camp, nor was Princetown visible till they sailed swiftly over it—a mere speck thousands of feet below.

It seemed only a few moments before the gleam of water and a pall of smoke showed Rupert that Plymouth was just ahead.

* * * * *

The monoplane began to descend in great spirals, till woods and houses were

clearly visible. Jim did not approach the town, but circled round a large down. Now crowds of people could be seen running towards an open green space with a great white cross on it, directly below them.

Rupert noticed that many were soldiers. More soldiers poured out of the line of huts to the south. The engine stopped. Now the cross was right ahead, and the ground appeared to Rupert to be rushing towards them. He clutched the supports on each side and realised they were falling at a frightful rate. Suddenly the engines started again—but only for a moment. Before he knew how it happened the monoplane was rushing along the ground with great leaps, till it stopped just beyond the canvas cross. In a moment a cordon of soldiers formed round the monoplane. Jim jumped from his seat and was shaking hands with a group of eager officers.

Rupert also climbed down and was instantly surrounded by soldiers, who plied him with questions. Before he could reply Jim pushed through them.

"Now, Jackson, don't stand gossiping there! Take my suit-case down to the 'Duke of Cornwall' at once. Ask for the rooms I've engaged. I shall want a bath and change immediately."

"Yes, sir." And Rupert gave his best military salute.

"Here, take that safety helmet off and put on your cap," Jim commanded, "or you'll be mobbed outside.... Now, men, don't interfere with him, he will be back in an hour. Just help to wheel the 'plane opposite the polo pavilion."

Rupert, bag in hand, hurried to the gate, glad to escape further questions from his supposed comrades.

At the gate he met a cavalcade, and had to stand aside to let it pass. Just as he was hurrying down the road again, he heard a horse behind him, and a voice hailed him.

"Hi! You there! Why don't you salute the General, eh? Here, sergeant, take this man's name and regiment." And the young officer turned his horse and galloped after the General again.

Rupert found himself confronted by a short, stout, red-faced man in a red tunic with three gold stripes on his arm.

"Name and regiment?" he snapped.

Rupert saw the necessity for a prompt answer at once and replied "Private Jackson, Royal Flying Corps."

"What's your number?"

"Number?" repeated Rupert in surprise.

"Come on, now—don't you let me 'ave none of your ... nonsense. Out with it!"

Rupert went hot and cold all over. His number! So he was discovered, after all. He gave it in a low voice. "No. 381. I'll go quietly with you, but I should like

to see Lieutenant Crichton first."

"I ain't going to put you in the guard-room," the sergeant guffawed, "not unless you gives me any more of your blooming cheek. But you're for the orderly-room to-morrow morning, 9.45 sharp, for not saluting the General Officer Commanding the Western District—and don't you forget it, or you'll find yourself in 'clink.' Now, fly off, and don't give us so much of your ... Flying Corps manners."

Rupert reached the "Duke of Cornwall" safely without further adventure. But on his way there, when he found himself in the busy streets, a sudden panic seized him. He felt his body alternately grow hot and cold. He was overcome by an overwhelming desire to run—to run away from the people who thronged the pavements, to fight a passage through the traffic and escape—somewhere, anywhere, where he could hide himself and be alone.

Alone in the darkness again!

Ever since his escape from prison he had lived the life of an underground animal. Always in the darkness. And at night, when he had dared sometimes steal a breath of fresh air; the darkness still surrounded him and the silence and the mystery of the night.

For the best part of a year he had been shut off from human intercourse and converse with his fellow men.

Now he suddenly found himself rubbing shoulders with them. He was jostled to and fro; laughter echoed in his ears. The noise of the traffic threatened to deafen him.

He had to keep a tight grip on himself, or he knew he would have bolted—like a thief.

Then, gradually, as his self-confidence returned and he found he was not molested, fear left him and was replaced by a tremendous excitement. He began to feel like a child who has run away from home, or a schoolboy who has escaped the vigilance of his masters. The noise of the streets began to have a meaning for him: colour and movement. The motors and tram-cars and the splendid shops.

And, overhead, the great blue sky. He was free, really a free man again.

At liberty! He mouthed the word lovingly. And he stood still on the pavement and gaped at the men and women who passed to and fro. How easily they took their liberty; how unconscious they seemed of it. They had never known what it was to be imprisoned. They had never known what it was to live behind walls, to be shut up in a narrow cell in the everlasting twilight, without even a window through which one might gaze and be reminded that God's in His heaven, all's well with the world.

Again he laughed. At that moment a policeman passed him and turning his head looked at him. Rupert was standing just outside a shop. Hardly knowing what he was doing he bolted into it. The next moment he cursed himself for a

fool and a coward. A huge glass mirror showed him his reflection. He stared at it fascinated. He looked no more like a convict than he looked like the old Rupert Dale he had once known.

An assistant's voice behind the counter asking him what he wanted brought him back to the needs of the moment. By good fortune the shop was a tobacconist's—and Rupert knew he did want something very badly. A smoke. He bought a four-penny cigar, and the chink of money gave him another strange thrill. He spent an unconscionable time in lighting it, but when he ventured into the street again he found to his relief the policeman had gone.

And so eventually he reached the hotel safely and sat down at the open window of the private sitting-room reserved for Lieutenant James Crichton.

And there an hour or two later Jim found him.

The two men shook hands silently. It was difficult to find words. They had both gone through big ordeals. They had both been fighting against pretty stiff odds. Victory seemed assured.

But they were not out of danger yet.

Jim had a hot bath and changed, then he told Rupert to do the same.

"You will have to get into mufti," he explained to him. "I've had a kit-bag sent here, and it contains everything you'll want for your journey. You remember all I've told you? Well, I've had to change our plans slightly. You sail to-night on a small boat, about a thousand tons, that's going East. I've booked you as a coffee planter—thanks to working in the fields at Princetown you've got a good tan on your face. Your name is John Cotton—which fits in with the initials on my bag. I thought it out as I was filling my 'baccy pouch——" He laughed. "For heaven's sake, remember—*John Cotton*! You'll find a book amongst your kit dealing with coffee planting. You'd better study it in case you're tackled on the subject. The captain of the ship's a pal of mine. He's got a box for the theatre to-night, and is bringing a friend. We're going to join him there, and after the show, in the middle of supper, we're all to walk down to the Barbican Steps, where the captain's dinghy will be waiting.... Captain Sparkes is a decent chap, and a sportsman. He knows you're under a cloud, that's all he knows. I would have told him the truth, but I couldn't, for his sake; for if he knew and anything went wrong he would get into no end of a mess. He won't question you. And once you're outside Plymouth Sound you'll know you're safe."

Rupert nodded his head. He could not thank Crichton. Mere words would not convey what he felt.

Perhaps Jim knew what was passing in his mind, for he laid his hand on his shoulder a moment, giving it a friendly grip.

"That's all right," he said steadily. "Now, from this moment I want you to blot out the past. You told your sister you were innocent. I didn't believe it at

first. I believe it now."

Rupert raised his head and looked straight into Jim's face. "Thank God for that."

"Forget everything," Jim continued. "Only remember John Cotton, the coffee planter, en route for Singapore."

He took out a note-book from his pocket and handed Rupert a wad of notes. "There's a hundred pounds there, half in English, half in dollar notes. When the radium mine booms you'll have more money than you know what to do with. Now then, just before you close the door on the past and lock it, is there anything I can do for you in England?"

Rupert walked round to the window and gazed out. Down below the bustle and business of life; the buying and selling, the loving and hating of the streets. Beyond, the shimmer of the blue sea, which for him meant safety. And, above, the dome of the blue sky, which for him meant liberty!

He wondered when he would grow accustomed to it.

"You will take care of Marjorie. Whatever happens, whether you marry her or not, don't let Despard get hold of her."

"You need have no fear on that score, old man."

There was a short silence. Rupert was still standing with his back to Jim, staring out of the window.

"There's a letter I'd like to write—to some one; some one very dear to me. I don't know where she is now. But I daresay you could find her. Perhaps you can guess——"

"You mean Miss Strode?"

Rupert nodded. He gave Jim her address and the name of the theatre where she had last played. "I want her to know that I'm well and safe—and—happy. Don't forget to emphasize the fact that I'm happy—because, perhaps it would be safer not to write—if you would see her and give her the message instead."

"I'll see her and give her your message. You mustn't write."

Again there was a short silence. Rupert took out the bundle of notes Jim had given him and fingered them thoughtfully. "I shan't want all this money. Ruby may be out of an engagement. I wish you would find a way of sending her half the amount you've given me."

"You stick to them. I'll see that she wants for nothing. That is the first thing I'll do when I get back. I daren't tell her even that you've escaped out of England, though of course, she'll guess. But I'll give her your message. Is that all?"

"I think that's all," Rupert replied. He found it very difficult to keep his voice under control. "Tell her—tell her I love her—and am grateful, always grateful."

Jim started. He made a movement towards Rupert, his lips framing a question. He checked it, and, turning away, rang the bell.

"And now for dinner and then the theatre. You had better go into the other room, Cotton, while I give my orders to the waiter, in case he saw you coming in with my bag—he might wonder what sort of game I was playing with my servant."

Rupert nodded and crossed the room. "I see you've got your name all right." Jim smiled.

As soon as dinner was ordered the two men strolled down to the lounge, and then Rupert remembered to tell Jim the incident of the General he had forgotten to salute, and the scene he had had with the sergeant.

Crichton laughed. "By jove, you might have got poor Jackson into a nice mess! But as you were carrying my bag and men are not supposed to salute when they're carrying things, I'll make it all right for you."

At eight o'clock they made their way to the theatre and found Captain Sparkes and his friend already occupying one of the boxes.

Four hours later they were walking beneath the starlit sky towards the Barbican. The captain was in a rare good humour with himself. They found the dinghy waiting for them at the appointed place. Sparkes and his passenger tumbled in unquestioned. The final farewells were shouted, the oars struck the water. The little boat pulled out and was soon lost to view.

Jim Crichton gave a slight sigh of relief, and, turning on his heel, walked back to the hotel. At the bureau he asked for a telegraph form, and, writing out a message, handed it to the porter with instructions that it should be sent off the first thing in the morning.

It contained three words. "Flight quite successful," and was addressed to "Marjorie Dale, Blackthorn Farm, Post Bridge."

Jim turned in at once. For the first time he realised that he was thoroughly exhausted. But sleep did not come. A dreadful fear seized him lest he had written his message a little previously. Captain Sparkes' boat was not due to sail until daybreak. Rupert would not be really safe until she was out of the Channel.

Long before sunrise Jim Crichton was standing at his bedroom window gazing with anxious eyes over Plymouth Sound.

A black speck on the blue horizon; a thin line of slowly drifting smoke! His glasses told him that the boat had sailed, and that Rupert Dale was safe.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### RUBY'S DECLARATION.

The first thing Jim Crichton did—after he had made a successful return flight to Netheravon—was, on getting five days' special leave, to run up to London and search for Ruby Strode that he might keep his promise to Rupert. He resisted the temptation to pay a flying visit to Blackthorn Farm. Rupert was safe, a thousand miles or more away on his journey. But that made Jim the more anxious not to take the faintest risk.

Despard had been suspicious. Despard disliked him, and was in love with Marjorie. Jim had received a letter from her—short, carefully worded. It dealt principally with the doings of Post Bridge and the radium mine. The company would soon be floated, the prospectus was prepared, and, she stated, it was confidently expected that when it came out the capital would be over-subscribed.

Jim smiled to himself, for he read between the lines. He had little faith in the venture, perhaps, because he had no faith in Despard, though he hoped for John Dale's sake it would turn out successfully.

Soon after reaching London he discovered that his father was in town, and Jim frankly told him the object of his visit—to see Miss Strode and give her a message. Sir Reginald congratulated his son on his flight, but Jim did not dare tell him yet how successful it really had been, nor its real object.

"I think I'd like to meet this Miss Strode," Sir Reginald said, somewhat to Jim's surprise. "Though, I'm afraid, I still feel convinced of young Dale's guilt, I've never been able to eradicate from my mind the part she played at the trial—the strange outburst when she confessed it was she who altered the cheque. It seems, too, that when the solicitors saw her she said that Mr. Despard could, if he chose, prove the truth of her assertion. Of course, it's very possible that she and Rupert were equally guilty. Perhaps the suggestion came from her.... The woman tempted and the man fell. I'd like to know if Despard did keep anything back at the trial."

Jim nodded. "I'll see what I can do. But I should think the kindest thing would be to let Miss Strode forget all about it, if that's possible. Guilty or innocent, she must have been very fond of Rupert."

His father's suggestion came as a surprise to him. He had, during the last few weeks, cultivated Despard's acquaintance and seen a great deal more of him than Jim liked. But, as a rule, Sir Reginald never made a mistake in his judgment of men.

"Supposing Miss Strode could prove that Rupert is innocent, what then?" Jim asked.

"I don't think she can do that," Sir Reginald said quickly. "I'd like to discover what part she played in the unfortunate business. And perhaps she could enlighten us as to Despard's past history, his character—and so forth."

Jim smiled. "You're beginning to feel suspicious of this brilliant company

promoter who is playing the Good Samaritan at Blackthorn Farm and trying to feather his own nest at the same time."

Sir Reginald did not reply at once, and looking more closely at him, Jim noticed that he looked worried. A heavy frown furrowed his brows. Presently he took Jim's arm and asked him where he was going.

"Well, my first visit is to the Ingenue Theatre. It seems rather too much to expect that I shall find Miss Strode there, but it's the obvious place to look."

"I'll walk with you," Sir Reginald said. "I've something I want to say to you."

Jim almost suggested that the best place to talk would be the sitting-room of Sir Reginald's hotel, in which they found themselves. But he refrained. He felt as if he had suddenly changed places with his father, and that it was the older man who wanted to unburden his mind and make a confession. Not until they were in the bustle and turmoil of the streets did Sir Reginald speak.

"I was talking to my solicitors to-day, and, of course, Mr. Despard's name cropped up."

"Why of course?" Jim asked.

There was a moment's hesitation before his father replied. "I had instructed my brokers to apply for a rather large number of shares in this—this radium mine when it is floated. I found it necessary to realise certain securities. My solicitors did not seem to have a very good opinion of Mr. Despard. They confessed they did not know much about him. They seemed to think him a man of straw. He has already been connected with one or two companies—rubber and oil, I believe, both of which went into liquidation shortly after they had been promoted. As you know, I'm one of the syndicate of this radium mine."

"I don't know anything about the game," Jim admitted. "But I didn't know that Despard had convinced you there was anything but water in the old Blackthorn mine. I'm sure he's a rotter. You're not worried, are you? I mean, he hasn't done you for any amount?"

"He hasn't done me at all," Sir Reginald replied testily. "He started by forming a little syndicate, and I—but you wouldn't understand. You mustn't forget we had expert opinion, and the reports read so well. If by any chance the venture fails—well, it would hit us rather badly. You must not forget," he added hastily, "that property has been depreciating lately, and that, in consequence, my income has been dwindling, and just when this fellow Despard came along I was looking about for a good investment."

Jim laughed and pressed his father's arm. He knew that Sir Reginald had been thinking of his future more than of himself. "The desire for wealth has never troubled me, guv'nor. Love in a cottage sounds sentimental rot, I know; but one's got to live somewhere, and as long as I've got work and the woman I want, a cottage will be good enough for me. Here's the Ingenue Theatre, so you

had better leave me now unless you want to lose your reputation!"

Sir Reginald laughed. "I understand that the stage-door of a London theatre is a damned sight more respectable than the most fashionable matrimonial office, and that unless a man can produce a marriage licence he don't stand a chance of getting inside nowadays."

In answer to Jim's question the doorkeeper told him Miss Strode was playing, and that she generally left the theatre about eleven o'clock. Jim left his card, and said he would return at that hour. He arrived punctually, and had not to wait long before Ruby made her appearance.

He had never met her before, and at first he was not impressed. She treated him brusquely, and asked him plainly to state his business. He explained who he was and told her he had brought her a message from a friend. She looked him up and down, and he read mistrust in her eyes.

"Perhaps you'll walk as far as the end of the street with me," he suggested. She nodded. He told her he was engaged to be married to Rupert Dale's sister. "Can you guess from whom I bring a message?"

She started then, and her face grew deadly pale. She hesitated a moment, looking steadily into his face. Then she asked him to call a cab.

"Do you mind driving back to my flat with me? Yes, I live alone at present, but you needn't bother about the conventions. What people thought and said never troubled me much, and now it doesn't trouble me at all."

They scarcely spoke until her flat was reached. Ruby led the way into her sitting-room, mixed a whisky and soda for Jim and made one for herself.

"Would it shock you if I smoked?" she asked. "I can't help it if it does."

"I smoke myself," he replied quietly.

He saw a tinge of colour touch her cheeks. She apologised, and handed him the case. "Forgive me; but you're a soldier, aren't you?"

Jim nodded.

"I suppose you think women who earn their living at second-rate theatres, who smoke cigarettes, drink whisky instead of aniseed, and live alone, lose caste, don't you?"

He laughed and shook his head. "No. Why should I?"

"The Ingenue Theatre is largely patronised by the army, the navy, and the House of Lords. I've found that the youthful members of the aristocracy want to marry us, naval men want to amuse us, the army men expect us to amuse them—Aunt Sally up to date, six shies a penny!" She turned her back on him. "Will you tell me your message?"

"It's from a man called Cotton, John Cotton. You knew him under another name. He left Devonshire a week ago en route for Singapore. He wanted me to tell you that he was safe, that he loved you, and was deeply grateful for all you

had done for him."

He waited, but Ruby Strode did not move. She still stood with her back to him. It was a long time before he dared break the silence.

"You understand?" he whispered.

Then at last she turned round and stood beside him. The expression on her face had changed. It was no longer hard and cold. Her eyes were tender and beautiful: the eyes of a woman who has loved. She stretched out her hand and Jim took it.

"You mean that Rupert has really escaped? That there's no chance of his being captured and taken back to prison?"

He bowed his head.

"Who helped him escape? Who got him out of England?"

"That doesn't matter," Jim replied. "It's enough for you to know that he's safe. He's bound for Singapore, where he'll find work—a man's work, under the British flag. He will, as the Americans say, make good yet."

He tried to withdraw his hand, but Ruby held it tightly. "You helped him. I daresay you didn't do it for his sake but for his sister's, the woman you love. But you helped him."

Jim did not reply. Bending down Ruby kissed his hand again and again. He snatched it away and turned on his heel.

"God bless you!" she whispered hoarsely. "Don't go yet, Mr. Crichton. Tell me—tell me that you believe he's innocent?"

He looked at her then. And in her eyes he read her secret. If he had had any doubts as to Rupert's innocence they went now.

"I believe he is innocent. But—why couldn't he prove his innocence? If you did it, unknown to him——"

"Of course it was unknown to him," she interrupted. "He never suspected for a moment—how could he? That's why I did it. Oh, I was mad at the moment, but I loved him so! His life was in danger. He was going to kill himself. Why won't anyone believe—why can't anyone understand? Ruin, dishonour, faced him. When a woman loves nothing in the world matters but the honour, safety, and life of the man she loves. Being a man you may not have much of an opinion of women—the Lord knows why we love them so! Just as a man will die for his country, just as a soldier will kill, spy, suffer indignities, be tortured, rather than betray his trust, rather than see his country shamed or his flag hauled down, so will a woman do just the same rather than see her man hurt or the flag he carries dishonoured. Oh, I suppose it's only an idea that each fights for—the flag for the soldier, the man for the woman. The flag is his country and its future. The man is her mate and the children he will give her.... Can't you understand? I'm not defending myself; but they wouldn't believe me when I confessed, because they

couldn't see why I should do it. The fools!"

"Surely you didn't think when you did this thing your crime would remain undetected?"

"A woman doesn't think when the man she loves is in danger. I tell you, if I hadn't found the money for him he would have taken his life. I had to find the money. The cheque was lying on the floor, he had forgotten it. The idea came. I acted on it. I didn't think. It was a crime, I daresay. One day, when you're at war, perhaps, and you capture a spy you'll shoot him. You know he's a brave man and a soldier doing a job you might have been deputed to do for your country. But you'll shoot him. That's a crime in its way, but you'll do it because it's your duty to your flag. If you stopped to reason, to think it out, you wouldn't do it. When I committed my crime I obeyed the orders of my heart—instinct—call it what you will. I wanted to save my man—who was to be the father of my children. That's all I knew or remembered. I didn't save him. It's not too late now—if only they would listen to me, if only they'd believe me."

"They will believe you if you can find proof."

"The man who can prove it won't speak. I believe he could prove my guilt and Rupert's innocence absolutely if he would speak. Several things have come to my knowledge since the trial. That man is Robert Despard. He has disappeared from London and I can't find him."

Ruby was walking up and down the room now, her head thrown back, her fists tightly clenched. She looked magnificent, terrible.

"If I could find him," she cried between her teeth, "I would accuse him of perjury. For he did perjure himself. He came into Rupert's sitting-room just after I had altered the cheque. I was holding it in my hand just underneath my glove, and he saw it there and asked what it was. I believe after I left the room he must have seen the marks on the blotting-pad. Things I had forgotten at the time, things he said, returned to me afterwards when it was too late. He knows, but he won't speak."

"Gently, gently," Jim said, taking her arm and making her sit down. "We must help you, my father and I. We'll force Mr. Despard to speak—we must clear Rupert's name if——"

"There's no if!" she cried.

"You realise that if we clear him it means that you take his place? You will be sent to prison."

She seized his hands and looked into his eyes. "For me, the day I enter prison and he is pardoned, will be the first happy day I shall have known since

Rupert was arrested. I love him."

## CHAPTER XXV.
### AN EXCITING TIME.

Singapore!

The chain rattled through the hausehole with a deafening roar, and the great ship swung at anchor in the Roads.

A tropical sun beat fiercely down on the awnings, and Rupert Dale, leaning over the rail, gazed shorewards at the great plain framed in cocoanut palms—the Cathedral spire rising white and dazzling out of the green, fan-like leaves. To the left the brown slopes of Fort Canning, crowned with its giant flagstaff and fluttering flags. Round the ship a score or more of sampans tossed and jostled each other in the sparkling sea, their copper-skinned owners—naked to the loins—gesticulating and shouting in a language which sounded harsh and vehement to his unaccustomed ears. A strong, pungent odour of hot spice in which cinnamon predominated filled the air, while kites and eagles wheeled and swooped round him above the dancing waves.

Singapore! The gate of mystic, far Cathay! China—Japan—Siam—Borneo! Lovely Java, sea-girt Celebes. The spice islands! Lands of wonder and romance. The great Unknown, his future Home!

What a revelation it had been to him—the wonderful voyage. He had never been abroad before, and "foreign parts"—as anywhere out of England was called in Devonshire—were still a closed book.

Egypt! The Desert seen from the Suez Canal had impressed him. The Red Sea, with a distant glimpse of Mount Ararat, had brought the Bible story of the Israelite wanderings right before his eyes, for was not that the very "Wilderness" all round him? What was he but a wanderer in a strange land, surrounded by the desert of the sea—the promised land a mere speck on the chart—a tiny island away in the far north-west. The dear homeland, his home which he would never see again.

Then the miracle happened. First at Gib, then at Malta, Aden, Colombo, Penang, and now here. All along the vast ocean journey, four weeks long, wherever the great ship touched, there ashore flew the old flag, his flag. There stood his own countrymen on guard beneath its folds. Home? Why, he had brought

it with him. There it was ashore now, and there stood his blood brother, white-helmeted, his bayonet flashing in the sun for witness of his birthright.

Rupert could hear a band playing somewhere ashore, and as though in answer to his thoughts across the water there floated the heart-swelling strain of "Home, Sweet Home." He listened entranced till the air died away and all was silent. Then came the stirring crash of the National Anthem. He remembered the last time he had heard it. At the Moreton flower-show. It brought back in a flash to him the faint damp scent of moss and roses. That happy summer day. Home and all it stood for was here! It was good to be a Briton and feel this glorious freedom, this great sense of fellowship, of ownership.

"You will be getting sunstroke if you stand there with your helmet off, Cotton."

He started—the spell was broken. His fellow-passenger, a grey-haired, clean-shaven man of fifty, with whom he had struck up a friendship during the voyage, stood behind him with a smile on his kindly face, which was lighted by a pair of keen, grey eyes.

"It sounds good to us exiles—the old tune—doesn't it? 'What does he know of England who only England knows?' Eh? The chap who wrote that must have known something of our Empire—what? And yet there are millions of fools in the old country this moment who neither know nor care whether the Empire exists or not; while the very bread they eat is bought with the blood of those who created it! Look at that long wharf over there. See those piles of bales? That is cotton pieces from Manchester. See those chests piled under that big shed? Tea—cheap 'Straits' tea—shilling a pound in any little grocer's shop at home! See that steamer loading those sacks, there, that black-funnelled one? That's sago, that the kiddies eat at home."

"Wonderful!" Rupert echoed, and then he sighed. He had left the old country—a felon. He had found a new world, a free man!—with his country's flag flying a welcome. And yet——

"Do you see that little cruiser over there?" Patterson continued excitedly. "It's hard to realise that she's the only British warship within a thousand miles of this—the most important trade-route in the world. No, that's not a British ship—that big battleship over there is a German, and that other with four big black funnels is a Jap, and the one beyond is a Russian. Bit of a shock, isn't it, when you recognise what a tiny thing the British Navy is compared to the Colonial Empire it has to defend?"

Rupert nodded. His head was in a whirl—and his heart. He had reached the end of his journey. He was free! And yet——

"By the by, have you decided what you're going to do? My offer is still open. Your mining knowledge would be very useful to me in Borneo, although

you haven't got the certificate of the School of Mines. It will be rough work—dangerous work at times, as I told you, for we are going up to the unknown interior where the Head-hunting Muruts live, and you may not see civilisation again for twelve months."

Rupert looked him in the face. Patterson was a "white man" he knew. A straight man.

"I have thought it all over, and I decided last night to accept your offer if you are still willing to take me after you have heard why I am here. I can't explain everything, but what I shall tell you is only what you ought to know. Come down to my cabin and I will tell you who I am."

In the saloon of the boat—deserted now—where they had spent so many happy weeks, sharing storm and sunshine, dangers and pleasures, unconsciously growing to know one another, as men ashore never can.

A genuine friendship, backed by respect, had been formed between Rupert and Patterson. The former had only just realised what this friendship had done for him.

What it meant for him now! He, who had been for so many months a convict, cut off from all communications with his fellows—a mere machine, a cypher! Number 381!

Patterson had offered him a job. Work after his own heart. It was only now, at the last moment, that Rupert realised he could not accept it, could not continue the friendship that had commenced, and which meant so much to him, unless he told Patterson who *and what he was*!

An escaped convict, a felon with a price on his head!

A nice companion for this straight, clean Englishman, who proposed to take him, alone, in the vast interior of wild Borneo.

To speak, to confess, meant losing his first, only friend. It meant losing the chance of work. It might mean that he would be arrested and sent back to England and prison!

But he had to play the game! It is curious how little things affect one at a great crisis of one's life. Rupert had known he would have to leave Patterson and refuse his offer—or else speak and tell him his history, and, sub-consciously, he had decided to say nothing, make some excuse for refusing his offer and just leave Singapore, alone.

It was the sight of the Union Jack flying from the shore, the sound of the old English tune, "Home, Sweet Home," that had suddenly turned the scales and made him decide to leave his fate in Patterson's hands.

He thought of his father, of little Marjorie, his sister. And last of Ruby, the woman he loved!

They would have asked him to play the game.

So, over a final drink in the empty saloon, Rupert told his new friend, already his old friend, Jim Patterson, the story of his life, his imprisonment and escape from Dartmoor. He refrained from mentioning any names; he made no attempt to defend himself.

When he had finished Patterson ordered another drink, and then lit a cheroot. Having got his "smoke" well under way he rose and held out his hand.

Rupert took it hesitatingly. "I'm glad you told me, Cotton," Patterson said. "I rather flatter myself that I'm a judge of character. I knew the moment I saw you that you had a 'history.' I didn't want to know it, but I guess you feel better for having told me. A man who has gone through the fires and has got his fingers burnt is worth twice as much as the fellow who has never fought and blundered, suffered and gone on fighting. Now then, shut down on the past and ... get ashore!"

"You—you still want me to come with you?" Rupert stammered. "You still trust me?"

Patterson laughed. "Now, more than ever."

Half an hour later Rupert's bag was put into a long boat with Mr. Patterson's more bulky luggage. There was a choppy sea on and it was not an easy task to get into the boat as it rose and fell at the ship's gangway. At last they pushed off, Patterson sitting beside Rupert in the stern, with their baggage piled in front of them. The six Malays bent to their long, thin paddles with short, jerky strokes, and the light boat flew through the white-topped waves towards the shore beneath the slopes of Fort Canning, where the Union Jack still fluttered a welcome.

* * * * *

A long canoe cut out of a single giant tree, with a palm leaf awning covering the stern portion, under which two white men inclined on a mat, while eight brawny Malays, sitting crossed-legged with their backs to them, bent their bronze-coloured bodies from which the sweat poured in streams to the regular strokes of their paddles. In the stern, behind the awning, sat the steersman, an old, parchment-faced Dyak with a small white goatee beard, fierce, pig-like eyes, and a broad slit of a mouth which dripped a blood-red juice as he chewed his betelnut quid.

He was the guide, an old "Gutta-hunter" who knew this trackless forest, these giant mountains through which the great river flowed three long weeks' journey to the sea. Here, in the far interior, where no white men had been before, it had become a clear, swift stream, with constant rapids, up which the narrow canoe had to be dragged by the crew waist-deep in the rushing white-foamed

water as it swirled and tumbled over the jagged rocks.

Tropical vegetation hung in thick green masses to the water's edge, while the blacker mass of foliage of colossal trees whose huge trunks shot up a hundred feet or more without a branch, shut in the landscape on every hand.

"'This is the forest primeval, only more so,'" Patterson quoted gaily, "and, if it wasn't for the leeches, not a bad place after all."

These pests hung on every leaf and blade of grass and, with outstretched head, waited the passer-by on whom they instantly fixed, to worm through puttie or breeches, through coat and shirt, until the flesh was reached and the blood-sucking head inserted beneath.

For nearly nine months now Patterson and Rupert had been travelling—prospecting and working—in this wild and dangerous region. For Rupert, nine months of keen excitement, which had almost wiped out the dreadful past. But, deep in his heart, was embedded the memory of the woman he still loved; and the memory of his father and the little homestead among the Devonshire moorlands.

The one thing he could never forget was that he would, perhaps for ever, remain an exile. Yet he dreamed of returning home one day, of seeing his loved ones again—if only for a few brief hours.

The sun was below the mountain tops, and it was almost time to think of selecting a camping-place for the night. Patterson stretched himself and sat up.

"Where shall we land?" he asked in Malay.

"I don't know—wherever your honour wishes," the helmsman replied. "Your honour knows best."

Before Patterson could reply a huge tree on the right bank, not twenty yards ahead, crashed down right across the stream, its great branches throwing up a column of water, while its dense top was locked in the foliage of the other bank.

"Murut! Murut!" shouted the Malays. "Turn quick! Quick!"

The water swirled beneath the swift strokes of the paddles as they turned the canoe in its own length. A sudden crack with the rending sound of a falling tree caused them to pause with paddles in the air, as another giant of the forest crashed down the stream below them. Instantly a shot rang out from the jungle and the air was filled with yells of "Hoot-ka-Poot," the dread war-cry of the Head-hunting Muruts.

Naked figures climbed over the fallen trees that hemmed them in, and musket shots from both banks added to the din, though the bullets whizzed high overhead or harmlessly struck the water.

At the first alarm Rupert and Patterson had seized their rifles and opened fire, Patterson shouting orders to keep the canoe in mid-stream.

"Fire at the men on the tree ahead, Cotton," he said. "We must force a passage up stream.... Good shot!" as a Murut who had reached the middle of the

tree threw up his arms and toppled face down into the stream.

Two more were lying limp in the tangle of branches and another went splashing and spluttering past the canoe, the swift running current red with his blood. Suddenly the man in the bows leaped up with a shriek that ran high above the noise of the fight, his eyes starting from his head with horror, as he stared at a tiny bamboo shaft that he held in his left hand, while his right plucked convulsively at his side, from which a few drops of blood were oozing. Slowly he sank to his knees, while his fellow paddlemen huddled away from him, muttering the dread words, "Upas, Upas poison! He's hit!"

As the cruel poison began to work, the poor fellow's face became livid and his limbs contorted with agony, and soon he lay a knotted and inanimate mass of twisted limbs in the bottom of the canoe.

The deadly blow-pipe is the Murut's chief weapon, for guns are few and only obtained where the Arab trader has penetrated to buy "gutta" and other jungle produce. The blow-pipe is about six feet long and is bored with wonderful skill from a perfectly straight piece of seasoned hard wood. Its darts are made from bamboo, thin as a knitting needle, and with a very sharp point, which is nearly cut through, so that it breaks off in the wound before the dart can be withdrawn. A piece of pith that exactly fits the bore of the tube is fixed to the other end of the dart, and so powerful is this primitive weapon that a skilled warrior can blow a dart with extreme accuracy to forty or even fifty yards range.

The Malay next Rupert dropped his paddle, which floated away, and when he looked at him he saw a thin line of blood running down his face from a hole in his left temple. He was stone dead, but still squatted in his place. A bullet now broke the steersman's, Unju's, paddle, and the canoe began to drift towards the bank.

It had all happened so quickly that they had scarcely time to realise their danger, and it was not till a shower of spears had wounded Unju and killed the other two Malays, that Patterson saw they were almost ashore.

"Quick, Cotton, paddle for your life!" he shouted, and, seizing a paddle, he tried to turn the bow of the canoe to the stream again.

But it was too late, a score of naked forms leapt from the bank and threw themselves upon the canoe, which filled with water, and surrounded by shrieking savages was soon fast wedged in the undergrowth on the wear side.

It would have gone hard with the two white men, for a dozen spears were poised against them, when Unju, the Dyack, yelling his war-cry, leapt into the midst of the Muruts, his heavy parang swung by an arm of steel, cleaving through skull and shoulder, breast or back, and sending death and destruction on every side. In a moment he had cleared a circle round the canoe. Suddenly a shot rang out, and Unju collapsed into Rupert's arms, and an instant later a tall native with

a Winchester repeating rifle in his hand, stepped from behind a tree, and, signing to the Muruts to keep back, approached the canoe.

He wore a short Arab coat, a pair of tight-fitting "sluar," and a small handkerchief turban of stiff gold embroidery round his head. An acquiline nose, two piercing black eyes set very close together, and a small black moustache that covered but did not hide a thin, cruel mouth, showed that the newcomer was not a Murut. He addressed Patterson in Malay with the peculiar drawl of the Brunie noble.

"Surrender, and the Muruts shall not kill you. Touch not your guns but step up upon the land."

He then turned to the Muruts and gave some orders in their own language. Unju had sat up, and Rupert was trying to staunch the bullet wound in his left shoulder. With Patterson's assistance they lifted him from the canoe and laid him against a tree on the river bank. The Muruts were cutting branches of trees and with a few rattans soon constructed a rough litter.

What fate awaited them Rupert hardly dared to guess. That their lives had been spared was evidently due to the presence of the Brunie chief, whom they learnt later on was an outlaw and a desperado called Mat Salleh, who, in his young days, had been a pirate and was a native of Suloo, an island of the north coast. Old Unju knew him well by reputation, and seemed to fear him far more than he did the Muruts, whom he really despised. Mat Salleh had obtained a great influence over the Muruts of the interior, who believed him to be invulnerable and possessed with supernatural power.

When the litter was ready, Mat Salleh ordered them to march behind it, and surrounded by armed Muruts and preceded by others carrying the gory heads of the poor Malays, they started up a steep mountain track through the gloom of the dark jungle. After about an hour's march they emerged from the forest into a large clearing, where paddy and sweet potatoes were planted. At the top of a conical hill in the centre of the clearing was a high stockade of bamboo enclosing some dozen houses on piles and thatched with palm leaves. As the long procession entered the clearing, a great hubbub arose out in the village. The deep notes of a big war gong mingled with the shrill cries of the women, who poured out of a gateway and danced down towards the approaching warriors. The sun had set and it was nearly dark, though a bright moon lighted up the clearing, throwing the stockade and houses into black relief against the opal sky.

Rupert glanced at Patterson. The latter shrugged his shoulders. "We're in for it, I'm afraid, Cotton. Sorry, old man, but while there's life there's hope!"

As they entered the stockade flames shot up from a huge fire that had just been lit inside, and the ruddy glow thrown on the bronze figures of the men and the naked bodies of the women who surrounded them, made a scene so weird

and eerie that Rupert's blood ran cold with dread of what was about to happen in this devils' cauldron. At one end of the enclosure was a long house with an open verandah about six feet above the ground, against which was placed a single bamboo in which notches had been cut to form steps.

By this Mat Salleh and the Murut chiefs mounted, and squatting round a huge jar began to refresh themselves by sucking a reed that was inserted in the top. Similar jars were placed near the fire, and groups of warriors quickly surrounded them. Patterson and Rupert were dragged to the fire, and poor wounded Unju was also dragged there by a horrible old hag, who appeared to be the mistress of the ceremonies. The women now took the heads, still dripping with blood, and began to slowly dance round the fire, chanting a deep song with a high wailing note at the end of each stave. Their long black hair hung straight to their waists, they were naked save for a dark cloth of bark round their loins. The great wooden gong beat time and throbbed on the still night air. Gradually the time became faster, and men and women from the drinking jars joined in the dance. The gory heads were tossed from hand to hand, and it was evident to the unfortunate prisoners that the drink was beginning to inflame the dancers.

Spears and parangs flashed in the firelight, and old Unju, who had hitherto remained motionless, stirred uneasily and at last spoke to Patterson in a low voice.

"Beware, O chief, for they will take our heads presently when their blood is fired by drink."

Patterson nodded. "I'm afraid I've given you a poor run for your money, Cotton," he whispered. Rupert smiled. "I'm all right. Glad we're together."

At this moment a band of women were seen advancing from the chief's house, leading two youths who were to be initiated as warriors. They each carried a head by the hair and were led into the circle of dancers. The same old hag who had conducted the dance now smeared the youths with blood, shrieking an invocation, to which the crowd replied at intervals with a shout of "Augh!" Next an old warrior stepped forward and broke off their two front teeth with the aid of a stone and a short iron instrument, afterwards filing the stumps off to the gums.

This was done to enable the sumpitan or blowpipe to be used with greater facility and is the sign of manhood. More jars of tapi (rice spirit) were broached, and every one gave themselves up to drinking.

Patterson whispered to Unju and asked him if he was able to walk, to which the old man replied that he could walk all night if his head remained on his shoulders—about which he expressed some misgivings.

"Listen," said Patterson, "in a short time the moon will be down. They have put green boughs on the fires to smoke the heads while they drink. It is pitch dark under the stockade, and most of the men are already drunk. If we can crawl

one by one to the stockade, without being seen, we can overpower the man at the gate, and, once outside, Unju must guide us to the river. It is a desperate venture, but to remain here is certain death."

Unju shook his head. On the whole, he preferred to remain where he was. Their lives were in the hands of fate. To go or stay—it would come to the same thing in the end.

Patterson turned impatiently to Rupert. "What do you say? At least we shall be doing something, and, anyway, get a fight for our lives. This inaction is getting on my nerves."

Rupert managed to laugh. "It is a bit dull. I almost feel as if I were watching my own head being smoke-dried over that beastly fire."

It was agreed that at a signal from Patterson each man should begin to creep towards the stockade, keeping as far apart as possible. If one was discovered and caught the other two were to make a dash for it, trusting to the excitement and drunken confusion to get away.

Patterson drew a ring off his finger, a plain gold band, and gave it to Rupert, asking him (in the event of his getting away and Patterson being caught) to give it to a certain person he named and whose address Rupert would find at the National Bank, Singapore.

"Anything I can do for you, old man, if—if you're unlucky?"

Rupert thought for a moment. "There is a girl I love called Ruby Strode. You will probably find her at the Ingenue Theatre, London. Tell her that I understood and appreciated everything she did on my behalf—tell her she was my last thought."

"Right-ho," Patterson replied cheerily. "Now, crawl a few feet away and lie low until you hear me whistle twice. Then make for the stockade on your hands and knees. Each man for himself, remember. It's our only chance."

Rupert gripped his hand. The next moment he found himself alone. By the faint light of the flames from the fire he could see the hideous, naked figures of the Muruts dancing to and fro, men and women. They reeled, leapt, staggered. The rice spirit was doing its deadly work, and already they were mad with excitement.

Suddenly above the noise Rupert heard two long, low whistles. He turned over on his hands and knees. But, as he did so, he heard a wild yell.

The hag-like woman had seen him. Patterson was discovered, too.

A score of writhing, steel-coloured, blood-stained bodies reeled towards them, closed round them, cutting off all chance of escape.

Rupert saw Patterson rise to his feet. He followed his example, giving himself up for lost. The flames from the bough-fed fire leaped up brightly for a mo-

ment, then died down again, making the night inky-black.

## CHAPTER XXVI.
### AN ARGUMENT.

Despard sat in the den, as he called it, of his new chambers in Duke Street, London. A shaded electric light shone on his desk. A mass of papers and a private account-book lay before him, a half-smoked Havana cigar was in his mouth, a whisky and soda by his side.

The gold travelling clock on the mantelshelf struck the hour. Nine o'clock. Despard pushed back his chair, took a pull at his cigar, sighed, and then, looking at the clock, frowned. Evidently the visitor he expected was not coming.

Nearly two years had passed since he successfully floated the radium mine at Blackthorn Farm. For several months his little venture had threatened to sink. It had been more difficult than he supposed to get people to believe in radium. The public wanted something they could see and handle for their money. Radium was a little too elusive.

But Despard, for all his faults, was a fighter, especially when he had something for which to fight. He had got two or three people with a small amount of money to believe in him—and in radium. Some of those people had influence. So, after many weary months of working up a slow but steady boom, and by a brilliant system of advertisement, the company had been successfully floated and launched, and the public had come in at first slowly and hesitatingly, but eventually with a rush which was accelerated by an unexpected boom on the Stock Exchange.

The one-pound shares in the radium mine, fully paid up, mounted from five shillings to par. From this they suddenly boomed to twenty-five shillings, and then gradually and steadily rose until they were quoted at three pound ten. Sir Reginald Crichton and one or two other members of the original syndicate, though honestly believing in the venture, were surprised. So far, no radium had been extracted from the pitch-blende—though the reports were excellent and full of encouragement. But Crichton expected he would have to wait some years before he got a return for his money.

Now, if he chose to sell his shares he knew he might realise a small fortune. But Despard begged him to wait.

”They’ll touch five pounds yet,” he said.

His nerve, which had never deserted him during the early days of the venture, when people had frankly laughed at the idea of radium being discovered in Devonshire, when there was real danger of utter failure, and rumours of fraud echoed in his ears, now began to fail him.

He knew he could trust old Dale, Sir Reginald Crichton, and a few other men who had been nothing more nor less than his dupes. It was his friends in the City, sharks like himself, whom he could not trust. Men who had helped finance the company and boom it; the men who had forced up the price of shares originally when they were worth as many pennies as they were quoted in shillings.

Gold had been the god at whose shrine Despard had always worshipped. For he believed that money could purchase anything, even the love of woman.

Even the love of the woman he had grown to desire more than any other, more than anything else in the world, save wealth—Marjorie Dale.

The frown on Despard’s face deepened as the clock ticked cheerfully on and the hands slowly but inexorably pointed to the fleeting minutes. In spite of all opposition, in spite of all the influence he had been able to bring to bear on her father and on Jim’s father; in spite of threats and promises she still refused to listen to him or to consider him for one moment as her lover or her future husband.

The announcement of her engagement to Lieutenant James Crichton had been made, only to be contradicted by Sir Reginald. Her father had sent her to London to stay with some wealthy friends they had made—through Sir Reginald’s introduction and the fame the mine had brought them. He had hoped that a season in the great city would help her to forget and make her more amenable to his wishes.

But he did not know his own daughter. It had always been his boast that when a Dale gave his word he never went back on it. Perhaps he forgot that though his daughter was a woman she nevertheless inherited the same proud, obstinate spirit that he and his forefathers possessed.

He had almost given her up as hopeless, had frankly told Sir Reginald he could do no more.

Society has a conveniently short memory on occasions, and those members of it, who knew the history of the Dales and the story of the convict brother who had escaped from Dartmoor and successfully disappeared from the country, quickly forgot all about him. Those who had not heard asked no questions. Miss Dale was young, rich, beautiful, and apparently well-bred. That was enough. Even Sir Reginald was in his heart of hearts beginning to relent, though, outwardly, he showed no signs of it.

But Despard knew this, and it encouraged him to play his last card. A

desperate one and a dangerous.

That was why he now glanced impatiently at the clock and the frown on his forehead gradually deepened. That morning he had commenced to unload—to sell his shares in the radium mine. He had gone to work cautiously so as not to alarm the public. It was important that no one should know that he was clearing out of the venture until he had realised every penny he possibly could. As soon as the shares began to drop he knew there would be a rush by those behind the scenes to sell. And eventually there would be a scramble by the public to get rid of the shares that he believed were not worth seventy pence, much less seventy shillings. By that time Despard hoped to be out of the country—travelling for his health! And he fondly dreamed that Marjorie Dale would be with him, too. As his wife—or, if she proved obstinate, he intended to try what force would do.

He had made up his mind that Jim Crichton should never have her. For he hated him. And he had good reason. Jim had kept his promise to Ruby Strode and had left no stone unturned to try and force Despard to prove Rupert Dale's innocence.

But it had been of no avail. Sir Reginald's suspicions of Despard had been lulled to rest again. Money talks, and it had successfully lured the elder man into the comfortable belief that things were best left as they were, and that Rupert Dale, having escaped and apparently been forgotten, his memory was best left in oblivion.

The clock on the mantelshelf struck the half-hour. Despard closed his books, folded up his papers and put them away. He had realised a tidy little fortune, and for the moment the frown disappeared and he gave a sigh of satisfaction. To-morrow, he decided, he would warn Sir Reginald to sell; but if Marjorie Dale did not come to his rooms that evening in reply to the letter he had sent her, he would let her father be stranded with a few thousand worthless shares, and the old tin mine at Blackthorn Farm as a reminder of his folly.

He had warned Marjorie in the letter he had sent her that unless she came to his rooms that evening to hear what he had to say he would ruin her father, ruin him utterly and irretrievably.

He crossed the room and opened the door which led into his bedroom. His trunk was packed, everything was ready to start for the Continent at a moment's notice. It looked now as though that start would be made within twelve hours. For he knew that if Marjorie did not respond to his letter in person, she would either send it to her father or else show it to her lover, Jim, and in that case—in Mr. Despard's own language—"the fat would be in the fire," and the sooner he got out of the country for a few months' change of air the better.

He knew Marjorie had no fear for herself. Poverty had no terror for her, and she had shown by her loyalty to her brother that she was ready to face disgrace.

But he believed that she would come for her father's sake.

Just as the hands of the clock pointed to a quarter to ten there was a knock at the front door. Despard started, and a smile flitted across his thin lips.

She had come after all!

He closed the bedroom door and glanced round the room. There was a little too much light, so he switched off the hanging lamp. He glanced at himself in the mirror, smoothed his hair and straightened his tie.

She had come. He knew, as he noiselessly crossed the hall, that she would not leave his rooms until he had obtained her promise to marry him, or, failing that, until he had obtained a promise more certain of fulfilment.

His fingers trembled a little as he turned the Chubb lock and opened the door.

The woman standing outside entered quickly. Despard closed the door, and, turning, held out his hand.

"I was afraid you were not coming, Marjorie——"

"You have made a mistake. I am not Miss Dale. I am Ruby—Ruby Strode."

Despard's teeth met in his lip. He repressed an oath. "You—what do you want with me?"

He hesitated a moment, then pulled himself together and opened the sitting-room door. Ruby entered and he followed her.

"Won't you sit down? Have a whisky and soda?"

She nodded. "Thanks, I would like a drink."

While he mixed it she stared round the room. "I've not been here before. Rather a nice place. You have made a lot of money, haven't you?"

She spoke nervously, in short, sharp sentences. Despard realised something was wrong. He wondered what. He looked at her more critically as he handed her the tumbler. She was smartly dressed. Her face looked very white, her eyes large and brilliant. If anything, she was more beautiful than when he had last seen her. She had always attracted him. He remembered how once he had wanted to marry her.

And the thought crossed his mind that if Marjorie did not come Ruby Strode would not make a bad travelling companion for an enforced holiday.

"It's a long time since we've met," he said easily. "Though your friends have been busy on your behalf—or perhaps I should say on behalf of your quondam convict lover."

He saw her face grow scarlet for a moment, her eyes flash, then she veiled them, and, shrugging her shoulders, laughed easily.

"It's about my quondam lover, as you call him, that I've come to see you."

Despard yawned, and, taking a fresh cigar, lit it. "How disappointing! I thought you had come to see me for myself alone. You are just as beautiful as

ever you were, Ruby."

She emptied the glass he had given her, then pulled her chair closer to his and looked at him eagerly.

"Mr. Despard—Bob—you are rich now and powerful. You've got everything you want in the world."

"Not quite," he said, leaning towards her.

"Nearly everything," she continued. "You've got money, and that buys most things."

"Yes," Despard grinned. There was a moment's pause, and again he leaned towards her. "Have you anything you want to sell?"

Once more the colour mounted her cheeks.

"Perhaps," she stammered. "I'll tell you straight out. There's nothing I wouldn't do in order to clear Rupert Dale's name."

Despard leaned back and flicked the ash off his cigar. "The same old subject. Gad, one would think you believed I altered the cheque, I'm the guilty person. I've told you and your pal, Jim Crichton, that I can do nothing, that I know nothing."

Ruby drew still a little closer to him. In the dimly-lit room she looked exceedingly beautiful. Yes, he admitted that she still fascinated him as she had done a year or two ago.

"Listen," she whispered. "I know if you had spoken at the trial you would have saved Rupert."

"Supposing for the sake of argument that I could have. What then?"

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### RUBY'S HEROISM.

Despard knew exactly what Ruby Strode had come to ask. He saw his opportunity "for getting a little of his own back," as he would have put it. He smiled to himself as he watched her sitting there, nervously twisting up the gloves she had taken off, and, obviously, at a loss to continue.

A more generous man would have tried to make it easier for her, to have helped her. But Despard was not that sort. He merely calculated how much he might ask, how far he might go without meeting a rebuff. The cards all seemed to be in his hand.

Here he was in his own flat, alone, with a beautiful woman who had come

to ask, to beg, or to purchase a favour of him! He glanced at the clock; it was now past ten o'clock. In a few minutes the outer door would be locked and the hall-porter gone! He rose, and, crossing over to the table, poured himself out a stiff whisky. As he placed his glass under the syphon he broke the long silence.

"Won't you have another, Ruby?" he asked in a soft voice.

Ruby started, and the blood rushed to her face. Her courage oozed away. Then she thought of her mission—she must not fail. She must keep cool and play this man with his own game. She must fool him, deceive him—appear to give in to him; permit him to make love to her, anything, everything so long as she could persuade him to come forward with the evidence that would save her lover from the crime that now dishonoured his good name; that had ruined his life and threatened to ruin his sister's.

"Thank you, I will have a tiny drop, please, with plenty of soda."

Despard turned his back on her and half filled her tumbler with spirit, he then frothed it over the brim with soda.

"Now then, go ahead," he laughed.

"I have come to you to-night to throw myself on your honour, to appeal to your generosity—to beg you, to pray you, on my knees if necessary, to help me to undo the great wrong that I have done to an innocent man. Oh, Mr. Despard, I know you don't like him, but I do not ask a favour for him. I ask it for myself. You once said you were fond of me, that you loved me. Think then what it means to me when I love Rupert Dale more than life—more than honour—more than anything in this world or the next. Think of my feelings—-night and day, night and day, never a moment's rest—never a moment's peace; always the same terrible thought clutching my heart, tearing my very soul. That I—I, his chosen love, his future wife, have ruined him, blasted his life, branded his name with dishonour, made him an outcast, an outlaw, hiding in shame from his fellowmen. And Marjorie, his sister, she is suffering, too. I cannot bear it any longer. I should have killed myself long ago if that would have helped; but it would only end it for me, while he would live on, never able to clear himself, without hope, doomed to life-long suffering by my act. My statements were not believed. Your evidence contradicted mine, or, at least, threw doubt on what I said. The jury would not believe me, and an innocent man was condemned to penal servitude for my crime. I know you saw the cheque in my hand because you frightened me by asking me if it was my winnings. When I went out of the room I turned as I reached the door and saw you looking at the blotting-pad. You looked up and our eyes met. I knew you had seen the figures on it as surely as though you had told me. For some reason you denied all this in court. I thought at the time it was to screen me, I know now that you had another motive. I have been to my solicitors and to Sir Reginald's; they both tell me that it is quite useless appealing to the

Home Secretary for a re-hearing or a pardon or anything, unless there is some new evidence that was not given at the trial and that will conclusively prove my guilt. You can give that evidence—you can prove that what I said at the trial was true—you can save the man I love from worse than death. God help me, but you will, you will!"

She stopped. Despard struck a match and lit his cigar and puffed the smoke in rings to the ceiling. When the silence had lasted till she could bear it no longer Ruby's eyes fell upon her tumbler, and with a trembling hand she raised and emptied it. It burned her throat like fire, but her strained nerves hardly noticed it. She lay back in her chair and closed her eyes. She heard, as from a distance, Despard's voice, soft and coaxing.

"My dear little girl, I had no idea you felt it like that. You have always treated me so harshly, so coldly, I thought you had no heart, that you were incapable of feeling the passion that consumed me, or of understanding why I refused to speak. I will confess to you now that I did it because I love you—there, don't move, hear me out. I couldn't bear to send you to prison, to make you suffer. I thought you would forget this fellow Dale, now that he has gone out of your life for ever. For remember, that whatever happens, he can never marry you after this. Even if he was pardoned and returned to England—yes, I know he's abroad—the proof of his innocence is your condemnation, don't forget that! So it's not much good clearing his name of crime only to tie him to a felonious wife. Now, I have a little proposal to make to you. I have made some money out of this mine in Devonshire. I have a nice little flat here, a capital little car round at the garage, but no one to share them."

He rose and crossed the room, standing behind her chair so that he could see her face in the mirror above the fireplace, but she could not see him.

"Now, in order to clear Rupert Dale's name, to give him his freedom—which, by the way, he has already taken—I shall have to confess that I committed perjury two years ago. And they make it rather hot for perjurers. They would certainly send me to prison. And you will get there without a shadow of doubt. Nobody knows where Rupert is, nobody cares. He has probably married and settled down in some remote corner of the earth perfectly happy and content. By raking up this wretched affair we shall be merely making several people very uncomfortable, do ourselves an incalculable amount of harm, and benefit Rupert no whit whatever."

In the mirror he saw the colour mount to Ruby's pale cheeks. The suggestion that Rupert was happily married had not been tactful. He waited a moment, but she did not speak.

"Now, supposing I make a statement for private circulation only. It can be witnessed and made quite a legal document if you like, but only those interested

should see it—Rupert's father and sister, for example; Sir Reginald, if you can guarantee that he will hold his tongue."

"A statement which will absolutely exonerate Rupert?" Ruby's voice seemed to come with an effort.

"Of course."

"You admit, then, that you saw me alter the cheque in Rupert's rooms that afternoon?"

Despard shrugged his shoulders. "Well, as far as I remember I was just coming into the room and I saw you sitting at the bureau scribbling on a piece of paper. You blotted it and I saw it was a cheque. I hesitated a moment, and as I entered you rolled it up and put it in your glove. There was a guilty look on your face and I suspected something. That was why I questioned you. I took the opportunity of examining the blotting-pad with a little hand-mirror—of course, I could not tell anything was wrong, but I had a pretty shrewd suspicion. You may be a good actress, Ruby, but you gave yourself away that afternoon."

He turned round as he spoke and looked straight at her. Her face was contorted with rage, her eyes were flaming.

"You coward! You actually saw me alter the cheque and you examined the blotting-pad! You knew Rupert was innocent. You knew I did it. Yet, at the trial you would not speak. You let an innocent man, your friend, go to prison.... Why did you do it? Why, answer me? Why?"

Her sudden passion alarmed him. She had risen to her feet and was standing close to him, gazing straight into his eyes. He strained his ears fearing lest some one had overheard her.

"I've got the truth at last," she cried. "Every one shall know it now."

Despard moved, placing himself between Ruby and the door. He was afraid what she might do in her passion.

"You asked why I let an innocent man go to prison?" he said softly, in a gentle, reassuring voice. It was almost wistful in its tenderness. "I had to choose between my friend and—and the woman I love. You, Ruby."

"You never loved me," she cried. "Rupert was my lover and you know it. You came between us. You were jealous of him."

"That's true," he replied with a sigh. "But I would have been loyal to him if my love for you had not been the strongest thing in my life."

Ruby laughed sarcastically, then checked herself. What did it matter how Despard lied? What did it matter if she let him believe that he was fooling her? For two years she had been trying to get the confession he now made. She had tried every means but one. She had done everything but come to him herself and plead with him, bargain with him. Nothing mattered if she could get him to put in writing the confession he had just made.

She turned away as if overcome, and with an unsteady hand poured some more whisky into her tumbler and raised it to her lips.

"I laughed because I found it difficult to believe you really loved me, Mr. Despard."

Stepping forward he seized her wrist and swung her round. He had just called her a bad actress, but she acted well enough now to deceive him.

"You knew I wanted you," he said huskily.

The colour ebbed and flowed from her face. "Oh, yes, I knew that, but——"

"I want you now," he whispered.

She pretended to try and drag her hand away. "Why have you only just said so?"

"Because I knew Dale still stood between us. Because you have done your best to avoid me, and have tried to set Rupert's father and Sir Reginald Crichton against me."

"Oh, can't you understand my feelings," she cried piteously. "I loved Rupert and I knew that he loved me, and I had injured him in trying to save him. It was my duty before everything else to clear his name.... And I was always a little afraid of you—perhaps because I knew you were Rupert's rival."

Despard drew in his breath sharply as he inhaled the perfume of her hair. She raised her eyes an instant, then lowered them. In every way she was the direct antithesis of Marjorie Dale. The latter was gentle, innocent.

Ruby knew how to love as she knew how to hate; a woman with hot blood in her veins, a woman with passion. Her lips gleamed moist and red in the dull light.

Suddenly he flung his arms around her and kissed her. She gave a little cry, struggled for a few moments, then lay quite still and limp.

Despard bent over her, feasting his eyes on her beauty. Again he pressed his lips to hers.

"I'm leaving London to-morrow for a holiday abroad. I'm going where there's sunshine, flowers, and music. You'll come with me, Ruby—far away from this dull, prosaic city. We'll go where there's life and colour and amusement. I'm rich now, there isn't a whim of yours I can't satisfy."

She started, stared, and wrenched herself free. She was still acting superbly. "No—you mustn't tempt me. I can't—not until Rupert's innocence is proved.... Duty must come before love—though I don't even know whether I do love you."

Despard advanced, but she retreated. "I'll make you love me," he whispered.

The clock struck. He glanced at it. Eleven! Marjorie would not come now. To-morrow she would probably show his letter to her lover or her father. They would realise quickly enough the threat it contained. The sooner he got away the better.

"I'll teach you to love me, Ruby. Come, let me kiss your lips again—they are sweeter than wine and more intoxicating."

She laughed hysterically. The spirit had gone to her head, but she fought to keep her brain clear.

"Prove your love!" she cried, stretching out her hands to keep him off. "Prove it!"

"Gad, what an obstinate little vixen it is!" he said between his teeth. "What does this fellow Rupert Dale matter to you?"

She forced herself to smile at him. "Perhaps I'm thinking of myself. I told you I've been in hell these two years. My conscience has given me no peace. I can't rest, be happy, until I have at least given his father proof of his innocence. It would be no use coming away with you; I couldn't love you or make you happy."

A moment Despard hesitated. He felt with the fascination a return of the desire he had always known for Ruby Strode. She was worth winning—worth purchasing.

"You want me to make a declaration that will clear Rupert's name, should he ever return to England?"

"Yes. Write down what you said to me just now. It must be witnessed and sent to Mr. John Dale."

Despard sat down at his table and picked up a pen. Rupert was never likely to show his face in England again, he was sure of that. But there was a risk. It was greater for Ruby than for himself. He glanced at her over his shoulder. He wanted her now—but in six months' time he might tire of her.

Dipping his pen into the ink, he commenced to write. Ruby stood beside him and watched him. When he had finished he signed his name with a flourish and handed it to her.

"Will that do?"

She read it carefully. "Yes, that's perfectly clear," she said, and there was a trace of surprise in her voice. "It must be witnessed."

He rose and stood by her side. "To-morrow morning. I'll get the hall-porter or some one. By the way, we'll have to catch the ten o'clock boat train. It's no use your going back to your flat. It's nearly midnight; you must stop here, dear."

He put his arm around her; she repressed a shudder. She commenced to fold up the statement he had made.

"I must go back in order to pack," she said with a little laugh. "Besides, Iris Colyer—I share a flat with her now—she'll be wondering what's happening to me."

"That will be all right. You can write and explain from Paris. And as for clothes, why, I'll buy a trousseau there fit for a queen. Come, Ruby, now I've got you I'm not going to let you go."

She shrank back, and Despard held her closer. He thought she was only a little frightened—and her fear was fuel to the fire of his desire.

She slipped the statement she had now folded up inside her blouse. Despard kissed her again and again. Then suddenly with a quick movement she escaped from his arms and ran to the door.

"Until to-morrow," she cried feverishly, trying to fasten her coat. "I must get back to-night——"

Despard followed her as she opened the door. "Oh, no, you don't," he cried grimly. "You might oversleep yourself or forget, my dear."

"I shall not do that," she replied boldly. "I love you."

In her anxiety she over-acted. Suspicion flashed in Despard's eyes.

"I don't trust you; I don't trust any woman living. To-morrow you might alter your mind. Your love may change and leave you cold. I want you now. I've kept my part of the bargain; you must keep yours."

Exerting all her strength, she tried to wrench herself free. "Let me go—you are hurting me!"

Her voice rose shrilly.

Despard lost his temper. "Very well—if you'll swear to be here to-morrow by nine o'clock!"

"I swear!" she cried eagerly.

"And give me back that piece of paper—my statement. If I have it in my possession it will help you to remember your promise."

Ruby ceased struggling and put her hands up to his face caressingly. "Don't you trust me, Bob?"

"I don't!" he grinned, and as he spoke he caught the neck of her blouse with one hand and with the other tried to snatch the folded sheet of paper hidden there.

Ruby staggered back, and clenching her fists, hit him in the face. Her cheeks burned with shame and indignation. "You coward! How dare you! I hate you!" She backed towards the door as she spoke. "I shan't come to you to-morrow, but I shall take your statement straight to my solicitors, who will show it to the police. You thought I would sell myself to you—you of all men in the world!"

She flung open the door and ran across the hall. Before she could escape Despard overtook her and seized her left arm. As he swung her round her right hand slipped into the pocket of her coat. She whipped out a tiny revolver and pointed it into his face:

"Let me go, or I'll fire!"

Instinctively he stepped back. Then, as he recovered from his surprise he laughed: "You little devil! So that's the stuff you're made of. Well, I like it. Put that toy away and come back immediately. If you don't I'll take that paper from

you if I have to tear the clothes off your back."

"If you touch me, I'll shoot you!" she cried between her teeth.

As she spoke Despard jumped forward and hit up her arm. But she kept a tight grip on the revolver. He tried to snatch it from her. They struggled.

"Let me go, or I'll shoot!" she panted. "I warn you! I'll kill you!"

Neither of them heard footsteps outside, nor the ringing of the front-door bell.

Despard seized the hand which held the revolver and slowly forced it back. A faint cry of agony escaped Ruby as she felt her wrist twisting.

Suddenly there was a sharp report. The revolver rattled to the ground. Ruby ceased struggling, twirled round, then fell in a heap at Despard's feet.

The front-door bell rang again. There was a loud knocking. Despard stood staring at the limp body at his feet. Then he knelt down and seized Ruby's hands—spoke to her. He felt for her heart—and his fingers touched something warm and wet.

There were voices outside shouting for admittance. He rose to his feet and gazed round. There was no help for it—he would have to open the door.

He did so.

"Quick—there has been an accident!"

His voice rattled in his throat as he found himself face to face with a tall, bronzed, bearded man—a man he did not recognise, yet whose features caused a thrill of fear in his heart.

"An accident!" he mumbled thickly. "Are you—who are you?"

The man brushed past him and flung himself on his knees at Ruby's side. "I am Rupert Dale!"

Despard staggered back and almost fell. The hall-porter who was just behind put out his hand and caught him by the arm.

* * * * *

Ruby Strode opened her eyes and looked into the bronzed face bending over her. A little light came into them as she gazed into the eyes watching her so tenderly.

"I—he shot me—an accident, I think; but he tried to steal——" She moistened her lips and tried to raise herself. Her eyes grew brighter. "Who are you?" she whispered.

"Don't you know me, Ruby?" Rupert said brokenly. "I am your lover, dear. I'm Rupert. I've come for you—I've come back to take you away with me, out to the home in the East I've made for you.... Ruby! Ruby!"

With an effort she raised her arms and fastened them around his neck. "Thank God you have come!" Her voice was growing very faint. "Don't believe

what Mr. Despard tells you. Here, inside my blouse, there's a paper signed by him. It completely exonerates you. It tells the truth which he concealed at the trial. Listen, Rupert, don't speak. You are free now—I've saved you at last in spite of all. Say you forgive me. I did it because I loved you, dear. Say you forgive me."

He lifted her and rested her head on his breast. He kissed her lips. "I came back to take you with me, Ruby. I made good out in the East, dear. A home for you. I only landed this morning. I went to your rooms. Miss Colyer told me you had come here. Hush, don't speak, you'll be all right by and by."

She shook her head. "I'm dying. But you'll take me with you, Rupert?"

His lips trembled. The words stuck in his throat, "I came home for you. I'll take you with me, Ruby darling.... I'll take you with me."

A smile flitted across her lips. Her eyes closed—almost as if she were tired and falling asleep. Then her head rolled and fell back. Gently laying her down, Rupert put his face close to hers.

* * * * *

When he stood up there was a crumpled piece of paper in his hand. He turned and saw Robert Despard standing in the centre of the sitting-room, on either side of him a police constable. An inspector came forward and said something, but Rupert scarcely heard. He unfolded the paper and handed it to him.

"I've just found this tucked inside the lady's dress," he said, fighting for control of his voice. "She told me ... it may throw some light ... on the affair."

"You know her, sir?" the inspector said.

Rupert bowed his head. He was silent a moment. Down his tanned, weather-stained cheeks tears were silently falling.

"She was my affianced wife."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### FINIS.

Robert Despard was taken before the magistrate at Bow Street Police Court and was remanded, bail being refused. At the inquest on Ruby Strode the jury returned a verdict of manslaughter. On Despard's next appearance at the police court he was committed for trial.

This took place some weeks later, but in the meantime something like a panic seized the shareholders in the radium mine at Blackthorn Farm. There was a wild rush to "get out." The early birds in the City—those who were prepared and had merely gambled—managed to do so, and to make a small profit: others lost heavily. Here and there in Devonshire there were rumours of men and women who had lost all their savings in the venture.

But the real sufferers who said nothing at all were old John Dale and Sir Reginald Crichton. They were utterly unprepared, and the tragedy that had occurred at Despard's flat engaged their whole attention.

They were too shocked and horrified to think of themselves, and even when they knew what was happening and saw the sudden drop in the shares, which were eventually knocked down to nothing, they made no attempt to save themselves. The thought of ruin never entered John Dale's head. And when it was slowly born upon him that he was ruined he merely shrugged his shoulders and said no word.

For his son had come back—had risen, as it were, from the dead.

Fate was kind, and they were allowed to meet for a few brief moments before Rupert was re-arrested and taken back to prison. And though by the laws of his country he was still guilty and a convict, yet John Dale had the satisfaction of knowing that his son had always been innocent.

And on his knees he thanked his God that he had been spared. And very humbly, too, he prayed for forgiveness for having ever doubted his own flesh and blood, for having, no matter what proof was given him, believed that his son could have been guilty of so mean and despicable a crime.

A fortnight before the trial of Robert Despard took place, Sir Reginald arranged a meeting between his son Jim, John Dale, and Marjorie.

"Repentance comes too late, I know," he said, "and it's no use my trying to explain; but I hope it's not too late to ask Miss Dale to forgive an old man whose greatest crime after all has been a foolish, unbending pride. I know now that it was false pride."

Marjorie shook her head, and when Sir Reginald would have continued she stopped him. "There's no need to say anything. Your attitude was perfectly natural. If I had been a woman instead of merely a girl and Jim had been my son instead of my lover I should have felt just the same, behaved just the same. So long as you and father understand—and will forgive us if our love has made us a little selfish sometimes—nothing else matters." She looked at her lover: "Does it, Jim?"

Sir Reginald glanced at John Dale. But the old yeoman farmer said nothing.

"Is it too late," the former said, "to ask you to take my boy and make him happy? Remember, he hasn't a penny now to bless himself with, except what he

can earn. I was never one to believe in love in a cottage, but perhaps I've been converted. Anyway Jim has brains, and I'm glad to say—I hope it isn't false pride again—that his country has already recognised it, and I think there's a big career before him. It will be still bigger, my dear, if he has you beside him as his wife."

Marjorie's eyes filled with tears as Jim took her in his arms and kissed her lips.

"When my brother's innocence has been completely and legally proved and he is set free we will be married, but not till then," she whispered.

And John Dale took his daughter's hand and kissed it.

Rupert was, of course, a most important witness when Despard's trial took place. The document found on Ruby Strode which proved that Rupert had been wrongfully convicted more than three years ago was sufficient to convince the jury that Despard, though he had not contemplated murder, was nevertheless responsible for causing the woman's death. The fact that his trunks were packed and that he was ready to leave the country at a moment's notice without anyone being aware of his intention to do so made the case look black against him. It was on his solicitor's advice that he made a perfectly frank and complete confession of the part he had played three years ago when Rupert Dale stood his trial for tampering with Sir Reginald Crichton's cheque.

But Despard's record was a black one, and the Counsel for the Crown did not hesitate to show him up in his true colours.

He was found guilty and sentenced to seven years' penal servitude.

A fortnight later Rupert Dale received the King's pardon and was set free. As it happened the very first man to greet him outside the prison doors was his friend, Patterson. He shook Rupert's hand almost casually, then gave him a hearty pat on the back.

"Gad, we've been in some tight corners together, Dale," he laughed. "But I thought when we got back to the old country we should find things a bit tame—no more fighting, no more narrow squeaks for our lives, no more excitement. I was wrong, eh? At any rate you stepped right into the thick of it. Glad I was here to see you come out top dog."

And Rupert nodded and gripped Patterson's hand tightly. "You're the best friend I ever had," he said huskily.

"I ought to be," Patterson grinned, "since I owe you my life. But for you I should never have got away on that black night when the Muruts were dancing round the fire ready to cut our heads off and smoke 'em over the burning embers. Lord, what a fine game it is! Think of it, this scalp of mine might have adorned some chief's sword now; or the old hag who played mistress of ceremonies might be using it on state occasions as the latest fashion in evening dress."

* * * * *

It was on a warm, spring morning in April that Marjorie Dale and Captain James Crichton were quietly married at Princetown, within sight of the prisons which had played such a strange and important part in their lives. Erstwhile Convict 381 was Captain Crichton's best man.

As soon as the happy pair had left for the honeymoon—destination unknown—Patterson, Rupert, and John Dale returned to Blackthorn Farm, and over mugs of old brown ale again drank their health.

The farmhouse itself remained unchanged, but outside there was a scene of desolation. The mine, which a few months ago had been a scene of activity, was now deserted. It was a blot on the beautiful moorlands. Though the great plant still remained, silence now brooded.

"Best thing you can do, Dale," Patterson said, "is to come out East again and bring your father with you."

"Take my boy," the old man whispered, "he'll succeed there, I know. The old country's played out, I'm afraid. But I—I'm too old now. I'd only be a drag upon him."

But Rupert shook his head and laughed. "I'm not going to desert you, guv'nor. We've been parted long enough. And, what's more, I'm not going to desert the old farm, or the rotten old mine, as far as that goes. After all, I'm responsible, for I made the discovery of pitch-blende and got the radium idea in my head."

"What will happen to the property now?" Patterson asked.

And old Dale explained just how matters stood. He was the largest shareholder and he had not parted with a single share. They had been quoted that day on the Stock Exchange at threepence!

"Seems to me the scare came at the very moment that hope was held out that radium would be extracted," Patterson said. "I was talking to one of the fellows who had made the first report on it the other day, a German, I daresay you remember him, Mr. Dale. He backed out of it because he objected to Mr. Despard and certain other men who were behind the scenes. He says he is perfectly certain there is radium and that it can be extracted. I don't pretend to know much about the subject, but I'd like to have a look round to-morrow morning, and it wouldn't be a bad idea to get hold of this fellow—Swartz is his name—and see what he has to say. By jove, I've put away a bit of money, and I'd just like to gamble! Think of picking up a few thousand shares in a radium mine in England at threepence a piece. Gee whiz!"

And that is just what Mr. Patterson did. Mr. Swartz was called in, and on his advice the company was reconstructed. Sir Reginald Crichton and John Dale

held on to their shares and even bought a few more. The new company took over the whole concern, buying it at a merely nominal price.

After six months of ceaseless work and research; of hope and despair, a rich strain of pitch-blende was discovered with radium emanations. The shares of the newly named "Blackthorn" Mine were daily quoted on the Stock Exchange. At first their behaviour was erratic, jumping from pence to shillings, shillings to pounds, and back again in a way that suggested that the market was once again being rigged.

But it was not. Patterson, working quietly and secretly with Mr. Swartz, discovered a new method of extracting radium-ore, which reduced the cost of production of the element by fifty per cent.

And shortly after Captain and Mrs. James Crichton returned from a very prolonged honeymoon, the Blackthorn Mine had produced enough radium to assure them they need have no fear as to their future—unless it were the fear that such great and unexpected wealth might rob them of the simple love and happiness they had found. John Dale was overwhelmed.

When, metaphorically, the rats had left the sinking ship, he had found himself with several thousand worthless shares. These shares were soon quoted at a hundred per cent. premium.

"I don't like it," he said in his old-fashioned way, wagging his head. "It don't seem right somehow. All I want now is a few pounds a week and the old farm, my son by my side, and my girl happily married."

"Well, you've got all that," Patterson laughed. "And whenever you feel worried by your wealth, you've only got to step outside your front door, walk over the East Dart, buy five thousand pounds worth of your own radium, and send it to one of the great hospitals in London. They'll know what to do with it there. Blackthorn Farm means life for thousands of poor creatures who have abandoned hope. We can give 'em life, John Dale, so don't worry about being rich. Money's an awful nuisance I know, but one always has the consolation that one can get rid of it as quickly as one likes—which is more than a poor man can do, anyway!"

Dale admitted that he had never thought of it in that way. But he has taken Patterson's advice, and he finds that it answers very well.

And he is still to be found at Blackthorn Farm, Dartmoor, living principally on old ale and brown bread and cheese, and—so the gossips affirm at the village inn—dividing his time between reclaiming the waste land and turning it into pasture, and signing cheques for the benefit of certain schemes and institutions, which he keeps a secret from everyone but his son Rupert.

Robert Despard is also living on Dartmoor—but not at Blackthorn Farm. His country keeps him—for his country's good. And he wears a very pretty uniform and attends church-parade regularly.

# A Word from Project Gutenberg

We will update this book if we find any errors.

This book can be found under: https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/42519



## The Full Project Gutenberg License



### Section 1. General Terms of Use & Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

**1.B.** "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

**1.C.** The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the Foundation" or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

**1.D.** The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country outside the United States.

**1.E.** Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

**1.E.1.** The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate ac-

cess to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" appears, or with which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at https://www.gutenberg.org . If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this ebook.

**1.E.2.** If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase "Project Gutenberg" associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

**1.E.3.** If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

**1.E.4.** Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

**1.E.5.** Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

**1.E.6.** You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Guten-

berg™ web site (https://www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

**1.E.7**. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

**1.E.8**. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

**1.E.9**. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and The Project Gutenberg Trademark LLC, the owner of the

Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3. below.

**1.F.**

**1.F.1.** Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

**1.F.2.** LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES – Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

**1.F.3.** LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND – If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

**1.F.4.** Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS,' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PUR-

POSE.

**1.F.5.** Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

**1.F.6.** INDEMNITY – You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

## Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need, is critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at https://www.pglaf.org .

## Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project

Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is in Fairbanks, Alaska, with the mailing address: PO Box 750175, Fairbanks, AK 99775, but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

For additional contact information:

Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

## Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit https://www.gutenberg.org/donate

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation meth-

ods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: https://www.gutenberg.org/donate

## Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

https://www.gutenberg.org

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.