

VIDA

The Complete Crockett

The Galloway Raiders

digital edition

Scottish works



VIDA

S.R.CROCKETT

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

First Published in The People's Friend magazine and in book form by James Clarke & Co, 1907.

This Galloway Raiders digital edition published in 2021 is part of a decade long project (2012-2022) to bring the works of Samuel Rutherford Crockett (1859-1914) together in one place. The Complete Crockett comprises 66 published works, re-edited and re-formatted by volunteer labour to the highest standard.

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INTRODUCTION

Vida, subtitled 'The Iron Lord of Kirktown,' is a contemporary romance. The story has a long history, stemming from Crockett's personal experience of a real life pit disaster in Mauricewood in 1889 while he was Minister of Penicuik. At the time this event claimed the lives of 63 men and boys. Crockett wrote to the Scotsman that '*these terrible and extraordinary risks must cease, and the inspection of the mines must be a much more frequent and real thing.*'

His first attempt at fictionalising the plight of the miners came in a short story 'Voc Clamantium' in 1894 where the Incubus Company gets its first mention. Subsequently the story 'The Respect of Drowdle,' in *The Stickit Ministers Wooing*, (1900) revisits the emotions of the event. But it is in 'Vida: Iron Lord of Kirktown,' that Crockett finally deals with the whole scenario, albeit as part of a serial romance. *Vida* was serialised in *The People's Friend* magazine in 1907 prior to publication by James Clarke & Co in the same year.

It is a successful romance story, but also contains a myriad of interesting contemporary sociological commentary. The impact of capitalist business practices, the Balkans connection and the role of engineers in contemporary society all feature. While on the one hand using a scenario from some twenty years earlier in the pit disaster plot, Crockett was right up to the minute in his discussions of capitalism, the state of religion and the impact of the motor car.

The motor car had been invented in the 1880's but it was not till 1901 that a 60HP Mercedes of the kind driven by James Kahn was manufactured.

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Motor cars were still seen as something exotic and the car chase from Dalmellington through the Galloway countryside to Newton Stewart is both exciting and to my best knowledge the first description of a car chase in fiction. Crockett shows his skill of vivid, pacey writing in the prolonged episode where the police pursue Kahn, who is himself being 'hunted' by Casimir. The metaphor of car chase as hunting is one of the finest aspects of this novel.

This is essentially a novel of society, wrapped in a romance. And it is interesting to juxtapose it against the society of some ten and twenty years earlier which Crockett writes about in other fiction. We are now firmly into the twentieth century and while some of the old concerns abide, much change in society can be seen. We are on the brink of the First World War and *Vida* shows that already the seeds are being sown.

Secular and religious society are in flux. The relationship is described by Crockett thus: '*18-30 years ago Kirktown feared God. Today it feared only Incubus, Romer and Co.*' Jacob Romer the 'Lord of Kirktown' is a new kind of laird. He is both an extreme Calvinist and a ruthless businessman. He determines to marry to keep him from the temptation of gambling, but pretty soon he commits his wife to a mental asylum, when he feels his career will be hindered by having a wife (and daughter) in tow. He organises their murder on the ironically named vessel 'The Good Intent' but of course his plans go aglay.

Vida is saved, not by the lighthouses which provide safety for so many at sea, but by a pair of lighthousemen; Dick Finnan and Billy Bryan, who

become her surrogate fathers. This unlikely pair show goodness and simplicity against the brutality of those for whom business is most important. With the lighthouse sequences, Crockett casts a veiled reference to a writer he greatly admired, Robert Louis Stevenson, whose family were Lighthouse builders. Phil Calvert dreams of becoming an author but submits to becoming an engineer's draughtsman instead. It was a dilemma familiar to Robert Louis Stevenson, but ultimately not a reality he had to face. And of course all professional writers face the dilemma of eschewing a 'proper' career, Crockett himself knew that well enough.

Engineers are given a certain degree of respect throughout the novel – good engineers that is. Vic Morris is the best but he faces a constant battle with his employers because he is concerned for worker safety. In the world of the Incubus Company, profit is the motivator and safety comes barely second place in the order of things. Vic is eventually sacked for his outspokenness and goes to Spain. Spain was a place familiar to Crockett and he describes the feeling of homesickness, alienation and plain difference of the two places admirably. By contrast, the Balkans connection, shown through Kahn and Casimir, is shown as something more sinister. The differences between cultures is highlighted and the nature of family feuds compared between Scotland and the Balkans. This is of interest as social history to the modern reader, wondering how the world was just before The War to End Wars. We often ponder retrospectively, and for me there is something compelling about finding at least partial answers in writing which does not have the benefit of hindsight. Crockett is often considered as a writer looking

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backwards, but in his contemporary fiction his future reveals our past.

Despite the romantic plot twists (of which there are many) the heart of the novel is clearly concerned with mining. Pit life is described in detail and with care. The differences of life for those below and above ground and the emotional cost of a life lived in a created urbanised environment is shown to great effect. The impact of capitalism on small town life is shown without compromise. The terminology of revolution and anarchism is used in context of the unrest of the pit and the threat of these is clearly shown. In some ways *Vida* is like an extension of Gaskell's 'industrial' novel *North and South*, written some fifty years earlier. While the masters' main concern is preventing a workers revolt which would undermine their profits, the main issue for the workers themselves is lack of safety. It is this rank carelessness for human life that both causes most of the pit disasters and, by extension, the unrest amongst the populace.

Throughout the novel capitalists are seen as careless and the relatively new practice of the formation of Limited Companies is held with deep suspicion. The transfer of shares and the possibility of fraud and bankruptcy are all dealt with during the course of the plot with few of the main characters remaining untouched by the impact of capitalism.

Crockett is clearly not a fan of emerging capitalism. But he also makes a wryly interesting observation (through the narrator) about socialism. He says: '*Socialism will never make any real progress in Scotland for the good reason that even in religion particularism and private property in opinion are so*

ingrained in the nation that no three men can ever agree with each other, or be of one mind upon any subject – above all about religion.'

(Three is a significant number in this novel, as we will see.) While with hindsight we might dispute Crockett's general statement on socialism, the salient fact is that reading *Vida* allows one to focus in on what people thought only a hundred years ago, about things that we take for granted today. We are not judging Crockett on the accuracy of his political predictions, we read him in order to understand how ordinary people felt a century ago.

The impact of factionalism is clearly illustrated throughout. The place of Kirktown is central to the novel. The very name suggests the importance of religion, but as we see, this is being superceded by business. The Three Kirks of Kirktown reveal the waning impact of religion on society. Kirktown is not a unified place and Crockett uses this to suggest a deeper factionalism of the Kirk, some fifty years after 'The Disruption' of 1843. In The Free Kirk – known as the Kirk of the 43, the minister is John Fowler and his daughter Janet plays an important role in the minor love plot. The Fowlers take Vic in after he has been sacked from Incubus, illustrating their humanity in the face of capitalist ruthlessness. The second Kirk hosts the Cameronian faction. This is known as the Hill Kirk or Kirk of the Martyrs. It is shown as an uncompromising, almost fundamentalist place. Jacob Romer looms large in importance here, mainly because of his uncompromising view of the 'elect.' The fundamentalism of the sect is shown to great effect in the personal struggle of its minister Ben Irongray. Of the Established Kirk little is said. This is known

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as the Kirkyard Kirk and its minister is Angus Lamont. That it plays no active part in the novel suggests that moderation is not something familiar to Kirktown.

As Kirktown has three Kirks, so Vida has three fathers. Rose Nunsby, among others, comments on this unusual and perhaps ridiculous fact. But one might see Vida in this sense as representative of everyman. Succour and security can come from a variety of places but having too much choice in the matter threatens to undermine the very core of security. The strong implication is that one father ought to be enough, both for Vida and for the Kirk.

While in many respects 'Vida' seems to be a more urban novel than Crockett usually writes, there is no deficit of natural description. It is simply used here to show how bleak and unnatural the urban life of the pit workers is. And it really comes into its own in the car chase – movement across Galloway moors – which scenes we may find familiar to John Buchan's later novel *The Thirty Nine Steps*.

Vida is a novel which has been both forgotten and overlooked and yet offers some of the best social commentary of the period in fiction on offer – as well as being a pacey read and a good romance to boot. I suggest reading it and then reading both *North and South*, *The Thirty Nine Steps* and perhaps some D.H.Lawrence. Only then can one really start putting Crockett into true context of his contribution to fiction.

Cally Phillips
January 2022

CHAPTER ONE

'YOUR DAUGHTER VIDA!'

Gorm House looked on the sea-that is, on the keel- tom, screw-tormented waters of the Frith of Cantyre. The misty blue mountains of Sannox, anchored full in the fairway, made of the peninsula on which it stood almost an embattled island. Yet the master of Gorm House stood at the window of his breakfast-room and looked on all this beauty, but saw nothing but a blur. He had crushed a letter in the palm of one huge hand, and risen from his untouched breakfast to stride about the room and frown upon the external world through expensive sheets of brand new plate-glass. He had ordered the yet newer footman out of his sight, and kicked the morning's Thistle into the corner without even glancing at the 'iron-and-steel report,' which as a rule was as holy writ to him. Altogether Jacob Romer was in what Mr. Bunyan would call an 'evil villain temper.'

His forceful hands twitched visibly as you watched them. He wanted somebody to contradict him, so that he might twist his neck. Indeed, in a very few minutes he had worked himself into a fine monarch-of-all-I-survey passion.

And this was the letter which had so provoked him. It was from his brother Tom-a celebrated doctor and a man like-minded with himself-one also who had never asked him for a sixpence (knowing that he would not have got it), in all points equally cross-grained, pushing and unscrupulous as Mr.

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Jacob Romer himself.

'Dear Jacob-' (thus ran the letter) 'I have done my best for you, and a good deal more than I would have done for anybody else-more than you would ever have done for me, or, indeed, than I should have asked you to do. But if it had been of the least use, I should not have minded.

'As you supposed-personally, Caroline gave no trouble. I had her journey all safely arranged for, and nothing would have been said, but for that Imp of Mischief, your daughter Vida. She it was who brought the whole wasp-nest buzzing round my ears. No sooner had we safely planted her mother in the Thorsby County Asylum (really the best and safest place for her), than this bantling of yours well-nigh lost me my municipal positions of Police Doctor and City Analyst by raising the whole town of Thorsby against me.

'Up to this point Old Tweedle and I had worked the thing quite quietly. Attendants, accustomed to such cases, were on the spot, and took Caroline off from Wood Green one moonlight night without a soul being the wiser.

'But the very next day our young Hopeful, instead of returning to school, goes straight to the Asylum and finds her mother on the Poor Side, where I had placed her, according to your instructions, as being less conspicuous. Then-crack! Off she flies like a fire-rocket to interview the Mayor at the Town Hall. Inside of ten minutes she has him persuaded that I am a cruel monster and an unconscionable tyrant. Next she appears before the sitting magistrate-yes, before our stipendiary, Mr. Eugene Bridge, and right in the middle of the police cases, my young lady steps up and asks for advice.

'Certainly,' says the magistrate; 'how can I assist you?'

'Is it right,' says Mademoiselle, 'that my mother, a lady of independent means, and the wife of a well-known Scotch iron-master, should be dragged from her home and put in an asylum-on the Poor Side?'

'What are the circumstances?' says Mr. Bridge sharply. And the reporters' pencils could not get over the paper quick enough. Before that they had all been asleep. 'What name? What name did she say?' they whispered, overlooking one another's notes, as eager as terriers at a rat-hole.

Then Miss Vida Romer states her full name, also yours, and-what mattered most of all in Thorsby-mine. The court officials, across whose hawse I have had to come several times in the way of business, sat up like so many cockroaches. They thought they had pinched me now for a certainty.

'Ah, Doctor Thomas Romer,' says the magistrate, in a melted butter voice, 'and the well-known local physician, Dr. Tweedle. Surely there cannot be anything irregular-two officials of the municipality and both Justices of the Peace.' (He had a sneer in his voice, I am sure!) 'Are you certain that your mother is perfectly sane, Miss-ah-Romer?' 'She has been very ill, sir,' said your daughter.

'She is weak and shy with strangers, but she was always good and happy with me when they left us alone. We were so happy in our little house at Wood Green, and she never went out even when I was away at school-that is, when she promised not. But at any rate, my mother has money of her own, and ought not to be put on the Poor Side of a Public Asylum. That is a piece of petty spite. She has two hundred a year of her own, and I know her

solicitor's address. There it is. She ought certainly to be represented!'

'And if she didn't write the address down on a sheet of paper and hand it up to the magistrate as cool as an old hand. He glanced at it, so they tell me, and scratched his head with the butt of a quill.

'You may go home, Miss Romer,' he said. Be assured that I will look into this.'

'And sure enough I had the Mayor, the Magistrate, and the Chairman of the Watch Committee all after me that same day. It was your business or mine, Jacob-and I had to let yours go by the board. Had to, I can tell you! For they were as keen as mustard after my scalp. The Mayor has a nephew about ripe for my shoes, and the Town Clerk has had his knife in me for a long time. I had to give way all along the line. I even showed your instructions. There was, of course, no question about the mental state of the patient, at least on the occasion when Tweedle and I saw her. We got clear of the Poor Side, on the plea that it was 'a simple mistake.' So I just managed to scrape out of it, but this is the last time I shall meddle with your domestic hornets' nests. If you want to get rid of your wife get a lawyer, Jacob-a fellow who is paid for doing your dirty jobs, and can carry it off under cover of professional duty and looking to his client's interests.

'But it is altogether too warm for your brother Tom, with such a niece as Miss Vida in the same town. I wish you joy of her, my friend. One of my competitors here, a young fellow, Hubert Salveson, who recently married very much beneath him, has been interesting himself (quite unnecessarily) in the business. Miss Vida called him in to see her mother,

and he took the affair up, for the sake of any spare kudos, I suppose. His father is a man of property and influence in Thorsby, so my advice to you is to get Caroline and her too lively daughter out of this place as soon as possible. You cannot do this too soon to suit.-Dear Jacob, your affectionate brother, ... THOMAS ROMER.'

Mr. Jacob Romer, of Gorm House, was a red-faced man, of middle stature, somewhat replete, with protuberant eyes and a whitish bristle of hair in which could be discovered no particular parting or arrangement. As he went on reading through the letter his face grew redder, and he rubbed up his hackle furiously as if his very fingers were electric with spite. A pair of remote eyes snapped and scintillated, and he put all the terse vigour of the master of many thousand workmen into the pendulum to- and-fro of his walk. A scared manservant peeped carefully round the corner of the door.

'Go away!' shouted his master, bending suddenly as if seeking something to throw at him. But another idea struck Mr. Romer at the moment, and he called out, 'Where is Kahn? Send Kahn to me!'

The man appeared round the door, obviously holding himself ready to dodge, and faltering his belief that Mr. Kahn had gone to the office.'

'Well, send for him, can't you,' shouted Mr. Jacob Romer. 'And see here, if you don't have him up within five minutes, I'll--'

But the man servant, Gregson who knew his master, was already assisting the page-boy upon his cycle with orders to ride for his life, and beg Mr. Kahn to hurry-the master wanted him immediately and indeed very much sooner.

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Scenes like this were all in the day's work at Gorm House, and as Gregson truly said, it was not every self-respecting man-servant who would stand it. But the pay and the place had their advantages, therefore Gregson remained, and did his grumbling out of business hours.

Mr. Kahn- James Kahn- was known both at the House and at the Company's pits as 'The Confidential.' He was a little fairish man, of indefinite age, indefinite nationality, indefinite everything in fact, anywhere between twenty-five and forty. He had a brisk, hateful look, as if the people about him mused him and he was thinking at the same time what ill trick he could safely play them. His small, grey, deep-set eyes dwelt an instant on your face and then swerved aside. Had Kahn worn poor clothes instead of being always fashionably attired, he would at once have been arrested as a vagabond. He had a false, pleasant smile, a thick neck, and such broad shoulders on such a short body that they gave him the look of being slightly deformed. He hid extreme bodily force under the flaccid languor of a used-up man-about-town.

When he entered the morning room at the House Mr. Romer motioned him to shut the door. Then without the slightest salutation or introduction he demanded, 'Which boat lying just now at Port Incubus can be got ready for sea the quickest?'

'Ore or cargo?' inquired James Kahn, with equally little surprise.

'Cargo,' said his master impatiently, 'and belonging to the firm.'

The little thickset man with the grey eyes that so consistently fled the regard, appeared to ponder a

moment.

'The Good Intent,' he said at last.

'And her master?'

'Captain Warner.'

'Put Warner on the Golden Swan,' said Mr. Romer; 'shift Captain Helstone to the Good Intent, and let him choose his own crew. You are to be supercargo, and to do as I tell you.'

'Very well, sir,' said James Kahn. He knew very much better than to ask a question or even to smile. He was on his promotion, though he pursued knowledge rather than minted gold. Afterwards-well, James Kahn would see. Knowledge was power-also money. He bowed and withdrew with his orders for the day. He was to go on a cruise, a little private excursion, with Captain Helstone as master, and the crew specially chosen.

'Ah,' thought James Kahn, 'there should be something worth knowing in this. I wonder what is the old man's game? I would wager there is not much cargo and a good deal of premium on the Good Intent. It is a blessing I can swim, and I shall certainly have a cork jacket by my bunk when I turn in.'

But he resolved that if there were any risk in the matter, he would make Mr. Jacob Romer pay dearly for the dangers he might have to encounter.

And within the morning room of Gorm House the master of the great Incubus pits continued his beat as upon a quarter-deck, with knitted brow, and his brother's letter crushed more tightly in his hand.

Mr. Jacob Romer was hurt in his tenderest domestic affections. His wife had disappointed, his daughter outraged him. His fool of a brother was good for nothing but prescribing for old wives. If

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only-ah, if only he could have done everything for himself - but to be compelled to trust to idiots-to a quack! Pshaw! And Pshaw! And Pshaw!

CHAPTER TWO

THE CRUISE OF THE 'GOOD INTENT'

'How nice of your father, dear, sending this nice ship and all these nice men just to give us a trip and cheer us up, before settling down again at home!' The voice of a woman, tired and faded, spoke languidly. She was lying on a pile of mattresses and cushions on the deck of the Good Intent, to procure which comforts her daughter had made a general pillage of the ship.

'Humph,' said Vida Romer, brusquely, 'I don't see why you ever married that man, mother. I wouldn't! He is too mean to live!'

'Childie,' said Mrs. Romer, sighing gently, 'you cannot understand; and besides, it is wrong of you to speak in that way of your father.'

'Let him show that he is my father then,' Vida declared, emphatically. 'He is rich and he leaves us poor. He never does a single thing for us. I wouldn't have him for a father if I could help it. And I can!'

'Hush, Vida, hush!' said her mother, lifting up a narrow transparent hand, which she laid tremulously over the strong nervous one of her daughter. 'You don't know who may hear you. And they are all strangers except that nice Mr. Kahn!'

In her better moods Mrs. Romer was just that type of colourless, easily satisfied person to whom everyone, not actively hostile, is either 'nice' or 'kind.' To the woman of weak mind and troubled nerves, James Kahn was both.

'Ugh, I detest him,' said her daughter, without the

least attempt at moderating her voice, 'a horrid, little, sneaking-'

'Oh, my dear, there he is now! Do be careful!'

'Careful, mother,' said Vida contemptuously, 'I don't care if he were standing here now. He can't eat me!'

However the supercargo moved off to the further end of the ship, and mother and daughter were again left alone.

'How did you come to marry Jacob Romer?' the girl went on, with the implacability of youth.

'I-I could not help it-I could not do otherwise,' quavered her mother. 'You see, Jacob said I must. My father and mother said I must. So I did, and I think he cared-at first-oh yes, a little. We were poor then, and, except for his finding fault with the housekeeping and my wrong additions in the money books, I was happy enough. But then he was clever-far too clever for me. He was always inventing things, so that it ended in his uncle, old Mr. Gorm, not being able to do without him, and he had always to be at the works, and we-that is you and I-stayed on at Thorsby, to be near grandfather and grandmother. Jacob used sometimes to come at weekends, for a while. Afterwards he was too busy, or something, and he could not be bothered with the journey. Then my father and mother died within three weeks of each other. After that it was much lonelier for me, and but for you I should have wearied. Yes, I know what they said what Uncle Tom said horrid things; that I took opium, that I was out of my mind; and if it had not been for you, Vida, they would have put your poor mother away. But now we are going home at last, and Jacob will be good to us as he was in the first days, when we were

poor.

You see he has sent for us of his own accord. They tell me, Uncle Tom says, that it is such a magnificent place, with gardeners and hot-houses, and grapes in bunches (though I don't believe your father will allow us to cut them), and more than one man-servant. Oh, I don't know how I shall ever venture to speak to them!

'I do!' cried Vida, bristling up, lioness-like. 'I'll speak to them, if they so much as dare to look as if they would smile at my mother!'

'And how kind of dear Jacob to give us this splendid cruise in his own ship, all round by the north of Scotland!'

'Rubbish!' said Vida, shortly. 'Now, sit up, mother, and I will arrange your pillows for you. You are slipping down much too low. There-that's better! Father wanted us out of the way a while longer, that's all. I suppose you think he ordered this nice, smooth weather, too, specially, so that we would be nice and comfortable.'

'It would have been just like him if he had,' said Mrs. Romer, smiling faintly, but with a certain glint of pleasure in her dim eyes, 'I mean like what he used to be long ago! He was quick-tempered and masterful, Jacob. Oh, always! And do you know, Vida, sometimes I think you are like him.'

'God forbid!' said the girl quickly, thrusting out her hands as if pushing something horrid away.

The mother raised her hands in pained deprecation. 'Oh, Vida, you must not remember the fifth commandment, the first with promise.'

'Oh, yes, I know, mother, that is all very well,' said Vida, 'but it says too 'like as a father pitieth his children,' doesn't it? And Jacob Romer hasn't pitied

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me a bit. Why then should I honour him?’

The mother found no other reply than the simple re-statement of the commandment, and of the fact, equally incontestable, that he was Vida's father. The girl shrugged her shoulders a little behind her mother's back, and made a grimace which said clearly that Jacob Romer, when he came to reckon with his daughter, would find quite other material on his hand than in his wife's case.

On board the Good Intent there appeared to be but little cargo. It was, in fact, a pleasure cruise for the benefit of the owner's wife and daughter. The master had saluted them with curt civility when they had come on board with James Kahn. The two or three sailors went about their duties as usual, but seemed to give the passengers as wide a berth as possible. So the supercargo was invaluable to them. James Kahn was not above serving their meals, and as interim ship's cook was evidently an artist in his way. He had found some comfortable old red-plush furniture and put them into the little cabin. In fact no one could possibly have been kinder, said the wife of his employer.

It was in June that they sailed away to the north, in these latitudes a month of uncanny calms, and sudden uncertain St. John's Eve storms upon the deadly Cape Wrath seas, and among the black, thick-sown reefs of the Hebrides. Yet amidst these lay their course, and neither Vida nor her mother noticed that a couple of roomy whale-boats were the chief new and striking pieces of naval furniture on board.

After they had passed the Firth of Pentland and stood westward, they were pursued by a series of chill, northerly winds, not so much tempestuous, as

deadly with the nip of ice-fields not far away. Vida loved the keen Arctic breath, and wished that they could go far enough polewards to catch sight of Faroe, or even of the white wastes of the Vetnat Jokull itself. But each day her mother shivered and wrapped herself in shawls and yet more shawls.

Yet in spite of all she would not stay below.

'I must be out in the sunshine, Jacob would wish it,' she said in answer to every remonstrance. 'He is giving us this chance. We may never have the like again-and in his own ship too. I would never forgive myself. No, no, Vida, I must stay on deck.'

Through a dreamlike serenity they sailed first west and then south. Sometimes they would keep the same horizon about them all day. The winds, though chill enough, were so light that the sails often hung lax and motionless. But all the same it was a memorable time for the sick woman.

'I am happy, Vida, darling,' she would say, as she sat with her daughter's hand clasped in hers under the awning which Vida had stretched for her. 'Oh so happy! I never felt so happy in my life-not even when I was first married. You are a good daughter to me, Vida.'

Everything about them was 'nice,' and after this there could be no higher praise.

But, swift as a lion from behind a bush, a western tempest, gyrating landward on the warm swirls of the Gulf Stream, sprang upon them one night about ten of-the-clock. For an hour the winds had whistled plaintively through the cordage. The sails were reefed or got in. Quiet amid the bustle Vida and her mother sat watching the west changing from dingy orange through powdery blue to a dusky slate, across which little white wisps, like jets of cloud-

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spray, went and came. Then for the first time Captain Helstone addressed his passengers. He touched his peaked cap with a stiff gesture, and begged that they would go below at once. It was going to be 'a coarse night.' They were in bad waters and might have to run for the open. The hatches would need to be closed.

Immediately Mrs. Romer and her daughter went below. Vida got her mother to bed before the storm caught them. Then for forty hours the Good Intent battled with the winds and the waves of a North Atlantic storm.

She must have had excellent stuff in her, that old tramp schooner, or she would never have made so gallant a fight for it. At first the two women heard the din of trampling above them, the clattering of many feet, heavy sudden falls, the creaking of blocks -all in addition to the noises of the sea which were deafening enough to the unaccustomed.

Vida, ill and dazed, found after a while a troubled repose. Time and again, awaking from her doze, she snatched the little lantern she had taken from the supercargo's room, and with infinite staggerings made her way to her mother's berth, always returning thankful that she was sleeping so soundly through the turmoil of the waters.

But Vida was too dazed to notice that the sounds on deck had died away, and that only the dull shock of heavy seas and the splash and tumble of breakers plunging over the bulwarks could be heard. Also the Good Intent swung heavily to the lurch of the waves, without buoyancy or life in her motion.

Suddenly the girl woke from a dream in a kind of wild and awestruck terror. It seemed to Vida that she was boxed up in a deadly place, with some

vague and imminent peril menacing her. She had evidently slept long, for it was clear day. She ran to her mother's little cabin, and opening the porthole let the light of a blue morning and the reflection of largely heaving water fall upon a face clear as carven marble. She put her hand upon her mother's brow; it was cold as stone!

Vida screamed out, and running to the companion ladder beat with her hands upon the hatchway.

'Open-help-!' she cried. 'My mother is ill-very ill. Open, I say.'

She dared not yet think of her mother as being dead. The ship's cat, awaked from some lair, came and rubbed itself, purring loudly, against her leg. Vida started and nearly fell down the steps. Luckily the hatches of the Good Intent were not very heavy. With a handspike Vida managed to prize one of them open bit by bit, wedging each inch gained further apart, till she had space enough to pass through upon the deck.

It was empty from end to end. No man was upon it. The forecabin was untenanted; the berths where the captain and supercargo had bunked were as empty as the cook's galley. She was alone upon the Good Intent, alone with a dead mother.

Something moved the girl to look over the side. She seemed strangely near the surface of the sea; nearer when she leaned over one side, that which she had heard the men call the port side, than on the other. The wind had died away as suddenly as it came, or perhaps the ship had drifted behind some island, for the water was fairly calm. But every now and then all about the ship the smooth undulating surface of the sea would dimple, suck down into a

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little funnel, then heave itself up all about, like a man lifting a heavy burden, and fall in an arching roar of green water on something suddenly revealed as black and smooth and shining.

That was death! That was a reef! These were the Wolves of Klor, though Vida did not know them even by name. As Vida stood on the deck thinking what she must do, the Good Intent staggered heavily like a man who has not seen a downward step on his path, recovered herself with a yet heavier rolling lurch to starboard; and then somehow or other as in a dream (Vida could not explain how), she found herself on board a beautiful white-painted boat with two men, one old and the other young, rowing it. Her hands were bandaged, and somebody was telling her not to talk. She could hear the clatter of the little waves at the bow. She could see the surface of the water all round her, and no Good Intent upon it anywhere! She saw only a tall, white pillar which, without being told, she knew for a lighthouse, and in her ears (so plain that it could hardly be a dream) the voice of her mother telling her that heaven was such a very nice place.

Then, again, for a little while Vida knew no more, and in a tall, modern, castellated building, whose topmost pinnacles one could see from the boat, set against a background of smoky chimneys and dizzying wheels, a famous ironmaster marched to and fro, waiting eagerly for the buff envelope of a telegram. At last he saw the boy coming. He went down to the front door and took it from him.

He tore it open and glanced at the few, widely-spaced words. Not a flicker of expression passed across his face. The boy lingered in hopes of a penny fee.

'Please, sir, any answer?' he asked meekly, scratching with his toe.

'Get out!' roared Mr. Romer, suddenly waking up. 'You are only loitering for money you have not earned. Get off my gravel!'

The boy moved off sullenly, and as he went his eye caught the white shaft of the Wolf Skerry lighthouse, where something was happening at that moment which was not mentioned in the telegram he had duly and officially delivered to the owner of Gorm House.

CHAPTER THREE

A NEW TYPE OF YOUNG MAN

The younger of the two men who took Vida off the wreck of the Good Intent in the Suck of Sannox was a red-headed Irishman, And when you were made stronger and readier with your fists than he was, you called him by that name to his face. If not, you said 'Mister Billy,' or familiarly 'Billy.' His name on the records of the Commissioners of the Northern Lights was William Bryan, but he rarely insisted upon this. Indeed he always looked up quickly to see if you were chaffing him when you referred to him as 'Mr.' Bryan.

Formerly these two had been stationed on a rock light of an inferior kind called the Muckle Ross, in Galloway, but had been promoted when the Wolf Skerry Light was built, which was a very big rise indeed. For the Wolf Skerry is one of the biggest, completest, most up-to-date, and most complicated lights in the three kingdoms, and a great writer very nearly had a hand in constructing it. Instead he looked for pebbles along the shore, and lo! When he found them they were all diamonds and emeralds and rubies.

On the Muckle Ross, also, Billy and his mate had been mixed up with a little girl called Saucy Easdaile, and two very naughty boys named Dinky and Toady Lion, but neither of them much liked to be reminded of that. Since then Dick Finnan had tried shore-going for a spell, but he found it monstrous dull after the lighthouse, where, at least,

there were always the reflectors to give a last rub to, the lights to rearrange, or the ships to watch. So when he heard of the Wolf Skerry, and how Billy Bryan was first on the list for it, he begged and prayed to be allowed to go with him, even without wages.

But now that Vida had come and Dick had definitely resolved to adopt her, the craving for the land returned. Only never again would he live a life of idleness. He had never in all his days done such hard work as during that six months when he had done nothing-so at least he was in the habit of telling his cronies, who, not being born that way, had considerable difficulty in believing him.

So he took the position of store-keeper at the big Incubus pits, and with it the lease of a pretty cottage almost at the gates of Gorm House, the residence of Jacob Romer, Esq., J.P., D.L.

Quite a slim girl when she left Thorsby Old Quay to join the ill-omened Good Intent, with her mother leaning on her arm, Vida had grown into a woman in the five years she had spent with Dick Finnan.

To begin with, there had been a quarrel between the two men on the lighthouse as to who was to have her to look after. The claims of the senior were, however, manifestly paramount. Dick was an aged man, a man of property, an elder of the kirk. He had served his time, so that he could turn his hand to anything. Billy was 'thirled' to the lighthouse, and that was no place in which to keep a young lass 'pewed up, as it were,' said Dick. (It is believed that he meant 'mewed.')

But Billy Bryan, upon the refusal of their young flotsam from the sea to give any account of herself which included a reference to her name, insisted

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that she should bear his and not Dick's. Otherwise he would contest the entire claim.

'Sure she's the orphan daughter of a brother of mine,' he said threateningly to his mate, 'and since ye have never seen my brother, ye can't gainsay it. Now I put it to ye, can ye, Dick Finnan? Besides, it's only reasonable. Here are you wi' that fine young lass for a daughter, or as good, ready to sew on your buttons and mend your stockings, read ye to sleep of a Sunday out of a good book, or sit along o' ye in' the kirk looking like a posy beside a scarecrow. And here I am on the Wolf Light-me having a much right to the colleen as you-with only the sea scarts and the reek of your cottage over yonder at the House Gate to cheer me. So she's got to be my only brother's only daughter, I tell ye. And if any man dares to say to the contrary, let him step out to the Skerry, that's all!'

So, simply in virtue of her silence-indeed, without being consulted in the matter-Dick Finnan's ward became Miss Vida Bryan. And what is more, all the young men, as she came to be Sweet-and-Twenty, considered it one of the prettiest names in the world.

'Vida Bryan!' 'Little Vida Bryan!' 'Pretty Vida-Vida Bryan!' 'Dainty Vida!'

Taken plain or with the sauce of adjective, anyway it sounded as her poor mother would have said, 'nice.' Yes, 'nice' -but alas! the owner was not often 'kind' to those who thus used it.

For Vida retained the temper she had shown so unexpectedly and volcanically when Uncle Tom crossed her in the matter of the Poor Side for her mother, at the Thorsby County Asylum. And though she made her own dresses-they were of week-day print, with alpaca for Sundays-and though she tried

to be only a cottager's lass, there was something almost fierce about her which she could not rule out-something that told in her gait, in the 'carry' of her head, in her way of entering a room, in her manner of sitting in a chair, in the way she handled knife-and-fork, and especially in the power she had of putting obtrusive and assuming males into their places.

This difference was variously expressed in the parish of Kirktown.

'She looks as if she thought herself somebody,' said the women. 'Pity our daughters have not been wrecked, and that nobody knows anything about them! Eh, it's a rare loss for the poor bits o' things. Then they might all have set up to be duchesses!' But the men, and especially the younger of them, said among themselves that Vida Bryan had more 'go' in her little finger than all the three church choirs.

For in Kirktown, the big, overgrown village which had sprung up around the Incubus Company's pits, the various church choirs contained the pick of the youth and beauty of the neighbourhood. Voice did not so much matter. Knowledge of music mattered not at all. You must be good to look upon, if a girl, or eligible, if a young man. These were the necessary and indeed inexorably enforced regulations. And justly so! For the quality of the choirs affected even the average attendance and the collection in the late, especially on dark, winter evenings, when escort duty was considered a natural obligation.

Vida Bryan did not sit in the choir. She attended the little Cameronian kirk-the 'Kirk of the Martyrs'-where Dick was an elder. The session was strict there, and did not encourage light blouses in the

choir because it faced the congregation. Yet all the summer Vida wore one in the pew of her adopted father along with a well-cut alpaca skirt, and not even the minister said a word.

There were, naturally enough, two sides to Vida's life; the one which was apparent to the good, sharp-tongued folk among whom she lived, and that which she lived 'in to herself.'

Daily she watched her father's carriage flash by, the stout episcopal coachman on the box, and Gregson, the easily-scared footman, erect by his side. Vida had looked unnumbered time on the fierce, irascible, vivid countenance of the man who was her real father, and (to her mind, at least in intention) the murderer of her mother. But the regard of Jacob Romer passed over her head. He seemed continually to be looking across the present into a tragic future-never with fear, never with repentance always with a kind of anger, bitter, contemptuous and with difficulty restrained.

But what really scared Vida was to recognise in a little man who sometimes sat beside the millionaire, the former supercargo of the Good Intent, Mr James Kahn. Sometimes she saw him alone, in an automobile, guiding the machine himself, his fleeting grey eye glancing dangerously at all and sundry in his path, as if, were it not for the law, he would be delighted to run them down.

Did James Kahn recognise her? Certainly she had altered greatly from the hollow-cheeked, fierce eyed, suspicious little girl who had kept such jealous watch over her sick mother. But had she altered to the extent that one who, five years before, had been in daily communication with her, would now fail to recognise her?

For the present, Vida could not find this out. Certainly the undersized, grey-eyed man, with the turned-up moustaches and the vaguely furtive air showed not the least sign of recognition. Once even, when she was gathering flowers along the hedgerows of a distant lane, remote from the clinging grime of the Incubus chimney-stalks, Mr. Kahn stopped his motor and politely offered her a ride home. He knew her, he said, as the daughter of one of his most trusted foremen, one to whom he was immediately going to entrust a task more fitted to his abilities and character.

Vida thanked the manager of the works for his offer, but still with a certain air of grave surprise, which sent him on in his motor, secretly rebuked, but certainly not offended.

Thinking it over afterwards, Vida was afraid that she had spoiled her good old friend's chances of promotion. But Mr. Kahn showed no resentment, and that very night Dick Finnan came home rejoicing. He was to be made Inspector of Ways at the bottom of No. 2 pit, and his salary was to begin at forty-five shillings a week!

It was more money than he had ever earned in his life, and Dick said so much in praise of Mr. Kahn and his kindness, that Vida, in spite of the Good Intent, was half ashamed of herself and her present suspicions.

'It would have been a long day and a short one before old Romer would have raised me half-a-crown,' he said. 'I question if he even knows me by sight, the hard-driving old rip!'

'But won't it be more difficult work, father, and more dangerous, besides?' queried Vida, 'away down there in the horrid dark?'

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'Oh,' said Dick, easily, 'it's nothing like so bad as you think-you must run down and see me some day. The underground engineer, Vic Morris the men call him, though he writes it differently- Ludovic, or something like that-he will explain everything to you. He is a rare good-hearted one, by all telling, and he said to me, off-hand like, that he might drop round tonight and put me up to my duties a bit. Why, I believe that might be him now!' Vida started, and cast a glance at the inner doorway which led to the stairs. But she was too late.

A tall young man stood barring all egress. He was a giant in his way, square-shouldered, with strongly-marked features, at once careless and daring. Yet here was something infinitely fine and delicately caressing in the blue eyes which showed so dark under the long lashes, turned up at the ends like woman's.

'I hope, Mr. Finnan,' he said, 'that I have not come too early? I am afraid your daughter, Miss Bryan, was just about to make her escape. Shall I step outside a moment and pretend I haven't quite arrived?'

Really it was somewhat forward of him, as they said in Kirktown. But then the way it was said- well, it was a gentleman's way, with humour, delicacy, quality in it, but nothing more. And Vida, though he had her father's frown on her face, found the Romer wrinkles smooth themselves away in spite her. She smiled.

'My daughter, who is better than any born daughter to me--' said Dick, by way of introduction, 'this is our underground engineer, Mr Morris, as nice a young man.'

'That will do, Dick,' laughed the young man

aforesaid; 'please don't disgust Miss Vida to begin with. She sees through us quickly enough, I hear. Don't make me more afraid of her than I am. But see here; I have brought a twenty-four inch plan of the workings, old and new, and I have made note of the state of the roads you will have to be responsible for. Also I have your predecessor's notebooks- which won't do you much good, I'm afraid. And now, Miss Vida, if you will pardon us, we will talk business!'

And Mr. Ludovic Morris took no further notice of her, but for an hour and a half by the slow-ticking kitchen clock, gave the girl an uninterrupted view of his broad back as he 'explained' the mine in detail to Dick Finnan. At last, tired to death of her crochet work, Vida rolled the white spider's web neatly up, and climbed the staircase to bed without even disturbing them, leaving the two still at it.

At her departure Ludovic Morris did not so much as turn round, though surely he must have heard her move. The rocking chair creaked, and Vida, usually so light and sure of foot, stumbled against a buffet

But the pair of students only bent more intently over the big crackling sheets which Mr. Morris kept tapping with restless, demonstrative pencil.

'Decidedly,' thought Vida as she blew out her candle that night, 'he is a new type of young man, this Ludovic Morris, the underground engineer!'

CHAPTER FOUR

A MAN AT WAR WITH HIS MAKER

One of Vida Bryan's best friends, after Dick Finnan and the red-nosed Irishman on the Skerry Light, was old Abraham Fyfe, the senior gardener at Gorm House. Mr. Romer refused to have a head gardener, or, indeed, a 'head' anything.

'I am head gardener,' he would say, 'head cook, and bottlwasher, head everything. There is no head at Gorm House or in the Kirktown pits but Jacob Romer. So mind you that.'

Still Abraham was the man with the best pay, the longest service, the most privileges, and the only man about the place who, at times, dared to speak his mind to his master. Jacob Romer knew sincerity when he saw it. For instance, he was as well aware that James Kahn was busily feathering his nest, as that Abraham Fyfe was serving him like a leal man and no hireling. But then his business was such that James Kahn was the more useful to him. Any may be a good man, but it takes a very clever man to be a serviceable rascal. Besides, a man of conscience and scruples is just so much more hampered.

But still Abraham had a tolerance and a respect from the iron master which were withheld from his cleverer tool. The latter was 'Kahn' always to his master. But the gardener was always 'Abraham,' and the fierce master of Gorm House would sometimes turn the discussion as to horticultural subjects with the admission that 'After all, Abraham,

perhaps may know more than myself, about shallots.'

Vida liked well enough to see Abraham 'slip doon' as he said, 'frae the Big Hoose, to help her to tidy up a wee!' It made her feel less lonesome do by the little Gate Cottage at the Glebe End. This was not the main lodge of Gorm House, but one which the gate always stood open, which led by narrower, longer, and more sequestered avenue, und a gloomy, almost secret archway of green, with couch of pine-needles restful and elastic underfoot to the stable entrance. But still Jacob Romer passed out much more frequently by the open Glebe End gate than by that guarded by the huge tortured saurians which represented the heraldic supporters of his uncle's family.

'See to that noo! He never so muckle as took the road ye are on, my bonnie!' said old Abraham who had his privileges with Vida, as he pointed after the smoking wheels of his master's carriage. 'Na, na. His heart is ower hard, even as the nether millstan. There is aye something for the grace o' God to work on in a sinner wha errs through the glamour o' a weel faured face. There was King Dawvid himself, ye ken. But Jacob Romer, never-I hae kenned him-aye, for forty year, and save for self and siller, that heart in his breast has never dunted the faster.'

Vida turned pale as she stood listening. Perhaps she was destined to hear from this stranger that which her mother had so carefully hidden.

'Did he never love any woman?' said Vida tremulously, slowly crumbling the leaves of a blond tea-rose between her fingers.

'Save us, lass!' cried the old man, snatching the branch from her, 'dinna gang spoilin' the best bloom

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o' the 'Pride o' Burgundy' that my ain hands planted for ye- aye, they did so- grafted on Ayrshire White it was, an' dug about an' watered- but what was it ye were sayin'? Ow aye, about the Maister. Was he ever in love? Love, love- hear to ye! Is then naething else i' the heads o' you young folk, but havers about love?'

'But, Mr. Romer- you were going to tell me.'

'Was I? I hadna mind that I mentioned it. Howsomever, ye will maybe no' hae heard tell that the maister was marriet, when he was a younger man. It was down Northumberland way, where there are bonny bits o' lasses, white an' delicate as bakers' biscuits wi' pink sugar on the tap. Aye, I served the auld man then- the first Maister Jacob Gorm, ye will hae heard tell o' him. He was a great man in Thorsby, what they caa' Chairman o' the Docks an' owner o' heaps of ships. Him it was that sunk the first o' thae Incubus pits and set up the company. It was coal he was seekin', but Jacob Romer fand the iron as weel-that has been the makin' o' this countryside in ae way o' looking at it, an' maybe the perdition o' it in anither!

'But the young maister, -oh, he took a strange notion into his head ae day. 'Abraham,' he says to me, 'I am to be married. A man never works with both hands and his head except when he has a wife and family to support. So they say. I am going to try it!' Good luck to you and your bonnie lady, says I. But mind, nothing must be said about it to--!' And he cocked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of his uncle. I nodded to let him ken that I was a' there, as the sayin' is, an' at he needna be feared o' Abraham Fyfe openin' s mouth when he had need to keep it shut! Weel, I saw the lass

married, for I gaed to the kirk.

It was at an Episcopian kirk in England-naebody but themselves twa an' the beadle craitur to gie the puir young thing awa! Me? I was safe hid in the gallery. Naebody kenned that I was there to see. But somehow the marriage didna answer. Never did Jacob Romer daur to whisper a word to his uncle, for fear that the auld bachelor thief wad disinherit him. An' after Jacob Gorm was in his grave, it was not a whit better. The wife gaed wrang i' the mind, or deed or something. An' sae it may be wi' reason that Jacob Romer gangs by the Glebe yet wi' his horses aye at speed, an' a face on him like death an' hell following after!

'Yes, perhaps he has need!' said Vida in a low voice.

The old gardener, who had been busily manipulating his pruning knife all the time, turned sharp upon her, measuring her with his eye.

'Maybe, maybe!' he said, 'aiblins the sins some gang before them into judgment, as it is written. And sinner though I be, I would rather hae the conscience o' puir Abraham the gardener to take me to bed, than that of Jacob Gorm Romer, the maister o' thoosands- aye, an' tens o' thousand! I judge he's gye an' lonely whiles-juist him and his Maker! Ech aye, him and his Maker!'

Vida would have liked to ask other questions, but a fear of appearing over-inquisitive withheld her. However the old man needed only to be let go, once mounted on the hazardous, stumbling nag of his octogenarian reminiscence.

There was a bairn, too-lad bairn or lass bairn I never richtly heard. But the bit thing lived not long. I wot, though, it wasna killed wi' kindness. How

could it? It's mither a puir peeferin' invalid an' nae faither but Jacob Romer! The puir wee snipe was far better aff, I'se warrant, at hame wi' its ither Faither and about a kindlier Hearthstane.

Abraham was silent awhile with the natural instinct of the man. For though, as a good Cameronian, he had officially his doctrine as to Elect and non-Elect infants, as a private person Abraham thought of heaven as a place where lassies and laddie played at marbles and ball upon the golden street 'For,' said he in explanation of this, 'it's natural that the young lightsome things wad whiles be tirin' o' the eternal harpin' an' singin'!'

'He was cruel to his wife, then?' Vida went on with an accent that might have put Abraham Fyfe on his guard, save for the fact that he had his deaf ear towards her for the moment.

'Cruel-weel, no' exactly,' said the ancient gardener of Gorm House; 'ye see he was juist a man at should never hae been marriety. Of such there are twa kinds; and tak' ye tent, lassock, o' what I sayin'! There are them that canna settle to ony woman, and them that canna settle to ony ae woman. Jacob Romer was o' the first sort. After a month his wife was nae mair to him than a coat that didna fit. A' that he thocht about, was how to get rid o' her!'

A moan forced itself from Vida's lips. The old man turned in astonishment, his shears still clipping emptily in his fingers.

'Eh, lassie, but what's the maitter- are ye 'blins no weel?'

'I am better already,' said Vida, snatching desperately at her self-control, 'I was only sorry for the poor wife that died without ever being loved.'

'If ye kenned Jacob Romer as weel as me, ye

wadna greet for her!' said Abraham Fyfe. 'Sure am I that baith the mither an' bairn will be leapin' and 'skippin' like twa bonnie young lambs on the mountains o' Beulah juist to be rid o' Jacob Romer's temper!'

'And why then do you serve such a man?' said Vida, looking at the sober face of the old Cameronian, momentarily lighted up with a flash of sombre glare.

'Deed, then, my bonnie, it is because Abraham canna weel do itherwise. Ye see, I served his uncle, the Auld Man he was caa'ed after-Jacob Gorm the First. An' I kenned the lad, an' fed him wi' pies, an' comforted him wi' goose-gogs when his uncle thrashed him- aye, for he was sorely thrashed in his youth. And maybe it was his uncle's ill-using of him that made him the hard man he is this day. But at any rate, God didna mak' me a judge an' a divider ower Jacob Romer. He has been a hard, but no an ill master to me. The puir lads at the pits, wha are under the thumb o' that misleard ill-doer, James Kahn-they can tell a different tale. But for me, when my maister is to be blamed in that which concerneth me, grace is given me to withstand him to the face. But as to the rest of his dealings and doings which concern me not, they are between him and his God!'

'No,' cried Vida, suddenly, 'they are between us two also between him and me, oh, I hate him I hate him, I hate him!'

Her excitement did not surprise the old Cameronian, accustomed to the stress of spiritual emotion. He laid his hand with affectionate understanding on the girl's shoulder, now shaken with her sobs.

'I ken, I ken,' he said, 'ye are young. 'Ye hate

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iniquity. That is sound in the faith; But let not that cause you to meddle with the man that wrought it. Dinna trespass on the Almighty's preserve and mind that yin o' the chief o' them is Vengeance. 'Be still and know that I am God.' That is the message. Aye, even if ye were the puir young wife hersel'.'

'Oh, you are old- you do not understand- you do not know!' cried Vida, with all the youthful bitterness of her soul in her voice.

'Maybe, maybe,' said Abraham, touching her arm gently, 'but I hae served God with an humble heart for fifty year, and Jacob Romer with my hands for near as lang, an' I understand eneuch o' baith juist to leave the twa o' them to it!'

CHAPTER FIVE

THE 'CONFIDENTIAL'

Brother Tom had come from Thorsby to see Jacob Romer. They quarrelled continually, the two brothers, but after all, they had no other intimacies, and each respected the other's tenacity, the other's independence, the other's comprehensive lack of scruple. Jacob's very vices were Tom's admirations, and Jacob considered Tom's stray virtues as so many weaknesses. They were, in fact, well agreed. But for all that they were not made to dwell long together. Like most other blood relatives, a distance of two hundred miles was requisite to make one bearable to the other. That is, after twenty-four hours.

But for the first evening at Gorm House it seemed as if Jacob Romer could not see enough of his brother. He conducted him in person to Tom's room. He saw that there was water in the ewer. He inspected the long-unused piece of soap, threw it out of the window, and, with a threatening movement of his foot, sent Gregson scuttling for another. He even sat on the bed while Tom arranged the remains of his locks to the best advantage over his bald head. As he watched, Jacob rubbed up his own thick bristle complacently, and reflected that he was the older man by a good half-a-dozen years.

'Tom,' he said, 'you are wearing but poorly- you are a younger man than I!'

'I have more to worry me,' retorted his brother, testily, 'I have not yet got over the last little job I was

fool enough to take in hand for you.'

'You mean about Caroline,' said Jacob Romer serenely; 'that was five years ago. Your position in Thorsby must be a precarious one if it cannot stand a little jolt like that!'

Dr. Thomas Romer stopped brushing his scalp and turned on his brother with the brushes still poised on either side of his head.

'It is easy for you to talk,' he said, with some heat, 'Here you are master of everything. You say to this man, 'Do this,' and he doeth it! Or you know the reason why! But I, I am the servant of the Town Council-that is to say, of the me fickle and foolish as so many women!'

'Why do you do it?' asked his brother, as he watched, over the dense woodlands of Inchgormach the whirling wheels above his pitheads. 'Sure you have saved enough money?'

'Money,' snorted Thomas Romer, 'that is all you think of, Jacob! Yes, I have some money, not what you would call much, but enough to live on thank God. I shall never need to come on you to keep me from the poor's house. I could even pay for myself in the County Asylum--'

'That will do, Tom!' said his brother, sternly.

'I know what you mean. We shall have to talk over that subject tonight. You can afford to let it alone till then.'

'Very well, Jacob!' said Dr. Romer, instantly quieted. 'I meant no offence to you as you know But retire I cannot. What should I do with myself? I am a man without hobbies; I have never gone in for their confounded scientific nonsense, cutting up dogs and frogs, and swearing the brutes like it. I have had no time to golf, or to fish, or to shoot. I

have only attended to my patients and to my Thorsby appointments. These have taken all my time. Even when I went off ten days in the summertime, I was precious glad to get back again to the round.'

Jacob Romer nodded appreciatively.

'Rare thing work!' he grunted, 'only thing worth living for. It gives you no time to think how miserable you are.'

'But I have not been miserable!' objected Dr. Tom, 'I have liked my work well enough and done it well. But now younger men are taking my place, passing me by. Yes, it is true, I am getting old. I do not take easily to newer and cheaper methods. There is that young Salvesen, now-oh, it angers me only to think of him--'

'What has he done?' asked Jacob.

'It concerns you also, in some degree,' said his brother. 'We will go into that tonight, But just now, I think I'll lie down a little before dinner--'

'Nonsense!' cried Jacob, 'lie down, indeed!

Stretch your legs, you mean, as far as No. 2 Pit, and see Kahn. I have to speak to him anyway.'

So the brothers went out, still amicable and united, as indeed was the fact, for it was their first night together: at all events respecting each other for the similarity of their characters, and the knowledge that though each might 'do' the world at large neither could impose on the other. Nor indeed would they have dreamed of making the attempt.

Blood and the absence of other kindred had made Jacob and Thomas Romer very like one another. But while Thomas had the sleek, well-fed look of one who has always hunted with the pack and dwelt in cages, Jacob was the real, lone wolf, even to the

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quick suspicious tum of head, the half-bared tooth, the ready snap. And through his youth he had underlain the vigorous brutalities of his uncle Gorm of Inchgormach, whose heir he had become. The Doctor had only followed his profession with regularity and success, his practice enlarging almost automatically with the growth of an enterprising northern seaport.

The brothers, two alert, active men for their ages, both of a height and carrying themselves with a certain swing of consanguinity, took the road the Glebe End Gate.

Wrapt in himself, bearing the destiny mark his brow, his mind continually striking out and injecting schemes, Jacob Romer was not given regarding either the persons or the things about him until, that is, he had his work under his hand. Tom on the contrary, accustomed to draw his conclusions and perfect his diagnoses by observations of all sort, had his eyes everywhere.

He walked a little behind his brother, half a pace perhaps, while Jacob threw remarks to him over his shoulder. Thus echeloned across the path they strolled on, while Doctor Tom counted the pheasants which his brother reared and preserved with such scornful care against the day when he called together his principal customers and their buyers that their gentlemen might have the pleasure of slaughtering them.

He noted that the road was seldom travelled, save by some single light-running vehicle, his brother's mail-phaeton as he judged.

Then quite expectedly they came upon a lodge gate with a brilliant show of rhododendron beds, and promise of many clambering roses to come later

in the year.

'You have a beautiful place here, Jacob,' said the doctor, pausing to admire.

'Beautiful?' the owner threw the word at him like a bone at a dog. 'Is it? I had not noticed. I know it is the nearest way to pit No. 2. Also the quietest. No one to spy on your comings and goings!'

'Quiet enough, certainly,' agreed his brother. And as he spoke he caught sight of the slight vivid figure of a girl, with eyes like the dusk of pansies, who watched them from the porch of a wayside cottage.

'Why, man,' he added, smiling, 'there is a girl whom most men would be glad to have spy upon their comings and goings!'

Jacob Romer turned about angrily, took in Vida with one sharp glance, and strode on impatiently.

'Tom' he said; 'you always were a fool. Now you are becoming a dotard. That is the daughter of one of my work-people, to whom Kahn gave the cottage because he had been long a Government servant-on a lighthouse, I think.

'Over yonder?' questioned his brother, lifting his finger and pointing to the tall shaft of the Skerry lighthouse, for the moment touched rose marble by the setting sun.

'I do not know. How should I know?' snapped his brother, 'I heard Kahn say old Finnan had a daughter, but I don't believe I ever set eyes on the girl before! I thought she was a child in pinafores from what he said.'

'Hum,' thought his brother, 'if it were not for what Jacob wrote me-well, never mind, it's certainly none of my business.'

Dr. Tom did not finish his thought, while habitually careless and wholly unconscious, his

brother

strode on, muttering to himself, 'I hope Kahn has not gone. It would be just like him to run off when I want him. He does not like my coming too often-no, yonder is his motor at the office door!'

'What is it that Kahn does not like?' queried the doctor, only half-catching the words.

'To be interfered with,' said Jacob, sharply. 'Now, Tom, I will leave you to observe the sunset while I am doing my work.'

The Doctor was left alone among great piles of debris which rose a hundred feet into the air, rusty waggons full of iron ore waiting to be taken to the melting bank during the night. It was the hour of changing shifts. The miners passed up, silent and exhausted from their labour, as the great engine swung hem into the fading light of a day they had spent in darkness. For a moment they gazed about with a bewildered air, as if scarce sure of their bearings.

Then they plodded off through the warm dust of the summer evening like so many tired animals, their feet falling strangely on the kindly round of the earth. Those arriving had lamps in their caps ready to descend. They looked blanched and weary. The only difference was that the relieving shift muttered a little the one to the other in groups of two or three, while those returning from underground kept wholly silent.

But the doctor noticed the fine average muscular development of the men.

'They are better made fellows than our East Dean and Long Morton 'Geordies,' he thought. 'They have fresh air about them, at least when they are not in the pit.'

Then a tall young man approached, walking with a certain air of authority, for whom the men made way with an appearance of respectful good will though, indeed, his nod was brusque enough a response.

'Aye, Maister Morris, I will attend to the job, I will that!' he heard a man say, as the newcomer swung himself into the cage and crouched down among the others. And another, 'We shall have some air to breathe the nicht, along the working face, since Vic Morris is going down!'

At that moment the Doctor's brother came out, talking rapidly to his second-in-command.

'Nothing of the sort, Kahn,' he was saying, 'that won't do for me. I conduct my business openly. Nothing useless, of course, but a second exit we must have. Besides the Government demands it.'

'And never looks for it-they will pass any ten foot hole in the ground!' laughed Kahn. 'But I will see to the matter immediately, sir. I admit that No. 2 pit is far from safe, and we have some costly plant down there.'

'Besides some few men?' said Mr. Jacob Romer, sternly.

'One hundred and four, sir,' said Kahn, promptly; 'but you can leave all that to me. The pumping engine at the bottom wants new connections at any rate! We can make one job of the two.'

The master of the Incubus pits said something which his brother did not catch.

'Oh, yes, sir,' said James Kahn, 'a most respectable girl indeed-excellent daughter and all that, I believe. We have just promoted old Finnan Inspector of Ways in No. 2, a very steady old fellow, lighthouse keeper for many years, always to be

depended upon. No, sir, I do not think you could find better tenant for your Lodge Cottage. There no work to be done, as the gate is always open, a most suitable arrangement, sir, if I may say so.'

The master of mines waved his hand as if to put the topic aside. He asked brusquely for some figures as to the out-put of the day. Whereupon Kahn instantly rained statistics. He had naturally a good memory, and knew that the way to improve it is to trust it and never keep a note-book. Jacob Romer listened, slowly nodding his head after each enumeration.

'Good, Kahn,' he said; 'that will do; and now, if you please the reports from the smelting?'

These also proved excellent. Prices were rising in the market. Jacob Romer was satisfied, and showed it, whereupon his inferior made a timid suggestion, the offer of his motor to convey his master and his master's guest back to Gorm House.

'Not on any account,' said he, 'I should not risk my neck in one of these snorting abominations. If I can't walk, Kahn, I take a good horse out of my stables. And my brother can do the same so long as he stays with me.'

Kahn had been looking steadily over Jacob Romer's shoulder as they talked. He had been trying to make out the figure by the time-keeper's desk, as Doctor Tom from Thorsby watched the crowd of wan faces and sturdy bodies ebb and flow about the pit head! He liked to know everything and now -this brother! His master's brother! A little, ugly devil of anger leaped up murderously in his breast. Kahn scented a rival favourite. He told himself indeed that fear was groundless. Who could do for Jacob Romer what he was doing? It was all nonsense about blood

being thicker than water. He had always heard his master miscall his brother for a rascal-and worse, a fool.

Still the thoughts of James Kahn were not entirely easy ones as he watched the two old men walk away arm in arm. Because, deep in his heart, James Kahn had resolved that, by right or wrong, by hook or by crook, the Incubus mines, Gorm House, and the Romer millions should be his. Who could better deserve the final result of a hundred years of grinding the faces of the poor?

James Kahn locked up carefully, summoned his servant, leaped on the motor, and was whisked away to his new residence on the other side of Kirktown, all red brick towers and redder roofs, but named in all humility, the Caravanserai. He took the highway, dusty and straight, with the belching chimneys on either hand, and the surface deeply worn and rutted by the traffic of Messrs. Incubus and Company's waggons.

'If I went the other road, there might be an accident,' muttered James Kahn to himself. 'I could give that old bone-setter a chance of healing himself with pleasure!'

As the Confidential's motor dwindled into a black dot, with two following cloudy swirls of dust, about the pit mouth of Number Two a group of men shook their fists at James Kahn and cursed him openly. All, that is, save one. For old Dick Finnan defended the thrice-condemned 'Confidential.'

'I speak o' men as I find them, mates,' he said; 'and so being that Mr. Kahn has behaved very obliging to me, and to my daughter... you know her? Well he could not have been more polite if she had been a lady!

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With one accord the men turned and looked long into Dick's face. But seeing there only a great simplicity, they shrugged their shoulders and turned away.

'Here's the cage,' said one, 'let's get below!'

But another whispered, 'It's being so long on them island-lights that makes them dotty!'

CHAPTER SIX

THE HEALTHY FAMILY

Vida Bryan had one great friend besides old Abraham, the gardener at Gorm House. This was Miss Nunsby, the local music-teacher. Her father was a man by no means popular in the district. First he was an Englishman and prided himself upon the fact. By 'Englischer' the Kirktown pit-worker meant someone not a 'Geordie,' which meant from Newcastle way-not a 'Lanky,' which, in addition to Lancashire included Yorkshire-to the disgust of casual natives of the county of the Three Ridings. 'Scotties,' 'Geordies,' and 'Lankies' were, however, more or less on an equality, because there were pits in all these places, and also owing to the respect bred by ability in bargain-making. But Mr. Nunsby was a south-country man, an 'Englischer' pure and simple, without shame or excuse, for whom there was nothing to be said, no extenuating circumstances. The popular verdict was 'Guilty,' without a rider.

Besides, what was worse, he fetched and carried for James Kahn.

Arthur Nunsby had been a man of a certain position. He had been educated for the office of National Schoolmaster. But he had had the misfortune to quarrel with his Vicar, and from that moment for him there was no return. Hope had abandoned him, and he hope. He grew bitter, as he saw himself far past the meridian of life, and still depending for daily bread on a man whom he hated

and despised.

It is small wonder that his saturnine humour increased and his tongue grew more and more caustic.

As he must always have someone to practise upon he made the little 'slavey' the immediate butt of his sarcasms. On this account Rose Nunsby secretly cherished the girl, affording her many privileges, and never for a moment suspecting that Leebie Callum cared no whit for her father's sarcasms.

As a matter of fact, Leebie considered him mentally afflicted but on the whole innocent; and, indeed, she was callous to human speech of every sort, so long as there remained to her the inalienable freedom of cupboard and pantry.

Rose Nunsby had been very lonely before Vida came to Glebe End Cottage. Her father was making sufficient money to keep the two of them in comfort. So that it was more for something to do than from necessity that Rose had begun to give lessons on the piano and violin to the children of the shopkeepers and pit superintendents about the Kirktown of Inchgormach.

Just as many perfectly harmless insects imitate wasps and stinging flies, the innocent Rose Nunsby had taken on something of her father's manner. But within her nature was mild as milk, and her heart even as a honeycomb. She had taken Vida to it at once, and from the first hour had loved her as a sister. She had taught her all she knew, watched over her by day, warned her of dangers, rejoiced in her springing beauty, and now at last she had found in her a companion after her own heart.

Every afternoon Vida Bryan went to 32, Dudley

Gardens, where a piano was waiting for her, and also for the space of an hour, a very emphatic and stern mistress. After that little Miss Nunsby began to spread a table, the Callum was summoned, all jam as to her mouth and coaly as to her fingers, from her secret afternoon lair. Life to the Callum was one protracted surreptitious meal. She had always been hungry all her life before. So since she came to 32, Dudley Gardens, it is small wonder that the Callum regarded not the most polished arrows of Mr. Nunsby's wit.

After tea Miss Nunsby walked back to Glebe End Cottage with her friend and pupil, and there she stayed till it was time to go home for her father's dinner-hour, which was often a late one on account of his never being able to get away from the Incubus Offices before Mr. Kahn.

Rose Nunsby was a frail, pale, almost dwarfish creature, with a strange twist to her neck, a high white forehead, and her father's abundant dark brows, from under which looked out, incongruously enough, a pair of the mysterious gentian blue eyes, which only the fairies and the good hunchbacks have upon the earth.

As usual the girls talked books and music, but every now and then they became more personal, condescending lightly on the topics of Kirktown -the pits, the possible strike, Mr. Romer, the church choirs, the preaching qualifications of the several ministers, their personal merits or defects, and Mr. Kahn. These subjects are arranged in order of interest as conversational topics, reading backwards. 'Rose,' cried Vida, so suddenly, and after so long a pause that little Miss Nuns by discontinued stroking her friend's head, 'I hate him!'

'So do I, dear,' said Rose Nunsby, promptly. Proper names are mostly superfluous in the intimate converse of women; with delicate voice intonations they differentiate their pronouns with severe classic accuracy.

In this case both understood that James Kahn was the object of their dislike. Yet his name had not been mentioned, and Vida was thinking of something else. Perhaps this peculiarity originated in a natural precaution against eavesdropping.

'Why then do some other people like him?' Vida asked of her friend, the music-mistress.

'My father because he has got to,' snapped little Miss Nunsby, almost as sharply as that gentleman himself, yours because he is so simple that he knows no better!'

'Yes,' said Vida, with slowly deepening pucker which ran across her brow when she was thinking, 'yes, poor old daddy, he is simple.'

'What a blessing that we are so wise and see so much more clearly!' said her friend, quaintly, 'I am sure of it whenever you make that wrinkle between your eyes! Do you know whom you look like then?'

'No-who?' said Vida, innocently.

'Why, old Mr. Romer!' said the little music teacher, laughing aloud at Vida's discomforture.

'You're younger, and a girl; prettier too, some would think, but it's the identical same frown.'

I wonder everybody doesn't notice it?'

But by this time Vida was learning self-command, and though the red came slowly to her cheek and brow, it might only have been mere annoyance at being likened to a man of an ancient, angry, crab-apple countenance, like Mr. Jacob Romer.

Now just over the cottage wall, in a wide

enclosure and with ample house-room, dwelt the 'Healthy Family,' so every one called them, and they were their father's best advertisement. He was the parish doctor, or at least the chiefest and oldest established of these.

The Calmonts were generally called the Calmucks, though their cast of countenance was anything but Mongolian. Dr. Hugh Calmont was a huge man of a ruddy countenance, who brought an almost offensive atmosphere of health and well-being into the sick-room. He was not popular in nervous cases. Dyspeptic ladies and valetudinarian gentlemen who liked a droopy practitioner to sympathise with them, and tell them how similarly he had been afflicted, had been known absolutely to loathe Dr. Calmont. But there were few of these in the neighbourhood of Kirktown, and the 'the Doaktor' was personally of an extraordinary popularity. Literally he enjoyed it-that is the word. He knew himself to be popular, and on the strength of it, he bullied the neighbourhood-genially, even jovially, he bullied it. But still he bullied it. Careless miners, flighty wives, silly girls, possibly prodigal young men were threatened with 'the Doaktor.' And they became 'good' on the spot.

His wife seemed hardly the helpmeet for him, that is, to judge by the law of probabilities. Mrs. Calmont was a languid woman, tall and dark, rather silent, of a quite invincible good humour, careless of things domestic, and her numerous family had apparently fatigued her. It, the Healthy Family, had been brought up, dragged up, kicked up in the midst of the most inexpressible hugger-mugger.

The Healthy Family lived in an elastic house. It possessed unnumbered friends, and no one was

surprised when two or three of these appeared in the evening with the obvious intention of staying the night. Nor was there ever the least difficulty; shakedowns appeared and disappeared as by magic. The peculiarities and capacities of every sofa in the house was known-those which needed chairs in rows to keep you from rolling off them, and the others which with the family photograph album under one leg, did very well when merely turned face to the wall.

Special corners of the dining-room and drawing-room, where the boards were notably soft, had also their devotees. Four boys and three girls, who considered themselves more or less grown up, composed the sum total of the Healthy Family of Kirktown.

They came into this story over the wall of the Doctor's orchard. An empty cube sugar box did for a spring board, and both girls and boys prided themselves on the flying leap with which they were wont to enter the garden of Glebe End Cottage. Neither Vida nor the little music mistress were at all surprised to see them. They were often thus interrupted. Only Miss Nunsby, who held greatly her talks with Vida Bryan very near her heart, somewhat resented the frequency of the infliction.

'Hallo, Calmucks,' said Vida.

'Hallo yourself! and see how you like it!' cried the twin infant Phenomena, Willie and Wilhelmina Calmont, going off as quick as a 'rip-rap' cracker. They were still at school, but the fact was considered to be under the rose. It was not polite to allude to it. 'We have come to see you!' said Jean and Jessica, the two elder girls fanning themselves with rhubarb leaves-a luxury the whole family had thoughtfully

provided itself with en route.

'Good,' said Aaron and Herbert (commonly called Hur), the two elder boys, both home from college, 'have some, girls! No end useful and ornamental! Suck one end and fan yourself with the other!'

But the third son, Phil Calmont, though he had taken the flying leap into the garden with the others, hung back a little, scarcely raising his eyes from the rose graftings to look at Vida and her friend the little music mistress.

The rest roosted like crows anywhere about, the twins occupying the corner of a wall where they made room for Vida between them. She had given up her place on the summer seat to Jean and Jessica, who having wedged little Miss Nunsby tightly between them, now propitiated her by offering her the contents of their 'skirt-pockets.' The girls of the Healthy Family all carried 'skirt-pockets'-that is, pockets tied round the waist under the outer skirt, and filled with various treasures.

'Grandmother did,' they said in excuse, 'and she was a minister's wife for forty years, and died without a shadow on her character. Why shouldn't we?'

When the Healthy Family girls ran they did not hold up their dresses. Of that there was no need. If a dress impeded the wearer in a race or a heel caught in a flounce, Jessica instantly produced a pair of scissors and shortened the offender to convenient proportions, while Jean 'basted' the new hem, the needle following hard in the wake of the clipping blades. It was the work of a minute. Then they ran on again, holding their skirt-pockets. These were heavy, and quite naturally so. Jean's contained household necessities-'hussives,' and balls of twine-

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Jessica's, scissors in wooden nests, and all the apparatus of first aid for the wounded (Jessica was her father's favourite, and even lent a hand at minor operations). Wilhelmina, or the She-Twin, possessed a 'skirt-pocket' too, but it contained nothing save a few very way-worn sweets, hoary chocolates, and stones to catapult Jack with. Jack was a fox-terrier who went rabbiting, refusing to come to heel when so commanded.

'Now, Infants,' said Vida, laying a hand on a shoulder of each of the Twins, 'do keep your feet still. If you want to stay where you are, don't damage my ivy plants.'

'I say,' cried Willie, the He-Twin, 'Vic Morris has got a girl!'

'I wish, Master William Calmont,' retorted his sister, 'that you would speak the King's English. You mean, I presume, that Mr. Ludovic Morris has engaged himself to be married.'

'I mean nothing of the sort and you know it,' sneered her brother, trying to snatch a somewhat fresher rhubarb-stock out of her hand. 'I mean Vic has got a girl and is going walks with her. I saw him. All our girls here are mad about it!'

With one voice his sisters denounced to the company the absolute unconditioned falsehood of Little Willie's statement.

'Mr. Morris,' observed Wilhelmina, serenely, 'has a sister, who has doubtless come to visit him. She stays with friends over at Garvie and walks here through the Gormach wood. It's a wonder you have not seen her, Vida!'

'Sister-rubbish!' cried the He-Twin, shrilly, dominating the conversation, 'I know sisters - I ought to-I've got three, haven't I? Little Willie doesn't

look at sisters that way,-no, nor put on fresh ties every evening when we take them out to walk! Do we, brothers glorious?’

‘Not much!’ said Aaron and Herbert together, with their eyes fixed on Vida to the absolute disregard of mere sisterly relationships.

‘Why,’ said Wilhelmina, ‘you’ve all got your Sunday ties on now, and you were only coming over the wall with us!’

There fell a sudden silence after this remark. Aaron and Hur became interested in a fly-casting round Hur’s hat which he held on his knee and turned round and round. The little music mistress relieved the situation by asking when Aaron and Hur were going back to college. But before there was time to answer, the sound of a gong at the farther side of the Doctor’s wall caused the Healthy Family to rise and with hasty unanimous fluttering, vault back over at the angle where the worn foot-holes were. Clump-clank they went on the cube sugar box.

They bade no adieus. Apologies were not thought of.

‘By Jove, look sharp, I say,’ cried Wilhelmina, poking her twin to mount more quickly, ‘if you dally with our fate like that, father will have wolfed all the boiled mutton and new potatoes before we get there!’

‘My favourite dish!’ cried Willie, ‘why didn’t you tell me. I will bound like a Barbary steed.’

‘My beautiful, my beautiful, that standest meekly by--’ he sang as he got into position.

‘That I just won’t! Not when it’s mutton with caper sauce! Stand meekly by yourself, Master Willie!’

And the whole conclave were gone in a swirl, like a flock of migratory birds that had alighted for a while on Vida’s wall and garden-seat.

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'Oh, thank heaven they're gone!' said the little music teacher, sinking back, 'they were giving me a headache.'

'They always give me a headache,' said a quiet voice from behind the trellis on which old Abraham's tropeolum was beginning to put forth its dainty crimson petals against the back-ground of dark moss-green.

'Yes, all the time.'

The two girls started up, and as they looked round, they caught sight of Philip Calmont, tall, lissom, and imperturbable-the least overpowering of the Healthy Family.

'Why, Phil, what are you doing there?' said Vida, 'Why haven't you gone to share in the mutton and caper sauce? They will eat it all up.'

'I know they will,' said Philip, resignedly, as he seated himself on the grass and nursed his knee, outlining the cap, and squinting with one eye to see how far it was off the straight. 'And I don't care. They are always eating. It tires me, and then father is never the same two days running. We have got to have dinner at all sorts of hours, whenever he turns up off his round.'

'Won't they miss you?' murmured the music teacher, gently. She had a weakness for all the oddments of the world, being herself one of the misfits and selvages of society.

'Miss me!' said Phil Calmont, looking down the long lean perspective of his leg to a rather shabby boot in the distance, 'not while there is anything left to eat!-And I rather hoped-', he went on and then stopped.

'What did you hope, Phil?' Vida was smiling at him encouragingly.

‘That you would give me some tea quietly, after the cormorants were out of the way. I knew they wouldn't stay long.’

‘Of course, Phil,’ said Vida, gladly. And she moved towards the cottage. ‘Dick Finnan will be home in a quarter of an hour, and you can have it with him.’

‘Better give him a cup out here with us,’ said the music teacher, kindly. For she had seen Phil Calmont's face fall at the suggestion of Dick Finnan, which however Vida had made in all innocence.

‘Oh, thank you!’ said Phil, gratefully, in a low voice as Vida went to the cottage. ‘She's wonderful isn't she?’

‘Not so wonderful as I am,’ said the little music mistress.

‘Why?’ asked Phil, looking up with wide, vague blue eyes, startled at her tone.

‘Because I also am a woman and not jealous.’

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE KIRKTOWN KIRKS

Kirktown was a quiet place till you knew it. Most days the Gorm Water, purling along the valley, made the only noise. Except, that is, the tongues of the gossips. It was a terrible place for gossip. It lived upon it, having dearth of other aliment.

No thing was sacred from the tongues of the Kirktown, neither great houses nor small, neither high nor low, soldier nor sailor, tinker nor tailor. But for choice the Kirktown talked about ministers. There were, as usual, three-and an Episcopalian-the latter a smiling pariah among the true blue Presbyterians, who stayed himself with jumble sales and comforted himself with the comminatory clauses of the Athanasian creed.

The minister of the Scottish Establishment was a high man, dry as high, and (for a while at least) comes not greatly into this story. He abode planted in his foursquare roomy house under the immemorial parish elms, one eye on the temporalities in the shape of a manse glebe capable of being feued out into 'eligible building plots,' and the other fixed on the eternities as suggested by the gravestones close under his study window.

The other two were the Reverend John Fowler of the Free Kirk, and the Reverend Benjamin Irongray, of the Kirk of the Martyrs. These were friends and consorted much together. The elder, John Fowler, was a married man with a growing family. Mr. Irongray was still a bachelor. They abused each

other frankly and theologically, bandying such names as Brownist and Calvinist, but they loved each other dearly.

They met for choice in the manse of the bachelor, a still and untroubled place, far from the scuffle of the nursery, and with no smell, either of cooking or washing, in the corridors and staircases. The Cameronian Church of Kirktown was almost as solitary as the Episcopalian, but historically there was a difference in the tradition.

The Reverend John Fowler was a tall, dreamy-eyed enthusiast, crowned with a fluff of silken blond hair through which he swept his fingers with a quick nervous movement. He spoke slowly, with an intonation sweet and a little mournful, quickening now to unexpected enthusiasms and anon dropping unfinished into quaint and pensive silences.

This day the Free Kirk minister's daughter Janet went steadily up the brae. Miss Fowler had a basket in one hand in which something snuggled, carefully covered with a white napkin. If you had been able to touch that basket, you would have found it pleasantly warm. In fact, the basket contained hough soup in a little aluminium saucepan, together with a good ration of cold beef, potatoes and vegetables.

'Merely a parson's daughter playing Lady Bountiful cheaply,' the uninstructed might have said -that is, if they had not belonged to Kirktown. But the village and the pits knew better. It was a rough, reckless place, with the tall chimneys and whirling cage-wheels held up barrenly against the sky, and its double shift of pitmen, night and day pouring up from the bowels of the earth, and dropping sullenly

down. But Kirktown knew the value of its ministers-and of their daughters. Not all these merits were patent, however. For it did not guess, as the blinds were drawn aside to watch the progress of 'Maister Fowler's lass' that in order to carry that supply to Widow McTurk, Janet Fowler had had to go hungry herself, to skimp her hungry, growing, growling brothers, and even pare regretfully at the portion of her father as it went on the plate for him to say grace over.

Such however was the case.

Janet Fowler was not beautiful, though she was young. She had a plain, kindly, pleasant face in which a pair of steady grey eyes shone with a consistent outlooking firmness on all the world-on her father, who needed looking after quite as much as the children-that is, her three brothers, Raif, Alf and Tim. These chiefly needed bullying, while her small sister Violet got mostly what she wanted. Last of all Janet's face looked kindly and tolerantly out upon the hopelessly improvident but humanly likeable pit-folk of Kirktown.

Janet was eighteen, but having borne the cares of the state for more than three years, she looked older. At one time she had threatened to grow tall and handsome, but early responsibility, the effort to fill the place of her dead mother, and to administer faithfully the doubtful finances of Kirktown Free Manse, seemed to have aged and altered her. Still it was an eminently pleasant face, and the wise kindness in the eyes added to the humour about the month drew an answering smile from you if you so much as met her on the street.

Today she was smiling to herself as she went. She was thinking of her brother Raif's face when he took

stock of his diminished portion on the plate, and looked up to find his sister 'bundling half the dinner' into a basket.

'Poor Raif!' she murmured, 'I must look out something for his tea. He is growing so fast.'

And then she grew suddenly sober as she thought of the knees of Raif's trousers and the approaching necessity of getting him a new outfit, if indeed he were to go to college in the autumn. This was a solemn thought to Janet, for it was quite necessary, also, that her father should have a new hat-for Sundays. The old would do very well for funerals, which were wet, windy, blustery affairs, from which you came back with a soaking overcoat and an incipient cold. But a new tall hat for Sundays-like Mr. Sleekman's, of Overston, Janet had set her mind on that. Not that her father cared. He would as soon have gone bareheaded or in an old wide-awake. Indeed, he had to be watched as it was.

Janet turned down by the cemetery wall on her way to Widow's Row-the straggling, out-at-elbows cluster of houses, which, being out of the jurisdiction of the great mining firm of Incubus and Co., was mostly inhabited by the widows and orphans of men who had once been in its employ.

As Janet passed the corner where the paths crossed between the Carron Pit and the Long Dook, she came upon two men standing close together in heated argument. She knew them. They were the two pit managers of these workings-by name Hector McKill and Walter Grindling.

'I tell you,' said the taller, a long lean man in a frockcoat clinging to his knees, and an incongruous torn Panama hat on the back of his head. 'I am about tired of that man Fowler. He has been too long

in Kirktown. I will use my influence-'

'You will lose your time,' his companion broke in, a ruddy, rustic looking man, with a blunt red nose and watery eyes. 'He has the ear of the Geordies-and what's more--'

'Sssht,' hissed the first speaker, laying his hand on the arm of the stout man and turning him half round. He had seen Janet over his partner's shoulder.

'That's Fowler's eldest brat!' said Mr. Grindling. 'She doesn't take after her father. He's a good looking dog, when all's said and done!'

'Beauty is vain,' said Hector McKill, shaking his head. 'Absolom was hanged in the magnificence of his tresses, and John Fowler is entangled in the words of his own mouth.'

'Hum,' said the ruddy manager of the Long Dook. 'Well, you know best, of course, about church affairs. That's your strong suit. But, speaking as a worldly man, Mr. McKill, I don't see how you are going to shift him out of Kirktown.'

'Am not I one of his elders, an influential one too? Do I not subscribe liberally to all that goes into the treasury of that church? I think you will allow I have some right to my opinion.'

'Doubtless,' said Walter Grindling, watching the girl's slender figure, as she carried the napkin-covered basket, tum into Widow McTurk's, 'but he is something of a favourite, isn't he? Now, that was his daughter, going with some of his dinner to the poor-ah, to Tom McTurk's widow in the Row. Well, the Geordies understand that sort of thing. It makes a man popular.'

'Mere ostentation!' cried Mr. McKill, stamping his foot angrily, 'Why, last winter I gave orders to my

cook to have a good saucepan of soup prepared every day for any who cared to apply, and I never heard any complaints. My wife told me that no one ever asked for it except the regular beggars, which shows that there can be no real want in the place. Surely what is worth having, is worth asking for, eh, Grindling?’

The stout manager of the Long Dook shook his head.

‘I daresay,’ he said, ‘but you see that is not the way they look at it. They like to be fussed over, and a help from the manse is-what is it? Twice blest-it blesseth him that gives and him that takes. That sort of thing. I’m no great hand at Scripture. ‘That’s not Scripture’ you say-oh, very well, it sounds like it, anyway. I’ve heard it somewhere. I might have known it wasn’t in the kirk. That is a place I don’t often trouble. But the minister, now, how much a year has he?’

‘One hundred and sixty-six pounds, six shillings and sixpence,’ said Mr. McKill promptly, ‘and a very sufficient and even superabundant salary.’

‘Salary perhaps-but a pretty lean wage,’ said Mr. Grindling. His eye rested on the trim cottages of the company’s reservation. ‘Yonder’s Block C,’ he said, pointing with his finger, ‘our Long Dook men there are good average workers-all on piece work, the father and two or three boys all working. How much do you think goes into each of those doors every Saturday night?’

‘A couple of pounds or even three,’ said Mr. McKill, carelessly, his mind still on his ecclesiastical wrongs.

‘From four to six pounds, I tell you, sterling coin of the realm,’ said Mr. Grindling, ‘I check the pay

sheets.'

'Dear me,' cried Mr. McKill, 'I must speak to the Chief. We must reduce our wages. Such a thing is positively indecent! It's bad for the men.'

'Possibly,' said Mr. Grindling, 'but just now with our contracts and the boom in the trade it can't be helped. The men would just go elsewhere. Only that was not what I meant. I was speaking of your minister on a salary of £166. He is a far poorer man than any good workman in our pits. There's Dick Pearson coming out now with his two boys. They are making a hundred pounds a year more than John Fowler, and they never dream of dressing like gentlemen, nor send their daughters to school in Edinburgh, nor their sons to colleges. They have no position to keep up.'

'A minister should be poor in spirit,' said Mr. McKill, 'look at the apostles.'

'The apostles, from what I have heard, were fishermen,' said stout little Mr. Grindling, his shoulder shaking a little with what he considered a jest, 'but what would the Chief say if Fowler took to fishing in his preserved water up on the Gormside?'

'Mr. Romer would have him prosecuted, of course,' said Mr. McKill, 'if only out of respect to his position as a magistrate.'

'Quite so,' said his junior, 'I have heard say that the disciples were dressed like fishermen, and it was only the other day that I heard you complaining that Mr. Fowler's hat was a disgrace to his sacred profession, and that if a man were a minister he should dress like one. Besides, the disciples were mostly unmarried men and had no families depending on them!'

'Why, Grindling,' cried Mr. McKill, 'to hear you, I

should suppose you were taking his part. Do you know that he preaches against us every Sunday, till Mrs. McKill can hardly keep her seat-and indeed, to do so needs all my own Christian patience!’

‘Why, then,’ said Grindling, waving his hand in jovial adieu, ‘then you should stay away, as I do!’

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE LOVE MADNESS OF JACOB ROMER

No, Jacob Romer had never loved a woman. In his youth-now so long ago, it had seemed a convenient thing at the time that he should marry Caroline French. He had felt himself slipping-too many evenings out, a tendency to force the pace, to play cards for sums that he could not afford-or rather, which he would not afford lest it should come to the ears of his uncle.

He never had much sentiment, this young Jacob Romer, nor yet a very strong bent either towards good or evil. But, first, second, and all the time, he meant to succeed, to stand heir to his uncle, to become a rich man, holding the lives of thousands in his hands.

He watched the great dignitaries of the county visiting Thorsby, and while he chuckled with the notion that his uncle could buy them all up, lock, stock and barrel, he admired them too.

They had what the rich Mr. Gorm never had, a certain quiet, assured, certainty of themselves. Their carriages were sometimes shabby, but they sat them like thrones. They had been their father's before them. Nevertheless, with the quick wit of the born successful man... he saw that the time was coming, if it had not already arrived, when money would admit even to that society-that is, if the moneyed person were at all decently presentable.

His uncle Gorm, with his broad Thorsby accent, was out of the running, but it was different with

Jacob. True, he had never been to college. His uncle believed in the yard and the counting-house more than Oxford and Cambridge, and the earlier the better. Still he felt that he could hold his own.

It chanced that one day, returning from his afternoon walk into the country lanes about Green Lane Common, he passed a little red freestone porch-a schoolhouse during the week, a church and Sunday School on the Sabbath. This was Sunday, though Thorsby was near enough the Scottish border to use the Judaeic name quite frequently. The classes were coming out, and the eyes of Jacob Romer caught a tall, palish girl, with a swarm of children about her, emerging into the street. She was like a queen bee with her hiving cluster.

'Miss French-oh, wait, Miss French!' they called after her.

And with a smile, the tall young teacher turned and waited. A little girl, two little girls, and then three or four toddlers all came out shouting on Miss French to wait for them. In baby accents they lisped it-they squeaked it like young animals. They fell flat and picked themselves up without crying, so eager were they to reach the object of their adoration.

Jacob Romer saw it all. He did not know the young teacher, but it would be the easiest thing in the world to find out who she was. However, he would, as he said, 'do a bit of thinking first.'

And that thinking he did during the week. He held himself aloof from his comrades with their talk of cards and racing, their strong waters and cheap wickedness-that is, till Friday, when he went to Thorsby Steeplechases and lost forty pounds- not all of which was his to lose.

He was a thief. If caught, his uncle would send

him unpitifully to prison. It was not so much the money he had to make up which troubled him, but the sudden revelation of his own weakness. When upon the spreading green of the racecourse he saw the fleet horses, heard the beat of galloping hoofs, and sniffed the powdery dust, keen with ammonia, about the weighing paddock, somehow he lost control of himself. He loved a horse, and with the strange perversity of those who attach themselves to that most simple-minded of four-footed creatures, this narrow, self-contained, money-making youth, grew wild at the sight of half-a-dozen horses stretching over the sward towards the goal. He was a 'straight' gambler, always backing his favourite-calling out the odds when the jockeys, in scarlet and rose and orange took their horses to the starting-post-nay, even during the race itself. He was mad, for the time being, and that night he had a vision of how it was going to finish. He saw himself in a prison yard, tramping round in a long procession of convicts, all in suit marked with the broad arrow.

The morning of the day after the race, Jacob Romer, pale with sleeplessness, took some papers down to a little shyster lawyer in East Dene, to whom he was known, and came out again with money in his pocket-but money for which he had paid a price that beaded his brow only to think upon. However his cash balanced when, at half past twelve on Saturday, that very afternoon in fact, his uncle Gorm came to cast the eye that was never yet cheated over his nephew's accounts.

When Mr. Gorm went Jacob Romer drew a long breath, and sat down at his desk, with the simulacrum of a task before him. But instead he bit the bone handle of his pen, and thought-thought-

only thought.

Yes, it must stop. This was the end. But down within him very deep, solemn as a knell, the words rang from heart to brain and from brain to heart-say from Will to Desire and from Desire to Will-‘You-will-do -it-again -you-will-do-it- again!’

And Jacob Romer, iron-willed and ice-cold in every other direction, knew that he would. That is, unless-!

The next day, which was Sunday, found him pacing up and down before that little Thorsby Sunday School.

He was communing with himself.

‘Married men have not these temptations-married men go home quietly at night. They read, they study. They have regular meals, which is already something. They have a reason for keeping straight-wife and children, home and position.

Jacob Romer, it is the gaol or the altar, my friend! Better marry than get a life sentence for forgery- for that is how it will end.’

Never perhaps was the course of a man's life-and incidentally also, a woman's-so coldly determined. Jacob Romer took to marriage as he would have resolved to follow a disagreeable but necessary course of medical treatment. After all, the cure was the thing. He would regenerate himself-he, Jacob Romer. God was not in his thoughts-not the God within him, the Speaking Spirit which is in every man. He ruled Him out. Jacob Romer took all the credit. ‘I will do it,’ he said. ‘I will break with the danger, I, I, I.’

But for all that Jacob Romer was above all things a man of action, and he showed it that Sunday afternoon. He paced the pavement opposite, noting

the children racing and tumbling as to a feast, in the direction of the Sunday School. Others (boys mostly) were led to the door by anxious parents, only to escape at the last moment, on the wings of the wind, in the direction of the river and the ships.

The teachers began to arrive, his pale tall girl one of the first. She remained, however, only long enough to lay a wrap and some books within, and was out again to commence her house-to-borne visitation. She plunged down an alley, caught three dirty urchins, and debouched into the main road with a growing tail. So that when she reached the schoolhouse she was at the head of a procession of seven girls and four boys, all well under the age of six. She must be, of a certainty, the teacher of the infant class. That, thought Jacob Romer, betokened domesticity. It was a good augury. Still better the next.

The tall girl disappeared for a moment, after a pause in which it was manifest that she was delivering a little lecturette. The uplifted forefinger, menacing, said as much. Though Jacob could see that it intimidated nobody. Good again! No self-will.

She would do as Jacob Romer ordered. He should have no difficulties of any kind. Better for him if she had.

Presently the infant mistress reappeared. She bore a cake of soap, a sponge, while a rough towel was over her arm. Then the line of small five-year olders began to swerve and dodge. They got one behind the other. There were cries of 'Come out o' that, you Joe!' 'Please, mother washed me juss 'fore I come! She did indeed, ma'am!'

But nothing availed. In a very business-like way,

as one used to the task, the tall girl called them forward one by one, and in spite of their protests, washed (or rewashed) her flock, paying special attention to the eyes, all screwed up into twists for fear of soap. Furthermore, she behaved like a very Stanley in the trackless wastes of Darkest Africa behind their ears!

Still, not one cried and not one refused the ordeal. Indeed, each stood to attention so soon as their own scrubbing was done, and enjoyed to the full the sufferings of their comrades-as good little Sunday School children ought to do.

'Good and better!' thought Jacob Romer, as he halted a moment on his heel to peer through the gate of the playground. Whereupon a tall boy, acting the part of janitor and magnifying his office, shut the door in his face, but Jacob, for once nothing angered, only murmured, 'She has enough firmness to manage children, what can a man wish for more?'

He congratulated himself that he was not the prey to any foolish sentiment, such as ignorant and youthful penons call 'love.' He never did anything more calmly in his life. He was suffering from a disease, that was all. He had diagnosed it-he had found the remedy, and now he was going to apply it.

He stepped all the way to the corner of the road, where Newcastle Highway ran long and straight to the horizon, with its length almost clear of the week-day traffic of waggons, and the pavements only encumbered by a few Sunday strollers, and belated school children in their best array.

He discovered that the street was named Ryan Street, and so by a simple reasoning process, the building which interested him would be called Ryan

Street Sunday School.

'Good,' he said, after a little. 'I will go and look up that superintendent.'

He fumbled in his pockets for a card. His name was good introduction in Thorsby and the neighbourhood. People were wont to look twice at a card with 'Jacob Incubus Gorm Romer' upon it. He heard the hymn rise and fall-the scuffling hush of the prayer. Then to his ear came the scurry and drumming clatter of the classes dismissing to their work. He let this settle a bit, and then strolled to the door. With a roll-book and a sheaf of papers in his hand the Superintendent, a small, eager, black-eyed man, was bolting across the little bricked court-yard when Jacob stopped him, big and strong.

'You are the Superintendent of Ryan Street Sunday School?' he asked. The quick, bird-like little man nodded, caught in mid-stride and slowly letting the arrested front foot sink to the ground. Jacob put the card back in his pocket.

'Then, since we are face to face,' he said, 'I need not trouble you with this piece of pasteboard. I am Mr. Jacob Incubus Gorm Romer.'

'Ah,' said the Superintendent, flushing, 'the nephew of--'

'Precisely,' Jacob cut him short, recognising him as a clerk and collector under the Thorsby Board of Guardians. 'I have been much interested in your work here, having to pass this way to my uncle's offices from my rooms--'

'Ah, indeed! Delighted! What can I do for you?'

The Superintendent scented afar off a subscription for struggling Ryan Street, and the nephew of their ground landlord was certainly not to

be bowed to the door like the first comer.

'Would you like to see our work in action, sir?' Jacob would, and in a minute he was being introduced to Miss French, 'who so ably and conscientiously teaches our infant class.'

As they went out Jacob, as if impressed by the long array of awe-struck chubby faces, all now clean, remarked, 'That is a difficult task, who did you say was the young lady teacher?'

'She is a Miss French,' said the Superintendent. 'Her father is a retired country post-master and schoolmaster. She has been well brought up, sir, and lives in Cliff Square.'

'So I see, so I see,' said Jacob, meditatively.

He glanced at the other departments, said some kind things as to arrangements, asked the Superintendent to allow him to send him a cheque in aid of the funds, and got away, much more expeditiously than the Superintendent had expected. He thought he had captured a sympathetic listener for the whole hour-and-half. He might even be persuaded to give them a little 'closing address.'

The Superintendent was always on the look-out for new material of that sort.

But Jacob was gone, and Ryan Street saw him no more, though he sent the cheque in due time, ill as, at the moment, he could afford it.

But he found his way to Cliff Square. He met Miss French on the Newcastle Road, and claiming acquaintance, walked home with her, asking questions about her class. Her home proved to be a little eight-and-sixpenny cottage belonging to his uncle's firm, which, but for the cheapness of the rent and the fact that it was attached to a similar

one on either side, would fain have called itself a 'villa,' and so had its rent raised to ten-and-six.

Jacob was pleased with the ex-schoolmaster, equally so with his wife, both frail old folks. They were wrapped up in their daughter. Neither mixed with the neighbours, hardly knowing them even by sight, so carefully had they kept themselves to themselves.

When he got out and was pacing slowly back, Jacob who never saw any difficulties and always looked well ahead, murmured only to himself, 'Wood Green- yes. Wood Green would do!'

And it turned out so. Step by step, as he planned the matter, the young man's imperious will drove the thing through. It was manifestly impossible to say a word to his uncle, who would have cut him off for a young fool making a misalliance. But Jacob knew better. He was no fool. He knew very well what he was doing. Wood Green was a little hamlet where property was cheap, three miles from Thorsby, but there was a railway station quite convenient. In the summer Jacob had the choice of returning by steamer to a pier within easy walking distance. Above all it was also on the 'other side of the water' from his terrible uncle.

As for the feelings of Caroline French, or her future interests, these did not matter. She was a step in the advancement of Jacob Romer. That, doubtless, should be sufficient for her.

CHAPTER NINE

JACOB 'S LADDER TO SUCCESS

So the home was arranged, the marriage made, and so far as Jacob Romer was concerned the success of the venture was immediate and complete. He encountered the little house at Wood Green, the neat garden, the well-planned meals, and the kindly eye of his young wife every night with a certain fresh surprise. They were a recently acquired part of his estate. Somewhat riskily he had invested in them, and he meant that they should yield him a certain definite return. Nor was he deceived.

In a month he could pass a race-course, or an array of swathed horses going out to the exercise-paddock without a quickening of the pulses. He even paid for admission one day to the Grand Stand at the Thorsby Spring Races, and came away without betting. He did this as a test-case. Having won, he could certainly win all along the line. His purpose with Caroline his wife was therefore served.

Oh, of course, Jacob Romer would do what was right by his wife. Small fear of that-only, she must in all matters, great and small, submit herself to his imperial judgment as to what was best.

And this Caroline did. And not only for herself, but she so worked upon her father, the feeble retired postmaster, and her mother, the silent house-mistress, that from their lips came no murmur of complaint.

Their daughter was married-well married-they told their friends. She lived at some distance, but

came regularly to see them. No, it was not a rich marriage. The young man was a well-doing lad, and in time would do better. But for the present, well, no doubt it took the young folk all their time to make both ends meet. All the while Caroline knew no more of her husband's affairs than if she had been the spaniel that yapped at his approach, then hid from his up-lifted cane under the red currant bushes, just now bursting into leaf. Some wives there are who do not wish to know such things; who take bite and sup, hearth-fire and clothing, purse and payment as their right, without for a moment caring to know aught of the struggles, disappointments, anguishes, and the long working hours which have produced for them these necessities and luxuries.

Caroline was not one of these. She would have sympathised with infinite zeal, though with little knowledge, if Jacob had deigned to tell her anything. But as he did not, she was quite content to accept everything as 'just Jacob's goodness.' Her world, like the original one after the six days creation was 'very good.'

Especially was Caroline happy when little Vida Romer began to grow from a baby into a child. She had, of course, always loved her daughter-always given her the first place. But she had not let her husband see (or hear) too much of the small elf-like thing who cried but seldom, but when she did, almost rent the ceiling, screaming out her baby angers with clenched battering fists and features wire-drawn into a myriad puckers.

Now like her parents in Thorsby, Mrs. Jacob Romer, in the little house out at Wood Green, kept herself to herself.' More than that, so far as in her lay, she kept her baby to herself. She had a subtle

sense that men like her husband did not care to be troubled with little red-mottled morsels, liable to perform shrilly unrehearsed vocal music at quite uncertain intervals. So if Jacob Romer saw little of his wife, coming home late in the spring gloamings, and going forth early in the keen, easterly-blowing spring mornings, he saw still less of his daughter Vida.

Afterwards he meant, of course, to do something for them. But in reality, their role was played out when Jacob could deny himself a race-course, and the pleasure of staking more money than he could afford upon a favourite horse. For the woman and the child, personally, he cared nothing; at least, no more than he did for the cheap workman's watch which enabled him to get to the office in proper time of mornings, or the folded foot-rule he carried in his pocket to help him set and gauge his men's work. They were as tools, nothing else.

Then his uncle Jacob Incubus Gorm the First died, and he, Jacob Romer the Second reigned in his stead. For a long time before that, Jacob had been chiefly in Scotland, opening up the new Incubus coal and iron mines in which there were, as he had discovered, millions of money snugly packed away in certain rusty clods which were iron, and other black irregular rhomboids which came to the surface from the splendid coal-seams, midway between the pit-mouth and the iron-ore.

It was here, while opening the earth to let out these nuggets of rust and grime, that Jacob Romer had his earliest visions of another life. So far his own had only meant millions, and the ladder to them.

But whilst Gorm Castle was building, and the

Gorm estates were in course of acquisition, Jacob was brought into contact with several quiet, low-voiced men of long lineage, from whom the land was slipping away, even as the power of pit-and-gallows had gone from their forefathers. He met their women-folk also, at once proud and infinitely gentle, who had a cool way of asserting superiority that made Jacob's soul bristle like a hedgehog. They impressed him, nevertheless.

During these months his uncle still lived. He was compelled, therefore, to represent himself as an unmarried man; and it chanced that amongst others he met Miss Georgina Bunny, the sister of Sir Bulleigh Bunny, the impoverished baronet from whom he had purchased some of the Gorm estates, and with whom he was consequently constantly in touch.

For twenty years Miss Georgiana had been known to all the county as 'a most capable woman.' She possessed strongly marked traits, a masculine presence, and all the brains of the family had been settled exclusively behind her capacious brow and within her well-proportioned head. At least her only brother, Sir Bunny, had none. This last was a certainty.

There is no doubt that Miss Georgiana Bunny attracted the master of Gorm Castle—that is to say, Jacob Romer, very strongly. In her company, listening to her easy, careless, world-wise talk, he often forgot the little house at Wood Green, forsaken and neglected, and the wan wife who never troubled him with demands for money, or even for his society. Jacob Romer had never had a 'real lady' interested in him before, and the newness of the sensation enhanced the pleasure. From that time forth he

went no more south to the little home on the edge of Wood Green Waste. His foot never crossed the threshold. His daughter Vida grew up unknown to him, but for her part quite able to identify her father. For his portrait stood on the mantelpiece of her mother's room, which was also hers. If it had not been for hurting Caroline Romer's feelings, she would have scratched it as with the talons of a fierce young sparrowhawk. Indeed, with her proud alert pose, fierce eyes, her black circumflex eyebrows, and determined mouth (albeit that was red as a geranium) little Vida Romer certainly had an expression extremely like one of the lesser Falcons—the sparrow-hawk for choice.

Then came a week when the silent self-contained woman gave way. For nearly two months no remittance had come from her husband. Somehow the thought of appealing to her parents was a pain quite inexpressible. The thing itself seemed impossible. Caroline, who had taught so well her infant class at Ryan Street, loved her little girl far too well to leave her in the misery of dependence. She therefore took her in her arms and they went out to die. As a girl Caroline had often found her way to Chillingham High Cliff, where the new lighthouse was a-building. She had sat there and thrilled to the sound of the surges of the German ocean breaking hushed and hollow beneath.

'Where are we going, mother?' Vida questioned, none so sure of the meaning of these things. She had never been out on the sea-edge by starlight before. Nor was she content with her mother's answer that it was such, 'a nice night,' and they were 'going to take a bonny walk all by themselves.'

Then why not go into the town and see the

shops?' retorted Vida, practically.

But this was quite another thing, past all the docks and ships, across a weary common, then over the level crossing on the Clinton line, and so to the dark truncated mound on the sea cliff, bristling with cranes and scaffolding.

Then suddenly seizing Vida in a close embrace, and in hurried whispers beseeching her pardon for what she was about to do, Caroline crossed the road to leap out upon the black rocks and white foam far below. But as they went Vida struggled. She was taken with the quick access of fear which gives strength. She escaped from her mother and ran screaming along the cliff road.

A young man stepped from a light, hooded vehicle, which he had been driving. He caught up the little girl and pacified her.

'My mother! My mother!' she cried.

'And where is your mother?' asked Dr. Hubert Salveson, the young Thorsby doctor, for he was the man with the capoted vehicle.

'Yonder, yonder,' cried the child, 'she is going to jump into the tide. She tried to take me with her.'

Hubert Salveson paused a moment. The girl might be romancing, but again she might not. However there was no hesitation as to the young doctor's action. He reached the height of the lighthouse cliff only in time to see the waft of a white dress go over the cliff.

'Here, hold my horse!' he called out to Vida, for he had been driving alone by himself. The girl sprang to the mare's head. As he rushed after the vanishing drift of white, Hubert Salveson recalled the time when his brother and he used to come bird-nesting there; his brother to sit on the cliff top and name the

eggs. He remembered the ledges. They were in series, if he mistook not one below the other, thick grown with gorse and heather. He doubted if anyone with the worst intentions in the world could leap far enough out to fall clear into the tide beneath.

Nevertheless he let himself down, his fingers gripping the ledges of rock. He felt for the next shelf with his feet, for he was a married man now, and had no right to play fast and loose with his life.

Presently he was on firm standing ground, and could catch a glimpse of the creepy phosphorescence far beneath, where the breakers fell, flooded white, and retired roaring sulkily. For the space of a long minute he could discern nothing distinctly. Then on the same ledge, but a little beneath him, he made out a lump, huddled and indistinct, but plainly human. Living also, as he found the next moment. It was, however altogether impossible for him to lift up Mrs. Romer higher than his head, and Vida could not assist him. He, therefore, called to her to go and fetch assistance wherever she could find it.

'Jump in the trap and give the mare her head!' he shouted. 'There is no time to lose.'

It was a pity for all the world except perhaps for the being of this story, that the help which Vida brought back was no other than her own uncle, Dr. Thomas Romer, of Thorsby, a man like-minded with his brother Jacob, and the particular enemy of Dr. Hubert Salveson.

And from this ill-omened meeting flowed many things.

Among others, Dr. Thomas Romer wrote to his brother that his wife was definitely mad, and that she would really be much better in an asylum where

she could be taken care of. She suffered from suicidal if not homicidal mania. The advice jumped altogether with Jacob Romer's humour. Tom was ready to assist him, on the usual terms as arranged between the brothers. But what to do with the child was the question. Tom Romer called her a 'young wild cat,' and steadily refused to charge himself with her on any terms.

After the brief adventure of the 'Poor Side' of Thorsby Asylum, the removal to a certain distant dependency of the great Gorm properties in Scotland was planned. So that there wife and daughter could be kept well under the eye of the husband and father, without being allowed to show themselves too much in public.

Jacob's scheme, as vaguely outlined in his head, was simply to isolate his wife till-well-till death might release him of his burden. As to his daughter, well, he would see. For the present there was no need to disquiet himself about her.

But by this time he had taken James Kahn, an adventurer of whom no one knew even the nationality, as his confidant and second-in-command. And James Kahn thought he knew a quicker way to rid his master of his burden, and at the same time clear his own way to the heirship of the possible Incubus millions.

He planned therefore the scuttling of the Good Intent and the abandoning of the woman and child on the night of the storm. The crew were first sent off by themselves, while the Captain and Kahn landed with their boat farther down the coast-only the two of them saved. Kahn did not lose sight of his, accomplice till he had seen him safe on his way to the Argentine Republic, with a couple of hundred

pounds in his pocket, the payment of which he grudged, but considered a great investment.

After that James Kahn felt secure till he saw the girl he had counted dead stand by the door of Dick Finnan's cottage at Glebe End. Mordecai was once more at Haman's gate, and what is more, he had a daughter with him-though only an adopted one.

CHAPTER TEN

CHOIRS AND CHRISTIANS

In spite of being 'Kirks' the three churches dwelled in unity-that is, for the most part. To remark that competition was severe is only to say that they were Scotch and Presbyterian. But the usual truck- and-barter of sporadic discontent was ruled out. After all, they were almost equally proud, and with about equal reason.

The Auld Kirk, the Kirk of the original Kirktown, still stood-modernised indeed, but with its ancient bell-tower erect to witness in its reverent age-to the exact spot where three centuries ago they burned the last of the Kirktown witches. The Auld Kirk of Scotland was the mother of a brood of children who had set up for themselves. But still, after all they were children to be proud of.

The 'Kirk of Forty-three,' was known as the Valley Kirk, just as the Cameronian was the Hill Kirk, and that of the 'Establishment' the 'Kirkyaird' Kirk.

But the haughtiest sect, the most austere, the particular assembly of the stalwarts who had never bowed the knee, was, of course, the Cameronian fold-a Kirk of the martyrs indeed, set on the Hill which could not be hid. The very names of the three Kirktown ministers were held to be significative.

For the Establishment was pastored by the Reverend Angus Lamont, who to a vague dry official theology added something of Celtic fire and true poetic sensibility. He was a man who would always be young, boyish at heart, not easily taking offence

nor meaning to give it, but with an unruly evil of a tongue which frequently brought him trouble.

John Fowler was the Valley Kirk minister, a learned man and a fine preacher, living perhaps too much upon the mountain-tops of thought. But he educated his congregation, and added thereto daily. For his word was with power, and to him duty had become well-nigh a fetish. Bodily he was trained fine, perhaps too fine. For a mind like John Fowler's, vivid, alert, unsatisfied with anything merely obvious or received, needs a solid bodily envelope to support it. A hard-driven engine ought to have the support of extra-solid bearings and bedplate. For the rest, Mr. Fowler was dark-eyed, alert, vivid, and sadly shy with strangers, and indeed, with all whom he instinctively felt incapable of understanding him. Yet, curiously enough, he was at home with all working folk. The common people heard him gladly. However abstruse his subjects of discourse, there was always a nail of fact or principle to join them on to everyday life. Mr. Fowler carried his weight of learning 'lightly, like a flower,' and few who met the rather dreamy and distant man would have guessed at the swift, keen insight which went directly to the heart of a problem, uprooted fallacies, and detected the true gold grown dim under the defilements of street corners and the mire of thronging pavements.

Lastly the Kirk on the Hill was ministered to by the Reverend Benjamin Irongray. He was the youngest of the three and a bachelor—a man of strict views and stricter life, grown a little disheartened from long battering the cold iron anvil of his people's belief. No melting pots for the faith for the Ironsides. No refiners' fire for the seven times repured gold! The congregation on the hill was 'the People,' and

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well it knew it. And so, sometimes, to his cost, did their minister.

To this congregation Jacob Romer nominally belonged. A defender of vested rights, an upholder of law and order, he would naturally have been found in the Establishment. But something akin to his own grim nature commended itself to Jacob Romer in the austere and undiluted Calvinism of the Gospel according to the Martyrs.

'If a man is saved, he is saved, and there is no more to be said,' so Mr. Romer argued in his rare theological moods, 'if he is lost-well, it was so arranged in the Councils of Eternity. Either way, the man has no responsibility in the matter. An excellent doctrine. I conduct my business on these principles, and I expect you, Kahn, to do the same. Promote a man or discharge him. But never give him a reason. Every going concern ought to have but one head, stern, infallible, irresponsible-the Incubus Pits just the same as the Universe.'

So Jacob Romer gradually became a power in the Kirk on the Hill, but the minister Benjamin Irongray was undismayed. For he feared not the face of man -save only his session a little, and his choir a great deal. In which he much resembled other ministers.

Now all choirs are full of the ancient Adam and the little less ancient Eve-Scottish mixed choirs especially. It was the minister's mother who was directly responsible for the Cameronian choir in Kirktown. Mrs. Irongray had been born out of the purple, a mere U.P. brought up under Burgher ministry. So, of course, she knew no better. Bitter were the conflicts before the Kirk on the Hill would submit to receive a choir.

The minister did not want it. The precentor did

not want it. The Session did not want it. Jacob Romer foamed at the idea. But little Mrs. Walter Irongray, with her wire-drawn old-maidish ways, the face of the mother of the 'only child,' beat them all just by sticking to it. But forming the choir was easier than running the choir when formed. That Indian institution called caste is as powerful in Kirktown as in all other Christian countries.

The best voice in the congregation was that of Vida Bryan, who sat alone in Dick Finnan's pew when Dick took the head of the Elders' seat, just under the precentor's forsaken desk. He conducted the choir now with his back to the congregation, and there were those who felt that a glory had passed from Zion. Still, in the main, the minister's mother had her way. But Vida Bryan also had a will of her own, and having a light blouse for the summer, she declined to change it at the bidding of Mrs. Walter Irongray, for 'something dark and respectable.'

So it came about that a certain young man of broad shoulders, energetic physique, and quite unaccustomed to church going, found himself Sunday after Sunday in the Kirk of the Hill, in close proximity to the white blouse and white-and-lilac blossomy hat, which spread a spring like freshness about the pew of old Dick Finnan, distinctly noticeable within a radius of ten yards, not counting the gallery.

On the other hand little Miss Nunsby's father was a New Religionist (the tenets of which sect varied month by month according to Mr. Nunsby's liver), and so he went nowhere. But little Miss Nunsby frequented the Kirk of the Hill, where she mostly disagreed with the sermon, but comforted herself by looking at Vida-her Vida.

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'Their choir, bah!' exclaimed Miss Nunsby, after the music lesson was over, one fine afternoon in early autumn, 'don't speak to me of their choirs. They want to be thought fine singers and to sit peacocking on the platform. Besides, there's the happiness of quarrelling with the precentor, and the summer choir trip into the bargain; you know the announcement in the Kirktown Journal always says 'accompanied by their friends and sweethearts.' Are you going to join?'

'Ugh,' said Vida, 'don't make me shudder!' 'You needn't,' said the little music mistress, with something of her father's irony, 'you will have to do it now. The minister's mother is joining, and all the great people—even Miss McTartar of the paper-shop.'

'The one they call Cream o' Tartar,' said Vida, smiling languidly.

'Yes, Creamie McTartar; her real name is Isabella. Then there's Mrs. Homiman from the livery stables, and the foremen's wives and the butcher's daughter. These are all 'ladies.' How they will get on with the others, who are only village girls, I don't know.'

'Surely they will not quarrel on Sundays?' said Vida, with something of hope in her tone. The Kirk on the Hill was occasionally a dull place during the league-long diets of worship.

'Won't they though!' cried little Miss Nunsby, 'the newcomers will snub the 'girls' and 'shop-women' because, of course, they are ladies. They do not stand behind a counter, but only keep house for their fathers and brothers, who do. The 'girls' will take the best front-row seats, by getting early to church, just to spite the ladies. And the whole will be blamed on the precentor. It will be a marvel if the minister manages to keep out of it. He won't, if

his mother joins the choir.'

'But why does he let her?'

'Who, Mr. Irongray?' little Miss Nunsby sniffed, 'that shows that you don't know the minister's mother very well.'

'She always is very pleasant whenshe calls here.'

'Yes, Vida,' her friend smiled as she spoke, 'but then you are not her son.' She allowed time for this to sink in and then continued.

'A manse,' said Miss Nunsby, 'is of course a little out-work of Eden, or ought to be. But Mrs. Irongray sees to it that if Benjamin does not do as she wants, the house shall be something very different.'

'I think you are unkind,' said Vida, 'even if it were true, you should be sorry. It must be dreadful to have your illusions shattered.'

'Ah, I never had any,' said little Miss Nunsby, somewhat bitterly, 'nature and my father's teaching settled that for me.'

She shrugged her higher shoulder ever so slightly as she spoke. Whereupon Vida rushed at her, the tears welling promptly from her eyes.

'Ah, cruel! cruel!' she cried, 'to speak so of yourself, and to me, who love you so!'

Little Miss Nunsby held her off a moment, quivering between love for her darling and general contempt for the world's inequalities.

'Do you love me, I wonder?' she said, thoughtfully. 'Can anyone love a thing like me? I would be so happy if I could only know!'

'I shall prove it, unbeliever!' cried Vida with wet eyes.

'Oh, you will get married,' said Miss Nunsby, 'and then it will be all over, except, perhaps, a cup of afternoon tea once a fortnight, if you live in the

neighbourhood.'

'You shall see, you shall see!' answered Vida. 'I would not for a hundred husbands, that any thing should come between us.'

The little music teacher clasped her friend, gratefully enough. But in her heart she said, 'It is not the hundred husbands, but the one that I have cause to fear.'

The entrance of the authoritative Mrs. Walter Irongray into the choir of the Kirk on the Hill did not produce all the effect the good lady intended. Her precious but too docile son was still worried.

Regularly the precentor gave in his resignation to the Session once a month at their statutory meeting.

Still after all something was effected by their staid presence. The young men behind did not pass voice lozenges wrapped in declarations of affection to the girls seated in front of them-which custom was not only unseemly in itself, but more so because frequently the bulls-eyes dropped out and rolled like marbles off the platform on to the heads of the elders sitting beneath.

These venerable and duly ordained men really ought not to have been assured that 'Sugar was Sweet, and So were They.' The information was as erroneous as it was uncalled for, and a recurrence of the motto on a communion day nearly led to the abolition of the choir altogether.

But again, after Mrs. Walter Irongray entered the choir, her son was certainly not annoyed every minute during his sermon by some chorister turning round with a half-concealed yawn to look at the clock. This was an implied reproach that the minister could ill bear. Nor did they whisper so much, neither giggle nor nudge, nor yet let fall

Bibles with clasps.

I do not mean that these things actually ceased. They can only cease when the earthly praise of the lower sanctuary merges into the higher and heavenly. Still, there was a difference, and a difference too on the right side.

Jacob Romer had a pew all to himself in the Kirk on the Hill. It was a square box-seat, and was distinguished from all others by showing no dogs' heads, or ships, or railway engines, or caricatures of the officiating minister scratched with a nail on the paint. This was because no boys ever profaned that solemn enclosure. Even at evening service: when the Kirk was indifferently lighted, and the gallery entirely closed, it was never invaded. The very Muirheads, the show 'bad boys' of Kirktown, would have shuddered to think of defiling it.

From it Jacob Romer watched over the minister's theology, the service, and the congregation. And it was from thence that he first remarked Vida Bryan's presence in Dick Finnan's seat, and recalled the girl who had been already pointed out to him by his brother on the way to Pit No. 2.

'Thomas always was a fool!' he growled. But, nevertheless in his general survey of the congregation his eyes sometimes returned questioningly to the quarter where Vida sat alone, a little to the left, farther down the church, in a plain, uncushioned pew. For directly behind her, only the interval of one seat separating them, sat Mr. Romer's best underground engineer, Mr. Ludovic Morris.

The autocrat of the Incubus Pits was wont to eye the young man murkily for some time. Then his thin lips twitched into the ghost of a smile, thin and

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faded, indeed, but still a smile. And he added, still thinking of his brother, 'And it strikes me that Vic Morris is another!'

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE PRIVET HEDGE

'I am supposed to be like my father,' Philip Calmont, the doctor's third son, was saying to little Miss Nunsby, 'so everybody expects me to run about crying, 'Ha, ha,' and slapping people on the back!'

'The eye that mocketh at his father, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out!' rejoined Miss Nunsby, punctuating with the quick gesture of her pretty hand, which she used to throw the thread the way she wanted it to run. Miss Nunsby kept her own father, as well as most of the Healthy Family in stockings. To knit came as natural to her as to breathe. And Phil Calmont liked to drop down to the small cottage by the abandoned smithy which Mr. Nunsby occupied, apparently in order to watch her do it. There was a garden behind, and from the back of his father's orchard Phil had only to cross a couple of fields and open a low-arched lych-gate with a leather hasp, to find himself in the summer-house beside the quiet knitter with the sharp tongue and the helpful heart.

Perhaps he went rather too often, considering the capacities of Kirktown for gossip. But he talked mostly about Vida, while Miss Nunsby smiled and knitted. He too had his hours of philosophy, this quiet youth.

'Why do you come here?' Miss Nunsby asked him sometimes, 'the rest will be over the wall talking to Vida, and you know you would rather be there!'

'Yes,' murmured Phil, lazily crossing his long legs,

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and plaiting his hands together, with his head in the hollow of the palms as he leaned back against the hedge. It was mixed of privet and thorn, and to recline upon it unpricked meant some care and adjustment. But Phil had had a long experience of the Nunsby's hedge. He knew it to the last thorn spine, took things gently, and never kicked against the pricks.

'Yes, no doubt. They will be talking at her and through her and across her, and all at a time. But I would rather come here and--'

'Talk about her!' put in Miss Nunsby. 'Verily, I am more than human. But go on, you amuse me, Phil!'

Philip Calmont, nothing loath, stretched out his legs to their utmost, accommodated his head more deeply into the privet hedge (with possible spines), and exposed his philosophy.

'Queer place, Kirktown,' he said, waving the point of his mended boot in the air, 'Incubus is our god, and Jacob Romer is his prophet. We all live by the pits; the ministers up yonder (he pointed with his finger to the ridge which was called Mount Zion because it was crowned with alternate kirk and manse). My father and all of us get our living, our schooling and colleging, our meat and drink (and a lot of these!) out of Incubus, Gorm, Romer & Co., of the Incubus workings. Your father's Sunday hat, and the bread he eats, the needles you are knitting with, the yarn that you toss every moment across your arm to clear the ball in the side-pocket of your apron (very pretty it is)-everything comes from Incubus. Why from Incubus?

'Because we work for Incubus!' said Miss Nunsby, simply.

Philip, who did the thinking for the Healthy

Family, and kept the results to himself, only nodded. After all, that was what it came to. They were put on earth to work, and it was no use arguing the matter. Incubus was as far out of reach of their complaints as if they had been overburdened ants, working night and day for the formic community.

More than that, as yet Phil Calmon had done but little work himself; to dream had been his vocation, and there was quite an easy chair marked out, green, elastic, adjustable as an air cushion (due care being taken to evade the pricks) in the privet hedge of the summer-house at Nunsby's cottage.

'Incubus holds us all within a barbed wire fence,' continued Phil, 'and James Kahn does the driving. It is not very hard in our time, but when we have all married one another--'

'Oh,' cried little Miss Nunsby, with a twinge of helpless bitterness, 'we are going to do that, are we? I should be glad to know my fate.'

'Well,' said Phil, quietly, 'I am only exposing the situation, of course everybody can't marry Vida Bryan, can they?'

'No, of course not,' said Miss Nunsby, and her hand trembled as she tossed the thread. There was a knot on the heel of that sock; it was for Phil to wear, and he had well earned the blister which resulted.

'So the rest of us must marry or bide single according to our fates,' Philip continued, tipping his chair dangerously on its hind legs.

'I fail to see the necessity,' retorted little Miss Nunsby, 'a great many people will need to be a good deal more serious before they can earn bread and butter for themselves, let alone for-for a family!'

Sharp, clipped, and dry fell the reproof, but Phil

Calmont never blenched.

'I know-I know what you think of me,' said Phil, with his usual philosophy, 'but I will do something one day. You shall not always call me 'only a long and lazy lout.'

At this Miss Nunsby blushed quite a pretty pink.

'You have not forgotten that?' she said. 'Ah, I only meant to stir you up a little. You are the cleverest of them all, Phil. Why will you persist in doing nothing?'

'My father is not rich,' Phil answered, quite calmly, 'all his money he makes from year to year. He has laid nothing by, and with two boys, Aaron and Hur, at the university, and the youngsters with a tutor, he has nothing to spend on me. Besides, the others all run in pairs, while I am a by-product, and must depend on anything that may turn up. The 'pater' actually wanted me to become a chemist, so as to be handy when Aaron and Hur took over the business; keep it all in the family, you know, ha ha!'

And he imitated his father's hearty manner, for which he was again reproved by little Miss Nunsby. 'It is horrible of you to do that,' she said, 'your father is indeed blameable for letting you run about like this, with nothing to do but scribble sonnets to Vida Bryan, or come down here to chatter about her while I knit. But just the same, Dr. Calmont is ready to do all he can for you!'

'Granted,' said Phil, cheerfully, 'only that does not happen to be anything which I can accept.'

'In my time,' said little Miss Nunsby, primly, 'boys were expected to do as their parents told them. There is, I believe, a commandment in your Bible to that effect.'

'Yes?' said Phil, interrogatively, 'but not to be a

chemist and druggist. Even Solomon who is pretty hard on us, draws the line at that. Why, I should poison the whole parish in no time, and you and my father would be hung for murder. Besides, you need not preach to me after all,-you are only a year or two older.'

'In years-yes,' sighed Rose Nunsby, 'but ages and centuries and aeons cannot express the difference in outlook.'

At this Philip Calmont moved uneasily. His great chair of privet, unused to such treatment, promptly interjected a thorn which pricked him sharply into consciousness. He erected himself and the balanced chair stood on four feet.

'What would you have me do, then?' he asked.

Little Miss Nunsby kept her eyes on her knitting. There was a great green peace in the hedged quadrilateral of the garden. Only overhead a hawk planed with slow balancings and swift short beats of the wing. Beneath the smaller birds collected and screamed with one accord, while motherly old hens in Mr. Nunsby's backyard, though for the moment broodless, nevertheless bristled up and drooped their wings over imaginary chicks as they gazed at the enemy, each with one bright eye turned skyward watching his movements.

'Do,' said Miss Nunsby, indignantly replying to Phil Calmont's question, 'do-why every man ought to be able to decide that for himself!'

'I daresay, in theory,' groaned Phil, dismally, 'but in practice it's jolly difficult, when you happen to be a man!'

The truth of this seemed to strike Miss Nunsby, but she recovered herself.

'Nonsense,' she cried, 'there are only a few things

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that women can do, but a man can do anything, be anything!’

‘For instance,’ suggested Phil, ‘King of England or Pope of Rome!’

‘Tut,’ said Miss Nunsby, ‘be sensible and set your mind on something.’

‘Well, then,’ said Phil calmly, ‘I set my mind on remaining here, becoming an author, and dwelling all my life among the green things and the faces of the kind folk I know and who know me!’

A quick flush passed over Miss Nunsby's face, something like sheet lightning seen pulsing up towards the zenith on summer nights.

‘Ah, you mean the green lawns about Glebe End Cottage and Vida Bryan's kind face?’

‘That has not been particularly kind, of late,’ owned Phil, still, however, shamelessly; ‘in fact I never get a chance to speak to her, except with all the Healthy Crowd fluttering after me!’

‘And pray what else can you expect?’ snapped the little music teacher, ‘you do nothing. You do not try to do anything. And every evening Vida has the advantage of comparing you with--’

‘With whom?’ cried Phil, excitedly dropping himself back against the privet hedge.

‘With Vic Morris!’

And at the name, prompt as an echo, Phil bounded erect with a sudden cry as if the biggest of all thorns had pricked him.

‘Vic Morris!’ he repeated. ‘Vic Morris; I will show her that I am as good a man as any Vic Morris in the world!’

And he went through the wicket gate rather rudely and without saying goodbye, though little Miss Nunsby looked after him, half amused and half

wistful. And Phil Calmont did not discover till he got to his room in his father's house, that a huge hawthorn spike had, indeed, pierced between the neck and the collar of his shirt. He thought it was the comparison with Vic Morris that was giving him pain.

But, at least, he had left some pain behind him, though Miss Rose in her garden suffered from no thorn-saw, it may be, from the fact that she had one shoulder higher than the other.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WOOERS AT GLEBE END

As Miss Nunsby had said, perhaps, in a moment of pique with Phil Calmont's easy-going ways, Vida Bryan, at old Dick's cottage had ample opportunity for making such comparisons as she might wish—with the stalwart figure and ready speech of Mr. Ludovic Morris, underground engineer, for a standard.

Vic Morris had dropped into the habit of going there frequently, nay, regularly, which is to say every night. It took an appreciable part of his dark hours down in the Dook, or those which he spent in the little boarded office above, to concoct the necessary excuses. But Vic was never at a loss. Besides, now that Dick was Inspector of the Ways in No. 2 Pit, he had become in a manner underground engineer's assistant. Vic needed to consult him quite frequently, and a young fellow like Vic could not expect an old man to be running after him all over the place, when he had just got home from a hard day's work. So Vic Morris called on him, which, as anyone can see, simplified things very much. Now kindness to the old is, according to Confucius, the pearl of all youthful virtues. Vic Morris found it so. He did not in the least regret being kind to old Dick Finnan, and any fairly careful detective could have found his deeply indented footsteps all the year round in the neighbourhood of Glebe End Cottage.

As for Vida, she could not tell whether she liked him or not. He was different from the others, that

was all.

'Sometimes,' she confided to her chiefest friend, Rose Nunsby, 'I think I like him. And then again I am quite certain that I don't!'

In truth the two quarrelled abominably. And that, according to all the authorities, was a good sign for the hopes of Mr. Vic Morris. For is it not written that 'Nippin' an' scartin' Are Scots folk's woin!'

But Vic Morris himself drew no conclusions. His strong, combative, even trampling nature, his genius in the conduct of men, the dauntless courage which led him always to hunt for the most difficult way of ascending a mountain, prevented him from feeling the least embarrassment in Vida's presence, or the least doubt about the issue; so soon, that is, as he had made up his mind to speak.

Now with a girl like Vida Bryan-as proud and self-opinionated as Vic Morris himself, with a feminine sensitiveness altogether unguessed at by the man, this was a most unsafe course to pursue. With girls accustomed to obey, it might have proved more successful. But as a general rule, a man, even when he knows himself to be the stronger, and certain that the victory lies with him, might to pass the honours over to the woman. Men do not now kneel ceremoniously and offer their all at the beloved's feet. But the well-advised find that this is still the right moral attitude. It pays the man because it elevates a woman in her own estimation. And if you do that sufficiently and continuously, there are but few things she will deny you. Which are the precepts of the grandfather of Sirach, the man of great diligence in gathering together all grave sentiments. Give therefore as much heed, young man, as if you had lived in Egypt under King Euergetes, in the

eight-and- thirtieth year of that never-to-be-forgotten monarch's reign.

So each night, in sweet grey spring gloamings, tinted tenderly lilac between the black branches of trees on which the green buds were doubtfully forming, in wintry 'forenichts,' blithe with the coming-and-going of lovers betwixt hamlet and hamlet, the snow crisp underfoot and the stars corruscating overhead, prompt to the moment Vic Morris appeared at Dick Finnan's gate, swung it back, tramped up the short gravel path, and knocked.

Generally it was Dick himself who came to the door. Every two or three months (according to the leave granted by the Commissioners of Northern Lights) it was a certain Mr. William Bryan, senior keeper of the Wolf Skerry Lighthouse, and as it were, a member of Vic Morris's own profession.

But it was never Vida who opened.

And the young man searched in his mind for the reason annexed to this fact. He ascertained that she opened to other people. Why not then to him? His assurance found the solution-one agreeable to his vanity. Yet Ludovic Morris was not vain. He cared neither for his appearance nor for the effect it might produce. But on the other hand his self-assurance was monumental, and the fear of man was not in him. Which is a good thing, doubtless. But then neither was the Fear of Woman-which is a thing infinitely ill.

Vic Morris was a strong man. His influence over the pit-workers was remarkable. He had no trouble with them. No tools or pieces of coal fell from a height on his head. Already he had averted more than one strike. But he was an advanced politician.

The 'Confidential' Kahn, and the General Managers, Hector McKill and Walter Grindling, never felt quite at home with him. Somehow they knew that he belonged by sympathy to the toilers. His sympathies were entirely with the forecastle. The afterguard, according to him, could always take care of itself.

Too brilliant at his work of estimating distances, directing new dips and shafts, to be thrown overboard, the higher personelle of the Incubus workings eyed him with distrust. Yet, in spite of the respect and even devotion the men had for him, Vic Morris awakened no great or enthusiastic love among them. He was a just man. He was on their side. What a leader he would make if, with all that he knew, and all that he could do, he were fully to cast in his lot with them!

But he neither attracted nor permitted any display of affection or admiration on the part of those under him. He would have regarded it as a breach of discipline. Still, the fact that he went nightly to see 'Dick Finnan's Lass' seemed to bring them nearer. For Dick worked alongside then, and was one of themselves. None doubted of the issue. Was he not Master Vic, who knew all there was to be known, and whom they would have followed to the death.

It chanced late one afternoon in April, a rainy April, when the trees dripped droopily on the dank turf, swelling it up with water like a sponge, and only the pine-needles pressed close in solid forty-year layers afforded a safe and dry passage to the cottage at Glebe End, that Vic Morris and Philip Calmont met there for the first time.

Hitherto Phil had been to the successful young engineer only 'one of the Doctors good-for-nothings.'

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Vic Morris had a thorough-going contempt for all kinds of talent which could not be practically applied.

He was fond of saying that brains could be expressed either in foot-pounds or pounds sterling, by which he meant either in work done or money earned. It is no wonder then, that to his sole friend, Mr. Irongray, of the Kirk, on the Hill he often expressed his contempt for the Calmonts.

'A vagrant brood, certainly, but quite harmless,' had been the smiling verdict of the Cameronian minister.

'Well, their father is sending them the quickest way to the devil,' Vic Morris had declared, 'they ought to be put to work. That would tame their vagrancy.'

Now for the first time he beheld a Calmont within striking distance. Phil Calmont was sitting quietly in the window corner, looking through the tendrils of last year's ivy and wondering at the little green dabs on Vida's rose-stems-dabs which would be 'Rambler' clusters one day-when Morris entered. They had not been introduced, but little that mattered to Vic Morris, who considered such ceremonies as only for weaklings 'suckled in a creed outworn.'

The engineer stood a moment in the doorway staring, his shoulders thrown back, his brows bent indignantly, and all his fair hair bristling like a lion's mane. He had the surprised angry look of some big dog who returns to find a little one (and a stranger) in possession of his bone and carpet.

But he did not leap upon Philip Calmont, who rose with his usual gentle quiet to his feet, and bowed, saying, 'Miss Bryan has gone out. Mr. Finnan has not yet arrived. I presume that you have

come to see him!

'Presume,' snorted Vic Morris, his temper suddenly breaking loose, 'I should think you do presume.

Who are you, sir, to dictate my comings and goings to me? If I choose to come here every night in the year what is that to you?'

To this Philip Calmont only replied, if possible more gently than before, that he believed that Miss Bryan would be back immediately. Then he re-seated himself and became absorbed in the growth of the geraniums outside the window. They were all moist with the spring showers. Having done his part and feeling quite sure of his position, he did not trouble his head farther about the quaint uncertain tempers of Mr. Ludovic Morris. After all, what more natural? He would not have liked such an intrusion himself, even from the rest of his family. But he was trying to act up to little Miss Nunsby's advice to do something for himself. So, characteristically, he was beginning with Vida Bryan.

The furniture of Dick's cottage was all of dull oak, which had descended to him by ordinary generation—the ancient settles and three-legged chairs polished at back and seat by centuries of hard worked home-spun, moleskin, and corduroy. Except at funerals broadcloth had never touched them. For a special chair was kept for the minister, covered according to age, with velvet, or haircloth, or cretonne. But furniture of that kind never wears out. Doubtless some remote Finnan, away back in the time of the Covenant, had made it—chair and dresser and four-poster, with adze and plane and turning wheel, to be in readiness for his sober Cameronian

bride. And, like their furniture, the Finnans had remained Cameronians ever since.

That night when Vic Morris and the doctor's third son were first brought face to face, Vic growling like an angry mastiff and Phil gazing serenely through the darkening window, the kitchen-parlour or house-place of Glebe End was full of quaint, moony reflections. Old oak furniture and panelling with firelight glinting on them conduce to mystery. The evening fire in preparation for Dick's supper burned on the hearth far back, and once Phil rose with his easy air to replenish it, which caused Vic Morris to spit like an angry cat.

'It appears to me that you know your way about - here, that is,' he said, sharply; 'but not so well in the world. I understand that you are the parish Doctor's son, that you set up for a man, though you do nothing, and are only a burden on your father!'

Phil looked steadily at Mr. Ludovic Morris, gently unmoved, but with the slightest curve of contempt on his short, upper lip. His face was always pale and now no more so than usual.

'You are right,' he answered, shifting a little round in his chair so as to rest his eyes deliberately on the broad shoulders of the engineer. 'Mr. Morris, of the Pits I think! Ah, I am right. Well, Mr. Morris, I am obliged to you for the interest you show in my affairs. My position, I admit, you state very truly. The alternative you are probably ignorant of, as ignorant as I am myself.'

This aroused Vic Morris. He stood in the firelight, vehement and energetic. He gesticulated. He even raised his voice, so that he could be heard out on the high road, forty rods away.

'What are you to do?' he cried. 'Why, man, Work!

Work! Work! When I was half your age, I was learning to run an engine in the daytime, out of school hours, that is- teaching in a night- school, feeding on the higher mathematics till I dropped, brow on my book, with pure sleepiness. Well, why did I do it? So that today there is no place in the face of the earth where I could not make a livelihood.'

'Ah,' said Phil, very quietly, 'I would that my lines had fallen to me in such pleasant places. But one must just do as one can. I have not been so fortunate as you, Mr. Morris. I have always had other people to consider.'

'Your own idleness, you mean, Master Philip Calmont,' cried Vic Morris, quite forgetting his manners, 'you like the do-nothing life. You are content to live on the hooks of your father-to render him half bankrupt, you and your brood, making him the talk of the place-'

At the first word of his father Phil Calmont had risen, pale, slender, and very stern. What would have happened in the next half minute cannot be imagined. For of course the lad was no match for Vic Morris, who could have crushed him between his hands. Though it is doubtful whether, even in his own opinion, he could have vanquished him.

But just then the inner door swung back, the one leading from the little back lobby which opened out upon the woods, the nearer shrubberies, and Dick Finnan's woodpile. Vida had entered quietly without either of the men hearing her, and in a moment the fat was in the fire.

She was dressed in a plain gown of blue serge, which moulded her figure like some natural leaf-sheathing of the spring. It was, however, merely her 'second best' dress; that which she put on in the

week-day evenings. She motioned Vic Morris to a seat. For a moment he did not obey, caught, as it were, in the loud empty echo of his own words. He realised for the first time that he had been speaking in that quiet kitchen as he would have done in the galleries of the mine.

He sat down. Vida waited a little, still in the twilight, standing near the door by which she had entered, her foot tapping impatiently and angrily. The firelight, having caught a nest of pine-knots, blazed up, and while the flame lasted neither of the men could take their eyes off her.

At last she spoke.

'Mr. Morris,' she said, 'you permit yourself to storm in this house as you might at the horses in some stable-yard. Is Dick Finnan under any obligations to you that you assume such a right?'

'Certainly not!' said honest Vic, hanging his head. 'Or am I?'

'Still less,' faltered Vic Morris, 'the truth is that I ought to ask your pardon. And I do. Mr. Calmont and I were having a little discussion- politics, you know, Miss Bryan, and I may have got rather warm.'

'I only know, Mr. Morris, that you have no right to shout in this house so that you can be heard in the public road. And now, Phil, what have you to say?'

She turned upon Philip Calmont, who had acquired the conviction that she had heard every word; which conviction, nevertheless, he kept severely to himself.

'It is a true bill,' he said lightly, continuing to stand up because Vida had not sat down. 'Mr. Morris and I were discussing problems of political economy, with personal applications.'

'How dare you tell me such a story, Philip

Calmont,' cried Vida, taking a step nearer to him, 'I heard every word. He grossly insulted your father and your family. If it had been me and mine, I...I should have had his blood!'

The words, reproduced instinctively from some sixpenny romance, sobered the unliterary engineer. But Phil Calmont only laughed. It seemed to him an echo of the daily speech of the twins, Willie and Wilhelmina. They were always on the war-path, thirsting for somebody's blood.

'Phil Calmont,' said Vida, sternly, frowning uproarious laughter, 'I thought you had more sense. And you Mr. Morris, be good enough to take your politics and your political economy outside, and do not either of you come back here till you have learned how to behave yourselves.'

'I beg your pardon!' said Vic Morris, stiff as a poker.

'I beg your pardon!' said Phil, bowing with his accustomed grace, the straw hat in his hand bowing also, and so low that Vida could see the light of the pine-knots shining on his boyish curls. As he passed the woodbox he threw on the fire a double handful of fir-cones, as if he had been fulfilling automatically a long-accustomed duty.

Then the two men went out together.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE MAKING OF A MAN

Old Dick was late at No. 2 that night. Even now he had not returned. The rain had ceased, and the wet gravel glistened as it crunched under their feet. Then came the compacted pine-needles of the Glebe End Avenue, that private road which Mr. Jacob Incubus traversed twice each day in his carriage. They felt kindly under foot, and upon their surface even Vic's strong 'K' boots fell silently as on thick Oriental carpets.

Curiously enough it was Phil Calmont who went first, alert to every sight and sound, without the least fear of the giant behind him, with whom he had cause to believe himself on bad terms. The big barn-owl he had christened Malachi, passed across the glade with a soft woof of feathers, as if his wings had been made of white crape. In the crotches of the dwarf thorns and among the alders of the ha-ha ditches, blackbirds scolded the disturbers of the twilight, raging and scuffling along their branches, each trying to knock the other off.

Then the two men ranged up a little, as Vic's long stride told, and the narrow arch of greening trees opened out upon a telescopic view of Kirktown and the Incubus pits. First a ruddy glare, from the blast furnaces over at the Dook Bank. Then a greenish 'skarrow' shot pulsing through the russet light, from the chemical works in the hollow beyond. All this was held and encircled by a sort of straw-coloured milky way which was the general gas-light

illumination of the town. But far away beyond the whirling and reversing silhouettes of the gaunt winding wheels and pithead fixtures of the Incubus workings, a single beam pierced the night at intervals, clear as a star, but infinitely greater. It was the electric flash of the Wolf Skerry lighthouse-beneath which, his eyes clad in the darkness of triple goggles, sat a certain red-headed Irishman, with two book before him-the Bible and 'Charles O'Malley.' And at that moment he was thinking of his duties as a foster-father, he was perusing the former. Billy Bryan was specially fond of the account of Paul's voyage in the last chapters of the 'Acts.' And his verdict was 'True courage-that's what I call it. Good men, every one of them! Please the pigs, Billy, ye will never have to do the like- knocking about them seas with never a lighthouse marked on the chart, or a decent man to keep the cogs running true, all the way from Blackwall to Bombay-not to mention that place Putty Holy, which is no seaport that ever I heard of. But all the same the Castor and Pollux is a very tidy name for a barque considering the times. I once sailed in her myself! Out o' South Shiel's it was, coast- wise, and the devil's own brat of a captain! But well found-oh, nobody could say that the Castor and Pollux was ill found.'

So while Billy Bryan meditated there, and the girl to whose support he contributed of his substance, peered through the dim window panes of the cottage, Ludovic Morris and Phil Calmont swung out of the black arch of the Glebe End entrance. They saw Mr. Romer's big iron gates like a double blotch of denser darkness on either side of them.They had never been shut since he took possession of the house.

'Well?' said Mr. Vic Morris.

'Well?' returned Mr. Phil Calmont.

'You have nothing to say to me?' It was the giant who spoke.

'Nothing-pray have you?' It was slim Phil who answered.

Vic Morris considered a while. Instinctively they had turned away from the lurid glare of the town and works in the valley beneath them. They paced more slowly up the broad road which led towards the hills-and so at the last, after infinite adventure among hills of heather and sheep-dotted shoulders of turfage, cried over continually by plover and curlew, into England itself. But that goal was far away. Drove roads, post-roads, ancient inns, murderous sloughs of despond, hills of difficulty, guardian towns with faded Guilds, and volunteers and police constables instead of fencibles and town-watchmen-these all had to be passed-but at long and last there was England.

They went that way. The two men, successful and unsuccessful, youthful energy and youthful dreaminess, convoying each other, while Phil looked upward at the hills cut black against the sky, and Vic Morris, honest and arrogant, tried hard to humble himself. He would rather have led a forlorn hope than do it. Indeed the former would have been easy to him. By sheer force of will, he had been doing as much all his life.

But Vic Morris was a very strong man-so much so that he could even give in on occasion, when he found himself in the wrong. As the pit men said, 'He could own up, but it gave him a crick in the neck to do it!'

And indeed his throat was dry and his tongue

well nigh cleaving to the roof of his mouth, when at last he made up his mind to apologise -and that to the 'idle lout' whom he had scorned so lately.

'Mr. Calmont,' he said, turning squarely in front of the young man and thereby stopping him as effectually as if by his art of engineer he had blocked the road from side to side. 'I am here to ask your pardon. Down there I spoke like a fool-as no man has the right to speak to another-no, not to his brother!'

'And I-I answered as a fool. I beg your pardon!'

'Really we ought to go back and beg Miss Vida's,' said Mr. Morris with some irresolution, taking half a step in that direction.

'No,' said Phil, stopping him in his turn with an outstretched hand. 'She does not want us.'

He had no desire to face Vida again that night.

Vic Morris sighed. 'I daresay you are right,' he said, 'but, I say, didn't she dress me down? And didn't I deserve it?'

Phil kept silence.

'Oh, you may speak out-' said Vic, with a laugh which sounded a little hollow. 'I know I did. I hope I have enough sense for that.'

Phil knew that such knowledge was good for the soul, and still said no word. There was a lengthy silence. They passed the end of several farm loanings, and came out on the unfenced moorland, which ran in dark patches of heather and dead bracken blotted on a lighter ground of greyish bent grass up to the black splintered shale edges of Caiden Fell.

'I wronged you, and-that is not what I wanted to say, don't let's get down to book talk,' said Vic, swinging his arms contemptuously, 'you are one

man-I am another. I am your senior and I talked like a fool-like a young jealous ass. Don't think I want to intrude myself. But if you will tell me what you would care to do in the way of work-I will give you my advice, as if you were my brother. No, better than that-my brother is a beast. I would have nothing to do with him if he came begging to my office on his bended knees. Pshaw-more book talk? Well, what do you mean to go for?'

And somehow there was a ring of such sincerity in the voice of the young engineer, that Phil was moved by it. His ear, keen-set for arrogance or assumption, could find neither now in the speech of Vic Morris. So he set himself to tell what he had never told to any, save only to little Miss Nunsby in the summer-house surrounded with privet.

His father's struggle with so large a family, his absorption in his work, his generosity in the large, his carelessness and lack of thought in the particular, had resulted in his Phil's being left to one side, stranded in early manhood without a career. For the uncle who had promised to leave him his money, had died without a penny, and had to be buried at the Doctor's expense.

'That's good anyway!' interjected Vic Morris.

'It certainly was not good for me at the time,' said Phil, quietly. 'I had been carefully brought up to do nothing.'

'A great fortune does not necessarily spoil a man,' said Vic with severity, 'but a hundred or two a year ruins him without fail!'

'Then is there in your world no place for the thinker?' demanded Phil.

'Certainly-a great place-the first place,' the engineer exclaimed, 'if only he will think useful and

helpful things.'

'Salvation by machinery-the old story,- I know it,' cried Phil, 'man made in the image of God by the explosion of a beneficent gasometer, by the sun letting drop some argon, which changes chemically the minds of men-makes 'em greenish! Well, it may be hopelessly antiquated, but I confess I prefer an older evangel to that!-'Love your neighbour' will outlive all the chemistry of gases.'

'I don't know what you are talking about,' said Vic Morris, 'but I was wanting an office assistant, and I offer you the place. You have a good head, with plenty of brain space above your hat-brim. You have an ordinary education, I presume?'

'Very ordinary,' said Phil, 'except perhaps as to poetry.'

'Then the rest of your faculties have had a long rest. So much the better-you will come fresh to the problems. Only promise me, no poetry-not a thought of poetry between the hours of nine and five. After that, you can dribble anapaests all night long, if you choose I Come at six tomorrow and I'll tell you what to do before I go down to No. 2 for the day.'

Somehow the two men found themselves, as they passed Glebe End Cottage on their way back, shaking hands.

And there was old Dick Finnan just entering the avenue. Instinctively they stood aside to let him pass into the shadow, and then without a glance backward towards the lighted window of Vida's speckless house-place, they took their way towards the town and Phil's new work.

So it came to pass that Incubus and Co. began to weigh upon the shoulders of Philip Calmont, long accustomed to carry no heavier burden than sonnet,

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ode, and lyric-of which in his time he had accumulated great store, an infirmary, in fact, of the maimed, the halt, and the blind.

The next morning at half-past five Philip Calmont found himself awake and dressed in a wide, sonorous, empty house. The Doctor and all the Healthy Family were asleep. Some would sleep for hours. Others would come yawning down about eight. But all were equally ignorant that the third son of the house-idle, dreamy Philip had begun his life's career. It was a clear morning, with the sun showing well above the wavy outline of the Keir hills to the east.

The bells of the iron works were clanging, the conches blowing from all the pitheads far and near. Presently the night shift would be coming up, and it was Phil's duty to be down in the little office which had been erected near the descent of No. 2 for Vic Morris to do his paper work in. What he was expected to do, or how he was to do it, Phil did not know. But he knew that Vic Morris must necessarily spend a good many hours each day underground. And so, with a new kind of prevision not at all natural to him, he routed out and slipped into his pockets several dusty volumes of Todhunter, together with an old Colenso's arithmetic.

He was standing with his hands in his pockets, a little chill from his early rising, when Vic Morris arrived, his morning fold of thought double-barring his brow. Morris started at sight of Philip Calmont, and for a moment that youth thought that he was going to deny all knowledge of him. The next he nodded brusquely but kindly.

'That's right-you are on time,' he said, 'there is much to be done. See that file of books. These are

Patent Specifications. Run through all of them for the last fourteen years, and mark the places of everything that deals with the ventilation of mines.

I am going below. So long. I shall see you in the afternoon! You will find pens and paper about.'

And Vic Morris, without further instructions to his new aid, was gone. Phil found it very lonely, left to himself in that small wooden house-the German stove in one corner scrupulously clean, and the stovepipe only used to hang oiled paper copies of plans upon, the walls three deep in 'sections,' geological and topographical, coloured with the most death-dealing reds and far-reaching blues.

But Phil soon found paper and a blotter. He had a fountain pen in his pocket. He took a rapid glance through the volumes to get the scale of his work, and then lost himself for many hours. Phil Calmont had a natural quickness of understanding, and instead of merely marking the places in the volumes of reports, he added to each reference a brief resume of the special features of the invention, so far as he was able to understand them. He had a ready talent for sketching-roughly, but with sufficient correctness to convey an idea. He added, therefore, many jottings of apparatus, and when Vic Morris returned at three o'clock he found his new hand still at his work, quite a solid pile of notes skewered on the desk-and the last volume of the Patents' series in course of being digested.

He stood a moment in astonishment. Truly, it seemed that there were many things that he must take back. He did not speak at once, but while Phil continued his eager search, his eager finger scrambling up one page and down another, his fountain pen scribbling feverishly, and his mind

happier and more content than ever he had known it-Vic Morris picked up page after page. All was in order, every pertinent case numbered and analysed-the technical words, at the meaning of which Phil could only have the vaguest guess, written very plain-especially when Vic glanced at the unpretending drawings, each of which told its tale to his experienced eye, he could not refrain from clapping his pupil on the back with a hearty, 'You'll do-you'll do!' which was the best reward he could have made the worker at the close of his first day of business life.

'All that!' cried Vic Morris, heartily, 'I will wager that you did not take long over your dinner!'

Phil was aghast. It seemed that he had neglected a part of his duty.

'I forgot all about it!' he said, penitently.

'Great Stephenson,' cried the engineer, 'have you not had a bite?-You must take it now!'

'I forgot to bring any,' said Phil, with shame deeper on his face. 'You see I was so keen to get out of the house.'

Vic nodded. He understood that. He understood also how he had misjudged his rival. But he was by no means a man to waste time in mere sympathy. He banged the door, and took a score of strides to the foremen's canteen, from which presently he burst in with an armful of potted dainties, half a chicken, sufficient good bread and a pat of butter.

'There,' he said, 'I never saw such a fellow-to go without his dinner!'

And as the lad ate and drank, Vic looked over the notes he had ordered him to make, more perhaps as an exercise than anything else, and murmured softly to himself, 'there will not be such an engineer's

draughtsman and assistant anywhere, when I have done with him! No, not in Britain. Perhaps even an engineer some day!

And he watched him eat with something like a smile of pleasure on his hard face.

'Yes, I will make a man of him,' he said, 'and, if possible, an engineer. So that, if the beast beats me with-with-(he missed out the name) she will at least get a man, in spite of her ill taste.'

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CROSS QUESTIONS-CROOKED ANSWERS

It is characteristic of the two men that their new relationship made no difference to their rivalry with regard to Vida Bryan. Regularly every Sunday the broad shoulders of the underground engineer were to be seen towering above the devout in the Cameronian Kirk on the Hill. As often as not also, Vic walked home with her, especially when Dick Finnan, detained by his position as ruling elder, was unable to leave the vestry at once.

In the forenoon Phil Calmont, whose father was a pillar of the Valley Kirk, was of course, handicapped to some extent. But as every alternate Sabbath evening the Valley Kirk shut its doors in order to join congregations with the Kirk on the Hill, and vice versa, Phil was able to recoup himself liberally. But, for some reason best known to herself, ever since the night of the meeting in the cottage at the Glebe End Gate, Vida had removed the light of her countenance from both Vic Morris and Phil-not perhaps to the same degree, but still markedly enough to make the latter young man demand a reason.

And the reason she gave was certainly a curious one. They were walking slowly homeward-that is, in the direction of Glebe End by the 'short cut' through the woods. The tall trunks of the Scots firs, warmed by the westerly light, which filtered through couches of dew, moisture, and the promise of the night's rain, were chromatically graded from a deep purple

just above the roots, through deep red and orange, to a golden yellow immediately beneath the glistening blue green umbrellas of the crown.

The trees rose very high. Very little and lonely, as it seemed, Vida and Phil walked beneath them. But because of the souls within, the flitting thoughts, the imperious needs and vague longings, the quick play of sympathy, the give and take of speech, they were the true things of God, infinitely greater than all trees, than all His other works-at least on this earth on which they stood.

And while Phil made his plaint, Vida walked proudly alongside, carefully guarding a neutral ground of a good yard wide, between shoulder and shoulder.

'I don't see, Vida,' began Phil, 'what you can have against me. You treat me as if I were a dog!'

Vida shrugged her shoulders with her habitual careless contempt.

'There are dogs, and dogs!' she said.

'Meaning,' cried Phil, with petulance, 'that I am not one of the favoured-even considered as a cur.'

'You certainly do not need to be 'made of,' said Vida, 'you have had too much of that already--'

'Not from you!'

'No, I know better-from Rose Nunsby, among others, if you want to know!'

'She has told you--?'

'Nothing-do you suppose I would ask her?'

But I have eyes in my head, also ears! And-and I am not so sure but that you ought to be very much ashamed of yourself, Mr. Philip Calmont!'

'Ashamed of myself-why in all the world?'

Phil was genuinely astonished now. But Vida gave him no help. She only nodded resolutely, to

emphasise her position.

'Pray what have I done?' pleaded Phil, 'tell me!'

'You have spent a considerable deal of time in there, during the last year or two,' she said, looking carefully away in the opposite direction, 'and now, all of a sudden you have not been near Rose for weeks. If I thought it was the influence of-of Vic Morris-Mr Morris-I should have something to say to him that would take the eternal smile off his face.'

'But,' faltered Phil Calmont, quite overwhelmed by the unexpected accusation, 'I went to the Nunsby's house only to talk about-'

'I do not care what you went to talk about, or what excuse you made to yourself. The fact is that for months-years perhaps-you have gone there every day- every afternoon. I myself have seen you crossing the fields. Why, Master Phil, I could have set my watch by you-so exact you were. Many a time I did not go over to Rose's just because I did not wish to break in upon your tete-a-tete.'

'But Rose knew,' gasped Phil, 'she knew that I only went there-to talk about you!'

In a green glade mottled with the waving golden drift of slender Lent lilies the girl faced about. The sunlight was fair on her face. But the quick wrath which Phil knew so well had leaped up into the dark eyes. She had drawn back her small nervous hands and held them tight clenched by her sides, and a little behind, like an athlete straining for the start of a race. 'And you think that makes it any better!' she cried, 'even if it were true, Phil Calmont! You have gone there-to the Nunsby's-for years- always when Rose's father was absent!'

'I never thought about it, though it is true that I do not like her father!' put in Phil. Indeed, few

people did. But the fact made, at the time, no impression on the angry Vida. She swept on, over-leaping all obstacles in the pouring spate of her argument.

'She is not as other girls-you will say! (Phil tried to intimate vainly that he had said nothing of the kind). 'No, sir, she is not as other girls, my Rose. She is far better, far more unselfish, I am not worthy to be her friend, to have her love-her friendship. It is hard for me here even as it is-and it would have been altogether impossible without Rose. And now, you, Phil Calmont, whom I had looked to -whom I had expected to make Rose happy-you leave her alone for weeks and weeks-just because- (she dabbed hastily at her eyes) she has one shoulder little higher than the other. Why, Rose's heart is higher and truer a thousand times than yours, Phil Calmont. I would give up everything, if only I could be a little like her-so true, so generous, never caring a bit about self. And that a man-one like you, Phil Calmont, should toss her aside like a worn glove--'

'I did nothing of the sort,' pleaded poor Phil, 'indeed I never thought of such a thing--'

'You ought to have thought!'

'Well, ask Rose Nunsby herself-I will stand by what she says!' cried Philip, desperately.

'Oh, of course-Rose is too proud, too true, too loyal even to a thing like you ever to say a word- oh, my poor Rose!'

And the handkerchief went up again. It was one of Vida's 'on edge' days when a little went a very long way with her. Phil happened to present himself for sacrifice, that is all!

'But, Vida-'

'Don't call me Vida-I will not have it! I am not

Vida to you!

'Well, Miss Bryan, then,' said Phil, gently, 'I have only to bid you good-evening. You will not believe me when I tell you the truth. You will not even believe your own friend. Since I went to the pits to work in the office with Mr. Morris, I am often kept late. There is always so much to be done. My afternoons are not my own any longer.'

'But your evenings are!'

Then quite suddenly a little flood of colour mounted to Phil's cheek-bone. He was going to make his first mistake.

'You mean that I am not to come here-not to see you!'

Vida nodded. She was thinking of Rose's happiness. There had grown up in her heart something truly maternal, protective, for the little wistful girl, in whom even the casual eye distinguished something strange and elfish. She would, as it were, give Rose out of her abundance. She would also give her of her best-what it cost her most to part with. And with this in her mind, it was Phil Calmont whom she had selected for the sacrifice.

But now Phil was disappointing her, just when she had settled everything. You never could tell with men, she thought. Up to a certain point they were pretty much all the same. Afterwards-to a certain point also. But betwixt the 'before' and the 'after,' there is a neutral ground when they were apt to fly off at the wildest tangents. They cannot be persuaded to 'behave,' and certainly Phil was proving shamefully restive.

'No,' she said, 'you are not to come here. When you are not occupied with the duties of your office,

you had better go down and help Rose to keep her father in order. Play backgammon with him. Learn chess. Take him interesting newspapers--'

'But keep away from you,' said Phil bitterly, 'so as to leave the field clear for my betters!'

Vida stiffened herself, and her chin became like that of Mr. Jacob Romer when the pit delegates asked him for a general rise in wages.

'You mean?' she said, very low, the breath whistling, suddenly intaken, between her teeth.

'I mean Vic Morris-no other!' said Phil, looking at her eye to eye.

There was a moment of silence, so still that one heard the flapping of the rooks' wings as they came sailing back from their field work.

Then without a word or the slightest sign of farewell, Vida turned on her heel, and walked off home-wards through the tall ivy-beclambered ash-trees.

And though he watched her slender figure as long as possible, Phil Calmont knew better than to follow her. After she had disappeared he sighed very long, and turning on his heel, marched through the wood, vaulted the wall, and made a bee-line for the house behind the row of big old Lombardy poplars, where dwelt Rose Nunsby and her father.

As Phil had foreseen, Thurman Nunsby was at home, and being the assistant of James Kahn's chief enemy, it struck him that he must be careful as to his words with one allied so closely to the 'Confidential.' But Mr. Nunsby proved unexpectedly genial.

'Come away in, Mr. Philip,' he cried at sight of him in the doorway, 'your father has been my doctor for thirty years, and a rare good one he is. Never a

better anywhere, except Dr. Webb down at Weald Marsden, where I was born.'

And without ever a word about the relationship in which Phil found himself to the underground engineer, Thurman Nunsby began to tell of famous cures wrought by the Weald Marsden doctor. That practitioner's methods were certainly Spartan. For his treatment of all diseases appeared to consist in bidding his patients run three times up the Hanger in summer, and in winter-time to break the ice on Wealden pond, and stay in five minutes by the watch, suspended with their chins to the broken edges of the ice.

'Ah, there were none that shammed sick in all Weald Marsden in old Doctor Webb's time. Your father is a good 'un-as good as they have in this country. But I will say he is soft with his patients.'

'But you know, father,' his daughter interrupted, 'the last time you called him in, you would not take the medicine which Dr. Calmont prescribed. You said that it was not fit for pigs, and poured it away into the drain with your own hand!'

'Hush, missie,' said her father, 'have you done your Latin version? And practised your hour at the piano? And copied for me the notes on the later life of Mirabeau?'

His daughter nodded. She had still work to do for the ex-National Schoolmaster as when she was a little girl.

'Then put down your knitting and get out the backgammon board.'

It was that night that Phil for the first time acquired the mysteries of that tricksome game, in which he acquitted himself with such remarkable lack of success, that the old man was delighted.

Backgammon and draughts were with Mr. Nunsby quite infallible tests of intelligence. He judged that of Vic Morris's new assistant as negroid, or perhaps even gorilloid in type. It was only when his daughter had beaten him twice in succession that Mr. Nunsby began to suffer from 'cold feet.' Then he ordered her to get him *The Educational News* and the last four numbers of *The Palladium*, the organ of vested rights and the defence of the classes against the masses.

'And I hope, Mr. Calmont, that you have not imbibed your chief's foolish and erroneous doctrines on that head,' said Mr. Nunsby, shaking out his favourite journal.

'Mr. Morris never speaks to me of anything but business,' said Phil, 'it takes me all my time to keep up with the daily routine of the office work.'

'I suppose it is necessary that the engineer should have an assistant,' said Mr. Nunsby, 'but if you are to succeed in life, you must get Mr. Kahn to put you in the general office. That is where you will get on there, and only there.'

'Mr. Morris gave me this chance,' said Phil, loyally, 'and certainly I have not yet begun to understand one half of what is necessary, if I am to be a real help to him. He is very patient with me.'

The eyebrows of Mr. Thurman Nunsby arched in surprise.

'Why, we all thought that he would have cursed you up hill and down dale. It seems we have been throwing away our sympathies. What can you have done to Vic Morris. He is not so accommodating as a rule!'

'Come, father,' said Rose, who had been standing waiting, impatiently enough, 'here are your papers

and your glasses.'

She placed a footstool under his slippers feet, arranged him in the best light so that he could read at his ease, put a steaming tumbler at his elbow, in which a spoon stood upright in a gauzy mist of melting sugar.

Then Rose drew her chair opposite Phil. They moved the pieces on the chequer-board without much thought, Rose glancing every few moments at her father. She had a little pile of spectacles close at hand. Mr. Thurman Nunsby, late National Schoolmaster, sipped, read and nodded-nodded and read. Each time that he nodded, he pushed his spectacles up on the crown of his bald head.

Each time he felt the paper slipping he reached out for another pair of spectacles which his daughter had placed conveniently to his hand. These adjusted, and, in five minutes they too were on the top of his head. Great care was needed lest the pile should fall. But after a quarter of an hour the school-master slept, and his daughter disembarrassed his crown of its pile of spectacles, drew The Palladium gently from his hand, cast a light plaid over his knees, and finally lowered the light.

'Now he is safe for a couple of hours,' she whispered softly in Phil's ear. And hand in hand, with backward glances, they withdrew to the kitchen, where they set fresh kindling wood and coal upon the ashes. For in that country of forest and coalpit, none need go either lightless or cold. To go hungry was at times quite another thing, as the workers at the Incubus pits had occasion to find out.

'And now, Phil, what is it? I see you have

something on your mind. Has the engineer fellow been beating you with Vida, or have things not been going smooth at the office?’

It was the little music teacher who spoke, sitting in her low wicker chair, with her own face in the deep dusk and her eyes on those of her friend.

For all his calmness Phil had a way of blurting out things to his only confidant, quite unlike his reputation as known to the world, which was that of a shy, silent lad.

‘Vida thinks I have behaved badly to you,’ he said. And the little girl, suddenly shooting up her higher shoulder as if in pain, went all pale. Her lips quivered, and she trembled violently in the dark where none could see her.

But she commanded herself and answered, ‘Nonsense, Phil, you misunderstood Vida. You were either dull or Vi was in a bad humour!’

‘Possibly both,’ said Phil Calmont, ‘but at least that is what she says. And she forbids me to go to Glebe End any more!’

It seemed to him that his way through the world had ended in a blind alley. His work, of which he had been so proud, his drawings and mathematics, had all become in a moment mere vanity of vanities.

‘Vida does not mean it-I will speak to her- it is impossible! I wonder what put such folly into her head!’

Such were the words that came out of the dusk in which the little music teacher had ensconced herself.

And like a man Phil Calmont took these expressions of indignation, incredulity, and sympathy each at its face value.

‘Of course, you understand how it is,’ he

explained, feeling the need of expansion, 'you and I have been friends. I could not be friend with any of my own people-except perhaps the pater, that is, if he had time to be friends with me. The rest are, like so many pigeons in a barnyard at threshing time-seeking whomsoever they may devour.'

'Come,' said Rose, smiling faintly, 'it is the lion who does that!'

'Well, anyway,' said Phil, 'I was happy coming to see you-far happier, I think, than when I went to Glebe End. For you and I could just be friends, without thought of anything else. And with Vida - well, it was seldom I got a chance to speak to her. And when I did, it mostly ended in making myself unhappy-or her angry! But you and I, Rose-'

'Are just you and I!' said Rose, softly, holding out her hand. Phil took it, and with one of the strange un-Scottish instincts which came to him at times, whence he knew not, he stooped and kissed it. Rose withdrew her fingers rapidly, and left him staring.

'Keep that for Vida!' she said, sharply, withdrawing farther into her corner.

'Indeed that is just what I will not do,' said Phil, 'you understand me, and I do not think that Vida ever will. What is still funnier, she thinks that she understands you.'

'How curious!' said the little music teacher in a level voice.

'Yes, she will have it that you are in love with me, and that I am very senseless and cruel not to see it!'

Phil laughed a gay little laugh. He was recovering his spirits. He found some wood and threw it on the fire. He offered to set 'the keeping coal' which was to last till the morrow's morn, but in the darkness of her corner he could see little Miss Nunsby shake her

head at the suggestion.

'Ridiculous, wasn't it?' he said, pausing with a glistening lump of No. 2 Pit coal in his hand.

'Very ridiculous!' little Rose answered, steadily.

Phil placed the coal carefully in the grate, manipulating it with his fingers. Then, as was his custom, he went to the sink and turning the tap, let the water splash on his fingers. He checked it back with something that sounded curiously human-like a sob. He had never heard a water-tap do that before.

And if certain tears fell on little Miss Nunsby's grey stuff gown, they fell quite silently, and the sudden dulling of the light caused by the putting on of the coal, hid even the glistening trickle on either cheek.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A JOINT STOCK DAUGHTER

When Vic Morris arrived at the Gate Cottage the next night, he came upon an earlier visitor making himself very much at home. He was a tallish, thin man, with reddish hair plentifully salted with grey and wearing thin on the top. At sight of Vic he took a pair of smoked glasses, as if by instinct, out of his pocket. Then instantly changing his mind, he peered at the intruder with deepset, black, humorously twinkling eyes.

As Vic's huge shoulders and clean-cut granitic features filled up the doorway, the man in possession turned his eyes upon him, with a request to be informed 'Who in kingdom-come he might be?' Vic returned the compliment in kind, and his query was answered by the ruddy-grey man without a shadow of a smile on his face. He would tell his name-certainly. He would even give particulars. 'Maybe ye have heard o' Mahony the celebrated robber and murderer? He fairly wallows in gore and land-agents, does Mahony. I'm him. Well, I've just polished off the lot here, and now I'm washing up, as it were. And I would be obliged to you, sorr, for the information why you come shoving your ugly nose into anny man's business. D'ye want to see my licence to commit homicide at any moment? What, ye doubt me worrud!-Well, then, come in with ye and sit down-I'll see what is the best I can do for you in the cold-tea and bread-and-butter line. For ye look as if ye needed it, young man!'

'I called to see my friends,' said the engineer, with dignity.

'And what might your friends be callin' themselves when the police wasn't after thim?'

'Mr. Richard Finnan and...'

'Good,' cried the piebald Irish man, 'owld Dick wud nivver know himself by that name. Too yard wide for him, my son! And your other friends- all now dead and gone, and their first term paid to the Cimit'ry Company. Excuse me while I dhrop a tear!'

He searched, but in vain, for a handkerchief, and finally went into a corner and dropped the tear noisily on the floor.

When he returned he said in a confidential whisper, 'If ye have annything rale comfortin' about ye sir, I'll take a drop afore I hear the name of anny more of your friends.'

But the engineer had had quite enough of this form of humour, which might be called the piebald Irishman's speciality.

'This is the house of my friend, Mr. Finnan and his daughter Miss Vida Bryan,' said Vic, squaring his shoulders, with the evident intention of combat, 'and I shall be glad to know what your business is here?'

The Irishman also squared his shoulders with an outrageous caricature grand manner of the underground manager's grand manner.

'My name is Billy Bryan,' he said, 'Ireland is my nation, as maybe ye'll have had the penetration to take note of already-more by token that I never acquired the poor mean snip-scissors English brogue. And I do not ask you what you are doing in this house. I know Sorr, phwat are your honourable intintions with regard to me da-a-a-ughter?'

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And with his arms folded and a portentously beetling frown on his jovial countenance, the lighthouse man 'paused for an answer.'

It was evident that Mr. Vic Morris was taken very much aback. He had heard, vaguely, that Vida had been a castaway from some ship, and had a romantic story attached to her. But he was not the sort of young man to lay much stress upon romantic stories. It was all the same to him whether Vida was called Finnan or Bryan or Smith, or Brown or Jones or Robinson. All that he asked was that she would consent to take as a permanency the name of Vida Morris. He expected no dowry. His two strong hands, the professional knowledge which lay packed away in his energetic and well squared head, were dowry enough for two. He had a rough-shod will, and an over-riding belief in the skill of his own combinations, to which he would expect a wife to conform. Otherwise, he was completely indifferent to the claims of long descent. Lady Clara Vere de Vere and Susan Sugg had, so far as he was concerned, no start in the race of life- except that, as he would have stated the case to himself, the probabilities were that the Lady Clara had her head stuffed with all sorts of nonsense. He did not pause to consider that in all likelihood, Miss Sugg took in the Farthing Novelette- and that, consequently, the two were much on the same intellectual level.

The Salt-and-Cayenne-pepper Irishman had indeed paused for a reply, and that reply was hard to find.

'My intentions with regard to your daughter--?' repeated the underground engineer, dully.

'Aye, just that,' said the Irishman, 'what ye are up to is clear-coming here night afther night!- Coortin'!

That's it! What ye are going to be up to, and you an English Saxon, is what (as half a parent) I shall make it my business to find out.'

But when Vic Morris argued, he liked to be sure of his premisses. And he remembered that he knew no more of this intruder than that he asserted his name to be Bryan, and that Vida was his daughter - which might have no more secure basis than the previous legend that he had finished a wholesale massacre, and was cleaning up the place afterwards.

Still, Vic did not put this into words. He knew that it could not be many minutes before old Dick

Finnan would be coming along through the gates of Glebe End, and that in all likelihood, Vida would be with him. Then everything would be explained.

Meanwhile the man-in-possession went on calmly washing up. He even turned and rated Vic Morris for his idleness.

He was, according to him 'a great hulking lout, no better than a Constabulary, standing there first on wan anvil-top of a boot and then on another, doin' nothing at all at all for the privilege of breathing God's air!'

'If ye was on wan o' His Majesty's lighthouses, now, we'd learn you different, that we wud. Why, in Dick's time-but it's no use wasting good Solomon on the likes o' you. Catch hold of a dish-clout and dry for your life!'

And a drying towel came towards the engineer with a damp whoosh that sent up his cricket-trained hand to catch it as if he had been fielding 'point.'

So when Vida pushed the door open, and entered with her marketing-basket on her arm, she was astonished to find two men hard at work with their backs towards her. They were finishing up the

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dinner dishes, and a Hibernian voice of astonishing power was criticising the work of the brevet-scullery-maid with more frankness than compliment.

'If ye cleaned reflectors no better than this, me son,' he said, holding up a salad-bowl, on which remained some oily streaks, 'it's ashore ye wud go by the next boat-an' sthop there! 'Tis easy seen ye have been trained in a school for young ladies! Now there's my daughter Vida--'

And the next moment, with a cry of 'Billy-Billy,' her arms were about his neck, the basket having been dropped on the settle with small care for the fragility of the contents-while, with the rejected salad-bowl in his hands, turning it about as in a conjuring trick, Vic Morris watched the scene open-mouthed.

Afterwards, when Dick Finnan came in, and had taken his supper, the cover being laid for one (for Vida had been all the afternoon at Rose Nunsby's) Dick lighted his pipe, holding his head near the open fireplace so that the 'reek would draw' as he remarked. For Vida did not favour the smell of tobacco in her house.

Then being pressed with questions Mr. William Bryan began his remarks, by divulging to the astonished company how that he had resolved to stop smoking.

'Ye see,' he said, 'reliefs are so oncertain on them island lights, that I wud rather do widout altogether, of my own accord, than run the risk av being put to it, whether I will or whether I won't! Besides it's more manly. It fairly puts a premium on cadging to see other men's tobacco pouches bulging all over the table and to feel yours, flat and empty, in your

pocket!’

This subject having been exhausted, Mr. Bryan proceeded to give his late chief the most alarmingly technical information about the working of the Skerry Light, the shortcomings of his last mate Tom Arrowsmith, the misfits of the new spare electric plant, and how one fell night (both ‘regular’ and ‘relief’ failing) they had to turn the lantern by hand—how the syren would only splutter and cough, and how they muttered prayers indiscriminately to the Virgin, the Saints, and the God of all poor sailors outcast on stormy seas—that, if evil befel, the weight of it should not come upon these two toiling watchers, Protestant and Catholic, but upon the engineers and storekeepers, the contractors and supply clerks, who had done last month’s providing for the Skerry Light.

‘Tom Arrowsmith cursed them,’ said Billy Bryan with gusto, ‘and when Tom was finished saying his piece in the style of General Booth (for he wears that uniform when ashore), I took it up with as much as I could remember of Father Dinnis upon the althar steps in the owld chapel at Roscommon! And if there is a fair division o’ pains and penalties when the last indent sheets are filled out above, there’s a power av Northern Light and Thrinity House men that will be down with something worse than the stomick-ache!’

‘But nothing struck your rock?’ said Vida, anxiously.

‘No, the morning came, as it always will, honey, if only ye wait long enough. And it was a clane- swept sea that lay about us. So then we reversed engines and did some thanksgiving—got down on our knees to do it, and Tom Arrowsmith clear forgot to miscall the Pope for a whole day, and I promised to

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contribute to the Army's Self-Denial Fund--'

'So,' chuckled old Dick, between puffs, 'that was the meaning of your giving up smoking! I thought there was something behind that yarn, about the tobacco running out.'

Billy looked ashamed, and at once attempted to change the subject.

He looked across at Vic, and with a twinkle in his eye he said, 'Him an' me nearly began our acquaintance with a dooel, but I vanquished him and set him to wipe crockery. Though I must say he's no great hand with the drying towel!'

Whereupon Dick Finnan explained that Mr. Morris was the underground engineer of the Incubus pits, and the best hand at telling when the men were near 'the stuff' that ever had been seen in Kirktown.

'Ah, well,' said Billy, 'praise the pigs, there's a job for every man if only he can find it. Even Tom Arrowsmith, the stupidest man that ever shinned up a lighthouse ladder, has his good points. He can blow his nose equal to any magistrate on the bench, like the Skerry fog-horn, but more solemn like.' Vic was now in mortal fear lest the talkative Irishman should reveal the cause of their disagreement, but Billy contented himself with winking- solemn, portentous winks, which compromised much more than the truth nakedly told.

Vida was sure that the two men had been discussing her, and promptly resented it, speaking sharply to Billy; yes, even to Billy, and not at all to Mr. Ludovic Morris.

But she was wrong. Billy's secret was of a different sort.

'Honey,' he said presently, addressing her, 'don't ye want to go up to your room, just to prink and

prettify, clean up the brasses a bit, as it were, and breathe on the reflectors? Ye'll be a bit fashed and blown with your homecoming. 'Tis something of a windy night.'

'No, thank you,' said Vida, settling herself with her feet to the fire, always grateful in the woodland shades of Glebe End. 'I'm very well as I am, I thank you!'

At this Billy Bryan looked no little disconcerted.

'I'm a poor hand at an excuse,' he said, 'owing to having been brought up by a woman that stammered, which caused me to stammer too, and then she always licked me before I could get the excuse out, or she could explain why she was giving it to me. But the truth is, ladybird, that if you fly away for a minute or two, till I have a private word with old Dick and this young man, you'll be doing your old father (one o' the few that ye have, honey) a good turn that he won't forget!'

'Oh, of course, if you don't want me, I'm always ready to go!' snapped Vida, suddenly relapsing into her haughty-haughtiest mood.

'Now, stormy-petrel, don't get up on your little ear,' said Billy soothingly, 'faith, an' it's yourself that will be the sorriest when our formulations have all worked out, and the bird-I mean the rat, is out of the trap.'

Vida swiftly drew her skirts close about her ankles.

'Oh you horrid men,' she cried, 'you have got a rat. I knew there was something!' And taking a flying leap on a chair, she mountaineered by way of the furniture till she reached the stairs without touching the ground. For Vida was of that admirable and wide-spread type of woman, who, if once the words

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'rat' or 'mouse' are used, will not believe any future oath, however solemn, and by whomsoever taken, that these inoffensive rodents are wholly absent.

Sitting still in the big kitchen they could hear Vida going up to her room, as a certain travelled gentleman went through Athlone, 'in standing leps.'

Then Billy Bryan laughed a little as they heard the door slam above. He rose promptly, and, beckoning to Vic, he whispered,

I have a little parcel out there among the brushwood. It will need some handling to bring it in. If your shoulders are anything like as stout as they look, owld Dick there will have nothing to do but carry the address-tag. Leave the door open and follow me. But first let us have a squint to see that our young spitfire up there is not by any chance spying out of the window.'

But the girl's candle was already alight, and they could see the outline of her head on the blind as she bent over to her writing. They could watch her dipping her pen in the ink.

'All clear aloft!' whispered Billy, 'now for it, lads!'

And he scurried into the shrubbery, where he was suddenly halted by stubbing his toes against a big box. The others found him appealing to all the saints of the Roscommon calendar to know if they knew any fool quite so big as he, William Bryan. The saints were silent, and Billy nursed his foot in the hollow of his hand.

'What you got there, Billy?' demanded Dick.

That'll never come inside our shanty. Why, it's as big as a house.'

'They told me it was a 'Special Cottage,' so it has got to go in,' said Mr. Bryan, 'but be quick, Mr. Dishwater Engineer. For this here is a delicate little

pocket instrument, and might as easily get a sore throat as a lady singstrees at loggerheads with her manager!’

So with many bumpings, heavy breathings, and smothered exclamations, they zigzagged their way to the front door, Billy with one eye cocked on the lighted gable-window, behind which his daughter of adoption sat writing.

‘Now, off with the case,’ he whispered, when at last they had placed the box on the doorstep, ‘she comes away as easy as shelling an egg. The tip lifts up so. And the side falls down. Out she comes! Now for those shoulders of yours, and treat her tender, as if she were chockful of watch glasses.’

‘What’s that? What’s that?’ gasped Dick, his eyes goggling. ‘Billy, I believe you’ve taken leave of your senses, you fool-you fool!’

‘Think nobody but yourself can do anything for the Flower of Creation!’ cried Billy. ‘Howd the candle, and talk less, you old Cameronian, chin-wagging baboo! Did you never see an A1, first chop, newly varnished, catch-the-tune-as-she-hops piano!’

They set it up with immense care under the stand lamp which had been hitherto the pride of Vida’s heart. They read the mystic word ‘Broadwood’ upon it, which meant so little to them, though a good deal to Billy’s pocket, and still more to the one joint-stock daughter of these two loving fathers.

‘When she glimpses that, if her eyes don’t shine like any two Skerries I’m a Dutchman!’ said Billy Bryan. ‘Yes, Hans Van Bryanhuysen shall be my name if the little lass doesn’t go fair wild with delight! Let’s call her down now. No, hold on there’s some more truck. Candles for the wing lights! There, drop them in, old Dick. And now young man get out

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her gearing for the holding the music-I bought a lot. For that I had to trust to the young man in the shop. He swore it was all right. And I warned him, that by the saints, it had better be, or I should come back and take the hide out off him, stripe by stripe. But he was a very confident young fellow, and said he would take his chances. Now let's call her down! Honey, ahoy, up there, the Skerry calls! Stand clear, lads, she's comin' down!'

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE BATTLE ENGAGES

It would have rewarded a giver more exacting than Billy, joint foster-father and lighthouse man, to have seen the face which Vida turned upon him, She stood awhile in the doorway of the little parlour, stunned at first, then orienting her ideas out of a kind of vague inability to think what had come to her, but never quite taking her eyes off the beautiful little 'cottage' piano which was now her own.

Slowly she understood. Dick could not have bought it. She knew the extent of Dick's resources. Mr. Morris-well, he dare not. It must be Billy. It was Billy-her foolish old Billy. She saw the guilty, complaisant, happy look on his face. The very width of his Irish grin gave him away.

'Oh, Billy!' she said. And suddenly with hands still at her side, and standing there in the doorway, she began to cry. The tears ran down her cheeks, as Billy Bryan rose at once to go to her. Was anything amiss? Was what he had thought of for years on his lonely lighthouse, dreamed of goggle-eyed under the weighty glare of the electrics, pondered upon by the hour in his bunk when the waves make the Skerry tower rock like a tall tree in the wind- was it all to go wrong? If so, he would reckon with that young man in the music-shop who helped him so cheerfully to choose it.

'What is it thin, darlin'?' he stammered, his ruddy face a little pale, 'is annything wrong with that there music-box? If so, I can get it changed. There were

other sorts, one that ye just put in the sheets with the music on them all ready pricked out, and turn a handle. But my young spalpeen with his ears tacked to his collar top, laughed and said that he guessed you wouldn't want that kind. It came cheaper too, for all the convenience. But if he has worked off a dead bird on Billy Bryan, Billy will pack this old case straight back to the shop; yes, that young man had better be on the high road, or Australy when Billy gets there himself!

'Oh, no,' cried Vida, 'it is lovely, it is too, too good! But-but-you are too thoughtful for me- too kind-I never do anything.'

'Not a bit-not a bit, honey-sit ye down on the corkscrew seat with the button on the top, and just make the machinery warble once in a way. That'll pay for all!

By this time Vida had come forward, holding her breath, lest with the smallest noise on her part the whole would vanish away like a dream. 'I know it isn't one,' she said, softly, as if to herself, 'but it is just like a dream. And it's a Broadwood! A real Broadwood!'

'Yuss,' said the now relieved Billy, 'no narrow wood for me. I got it as broad as I could afford in the 'stand up' kind. The 'lying down' sort would have stuck out at the front door, and part way down to Kirktown! Besides, there would have been no place for visitors, except perhaps underneath. Well now, just think o' Old Dick there and that young giant out of a travelling menagerie, playing house under Billy's piano. That would make a cat laugh, let alone a poor old light'usman that never sees but the scarts and the sea-fowl to laugh at! This is a good time, Billy, my bhoy. Ye never saw a better.'

And Vida, happily turning over the music, sat down and softly from beneath her fingers came the first notes of Greig's 'Midsummer Night on the Nord Fjord.' The men sat entranced. She played with the instinct of melody, her head thrown back and her body swaying slightly-so well indeed, that Billy, still suspicious, bent and looked beneath.

'Faix, I was thinkin' that little gintleman in the pretty ringlets had passed off on me the machinery -pianno after all.'

But 'The Wearin' of the Green,' and 'Kitty of Coleraine' brought the tears running in warm spate down his Irish cheeks. Billy was speedily reassured that he had not been deceived; also that, so far as the 'Broadwood' was concerned, his money was well spent. He went to bed that night feeling that however good it might be to dream of youth and beauty, to the trip and purr of well-oiled machinery up in the Skerry Light, Dick his mate had the best of it with Vida always before his eyes, bringing music out of the new piano in the little cottage near the Glebe End gate of the great Gorm House properties.

After Vida had been induced to leave the keys and shut down the cover with the delicious sound of exquisitely fitting rosewood which went to her heart, she said good-night. And Billy explained to Dick that he might count himself very lucky. Moreover he was a selfish, unthankful old man, and it was full time that he, Billy Bryan, left the lighthouse, and-married Vida himself.

Whereupon old Dick Finnan pointed out that having endowed Vida with his name and adopted her as a daughter, such a connection was clearly impossible according to the tables which he would find at the beginning of the Bible, as well as

forbidden by the laws of his country.

'Besides,' Dick added, pointedly, 'do you really think now Billy, that the young lass would take up with a scrawny old salt herring like you?'

Billy scratched his head for a minute, first on one side and then on the other, and looked sorrowful. But he did not give way.

'There may be something in what you say as to the law,' he retorted, 'but as to your other suggestion, that she wouldn't have me because of my personal appearance, I scorn it. Never a woman yit, that I asked to marry me, that ever refused me.'

'Then you took good care not to ask any at all,' said old Dick, picking up his candle and shuffling off up stain. 'Come to bed, Billy. Young maids like Vida are not for you and me, except just to look after a bit till the proper man comes along. Then it's 'Good-bye, Dick!' 'Good-bye, Billy!' And she's gone from us for ever. That's the sort of fathers we are.'

The underground engineer went out of the Glebe End Gate very thoughtfully that night. He had accustomed himself to believe that nothing he undertook could possibly fail. But he was not conscious of any particular progress which his suit had made.

He had advanced no farther in the good graces of Vida Bryan than at first. There was some obstacle. He was sure of that-something or somebody he could not put his finger upon. For after taking Phil Calmont into his office, to be under his eye, he had not given that rival another thought. He could pretty well account for every hour of Phil's time, and besides, he knew him to be working hard at his new profession.

At the end of the dark avenue of trees, but drawn

aside from the public highway, Vic Morris came upon the red side light of a little automobile. Its head lantern had been covered with a mask of black velvet, like the cloth which photographers use for their stand cameras. It could only have been there a few minutes, for the whole body was still a-tremble with the purr and throb of the prisoned forces. Yet there was no one to be seen anywhere about. But Vic Morris had no difficulty in assuring himself that the car was one of those belonging to Mr. Kahn. No one else thereabouts had anything of the kind.

'What was it doing there at this time of night?' he thought. 'Had he anything to do with the gift of the piano, made to Vida, by means of Billy Bryan?'

Was it likely or possible that a lighthouse man, even of long service, could have been able, with all the good will in the world to spend such a sum on a present to a daughter who was not his daughter?'

This appeared so suspicious to Vic Morris, that, though it certainly was no business of his, he considered that the circumstances justified a tour of inspection round the cottage. In the gable window a light still burned in Vida's window. But all else was dark. He discovered nothing, till he fell over the empty piano-case, with which he entangled himself, producing between them such a noise of rolling thunder as it tumbled down the steps that he brought the angry face of Billy Bryan to an upper window.

'Get away out of that, ye sneakin' hound!' he cried, 'tryin' to steal the pianna case that I have to return carriage-paid or pay for mesilf, sure ye are that I'll be afther puttin' a good navy bullet through ye, ye sneakin' villain. I have got the range of that case and the next man that touches it wid the toe of

his number sixteen shoe, goes a good bit farther than purgatory door!

The patience and circumspection with which Vic retired, were such as he would have used in an old and dangerous working of which he did not know the landmarks. But he reached the outer gate in safety, perhaps a little ashamed of himself. It was of course possible that the 'Confidential' might have gone up to visit his master, Jacob Romer, secretly, and that he had merely left his car there, drawn up out of the reach of the casual passer by, while he transacted his business. Yes, of course that was it. What a jealous fool he was after all. Would any have believed it of him, Ludovic Morris, hitherto as insensible as the average lamp-post to the frou-frou of feminine skirts.

The car was still there, bedded in a niche of shrubbery, and sending out upon the night an unfamiliar odour of oil and hot iron, which strove, all too successfully, with the hale pine scents and the keen night breath of dew-wet laurels. Vic listened.

From the cottage there came no sound of pursuit. One of Jacob Romer's pheasants, down in some dell not far away, sent up a curious half-human cry, a mere signal to its mate doubtless, but in the dank darkness, expressive as the book of Ecclesiastes of 'the painful and transitory nature of all things.' Perhaps it foresaw the day when Jacob Romer's clients and friends would come forth arrayed for carnage, and when all the pheasant kind, hitherto mere domestic poultry, would suddenly be slaughtered with arms of precision, and counted by the hundred 'head' like so many dead Boers on a South African battlefield.

A double glimmer on the steel levers, uncertain dull reflections of the padded leather, something which reduced the red of the side lamps by the incursion of a more lurid light, caught Vic Morris's attention.

He glanced behind him. He had been absorbed in the examination of the deserted car. Indeed his fingers had already been itching to get hold of the steering gear. Each quiver of the chassis took him in the fibres of his being.

But now there was something vaster in force and bearing behind him. From the dark mass of the buildings which were the general offices of Incubus, Romer and Co., a clear straw-coloured flame mounted. Vic could see very little smoke, but he knew in a moment that the fire must be a serious one. He sprang into the driver's place without a thought. But before he had drawn the lever or started the machine, a figure sprang over the wall.

'What are you doing with my car? Get out!'

It was James Kahn, but Vic recognising his man, simply pointed with his finger.

'It's time we were both yonder,' he said, 'up with you, Mr. Kahn!'

And neither even thought of asking what the other had been doing there. They kept their eyes on the road, which, in the nearing light of the burning buildings, became as day.

'Let her out-let her rip!' said Kahn excitedly, reaching over to grasp the speed-lever.

'One at a time, if you please,' said Vic, holding him at a distance, with a determined elbow. 'I am running this car at present; hands off, Mr. Kahn!'

They raced down the long hill, and Vic had just time to slow before they struck a crowd of watching

miners which filled all the wide square in front of the burning Incubus offices. There was an ominous growl at the sight of the yellow car. That was for its master. Then a cheer as Vic Morris was discerned in the driver's seat. A way was made for him, and Vic stopped the motor in a bricked courtyard, the buildings about which were not connected with the burning pile.

'Where is the fire engine?' he demanded furiously.

'It is useless, the piping all cut to ribbons,' said one of the two men whose position compelled them to be faithful to the Company-Hector McKill and Walter Grindling.

'And the engine of No. 3 pit?'

'The men to man it could not be found!' cried Hector McKill, 'They had taken French leave-that's your teaching, Mr. Engineer Morris.'

Vic clenched his fist, and was on the point of felling McKill to the ground when he recognised that it was hardly the time for encounters of that nature.

He understood, however, that this was the beginning of strife. The first gun in a long fight had been fired. There were, however, a few of whose loyalty he was sure. For instance, Phil Calmont, revolver in hand, stood guard over the pile of books he had saved from his own office.

'I've got all the working drawings, the new calculations, and nearly everything except the patent reports; they were too heavy.'

'That doesn't matter,' cried his chief, 'we can get others. Where did it begin?'

'Not on our side,' answered Phil, 'somewhere over in the general offices, I think. But it ran along as if on a trail of paraffin.'

'Nothing more likely,' said Vic, 'you may have hit

it. Who are in it, do you think?’

‘That I couldn’t say,’ answered Phil, ‘the younger men of No. 1, perhaps some of No. 3—those taken on last-southern men. But No. 2 is sound. They’ve really helped as far as they could. They have cut the fire off from the bank-works and pitheads. They are standing guard now. That was all I could do.’

‘Very good,’ said Vic. ‘Keep holding the fort till I come back. Is that thing loaded?’

‘No, but they think it is, which is just as good!’ There was no chance of saving any part of the great pile of buildings which, with the uniformity of its numberless windows, its pitch-pine varnished interiors, its infinite ranges of drawers and mahogany desks had been the Olympus of the wrathful Jupiter of Kirktown.

To circumscribe the conflagration in some degree, was all that could be done. And to this Vic applied himself, while Kahn, with his keen, tracking instinct of the weasel, developed by a lifetime of trick and stratagem, strove to put the blame where it belonged.

But for this the scale of the disaster was too vast. The fire, if kindled by servants of the company out of spite, as seemed likely, had extended so that it had destroyed the evidence of its own beginnings. The ruins were soon only a vast brazier, and as roof after roof fell in, and the flames shot up roaring into the smoke-dimmed sky, a dull, uncanny answering roar rose from the people who—man, woman, and child—every soul in Kirktown in fact—were massed about the glowing debris of what had been so lately the offices of the omnipotent Incubus Iron and Coal Company.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

VICTORY OF THE TRIPLICE

'It is no use, gentlemen,' said Vic Morris to the high Council of Four who had been convened on the following morning to decide what was to be done as to the 'disaster,' 'the miners of Kirktown are no more to be condemned in a body than employers, managers, or engineers! I do not know whether the fire was lighted by any men in our own employ. Such a thing is possible, of course. I have always thought there was a rotten bad streak in the new drafts from the south-mouthers, most of them-breeders of ill blood.'

'I am glad to hear you speak like that, Mr. Morris,' said James Kahn, 'for, to tell you the truth, I have heard it whispered that you yourself were not exactly faithful to your employer!'

'Then, Mr. Kahn,' said Vic Morris, with sudden fierceness, 'whoever told you that, lied. And if you wish for a more absolute contradiction, bring the tale-bearer face to face with me!'

Kahn glanced first at his two subordinates, McKill and Grindling, and then at the rather grim look on the face of his chief, Mr. Jacob Romer.

'Go on, Mr. Morris! Expose your ideas fully!' said the latter. He cared nothing for the strifes of heads of departments, nor even a great deal for last night's fire. It was annoying, of course, but after all, to put it right was a mere matter of detail. All his contracts were in his lawyer's safe, and so long as the pits themselves were intact and the night-and-day shifts working, nothing mattered very much to Incubus, Gorm, Romer and Co. He had also an idea that the

influence which Vic Morris had over the best of the men, the ascendancy he possessed over all, might be more useful to the firm than the hasty and ill-judged measures of severity into which the triumvirate of Kahn, McKill and Grindling would fain have forced him.

At first therefore he was inclined to listen to Ludovic Morris. And, accordingly, Kahn and his two satellites felt the wind of the great man's favour blow cold upon them. The hate of their hearts went out to Morris, for which the strong careless Vic cared not a whit. His single weakness had been his passion for Vida. Even his enemies could not put their finger upon another. And this was perhaps the greatest weakness of all—that he had none. It lifted him clean away from that strange, yet very human sympathy which the working class feel for the peccadilloes of the great.

'Eh, but he's a lad,' says the Lancashire pitman, with a certain pride in his young master's 'going the pace.'

'He's a gye boy!'

'Nocht till oor yin!' will reply, in the comparison of 'bosses,' the 'Geordies' of Fife and Lothians.

So, though his rigid honesty could not help but win him respect wherever he went, and though everyone in the pits, from the bank foreman to the youngest tally-boy, knew that Vic Morris was 'on their side,' the rigidity of his discipline, and the fact that he neither drank, smoked, swore, nor flaunted cheap iniquity, were unquestionably against him in that queer topsy-turvy world of the mine.

'He is more like a parson in the pit!' said 'Bubbly' Sugg, the father of Susan aforesaid, and the champion heavy weight of the three main pits. Yet

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for all that 'Bubbly' put away his pipe in a hurry whenever there was a stir and a whisper of 'Here's Muster Morris' along the working faces.

'Expose your ideas,' repeated the Chief. 'I am here to listen.'

'Well, sir,' said Vic, nothing loath, and not in the least daunted, 'the work is all right. It frightens nobody worth his salt. And if the men are satisfied on a point or two (in which they are absolutely in the right) they will work to your utmost desire.'

So much I hold myself ready to guarantee. Men who live habitually on the surface cannot know what goes on underground. Sixteen hundred feet of solid rock between one's crown and the green grass change men's ways of looking at things, when they have to stay there ten or twelve hours at a stretch, every day, year in and year out. But, as I have said, I will charge myself with all that, if so be you give me a free hand to finish the 'second exits' in the pits where these are not already completed, and to uplift the steam pipes illegally placed, in those that are.'

'Has not that all already been done to the satisfaction of His Majesty's Inspectors?'

'May be,' said Vic, sourly, 'but not to my satisfaction.'

'Do you set yourself up as knowing better than the man appointed for the purpose by Government?' demanded Mr. Jacob Romer. And at this the three plucked up heart. They knew that Vic was treading upon dangerous ground. Mr. Romer was a great man for the letter of the law when it could be read in his own favour.

'The situation is this,' said Vic Morris, who could not keep a certain iron dogmatism out of his voice, no matter to whom he was speaking; 'the men have

a right to a second exit.'

'But,' interrupted Kahn and McKill, speaking both at the same moment, 'none of our pits are fiery. And besides, we conform to every legal regulation.'

The owner, throned in the sole chair which had escaped the fire, nodded approval. Kahn and his friends felt that their battle was won.

'The men have a right to an accessible second exit,' Vic Morris repeated, with greater firmness than ever. 'I am in possession of copies of the papers in which one of my predecessors, Mr. Job Henderson, asked again and again that the second exits should be completed. I have also a copy of his resignation when his wish was not complied with. I know that all work was stopped on these exits so soon as he was out of the yard. It has never been resumed in spite of my representations. I believe, sir, that the loss you have suffered is partly, if not wholly, due to the men's feelings on that subject—feelings which have some just foundation, which have not been allowed vent, and so have taken the wrong turning!'

'So you make yourself the apologist of incendiaries, Mr. Morris!' cried Jacob Romer, suddenly thumping his hand on the table.

The others muttered 'Revolutionary!' 'Anarchist!' 'Wolf in sheep's clothing,' according to their several vocabularies, the last being the contribution of Mr. Hector McKill.

'I have nothing to do with incendiaries,' said Vic firmly, 'but I try to understand cause and effect, I endeavour to earn the wages you pay me, and to find out right and wrong.'

'I thought you expressed yourself as willing to make yourself responsible for the conduct of the men!' sneered James Kahn.

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'In the pits, yes!' said Vic, steadily, 'and if their just representations are attended to, I have then no fear. Besides, I know how the Government inspection is slurred over here, I know to whom the business was committed. I know how the matter was arranged.'

'Then you know more than I do, Mr. Morris,' said Jacob Romer, 'for this is the first I ever heard of any arrangement. Let me hear all you know.'

It was now the turn of the three allies to move uneasily.

'When Job Henderson wrote out his resignation, he did it painfully. For, unlike me, who at a pinch can always wield a pick, he was a man with a large family. It cost him something to do right. But he would not consent to play with the lives of men. One of your managers sitting there laughed, and said, 'Risk to the lives of men,' -well, Job Henderson, don't we pay them for taking that risk? Don't they know the bargain as well as we?'

'I agree with that!' said Jacob Romer, 'I have no sympathy with cant!'

And at this the Triplice of Oppression smiled with recovered spirits.

'With cant, no-I as little,' Vic Morris continued, 'but with your new engineer began the cutting down of the working expenses, the filling up of the existing exits with steam-pipes, so that no man could go up or down-no, not for fifty fathoms- and all that the profits might be increased.'

'And I beg you will tell me,' interrupted Jacob Romer, 'for what other purpose I pay you a salary, than that you should have my interests at heart, and increase my profits. Do you expect that these idle pitmen would do as much of their own accord?'

'Sir,' said Vic Morris, 'I think that your balance sheet since my arrival will best prove that you have no cause to complain of the fidelity of my services. I have worked well for you-the men also-specially in Number 2 Pit. And they deserve to have their exits safe and clear in case of danger!'

'Mr. Grindling,' said the owner of the Incubus pits, 'what have you to say to this?'

'That it is all sultry nonsense!' quoth the rotund manager of the Dook, 'this engineer man is no better than a miners' agent. His business (and ours) is to get as much work out of the men as possible, the men's business is to get as much out of us as possible-and do as little for it. Mr. Vic Morris is trying to straddle the fence. But that's not my idea of loyalty to one's employer.'

'Nor mine either,' groaned the senior manager, Mr. Hector McKill. 'He that is not for us is against us-as it is written.'

'I have heard of the devil's quoting scripture to suit his purpose before now,' said Vic, sharply, 'if you wish me to tell you what I think, I will do it. I don't believe in men going first to prayer-meetings and then home again to arrange for cutting wages ten per cent. all round, when profits are 33 per cent over all!'

'Confine yourself to the matter in hand, Mr. Morris, and you will do well for yourself,' said Mr. Romer, his grim face a shade greyer and grimmer than usual. 'And be good enough to remember that outside that window there is thirty thousand pounds worth of property destroyed-in all probability by the men whose case you are pleading so eloquently.'

'No, sir, not by them,' said Vic, earnestly, 'but perhaps by the second-class men whom you have

brought to Kirktown by the second-class wages you are paying. By men who have not that respect for themselves which only comes of being respected by their employer.'

The owner of thirty blocks of miners' houses in Kirktown and Inchgormach waved his hand .

'If the men are not satisfied,' he said, 'they possess the same liberty of going elsewhere of which you can avail yourself, Mr. Morris.'

'Exactly,' said Vic, 'but first of all you asked me to speak-and speak I will.'

'Certainly-delighted to listen, Mr. Morris!' said Jacob Romer. And the triplice of Kahn smiled, well pleased. Already they saw Vic Morris going down the High Street of Kirktown a dismissed man.

'As for the Government inspection, it was a farce, nothing less. Nor do I think it is altogether the fault of the inspector. Our last was a man accustomed to dangerous fire-damp mines. He thought nothing else was worth looking for. He knew our good repute in Kirktown in that respect. The iron-stone kills the fire damp. Well, Mr. Grindling took him in hand. He treated him generously. The obstructions had been cleared away from the bottom of the second entrance, the steam pipes covered up. In gay company our inspector went down as if to a picnic. He admired the beautiful working of the cages. He took into his lungs the full current of fresh air. He walked along the working faces. He spoke to one or two of the men. He asked if they were content. They were married men with families, and could be warned out of their houses at a week's notice on the part of the Company. They had no complaints. He passed the tunnel, with the sheets covering the steam pipes that led to the pumping engine at the

bottom of the shaft. 'Our new exit!' said Mr. Grindling.

'Ah, indeed, quite right!' said the inspector, passing on to lunch. For he had been late in arriving and had not long to give to each of the workings. Besides, there was no one to tell him the truth, as I would have done if I had been there.'

'Very interesting,' said Jacob Romer, 'Grindling, will you look up what we owe Mr. Morris? We are plain business men—a company organised for the shameful purpose of earning a fair return for our money. We cannot afford to transform ourselves, even at Mr. Morris's bidding, into a General Benevolence Association for the benefit of the working classes, certainly, least of all with the ashes of thirty years work lying red about us through the efforts of Mr. Morris's friends.'

And so, just as the Triplice had foreseen, Vic Morris went down the street of Kirktown a dismissed man with Jacob Romer's cheque in his pocket.

Half-way he met Phil Calmont.

'I've got the sack,' he said. 'I gave it them hot and strong—to the owner and all, so they handed me my money and told me to get out. But my walking has nothing to do with you. You know the inside track of the office work now. You will be needed. They will give you a good salary.'

'You took me on when I was a lazy, useless hound,' said Phil, steadily, 'so if you don't mind, I'll stick to you now!'

'All right!' said Vic Morris, 'mind, it's precious little you'll get out of it. You are a fool for your pains, and so I tell you. But perhaps one fine day I'll make an engineer out of you.'

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WIND BLOWN STRAWS

Thirty years ago Kirktown feared God. Today it feared only Incubus, Romer and Co. But the time was coming, as always, when the fear of the Lord was to get a second chance. The originator of the company had been a certain Johann Inkob who had located the coal and bought the land. His daughter, Sophia, married one Jacob Gorm of Thorsby, a man filled with the love of gold, and after him his nephew, Jacob Gorm Romer had developed the small workings of the Dusseldorf chemist into the vast Coal and Iron combination known as the Incubus Companies. It had occurred to the founder when he married to Latinise his name, if only for his wife's sake. 'Mrs. Johann Inkob' had a strange new foreign sound, but 'Mrs. John Incubus' proclaimed aloud, sounded rather like the wife of a possible peer.

Still it was the money made by Jacob Gorm at the docks of Thorsby that had been utilised to develop the discoveries of the original Inkob. The iron lay very deep and the working of it was expensive.

But under his nephew, Jacob Romer, little by little everything had taken shape. He had the great gift of selecting suitable instruments. For instance, he needed James Kahn, because an unscrupulous man was a necessity to him. Hector McKill, a leading elder in the Village Kirk was one of his chief stand-byes. He had chosen him because Scotland is a land of pious people, and Hector possessed that

repute.

But Scotland is also a country of uproarious good cheer, where the bottle circles and where song and unbound mirth mock the frigidity of Calvinistic manners.

For this reason Walter Grindling was Manager of No 2. Grindling had no use for prayer-meetings. He made not the faintest pretensions to religion. So the two managers did not in any way interfere with each other. Hector McKill worked the piety wing of the business, and he did it to perfection. Walter Grindling did the like with the social and hospitable. It does not do, in the most thriving concern, to overman any department.

In the Incubus pits this division of labour did very well on the whole. If it were desired to get rid of any man who was a church member or frequented prayer meetings, Mr. Manager Grindling dismissed him. He informed him that he had been taking up with ranters, to the neglect of his own proper business.

If the undesirable and unprofitable servant cared for none of these things, then Senior Manager McKill called him into his office, sighed, wrestled with him in the spirit, even prayed with him for his soul's good, -charged him with 'carousing,' and finally dismissed him without a character.

And on the whole the men so dealt with, when they came to compare notes, agreed in preferring Grindling's rough 'We've no use for you here-get out of this!' to the suaver methods of Hector McKill.

As Phil Calmont went home that night, once more 'out of a job,' though not without a purpose in the world, he paused and looked at the dreary mounds of refuse and shale spread out everywhere, the

complexity of level crossings and multi-coloured railway signals, the tall stagings of the pits, with swiftly spinning wheels, whirling and reversing as they wound and unwound the endless steel cords. Phil had the gift of imagination, and he could see beneath him the braes of Kirktown before all this came to pass—the quiet old-fashioned white-washed hamlet, the serried rows of the com stooks, the shy questing bairns with their mouths stained with blackberry juice in the autumn—all now passed away to give place to rows on rows of brick-built houses, each exactly the pattern of all the others, in which lived the ‘employees’ of the Incubus Company—gardenless, pleasureless, almost crushed out of the sight of heaven by the vast mounds of debris which represented the tailings of the Romer millions.

But beyond these the woods still stood up untainted all about; except, that is, for a dingy skirting of pines and larches straggling about the smelting banks.

The lower branches of these had been burnt brown by the furnace fumes, whereupon one of the neighbouring landlords, having threatened proceedings, Jacob Romer had bought up his property, lock, stock, and barrel. This, however, was a mere fringe. It seemed as if the smell of vernal woodlands, of the unwinding crosiers of the ferns, of the glades where shy rabbits played and leaped and pattered, were able to form a barrier against the encroachments of the desecrated lower valley, which at the bidding of Incubus and Co. had been given up to smoke and flame and rubbish heaps.

Day followed day, and always at the Glebe End Cottage Vida saw Jacob Romer's horses pass at full speed down the avenue, the wheels making no noise

over the elastic carpet of pine needles; then, with a sudden rasp of gravel, and the noise of hoofs drumming on hard macadam, turning at right angles towards the Incubus Works in the valley.

These were the days when Vic Morris, a disgraced man, was seeking any rest for the sole of his foot, and when Jacob Romer, glad of an outlet for his natural faculty for organisation, went and came to Kirktown, sometimes twice in one day. No change had been made in Dick Finnan's position by the departure of Vic Morris. He had, indeed, a greater responsibility than before. Because, in the absence of a regular underground engineer, James Kahn went down every day, and so far as Pit No. 2 was concerned Dick Finnan carried out his orders, or modified them according to his liking.

For though Dick only saw Vic for short moments and at long intervals, Phil Calmont came to the Glebe End Cottage every evening in his place. And so far as Dick and the other overseers had any power, they still did the will of Vic Morris. The pity was that their power was so limited. Because it was with grim characteristic energy that Jacob Romer ruled, when at last, weary of tools, he set his own hand to the plough, as in the days of yore.

Of course Phil was seen coming and going to Glebe Cottage. Everything was public property in Kirktown. Everything commented on. But then Phil had no position. His engineering ambitions were not known. He had always been considered as a worthless character, without ambition, without future-just 'yin o' thae Calmonts.' If in his folly he added one to Vida Bryant's suitors, that was his own lookout. He went to scorch his wings, at his own risk and peril. Yet so far as the workings were

concerned it was through him and Dick Finnan that Vic communicated with the pit-men, the gang-foremen, and the lessees of so many cubic feet of extractable ore upon the working-faces.

Vic himself kept away, being certain that his presence at Glebe End would procure the speedy dismissal of Dick Finnan, the end of his own usefulness in the pits, and the expulsion of Vida and Dick out of the pretty cottage at the wood-side. Indeed, it was difficult enough to obtain suitable accommodation in a town where all, more or less, were dependent on Incubus, Romer and Co. for daily bread.

Mr. Irongray would gladly have given him shelter. The Cameronian minister was Vic's firm friend, and often the two discoursed together of the things above, upon, and under the earth till three in the morning, and the summer sun peeped in reproachfully from all round the study blinds.

But then again, would such a course be fair to the struggling little Cameronian congregation of Kirktown, with the financial burden of whose upkeep its most important member charged himself. For Jacob Romer provided more than half the minister's stipend, saw to the repairs in the church, and out of his own pocket recompensed the precentor and beadle. For himself, Benjamin Irongray was quite willing to give up all these advantages. But his session pointed out to him that the congregation was so scanty in numbers that however willing they might be to pay him a living wage, and to carry on the work of the congregation, they were not able, practically the whole of them depending upon Jacob Romer. Therefore, in all probability, the Kirk on the Hill would be shut up.

From this decision only one dissented-Richard Finnan, ruling elder-who was willing that he and his minister alike should dare all things in the cause which they accounted righteousness.

But at this juncture there came another offer. Dreamy, detached, his flossy hair cast back in a poetic curve from his broad unwrinkled brow, the Reverend John Fowler, of the Free Valley Kirk, strolled across to Vic's lodgings, where he was under a week's notice to quit.

'I hear you are turned out,' he said, 'so were we-so was my father, I mean,-in '43, at the Disruption. I feel for you, Mr. Morris. My friend and yours, Ben-I mean, Mr. Irongray, of the Kirk on the Hill, has told me of your position. If it be your will to enter my house as a guest, I and my family will feel ourselves honoured.'

'It is true,' said Vic Morris, 'that at present it not suit me to quit Kirktown, and that for many reasons. A situation has been proposed to me at the mines of Rio Tinto, in Spain. But that will have to wait. I have a feeling that I may be of use here. Sooner or later-and I believe rather sooner than later, the Incubus Company will get the fall it is riding for.'

'But,' he broke off short with a look at his visitor (who sat, his silken hair in a fine disorder, making a sort of halo about his head) 'you also have those connected with the works in high place in your congregation-Mr. Hector McKill, is I think, an elder of yours! Can you afford-?'

The Reverend John Fowler sketched a little gesture of carelessness, which, like all that he did with his hands, was beautiful to see. John Fowler, whom Hector McKill called Absolom, could not do an ungraceful action if he had tried. And the beautiful

spirit that was in him, mated well with the bodily presence which stood him in such excellent stead in the pulpit.

There was some proper pride of the right ghostly sort in the tum of the head with which he answered,

I am minister of the Free Valley Kirk, and the stipend of one hundred and sixty pounds, six shillings, and sixpence which is paid to me comes from the Sustentation Fund of the Church to which I have the honour to belong. That payment will not be affected by a score of Hector McKills, nor yet by the increase or falling off of the free-will offerings of my people, concerning which, however, I have little to fear.

You are welcome to my house, Mr. Morris, if you will be our guest.'

'But I cannot come unless-unless-' and here Vic Morris, man of granite, who could speak before capitalists and kings without disturbing himself, faltered at sight of the steady gaze of the dreamy eyes, the gentle kindness of the mouth, from which, however, dropped, all unexpected, pearls of wit and quiet irony, when after long, you came to know the man.

'Unless what?' said the minister, smiling.

'Unless you allow me to pay-let us say-what I pay here, or a little more for the superior accomodation.'

John Fowler lifted his hands as if to put that part of the question away once and for all.

'My daughter Janet,' he said, 'does her best. But you will have no superior accommodation. 'Ours is a poor house-the house of a man with a flock of children to educate and little enough to do it on. Not that I take much to do with that-to my shame be it spoken-I hand over the money to my daughter when

it comes in, and there is an end of it. I have no doubt that Janet will tender you the statement of any extra expense to which your presence may put her. But that is between you and her. You will understand that I do not wish to place you under any obligation--'

'You place me under a very great one,' declared Vic Morris, 'but for you I should have had to leave the place, and any influence which I may have in case of trouble among the men, would be greatly marred.'

'You are welcome,' said John Fowler. 'I consider your presence in my house an honour!'

'And Mr. Hector McKill?'

The minister opened out his palms with a movement expressive of infinite scorn.

'He wearies me, this good Mr. McKill,' he said.

'He does the meanest actions all the week, and then on prayer-meeting night he will take up half an hour praying for the spread of perfect sinlessness among professing Christians. On Sunday he sends round requests to the vestry that we may sing his favourite paraphrase 'That to Perfection's sacred heights, We nearer still may rise.' Besides which his wife takes in the Prophetic Herald, and wears my soul into tatters with her 'little horns' and her 'times and times,' and and 'half a time.'

So it was arranged on the spot that Vic should move down to the Valley Manse with all his 'props' that very night. Janet would have a room ready for him, and though Alf and Tim would be a little cramped for space in the garret, they were used to it, and could always get up a glow by fighting each other, rolling and tumbling all about the floor. Raif would be busy preparing for his bursary, but little

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Violet Fowler would be rare and glad to see the newcomer.

A wide, rather bare room suddenly transformed into a bedroom and workroom—that was what Vic found when he went to take possession that same evening. Janet Fowler had planned, and Raif had been called in to help with the moving of furniture. Little Violet had hindered to the best of her ability, by getting impartially into everybody's way. Lastly, just before the advent of Vic, the Reverend John had been called from his study to pronounce upon the work, and had found it very good. Which, taken in connection with the Bossy silken locks tossed back from his temples with the habitually gracious gesture, was in its way a benediction.

Vic was frankly delighted. There seemed to be nothing wanting. A fairy had foreseen and planned everything. During the day the bed in the corner was shut off by a screen of many foldings. But as Vic Morris was accustomed to read in bed, a little table held ready a couple of tall candles and a box of matches.

Then a big, well-lighted work table stood in one of the windows, of the solid planed deal, which would not be hurt by spilt chemicals or multiplied aspergations of ink. Shelves for his books stood empty in the angle. Only about the central table and by the bedside were there carpets and rugs. For the rest Vic could trample, as he loved to do, on bare, clean boards. Two cupboards, one large, deep and unshelved for his boxes and boots, and the other, which closed with a lock and key, completed his bliss.

Janet it was who showed him over, her father beaming mildly in the background.

'It is, I declare, magic-absolute magic!' cried Vic, 'Why, it is what I have dreamed of, but never thought of realising. How I shall ever go away, I do not know.'

'You have not been so long in possession yet,' said Janet, quietly, though with a touch of her father's irony, 'that there is any pressing need to speak about that!'

'But there is one thing, Miss Janet,' said the tall young man, still, however, uncomfortably enough. 'I must arrange with you-have been accustomed to pay sixteen shillings a week for my rooms, taking my meals out-'

Janet held up her hand with something of her father's grace of gesture, but with far more of command.

'In the proper time I shall present you with your weekly statement,' she said with a quiet imperiousness which utterly silenced Vic, who found himself muttering as he watched the authoritative housewife, 'How could I ever have thought that she was plain!'

Naturally the news of what the minister of the Valley Kirk had done ran swiftly through the village.

The Valley Manse was very advantageously placed for purposes of observation. Nearly every housewife in the whole length of the High Street could see the manse door by merely putting aside the little white lace curtain, strung on a piece of tape across the lower third of her window.

At eleven of the morning Hector McKill called, entered, and remained a long time closeted with the minister. Then he flounced out, and went up the road with long strides.

The whole High Street felt certain that he had

'lifted his lines,' and wondered where he would go now. 'Lifting one's lines' is the technical expression for disjoining one's self from a congregation. Only on the occasion of a grave and serious quarrel is this resorted to. For Scottish folk are very faithful to their places of worship when once they have chosen them-or, as is more probably the case, had them chosen for them by the religious professions of their parents.

The conclusion drawn by the wise folk of the High Street council, was, for once, correct. At the Manse Hector McKill had beseeched, had threatened, had sworn to 'split the kirk,' always a dire possibility in Scotland. But every time he had found his threats broken upon the quiet unresentful determination of Mr. Fowler. He had carried away with him the double certificates, with the ink scarcely dry upon them, which stated 'that in the opinion of the Reverend John Fowler, Mr. and Mrs. Hector McKill were fit and proper persons to leave the Free Congregation of the Valley Church in Kirktown.'

Being otherwise occupied, and with the anger within him still effervescent, Mr. McKill did not notice the curious wording of the certificate. At any rate he had no intention of making use of the 'disjunction lines.' No other church, certainly none in Kirktown, was worthy to receive his adherence and that of his amiable wife. He would do better. He would set up a new sect in Kirktown. Yes, here at last was his opportunity. He had long been dissatisfied with the prelections of 'colleged divines.' He would call the ultra-faithful to arms -and minister to them himself.

It was with this purpose in his head that he went so rapidly up the street to take a Sunday and

Wed-nesday lease of the Oddfellows' Hall. He secured both. He had also chosen a name for his new sect. It was to be called 'The Church of the Thousand, Three Hundred, and Five and Thirty Days.' He had thought of simply and unostentatiously naming it 'The Church,' as being the only one, uniting pure doctrine with real authority. But his wife, whose reasons could not be denied, had asserted the claims of exact prophecy. And so, with some sacrifice of simplicity, Hector McKill had yielded.

After lunch he sent his wife, in company with the beadle's wife, to uplift his Bibles and Psalm-books, his hymn-books and hassocks from the pew he had occupied so long in the Valley Kirk, now become a Sodom and as Gomorrah to him. And if one were to believe that excellent person, the wife of the beadle, a woman wholly devoted to 'Maister Fowler,' it was with the utmost difficulty that Mrs. McKill, 'that greedy gorb' was prevented from carrying off not only her own, but a large number of other books of her late cult, which were by no means hers to dispose of.

'Eh, but she's worth the watchin',' said Mistress Haldane afterwards. 'I declare if I hadna been there yon wumman wad fair hae strippit the kirk. She wanted me to let her into the vestry. But, 'Na, na,' says I. 'I hae far ower muckle respect for the pulpit Bible!' That's what I said to her, says I.'

It cannot be affirmed that the success of the new venture was proportionate to the energy with which Hector McKill pursued his work of proselytism. He went from foreman to foreman, from worker to worker, and after considerable difficulty (more or less) he did indeed succeed in extorting the variously

worded promises, or in some cases mere grunts of acquiescence-that they would maybe look in upon the 'Church of the 1335 Days' -that they 'wad gie him a hearin'-or more often, that 'they wadna just like to say, but would maybe see!' All which eminently Scottish modes of begging the question, and 'reading the bill this day six months,' were calculated and arranged for the sole purpose at once of affording Hector McKill no reason for anger, and of personally committing the speakers to nothing in particular. For though it is not much known south of the border, Scotch 'canniness' consists not so much in a 'bang-went-saxpence' carefulness as to money, which is rather rare-and in which the Scot is far surpassed by both Wales and Yorkshire- but in the above faculty of never quite committing himself, never leaving himself without an intellectual backdoor in any argument.

Nevertheless, in the Oddfellows' Hall each Sunday and Wednesday Hector McKill found employment for his facility in misquoting and distorting Scripture, and condemning others to eternal torture for their inability to see eye to eye with himself. He even got a certain following, at least at first. There are always in Scottish churches a few of what may be called 'dissidents from dissent.' Socialism will never make any real progress in Scotland. For the good reason that even in religion particularism and private property in opinion are so ingrained in the nation, that no three men can ever agree with each other, or be of one mind upon any subject-above all about religion.

Still, with the aforesaid dissidents, the riff-raff ever ready to enter any new Cave of Adullam, and a few honest men driven to follow the senior manager

for reasons of bread and butter, Hector McKill gathered a certain meagre following.

He was less successful, however, when he invited 'all interested in the dissemination of the truth,' to send in special requests for prayer. One of these notes (strictly anonymous, it may well be presumed pointed out that the whited sepulchres of the vicinity were much in need of new coats of paint, and urgent prayers were asked for the same. Another remarked upon the tattered condition of the local hypocrites' cloaks and suggested a fresh supply as an object to be borne in mind by Mr. McKill on his next Wednesday evening.

A third referred to the 'second exit' of all the Incubus pits as pressing petitionary need. While yet others, written in ill-formed caligraphy, with a strong slope to the left, suggested an immediate general rise of ten per cent on the wages bill, and an inquiry into the sanitary condition of the houses recently acquired by Mr. Hector McKill, with the hard-earned savings of a lifetime.

In fact, as Mr. McKill well said, 'Such an exhibition of the lowest and most debased rascality made him almost despair of human nature.' He replied by putting up the rents upon his tenants so as to pay for the expenses of the services in the Oddfellows' Hall. What would have been meanness in an ordinary man, was only the approved and necessary wisdom of the serpent in a tried vessel like Hector McKill. That Hector was harmless as the dove was abundantly proven. In fact he admitted as much himself.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

BROUGHT TO BOOK

Of all Vida's lovers the most subtle, persistent, and best equipped with argument was one who never appeared in public, whom none ever saw knocking at the door of the little cottage at the wood gate. In fact, no other than James Kahn, the Confidential himself.

He had studied his abrupt and passionate master, and on the strength of the knowledge so acquired, he exploited them thoroughly. He knew that much of Jacob Romer's apparent hardness was the effect of a very real remorse. He believed that if he could only present to his master a daughter fair, stately, and-this was essential-married to himself, James Kahn, she would be immediately taken to her father's heart. Also Mr. James Kahn would slip without trouble into the succession of the Romer millions, towards which his heart yearned as a bridegroom towards a bride.

There was something else, of course. Vida Bryan was to him a beautiful wild animal, and he promised himself the luxury of taming her. That this would be a real pleasure he doubted not. He admired her. He missed no turn of her lithe form, no expression of her vivid face. The energetic traits of her beauty were in accordance with his own curiously savage taste-Ghetto crossed with Serb of Belgrade, perhaps-a bad blood and a dangerous breed.

A singular and apparently causeless jealousy fired Kahn into angers all the more terrible because they

had to be contained so severely. There was no reason in the world why he should not have come to Glebe End openly and by day, before every one. Vida was a poor girl and his purpose of marriage apparently unselfish and even noble. But he could not sit and see Vic Morris enter as if the place belonged to him, or even, in Vic's recent absences, Phil Calmont. Yet withal Mr. Kahn was the most modern of men, in so far as apparel went- wearing a sleeve-like turn-down collar, a narrow wisp of a tie in Crepe de Chine confined with a minute gold fastening, legginged and wind-coated and flat-capped-in fact quite the complete chaffeur. But in a little sheath double-stitched by himself into the waistband of his trousers, he wore a knife, or rather a dagger, very sharp, workmanlike, and warranted to bridge, easily and swiftly, for anyone who displeased Mr. James Kahn, the gulf between time and eternity.

What is more, his Serb blood made him inclined to serve himself with it. But he was wise enough to know that in this century, and in peaceable litigious Scotland such a mode of settling difficulties would assuredly be gravely inconvenient for himself.

His jealousy was so extreme that he had dismissed two chaffeurs in succession-one because he showed, contrary to the wont of these gentlemen, too great an interest in his master's journeys to Glebe End, and what he did when he got there.

After the second time he conducted for himself. But ever since, on the night of the fire, Vic Morris had so nearly run off with his car, James Kahn had walked all the way up from 'The Caravanserai' his red brick house on the other side of Kirktown-a good couple of miles, which in a man so little avid of

exercise as the Ghetto-Serb, spoke volumes for his earnestness of purpose.

Month after month he wooed Vida with a mixture of sentiment and savagery which warranted that wise young lady in considering him to be mentally deranged. Sometimes on moonlight nights a violin played as no Briton could play it, could be heard sending forth strange out-of-the-world music from the pine woods under her window. Or a patter of pebbles jetted from beneath, would bring her to panes down which the moisture was running freely. Vida would look out, and discern dimly in the rain the figure of a man in a long cloak, standing beneath the window in the shelter of the Douglas pines. More than once she had lifted her window to beseech him to go. She would have been infinitely amused with the adventure had the foolish person been other than James Kahn. But there was something about the man which caused her an instinctive feeling of repulsion-fear and aversion in one. She remembered that this was the man who, on the Good Intent had abandoned both her and her mother. And though she had no idea that he had recognised her as the frightened little girl who carried her mother's cushions and footstools about the deck, the instinctive shudder which his neighbourhood caused, persisted now when she was a woman grown and surrounded by strong and willing protectors.

On the other hand she could not forget that it was through this man's favour that Dick Finnan had received advancement in the mine, and to whom he owed, at least indirectly, his lease of the pretty cottage at the great man's gate.

It was because of these things, that Vida with a

quaking heart had on one or two occasions opened her window and besought him to leave her in peace.

He had always answered her with wild, semi-oriental professions of love, declaring his desire to make her his wife, even though by doing so he should forfeit every hope of any worldly advancement.

In spite of the extravagance of the man's words, there was something not without attractiveness in the place and circumstances, which affected Vida with a curious fascination, like a scene in a theatre. The filtered moonlight, the high black umbrella like heads of the pines, the low voice speaking on of the deepest gloom, had all something of the Waverley Novels about them. Even so did Ensign Brown declare his love upon the pensive bosom of Windermere. Perchance on such a night Wilfred of Ivanhoe philandered beneath the window of the daughter of Isaac of York, and only recalled his majestic Rowena at ever-lengthening intervals.

In short, though mortally afraid, and wishful that the 'Confidential' would depart, Vida had enough of the original Eve within her to feel rather flattered. In any case, she had no intention of marrying James Kahn-not if he were the only man in the world-so she told herself.

But in spite of any amount of innocence in fact and intention, there is always a certain danger in playing with fire, especially of the Ghetto-Serb type. And though Kahn had begun by determining to marry Vida as the simpler of two ways to the Romer millions, he had ended by feeling for her that sort of dog-in-the-manger love which consists in affirming, 'If I can't have her, nobody else shall!'

All the fire of his doubtful blood strengthened this

resolve-as well as all his commercial prudence. For if by chance Vida either remembered or chanced to have brought from the wreck sufficient evidence to convince Jacob Romer of her relationship, the Master of Millions might prove to be as accessible to the domestic emotions as if the subject had been introduced by Mrs. James Kahn. And that another (let us say Mr. Vic Morris) should carry off from underneath his very nose both money and maiden, was something that the erst-while commissionaire of Belgrade could not permit. If in no other way- well there remained the Servian tradition of how to clear a way to a throne.

‘Please go away!’

‘Listen to me then, Miss Vida. I love you-yes, with all my heart. Only say that you will accept me, and I will ask your adopted father's permission tomorrow. He will not, I know, refuse me. I have helped him in the past-you know that. In the future I shall make it my business to reward all those who have been kind to my wife!’

‘Oh, please hush-go away! I have answered you a score of times before. Can you not believe me? There is no more to be said!’

‘You love another; if so, let him beware the anger of James--’

‘Hush, I tell you! I ask you to only go away. I have no wish to hurt your feelings. I do not love you-I never shall love you. It is an impossibility. There is there is-a bar between us--’

‘Ah,’ said James Kahn, fiercely. ‘I know-Vic Morris!’

‘No, no, something quite different,’ said Vida, eager that she should bring no harm to her friend-or rather her good old Dick's friend. Though, indeed,

Vic would have thanked her little for the denial. He would gladly have braved all the possible angers of James Kahn, including the dagger in the Serb's waist-band (if he had known of it) for the privilege of being that 'bar' which shut off for ever the love of Vida Bryan from Jacob Romer's chief of staff.

'Not Vic Morris?' said James Kahn, 'then who?'

'No one,' said Vida, breathlessly, 'I do not love you-that is all.'

'You will learn,' he pleaded. 'I will be your slave. I will make you love me. It is in our race. Life and death are little to us compared with the woman we love. If any man comes between us- let him have a care for his life. He shall never live to marry you. I will watch you day and night--' A brilliant illumination suddenly sprang from the window of the garret chamber used for visitors, and situated immediately above Vida's. It flickered, increased in power, concentrated with a sudden click, and revealed James Kahn standing in his long cloak blinking beneath the shelter of the Douglas pine.

'Come out o' that, ye hulking Dago,' I see you and your Mother Hubbard's mortcloth. Come out like a man, and say what ye have to say to Billy Bryan, instid av complotting wid a poor man's only daughter-and only the half av her his.'

James Kahn stooped, turned, and would have fled. But a couple of full-sized navy revolver bullets -one of which tore through the pine branches overhead, and the other went howking like a trenching mole in the needle-covered earth-induced him to change his mind. He stopped where he was.

'Stand ye, there, me pretty moonlight boy,' said Billy Bryan, 'Vida, honey, shake up Dick, and tell him to come here a minute, if pistol-shots won't

fetch him. Don't move, you l I have you covered, and I'll tunnel ye like the Straits o' Dover. Faith, ye will never be seasick again.'

In a minute old Dick came shuffling out in loose foot-gear and hastily wrapped in a long sea-cloak which he had used when the mists were thick and chill about the Mickle Ross, and the glasses of the lantern grew blurred and uncertain with the congealing of the ice crystals.

'What is it, Billy?'

'Hould away, don't ye joggle my arm, Dick,' cried Billy, 'this Navy-league might go off and make a hole in a certain kind gentleman down there; a gentleman who, by his own tale, wants to speak with you and me, Dick, about the marrying and giving in marriage of our joint-stock daughter, which her name is Vida Bryan and her nation that of Dick Finnan. Step up, my lad, and speak your mind to the Vida Bryan Paternal Syndicate-sharp too, for there's a twitch in my right forefinger that I am apt to suffer from when kept waiting over long.'

Slowly out of the dazzling circle thrown downwards by the lighthouse man's acetylene lantern, the figure in the shelter of the Douglas pine stepped forward. The illumination followed him like a search-light. And it was evident also that so did the navy revolver. A steely glint above the bent knuckles of Billy Bryan's right hand afforded to James Kahn this useful information.

'What, Mr. Kahn!' cried old Dick, so astonished that he could hardly utter the words, 'why, sir, what has brought you here at this time o' night; anything wrong at the pits?'

'No, Finnan, certainly not,' said the Acting Manager, determined to make the best of it. 'The fact

is I was on my way up to the Castle, and I paused to take a look that all was right about the cottage. (There have been wandering bands of doubtful characters abroad ever since the fire). And this lunatic-I must presume some friend of yours-took me for a burglar and fired two shots at me!

'She's twitching!' said Billy.

'Will you oblige me by asking him to put up his revolver, Mr. Finnan?'

'Warning Number one,' said Billy, 'special for them that doesn't tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, as the Good Book says!'

'I had also a little previous conversation with Miss Vida, whom I found enjoying the night air at her window.' James Kahn felt that it was better to be plain. Circumstances were for the present against him.

'Ah, we're getting at it now,' said Billy.

'It came about from seeing her so unprotected, and her window so near the ground. I was afraid that some misfortune might arrive!'

'Warnin' Number two! If she twitches like that again, somebody will have no further trouble in this sinful world.'

'The fact is, Mr. Finnan,' said Mr. Kahn, 'that I have a private reason for being interested in the safety of Miss Vida. I have long cherished the intention-the hope, that is, of making Miss Vida my wife.'

'Break off! Dismiss! Disperse! Inspection over! Only hould on like a little man till I open the door!' cried Billy Bryan, jubilantly. 'Come in an' have a social glass of barley and water, best pot product, nineteen years in bottle, considered powerfully soothing to the nerves with a squeeze of lemon.'

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Recommended by the faculty and all temperance societies-testimonials by every post. Don't sleep till you have some!"

And Billy's footsteps could be heard thundering down the stairway, then crossing the hall. A pause ensued as he fumbled with the bolts. The light of the lantern he carried raced horizontally across the little, lawn, sparkling on the dewy grass and doubtless astonishing the shut and slumbering daisies as with the coming of an untimely dawn.

Vida had gone to her room (though I will not affirm that she was not listening) before Billy Bryan brought his prisoner in. Old Dick, hastily attired to do honour to the second-in-command at the Incubus Works, brought up the rear with a couple of candles which he was about to deposit on the new piano. 'Whoa there!' cried Billy, 'remember Miss Vida's Broadwood. It was never bought for a stand for your dirty brass lamp-posts. It has fancy candelabra of its own, wan on each side. Wait till I get a newspaper.'

The candles at last found a resting-place on a side-table and Billy continued to do the honours.

'Ye are on your way to the mansion, but since ye did us the obligation to look in, ye will partake. So bein' as 'tis likely hat ye may be late for supper up yonder at the Castle and the kitchen fire out. But a dhrop av barley water, now, or cowld coffee will hurt no man at no time of night.'

By this time, chiefly from the instinct of obedience, old Dick, as in a kind of tremulous state, half alarm, half apology.

'Mr. Kahn,' he said. 'I hope that ye will take no offence. You have been a good friend to me and mine. And Billy means well. He is my old mate, and

in a sense him an' me are partners in our little lass upstairs.'

'I quite understand,' said James Kahn, helping himself liberally to all the goodly provisions—those promised by Billy, and also to the bread, cheese, and cold meat which Dick had unearthed from Vida's receptacles.

Kahn let his wealth and position drop away with the instantaneousness of a man who, after years of a foreign tongue, begins to speak his own language. Indeed he felt more at home with these two working men, there in the heart of the night, and having just escaped a very definite peril, than at a great function in the dining room of Gorm Castle.

Moreover, he had no intention of backing out of his offer. And as soon as might be, he put his proposal upon a business basis. If Vida would accept him, he would settle ten thousand pounds upon her on the day of her marriage. He would put Dick Finnan into a cottage of his own, and would arrange their marriage in any way that Vida might wish. No one could do fairer than that. Only, having regard to his present arrangements with Mr. Romer in the way of business, the Master of Gorm Castle was not to be told till after the marriage, and at such a time as he, James Kahn, should decide to be best for the breaking of the news.

'Witnesses?' Why, as many as they liked, publication of intention in the journals of his country, registrars, parsons—a bishop if they wished it, everything of the surest, loyalest, and most binding. It was not that of which he was afraid. The consent of Miss Vida—ah—Bryan.'

'Miss Vida Bryan, without the 'ah'—if you please!' interrupted Billy, who was in a mood to raise

difficulties. But for all this pleasant feeling, they were definitely at a standstill.

It was agreed by all parties that nothing could be done without the lady. Dick, when applied to, could shed no light on the condition of that half of his daughter's heart for which he was paternally responsible.

'It might be Mr. Morris (at this James Kahn quivered with desire to sheath the Serb knife in the broad back of Vic Morris) or again it might not. Mr. Morris generally talked with him about pit work, but he had not been there for some time. Then there was that young Calmont-the doctor's lad-him that was working about the drawing offices.'

'Pshaw!' said Kahn, dismissing with a wave of his hand poor Phil altogether.

'But,' continued Dick, 'I can't say how Vida took it, only as for myself I had never thought of such a thing. It has come upon me like a blow.'

'Well' said Billy, cheerfully, 'what of that, ould 'un?--The foreign gentleman is not asking you to marry him. I vote that we call down the little colleen herself.'

'That's talking!' said James Kahn, but his heart beat thickly all the same. He was within a single stride of success. He saw the Romer millions. He saw also the girl-whom he had ended by loving according to his kind. The future depended upon that little thing-a girl's word, a girl's fancy, a girl's liking

The three men passed a curious quarter of an hour while they waited for Vida to come down. On the table a copy of the Border Advertiser spread broadly out, sustained the two tall candlesticks which Billy Bryan had so hastily and unworthily

compared to lamp posts.

James Kahn, visibly ill at ease, allowed his eyes to wander here and there about the little parlour, taking in the dado which Vida had painted with a running pattern of rowan branches and red berries. He noticed the new piano, and for a moment it seemed as if he were about to ask a question. In that poor cottage house, such a thing seemed certainly the gift of a favoured lover, and it grieved the foresight of James Kahn that he had not thought of it before.

Billy also regarded the piano, but with a proudly parental look, which, if Kahn had paid the slightest attention to, would have told its tale. Dick Finnan, almost superstitious in his devotion to constituted authority, watched James Kahn furtively.

The three men, silent and watchful, presently heard light steps on the floor above, on the landing, coming down the stairs. The door opened, and Vida appeared, in a simple dressing-gown of old fashioned oatmeal cloth with a lining of palest blue showing at throat and cuffs. She had made the gown herself, and was no little proud of her work. The three men were now standing up.

'You wished me to come down?' she said simply, resting one hand on the back of a chair.

'Yes,' stammered Dick, 'that is to say Mr. Kahn wished it-he has something to ask you.'

'Take your time, little girl,' interrupted Billy, 'don't let anybody fluster you-not if he was the Boss of the Trinity House itself.'

'Mr. Kahn makes us a wonderful offer,' said Dick, quaveringly. 'He has been wonderfully kind to me. Without Mr. Kahn I should have been working for a day's wage-'

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But at this point James Kahn, seeing the firmness growing into obstinacy about the girl's mouth, broke in. 'Our old friend mistakes the point,' he said,

'I am not here to ask for the repayment of any boon. There is no reason why I should, Mr. Finnan was the best man for the position he occupies. I appointed him for that reason. For the same reason he has this cottage at Glebe End Gate. He and you, Miss Bryan, will continue as you are without any interference from me, whether you feel yourself able to agree with my proposition or not.'

During this speech, old Dick Finnan looked at James Kahn with an expression of dumb loyalty, as if in the world there could never have been a man so generous and so unselfish. Then his eyes rested on his adopted daughter.

'You see,' the look said quite plainly, 'what a man he is.'

'No,' James Kahn continued, in the quiet tone of one who has nothing in the world to boast himself about, 'I come tonight as a suppliant. I have loved Miss Vida ever since I set eyes on her, gathering flowers in the springtime on the bosky sides of a dell which shall ever be sacred to me. I have, it is true, allowed Miss Bryan to understand my preferences, and my intentions with regard to her. But I leave it to herself to say whether or not this has not been done at all times with the utmost courtesy, and after the manner of an honest man'

The words and the manner impressed Dick Finnan. They were exceedingly well delivered—perhaps a

trifle too well. James Kahn had mastered all things British, save the art of leaving well alone.

So he could not be prevented from adding, 'Of course, I recognise that the difference between our positions must be taken into consideration. I will, therefore, abundantly provide for the old age of both her benefactors, Mr. Finnan and Mr. Bryan—'

'Stop there,' cried Billy Bryan, 'stop just in this exact place, and look me in the eye, young man, if you can, for wan consecutive minute. Now Dick there can do as he likes, being given over to lords and masters and them in authority over him,—such being his nature. But wid Billy Bryan, 'tis some little different.

I put no stress on the young lady, that is the daughter av one and the other of us. But being responsible for wan full half of her soul, mind, body, and estate till she reaches the age of twenty-wan years, no more will I allow any other person or persons to put pressure upon her. She shall choose accordin' to her free will. If she says 'No' it shall be 'No'; if 'Yes' '-Yes!' And as for that talk of puttin' Billy Bryan in a comfortable position for his ould age—that day has not yet arrived. And Billy will do that for himself by the strent of his arrums, and the brains in his head—yuss, and if need be he will provide for both halves of his daughter, just as he did for that wan whole and undivided Broadwood pi-an-no standing there in the corner.'

Billy said all this to the vivid punctuation of his clenched fists on the table, so that the candles on the sheet of the Border Advertiser were well-nigh jolted out of their places.

James Kahn, however, was as gentle and suave as ever. He was far too much a man of the world to allow himself to be led into side issues. He had made up his mind what he would say, and was

determined that he would not leave the room without saying it.

'Certainly, Mr. Bryan,' he said, 'no one dreamed of anything else. All that I meant to imply was that I should be ready to consider every interest, if Miss Vida did me the honour of becoming my wife. I need not again repeat what I have previously told Miss Vida. This is an affair betwixt men, and if Miss Vida will give me a favourable answer, or even a hope of such an answer, I will easily arrange the details with those who have every claim to be considered her natural protectors.'

He stopped a moment as if to allow Vida time to speak, but finding that she remained silent, with the light striking upward on her face from the candles on the table, and her hair falling in a dark mass on the shoulders of her cream-coloured dressing-gown, he went on again, exactly as if making a speech at a business meeting.

'In fact, as I have already had the honour of informing these gentlemen, I charge myself with everything. All that I ask in return is that the fact of the marriage be kept a secret till I have fulfilled the present arrangements I have with my esteemed chief and principal, Mr. Jacob Romer. I ask the right, for reasons that are at once simple and private, of telling him of the marriage at my own time-but within a very brief period of delay, certainly not exceeding six months in all, that being the period over which our present arrangement run!'

Dick looked at Vida beseechingly. He was clearly on the aide of his master. The mere proposal seemed very wonderful to him. He certainly considered Vida a most fortunate girl.

Billy Bryan was also on the watch, but in a very

different spirit. He merely wanted to be sure to which aide Vida's desires inclined, in order to lend her all the weight of his support-backed, if necessary, by the revolver which had first induced James Kahn to speak out his mind that night.

'Well, Vida?' said Billy encouragingly, 'is it 'yes' or 'no'? Will ye be rich in the cracking of a finger-and-thumb, or will ye stay poor yet awhile longer? Yes or no, lass! Out with it! And speak just as ye feel, honey. To the poll with you like a free elector in the county av Tipperary, where they care for neither priest nor parson!'

'My answer, Mr. Kahn,' said Vida, with a grave, severe restraint, 'is, as I told you before, 'No!'

'You have nothing to add, no hope, no reason?'

'None,' said Vida, 'at least no reason that I can give. I bid you good-night!'

And she passed out of sight up the stairs.

Then Billy Bryan broke loose. He actually danced a jig.

'The brave young lass,' he cried, 'she deserves a coronet of diamonds, she has chosen to be poor!'

Meantime Dick, sorely disappointed, was showing James Kahn to the door.

'I hope,' he said, 'that this will make no difference between us.' But James Kahn took himself off into the darkness without a word.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE SECRETS OF A SUMMER HOUSE

In the forenoon Phil Calmont laboured with his late master and present friend Vic Morris. There was no lack of occupation. Vic had several inventions to perfect, and in especial, an entirely new system of installing electric fans for the ventilation of very deep mines, which he hoped to see adopted on the Rand, and also wherever the workings had to be carried on at depths of over fifteen hundred feet.

Vic insisted on paying Phil for the hours of work he did for him, and it was with the utmost difficulty that Phil was able to arrange for a much lower scale, in consideration of the valuable experience he was getting. It was only when Vic Morris represented to him that he would need a certain sum of money for his college expenses, that Phil finally accepted, even then much against his will. In the afternoon he indemnified himself for the morning's work by a visit to his friend Rose Nunsby, and as often as not towards the gloaming he might have been seen making his way in the direction of the cottage at Glebe End Gate.

This day, however, he was doubly fortunate. For on crossing the field and overleaping the wall, he found that the Nunsby summerhouse was occupied by two young women, taking their tea together.

A third cup was set, at which Phil gazed with something of apprehension. But Rose speedily relieved him.

There used to be a certain regularity in your

misdeeds, Phil,' she said, 'which has not left you since you became a man of affairs. I thought that you would be sure to look in this afternoon, so I made ready. There is your cake, the sort with the 'juicy-boy' currants you used to like so much, Now I can make it without the little hard piece in the centre, which you called 'Concentrated Indigestion,' though I never noticed that that prevented you from eating it.'

Then Phil, with a distinct rise in his temperature, sat down on the familiar seat by the privet hedge, and looked across at the smiling face of his hostess, and occasionally, but with increasing frequency, at the dark eyes and slender beauty of her friend Vida.

At first Rose did most of the talking.

'I suppose,' she said, 'that we shall be losing you soon.'

'I have not heard,' said Phil, smiling, 'how am I to be lost?'

He thought it was a question of some chatter of their rustic bourg.

'Why,' said Rose. 'Mr. Morris is to go to a great appointment in Spain, so they say, and you are to go with him as his assistant!'

'I wish I were ready!' cried Phil, with a new glint in his eyes, 'but I must work hard at the book part of the business first if I am to do any good. I must go to college, and how am I to get there, except by working as an office assistant, I do not see.'

As he spoke Vida looked at him, and was not at all sure whether or not she really liked the new man who was being evolved out of her old dreamy Phil. Sometimes he reminded her too much of Vic Morris. She noted, for instance, that he never lounged back in the arm-chair he had made for himself in the

privet hedge as of old. He was so much out of practice that the spines pricked him when he tried. Formerly he could locate every one, nestling his shoulders securely among the thickest of them.

'So you are fairly at work, Phil-Mr. Calmont, I mean?' she said the first time that Rose went into the house and left them alone.

Poor Phil looked so grieved that Vida relented, 'Well, 'Phil' then,' she said. 'But really you ought to be proud of our feeling the difference. The Toga virilis, isn't it-or something like that? There is a difference, and you can't blame us for marking it!'

'I don't want there to be any difference,' said Phil, 'not between us three. You were always glad to see me, and scolded me when I was a lazy good-for-nothing. Well, I am not a good-for-much yet, though on the way to improvement. Your denunciations have had their effect. So don't make me suffer for my very virtues. I want you to be just the same!'

'The same number of lumps of sugar in your tea?' queried Rose, later, 'we are poor now and we really cannot stand that always. You used to go on piling up square after square till the top of the pyramid showed itself above the tea!'

These nothings of talk made Vida curiously happy. She was feeling the rebound from the anxieties and dismay of the past night. She had got away early, leaving Billy Bryan alone with the cooking, a task he was quite capable of performing. She had no desire to confront the reproachful face of old Dick on his return from the mine that afternoon.

She was in need of a confidant. And for once, it did not seem that the man was in the way. The positive masculine electricity which generally prevents all real talk between women when there is

a man present, somehow did not hold with Phil. A woman knew at a glance that he knew. He was free of the guild. He understood. Indeed he understood, sometimes, when the woman did not herself understand. That was perhaps the reason why Rose, being some years his senior, had made such a pet of him in the old days. Phil had been like a girl friend to her, yet he brought with him some of a man's out-of-door life, together with the subtle difference which is the salt of all intercourse between men and women,-the salt of sex that never loses its savour.

'I have hurt Dick,' she sighed, with her eyes on her cup. She stirred her tea gently with a spoon, though she took neither cream nor sugar, watching the clear garnet-coloured liquid dropping from the spoon back into the cup.

'What have you been doing now?' said Rose, without much sympathy.

'I won't marry Mr. Kahn.'

'Mr. Kahn!'

The cry came simultaneously from both Rose and Phil. 'Oh, no, not Mr. Kahn.'

And as if in a magic crystal the vision of the broad shoulders and masterful carriage of the dismissed underground engineer rose before them. Rose said again: 'Impossible, not Mr. Kahn.' But Phil only sighed. Beside either of these-the rich bachelor manager, and the clever engineer, he seemed such a boy, feebly trying this and that, uncertain whether anything would ever succeed with him or not.

'And he asked you to marry him, really and truly,' said Rose, with no trace of bitterness in her tone, 'why, you would have had horses and carriages and motor cars, and I don't know what else.'

'I know what else,' said Vida, with a disdainful

toss of her chin. 'James Kahn.'

'Well, of course, you will have to marry somebody, Vida, if only in the interests of the public peace,' said Rose, caressingly. 'As it is the young maids who have admirers in and about Kirktown curse you with the curse of the Jackdaw of Rheims. They cross themselves at your name, and I am a very angel for putting up with you even for a moment.'

Vida smiled at her friend's extravagance, but shook her head gently. 'You are too partial,' she said, 'I am just a poor girl without even a right to the name I bear--'

'Much that matters,' retorted Rose, sharply; 'when you have King Cophetuas coming at midnight to your beggarmaid's hut and proposing to you the holy estate of matrimony--besides goodness knows how many others! One down--the others come on!'

'You are dreadful, Rose--I shall wish I had told you nothing.'

'I freely abandon to you the flock,' said little Miss Nunsby, 'but I should like to keep one ewe-lamb!'

But I have fears even for that. You are a perfect Maelstrom, Vida--you engulf all, whales and minnows alike.'

And waving a hand so as to shut off Vida Bryan's reply, which bore upon the folly of mixed metaphors, she vanished indoors, looking for once in her life, Phil thought, almost pretty.

She glanced at Phil as she passed out of sight, nodded, and smiled, as much as to say, 'See what I do for you, ungrateful boy!'

And so she left him wondering what she could mean by her 'one ewe lamb.'

With Rose's departure a hush seemed to fall upon the wide old garden of the Nunsbys. A silence and

constraint descended on the two who remained behind. It was a full-blooded summer day, almost too hot in the sun, but perfect for young blood in that bower of greenery, splashed with the purple blossoms of the wistaria.

Overhead the dainty foliage of the tall ashes on the boundary line of the Doctor's field hung apparently a far-drawn curtain, half-way up in the blue. For setting of scent and sound, there were the latest homely privet blossoms, suggestive of far-off Sabbath days, when privet and southernwood tied together with a black riband made a decorous Cameronian bouquet to take to church on hot forenoons. From the fields behind came the breath of cows, mingled with the scent of the clover through which they were working a way, with regular crop-croppings of their mouths and the lashing twitch of their tails at the flies—a hot-weather sound quite clearly audible in the Nunsbys' little summerhouse.

Nothing reminded one of Kirktown, save only away to the south the summit of one tall chimney, which, set on a hill-top towards Mr. Kahn's 'Caravanserai,' poured forth a pale rose-coloured smoke. This would take on form and body as the full summer's afternoon darkened to twilight, and the engines were fired for the change of shifts.

And listening to all this, Phil and Vida were silent. Yet it was not because they had nothing to say, the one or the other.

Curiously enough, it was Vida's eyes which rested on those of Phil, and those of the young man that fled her regard. About the girl's lips appeared and vanished alternately a faint smile which seemed to radiate from the ghost of a dimple. Apparently, here in the garden of the Nunsbys, Vida had forgotten her

cares and was thinking pleasant thoughts.

'Phil,' she said, presently, speaking in a low voice to the youth who coloured and started at the mere sound of her voice, 'you are in love! You must be in love! Do you know that you have been neglecting me-me-these last weeks! Come, out with it. I am dying to be told. I shan't say anything to Rose unless you give me permission! There!'

'I neglect you!' Phil still dared not look at her. Instead he examined the finely combed locks of cirrus clouds up in the zenith, as if his excuse was somehow to be found there.

'Yes, indeed,' said Vida, 'and shamelessly. I thought you were a friend of mine-you used to be at least. We liked the same sort of toffee for years. You taught me how to spin a top, after fighting Alf Fowler because he wanted to teach me also-you have forgotten all-all that?'

The least echo of a sigh escaped Vida.

'You come to the Cottage, it is true, but never till Dick is at home, and then you talk till midnight about the things in the mine. I believe it is Mr. Morris who has spoilt me ...my Phil! I owe him a grudge for that!'

For an instant the blood flooded to Phil Calmont's face. He half rose to his feet, and then sank back again into the green shelter. A stronger instinct of loyalty had grasped him. He would not be disloyal to his chief. He went to the Cottage as Vic's representative, and, as Vida truly said, he had, indeed, confined himself to such directions as Vic had told him to give to old Dick, that he might spread them abroad among the men.

He knew that Vic, in the interests of the safety of all those working in the mines, was moving for a

governmental inquiry into the state and safety of the Incubus properties.

Of this, however, no whisper must reach the owners or managers. He alone was in the secret, and it was this sense of being trusted by a great man-for so he held the young engineer to be-which paralysed his tongue.

With a swift divination Vida caught the reason of his silence.

'But I suppose you are like the rest. You only speak when Mr. Morris gives you permission and instructs you what to say. You are not a bit our old Phil at all, the boy who used to stay behind after all the Healthy Family had taken wing, just to eat tea-cakes and currant buns with two girls. You had better go over to the Valley Manse and ask your master if it is right for you to be here at all, in broad daylight, and unprotected!'

'Mr. Morris,' Phil answered stiffly, 'has nothing to do with my actions after hours of work are over.'

'So!' said Vida, mockingly, 'my compliments!'

Something like a flash of summer lightning glimmered in the eyes of Phil Calmont-just glittered like a drawn sword and was gone. Vida, quick to notice differences of mood, felt the masculine harshness overpower the sympathetic and feminine element in Phil. She could not say that she liked him less with that danger signal in his eyes. Even the possibilities of it were interesting. But at any rate he put her on her guard. She was at pains to lead the conversation speedily back into its old safe channel.

'Mr. Morris,' she said, with a quite false submissiveness, at once noted by Phil, 'is a truly remarkable man. I felt as much from the first!'

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Somehow this made Phil indignant-all the more so that he quite realised the hopelessness of his own love for the girl beside him. He was glad to find her untouched by Vic Morris's strenuous manfulness. Yet somehow he felt indignant too. He resented it as a slight on his chief, as a loyal servant feels a slur on the good name of his firm.

'Ludovic Morris is indeed a great man,' said Phil, with emphasis, 'greater and better than you or me- or any of us!'

Vida laughed a little, mocking laugh.

'I daresay he finds us a little tedious sometimes!' Instantly, by his feminine insight, Phil understood her innuendo, and answered, 'He is not tedious. It is only we who cannot always understand him-rise to his level!'

Vida breathed a long, unmistakable sigh.

'I am glad to hear you say 'we,' she cried, 'it sounds just like old times! Before the days of logarithms, I mean, when you still wrote sonnets-I have quite a pile of them, do you know? I wonder what they will fetch when you are the greatest engineer on earth, decorated and peeraged, no doubt, and I an old woman doddering on a stick from garret to cellar. I daresay you will give me something handsome for them then; at least, enough to keep the wolf from the door, and assure my pussy his daily skewerful from the cats meat man.'

Now at this very time Phil had other sonnets in his pocket. He could feel the paper crackling (they were all written on thick Venetian hand-made paper, tinted with the local sunsets) but he dared not produce them in the face of the raillery with which they would have been greeted.

'That is, I believe, what they call 'blackmail,' she went on, 'I have read about it in the paper. The only cure is for you to become too rich or too celebrated.'

'What in the world are you two quarrelling about?' called out Little Miss Nunsby, coming across the lawn, 'why, you are frightening the cows in the Doctor's field, and in the hedge above a blackbird is scolding his mate out of sheer sympathy. You ought, even in your evil tempers, to consider the happiness of the lower animals-poor dumb things!'

'They are not dumb, that is just the trouble,' said Vida, 'it is Phil who has become dumb. I was only pointing out the evil influence of Mr. Morris over him. Why, in the old days he used to chatter like a jackdaw when he came here. But now (she sighed with palpable affectation) he considers the talk of girls like us mere foolishness, compared to 'Weale on Ashlar Work' and the merits of Hall's Distemper. I believe he will catch it, before all is done!'

'Catch what, you madcap?' said little Miss Nunsby.

'Hall's distemper-and that may be serious, you know. For on the advertisement up at the Station it says that water has no effect upon it! So be careful! Phil. You must never get dirty, lest you have to stay like that always!'

This was just the kind of cheerful nonsense in which Phil would have revelled a few weeks ago. But the iron that Vic Morris had put into the young man's blood during the past months, was slowly making him like other men. It was extremely silly, of course. Vida was talking the most utter rubbish, and knew it. But she knew also that between two people who are or may be fond of each other, the great thing is to talk-it matters little about what.

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And all the time, because only the mannerless person or the dullard can look away, eyes speak to eyes. Little winged loves float to and fro invisible. The pulses catch the cosmic beat and tick in unison, and the tides of earth-magnetism make the two a part of the great Mother. For two lovers in the solitude of nature, under the green wood, on a mountain top, wherever free, will always instinctively place themselves north and south, for so the earth-magnetism may have fuller play. Thus might the magnetic poles have been discovered and ships navigated long before the first Chinaman suspended his magic needle in oil; indeed outside the Garden of Eden itself in that first reconciliation when Adam forgave Eve for her foolish haste in the matter of the apple.

Half-an-hour afterwards, pursued by the wistful eyes of little Miss Nunsby, Phil and Vida walked homeward together.

It was curious how utterly and instantly persiflage dropped away as they took the long woodland curves which brought them round the base of the hill on which Gorm Castle was built. Kirktown lay far below and to the right, drowned in a greyish haze of its own smoke. The red brick buildings and stables of the 'Caravanserai,' stood out on the opposite hill, a double sweep of white drive leading up to the pretentious gothic of the front door. The sight recalled to Phil that the girl in the blue serge dress and cheap straw hat had refused the master of all that, and was now walking by his side, a little mockingly, it is true, with no suspicion of sentiment; but still, when all was said and done-there! With him, Phil Calmont, and not with another.

But a new-born loyalty, and something of the chivalry which he had always possessed towards the absent, caused Phil to take up the cause of his friend. And this though the side of his nature which was feminine cried aloud at the grotesque folly he was about to commit.

'There is no one like Vic Morris,' he said, determinedly, 'I can't help saying it-though he would be angry, and it is none of my business. He is staying on here in Kirktown because of you. Of course he is. He loves you. If I were a girl I should count it an honour to be loved by such a man.'

And all the while the Other Side was saying. 'What a fool you are, Phil Calmont!-And you know it!--What an abject fool!'

For the moment Vida seemed a little taken aback. She had not quite expected an attack of this nature. It was her first proposal by deputy, and she smiled as she thought of Captain Miles Standish and the celebrated mission of John Alden. But in a moment she was herself again-only a little cross with Philip for spoiling the evening calm and the quiet of the woodland walk, with the crows going noisily home to bye-bye overhead, and the cows setting their noses over the pasture bars, and lowing melodiously to be milked. It was the time of all others that Vida loved, and she was not well pleased with Phil for spoiling it for her. He might have known better, in fact he did know better. But she would serve him out.

'Did Mr. Ludovic Morris send you to me, that you might tell me that?' she said, 'really I must consult my natural protectors, Dick and Billy, before I give an answer to this proposition by deputy!'

'No' said Phil, hastening on the faster as he felt more and more keenly the utter folly of his

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proceedings, 'he has never breathed a word to me.'

'Then,' said Vida, sharply, 'I think out of mere respect for my feelings you might have sounded your principal's intentions before committing him to this. What is done by the servant is done by the master. Even I know as much law as that. In fact, before we proceed farther, I think we had better step over to the Valley Manse and inquire of Mr. Morris whether he is prepared to homologate your actions.'

And she made feint to tum about.

'Don't,' said Phil, catching her by the arm. Vida laughed till she cried, long and helplessly.

'You silly,' was what she said.

'Yes, I know,' said Phil, watching her softly. 'I am silly. But things are hard with me-you can't help seeing that, for it seems to me that you see everything! You are Cleverer than I am. Most people are. I am only a poor, useless fellow trying to do what is right.'

'And pray, sir, of your courtesy, tell me what do you judge to be right. To enable you to rise in your self-esteem, must I consent to marry a man who has never asked me-why, you are worse than Mr. Kahn. He at least brought his intentions up to the front door, and said his say out like a man!'

'He loves you, Vida!'

'Who-Mr. Kahn?'

'You know very well, Vic Morris!' said Phil, sternly, feeling his courage gather as the path began to tangle itself between clumps of brambles already in flower, and red and white raspberries, still in fruit. 'Mr. Morris loves you, but he is too honourable to say so. He will not even come in the evenings.'

'To talk with Dick about 'dips' and 'strikes' and 'exits'--'

'Not at all,' cried Phil, feeling somehow ridiculously happy, and impotently angry with Vida, 'he has not said a word of you-I tell you he is too noble.'

'Hum,' said Vida, apparently deeply disappointed, 'then this is not a profession of love after all, as I had been led to believe. Yet something in your manner...'

'Oh, Vida, he loves you! He does love you!'

('What a fool I am! Oh, what an ironclad fool!') Vida put her hand in her pocket and drew out her little handkerchief. Then selecting the very centre she held it daintily up to her eyes and pretended to cry into it.

'A foul attempt has been made on the affections of a poor unprotected maiden!' she sobbed, 'I was led to believe-yes, your words said as much! And now--'

'Vida, I could shake you!'

'Yes, yes-do-do! Add violence to the deceit you have cunningly practised upon a trusting heart! How you can ever look me in the face! But I am not so feeble, so submissive as I may appear. I will have my r-r-revenge! A proposal of marriage has been made-by master or man-it matters not which, at least not legally. Either by Mr. Ludovic Morris, or by his trusty henchman Phil Calmont, on his own behalf! I call upon the firm to stand by their words -to make them good. Somebody loves me. Somebody wants to marry me. I bid you tell me which?'

And suddenly dropping all pretence with her kerchief, she turned upon Phil two eyes, with something in them far more real than mere teasing could have brought there, and red lips moist with fast- coming breath a little apart like the hands she

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had spread in asking the last question.

At the sight Phil completely lost his head, and catching her almost roughly in his arms he cried out, careless of who might hear him, 'I shouldn't,- Oh, I shouldn't! Vic Morris is a thousand times a better man than I am. But Vida-Vida-it is I who have loved you longest and best.'

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

THE SHADOW CAST BEFORE

These summer days were, quite apart from everything else (his love for Vida included), days of great anxiety for Vic Morris. It was a summer such as had not often been seen in Kirktown. Day after day, instead of the usual April weather, variegated by thunderstorms, which usually passes for summer in Scotland, the Kirktonians had basked in the glow of an almost tropical sun. The waggons of Incubus, Romer & Co. clucked dumbly along the roadways along which they had formerly clattered, up to the inner side of the felloe in dust.

The children, at home from school, ran barefoot and barelegged all the summer, till the extraction of thorns and pieces of glass became an ordinary (and unremunerative) part of the duties of Mr. William Stuart, A.P.S., of the local Apothecaries' Hall.

In the pits down below, of course, nothing was changed. Twice a day, at morn and eve, tired men rose to the surface, and with white faces 'passed the word' as to the condition of the air and other matters below, to the comrades who were there waiting for the cage to descend.

Vic had been able to move for a general inquiry, through a labour member whom he had known on the same bench as himself at the City of London Technical School.

But with the best will in the world, from a government point of view, it was a difficult matter to appoint such a commission directly. To do so would

be to censure their own officials. Nevertheless, filtering through some channel, there came a suggestion to these gentlemen that they had better arrange for a day on which to make a surprise visit to the Incubus Coal and Iron Works.

Whereupon, filtering through channels yet more mysterious, the news also reached Mr. Walter Grindling and his faithful co-worker, Mr. Hector McKill. They held council together on what was to be done, Mr. Grindling taking high ground.

'Now, see here,' he said, emphasising his points with his clenched fist driven noisily into the hollowed palm of the other. 'See here, McKill, this is not a matter for the Oddfellows' Hall, nor yet for the -One Thousand, Three Hundred, and Five-and-Thirty. This is serious. I have got to see it through. There is no use troubling the chief-nor yet Mr. Kahn-you understand. The chief is too much of a swell, too authoritative also with such men. And, as a foreigner, Kahn is handicapped. He does not know how to treat government officials. Now I do. They are to stop with me, mind- and in some way or other I am to be indemnified for my trouble and ex's.-now mind that-enter so much more as of a grade lower, perhaps, something like that.'

'You know that I cannot conscientiously approve of such proceedings!' said Hector McKill.

'And you are not asked to,' said Grindling. 'All you have to do is to keep your mouth shut, and stick your initials in a corner of a sheet or two. You know I have the welfare of the concern too much at heart to spend a penny needlessly. I have never done it in my life! You go elsewhere and farther with your 'conscientious' approval.'

'I know, Grindling-I know!' said Hector McKill,

touched almost to tears to think that he had wronged his friend. For, strangely enough, these gentry had among themselves a species of honour, which was not without a certain contorted nobility.

They were working not for themselves but for the firm—cheating, lying, deceiving, risking the lives of hundreds of men, putting up prices and cutting down wages, all for the honour, glory and profit of Incubus, Romer & Co., the firm which they had served all their lives.

But all that year there was in the underworld of the workings great doubt and uncertainty.

This came to a head after the fire, and the dismissal of Vic Morris. Vague impressions and vain hopes were roused by the whispered name of that distant entity called Parliament. Something was wrong down below. Everybody knew that. Yet they did Vic Morris's will, as it was expressed privately through this foreman and that Inspector of Ways. They knew it was the dismissed engineer's will that they were doing. But they would have died rather than own it.

Yes, there was something wrong with the pits, not with one but with all. Some said that old workings, dating a hundred years back, stood full of water ready to be tapped, and that some day the chance stroke of a pick would flood the whole series from end to end, leaving not a living soul within.

Others who had worked in distant English mines, where the dread firedamp follows the fireblast along devastated passages, declared that they had seen the little detached bluish flame, which tells of a mine becoming fiery, hovering above their lanterns. Others had tales of ponies, which, having once lain down, rose never more. And there were tally-boys

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and gate-boys who would not have taken a nay on the sly for a hundred pounds-so much they feared the invisible gas, heavy as water, the drinking of which was death.

Still, at six of the morning in every second house, down all the endless blocks of the Incubus pit rows-numbered from A to Q-hundreds of men and boys stolidly got themselves ready for their day's work. In the straight little flagged kitchens they breakfasted, a father with his boys, or brother with brother - those who did not know them would have said a little doggedly-somewhat sullenly. At least little was said. Silence is particularly a morning virtue among Scottish working folk. And this not the less, that, at Kirktown, many were waifs and strays from half the workings of the three kingdoms- these being especially plentiful in pit No. 3-the sinking of which was yet not completed. These 'sinkers' had the name of a wild lot, even for Kirktown. And the staid men of pit No. 2-Scots of the old faith-and Cornishmen of 'the people called Wesleyans' -expected nothing less than that a judgment should fall on them for their language during the week, and their behaviour on Saturday nights. Because of the 'sinkers' the Kirktown police had to be increased. Yet in spite of all, the lessons of Job held true. And it was not on them that the tower of Siloam fell, for all their frequent sacrifices to Bacchus and other divinities even less reputable.

As each miner in the blocks got himself ready, he glanced about him for the day's provision which the woman of the house- 'Her,' that is-wife, mother, sister, daughter, sometimes granddaughter- had put aside for him; always on the low white wood dresser, in front of the array of blue willow pattern plates, it

stood. It consisted of a bundle, large but pocketable, wrapped in a squared napkin, generally of alternate blue and white, in a chess-board pattern-more rarely red and white, and knotted in a particular way.

Love and prayers, hopes and fears, especially fears, were tied up with each knotting.

'I will curse God and die if my John does not come back!' was the memorable speech of one woman, John Hoo's Cornish wife, Number 6 in Block C-a converted woman and a class leader. And if Mary Hoo spoke thus, what was one to expect of those others of fainter light and lesser leading?

The bundle made a large lump in each man's right-hand coat pocket. But the dinner can, filled with tea or soup, swung openly and independent in each left hand, as the father of the family opened his door and took his way into the fresh coolness of the summer morning. The night dews had partly laid the dust-or rather just caked the surface, which the sun would soon dry all up again, long before the feet of the little ones began to paddle abroad in the first luxuries of a morning dust-bath.

Thus it was in Kirktown; thus also in a thousand mining towns. Even the children there are taught not to shout and scream across the street like other children. The very babes learn not to cry-because the breadwinner is taking his rest for the next shift, and must on no account be disturbed. There are times in the hot noonday when the windows are darkened, when the doctor goes on tip-toe, when not even the minister calls. The sleep of the labouring man is a sacred thing. So it ought to be always. The men go to work. The women stay at home. They work. They wait. As soon as the laddies leave school

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they follow their fathers down the mine. That is their vocation. They have never thought of doing anything else. The wide airy world is not for them-except that straight piece of dusty road between two dustier hedges which conducts them from the little red kitchen in Block C, to the hole in the ground down which a great cage of iron dives incessantly.

Little sentiment is wasted on that outgoing. 'Weel, wife, I'm awa!' is about the extent of it.

And even this is felt to be stretching a point. True, some of the younger men take a look at wife and bairns before they sally forth, because all who win the coal or send up the iron must run this risk- that he who goes out may never return alive. The hand which closed the door in the morning may not open it again in the evening, at the time when the firelight glows red and the lamps are being lit.

No head is held so high at the outgoing, but there is a chance that its owner may be brought back foot-first, with that terrible look of limp helplessness which the human body takes on the carrying stretchers that are kept in readiness at all pit-heads.

But this fifth of September was a great day in the history of No 2 pit. It was but seldom that they had visitors down there. Never before had that visitor been a woman. But that day Vida had determined to go down, after many pleadings from Dick Finnan that she should come and see him at his work in his position of authority-a centurion of the dark, having under him men, able to say to this one 'Come,' and he came, and to that other, 'Go,' and he went. Of this pleasure Dick had dreamed long and often.

But behind Dick's simple-hearted petitions another spirit moved-that of the Ghetto-Serb Kahn.

He had persuaded himself, as indeed most of the village had done, that it was for the sake of Vida Bryan that Ludovic Morris remained so long in Kirktown. As for his keeping away from the cottage by day- why, that was Kahn's own rudimentary stratagem. His going to live at the valley Manse with Mr. Fowler and his family, was a little better, but not clever enough to throw dust in the eyes of James Kahn.

The acting manager of the Incubus Works understood very well that he had played and lost. He would never now be able to present to his master, Jacob Romer, a long-lost daughter, nor receive from him the 'Bless you, my children,' which sealed to himself the possession of the Romer Millions. That hope was past. James Kahn avowed it to himself. But one door being shut in his face, he set himself with just as much energy, and as deliberate a sang-froid to open the other.

James Kahn carried within him all the curious contradictions of a newly-arrived race-which, among drainage systems arranged at Lambeth, and installations of electric light fresh from Paris, keeps its ancient savagery of vendetta, and has no more objections to butchering its king and queen than to killing so many rats in a trap.

Yet, for all that, it is possible-indeed likely- that if Vida had married James Kahn he would have made her, his own liberty being safeguarded, a tolerable, perhaps even to the sight of most, an admirable husband. But since she refused him and stood in his way, she became no better than a mouse, which, gnawing at the wainscot, disturbed his rest.

Accordingly he set a trap for her, and baited it with his own good deeds and better intentions

towards Dick Finnan. Against Dick he had certainly shown no malice. Indeed at the pits and at the making of reports, he had shown himself kinder than ever. He had complimented him on the discipline of No. 2 pit, which before he had not liked. It contained too many 'Psalm-singers' for him, he said -Scottish kirkmen and true blue Presbyterians, with a sprinkling of Cornish Wesleyans, whom he detested yet more, being wholly unable to understand them. But among these men Dick had taken his place with all the prestige of his ruling-eldership at the Kirk on the Hill. Dick believed in James Kahn, and the miners believed in Dick. So matters went easier, till at last No. 2 was in most respects the most contented and loyal pit in all the Incubus workings. At least there were no complaints.

Consequently, nothing whatever was done for No. 2-the philosophy of the management of the Incubus mines being that which guided the Unjust Judge in his treatment of the Importunate Widow- which is to say, 'Make yourself enough of a nuisance and we will give you something to get rid of you!'

Ever since the night of his defeat at the cottage in the Glebe End Wood, James Kahn had slept little and hardly eaten. To his excited imagination it seemed that his secret was ready to slip from him.

'Vida Bryan is Jacob Romer's daughter,' the words beat in his brain. And to him it seemed certain that the girl must have carried away enough memories of the Good Intent to furnish the man she might marry with the means of acting exactly as James Kahn himself would have done.

He knew his master, and he knew, too, that the spectre of remorse and fear of a lonely old age was

eating into Jacob Romer's heart. Willingly he would forgive. Gladly he would believe. Then there would be nothing left for James Kahn but to sell off his motor cars, get rid of the 'Caravanserai,' and take the train back to Belgrade, where, after the fashion of the country, several unsatisfied blood feuds awaited him.

Moreover, with a man of the true Serb temper, nothing counted but success. What did it matter if, in order to attain his end, he should engulf a hundred workers? The securely invested Romer millions did not depend upon these. And so, having argued out the case completely, he condemned Vida to death without more feeling, at least apparent, than he would have kicked a dog out of his way.

But James Kahn scarcely reasoned with himself. One plan having failed-why, the other must be tried.

He did not dispute, weigh right and wrong. But he acted. With the same sanguinary readiness as did the slayers of Alexander and Draga in the old Palace of Belgrade, he acted.

A day particularly dreamy, soft, and silent was that which Dick, on the suggestion of his master and idol, had chosen for Vida to descend the mine and show her all that was to be seen there. The new electric fans were to be installed. These had long been promised. They had been the original proposal of Vic Morris, who had furnished the plans and specifications. But in spite of all, the old bad systems ruled. And the 'second exit' was still blocked by the steam pipe which drove the engine at the shaft-bottom. Even the new electric apparatus derived its power from that engine, so that the apparent good was only the old evil at another remove.

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Upon hearing of Dick's plans the pitmen had put their heads together, and being quite conscious of the honour done them, they had arranged a suit of overalls for Vida which permitted her to descend in safety and comfort. There were smiling faces about her as she went into the engine-house. James Kahn came forth from a conference with Johnemann, the engineer, who (as he gave out) had accompanied him from Vienna. Mr. Kahn was enchanted to see Miss Vida, who blushed somewhat at her rough boyish array. So obliging was Mr. Kahn that he insisted on descending the Dook with Dick Finnan and his adopted daughter. In spite of Vida's warning touch of the elbow, Dick accepted the attention as a new proof of the generous and forgiving nature of his incomparable chief.

At the foot of the long oblique dip called the Dook, they got out.

'Now, Mr. Finnan,' said James Kahn, 'I will leave you to show Miss Bryan your dominions down here. I daresay you will find plenty of willing helpers. Every man will put his best foot forward this day in honour of the visit of Miss Vida! You will have, therefore, no further need of me.'

And poor Dick listened with a full heart to his master's words. Were they not, if one were needed a new proof of the delicacy of his heart. The mere sight of him might make Vida feel awkward, thinking of the offer he had made and she had refused. Therefore he preferred to retire! Was there ever such a man?

Now in the Incubus mines, as in most others of similar depth, communications were kept up with the surface by means of electric bells. With a touch Mr. Kahn was snatched away, leaving Dick and Vida

in the glimmering dusk beneath, standing close together, gazing up the dark shaft of the Dook.

Dick turned to Vida, immensely proud of his position, and full of explanations of this and that. Already he had acquired that pride in the perfection of his workmanship which is the craftsman's pleasure. And he felt that a livelong day would not be too long a time in which to expose to Vida the wonders of the territory over which he ruled-if not as king, at least as viceroy.

And so it was 'Mr. Kahn admired this' -or 'Mr. Kahn wishes that' -till Vida had to restrain her speech by the thought of all that Dick had done for her. Yet what would Dick have thought if he had known that his idol, with fell purpose in his heart, had stopped the cage twenty fathoms up the shaft from where they stood ? Or that, even at that moment, he was striking a match to set on fire the covering brattice-cloth which he had previously drenched with paraffin. The flame flashed about James Kahn in a circle, was promptly caught by the updraft, and swept upward with a roar into the long thousand-foot of pit-props and brattice-work that divided the cage-ways from the ventilating shaft.

So swiftly did it spread that for a moment James Kahn thought himself lost--caught in his own proper trap. But he 'belled' furiously. Johnemann the engineer responded instantly, and with no more than the singeing of his hair, and smell of fire on his clothes, he was lifted to the surface, bringing with him the most terrible news that can ever be carried through a pit village,

'The pit's on fire-Number Two on fire!'

'Where-where--?'

they cried, running from far and near at the mere sight of his terror.

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'In the shaft-near the bottom. Johnemann was quick or I should never have got through.'

'How many are down there?'

'Nearly the whole morning shift, bar one or two!'

'And Miss Vida--?'

'She's there-Old Dick Finnan's little girl, you mean. Yes, I saw her go.'

And so, swift as the darting lightning, the news spread. The women sifting at the shale heaps let drop their sieves, and for the first time the strange keening note of mourning pit women was heard in Kirktown.

The regular safe work of day-in and day-out had gone on so long that it seemed as if it would go on for ever. There had been individual cases, of course; falls of rock on rash or careless heads, imprisonments of longer or shorter duration owing to a temporary derangement of the pumping apparatus and the swift rising of the bottom waters.

But in Kirktown, never since the names of Incubus or Gorm or Romer were known, had there been any great accident. And there need have been none now, save that a certain Ghetto-Serb was clearing his way, after his racial manner, to a financial throne.

There were still a few laggards on the road-expectants of fines for their late hours. A father scolded a couple of boys who went along with downcast heads on either side. The elder walked fast to make up time, taking long strides. The boys ran a few steps to keep up. Here and there was an unmarried man, a little red about the eyes, trudging stolidly along with his boon companion of the night. Their heads ached, but their very shortcomings had saved their lives.

As always, up to the very moment when James Kahn arrived from the pit-bottom, the black wheels on the tall Incubus scaffolding spun and reversed. The beam engines danced their awkward dance like elephants in a show. Down the deep straight shaft the men and boys dipped, leaving the light and the fields behind them. Tools clinked as men, packed closely together, shifted the weight from one shoulder to the other. Nothing, after his children, is more dear to the good pitman's soul than his tool. He treats them well, and in all but the most instant alarm, carries them with him wherever he goes. Sixteen hundred feet beneath the yellow corn-fields -sixteen hundred feet beneath Mr.Kahn's 'Caravanserai,' and yet farther beneath the foundations of high perched Gorm Castle, lay the workings, branched and tunnelled and duplicated, where an hour before the earliest picks had begun to play their merry tune -the tune that meant work and wages to the brick rows of Kirktown.

The pony-boys brought the waggons quickly along the dark underground ways. Here and there lamps glimmered and danced over mounds of ore, or rubber waiting to be pitched into yet deeper 'wells' the gloomy unknown inferno of the 'sump.'

From the abandoned workings, away to the right, of which the boldest fought shy, there came faint faded odours-rather whiffs than downright smells. Near to these, even on ordinary days, the lamp-flame sometimes forsook the centre wick and seemed to cling strangely to the gauzy wire of the Davy frame.

Few of the men in that great No. 2 pit remembered, as they worked, that the yellow light of the autumnal day dreamed and slept in alternate

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sunlight and shadow above them-that above was the golden grain, and the long shadow of the corn stooks. These were things with which they had nothing to do.

They did not enter into their life or experience. Even on Sundays they hardly lifted their eyes to the fields, but preferred to sit on their 'hunkers' (which is to say 'squatting'), their backs to the nearest convenient tarred fence-the pious among them with their Testaments on their knees, and the rest with a few packs of cards, so dirty that, at first sight, they seemed to be composed exclusively of aces of spades.

At most a boy or two, holding the cord of a door, or guiding a pony, felt a twinge of heartache for the green meadows and purple blackberries, the clustering nuts in the Gorm Wood, where sometimes you had to run from the keepers, and for the rabbits that dotted and hopped about the holms of the Glebe End. But they were soon reminded that with these, in this present life at least, they, no more than their fathers, had any concern.

For at sixteen hundred feet below the blackberry bushes and the reddening haws, the pit hummed about them like a hive. That was their life's work. There was little enough time for thought-none for regret in the turmoil of No. 2. The doorboys heard the whistle of the men running the coal trucks through the dark passages, and at the signal they threw open their doors. Then with a yell, a flurry of sparks as the brakes girded harshly on the rails, and a fierce gust of wind, the long line of laden cars clacked and jingled through the open doorway.

Sometimes, but not very often, one of the men, lying prone upon the ore, would wave a kindly hand to the lonesome boy, left there all day by himself in

the darkness.

And the light from their lamps in their hats, striking on the dusky roof above, appeared to his eyes to stream backward, like the red 'scarrow-light' of an engine's smoke-pennon at nights on the railway, when the fireman opens his furnace door.

Suddenly that August day, as the boys were bringing their first loads of ore to the well of the Dook, the 'bottomer,' John Roy, looking upward saw thick volumes of smoke rolling down the main passage of the incline.

'The pit's afire!' was also his cry instinctive, quick, and terrible as that which ran seven hundred feet above.

He hastened to lay his hand on the little 'return cage' which had just come in. For as Kahn went up swiftly hoisted into safety, the empty cage, descending, had passed him on its little loop, midway, where two men were working at the latest coal strike. They were about to 'drift,' in order to catch a seam which had 'pinched out' higher up.

John Roy laid his hand on the door of the cage. It also had passed through the fire, but as the flames had not yet taken a firm hold on that side of the shaft, owing to the ventilating air blowing the other way, it was no more than bearably hot.

'The pit's afire!'

There was but one way to the surface; at least one way that a man could use. John Roy knew that one wall of it was already dangerous. Only a few props, some light wood, inflammable as matches, and long strips of bratticing protected the other. It was a matter of a few seconds at the longest before the air shaft should be attacked. A man has but one life. He will save that. All that he hath will he give for it.

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And for the first time John Roy knew how dear his life was to him, when he glanced upwards and saw that dull, red glow in the heart of the blinding reek.

Yes, doubtless (so his conscience argued), it was his duty to abide by his signals. But his life-his life! He was the only man who knew the bells- the only man who could reply to them. The 'bottomer' is the man at the helm. Only he can communicate up that long incline, nearly a third of a mile in length, with the men in the engine-house on the surface, whose steel levers, wire ropes, and electric signals control, in their tum, the movements of the cage by which alone safety can be reached. But his life-his life!

But John Roy did not happen to be a very brave man; less so indeed, than his fellows, and the necessity of choice came upon him very swiftly indeed. Stunned, bewildered, not knowing which way to turn amid the blinding downpour of stifling smoke, and the crackling of the fire eating its way upwards among the timbers of the pit, John Roy acted as his master had done and leaped into the cage. He would have saved all if he could, but himself first of all.

He stood for a long moment with his hand on the bell lever, which on that side was still working. Three boys were running towards him, crying out to know what was the matter. They had just arrived with their pony-loads, ready for the trucks on which they were to be conveyed up the Dook.

'The pit's afire, lads,' cried out the 'bottomer,' 'come away with me! Jump in! Quick with you!'

But these three lads (and this is a true tale) whose names deserve to be written in golden letters, though no more than children in years, returned to the faltering 'bottomer' the answer of brave men.

'No,' they said, 'we will gang back and warn the men!'

But fear had fallen on John Roy. The helmsman forsook his post. Thrice he jerked the lever, and was whisked away just in time, for the fire had caught the ventilating shaft. He escaped, and left a hundred helpless men to face their fate- and with them a girl.

The three boys sped on their way. The weight of many lives oppressed their eager, boyish hearts. The main workings were far away. Breathing deeply to give them vigour, bending low to take the awkward corners, leaping aside to avoid some laden waggon running towards the 'well,' they ran through the increasing smother. For already the air passages were tainted, and instead of feeding the great pit with pure air, the down-draft was pushing the deadly smoke, which men cannot breathe, along all the working faces of the pit.

The boys raced, their backs bent from their hips, as they took one dark archway after another, or scrambled over dangerous heaps of rubbish in their zeal to be the first to warn their comrades.

'The pit's afire-run, men-for your lives! Leave your picks!'

The last word clenched the matter. The men knew that only in the most perilous necessity would such an advice be given them. So at the word, all along the long lines of half-naked men, each man and boy dropped the tool he was using-pick or drill or hammer or gelleck, and ran as fast he might for the bottom of the incline.

But when they arrived, they found only the red fire glowing sullenly from high overhead down upon the dull waters of the 'sump,' and the cage which

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ought to have taken them to safety, gone with the pilot on board.

And yet to the credit of thei manhood, their first thought was not for themselves, caught thus as it seemed without hope. They thought of Vida Bryan, whom they found standing beside old Dick Finnan, smiling, but a little dazed. She did not know what it was all about.

'Eh, the poor lassie,' they said among themselves, 'this is the risk we hae to run. But it's waur for her that kens nocht about the deep things o' the earth or the perils o' men that spend their lives there!'

And above them, filling their only exit from side to side, the fire roared blowing down its choking breath upon them, while the red eye among the smoke seemed to look at them ever nearer and closer.

'Hear to me,' said Dick Finnan, after a long look upwards, 'lads, we had better get to the prayin! Yon's death!'

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

THE BATTLE WITH DEATH

Above in the faint misty sunlight of September, the cornfields all about, the tops of the nearer stooks a little smutted by the bank furnaces, men stood and waited for the end of the consultation in the big room of 'The Offices.'

Women sobbed drily, low in their throats, without ever putting their aprons to their eyes. Mr. Romer had arrived. He was closeted now with Mr. James Kahn (who knew the pit so well), with Hector McKill and Walter Grindling, the two general managers. The conference lasted a long time, and meantime down below men and boys might be dying. The pitmen grew uneasy. They moved towards the pit-head as if to make some effort on their own account, but they sadly needed a leader.

The women-folk till now retained about the 'offices' by the superior confidence of the men of the night-shift, closed in also. The hours slipped on. Now and then James Kahn's motor, with a sudden coughing, followed by a long whirr and 'whoop,' would shoot out on its way to the telegraph office, returning to its stance-where the whole earth about it thrilled gently to its continuous purring.

It grew dark, but that did not matter. It was always dark underground, and for that pit-folk are prepared. Everybody had lanterns, and, in the mild September night, they shone curiously on the white blurr which was the light waistcoat of Hector McKill, as he promenaded it among the anxious groups,

advising them that, since they could do no good, they must just trust in Providence, as he was doing. Neither they nor he could reach their men down below. And he quoted Scripture.

Even as he dribbled commonplaces, suddenly a woman broke down. The weird, unforgettable thrill of the Irish 'keen' went out on the still air, nearly breaking the hearts of those who heard it. Grief among the Scottish women was quieter, more patient, stiller. But even this changed when it was found that all the men were not at the pit bottom. Some few, nineteen in all, had been in the short cross-workings a little above the spot where the fire commenced. They were soon caught, for they had nowhere to flee for refuge. For them there was not even the poor mockery of a half-blocked second exit. So, when the first descent of the cage was attempted, the fire in these short cross-chambers was already a smouldering blaze.

Then the bodies began to come up. Through all Kirktown the news spread that they had found them dead—all dead, smothered and burned! There were those who knew better—like Vic Morris, who came hurrying down with the two ministers, Benjamin Irongray and his own host John Fowler of the Valley Kirk.

Then the dead-carts began to rumble along the dusty ways. The forms of what had so lately been men were laid upon them, and they took their way home. And then with such a sound as men hardly hear twice from human throats in this world, the multitude of women, till now restrained, suddenly clambered on the waggons, as a forlorn hope takes a besieged city, crying aloud for their murdered husbands. 'Most unseemly!' said Hector McKill,

'complaining of Providence that way!'

'Lot o' good it'll do them!' muttered Walter Grindling, less piously.

But, be it remarked, they did not now move so easily about among the crowd. Curses followed them—curses Biblical, said between clenched teeth, curses which sounded like the pious angers of Israel against the oppressor.

But for once Hector McKill had said a true word. It was unseemly, and Mr. Irongray, the Cameronian minister, and Mr. Fowler of the Valley Kirk, ran alongside and dispossessed the women with the power of their persons and authority. Reverently, they laid aside the face-cloths, no better mostly than a rough sack. They identified the poor mishandled clay, and so taking reins in hand, drove the husband home to the fireside he had left that morning with the Monday's nod of adieu.

Unseemly-of course it was, because grief uncontrolled is always unseemly. And only because such poor people had not learned how to dress their emotion, to manage it daintily, to fix bearing-reins upon it, to lead it out and make it caracole only upon due occasion—as when a visit of condolence is paid!

Unseemly—yes, surely! In the presence of that sleek, well-groomed company gathered in the wainscotted, leather arm-chaired parlour of the Incubus Offices! Only the fierce stare of Jacob Romer's insolent, indomitable eyes, and the grizzled hackle which stood more upright than ever on his head, belied the well-meaningness of those there. Yet that fierce energy was perhaps the best asset of the firm and its advisers.

He listened to the explanations of the managers—

to the suave suggestions of his very junior partner, James Kahn—who, because of his share in the proceeds, small though it might be, had yet set the trap and baited it with thirty shillings a week. But Kahn did not think it worth mentioning that there was a girl down at the bottom—a certain Vida Bryan, whom the old man with one flick of his befogged eye had seen, as he drove past her cottage as fast as two speedy bays could pull him, or had looked down upon from his pew in the Cameronian kirk, as he murkily surveyed the audience, and quarrelled internally with the insufficiently sulphuric quality of the Reverend Benjamin Irongray's sermons.

These four had before them the plans of the Incubus pits—especially that of No. 2 pit, where were the imprisoned men. The senior manager, Mr. Hector McKill, was, as all knew, a pious man, and he had often prayed for the spiritual state of those now penned below. Only he had blocked up the Second Exit with steam pipes. But his prayers must have been a great comfort to the prisoners at that moment. They knew of them, because Hector McKill always said his prayers in public, pumping them up from his large well-fed system with a wheezing noise apparently intended to represent uncontrollable emotion.

The plans of No. 2 pit, approved and passed by the proper authorities, went slowly from hand to hand. They were furnished with splendid extra exits, fire escapes, traps, rests. Everything was wide and clear. You could have driven a carriage and pair up-and-down without scraping the wheels—that is, as the Second Exit of No. 2 had been arranged on paper.

It is a pity that men cannot be saved on paper.

Now and then the manager of a neighbouring pit, having heard of the accident, would tap timidly at the door. He would have come boldly in, but for the fear of Jacob Romer. As it was, seeing before him the falcon eyes and fierce beak of the master of the Incubus workings, he meekly inquired if he could be of any use, discovered that he could not, and so went his way .

But it was the coming of Vic Morris with the Valley Kirk minister, that first put hope into the men at the top, of helping their comrades below. If any one could help-if anyone knew the pit, it was Vic Morris .

It was from Johnemann the engineer on duty (once of the Good Intent, who had turned up at Kirktown unexpectedly) that Vic Morris learned the ghastly news that Vida had gone down that morning to be shown over the pit by her foster-father, old Dick Finnan.

'He's been at her a long time,' said Johnemann, 'and now he has got her down!'

He did not know how near he was to getting something from Vic Morris which he would not have forgotten. But at that moment he was safe. Vic Morris had need of him.

Vic had conceived a bold plan-one of infinite risk to himself, but still the best under the circumstances. Equipped with a suit of fireman's asbestos, he had resolved to descend the Second Exit!

But of this he said nothing to Johnemann, whom he considered a little better than one of James Kahn's spies. Besides, first of all, there was the perpendicular drop in a large cage to the space known as the 'Eye of the Pit.' From thence the 'dook'

or dip slanted away for nearly twelve hundred feet, while a little to one side of it was the opening of the Special Exit that had been half-filled with the steam pipes which served the bottom pumping-engine. But already the pumps had been stopped, probably by falls from the roof. The steam was worse than useless, as those at the top knew by the volumes of it which rose like clouds, mingled with the grey pit reek from the burning coal-seams and ph-props in the shaft.

The supply was, therefore, cut off at the surface, though Vic knew that every moment while the bottom pumping-engine was out of gear, the bottom waters would be gaining, and that even if he were fortunate enough to reach the end of the 'dook,' he might find himself beset by the rapidly rising waters.

The minister accompanied him on his first stage to the Eye of the Pit-the foot, that is, of the first perpendicular descent. They found Dr. Calmont already there, his instruments and dressings laid out on a rude table of props and scaffolding as carefully as on the table of his surgery.

Farther they must not go. Only Vic and one or two others tried the long incline of the 'dook,' up which the flames were roaring like a chimney on fire. Only this chimney was twelve hundred feet long! Six hundred feet higher Johnemann stood intent with his nervous hands on the lever, his eye on the index-dial which told him how near the cage had crept to the flames, and his ear listening for the bells, which from the distance of a third of a mile underground, signalled 'Ascend,' 'Descend,' 'Slowly' or 'Snatch Away.' Beside him stood James Kahn. He knew that Morris was now down there. He knew also that if Vida escaped it would be owing to him. In

love and war he was his rival, and the instinctive antagonism between the two

men caused the Serb to stand there in the little engine house, his muscles tense and twitching with desire to seize the lever out of the hands of Johnemann and plunge the cage with all its occupants into the flames. He might have done it too, but for his steady belief in the impossibility of escape from the depths of Pit Number Two.

The belief was well founded. Up the main shaft there was no way save through the long roaring tunnel of flame. After a long survey of the principal shaft Vic became certain that that way there was indeed no hope. If not by the extra exit, narrow at the best (except on paper) and half-filled with steam pipes, certainly all was lost. He exchanged his thick fire-man's attire for a sweater and a pair of the ordinary wide pitmen's trousers. He borrowed a broad leather belt for his waist.

A little stream of water had been falling down the main shaft only to be thrown back in clouds of steam when it reached the lames in the pit-throat far below. Vic turned part of it upon the heated pipes in the narrow Second Exit. The steam had been cut off in the pipes owing to the fall of material at the pit bottom, but the iron was still far too hot to venture down with any safety.

Nevertheless he resolved to make the attempt.

Dr. Calmont and his assistant Phil, who had descended with him, united in dissuading him. But Vic held out. If he could not make it then nobody else could. Besides every moment gave them less chance of saving the girl.

It was then that Phil Calmont felt most bitterly his inferiority. He had called himself an engineer

above ground, but down there in the dark, the commonest pony-boy knew more than he. And far below him in a deeper darkness, shut off by doors of flame, was Vida Bryan. True, he could not help her. Even to die for her sake would not advantage her in the least. It was fortunate that his father gave Phil some of his instruments to polish and cover. The drip from the roof told upon them, and Dr. Hugh Calmont loved them considerably more than his children-who, generally speaking, were a nuisance to him. But after this night he had hopes of Phil. He knew how to use a piece of chamois leather.

Phil sank his nails into his palms as Vic Morris, taking a long breath, set his foot on the first rounds of the long steel ladder. Only by keeping very close to the wall could he avoid contact with the still heated pipes. The running water had cooled them to some extent, but the narrow tunnel was filled with stifling fumes, with whiffs of dissolving steam, and above all with the dull sullen heat radiated from the heated metal.

What Vic Morris suffered in that long descent can never be known. He has not thought fit to tell at any length.

'It was a tight job!' Or, perhaps, in moments of great expansion, 'A little more and I should have slept in the 'sump' that night!' These came the nearest to any description of his experiences. But he reached the bottom, though more than half roasted. He found that the miners were gathered waiting, most of them up to their knees in the water which was already collecting at the bottom of the 'dook.'

'Better get away at once,' he cried, 'come, boys-follow me!'

'It is impossible!' the men cried, 'Peter Sharp

there, who won the wrestling belt, was up about thirty fathom and had to come back.'

'I have come down, boys, all the way,' shouted Vic, 'and I am going to show you the way back. Where is Miss Bryan? Let me have Miss Bryan.'

Even then he did not say 'Vida.'

They handed Vida, as it were, overhead, to him: passing her upon their palms daintily as if they knew they were handling something precious. Vida was soon on the ladder, Vic Morris setting her feet on the rounds, while with his out-stretched left arm he clasped the girl's belt to keep her well away from the the heated pipes.

Time after time Vic Morris called out encouragingly for the men to follow him. He seemed to them hardly less than a messenger from heaven. They were content to follow, halting when he halted—then, half-baked, going on again, the youngers supporting the elders, and so in time all the men in the West workings of No. 2 pit reached the surface. Vic Morris was first man out, holding Vida almost unconscious in his arms.

He put her under the care of Dr. Calmont, and they had her all safe at the pit-head in ten minutes. The perpendicular cage was still working steadily. But the men in the East Workings, living mostly in Blocks K and L, had not been able to get across. Between them and the bottom of the 'dook' was a long declivity, and then a steep ascent, where a fault had rendered difficult the search for an elusive vein.

The stoppage of the pumping engines had even caused the water to collect at the bottom of this declivity, as in a great capital U. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to retreat before the waters, searching for ever higher and higher ground. But for

every man of them the end was sure. The fire in the shaft had stopped the pumps. The water was gaining every moment, and ail the purer air was being driven into a corner. The men followed it. Chief of them was Christie Penman, joint surveyor of the ways with Old Dick Finnan and a man of a simple and natural piety . Christie knew well that it was impossible to lead his men to safety. They were shut in on every side. But he called the roll. There were sixty-three of them, men and boys. As the waters mounted he asked them to kneel, he himself prayed aloud in their midst-not after the fashion of Hector McKill.

And so they were found after seven months under water, their bodies almost perfectly preserved by the iron which the water held in solution. They made two great circles, dark, indistinct shapes worshipping God. Some had fallen forward. Some had simply sunk down, but all were still kneeling, and one of the little boys who had 'run to warn the men' was found with his head on the parental knees. He at least had found his father! Who shall say that the others had not also.

In foreign churches I have seen pictures of the Perpetual Adoration-angels and archangels winged and glistering, prismatic and glorious, circling about the Great Throne itself. But what is that to these sixty-three in the black pit deeps, far under the water, kneeling for seven months with hands devoutly clasped, even as the waters had caught them, making their homage-prayer to the God of all Forgiveness.

Yes, the boys had warned the men! No Victoria Cross was theirs, but long after strong arms lifted them tenderly one by one; the first (as I have told)

from across his father's knees, another prone on his face as the deadly reek had caught him hurrying on his mission, the third so deep in the 'sump' that even the glare of the search lantern could not reach him, and it was the grappling irons which brought to the surface his poor little wasted body.

It was a quiet Sabbath when the first-fruits of death were laid in their final resting-graves on the breezy hill-top looking down on the slopes under which they had been entombed more deeply. There was a service on the green between Blocks K and L. There the widows and the elder orphans sang the psalm of the Scottish death-bed-which is the twenty-third in the version of Francis Roos. And the lilt of their voices nearly broke the hearts of those who heard: *Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale, Yet will I fear none ill, For Thou art with me, and Thy rod And staff me comfort still.*'

And at the open-air service, behind the rows of weeping women, the little children of Blocks K and L played about on Kirktown Green, or stood staring open-eyed as at a show-with never a father among them all.

On Sunday, however, Hector McKill conducted the services of the 'church of the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days' with a conscience void of offence. The firm had subscribed a hundred pounds to the relief fund, and he personally ten shillings. But in spite of this, John Fowler, the minister of the Valley Kirk had a word to say. And without fear of man he said it. Why should he fear? Had he not one hundred and sixty pounds, six shillings and six pence from the Sustentation Fund of his denomination which no man could take from him.

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'I do not,' he said, 'deal out blame nor pretend to decide legal quibbles. But I do say that the men who are responsible for failing to provide a way of escape for these men, are responsible for the loss of sixty-three lives, and for this they shall one day answer at the bar of God.'

Wherefore it came about that two mornings afterwards John Fowler found on his manse table a letter from the solicitor of Incubus, Romer and Company.

The letter informed him that he had laid himself open to an action for libel, and requested the name of his law agent. John Fowler had none, but he made an answer with his pen, and the answer ran as follows:

'I specially declared in my sermon that I took nothing to do with apportioning blame before human tribunals. And as for the others, I shall be wholly satisfied to meet your clients at the Bar which alone I named, on the Great Day when all wrongs shall be righted and all crimes punished.'

John Fowler heard no more of the action for libel. When Vic elbowed his way outside the throng, he found Janet Fowler looking for her father. She was a plain-faced girl with beautiful eyes, and she always had on her shoulders the burden of the Valley Manse. Generally Vic Morris, his head full of Vida Bryan, paid little attention to Janet. She was, of course, full of questions as to her father.

'Yes,' (Vic answered), 'Mr. Fowler was well; Mr. Fowler would be up in a few minutes. The men in the West Workings were saved. How did he know? Well, he, Vic Morris, had been down.'

Then Janet Fowler began to cry, not noisily, but, in such a way as made her little sister Violet say

severely, 'Janet Mackaposh Fowler' (Mackaposh-McIntosh), 'what for does the water run down your cheeks into your neck; you'll take the starch out of your lace collar, and then!'

But as soon as Janet Fowler knew that it had been to bring up Vida Bryan that Vic had risked his life, she stopped crying quite suddenly and went home, dragging after her the most unwilling Miss Violet, who thought that it was 'juss lovely to see so many people, an' the lamps all lighted, an' the carts an' all!'

She was no longer anxious about her father.

Neither were Tim and Alf and Raif. They were much excited, on the contrary, to see Mr. Morris.

They hurraed as he came up the garden, where Tim (of the age of nine, who had his head filled with 'The Gallant Acts of British Soldiers,' gleaned out of a prize-book of Raif's), decorated him on the spot with the capsule of a ginger-beer bottle by way of Victoria Cross. They were all disappointed, however, when Vic Morris went to his own room to escape their attentions. It was mean of him not to stop and tell them all about it. But when Vic Morris got there, he went to his window, and looked away up into the Gorm woods, through a long green alley-way of trees. His chamber at the Valley Manse was so high that he could see right over the houses of Kirktown, along the valley of the Gorm water as through a telescope, and so across where it turned at right angles, to a little cottage on the edge of a wood. In the gable-end of it a light had begun to burn.

So he had saved Vida and sent her home, and she had never even thanked him for it. But he did not know-he had come away before the wonder happened. All his thoughts were now bent on getting

away. It was time. Vic Morris had held Vida in his arms. He had saved her life. Yet he knew that she did not love him; he felt she never would. But, having had her life saved, it might seem only reasonable to the girl that she should in some way show her gratitude to her preserver- perhaps even by the gift of herself.

Now Vic Morris detested gratitude. He would accept no 'preserver' business, or so he told himself.

That a girl should look the more kindly upon him, because she was grateful for his having done anything so ordinary as saving her life, was inexpressibly annoying. He would as readily have done it for a pony-boy or a door-tender. So he said, and there is reason to think that he believed this himself.

That very night he began his preparations for quitting Kirktown. They had been long expecting him at Rio Tinto, not to count the extra offer he had had from the new mines at Bilbao. He would have look at them as he passed through.

But what he did not know was that a fierce-eyed, haughty man had directed the carefully wrapped body of the rescued girl to be placed in his comfortable carriage-old Dick by her side, while he himself took his place with the coachman.

It was when they entered the cottage and the wife of the nearest game-keeper had been waked from her slumbers to help Vida to bed, that Vic Morris saw the light start out of the sombre blur of the Gorm woods, in the exact place where he knew the lodge to be. By night or day he could fix it as well as if he had laid it down by chart and compass.

All night long Janet Fowler, the plain girl with the beautiful eyes, kept those eyes open. She heard the

bump, bump of Vic's leathern trunks, as each was filled and up-ended, to be out of the way in the corner.

Somehow there came into her heart a pitiful sense of desertion. With a woman's clear-sightedness in that which concerns only her own sex, she knew that Vic Morris was going because of Vida Bryan, and believed that he did not think of her even a little bit.

'Yes, I suppose she is beautiful,' she said to herself, moving a little-a very little in her bed so as not to awake Violet, 'she is what they call beautiful, and I suppose that is all men care about! No, that is a shame of me. She is good, too, I am sure,' (here Janet sighed long, as if she wished she could con and set in a note-book all the iniquities of Vida Bryan, and then present the book for the perusal of Mr. Ludovic Morris).

Janet Fowler was early awake. That is, she did not sleep at all. But, nevertheless, she came down with her face glowing with cold water, her hair neatly arranged, and her eyes blue as the tam which is bluer than the sky-in fact, as well as in Wordsworth's verse. Among her many virtues Janet could not allow anyone to leave her father's house, not even a 'probationer' supplying for a Sunday-last and least of the human species-without a good breakfast. She knew that there was an express at ten minutes to six. So that at ten minutes past five, the substantial breakfast aforesaid was on the table. From the hall she had heard Vic's final preparations mingling with her father's snores, but now there was a lull. Had he finished?

She tapped timidly at the door. Vic, as she had supposed, opened it, dressed for a journey. He

stared at Janet in astonishment.

'Miss Fowler!' he said. And without meaning it he spoke under his breath, as if they were a pair of culprits who must thus commune of their misdeeds. She answered him with a nod, and the whispered information that if he wanted to go by the first train from Kirktown Station, breakfast was quite ready for him whenever he liked to come down.

'But how did you know!' he asked in astonishment, 'I hadn't told a soul!'

'I knew!' she said, softly, looking at the tapping foot which peeped restlessly from underneath her grey skirt.

'But how?' he insisted.

'Well,' said Janet Fowler, lifting to his face a pair of eyes, which, had man not been a purblind and self-centred animal would have dazzled him,

'If a man will spend all the night tumbling trunks about, tramping like a regiment, and dumping each in the corner when he has finished with it-if there is a wakeful housekeeper in the room below-well, he cannot expect to fold his tents and steal away like the Arabs-no, not precisely!'

'I am very sorry!' said Vic, 'I did not know where your room was.'

Yet he knew to half a point where Vida's was, though far away among the Gorm woods. Each time his eye swept across the landscape of wide, green woodland, the little dot of black in the gable-end of Dick Finnan's cottage stopped him, as if with a Westinghouse brake.

'It does not matter,' said Janet, dropping her eyes, 'come down to your breakfast.'

It was a solitary meal-the more so because Janet sat silent and forlorn, waiting the hour of departure.

Vic explained that he had written a letter to her father, about where the trunks were to be sent to the steamer and all that. There was money in the letter. He halted, and stammered.

'Better give it to me,' said Janet, sharply, 'father is no good for that sort of thing. I will attend to it all for you.'

'But I could not think of troubling you,' he said, a little self-reproachful (but not much).

'Oh, the trouble is nothing,' she laughed, merrily; 'not nearly so great as if you asked my father to do it for you!'

And in her heart of hearts, as she turned away, she murmured, 'It is always something.'

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

THE SPANISH STAMP

It was wonderful how, like the mantle of Elijah out of the heaven, Peace fell on the stricken village. Men coming from a distance found the widows cold, almost unsympathetic. Unsympathetic they were, to those who visited them thus casually. They declined to make a spectacle of their sorrow. But the ministers knew different—those who had seen to it that every week twenty shillings went into each stricken house. They encountered no hardness, ingratitude, or lack of sympathy.

Only these Scottish widows were of the Scriptural opinion that the heart knoweth his own bitterness, and that a stranger intermeddled not therewith. Grave, quiet, as if making acknowledgement that these things come in the ordinary course of Providence—such were the leading characteristics of Kirktown's sorrow.

Pumping engines, newly erected for the long labour of emptying the Pit No. 2, were already at work. The widows for the moment abode in their cottages in the long red-brick rows of Blocks K and L, but in the other pits the double shifts went to and fro as if nothing had happened.

No-nothing was forgotten! That is not Scottish wont. But, equally, nothing was said.

It was a brisk, bask, chillish day in the back end, late in November, with the wind blowing over Baltic ice, when Janet Fowler received her first letter from Spain. She knew it by instinct, though, hitherto, she

had only seen the handwriting in scraps of calculations. The address on the envelope made her tremble.

It was breakfast time. Janet was in her place at the head of the table. Little Tim brought it in. He had heard the dog barking at the postman's uniform.

'I want the stamp,' he cried. 'Our Jenn has got a foreign letter. I want the stamp!'

'Me too-give it me-you don't collect, you little beast!' said his loving brother Alfred, under his breath.

'Eh, what's that?' said Mr. Fowler, who was looking over the morning paper, which he used as a kind of counter-irritant for clarifying his thoughts on all subjects. If The Tartan thought one thing, he, John Fowler, generally felt himself pretty safe in believing the exact opposite. He had lived a long and honourable life; directing himself thus. The Tartan's arguments, clever and brilliant at times, were seldom meant to be anything but irritating. Yet each morning dreamy John Fowler read the complete series of Tartan editorials in order to rouse within himself sufficient combativeness to think out arguments tending to directly opposite conclusions.

Now if the boys had only been quiet he would have subsided into the mental construction of a never-to-be-written sermon demolishing the third Tartan editorial. But, presently, they were all raging together, kicking each other furtively under the table, so much so that one stinging 'shin-plaster' intended for Master Tim, caught his sister Violet, who, nothing loath, Jifted up her voice and wept.

John Fowler put down his paper.

'What is the matter now?' he said, beaming mildly

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through his spectacles. These were very round and gave him, in spite of his personal beauty, a slightly surprised, though distinctly benevolent air.

Then Alf and Tim exclaimed volubly that Janet (otherwise Jessie, the names being interchangeable in Scotland) had got a letter from Spain that morning -and that-that-

'But what has a letter from Spain or Kamschatka to do with Violet crying?' demanded the Reverend John Fowler.

'Because Alf--' began Tim.

'Because Tim--' riposted Alf.

'They are young fools, father,' said Raif, who was busy with his second egg. 'They are always kicking each other under the table. They don't mean any harm and Vi was a goose to howl. All the same I'll punch them when I get them out-after prayers!'

There was a time for everything, and the Reverend John recognised his son's wisdom.

'Ah, do so,' said this sage parent.

He knew that, when you know your eldest son, there is no family chastisement so admirable as his. Your own authority should be but a threat-a sort of final Court of Appeal. The rest can be delegated to a wise elder son. Only be sure of the first adjective.

'Well, about this letter, Janet?' said Mr. Fowler, looking at his daughter.

'It is from-from Mr. Vic. That is-I think-I believe that it is from Mr. Morris!'

'Look at our Jess,' said Alf, laughing out loudly and fraternally. Then in his pleasant way he held one of his fingers up to her cheek, and pretended that it went off with the 'phoo' of a Vesta match.

This was Master Alf's method of getting even-he was not particular as to whom he got even with

Certainly Janet had done him no wrong.

'Ah, let us hear it,' said the Reverend John Fowler, laying down his paper. 'I am glad he has written I thought he would.'

Now Janet would gladly have stolen away upstairs with her letter to read it in the quiet of her chamber, but, of course, her father's request was a command. Privately, however, she resolved to put the young imps, who had brought this upon her, upon a very plain and even restricted diet for several days.

Of course, he would say nothing particular. There would be nothing in it, but still-it was he, letter. She had, however, one resource.

'Do you think,' she said hesitatingly, 'that these children-except, of course, Raif--?'

She had got no farther when she was interrupted by a volley of cries to which even the still sobbing

Violet added her quota.

'We don't want to hear your old letter-we don't. All we asked for was the stamp, and that has big black bars across it.'

'Silence!' said the Reverend John, his eyes sparkling through the benevolent round goggles, and the Absalom hair waving with the up-throw of his head. 'If I hear a word more out of your mouths, I shall have you all up into the study-to do deductions!'

'Don't worry, father,' said Raif, without looking up from his plate, 'that will only give you a headache. Leave them to me-after prayers!'

And with this promise (or threat) the reading of the letter was postponed.

Of course it did not really amount to much-Janet made sure of this before she brought it to a public

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reading. Certain parts she even altered slightly, and one she left entirely out. Not that any of these were altered or amended for the usual reason for which young women edit male letters for home consumption.

Here however, is Vic Morris's letter without amendment or change.

Hotel Colon, Huelva, Spain.

October 22nd.

'Dear Mrss Fowler, I am obliged indeed for all the care you must have taken to get my traps off on the first of our steamers to come out here. Everything was right, and this I owe entirely to your good offices. I trust you will not think I have shown myself ungrateful, either to your father or yourself-to your father for welcoming the coming, to you for speeding the parting guest.

I have now been up at Rio Tinto nearly a month, and have taken hold pretty well. I ran down to stay over a weekend in the charming hotel here, which, I understand, belongs to the Company-also to see my trunks through the Customs. All the formalities have now been gone through, and I am several crowns the poorer, thanks to the useful but impoverishing system of bribery and corruption which obtains here.

'But up at the mines I shall have to put my foot down, I can see. And I am told that if I do, some of these dusky-skinned rascals will think nothing of putting a knife into me. Still, every job has its risks, and on these sierras one is no more likely than anywhere else to meet 'The Stranger waiting on the Waste.'

'Now I am not going to preach. I couldn't at any rate. Your father will call this rank fatalism, but it

is a sound, healthy (if not hearty) belief to carry round with a fellow into strange places—that a man can't die before his clock strikes the hour. If he says different, tell him from me to preach next Sunday from the text 'My time is not yet come!'

Here John Fowler laughed a little, and shook his head, murmuring, 'A little knowledge of Scripture is a dangerous thing. He forgets the context: 'But your time is always ready!'

For practise each morning with The Tartan editorials had made him a very dangerous adversary in argument. Janet read on without entering into this while her father continued to chuckle. Raif lounged on the sofa and petted the fox-terrier. He had just returned from having 'a few words with the kids' on the back green, as he had promised 'after prayers.' It is always well to take a little exercise of a morning.

'But so far I have seen nothing of all this' (the letter continued). 'Every one has been kind, and easy to get on with. I have had no need to show my teeth or the men their ten-inch knives. If you on your part will enlighten me on the doings at Kirktown since that morning when you gave me breakfast, and I slipped away into another world by the 6.10 a.m. train, you will do me a great service.

'How is old Dick up at the Glebe End Lodge, and Miss Bryan? Please remember me to them. I hope she was none the worse of her rough handling in the pit?'

'Not a bit—not a bit!' said the minister. 'I saw her yesterday—prettier than ever. I always call as I pass by, though they are Irongray's people. You have my authority for reassuring him on that point.'

As her father continued to manifest an

unwelcome and pointless tendency to enlarge on the beauty and health of Miss Bryan, Janet shut him down with a snap as if he had been the lid of a box, and proceeded with the next sentence. Raif impassively caressed the fox-terrier, which feigned its usual cat-like indifference.

'I suppose the Company took my advice and made young Calmont interim engineer. With Fraser and Helver to steady him below, he will soon get all the underground practice that is needed, and Incubus and Co. could not do better. Also the men will get something done for them. But I suppose there has been a mighty locking of stable-doors since the steed was stolen. I was discharged for telling the truth. 'Great is truth and shall prevail,' says your father, Miss Fowler, and very right he is. But in this case it took sixty-three dead men to prove it. And here I am in the Hotel Colon at Huelva, listening to the fountains in the garden, before the Truth could finally prevail.'

'The way of truth shall be evil spoken of,' said Mr. Fowler, gently.

'Not by Vic!' flashed his daughter, in a voice so different from that in which she had been reading, that her brother Raif looked up sharply from scratching the fox-terrier under the chin.

'Yap!' objected the fox-terrier-whose name, Janet had always been secretly glad, was Vic. He was not used to having his name taken in vain, when rats were not in the question.

Mr. Fowler scratched his ear and blinked benevolently through the golden circle of his glasses. He nodded his head at his daughter to intimate that she might continue.

She hesitated a little, and then glancing her eye

down, boldly skipped the next portion. Her brother saw her do it, but, being well aware that in his turn he would need such complaisances, he passed the matter over in silence, devoting himself to the inside of Vic's ears. This, however, since there need be no reticences with readers trained in the newest Journalism, was the passage omitted.

'One does a deal of clean-cut solid thinking out here' (proceeded Mr. Morris's letter) 'burnt-up scrub which cuts like knives and stings like needles on the one side, and the blue-black vault of the sky above-all about queer little hill villages where they dig up Roman coins and use them to pay for paraffin at the company's stores-the populace wild-faced, begrimed men, each with a knife, which can cut cheese or take the life of a man! And among other things, dear Miss Fowler, it has come to me, that your eyes are the colour of live sapphire, and that I was a fool not to want to talk more to you when I had the chance.

'Perhaps you would not have cared about it- but I should-now. Now . . . ah, that is the pity. Many things take on their proper proportions when one is two or three thousand miles away.' There was much more in the letter, but for Janet this was the piece she kept for herself, making nor man nor woman partaker of her joy.

She saw a chance-far off and difficult, but still a ground on which she might strive with the beauty of Vida Bryan. She could write a better letter. Oh, yes-the thought made her face flush and burn.

But there was no need to deny it to herself-why should she? She was in love with Vic Morris-with Vic Morris who had left Kirktown because of the unkindness of Vida Bryan. Not very dignified- but still-'beggars must not' -oh, yes, she knew the rest.

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'If a man can remember the colour of another's eyes all that time,' she murmured, 'well, we shall see!'

And Janet Fowler set herself to write such letters as had never before gone out of the Kirktown post-office, while Raif put an Ovid in one pocket and sneaked past his father's door. He liked to study in the woods, he averred. And whistling to the fox-terrier, Raif betook himself up to Glebe End to see if he could not get a word with Vida Bryan.

And the first thing he said was, 'Janet, my sis, has just had a letter from Vic Morris!'

'Ah!' said Vida, calmly.

Such traitors are men! There is no honour among them when it is a question of one or the other. Or even of neither-for in this case Raif Fowler was only 'putting a spoke in Vic Morris's wheel,' doing it gratuitously, too. He wanted to find out if Vic Morris had also been writing to Vida. But he returned as wise as he went. Vida regarded his boyish gambols as he would those of the family fox terrier.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

EDUCATION BY CORRESPONDENCE

Valley Manse,
November 6th.

'Dear Mr Morris, The letter which you were so thoughtful as to address to me gave my father and all of us much pleasure. We were glad to hear of your safe arrival in Spain, and my father charges me to thank you for the money sent to his poor folks, whom he finds all too numerous at the beginning of winter. He appreciated highly the mistakes and scriptural misquotations in your letter. Indeed, I have rarely seen him in such high spirits of late. Please write again.

'He advises a sound course of Bible-reading to you, and if you have not a copy by you, my father has a friend in the Bible Society's distribution work at Madrid who will send you one, carriage paid. But he wishes me to add that ignorance of the original languages will seriously handicap you in your researches-in which case he professes himself very much at your service.

'This, I have already pointed out, is not genuine Protestant doctrine, but it is what my father says, and I have faithfully reported it to you. You complain, dear Mr. Morris, of the lack of conversation in Spain, and yearn, so you say, for mine. The lack of it certainly did not seem to trouble you while here. But since you cannot see my plain face, nor I your stern one, perhaps we shall get on all the better, because of the intervening

distance, you and I.

At least we shall try-upon conditions. Foreign paper is cheap. I can use father's ink, and my handwriting, carefully restrained, will look as well on the paper as another's-father's for instance, I mean. Then the charge is one shilling per sheet, which, if you find the article supplied worth the money, you will kindly remit-no more, no less- to be used for the benefit of my poor-gloves!

Well, Kirktown is Kirktown again. The storm has passed over. The Company has not yet turned out the widows. No. 2 is still standing full of water, and they say it will be four or five months before the poor fellows in the East Workings are got out.

Phil Calmont is proving the value of your instructions. He has defied Kahn on two occasions-and he had, they say, Grindling and Mr. Romer behind him. He visits all the pits every day, and the new exits in No. 1, No. 3, the Carron, and the long Dook are all being finished according to your plans. Father told me this. He is writing his sermon, or (he says) he would write to you himself, at least He would mean to, but he would never really do it, writing being a pain to him. Not so to me, so to be just, I have taken enough out of his 'Poor' drawer to pay the postage of this to you. If you do not consider me 'poor,' or if, appreciating the value of my conversation so suddenly and violently, you are not prepared to refund the postage of my letters to you, please tell me, and I will thereafter 'for ever be silent!' But the present fivepence (5d.) you will never recover-never, never, never, never! Not even by an action at law! So there!

'Raif has gone off to college and taken his terrier-named after you-with him. The youngsters, Alf, Tim,

and Violet, fight most of the time, and pester me the rest. If I were Niobe, and had lost my family, I should not be 'all tears.' No, Mr. Morris, I should-well, it is no use saying what I should do- for are they not all three beneath the window, yelling like young hyenas, and my father at his sermon!

He will be calling out to know what I mean by it in a moment. Could you not export a good 'empoisoned dagger,' or 'bowl of poppy or mandragora,' warranted to bring about enduring peace in a Christian home, without causing awkward police interference?

Yet I should miss them too. For I cannot be all the time conversing upon paper with you- and they do not have to go two thousand miles off in order to remember the colour of my eyes! I am, dear sir, Your Obedient Servt.,

JANET FOWLER.

To Ludovic Morris, Esq.

'P.S.-This reply to your esteemed communication would have been better and longer, had it not been for the time taken up in looking in all father's encyclopedias and dictionaries for the meaning of 'live sapphire.' It is not in any one of them. Even the Britannica-ninth edition, is silent on the subject. I also called on Mr. Alexander Purdie, our village jeweller, and asked him for technical information. But he only said that he was busy, adding severely that it was quite six months from the first of April. I have therefore written to 'Forget-me-not' to ask the 'Lady Eleanore' what 'live sapphire' may be. I believe it to be something horrid-bites, very likely. Yours truly, L(IVE) S(APPHIRE).

Such was Miss Fowler's first letter. Simple fooling, I daresay, and very forward and uncalled for. But then-Vic Morris had been looking for the coming of

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that letter a long while. And every time one like it did come, something swam across the heavens, bluer than the blue. It was not Vida's swarthy glowing face of falcon brood, with dark flashing eyes that he thought of. But on the contrary, he saw eyes mild and sweet and dreaming-the sole feature, except her wavy hair, which Janet Fowler had received by ordinary generation from her handsome father.

The hard sky of Southern Spain, a sky which had not known rain for months, arched over the brown hills and tawny-russet rocks of Rio. The mail came up on the little English-built railway, with the spiky agaves and 'Figs-of the-Moor' growing between the rails. Every morning Vic Morris went over to the office to get his letters. They were purely on business, and sitting down at a desk he had them answered in a quarter of an hour.

It was with a kind of joy that he had left the hotel Colon and the port of Huelva, to put himself again at work. But after a week or two the barren wilderness of Rio Tinto and the high-set nestling towns niched and pinnacled among the Sierras, palled upon him. At the works all was going well, save that he had had one first-class row with his home directors. This occupied him in the absence of an answer from Janet Fowler.

The matter was this. There was a mode of smelting which consisted in sprinkling the ore at a particular state with salt and water-nothing more and nothing less. The discovery was supposed to improve the quality of the product. Vic proposed to do without this. According to him, the salt only retarded the action. But then a certain director was paid a percentage on each ton manufactured by

this means. Naturally the director objected, and Vic had his battle to fight against vested interests.

He was forbidden to dispense with it entirely.

He solved it by sprinkling salt and water over one ton per week, and allowing the director to collect what was due him on this moderate out-put.

It chanced that upon another Saturday, a month after, Vic Morris, pressed by the needs of society and the desire for change, took the coast train along with the Scots doctor. Their purpose, as expressed by McPherson, was to paint Huelva carmine. This sounded promising, but their exploits in this direction were not even colourably roseate.

For on entering the hotel, Vic espied, behind the glazed portals of the little wall letter-case, an envelope, daintily addressed in a small, widely detached running hand. That is, the letters and words were small, but the spaces between the words were wide, as in print—a remarkable hand, and no less remarkable was the letter within.

Vic had been telling himself that he did not care.

Why should he? Of course he was long ago forgotten in Kirktown. What were a pair of blue eyes to him or he to a pair of blue eyes? She was a plain girl anyway—if she had got up to make breakfast for him.

He simply wanted to know about Vida Bryan, and about her only because he had (like a fool) put himself in a position of considerable danger to get her out of No. 2. Still, it was all of a month ago since he had written to the Fowlers—to Janet Fowler, to be exact. And if they owed him nothing else, her father might have acknowledged the money. Thus growled Vic.

But he had only proceeded no farther, when he

noticed the date of the letter. It had been lying in the hotel for nearly three weeks. Vic made as many bounds to the beaureau. It was empty. He surveyed the staircase, seeking whom he might devour. Pablo with his duster stood open-mouthed on the landing in sheer amazement. Vic spake. Pablo had not believed that the young Englishman could have attained such fluency in the difficult objurgation of Andalusia. Why-a muleteer from Leon or Artorga could hardly have done better. But Pablo's admiration was mingled with self-righteousness. He was thrice armed. Pablo's quarrel was of the most excellently just. It was not his place to interfere with the letters in the case. It was, in fact, as much as his place was worth. The manager- why?-was not the Senor Vittorio himself manager?

There was no other. There was no order to send the letters to the Rio!-Better not-ever so much better. Many things were stolen en route. It was much more satisfactory that the Senor should come here and claim his own letters-see? Nothing had been touched, not the seal, not the stamp, not the gum!

Pablo was ordered (in a mixture of ten languages) to hold his tongue, and Vic, leaving the doctor laughing in the hall (a man of experience, the doctor, Colin McPherson) bolted upstairs to his own room, and, finding Pablo there before him, engaged in laying out his 'things,' he kicked that long-suffering servitor out, and locked the door.

Then he sat down to read.

At first he was dazed-so little was the letter what he had expected. Then he grew angry-because he was a young man of much personal dignity, and, (which is to say the same thing) of little experience of

women. Young men if they are to be liked by their peers and seniors of the other sex, must not suffer from superfluous dignity.

It took Vic some time to read the letter three times. Then he thrust it fiercely into his pocket, envelope and all. He passed the doctor in the hall, who called after him to know at what time he wanted his dinner. As he did not answer, the doctor shrugged his shoulders and explained to Pablo that his patient had had a touch of the sun, but was not really dangerous. Vic went down to the Huelva docks, and during the first hundred yards had stumbled over one sleeping urchin, three cables, a heap of peacock copper, set apart for specimens and souvenirs- and a yellow, elongated, scrub-haired cur, with half a tail, one eye and three legs. The animal immediately turned and snapped at him conscientiously, as if he had been a flea.

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

GORM CASTLE

James Kahn was not long in hearing that Jacob Romer went every day to see Vida Bryan at the little cottage at Glebe End. Considering the exaggeration common to all small towns, which increases in inverse ratio as they tend to become villages, this was fairly correct. Jacob Romer did not go there every day, but he had been twice in three weeks. Since Vida's illness, after the affair of No. 2 pit, her friend Miss Nunsby had been with her continuously. Rose had left her father and 32, Dudley Gardens to the cares of Leeby Callum, whom he daily abused continuously in language quite incomprehensible to her. This did not hurt Leeby Callum. She was glad when the 'maister relieved himsel'.' It showed he was not 'keeping onything up against her'!

Still, even two such visits were too much for James Kahn to consider with impunity. To his distorted imagination it seemed that his master was not so confidential with him as he used to be. He had noticed, also, that Jacob Romer had directly consulted young Calmont-a mere tool of Morris's on more than one occasion.

Doubts harrassed James Kahn on every side.

Since it was his nature always to play a double game (or indeed several at a time), he suspected that others were doing the same thing-perhaps a safe belief enough, but not one which makes for personal popularity.

What, for instance, if Johnemann, who had been

on the Good Intent with him, recognised Vida? He had certainly looked very strangely at him the day of the pit disaster. Might he not forestall him with Jacob Romer, by presenting the old dotard with a long-lost daughter, thus earning his gratitude? Certainly Johnemann had better be looked after.

Then the Serb fell to reflecting on the reasons which might prevent the girl from listening to his offers. He even went so far as to suspect a dismissed servant at the 'Caravanserai' of telling tales. This man had been working up at Gorm Castle for old Abraham Fyfe the gardener, and Abraham Fyfe was a favoured guest at Glebe End Cottage.

Otherwise it was simply incomprehensible that he, a rich man, high in the confidence of the head of Incubus, Romer & Co., should be slighted without reason given by a slip of a girl.

'It's the Romer temper,' he affirmed at last, 'look at her nose! The 'Old Jacob' strikes from her eyes like fire from flint. I believe now that if I were a poor man, with my way to make, I might have a better chance.'

Like most men, when baffled, he never suspected that he himself was the cause. It never struck him that he might sell his house, his horses, his motors, and pretend to be poor. But this was too much to face. James Kahn would not give up a farthing he had gained for half-a-dozen Vida's. Vida and the farthings-good! Without -many thousand times no!

But all the same the distant whirr and nearer grunt of James Kahn's motor became a familiar sound in the little house at Glebe End, sitting back from the gate into the wood. And Vida, who till now had known no fear, besought little Miss Nunsby to remain with her. There was something about James

Kahn which intimidated her.

'But my father will go crazy!' said Rose Nunsby, shaking her head, 'if he is left any longer with Leeby Callum and the soapy blocks which are Leeby's idea of boiling new potatoes-there will be murder done.'

Meanwhile old Dick had recommenced his service at the Carron pit, and was absent most of the day one week, and the whole of the night the next. Since the disaster Vida's nerves were not what they had been. She was afraid and she knew not of what. The days were growing shorter. The tall trees were shaking themselves clear of leaves, which it was the girl's pleasure to gather and burn in the short windless afternoons, her friend, Rose Nunsby, assisting her. Occasionally Phil helped too, when he could snatch time from the duties of his new occupation. He went and came at all times, making straight up from the pits, dropping off his father's gig on the pretence of going to consult old Dick Finnan-and ever ready either to make tea for, or to accept tea from the pair of girls in the Gate Cottage.

Both times it was in the afternoon towards four o'clock that Mr. Jacob Romer had arrived. He marched down the avenue, erect in carriage as ever, rugged in outline of face, albeit clean shaven and ruddy, with thick, quick-moving irascible eyebrows. He had a habit of pouting the lips as if to whistle, and then drawing them in again as if he thought better of it.

He rapped at the door under the ivy-sheltered porch with his knuckles. Little Miss Nunsby opened it.

'I have come,' he said, 'to see the-the young lady who had the misfortune to be down the pit on the

day of the accident.'

'Ah, come in,' said Rose Nunsby, briskly, to the lord of the Gorm estates. 'Miss Bryan is in the kitchen.'

Mr. Romer stood musing a little on the doorstep, a little cane tapping his pouted lips.

'Miss Bryan,-' he murmured, 'so that is the -the young lady's name. Any relative of yours?'

'None,' snapped little Miss Nunsby, 'my music pupil only-also (a little) my friend.'

'Music pupil?' queried the great man as if speaking to himself, 'and you are-'

'Rose Nunsby,' said the girl, 'my father works in your office!'

'Ah, of course!' said Mr. Romer. The information conveyed nothing in particular to him. In Kirktown the words described nine out of every ten male inhabitants.

Now the light of a biscuit-dry November day is different from every other in all the year. There is something of unpolished silver about it, full of vague wistfulness and the regret of the lost years.

At least Jacob Romer found it so. For when he entered the little parlour with the late-coming flowers arranged on table and mantelpiece, he sighed involuntarily.

Perhaps some love for the old homely cottage life opposite Thorsby survived or revived in the stubborn old heart of the master of millions. At Gorm Castle Jacob Romer seldom saw anyone but Gregson, the formal, the meritorious. Everything was large and still and chill-unpropitious for the kindling of old blood, about Gorm Castle. The fires did not heat the Tooms. When lighted they seemed sorry for themselves, and drooped like flowers after a first

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frost-such a one as was beginning to fall over the woodlands this very afternoon.

But here, in the little cottage, warm firelight in early November was a thing to remember and be thankful for-even supposing that the sun still shone through the gable window on the bare arms of Vida, who was baking with her sleeves rolled up, and on the flushed cheeks of little Miss Nunsby, who presently would be running to and fro about the fireplace ranging and testing the girdle cakes. A long woodland gap permitted a glint of autumnal gold to rest on Vida's cheek. Jacob Romer thought that he had seen something like that before, and the warm smell of the baking, the good dust of the farina in the air, the girl's round quick-moving arms and rapid changes of position, the 'Thump-thump' of the rolling-pin on the wooden bake-board, all spoke to him of ancient things-older than his wife, perhaps speaking of his youth, of his mother or grandmother. For the moment comfort banished from his mind the desire to grow richer and ever richer, and the thought of calling in Miss Georgina Bunny to sit at the head of his table at Gorm Castle vanished like a cloud-shadow off a hill.

He found little to say and when he was gone, Rose Nunsby said to her friend with a smile, 'I know somebody who may be mistress of Gorm Castle one day!'

Vida looked at her friend for one long moment- a horrible suspicion crossing her mind that, perhaps, after all, Rose spoke the truth. Then gripping her friend by the wrist she said fiercely, 'I am going myself to Gorm Castle tomorrow-will you come with me? I have something to say to-to my father!'

'Gracious!' said Rose, with her nose in the air,

'isn't it usual to let the man make up his own mind?'

'I am his daughter!' said Vida, tragically.

Rose, nothing astonished, stepped back and regarded the girl.

'He will make the third,' she said, calmly, 'Billy Bryan, old Dick-and now Mr. Jacob Romer. I wonder which third of you he will take. Certainly I will come and see. I don't think father will actually kill Leebie Callum for another day yet.'

But Vida, deep in the terror of a thought, did not even listen. She was imperilling her home and Dick's -yet it must be. She had no right to let things drift. She must go to Gorm Castle tomorrow.

The next afternoon at three o'clock precisely the two girls locked the outer door behind them. Vida took the exceedingly cunning and never-before-thought-of plan of hiding the key under the mat, so that Dick Finnan, if he should return before they got back, would not be shut out from the warmth of his fireside. Dick delighted greatly in the originality of this device. He saw the hump on the mat from far off.

It was a sharp, clean, windless day, with the ash trees cricking away merrily overhead, letting go all sail, and the big broad leaves balancing noiselessly down till they formed a sort of moist; dark green shadow on the ground, grateful to the feet after the hard 'Macadam' of the roads.

It was real 'back-end,' weather, and from the nearest fields (the winds being blown) the 'Wine-yer-Whoather' of the labouring ploughman could be heard mingling distinctly with the snap of his far-flung reins, the ring of a horse's hoof-iron on a loose pebble, and, much nearer at hand, the clean trill of a robin on a bough. These were all late 'back-

end' sounds -characteristic of the days shortening sharply after the 'way-gaun o' the swallow,' of the reddening hawthorn, and the rime lying grey on the bracken leaves along ruddy forest glades, or high in wild 'hopes' where the mountain spreads out emptily its palms to the sun.

Little Miss Nunsby limped slightly-so slightly that it could hardly have been noticed by another. Only just enough to make her conscious, not jealous, of the alert springy tread of her companion. You may be sure that Vida never dreamed of such a thing.

Hardly had they rounded the corner of the avenue, walking on a perfect couch of pine needles, feet-thick, which Mr. Romer would not allow to be disturbed, than Phil Calmont was at the cottage door. He had ridden over on his cycle from the Carron Pit. He found the door shut, but a clear, red fire was winking encouragingly through the window lattices. This told him that the nest had not long been deserted. His foot, on the mat at the door, encountered something hard -the key, certainly. They had not gone to the Pits to meet Dick, nor yet to the village. In that case, he would have met them. Neither up towards the hills. He would have seen them miles away. There remained only the direction of the Castle. Yet what in the world-in twenty million worlds-could they be seeking there?

At the same moment the necessity of calling at Gorm Castle with a request to see the master on business, came upon Philip Calmont. Gregson would deny him, of course. Still he would be there, he would see. He leaped on his cycle and sped castlewards. What was short to him proved a long way to Miss Rose Nunsby. There was that strain of the knee which she never remembered being

without, the pain in the small of the back! Ah, if only she could have known what it was to be altogether well for twenty-four hours. Rose was sure that she would have been a different girl. Different-certainly. Better-hardly.

Phil first saw them a long way ahead. But the swift wheels shod with air, even on such an unconventional track, soon caught the girls up. Rose stared as Phil lighted down. Vida hardly appeared to notice him. All her thoughts were on what she would say to her father.

'Going to call at the Castle, Phil?' Rose demanded, tauntingly, 'old man asked you to afternoon tea? Had a lounge in the privet hedge specially arranged for you?'

But Phil looked anxiously at Vida. He divined her mood, and with great good sense refrained from putting any question. He did not reply even to Rose, save by a wan smile.

He indicated the direction of the castle, the grey porch of which now appeared at the end of the avenue, cold and forbidding. Rose nodded back and then shook her head. That meant that Vida had got an idea, and that for the present it was unsafe to meddle. So much Phil knew already; but he wheeled his cycle alongside of them in the most business-like way.

Presently Vida took notice of his presence.

'I don't want you, Phil,' she said, frowning upon him.

'I know,' said Phil, modestly, 'all the same you may need me, and besides--'

'Besides what?' Vida demanded, fiercely. 'I am here on urgent private affairs.'

Vida looked him up and down keenly, but he was

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pinching the front tyre of his machine with an unoccupied hand, and appeared utterly oblivious.

They were at the Castle porch. Vida was pulling the ancient wrought-iron 'seneschal' handle, which in turn pressed an electric bell within the butler's pantry-a combination, really Gothic, which had pleased Mr. Romer, who found joy in bullying his architect-a sensitive young man under the impression that the chance of his life had come to him in the building of Gorm Castle. Within two weeks, Mr. Romer had taught him different.

Gregson appeared.

'I wish to see Mr. Romer,' said Vida, firmly.

'I am not sure, miss-he is often out,' said that respectable apparition, 'he goes without disturbing this side of the house. But-but I shall see. What name shall I say, miss?'

'Miss Romer!'

The accurately black-and-white Gregson nearly fell over backward. He knew Vida well enough by sight. He had heard Miss Bryan's praises from Abraham Fyfe, the old gardener. He himself had strolled along by the cottage, merely 'to have a look' at the wonder, had found Mr. James Kahn; had been threatened with a kicking, with dismissal; and so had forsworn 'visiting,' which apparently was for his betters.

And now to be informed by 'the little girl at the gate' that she was Miss Romer-Gregson had a shock, indeed! But Vida was already in the hall.

Rose and Phil followed as a matter of course. Gregson tried to remember as he ushered them up the stairs, if the revolver in the master's room had been loaded the last time he had squinted down the muzzle. Gregson was a fearful man. Perpetual

terrors thickened about him. He could not bear fire-arms, and, therefore, always made sure of them. He had a double method of doing so. First, as aforesaid, he looked carefully and long down the barrel, striking a match to do so. Then he stirred the contents with a hat-pin abandoned by a housemaid, to whom, in his long widowed state, Gregson had offered honour-able matrimony. Then he looked again. Now Gregson always held the article by the trigger to make sure. So that if it did not go off, Gregson could count with assurance upon its future behaviour. Nevertheless it told on his nerves to be in the room with anything loaded-even a photographic camera. He was not so young as he had been.

But Gregson had his duty to do, be the consequences what they might. He opened the door of the library, in which Mr. Romer sat in an irascible-looking dressing-gown of scarlet and powder blue. He was bending over sheets of many-coloured plans, and his eyebrows were twitching up and down. Left to himself Gregson would have mended the fire at the risk of his life and fled.

But now in duty's path, Gregson feared no foe, and he would announce the visitors even if murderfollowed.

'Mr. Philip Calmont, with Miss Rose Nunsby and - and-Miss Romer!'

The old man started to his feet. His hand went to his throat, as if he were choking.

'Miss...Romer!' he stammered, 'there is no Miss Romer! Who says that there is a Miss Romer?'

'I do!' said Vida, promptly putting the others behind her. Gregson had disappeared. He knew his duty. Whether he stopped behind the library door, whether he examined the mechanism of keyholes, is

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known only to Gregson himself. He has printed testimonials, and the author has perused them without finding any mention of either circumstance.

They faced each other, father and daughter, the relationship patent to the eye. Greek encountered Greek, and Romer eye looked into Romer eye. But there was to be no yielding without a struggle.

'I am your daughter, sir,' said Vida to Jacob Romer. 'I am ashamed and distressed to own it. I count you but little less than the murderer of my mother--besides--'

'It is a lie-a lie-a lie!' cried the old man.

'My wife and daughter went down in the Suck of Sannox. Mr. Kahn-Captain Helstone--'

'Lied,' said Vida, gaining confidence; 'your wife went down. Your daughter is before you.'

'I will send for the police--this is blackmail,' Jacob Romer shouted.

Vida made a contemptuous motion with her hand as if putting aside an annoying puppy.

'Do so,' she said, 'I shall have much to tell them, of your brother, of yourself, of your treatment of my mother! Why you should so hate us, that I cannot tell them. I never knew, but you did.'

'Yes, send for the police. Your brother, the doctor, will thank you. It is only six or seven years ago, after all. The same police magistrate from whom I asked advice is still at East Dene; the mayor and his secretary are still alive. Though they have knighted him, the Town Clerk will remember me. Even Engineer Johnemann, I have reason to believe, will not deny me.'

The harsh, rubicund face, generally Peterhead granite, had turned into granite of Aberdeen. Mr. Romer was livid to the lips.

'And you have brought these with you to hear you say this to me?'

He pointed to Rose and Philip Calmont.

'Miss Nunsby is my friend. I brought her, certainly. As to the gentleman, I know nothing of him or he of me!'

So fierce was the Romer blood when aroused, that Vida seemed to take a real pleasure in trampling on hearts-even Phil's. Particularly Phil's, indeed.

'Well, it does not matter,' retorted the other Romer, 'since they are here, they must take the consequences.'

At this exceedingly opportune moment, Gregson, calm and deferential as ever, announced 'Mr. Kahn.'

At once the tempest broke forth.

'More!' he shouted, driving his hand suddenly among the sheafs of paper, 'send up the servants, the kitchen-maids, the stable-boys. Send up the gamekeepers. Rouse the night-shift and have up the village scavengers. My family matters are not widely enough known. You have chosen well, young woman. But all the better! I know how to protect myself. Thank heaven, there is a law against impostors in this land!'

He turned upon Mr. Kahn, who, with keen, foxy eyes and suave cunning of expression, seemed to understand the whole scene as if he, too, had been listening at the door. Yet he was entirely in the dark. He was a clever fellow, this Serb. He had understood, weighed probabilities, oriented his policy, decided on his course of action; all the while standing serene and grave as ever, waiting for his master to address him.

'Who is this woman, Kahn?' demanded the old man fiercely. He went up to James Kahn as if to

take him by the collar and shake the truth out of him. 'Have you lied to me? Heavens, if you have, better for you that you had gone down with the Good Intent! Is it true what she says? Speak out, man!'

Entirely master of himself (which goes a long way towards being equally master of others), James Kahn replied, 'I do not know if the presentation has already been made. But if not, permit me to have the great pleasure of introducing you two-Mr. Romer-your only daughter! Miss Vida Romer-your father!'

And he stood back a little, smiling, and rubbing his hands as if entirely satisfied with himself. He knew that his life hung on a hair. He saw Jacob Romer's hand go towards the loaded revolver in the drawer of the desk. He stood smiling, a bold swift knave. It was almost as if he had been at home in Serbia! He liked it so-to play with life and death as men play with cards and counters. His own or another's-what matter!

Mr. Jacob Romer's hand moved down to the broad solid hilt of the navy revolver. His fingers closed upon it. Some colour had come back to his face, and his eyes were fixed upon those of James Kahn. The Serb did not move. He stood still, smiling gently, his head thrown back with a certain bravura of expression which was as distant as possible from bravado.

'You lied to me, sir!' said Jacob Romer, calmly, adjusting 'his victim' (as they say in the abbatoirs of great cities).

'I lied, indeed,' said James Kahn, 'but it was for your good. My silence of five years proves it.'

Have I not watched over your daughter? At that time would you have welcomed her? Then you had

projects with which she would have interfered. Now it is different. You need a companion. I give you a daughter.'

'You lied to me-you whom I trusted!' said Jacob Romer, sombrely, 'and now I am going to shoot you like a dog!'

'Do it!' said James Kahn, and he folded his arms.

Then the other Romer stepped in front of the levelled tube, between James Kahn and his angry master.

'Father,' she said, 'give that to me!'

There was an instant battle-eagle and falcon, peregrine and sparrowhawk. Vida stretched out her hand. She walked towards Mr. Romer.

'Out of the way-he has lied to me!' cried the fierce owner of the Incubus properties.

'And, pray, did you never lie?' demanded his daughter,- 'to my mother whom you promised to love, honour, and protect?-You sent her to the Poor Side of the Thorsby County Asylum. She would have died there but for me-now give me the pistol!'

Thus defied, Mr. Romer stood irresolute. But the next moment the revolver was in Vida's hand, and she had moved aside, leaving master and man face to face.

'Now,' she said, 'you can settle it between you!'

And she slipped the loaded weapon into the pocket of her dress and turned towards the door.

'Good-bye, father,' she said, 'I did not come to ask anything from you. Only I had to tell you- lest there should be misunderstandings . Tomorrow I will take my proper name. But because I know only two men who have been true fathers to me, I will be their daughter still in all affection. Not yours now-no, nor

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ever yours, save in name. I will go to your pitman, Dick Finnan, and to Billy Bryan, the lighthouseman. I will accept my livelihood from them-not from you!’

And she went down the stairs of Gorm Castle, bowing in a stately fashion to Gregson, whom, curiously enough, they encountered on the landing with a tray in his hand.

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

THE TIDES OF ROUGH ISLAND

Six days later old Dick Finnan had settled his household gods, including the goddess, in a trim little cottage looking out on Rough Island, whose low-lintelled doors and square windows afforded neat and commodious views of Wolf Skerry Lighthouse. Billy Bryan had had his eye on this particular 'bit housie' for a long time. He had made offer after offer to purchase, but there were 'sea bathers' (as the countryfolk called summer visitors) in the land, and the price had risen.

At last, however, Billy had closed—just in time to tenant his new possession with Vida and Dick. I daresay Dick might have remained on at his Kirktown post, but Vida was far too stiff and proud. If Dick would not come with her, she would go alone. And Dick Finnan went, to tell the truth—not very loath. He was wearying for the grit of the sand and the trample of the pebbles, for clean salt air to breathe, and for the clear green sea to run twice a day sweltering into the coves and break in chromatic arches on the white stones of the beach.

For one who has lived a long life within cry of the sea-birds, it is dull work to hear only the toot of the steam whistle at six o'clock of a morning, the whirl of the endless wire cables in the dark of a mine, and the rumble-rumble of waggons, full and empty.

A dainty spot was that little bit of beach. Billy Bryan would not hear of rent. The very mention of money made him furious. He expressed himself

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thus:- 'Let the little one make a cosy nest for us two old wizened fellows, before she flies away to a nest of her own-as of course she will do-and Billy Bryan will be content!'

Billy had got a few days off duty from the lighthouse-out of turn, and very naturally had abused his outgoing substitute as far as his yoke could carry. Then he had given himself up unrestrainedly to the pleasures of sense.

He went about with Old Dick calling him all the names he could lay his tongue to, but pointing out all manner of dainty sea-going (or rather sea-home coming) devices, to which the 'Ould 'Un' could turn his hands in the brief spells when he was not 'laid up entirely wid laziness.'

There was, for instance, a spot where a tall flagstaff must be erected. Billy knew the tree and the man that owned it. Then there must be a brass cannon to fire salutes with. And Billy knew the sailorman who had 'nearly finished wid that!' (It turned out that the man in question had nearly finished with life as well, and that his next visitor would likely be One for whose coming no salutes are fired).

'Brass,' said Billy, triumphantly, 'wid white waterproof sheeting and a ball to shut its mouth when it's done talking. And a good thing for you, Dick, if you had the like! Then there's a summerhouse, with a stand for the telescope-ships for to see, and sailormen going by, hanging out their shirts to dry in the sun, and me on the lantern platform of the Skerry, shaking my clout for cleaning the reflectors at ye, and wondering what you and Vida here have been having for breakfast.'

Nothing could have delighted Vida more. She was

still within six miles of Kirktown, from which Rose came often to visit her. The eternal whirl and reverse of the pithead wheels were done with.

The miles of woodland shut them out-with tufted moors, green and purple in the summer, grey and brown in winter. Vida could have sung for joy only to look at them.

In fact, when there was no one to hear her, she did. Phil said she sang like an angel, but Vida thought better of the angels than that.

Then there were the birds. Outside in the great, green deeps of the bay, between her and the tall granite column of the Skerry, she loved to watch the gannets winging their heavy direct flight shorewards. Straight from Ailsa they came, making no more of the distance than did Phil Calmont on his bicycle when he came down from Kirktown to 'caa' the crack' with old Dick, or after church on Sundays, to have a peep through the telescope at Billy Bryan on the Skerry platform. The gannets in the morning, and Phil in the afternoon, filled happily enough Vida's day.

There was a piece of white sand in front of the cottage. Thence, with only one narrow port, rugged far-jutting skerries ran seaward. Behind were little rocky knolls with cunningly sheltered green nooks where the turf was emerald, the fems grew high, and the heather made a hundred coverts for wind-blown birds.

Rough Island Cottage was the ideal home for two old lighthousemen. And just at that moment it was good for Vida also. It took her mind away from Kirktown, its narrow issues of church and trade-above all the sullen atmosphere of grit, volleyed forth from the chimneys of Incubus, Romer and

Company.

The change was good for another person also.

All that winter and spring, through biting sleet, driving floods of rain, and blinding snow, Phil Calmont drove his cycle up over the edge of the cup in which lay Kirktown, out of the smoke circle, past the raw towers of Gorm Castle, and so on over the moor seawards. It was bad for the machine, of course, and in the summer it was with difficulty that Phil could get an offer of ten shillings for it, but it was good for Phil and, to tell the truth, for Vida also. At least, she did not object.

Of course, she cared nothing about his coming. Dick was enough company for her-and Billy, when it was his shore leave. Dick could tell her all about the birds, and how the 'Coal-and-Candle Light Duck' called 'Calloo-Calloo' like a ship's syren, only in a clear tenor note, prolonging the last 'alloo,' till it was cut off as suddenly as if the singer had turned the corner of a street.

Having arrived, the Ailsa gannets fell like bolts out of the blue, spurting high columns of white water as if emulous of the Skerry tower. Dabchicks made sport for her all through the winter, playing hide-and seek among the fronds of the seaweed in the rocky pools. Then sometimes towards the lingering gloaming of the spring days, old Dick would take his little girl out in their boat, which Billy had bought cheap from the Port Ling fishermen. Vida liked to visit the breeding-places of what Dick called contemptuously the foolish Guillemots. Multitudes of these birds stood on the rock-ledges like penguins, in the pictures of Antarctic travel, which Phil brought her. For with his scanty earnings he had made shift to join a

circulating library. A little box of books came down every week. He had them sent to the office. He knew his family too well to permit them to have the benefit. Let them join libraries for themselves. Besides, they did not care for reading anyway. They were too healthy. It was a matter between Vida and himself; all he could do for her, indeed, or let them go and find Vidas for themselves.

Of course, they called him names when they found out; especially the twins, Willie and Wilhemina. They even tried on several occasions to break into the office during his absence, bringing with them a whole arsenal of housebreaking tools, including some dental instruments belonging to their father. But that unfeeling brother, Phil Caimont, warned the night watchman and the day timekeeper. Whichever happened to be on duty was to loose the yard bull-dog upon any of the race of Calmont, who should approach the engineer's office, his father only excepted.

After Vida had explained all about penguins, and how you could kill them with a stick, Dick in his boat, the water dripping lightly from his oars, paused to point out the guillemots overhead.

'They're no like thae penguins,' he said, stolidly, 'they're nervous beasts, guillemots!'

'Come let's scare them,' said Vida, and when immediately below the cliffs she rose and clapped her hands. No more was needed. A beating rush of wings, a great white V turned with its apex towards the sea, and all Rough Island seemed to fly up into the air and pass overhead. Vida laughed her delight. One or two clear greenish-blue eggs would roll over and fall with a yellow splash on the rocks beneath.

Then Dick Finnan, who had lived his life-or the

most part of it, on desert islands and lighthouse platforms with a glass at his eye, explained to the young people the theory and practice of bird life on such places. Vida and Phil, seated close together in the stem, a big waterproof rug, lined inside with flannel, covering them, were pleased with the lengthiest explanations.

For a model Dick used Rough Island itself under which they were gliding. Up on the grassy top where the bunchy rabbits 'botched' and hopped and bent their ears at twenty angles in as many seconds, were the puffins. Dick was fond of them.

'Eh, but they are queer beasts, the Tammie-Norries-good eating, though,' said Old Dick. 'Up yonder ye can hear them deep under sod, yammerin' and chunnerin' and learnin' their bairns the Catechism, I dootna! And what a bite ye will get if ye put in your hand to pu' yin oot-and scart, scart like the dell, they wull! Ow, aye-they bide aye on the top where the rabbits mak' the holes- but ye are no listening-you twa!'

Old Dick would pause at his oars and suspend his instruction.

'Ye are maybe no comfortable. Trim the boat, laddie! Ye will hae Vida in the water.'

For Phil had gradually been encroaching (as is the duty of his sex) till Dick, at the oars, felt the drag on the starboard side. But, being a man without guile, and of little feminine experience, he failed to connect cause and effect.

At last Vida, for the sake of peace, and because, when all was said and done, he had come so far to see her, allowed Phil to hold her hand for a little-a harmless amusement, much practised by the very young, but apt to prove insufficient and unsatisfying

to the hand-holder just when it is beginning to interest the hand-held. Still during these days, this made Phil ridiculously happy. He forgot rain and shine, snow flurries from the sea and the salt drive of the spray in his face—even Dick's bird lore, in dreaming of the warm softness of that little girlish, ungloved hand.

And let those who have never been young, cast at Vida and Phil the first laugh. Why, even Jacob Romer, sulking at Gorm Castle, and Gregson the Immaculate waiting tremblingly upon him, knew better. At least they had lived out their youth, such as it was. And once a year or so Gregson forgot to serve the caper sauce with the boiled mutton for at least two seconds, because he was thinking of the housemaid who had left him for love tokens, only a hatpin and an empty soap dish.

'An' them under the eaves o' the Isle are the Auks (what some folk caa the Razor-bills, as if a' thae sea-fowl hadna nebs that bite like razors, on accoont o' the fish they catch.) Trim the boat, laddie! Or else tak' the oars yoursel'. And then come the Guillemots, and the bonny wee white kittiwakes sittin' like leddies on nests that are nests, and no bit scrapes o' cauld stane like the fule craiturs aboon them. Ech aye, but I am daft-daft. The sun's gane doon, and you twa that cauld, wi' the sea-cloak up to your chins. What wad Billy say? I maun hae ye baith learned to tak' an oar apiece- that will keep ye braw and warm!'

Nevertheless Vida assured Dick that, so far as she was concerned, she was entirely comfortable, and the visitor quite agreed with her.

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

THE FIGHTING SERB

The explanation which James Kahn had had with his master had not separated them.

'What can I do?' Jacob Romer had argued with himself. 'McKill is a wind-bag and Grindling a whiskey-cask. Young Calmont knows little, and is on the men's side at any rate. Good work may be done with a tool that has fallen and fouled itself in the mire. It would be no gain to me if James Kahn should carry all the secrets of the firm with him elsewhere-or perhaps, who knows, set up for himself'

Mr. Jacob Romer was far-seeing. His subordinate had regarded both these possibilities in the face. But Mr. Kahn's chief reliance was on the fact that now the master of millions knew that he had an heiress in the flesh, he would never allow her to marry anyone who would not prove a worthy successor of his own.

James Kahn was that man.

He grew certain that the old man would not pass his daughter by. 'Blood will tell,' said the Serb sententiously, who in his own country had several unsatisfied blood feuds awaiting his return. Having made his fortune he would go back to no inglorious ease, but with the certainty of spending his declining days in the excitement of continual long-distance rifle-practise among the Balkans. To such an one, human life did not count-not even his own.

It is hard to convey the impression which such a

man took on of life in the South-West of Scotland, with its alternate 'douceness' and 'dourness,' its general kindness in deed and equally general incivility of word, especially the tenderesses of its religious life which were as the foolish plays of bairns to him.

Profoundly superstitious by nature, James Kahn boasted among his cronies at the 'Caravanserai' that 'such a man as he had no use for religion.'

And, indeed, it was true, at least, of the land of his temporary adoption. He understood neither Mr. Lamont's easy-going kindly ways, nor the sternness of Benjamin Irongray's historic faith. Still less did he see the beauty which underlay John Fowler's mysticism-the glory undimmed that made bright for him all the shadows of this world, when like him of Mount Horeb he could say, 'I testify my Saviour openly. . . I am ready for the everlasting light that shall shine upon me.'

From the long result of centuries of education, practically free and compulsory by the weight of public opinion, James Kahn was shut out, and never knew it. He lived in Scotland, surrounded with up-to-date luxuries, and they were to him but pearl and barbaric gold. He rushed hither and thither in Mercedes motor cars. He conducted complex businesses, according to the ideas of Jacob Romer. But the foundation of the man was as unScottish as if he had been a Norman captain of Duke William's, sailing from Saint Valerie-sur-Somme.

Cunning and ready of ruse, Kahn was no coward. He would turn to bay with a snap of white teeth like the wolf of his mountains. He had by no means given up all hope of Vida, though to Mr. Romer he never more mentioned her name.

He had accompanied the flitting to the sea cottage, though none had seen him. Vida heard his footstep, and in the distance the throb of his automobile. He knew how often Phil Calmont found his way thither. And he was an unseen 'assistant,' in the French sense, at the water promenades under the cliffs of Rough Island. He had the most powerful binocular possible, especially made by Aitchison of London, and through it he watched with anger and jealousy the little attention which the young people bestowed upon Dick's ceaseless lectures on ornithology. He had his suspicions, too, as to the hands under the waterproof covering. And only the fear of a law other than his own, prevented him from putting a bullet through Phil Calmont, as he rode slowly homewards in the long spring gloamings.

'I knew one was dead-I thought the other was!' he had explained to Mr. Romer. 'Helstone thought the same. That was why we left the Good Intent, the last men on board. That is why I sent you the telegram. At the time I thought the news would hardly be unwelcome.'

'How dare you think?' cried Jacob Romer.

And he raised his hand to strike. But the little foxy Serb never flinched. To raise the hand in anger was to bring things to a common denominator. He understood striking and doubted not, that, if the worst came to the worst, he would easily have the best of it. In a settled country it gives a man great power to be without moral scruple, without fear, and with an ancestry behind him which holds it much easier to kill than to pay rates.

Sole among those with whom he came in contact, Vic Morris had something of that same wild spirit. Instinctively James Kahn recognised the man who

stood willing to back his opinion with his life. But he did not mean to let Phil Calmont come between him and his projects.

It is doubtful if the Serb's courting of Vida had anything beyond admiration of interest in it. He would as soon have made Rose Nunsby the object of his plans. He had been ready to condemn Vida to death, and with her an entire pit swarming with men and boys. For this no remorse haunted him. The plan had failed, that was all. Yet he had been prominent in the after search. He had superintended the placing of the new pumping plant which was to empty No. 2 pit. He had been a large subscriber to the Fund for the Widows and Orphans. His word had gone far in obtaining that crowning grace for the widows that they should remain in their houses during the winter. There was no needless cruelty about James Kahn.

Only he drove straight to his goal. And whoever or whatever stood in his way, he would crush without a thought, like a wriggling worm under the wheels of his 60 h.p. car.

Curiously enough James Kahn wanted a confidant. He had a certain pride in wickedness which would be not sufficient unto itself. Now Johnemann had also come to Scotland by way of the Ghetto, but via Hamburg. They had been drawn together mainly by common interests. Johnemann had a superior knowledge of machinery. The Serb possessed the brains and the daring. Mostly therefore he talked to Johnemann, though, of course, even with him, he was compelled to observe certain reticences.

Johnemann had his hours-chiefly on the evenings of pay night-when, with the best intentions in the

world, his tongue was not to be trusted. It chanced, moreover, that Johnemann had a young friend, who had arrived at Leith on a Riga timber ship. He called himself a Russian, but the lissom grace of his movements told of a more southern and even oriental origin. He called himself Casimir, for the same reason that the Serb called himself Kahn, and Johnemann, Johnemann-because such were not their names.

Casimir had no particular Christian name. When pushed to extremities he was willing to accept John. But this was only because on one occasion a paymaster, weary of questioning, had so entered him on the books of a firm he was serving. Casimir spoke all languages which are to be found east of Switzerland, always with the same graceful hesitation and apparent search for words. But he had a sure hand with machinery, which made up for his little knowledge of English. Therefore he recalled other lives to James Kahn-open air lives which men spend in cafes, while women gossip in courtyards and behind lattices.

He had, too, the education which the rough Johnemann lacked. So the 'Confidential' advanced him rapidly in his private office, where at odd moments the two talked concerning a great number of things, which three centuries of John Knox have caused not once to be named among honest Scots. But to Casimir and James Kahn there was neither moral nor immoral, good nor bad-so that the final sum worked out correctly, like two times two or three times three.

They looked around them on the sober kirk-going Scots, whose sins of youth consisted of a good deal of night-raking together with a little fortnightly

jollity, and found them of a different speech and language—other souls, other bodies in which ran quietly another blood. They talked much together, and what they really said was always two removes, at least, from the meaning which lay on the surface of the words.

This slim, dark-skinned boy was clever with his hands, and the Greenock chaffeur becoming too frequently attainted with the 'Galloway Failing,' he was relegated to the garage 'to clean up' while John Casimir drove his master abroad in his stead. He did not love Casimir, of course. It was not in human man so to do. But his idea of vengeance did not go beyond a rough-and-tumble fight or telling his master that there was shortage in the 'petrol' tins, and that 'that Cashy-mere' had been seen selling them in the town. He was unsuccessful in both attempts. From the assault his enemy escaped with a glitter of white teeth and an injurious expression in an unknown tongue. And as to the sale of the petrol tins Casimir had warned his master that he had better keep tally of these himself, because such an accusation was what would naturally occur to the jealous mind of a man from Greenock, who had learned to 'sup' in Galloway, according to Casimir a particularly stupifying combination.

So James Kahn only laughed, drew from his pocket the Croall and Co.'s invoice for the petrol, and turning it over showed his own jotting of those which had been used. But he showed mercy, having a use for the slow-brained western.

'Go back!' he said, calmly, 'I advise you, Thomas Pagan from Greenock, to keep sober, and to have the charity to think other people at least as honest as you are yourself!'

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Then he returned to his talk with Casimir, the slim, dark Danubian. And their talk bore upon places with strange names-Sarejevo, Strani Maidan and Bittoray. They spoke also of the Black Mountain, and how the Serb on his side and the Montenegrin on his, cultivated the soil each with a rifle within reach of his hand. And they smiled as they said it. They were in foreign lands earning their bread ignominiously. But one day they would return and take up the unfinished family quarrel, an arsenal of the most recent weapons at their belts, and the distance from their enemy's house counted in metres upon their rifle-sights; or so, at least, thought James Kahn. But the eyes of the slim youth Casimir glistened as they spoke of it.

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

THE FORTUNES OF BILLY BRYAN

It was Billy Bryan who first enlightened Dick Finnan upon the mystery of what Phil and Vida did with their adjacent hands when he rowed them about in the autumn evenings under the bird cliffs of Rough Isle.

Billy was on 'long leave,' and the first twilight he took stroke while Dick obediently went to bow. It was a chillish night in May, and, on the Western coast of the Carrick when the wind blows up from the Atlantic, it can be cold as January,-even though Kintyre and the Islands keep the sea down to a gentle 'lapper' of wavelets against the boat's timbers. In spite of the most careful adjustment of the flannel-lined waterproof rug, before the return of the party, Billy had got his facts 'down to a fine point.'

'You see, Dicky,' he said, 'just here lies the differ between a man of profitable experience and a man of none. The man of experience (he said 'expayrience '), that's me. The man of none- that's you! If it had been out on the Skerry, now you would have seen the first puff of the Atlantic fog pouring through the Paddy's Slap (the North Channel), or the topsails of a brigantine sagging westwards for the Solway ports and likely to pass too near to the Wolf. But with two young people, one boy and the t'other girl, in the stern of a boat- that's my job, Dicky, being as I have said, a man of experience from my youth up-though havin' never, as it were, proceeded to extremities before priest or parson.'

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'What do you mean by not proceedin' to extremities, Billy?' demanded Dick Finnan, not at all well pleased at Billy's description of him, but attempting to put an unstruck match to his pipe to hide it.

'Why, always lightin' out for foreign parts the day before ye felt that ye must ax the girl to marry ye, Dicky. That's what I mean,' explained the man of experience from his youth up.

'I saw nothing wrong in the boat,' said Dick, failing to light up for the third time, and stamping the remnants of the match into the seaweed as if it had been the fault of Messrs Bryant and May.

'Wrong? No, who talked o' wrong, you old fool, Dicky,' cried Billy, 'only these two yung uns are fixin' it up to get married!'

'Married!' gasped Dick, 'christened, ye mean, you red-headed Fenian.'

'Married, I said, Dicky. And they don't know it yet, that's the beauty of it!' chuckled the man of experience; 'it minds me of little Molly Molloy that I used to hold the hand of in '60. She tied up wid a ship's carpenter owing to my being lost in the passage to Milford, fell overboard in the night-'twas reported by the second mate-a great friend of mine. There was fine mournings, they said-headaches all through Tipperary.'

Still Billy Bryan had not proved his case. At Glebe End Cottage Dick Finnan had known too many come and go. His 'little girl knew better.' After Vic Morris, indeed, who could hope to succeed?

But Billy only shrugged his shoulders, and poured forth the full bouquet of his wisdom like a wine-cask from which the spigot has been removed.

'With girls ye never can rightly tell,' he said. 'tis

not as wid us. Of a dozen girls in a row a man will take the prettiest or the one that gives his narves a tug like usin' the curb for the first time to a restive beast. Or maybes he will only take the one he can get, if the rest won't have him! Or as like as not, the one that flatters him the most. But at all events he will know the one he wants, and will have her if he can. Now with a woman it is just contrariwise. It isn't the handsomest they want-praise be, or little Molly Molloy would never have fancied me (though she married the ship's carpenter after all); it isn't the cleverest. 'Tisn't even the one she fancies most, at least not at first. No, it's the one that nobody wants her to have, the obvious misfit, the rolling stone, the lad that nobody thinks good for anything. 'He's only got me,' she says. She tells herself (blessings on her true little Christian sowl) that she will make a man of him yet! And that's what our Vida is a-fixin' up wid herself that she will do with this doctor's young spalpeen.'

'But Philip Calmont is no good-for-nothing,' said Honest Dick, who also could stick up for his friends, 'he is worth his wage anywhere, and can do a day's work with any man. I have seen him!'

'Granted,' said Billy, 'but he has no right trade to his fingers, and is past the age to learn one. They only keep him on at the pits till they get a man in Vic Morris's place. He is only gummed on there, and the gum is cheap stuff too.'

Dick sighed. He liked Phil, for which liking he had his reasons.

'I am rale vexed ye dinna tak' to the lad, Billy,' he said.

'Phil's a good boy, considerin' his upbringing', for his kindred are lighter than the thistledown. But he

has aye been grave beyond his years. Are we to forbid the laddie the hoose?’

Billy held up his hands in astonishment at the simplicity of his co-parent.

‘It's little ye are yet in the road of learnin' about women,’ said Billy, severely; ‘forbid him the house!’

Is it that ye want our bit lass to fly up through the roof like a rocket up a chimbly? Is that how ye would have her to be leavin' us, No? Well, then, sit down, Dicky, and set your brains a-steep. The question is just how we are to keep the bit lass near to us, so that she may look in of a mornin', or set things to rights while we take turns at the telescope in the afternoon. To tell you the truth, Dicky, I have been thinkin' it over for some time. I saw from the first that she looked as cold at the engineer chap, as frozen Australian mutton when it comes from the refrigerators. How did I know? Why, -by little Molly that loved me, but married the ship's carpenter (me havin' been lost overboard). No, Dicky Finnan, Vic Morris was never the man- not if he had been stuck all over with life-saving medals, Victoria crosses and such-like like a man-in-armour in a museum. But at this one she looks to see if he has wet his feet. And makes him mind about the comforter about his neck when he goes away-stands on tip-toe to tuck it in.

T'other night, she took out a pair of your socks, Dicky, and made him march upstairs and change. And tonight I saw her darnin' a hole in the heel. She had washed them her own self!’

‘Well, why shouldn't she?’ said Dick, ‘she darns yours and mine, doesn't she?’

Billy, the man of experience, slapped his knee with a weary air, as he explain to Dick that he had no more gumption than the father of a Kerry mule,

and that words like those of Solomon were wasted on him. But that the short and the long of it was that he, Billy Bryan, thought of setting up the young people!

'Set yourself up first,' retorted Dick Finnan, 'you, a first division lighthouseman with the prospect of an ordinary pension within six months-how can you give away fortunes?'

Billy Bryan pointed to the piano in the corner.

'How did I give away that?' he inquired, somewhat pertinently.

'But they can't set up house in a piano, eat and drink in a piano, live in a piano!'

Billy wisely shook his head as he looked the cottage Broadwood all over.

'Well, not exactly in that one,' he admitted. 'But wait. Did ye ever know Billy Bryan without two strings to his bow or two plans in his head?'

'Yes, oncel!' Dick grinned largely. For it was a sore memory to the Irishman, and had to do with a scapegrace boy called Sir Toady Lion and a little girl called Saucy Easdaile.

'Oh, that,' said Billy, surlily. 'I've heard enough about that.'

'Well, you asked, you know,' said Dick, grinning still wider.

'We were speaking of our little maid, and what to do with her if she has made up her mind. I'll tell you how it is, Dicky. Directly I saw that there was no hope for that chap with the jaw-the engineer-him that went to Spain-I got a little information out of him before it was too late.'

'What about?' asked Dick, suddenly ironical, 'the investment of your fortune in mining shares maybe? Now I believe I did hear that a seagull out on the

Skerry died and left you all its property!’

‘Might ha’ been,’ said Billy Bryan; coolly, ‘on’y it wasn’t. My uncle Barny was the seagull. He went to America, and as he had been the greatest fool in ten parishes at home, naturally he got elected out there into them things they call legislatives! The Yanks get the Irish to do that sort o’ business for them, being too proud-I expect, sort o’ scavenger work. I judge! Politics they call it. Only instead of havin’ to do with carts and such-like, it’s just sweepin’ up the riff-raff and bringing them to vote at the proper day and hour. Anyway my uncle Barny made a fortune politicianing in little Old New York. Then he died, and left it all to me and my brother Tim, what was eaten by a shark at Colombo on board the Castalia. So I collar the load, and I have kept it till now; me thinking of our little lass being none the worse of a few half pence one fine day!’

Dick had let his pipe go out as he listened, ‘It’s one of your Skerry rock yarns,’ he said, ‘you don’t expect an old man like me to strain him- believin’ that.’

‘By the dure-step that tripped up Sapphire the wife of Ananias, I am tellin’ ye no lie: not even flavourin’ the truth with a little essence of Blarney. It’s a case of the gospel as it was delivered unto Moses. And if you don’t believe, I’ll take a whack at the rock, just like he up and did. Your head will do, Dick. ‘Tis thick enough.’

And in the face of these the most sacred oaths known to his lifetime friend the Skerry lighthouse-man, Dick Finnan became aware that Billy Bryan spoke the truth. At last he sat smoking face to face with a rich man. With a large and copious gesture of apology he rose and offered Billy Bryan, as his

vested right, the bigger armchair.

'And what are ye thinkin' of doin' with your uncle's American scavengering money?' Dick asked presently, leaning back and puffing at his pipe with the air of one wealthy man talking stocks with a companion. 'Buy a second-hand lighthouse,' said Billy, as gravely, 'plant her down on the point, and set you to the keepin' again, you oily old potterer!'

The old man grew suddenly red, and then paled. 'It's none right o' ye, Billy, if ye have got an uncle a rich Scavenger, to make a jest of such things! They're too serious. I would like that most everlastin' well, and you know it!'

'Me too,' acknowledged Billy, 'once a lighthouseman, always a lighthouseman, I suppose, Dicky. Mayhap, one day, when this is off my mind, I may speak a word to the Commissioners, and get them to sanction a light out on the point yonder-not to keep us out of our beds, every night, you know, but just something fixed and easy-with maybe a little engine to compress the air for the syren on thick nights, and a gravelled walk down from the cottage.'

'Oh, Billy,' was all that Dick Finnan could say. The vision was almost too much like the Book of the Revelation for him. He knew that there would be no sea where he, as an elder in Mr. Irongray's kirk, was going, and therefore no hope of lighthouses. By consequence Dick Finnan's occupation would be gone. He was downcast about this, for he had once heard a harp played in Kirktown at a penny reading, and considered that a much over-rated method of passing Eternity; all very well maybe for King David, who (so to speak) was a professional. But Dick Finnan felt that it was too late for him to learn.

But still there was something which comforted him. The streets of gold he had not been brought up to. 'But them foundations, now.' They were all named in order: jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, and so forth. Then the twelve gates, each a pearl. From the sound of it, Dick was sure that these would need 'some keepin',' and a man accustomed to clean reflectors would not be out of a job in a hurry up there. And he thought about that verse in the psalms, about being a door-keeper in the house of God, and so Dick was much comforted as to the matter of the harps. It would be nearly as good as a lighthouse.

But Billy's fortune, that mingled itself with the thought of the twelfth foundation, which was an amethyst, and the white gravelled path to the new light, and whether their beam would be seen from the Skerry. He could reply to its big steady flashes, as it were, with a mild and steady beam. And the chaps out yonder there would be saying 'Aye, yonder's old Dick and Billy that first kept this here Wolf's Skerry, and are now retired to live on their money, and to keep a light for old sake's sake.' And Dick knew as well as if he had heard it, that there would always be one who could reply, 'Keep a lighthouse, when I get ashore! Catch me! I mean to keep a tidy little public! A hundred miles inland, and not enough water within miles to drown a kitten.'

'But he wouldn't mean it, not he,' said Dick aloud, 'once a lighthouseman, always one. In a month he would be hanging about the coastguards' station, pestering to see the lieutenant and show him the state of his service.'

'What may you be maunderin' about, now, Dicky?' asked the man of means.

'My thoughts,' responded Dick shortly, 'are mainly about a fellow who swore that as soon as he had done with lights and reflectors, he would set up a public-house a hundred miles from salt water.'

Shame grew on Billy's face. Memory reproached him that, on more than one occasion, he had given vent to such sentiments.

'Well, there's our little girl,' he said, 'you wouldn't have her tell her eldest to toddle over to grandfather's public-house for the dinner beer.'

'Pshaw,' said Dick, always jealous of any paternal assumption. 'Mr. Romer is her father now: she does not call herself after you any more.'

'Ah, doesn't she,' cried Billy, 'that's all you know. For she signs herself Vida B. F. Romer!'

You don't know what 'B.F.' means, I'll bet, Dicky?'

'No,' said Dicky, 'something she was christened, I'll wager.'

'It means Bryan-Finnan!'

'No!'

Old Dick stopped smoking and blinking. He saw an objection.

'But,' he said suddenly, 'if we get the lighthouse, and the path, and all, Vida won't ever want to get married and leave us! Fancy havin' a private lighthouse!'

Billy gave his senior in service a slow glance of scorn.

'Tis easy seen,' he remarked, with bitter point, 'that there never was any Molly Molloy in your wizened old life!'

'So,' said Dick, 'if there had been she wouldn't have married any old dockyard ship-shaver.'

'Richard Finnan,' said Billy, 'don't you go gettin' funny at your age! It's strainin' to the constitution.'

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Keep your strength for them lighthouse ladders. And you believe me, it's not twenty Skerries, all silver-plated, electric-fitted, and just a swimmin' in quicksilver baths that would keep a girl like ours from settin' up house for herself. It's the babies that does it, mostly. Just watch a right maiden grab one, and you'll see there's an achin' somewhere!

'Well,' said Dick, 'I believe for once you are talkin' sense. I reckon it's natural somehow. If our mothers hadn't been took like that, where would we have been?'

'Ah, where indeed?' assented Billy. But he felt the subject too big for him and hastened to change it.

'Know Portogarten?' he inquired. Dick almost snarled.

'Do I know my own name?' he growled, 'Wasn't I born over there? Isn't the Port within twenty skips of a goat from here-first point to the starboard.'

He indicated the direction with his elbow.

'Well,' said Billy Bryan, blowing a long cloud, 'there's coal up there.'

'Who's been picnicking?' inquired Old Dick with unexpected levity.

Billy regarded him with severe attention.

'I warn you if ye take to it this late in life,' he remarked magisterially; 'it will be worse than the harpin!'

'What will be worse?'

'Tryin' to be funny when nature never intended aught o' the sort,' said Billy Bryan, 'But I saw a cure for it advertised in a paper-pills it were, and then fly-blisters. If ye persevere, success is sure, and you get half your money back in return for a testimonial and your photograph. Tussauds 'ud be glad to set yours, Dicky.'

Mr. Finnan here remarked upon the improbable sanity of his mate. He had, it appeared, observed it coming on for a long time! Then he also attempted to turn the conversation, but at this game Billy was easily top dog.

'Coal, ye said?'

'That's what I said.' It was Billy's time to be reticent.

'Who was pullin' your leg?' demanded old Dick quickly.

'Only a gentleman by the name of Morris,' said Billy, severe but relenting. 'One day I saw him lookin' at the rocks down there. He gave a bit of the ledge a kick out with his foot. He looked at it through a glass. Then he smelt it-tasted it too, I think.'

'But what did he say?'

'These were his words: 'That's the same as the main dip in our Carron Pit! There's iron there or I'm a Dutchman,' says he, 'maybe coal too. I wonder how it got there-must have broken its back and come up again!'

'Think there's money in it?' says I.

'Might be,' says he, 'only I've no use for money. This is my Sunday off, and a day of rest for man and beast. Moresomeever' (this is what he finished up with) 'if I had all the money that is, I wouldn't spend a penny of it on grubbin' in a hole in the ground!'

'Hear, hear, my sentiments to a "T"!' cried old Dick Finnan, slapping his thigh, 'give me a lighthouse platform and the gulls' wings whooshin' and balancing!'

'I daresay,' said Billy, 'but with the Babes in the Wood to provide for-and any other babes them two may be taking up with in their life's pilgrimage-it's

not gulls' wings that will afford them a livelihood-not to pay income-tax on!

'What then?' said Dick, bending forward, with his palms between his knees.

'Well, Dick,' said Billy, 'I have had a little work going on-just a man or two scrapin' and howkin' up on the brow of the cliff where the hazel bushes hide the holes. And there's coal there and iron too-Vic Morris was right.'

'Maybe,' said Dick, 'but are they yours?'

Billy Bryan nodded his shaggy head, now Venetian russet sprinkled with grey.

'Yes,' he said, 'I bought the moor yonder-all Portogarten cove and a couple of miles back! Or at least my Uncle Barney's money did. And that young fellow has got to quit his present job, and come here to help me get Uncle Barney's money out again!'

'What for should he come?'

'For that,' said Billy, with profound contempt of Dick's obtuseness. And he indicated with a movement of the head where Vida, humming a tune, was hanging out the dainty washing which she preferred not to trust to her ordinary laundress-one Emma Smith, wife of old Admiral Tree-eyes, down on the Kirkanders shore-a capable woman, but one with a heavy hand on what she called with disdain, 'them frilly things.'

'And what,' mourned Dick, as he watched the fluttering array with the complaisance of ignorance, 'shall we do for a housekeeper? You will be out at the Skerry and it won't matter-but I shall miss her horrid!'

'Horrid or not, we have both just got to miss her!' said Billy Bryan, 'and if you figure to yourself that I am going to allow the marriage one day before I get

back from the Skerry with my pension and my sea chest-why, you have got your arithmetic wrong in the additions. Moreover, when I move in here-me that has done all the housekeeping in a lighthouse ever since I was a little nipper with a red head, tied to the coat-tails of a lazy worthless old man called Dick Finnan, do you think I cannot manage this-this-pigeon-cote ?'

'Yes, Dick (he continued) you have had your day, and well enough you have done, though not knowin' about the management of women, and--'

'Ship's carpenters!' put in Dick whose jokes never wore to the quick.

'I am going to look after these young people,' Billy continued serenely, 'just to see that Vida gets the best out of Phil, and Phil the best out of the Portogarten pit, in which I have sunk Uncle Barney's money as was an Honourable Wigwam in New York, and abused by all the papers in a way that must have made him pleased and proud, dead or alive. The things they said about Unc Barney after he deceased!

'-Faix, 'tis me, his rightful heir, that felt like takin' down my bit o' blackthorn and startin' out to raison wid them tumultuous-but I reflected that after all, 'twas a kind of honour to the family, all that reading matter about one of them. Moreover, I didn't know my uncle Barney since I was two years old-yes, the very month my t'other uncle was hanged, owin' to a dispute with the landlord. So 'tis possible that Barney was all they said. But they sent over his money all right, which was hand- Some of them, considerin'. Well, so long, Dick. I will go and see that young coal-heaver tomorrow!'

'And Vida?' inquired Dick, 'what of her?'

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‘Oh, she comes after!’ said the confident ex-lover of Miss Molly Molloy.

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

THE THIRD JOINT-STOCK PARENT

Now there was a certain number of persons who made it their business to keep themselves abreast of the doings upon Portogarten Moor. They knew why young Calmont had resigned. They knew what he was doing over there. And they laughed-laughed at the ex-lighthouseman and his rule-of-thumb engineer-because they were so simple as to think that, to bring a pit to the paying point, it was only necessary to buy the land about the pit-mouth and make a deep enough hole in the ground.

Chief of those who laughed was James Kahn. He and Casimir made exceedingly merry. So, after their kind, did Hector McKill and Walter Grindling.

But the man most gravely interested, after Billy Bryan, did not follow their example. Mr. Jacob Romer did not laugh. He informed himself, however.

Now Jacob Romer had been occupied for some time with a great operation, having for its object the turning of all the Incubus properties into a Limited Company. Everything had gone to his satisfaction. Half of his entire holding he would receive in cash. Kahn was to remain as managing director. The name of Romer was to disappear from the concern. He would be simply Mr. Romer, of Gorm Castle, of whose wealth no man knew the figure, of unimpeachable commercial credit and conduct-but-with a daughter who preferred to live with a couple of old lighthousemen on a rocky promontory a couple of miles away.

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Eased of the daily care of his own affairs, Jacob Romer made pilgrimages at carefully spaced intervals to watch the growth of the new installation at Portegarten.

From the first the little house on the Rough Isle Peninsula was gay with flowers. The foundations of the lighthouse on the point were cut out of the solid rock, concreted, dovetailed, fitted like a puzzle. At last the dainty white shaft began to rise. Uncle Barny's money was flowing bravely in that direction. But up 'on the butt of the heugh,' as they called it, the wary experienced eye of the ancient pit-master saw that all was not going so well. This was in no wise the fault of Phil Calmont, who, having much at stake, worked early and late. But 'sinkers' are a difficult and exigent set, and must have their money on the instant-if not some time before. Otherwise what the local police call 'disturbances,' and those concerned 'ructions,' are apt to arise with cyclonic suddenness.

Then sometimes Uncle Barny's dollars, though doubtless on the way, failed to connect, and the business on the top of the Port Heugh was in danger of failing also. It was when these crises were growing more frequent that Mr. Romer, having left his carriage below, strolled up to the new workings to see the manager. He liked to talk to him.

Some who had worked for him over at Kirktown affirmed that 'there was bound to be a laugh somewhere under the old man's waistcoat!'

But they were wrong. Jacob Romer was merely feeling his way to a kind action. He had not often put himself about for the purpose during his life, and to tell the truth was a little out of practice.

Indeed he went clumsily enough to work. First he

bemoaned his own loss of an occupation. He had not even a hobby, and he refrained from 'language,' when Phil, in the innocence of his soul, suggested photography or stamp-collecting!

'I am one of the unemployed now,' he said.

'I hope you don't mind an old digger coming up here sometimes-knew your father and all that-all our lives, in fact-good fellow, Calmont! And you are shaping very fairly since you left us. But you won't mind my saying that you need grounding.

Well, you will get it before you are through!"

Jacob Romer did not say more at the moment, but each time he came he added a little more. He was kindly too, and after a while our lonely Phil became more and more glad to see the old man in the grey suit, the tight, close-cropped whiskers and shaven face, coming slowly up through the scattered hazels and birches on the Portogarten slope. Sometimes he would send his coachman on to the little inn at the Port, telling him to return in an hour. Then he would talk to Phil till the carriage came back.

'I'm not here in the interests of Incubus & Co., you know,' Mr. Romer would say, 'I leave all that to Kahn now. But I knew your father, and-I take an interest in these good folk down there--'

He pointed to the lighthouse and there was a twinkle in his eye.

'They are building a tower, and sinking a pit at the same time,' he said, 'and I fear they have never (what is it?) 'sat down before and counted the cost.' I have no experience in towers, and the Lighthouse Board may help. But I know all about this business of pit-sinking, and it gets rid of the dollars quicker than skimming them into the sea, eh, Master

Philip?’

Phil nodded a grave assent, and at this the old man sat down on the only available chair, cane-bottomed, roomy, and much mended-but, when you knew its ways, comfortable.

However, Mr. Romer at this time did not know its ways, and if Philip had not caught him he would have gone head-over-heels. Of old time Jacob Romer would have exploded furiously. But some new influence was at work. He actually laughed at the mishap. ‘Gently does it,’ he said resettling himself, ‘it’s that near foreleg. But I’ll be ready for her tricks next time-skittish little thing!’

‘Yes, sir!’ said Phil, stupidly. For if Mr. Romer had turned a somersault in at the door, he could not have been more astonished than at this style of conversation proceeding from such a mouth.

‘Now, Master Phil,’ he continued, ‘I suppose you have a few shares in this undertaking. They are not paying you a wage, I believe. Shares then? Yes, we shall put it at shares. Now I am interested - exceedingly interested in the success of this venture-you really need a new suit of clothes, Master Phil!-And if you see your way to make over to me some part of your shares, I would give you an exceedingly good price for them! Think it over. I am not a man to force anything. Only be sure that there is nothing but the utmost good-will under all this. I began late, and you will say that I have a good deal of lost time to make up. True enough, Master Phil! But please remember that I was never a free man before, and-ah, well-it doesn’t matter!’

He said no more, but ambled off, leaning heavily on his stick, his figure growing less through the trees. He was evidently ageing, and Phil said to

himself that wonders would never cease.

Phil had understood in a moment that Jacob Romer had begun to speak of his daughter, but that at the last moment (if such an expression can be used of Jacob Romer) courage had failed him.

Men more worldly-wise and mistrustful than Phil would not have believed a word of all this. The old lion scented something good, and meant to have his finger in the Port Pie-a little cloud at first, no bigger than Phil Calmont's hand in the concern- but presently to overshadow and control everything. But when a man, after years of bitter selfishness, at last sets out to do a kind action, he does it a little shamefacedly, awkwardly, but completely. And Phil's feminine sixth sense helped him to understand the master of Gorm Castle-helped him also to believe in Jacob Romer. Certainly the affair of the Port Pit urgently needed support less inconstant than that of Uncle Barny. He would put the matter to his principal.

'Why, certainly my boy-a capitalist, did you say? Wants some of your shares? Yes, of course, 'only don't go botherin' me-as many as you like! Only get the nest built on the site Dick and I found for you, looking over to the Skerry, and yet sheltered by the fir woods from the north and east. Then we will see about the mate for ye, boy Phil!'

In his secret heart, Phil would have preferred to settle that part first. But every one down at the Rough Isle was so busy with the building of the model lighthouse (the out-going expenses of which woefully curtailed his wages bill up on the 'heugh '), that he saw but little of Vida, and that little always in the presence of either of the couple of joint-stock fathers.

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Now, however, he saw a way out of all this. He was to have three hundred shares in the concern. All was properly and legally arranged. These he could certainly dispose of at what he could get for them. Thus he would tide over the worst-the time of the building of the model lighthouse on the point, the lantern installation and so on. Then once more Uncle Barny would be available in his entirety-or perhaps by that time (such things had happened) the mine would be paying its way.

The next day you may be sure that Phil heard the airy clink of bit and bridle down in the road beneath the copsewood. A short colloquy followed, and then the carriage drove on. Phil's heart beat heavily.

It was now or never. If he did not get more capital-at least some temporary assistance, the Portogarten Pit would be a failure. Still worse, they would all think it had been his fault. Had he not had a free hand? Certainly, except with regard to money. The white tower down on the point, the petted child of the old lighthousemen's fancy, had taken most of that.

'Good-morning, Master Phil,' said Jacob Romer, gaily. He was always jocose when he came up to the Port Mine. It was a little daily relaxation which he allowed himself. Besides he could look down on the cottage at Rough Island and see his daughter moving about with quick, determined steps on the white paths cut among the green turf of the 'links'-while beyond was the to-and-fro of the workmen among the scaffoldings of the Point Light.

He laughed. Then he moved on a few steps to a new point of view, and laughed again. No one in the memory of man, had ever heard Jacob Romer laugh like that before.

But it was by no means done ill-naturedly. He clapped Phil on the back and put the question for which the young man had been waiting. This was Friday and there was not enough money in the Bank to pay Saturday's wages bill. He had spoken to Billy, but that careless capitalist had only answered,

'Oh, sure, many is the time I have had to wait three months out on yonder light for my money. Uncle Barny has failed to connect again, that's all! Give them your note of hand, if they come botherin'! And with that he made off to superintend the instalment of a new patent steam syren down at the Point.

'If we can't beat the Skerry in light power, we will out-bellow the old lady by miles!' was what he confided to Dick Finnan, who, though not so deeply interested financially, was equally enthusiastic.

As for Vida, she cooked and swept, and superintended the operations of Emma Smith every morning of the week, when she remained to clean up and do the rough work. Vida made herself pretty of afternoons, and played on her cottage Broadwood. And if she thought at all of the anxious, pale-faced young engineer, on the heights of the Port Heugh, up in the Bothy with only one of the pithead hands to cook for him, it was not in the knowledge of man - least of all of the person chiefly interested-that she did it. So for comfort to himself the youth talked to her father-that is, to her real father-who in Vida's opinion was still the slayer of her mother.

'Well, about those shares-how many have you got?' said Jacob Romer.

'Three hundred!' said Phil, his nerves quivering. 'Who is your lawyer?' said Jacob, balancing himself in Phil's chair, of which he had now learned the

secret.

'Purves of Coatestown,' said Phil.

'Well,' said Mr. Romer, 'if you like I will take a hundred and fifty of these,-and-keep you going till the stuff you take out balances your weekly working expenses and leaves you a hundred pounds to the good!'

Philip gasped. He could hardly speak. In a gush of confidence he felt that he must tell about the empty treasury and his urgent need. He wanted to sell on no false pretences.

Perhaps Mr. Jacob Romer wilfully misinterpreted. 'That's all right,' he continued, 'I will see Purves. He knows me. I have had dealings with him before. We shall need your signature-that is all. And by the way, lest I forget, after this week you had better let me see your balance sheet on Saturdays--shows a considerable lurch on the down side at present, I daresay. Well, that is always the way at first. But I've been looking round. The indications are good. You and I will hit it, if we only hang on to it-and don't build lighthouses, eh, Master Phil? Here's a cheque for two hundred to tide you over pay day-a fortnightly one, isn't it?'

'It's only a week,' blurted out Phil, with tears in his eyes, which shamed him. For were they not things that no business man ought to dream of showing. 'It 's only a week, and eighty would have done-only, sir, only-I did not know where to get it!'

The old man looked long through the trees, chuckled, and said, 'Master Phil. I am an old pit-sinker, and I had it figured down to about that. But an extra hundred in the bank won't hurt till I pay in through Purves. Only don't forget about the Weekly balance sheet, eh, Phil?'

It was the first time Mr. Romer had dropped the semi-ironic 'Master,' and Phil nodded with a pleasurable sense of equality. He cheered up at once.

'You are running things on good lines,' he said, 'I know-and I say so. But those who dig up coal and iron must be prepared to put a lot into the ground before they can take out any gold.'

And he went off to meet the returning carriage, swinging a light cane, and actually whistling.

A few steps down the slope he turned, and looking up saw Phil's wistful face.

'If I were you,' he said, 'I would not say anything to-the people down there about-well, about our little arrangement! You understand! You can consult a lawyer if you like. And work-that's the best medicine for your trouble, my lad. I was reading in the Book the other day-don't know what set me on to it-that hope deferred makes the heart sick. Ah, he knew a lot, the old fellow who wrote that. He set to work and gathered unto him of silver and gold and the peculiar treasure of kings and provinces-something like that!-Well, I suppose it just meant those Proverbs of his. I'd read them again, if I were you. There's a lot that a young fellow can chew the cud of in those Proverbs. I hadn't looked into the thing for fifty year-if ever. And I had got to think it was all for children and parsons. But I opened at the Proverbs and though I keep myself fairly well posted, I learned something new every line. Modern too, might have been written yesterday. Try it -you won't waste your time, either, Mr. Phil!-Good-day!'

He was gone, and Phil stood wondering at Saul being thus among the prophets. Then his eyes turned to the cheque in his hand. It was in his own

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name, drawn on the Kirktown hank for £200. 'Pay to Mr. P. Calmont in person,' was written across it.

So Jacob Romer had not come to bargain. He had his informations all taken beforehand, and there was the cheque ready written in his own study at Gorm Castle. To another more sophisticated than Phil this would have appeared exceedingly suspicious. But Phil knew better. He had seen a hard, bold eye grow soft. He had heard an imperious voice falter. He knew that when a sentence broke off unfinished-it was because a slender girl was ascending a white path. He understood- because he was sometimes taken that way himself.

CHAPTER THIRTY

THE SECOND BABE GOES INTO THE WOOD

In the office of Incubus & Co., Ltd., at Kirktown where everything is known before it happens, there were two opinions and only two as to the motives of 'the Old Man.'

'He is plainly mad!' said James Kahn and his faction.

'Trust him!' said Walter Grindling and Hector McKill, 'he has his eyes on that Port Pit and those two square miles of moor. I only wish we had thought of it in time. But we only bought out his 'existin interests.' This is a new game. The Old Man can no more help it than a cat can help stealing fish, or rolling in mint. He loves a speculation for its own sake. It's the interest of 'doing' the others that takes him-not the money to be gained.'

These might be called the two schools-one advocating 'Senile Debility' and the other the 'Dyer's Hand.'

But Jacob Romer's motive was hid from the wise and prudent, even in the head office of Incubus & Co. though not yet had it been revealed unto babes. Still Phil Calmont, who had leanings that way, divined more of it than any other.

Meantime, even as the old Mine Master bent his brows over Phil's Saturday balance sheet, and the paper mills over at Parton began to take the new Portogarten coal at nine shillings per ton-the building of the light on Rough Isle Point took up all the time of Billy Bryan and his senior assistant Dick Finnan. It became also the talk of the neighbourhood, and the laughter spread in a joyous

wave.

But for that at least Uncle Barny proved to be sufficient. There really was a need for a shore light on the spot, the channel being frequented and difficult. So after many negotiations with the Commissioners of Northern Lights, a little second hand electric plant was procured, which threw a beam sufficiently bright to reach the Skerry.

'We must keep a boy!' said Dick and Billy, simultaneously. Then they added, 'but where can we find one? Boys--!' And with complete unanimity they compared the male youth of the human species to the younger angels who kept not their first estate. Only these were not the words they used-something shorter and brisker satisfied Dick and Billy.

Dick looked at Billy and Billy looked back at Dick.

'Nicht about, you and me?' inquired Billy. 'Till we drop!' returned the faithful Dick. 'The boy can do some cleanin' up, with one of us to look after him,' he added, thoughtfully.

'What about Emma Smith?' suggested Billy, 'I am noways clear about havin' boys near the light. They are for ever pullin' handles and trying capers--'

'They're not all as bad as that one that called you...'

'Never mind-I know what he called me,' cut in Billy, whom this particular reminiscence aroused, as Dick was perhaps aware, 'red-headed' I may be, but 'red-nosed' I am not and never was!

It did not occur to either of them that up on the face of the Heugh above the Portogarten they had left a certain 'boy' considerably short-funded.

In mining, perhaps more than in any other human occupation, a comfortable bank-balance is necessary to success. It is not like sweeping a

crossing or writing books, or picking up nuggets among the gravel of some 'wash-out.' You must have people to dig for you-big-boned people, mostly Irish, all hungry and thirsty-particularly thirsty, with a thirst that increases as pay day draws nearer. With such men 'cash down' is the sine qua non. No money, no navy!

But the cash-figure, and particularly the name of Jacob Romer at the bottom of the cheque handed in by 'Philip Calmont in person' improved the commercial standing of the Portogarten Mine wonderfully. The cashier showed the bluish slip to his Chief with immense knowingness, and the Chief gratified him by nodding and smiling. Their opinion was very much that of Messrs. Hector McKill and Walter Grindling.

'At it again-he can't let it alone!' was their unspoken comment. And next Saturday both inquired privately of Phil if a share or two could be got at any reasonable figure in the new Portogarten Pit. Phil knew the wisdom of gratifying such men, and he spoke to his chief on the subject. The moment was not well chosen, one of the electric fittings of the main beam not having come up to time. But Billy Bryan told Phil to do as he liked, and not to come bothering him about every little trifle. Little things meant things unconnected with the lighthouse-big things the contrary.

Dick Finnan was already busily painting inside-all best regulation colours, and had plentifully bedabbled his grey whiskers and the side of his nose with bright green. 'Unc. Barny' had connected, but all the money that had been sent by the New York lawyers was urgently needed for the new installation on the Point. Phil, up on the Heugh,

alone with his 'sinkers' and pitmen, must get along as best he could.

'It makes the boy win his spurs,' said Billy, without the least thought of plagiarising the father of the Black Prince.

Only one at the cottage on Rough Island (which by the way, was not an island but only a peninsula) bethought herself -yes, of course it was a her-of poor semi-abandoned Phil Calmont, keeping his end up as best he could among the rough pit lads and noisy 'sinkers' on the heugh of Portogarten.

The little white cottage sat low down in a cove, where of old time they had landed many cargoes of Isle o' Man brandy, Hollands, eau-de-vie, and other potent waters. It was closely beset with high cliffs on the one side-those in which Phil was sinking his mine, and packed in on the other by a sea-worn jungle of caves and arches, sandy lanes and passages, in which children could play half the day-but through which, twice in the twenty-four hours, the green Atlantic water, hardly checked or altered by its passage through Paddy's Slap, roared and spouted. All this part was of sandstone and had worn readily to the lash and suck of the water. Phil's tall heughs, however, stood up invincible and ungapped, with the deep green water leaping eternally beneath them.

A path wimpled up the face of the cove in easy gradients. It was easier now, because it had been designed for the heavy lorry loads that came from the little construction railway to the lighthouse on the point. At the top stood a little old mill, long abandoned, the wheel slimily green and weed bedropped, the iron bars wrenched away for purposes undefined. The much maligned boy had

been busy there. Evidently also he had had a good time. This mill was contained within the two square miles of Portogarten Moor, but did not add greatly to the selling value of Billy's purchase. Behind the mill, however, a little perennial stream tinkled and sulked. Then it sped underneath the suck of the broken wheel, and brattled down the cliff, crossing the winding roadway two or three times. It was the same in which Emma Smith washed her clothes, and from which (if she were not carefully watched) she would slyly abstract the cooking water, instead of going three hundred yards farther to the little spring of sweet water called Captain Yawkin's Well that nestled just under the high heughs of Portogarten. Indeed it is like enough that the old buccaneer-smuggler had tasted that clean cool brew, mingling it with a caulker of his latest cargo, just to show that there was no ill feeling on either side.

Immediately above the old mill the braeside began to feather, first into bracken and primrose, according to their season, or the taller yellow broom—a brazen, flaunting beauty she. Then a little higher up, after the path had done winding round a certain knoll, from which you could see far below you the road to Kirktown, began the light stippled foliage of the birches, the cowering hairy-leaved hazels, that stick to the skirts and brush the face, and above all (and last of all) mounted the sweet sombre aisles of the firs.

Vida meandered slowly. It was not that she needed an excuse for going. That did not in the least trouble her. When Mr. Emerson met 'the fresh Rhodora in the woods,' and decided, quite correctly, that 'if eyes were made for seeing, then beauty was

its own excuse for being,' he settled Vida's case also. She had certainly and indisputably the identical same excuse for seeing and being seen.

Still at intervals she blushed, as doubtless did the Rhodora—a plant of whose beauty we can only judge over here by pictures and the faded desiccations of museums —just because some one had seen her where she was. The watcher was not formidable. He was not even looking her way—an old man apparently, bending over a stick, and letting himself slowly down the mountain side. But Vida waited till he had passed away behind a clump of trees towards the Kirktown road. She breathed freely again, pulled a primrose to stick in her dress, surveyed it with her head on one side, decided that it was too short in the shank—besides which the colour did not go with her complexion. Then she pulled a strand or two of the broom blossom, with stalks that were long enough to be set in her belt, and retained a branch in her hand against the flies. It was too early in the year, really, for flies, but it looked nice, and one never knows when one may need a weapon of some sort.

She was going to see Phil, since Phil had grown so cold—yes, and difficult. Well, perhaps it had been her fault. It is not a bad thing to neglect your Phil a little on purpose. If he goes off and plays with something or somebody else, then—if you care about him, it is time to take steps. And you will care about him as never before!

Perhaps that was why Vida's patience had been so long. Phil had only played with his mine.

Indeed he was looking at his balance-sheet when a certain shadow appeared among the trees by the window. It was a source of some considerable pride

to him-this balance-sheet. For the first time Phil had had enough to pay the men, without calling upon the cheque-book of Mr. Jacob Romer.

The old man had just been there. He had said some kind words-going his way, however, with a sigh, because he felt that the time of his little providence was drawing to a close. He would soon, if all went well, be reaping where he had sown and gathering where he had strawed-operations with which he was sufficiently familiar for them to have lost all novelty. His kind friends of Incubus & Co. were quite wrong about him on this occasion.

But the figure, mounting higher on the sprinkled sunshine up on the long folio of paper which had earned the applause of Mr. Romer, startled Phil at his accounts. At last Vida was coming down the track of the sunbeams towards him, out of the pine alleys-the same into which he had, ten minutes before, seen her father vanish.

She seemed a reward of merit. Joyous, gay, the light of afternoon misty and luminous about her, Vida was transfigured to the eyes of the young man. She smiled at him through the panes of glass-like the embodiment of a happier world. She seemed made for other destinies-to have her card filled first at a ball (Phil loathed balls), to garner as in a sheaf the applause of crowded theatres (Phil abhorred theatres). Yet for all that she had come to see him, the yellow of the spring gold laid against the black of her hair, the green and yellow of the broom in her hand, no more pliant than her young body! Yet she smiled, and-was it a dream?- kissed her hand daintily to him through the meagre lattices of the little wooden building, half-hut-half-office. Perhaps, Phil told himself, it was but the webs that the wood

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spiders had woven which had wafted themselves across his eyes so that he failed to see clearly.

Yet he knew better-oh, how much better!

So much better that he never made a mistake, or thought that the girl meant more than she wished him to think she meant. Quick as a woman he knew, and, in addition, he had the gift of stating the case exactly to himself, which women lack.

'It is only pity,' he said to himself, 'yes, pity- not love. She is pitiful because she has treated me a little badly after-after all she knows-all I told her. She has come up to talk, simply and kindly, as I would have done to Rose Nunsby, because her heart is empty.'

He would have liked to add, 'And I will fill it for her!' But because he did not say so, nor yet think it, his chance of doing so was so much the greater.

'Afternoon, Phil!' she cried in at the door, in her quick off-hand manner. 'Are you running the mill alone today? Where are all your grimy cohorts? I thought you were so busy saying to this man 'Go' and to the other 'Come'-that you had not found time to run down and see us!'

'You forget,' said Phil, gently pulling out his watch, as if it would tell him the clay of the week, 'that this is Saturday afternoon.'

'Why, what difference does that make, Phil?' she said, smiling past the to-and-fro wave of the broom branch before her dancing eyes.

Phil had come to the door now and they stood face to face. But they did not shake hands; it did not seem worth while: they were all to each other that that meant, years and years ago. Yet, though they did not know it, their fate, like that of many others who have ascended mountains, great and small,

‘stood tiptoe upon a little hill.’

Phil did not think of asking her to come inside. In the outer office there was only his stool, and the restive cane-chair on which her father had sat. Somehow that seemed to be insufficient accommodation.

So they went out past the ugly gash which the pit was making on the hillside, on beyond the piled heaps of debris. They passed the temporarily abandoned waggons on the unstable track. For Mr. Romer had used his influence to get a little railway line made to the nearest siding. Finally they came out on the untouched cliffside under lea of the big indigo-green pines.

‘Oh, yonder’s Rough Isle, and the bird cliffs!’ Vida cried, clapping her hands. Then she looked guiltily at him.

‘You never come now,’ she continued, hastily, ‘to go sailing out there?’

‘I am busy, as you see. Dick, too, is busy. Besides...

And he paused.

‘Besides what?’

‘Oh, nothing!’

‘But I want to know-I will know!’ cried Vida.

‘You have no right to keep these secrets from -an old friend!’

‘Well, then,’ said Phil, gravely and gently as ever, ‘I don’t come because the last time we went to the bird cliffs the waterproof rug was left behind!’

The girl had an answer, of course. But she knew instinctively that he would see through that just as easily, so she did not say it. It was no use telling Phil (any more than another girl) that the day was too warm and calm-that the rug was useless.

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'Well, I did not want you to do it!' she said, showing the highest respect that a woman can to a man-which is speaking to him as to another woman. That is the true order (and motto) of the Garter.

'No?' queried Phil, with great thoughtfulness, but no complaint in the monosyllable.

'We are not babes any longer, you know!' she explained.

Phil looked about him solemnly, and then glanced once and quizzically at the face of the girl.

'We are at least lost in the woods, you and I,' he said. And taking her hand, this time without waterproof covering or pretence of hiding, he led her to a felled pine, upon which he often sat to meditate upon the uncertainty of things-and women.

A little while they were wholly silent. Then 'What was that you said?' Vida broke out.

'Nothing!' said Phil, for whom the present possession of her hand was enough-warm, soft, pleasant, and with a little tingle to it, highly communicable.

'You called us 'the Babes in the Wood!'

'No,' said Phil, who followed closely, as if by instinct, every turn of the girl's mind, 'I only thought it-but you knew that I thought it without being told.'

There was a pause. Ten fingers (two of which were thumbs) had become dangerously electric.

'Do you know what that means, Vida?' whispered Phil, removing his glance from the slow, wormy crawl of the white-and-green sea beneath, and fixing it just under the brim of her hat.

'That you are one silly and that you are trying to make me another!' cried Vida, making a motion to throw away his hand, without, however, proceeding to extremities with her intention.

'That we are made for one another-that we understand one another!' continued Phil, still in the same dreamy, far-away accent. He might have been talking of the upward progress of the white shaft out yonder on the Point, for all of personality there was in his tone.

'I wonder!' said Vida, musing also, 'I suppose we shall find out in time.'

'I wish, Vida, you would find out now,' said Phil, 'it would save such a lot of trouble.'

'That is either unlike my Phil,' she said, 'or else you mean something I do not grasp.'

Phil was profoundly grateful for the adjective, but he knew better than to risk what he had gained by saying so. 'Sufficient unto the day is the advantage thereof.' Which is a good enough love motto.

'It is something that you do not yet know,' he said, gently; 'the building of the manager's house is to be begun this week. The mine has turned the corner. It has begun to pay.'

'Why,' cried Vida, innocently, 'has it not always been paying?'

At this Phil laughed a little, and answered in an off-hand tone, 'Oh, well, we have settled our bills.'

'I should think you have,' said Vida, not greatly interested; 'at least I hope so. For I see that you have been getting a new suit of clothes! Extravagance!'

Phil passed from this, as perfectly uncalled for.

'The manager's house will be in this sheltered clearing where we are now sitting,' said Phil, 'with its back to the pine-wood and a peep of the sea. How would you -I mean, what advice would you give as to the way it ought to stand? Here are the plans.'

He laid them before her, spreading them out on his lap, and as they were on large sheets of tracing

paper, they covered them both almost as well as the waterproof rug in Old Dick's boat. Instinctively they leaned nearer to each other, shoulder touched shoulder, and (the most heart-troubling thing in the world for innocent young folk) through the light serge of her sleeves and the new grey of his tweed they felt the kindred warmth and quick-beating blood of youth and love.

Out of such to-days are born the tomorrows of the world. It was all innocent as the play of children, as the first building of a worthy home-and with a nobility in it, too, in their very avoidance of each other's eyes. God might have looked upon them as He once did upon creation, and found them very good. Certainly as He looked, He could have seen nought purer nor better than these twain.

I do not know that they said much to the point -or to any point. Yes, the house had better face to the south on account of the sunlight in the winter days. But that need not in the least prevent the windows of the principal rooms-dining-room, drawing-room and perhaps a bedroom with a big oriel (oh, so nice!) looking out on the cliffs of Rough Island, and the flat widths of sea, flawed with purple and green, or foaming shorewards in long, spume-crested waves.

At bottom neither cared very much. There was a strange warmth in the heart of Vida-the same which certain had called 'cold as a stone.' That pitman's shelter, that ranchman's 'shack,' that agglomeration of clap-boards and logs, that whitewashed but-and-ben-yes, now she was sure of it-she would be content with any of these, if only he were there. As to Gorm Castle, she shuddered as she thought of it.

But who was 'he?'

Once on a time for a brief uncertain moment, she

had conceived the possibility that it might be Vic Morris. Now she knew better. Phil also was a capable man. But she did not care for that. He was a leader of men, like Vic Morris. She did not care for that. He was 'her Phil' -as she had said-weak or strong, rich or poor, driving at a hopeless task or honoured of all-he was the one man who could touch her nature, make her heart throb when she thought of him, and her hand tingle like that, so that she wanted to draw it away -and could not. The plans of the house fluttered down. Neither tried to stop them. Their eyes were drinking up each other's; they could never love enough. A robin, impudent like all his tribe, hopped up, cocked his dapper head, and pecked furtively at the red paint with which the architect had distinguished the various rooms and passages of the manager's house. They were the Babes in the Wood indeed, and there, among last year's leaves, was their robin, seated on the counterfeit presentment of the shelter prepared for them.

Their hands drew together-then their lips. 'My Phil!' she said.

When they came to themselves, one of them at least was a babe no more. The kiss had changed him, made a man of him-put decision, resolve, initiative into his soul. Perhaps, too, he had lost something of the ready woman's instinct in thus becoming a conqueror over a woman.

As he convoyed her down the slope in the slanting sun of evening, the tussocks of 'bent' grass started up before them great and prominent, the shadow of each as long as a man. They parted at the wood-edge, only taking hands this time. But Vida, though moved, could not refrain from casting a last

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quip over her shoulder. 'You ought to be ashamed, Phil. Call yourself a man, and yet wait for me to come up here and tell you that I-'

'That you what?' Phil was keen to hear.

'That I loved you! You will cast it up to me ever afterwards, but I don't care!'

'Did you tell me? I had not noticed! How strange!' said Phil, smiling.

'Well, I let you kiss me! That is the same thing.' And she thought it was.

'I beg your pardon,' said Phil, sweetly, 'you kissed me-which is not the same thing at all!'

'Oh, you great horrid story!' cried Vida, 'I never did! Never in this world!'

'Well, in some other world,' smiled Phil, gently as ever.

But all the same she smiled, and after she was no more than a little blue serge exclamation point moving over the white paths towards the lighthouse cottage on Rough Island, he still stood smiling to himself. For he knew very well that unless he had waited for Vida to do all that of her own accord, it might never have been done at all.

'This,' murmured Phil, as he waited for the oblong speck of the green cottage door to open and shut, 'is the absence that makes the heart, if not, fonder, at least emptier! Good boy, Phil!' (he congratulated himself) 'Useful, wise child! Go up top! She wanted me to be worried by her stopping away. And I wasn't!'

And with his eyes where his heart had long been, on the little whitewashed house in the Cove, he whistled a bar or two of a childish air- Mistress Mary, quite contrary.

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

MISTRESS MARY-QUITE CONTRARY

Next morning, however, Mistress-Mary-Quite-Contrary awakened in her little chamber while she yet breathed the thin keen air of earliest day, coming and going by the open window. It was as if the room itself were alive and breathing off the sea-clean, pure, salt respirations of the vast unquiet desert to the west.

Vida awakened slowly, her consciousness returning to her bit by bit. The call of the sea-she understood that in a moment, as all must do who dwell at the Cove of Portogarten. It does not affect sleep, that fine solidified roar-not even when it rises to the hammering of the tempest upon the great heughs which Phil Calmont was so busy piercing, mingled with a shriek as of compressed air driven through the passages drilled in the softer limestone and sandstone of Portogarten Cove itself. The ear soon got used to all that. It was the silence which awoke.

As in the narrow old street of St. Leonard's where for years I dwelt (and of which in dreams I am still a habitant), we slept like tops, my comrade and I, till within ten minutes of 'class,' with all the coal traffic of South Edinburgh thundering under our window-carters shouting, wheels gritting, and clattering engines snorting. But on Sunday morning, prompt at six, we awoke-because that day the great gates remained shut, the carters were themselves asleep, those who had wives, with wet towels about their

heads, the others yet unconscious of their griefs. But we were awake-because of the din of that silence!

So in her little room at the cottage, with the winds that look in every sound of the sea to visit her, Vida awaked early because the sea was so still.

At least that was her first thought. The next impression was a not uncommon one-that something had happened the day before. There was a little burning spot in her breast which did not at first explain its existence to her brain. The next moment connection with her thinking self had been made.

Yes, she remembered now-how she had gone-how she had-he had-oh, how dared he? But, wait a moment, one must be just (objected the hidden Mentor)-was it altogether his fault?

Of course it was! It always is when a woman begins to argue-an exercise for which she was ill fitted by nature, having only perseverance and infinite repetition to carry her through.

(This is a note, but like one of Bayle's digressions, better than the text. Phil had often to notice that in argument Vida would repeat something she considered telling to the threadbare point. But if, to prove a point, he made use of anything perfectly self-evident-as that 'crows are black, not white'-she would get out of the difficulty by crying scornfully, 'Oh, I have heard that before,' or, 'If you have nothing new to say, you had better say nothing,' which, of course, was conclusive. I note this here because, as it has certainly never happened to anybody but Phil, it ought to be recorded for the benefit of all good philosophers interested in the mentality of womankind)

Vida was at the window now. Craning her neck out carefully, so that the busy ants at the Point Lighthouse should not see her sleep-tangled hair, she looked up the cliff towards the green-blue tent of the pines. It was too high and far away to see anything, of course. Even the log on which they had sat was invisible.

Vida slipped on her dressing-gown, cut out and made by her own hands. Then she glided down through the sleeping house to the window where stood the little stand-telescope Billy had bought long ago with his first savings. She carried it unsteadily enough up the stairs. Three-legged things are a bore. They wobble and hit out without regard to Queensberry rules, unexpectedly and meanly.

She had learned, after much labour, the art of adjusting a telescope. For Phil had remarked that a girl who, on a cycle, could pass between a four-in-hand and a hay-waggon, ought to be able to see her way through a plain tube of metal with bits of glass in it. So, alone of her sex, she had learned the art. And certainly the teaching came in useful now.

She adjusted the eye-piece. It was difficult to look away up there, but young people were lithe, and she soon found a position on her knees, with the telescope held at a very acute angle indeed.

'Yes, yonder is the clump of trees-beyond, the site of the house-well if they were not already taking off the turf!'

And a fear fell upon her—a strange sudden awe of the Unknown—the manager's house! Her heart beat! Her house! Hers! Yes, that was what he had meant—what he had taken for granted. He took too many things for granted. Kissed her, did he? Declared that she—had he actually said that? Well, she would

show him! But there, as the long, brass tube swayed, trembled, and settled into crystalline clearness, her startled eyes beheld as a marvel the felled tree on which they two had sat. No mistake about that! There was the short bough which had come up under her arm, and prevented her from getting any farther away-as she had wanted to. Of course!

And there, strolling leisurely down the brae-side was Phil Calmont. Instantly Vida snatched herself away from the eye-piece with that curious fear which comes to those unused to telescope and high-power binoculars. She could not rid herself of the notion that Phil could see her as plainly as she could see him. It seemed like prying, taking an advantage.

And as this is indeed its use in war-why not then in love?

He got down on his knees. She went away with a feeling of awe, suddenly, like one who in carnival dress finds himself, at the opening of a door, in a church. Vida thought he was praying, but Phil, when he prayed, certainly did not do so before men.

She looked again; she was not curious-no, of course not, but the men cutting the turfs of the house up there, seemed somehow to bring matters curiously to a point for Vida-nearer but mistier, just like seeing through the telescope. Well, after all she had a right to see what Phil was doing there.

Again she put her eye to the little disc of glass; her emotion had blurred it. He seemed to be looking for something on the ground, but all his emotions were seen indistinct as through a chromatic haze. She took a fine linen hem-from near her heart it was-and wiped the little eye-piece; she was

rewarded. He had found what he was seeking—the yellow flower she had worn at her breast yesterday. He kissed it, glanced rapidly every way to make sure that no one was looking, and then—placed it carefully in an inner breast pocket!

Then, falling at once into a great carelessness, out of another pocket he produced a foot-rule and began measuring the fallen trunk. Someone was moving on the slope above; Vida could see a man come down towards Phil. At first he was too much in the shadow, but presently he came clearer into the spyglass field.

It was James Kahn.

Instant fear glued her eye to the telescope. She did not think of moving any more; she was not ashamed; she even pushed the window a foot farther up so that she could see the better. The two men saluted each other. How clearly she could see them.

Phil did not offer to shake hands; he had been of Vic Morris's faction, and the Kahnite Jews, and the Morrisian Samaritans had none save business dealings.

The girl saw very well, through Billy's lighthouse glass, that James Kahn was holding Phil in discourse. They walked to and fro, Phil the taller by a head (Vida was pleased to notice the detail). They seemed to be agreeing well enough, though the vibration or the moisture in the atmosphere kept her from seeing the expression of their faces.

The telescope moved a little; perhaps Vida, still inexpert, had shifted the stand; perhaps the loose old screw had swayed. At any rate, when she looked again, the two who had been promenading up and down her field of vision, as if they had been but three-score yards away, had passed with the silent

and almost indecent swiftness peculiar to high-power glasses. They had been and they were not.

Instead she saw the grey stone dyke, which once upon a time had edged the pine forest of Portogarten. The timber was mostly gone, sold by impoverished or improvident landlords, and but little of the old dyke remained-long useless, ruggedly built of old moor stone, broken down in places, but affording glimpses of the dusky solitudes which extended away down her hill, and beyond the mine that Phil was hewing out of these still beautiful relics of primreval forest.

Behind, the wood stretched, a wash of cool green shade, and something glided athwart it-not by any means a green thing. Vida first caught the glint as it slid between two broken down and crumbly sections of dyke.

Something that glittered-something that bent low, something that took pains not to be seen. She searched for Phil, found him, and then looked back.

The to-and-fro of the two men down on the braeface swung farther along-away out of sight of the busy foundation-diggers. And parallel to them, foot for foot, moved the tracking shadow behind the dyke!Once Vida could see the man, though dimly, from head to foot. In the dusk of the wood-shade, he placed his knee on a low part of the dyke. The long barrel of a gun moved up to the shoulder, fore-shortening as it went. He appeared to be aiming at Phil; a little puff of white smoke hung against the trees. There was no sound, but Vida ran to the window and screamed aloud to the sea and the emptiness.

Nobody heard her, of course. It was too far for her voice to reach even a tenth of the distance, Billy and

Dick were already busy at their model lighthouse. Vida dressed hastily, threw a shawl about her shoulders, and was on the road up the 'heughs.' Stumbling, rising again, bruising herself against rocks, lairing in morasses, her hair streaming over her shoulders, she reached the strip of cleared ground utterly worn out. Phil-her Phil had been killed. She - she alone had seen his lurking murderer.

Yet when she stumbled on to the smoother turf, and saw before her the green links of the cliff-edge, there were the two men walking together, and talking as if nothing had happened.

Instantly Phil ran to Vida, and, all power leaving her, she fell exhausted into his arms.

'You are not-you are not--!' was all she could say.

James Kahn kept at a discreet distance from this interview. He regarded the birds, gannets and terns, plunging in the sea. He could be a gentleman upon occasion-for a moment or two, that is, and to be seen of men.

Then Vida, with shame in her voice and her face rosy with anger, told her tale. She had been looking through-yes, through a little telescope. Billy ought not to have such things! It was his fault. But she had seen some one fire at Phil-seen the man clearly. He must be in the wood even now.

'Nonsense!' cried Phil, pleased nevertheless. 'Mr. Kahn was with me all the time. There is some surface blasting going on over yonder. We are opening up new ground; doubtless you heard them; They have been at it all the morning. Nothing else.'

Then he turned to his visitor, who strangely enough seemed to regard the matter much more seriously.

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'Miss-Romer' (Phil hesitated at the word) 'has been frightened by the firing,' he said. 'She and I are engaged to be married!'

James Kahn took off his hat and expanded himself in congratulations, as he knew very well how.

'I suppose,' said Vida, reluctantly, with a glance at her torn attire, 'it must be true, or I would not have been such a fool! But-I must ask you, for the present, to say nothing about it!'

'Ah,' said James Kahn, thoughtfully, 'certainly not. Miss Romer-you can trust me.'

And both of them, for quite different reasons, knew that James Kahn could be trusted to say nothing about it.

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

THE GIRL'S COMPLETE LETTER WRITER

Vic Morris had shifted his camp from Rio Tinto to Bilbao, and it was to that latter place that Janet Fowler wrote to him. His own replies had been of necessity short, but as to Janet's letters, like Master Oliver Twist, he had always manifested a desire for more.

'My Friend'(wrote the minister's daughter), 'let us first clear our page of the business of Kirktown. I will put it in as short sentences as I can, because most of it can be read in the Bordershire Advertiser, which is sent you weekly.' (Janet sent it herself).

'Mr. Romer has retired; he has made all the Incubus businesses into a Limited Company. James Kahn is managing director. My father says that the last state of that Incubus is worse than the first! but, about business, you need not mind what father says; he doesn't know past six times six, and even that he thinks is thirty!'

'He is not so far wrong, though, this time, that father of yours!' said Vic Morris, who was perusing this letter in a posture of enjoyment, with his feet out at the window of his 'shack' on the hill above Bilbao. It continued its even trail of black and white.

'Your friend Miss Vida has got a new father; that makes three. The new one is Mr. Jacob Romer. It seems that he was, really, only forgot about it till now! But she has taken all their names, which is cumbrous. My father says that if she goes on collecting at that rate she will never be a limited

company- 'The Vida Finnan Bryan Romer Co., Ltd.!' Will you take shares, mister?'

'Your father never said anything of the kind, missy,' growled Vic Morris, gnawing at his long moustache, and smiling grimly. 'Curious how I always thought her a quiet mouse of a girl with eyes on the ground! She isn't, though! No! Oh no!'

And he read on, thrusting his long legs farther through the window, so that the Spanish and Basque workmen passing underneath stopped and grinned.

'El Senor Capitan of the mine is going to heaven wrong end first!' they said, and passed light-heartedly on. As did he with Janet's letter.

Two of her fathers are building a patent lighthouse on Rough Island Point, and Phil Calmont is making a deep hole on the top of the Portogarten Heugh above them; I suppose, as a sort of second exit. You had better come home and innspect, if you feel that this is now in your line!'

'What a wretch of a girl!' growled Vic, but all the same he went on reading.

'And they are building a house for the manager up on the Heugh, between the new pit and the sea. They are not quite sure who the manager is to be; yet-some say Phil Calmont, and some Miss V. B. F. Romer. Knowing both, I bet on the lady!'

'The little vixen!' laughed Vic.

And he did not refer to Vida. 'Who would have thought it ?' He meditated a while, and then said softly, 'But after all, I like 'em better that way. I'll wager her eyes sparkled when she wrote that- and she a minister's daughter, blaming the worst things she can think of on her innocent father!'

Again he continued his reading. He was now

sitting on his shoulder blades, and part of a damaged flannel collar twisted about his neck, while his legs stuck out like stove-pipes, half way up the mountain.

'Mr. Romer, so they say, does not recognise his new-found daughter publicly. But he owns her through Mr. Phil Calmont, which is next best thing. He goes up the hill to the pit nearly every day, in a grey suit, grey whiskers, and the repressed affection of a life-time. Then he falls on Phil's neck and kisses him. Phil does the rest.

'Now I think this is about enough concerning the business part to satisfy even that noble son of toil; Mr. Ludovic Morris. You need not frown. It doesn't carry so far, you know, and besides-I have a father who can protect me!'

'Protect you! Hum!' said Mr. Morris, scornfully. And continued his reading.

'And now for gossip, which you can believe or not as you choose. My eyes are still blue as-but I need not continue-the same old thing. I am plainer than ever, but rather fun to talk to. I have only one father, however-the same one, and this renders me uninteresting. Three young men have left our choir lately to go and sing in Mr. Irongray's. I sing in the abandoned choir, and I need not tell you whose pew there is a good view of from the other. You know. All the youths become Cameronians because of conscientious scruples as to father's preaching. I hope you always respect such, even in a foreign land and among benighted Papists! My father says that he hopes that you will use your newly acquired fluency in the Spanish language, to bring some of these benighted people to a sense of the error of their ways, by instilling into them the principles of

the Westminster Shorter Catechism!'

'Your father never said any such a word, Missy!'

Rose Nunsby, who used to be in love with Phil Calmont-only had no Second Exit-is now beloved by Mr. Irongray, who has had the misfortune to lose his mother. (She has gone to a daughter, because she thinks she can annoy a son-in-law more than the Reverend Benjamin. Also the scullery was damp and there were rats in the coal-hole). So Benjamin is bereft of a mother's care. 'Weep for the orphan, lone and lorn' as the poet says. I would go up and comfort him myself, only he doesn't like me- even enough to write to me as 'Dear Miss Janet!'

'Oh, the sweet angel!' muttered Vic Morris, grinding his moustache between his teeth so hard that he bit off an end-the one he was best pleased with.

He became conscious that he had lacked that suppleness of pen and expression possessed by his correspondent. Yes, he had actually addressed her as 'Dear Miss Janet'-and what was the matter with that? It was a plain, respectable, respectful mode of addressing a lady. But-confound the girl, what did she mean by laughing at him? He put down the letter, turned to a file of indents and invoices, bills of lading and so forth, sighed a deep sigh, and picked up Janet Fowler's letter again.

'I am a fool,' he said, 'perhaps it is because I am out here all alone!'

But even then the vision of Janet Fowler veiling her sapphire eyes, hypocritically, with the corner of her morning apron, and reciting round the corner of folded Madonna hands, 'Weep for the orphan, lone and lorn' moved him to helpless laughter.

'It's no use getting wrothy with that girl-or

pretending to. A fellow likes her letters. No mistake about that. She tells you things, and you never know when the whip is going to crack about your ears.'

There was not much more of the letter at any rate, and involuntarily, in spite of the crack of the whip, he mourned that there was so little.

How would she end it? He always thought of the endings of Janet's letters. They were nice to think about down in the mine, or out on the great open ledges of the mountain, whence the big loaded sledges handed thmselve down from the heights to the banks of the slug on Nervion some thousand feet below, as easily as a monkey comes down a rove.

This is how Janet of the plain face and beautiful eyes concluded her letter to Mr. Ludovic Morris. First there was a crack of the whip.

'I see, and hear, a good deal of the healthy family these days (she wrote), the Calmonts, I mean. Excepting Phil, who is busy digging his way through to Miss Vida B. F. Romer, I declare I can't keep them off our doorstep. I have to shoo' them out of the hall- or set father on to them, to explain church history. Then only they will go. Church history and hunger are to them the extreme penalties of the law. But Aaron and Hur are dabs at holding wool. I taught them.'

'In-deed,' snorted Mr. Morris, fiercely; 'about all they are good for.'

But somehow the thought did not comfort him. Then after a pause and with an air of disgust which may have been due to the slang or may not, he added 'Dabs indeed! I'll dab them.'

He had crushed the letter in his hand. Somewhat too hastily, it appeared, for it cost him the trouble of

smoothing it all out again.

The end's the thing. And he wanted that. He knew very well that she was teasing him, but somehow that did not seem to help matters. He wondered what a girl like Janet saw in the Calmonts. Phil was well enough. There were the makings of a man about Phil. But as for the rest-a cloud of butterflies in a garden, a flight of wild geese alighting with a splash in a lonely pond and then with a squawking taking their way again the next moment- to these and other things, less savoury, did Vic Morris compare the Calmonts.

'Janet ought to know better-and she does,' he murmured. And the reading of the letter continued.

'You always ask me to tell you more about myself. Well, there is nothing to tell. I rise at six of the morning to see that Susy Mitten does the grates. Sometimes I help her. Then I wake Raif (when he is at home), and we two brush the shoes. (You call yourself an engineer and yet can't invent a machine to do a simple thing like that!) Breakfast follows prayers, which makes one hurried and the other cold, but what can one do with a father who is consumed with doubts as to eternal punishment. What does he care about cold eggs at breakfast?

'Then I do my house-books, count the linen for the wash (when there is a wash, which is mostly). If I have a spare moment I go to the piano and play, 'Where is my wandering boy tonight,' till Raif's fox terrier Vic scratches at the door to be let out.'

'The daughter of a minister and tell such-humph!' broke off Vic, aggressively. 'I wonder why I care about getting such letters. I'm made different from other fellows, I expect-ah, well! so is she from other girls!'

And he returned to the subject in hand, secretly vexed to see that so little remained to be read.

'Dear Mr. Ludovic, the roaring winds do blow- on the Bay of Biscay-o. And you are just at the far side of it, sitting up aloft (I have looked you out), like the little cherub mentioned by the late Mr. Dibden. So I beg you to pity the fate of poor Miss Janet. Susy Mitten has just broken a cup and saucer out of our only afternoon tea-set, and you can't send me another, because you don't know the pattern. Otherwise I would not say no; thank you very much all the same, but keep them for a marriage present to your friend, Miss V. B. F. Romer, who has not yet annexed any more fathers. I don't think she will claim Phil Calmont as one.

'Dear Vic-was it mad, then? And did it stride to and fro, and shove about those long legs, in the boots with spurs I saw on the photograph you sent (what do you do with spurs up a mountain-I have heard of mountain-spurs, but it can't be that?) Well, I know there are people who would make a fuss about you, and tell you how noble and bemedalled you deserve to be. Oh, yes, there are lots-girls too - much prettier than I. Only, you see you wouldn't enjoy their letters so much; they would make you yawn; they write all of a pattern, and you seem to have received quite a lot, I know, because you follow their copy-headings so closely, dear Mr. Ludovic!

'By the way, Aaron Calmont has just been over with a bunch of roses, and Hur left some with Susy at the back door this morning-I can't think why? Can you? they must be meant for me, only it is just pretty girls get things like those. Aaron had been over at the East nurseries, and spent his last shilling, I fear. Silly boy! But I am kind. I would send

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you a very little bud, even if it cost me an extra tuppence-ha'penny of postage, only I know exactly what you would do. You are a kind of noble Royal Humane savage, dear Mr. Ludovic, and you own a vile temper-oh, most vile! Come, you know you do! If you have a good point it is that of owning up-a virtue very rare in men, unknown in women.

'Now if I were to send you this perfect bud, bought at the expense of a poor lad's money, you would dash it to the floor, and grrrind it to powder under your heel! Now, wouldn't you? Besides I have pity on the Queen's English!

Therefore considering these things I have slipped out into the garden, and in a little nook which I love (where you used to sit under the big apple-tree at the corner of the hedge), I have found a pansy-no, looking again I see that it is a forget-me-not. It is a little damp, but I have fixed it down to the letter with strips of paper, and I am going to give it to my sister, Violet, to kiss before sending it.

I am, dear Mr. Ludovic,

Yours truly.

JANET FOWLER.

'P.S.-After all, I could not find Violet when I went in search of her to kiss the forget-me-not. Does it matter?'

One by one Vic Morris removed his legs carefully out of the open window. A mule was sniffing at them, and there are few things that a Spanish mule cannot eat-nothing whatever that he will not try to eat. Vic was just in time to save good boot leather.

'I wish to Christopher,' he said, crosssly, 'that that girl would say what she means, once in a way. I would give a month's pay to know what happened to that 'forget-me-not' when she couldn't find Violet!'

Science is great and no doubt shall prevail. Vic Morris was a scientist. Phil Calmont was rapidly becoming another. Now it is curious how similar the actions of one scientist are to those of another. Each of these two learned men had a crushed flower in his pocket-book kept with the utmost care, doubtless for future classification, analysis and consignment to a herbarium. Yet neither knew anything of botany, and this fact only deepens the mystery. Even Janet was wrong. The flower was neither a pansy nor yet a forget-me-not, but only an innocent unsentimental little spray of speedwell! But it did just as well to keep Vic Morris's mind in a state of suspense and uncertainty. He knew no different, bless you!

CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF 'THE CONFIDENTIAL'

Jupiter nodded. The wisest man the world e'er saw, owned to many unwise actions. There were few better business men than Jacob Romer, but during these latter years he had certainly left too much power in the hands of the 'Confidential.' For instance, it was by his wish that Mr. James Kahn was deputed to receive and pay over to the vendor, that part of the purchase money of Incubus & Co.'s business, which he was to receive in cash.

To this Mr. Romer's lawyer objected, and had been met by the retort, 'You may know something about law, possibly, but not so much as Mr. Kahn knows about money. He has handled all mine for fifteen years.'

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders, and delivered his headstrong client over to the freedom of his own will. To go through the world without legal advice at every step was bad enough. But to fly in the face of a qualified practitioner was the next thing to defying providence. And so indeed it proved.

One morning James Kahn did not arrive at the Incubus offices. The guardian doorkeeper ran in and out like a dog at a fair. Johnemann had been down to see Mr. Kahn half-a-dozen times. Within, the call bell of the telephone was ringing shrewishly.

A dozen aids and foremen stood about expecting orders. McKill and Grindling were there waiting for a Conference of the Greater Powers. Still James Kahn did not come.

They were all instinctively watching the pale lilac strip of road, sparsely bordered with brick cottages, down which the big automobile was wont to run like a mustard-coloured bolt. The road remained open and empty. Certain children, removed by careful mothers at the hours of the master's passing, trickled out and began to play about again.

'Got something the matter with him?' said Hector McKill, tentatively.

The second acting superintendent cast a glance at him out of a pale blue eye so deeply trenched in his chubby face that its position seemed the result of a surgical operation.

'Something wrong with the till, more likely!' snapped Grindling, who had been late up for three nights running (Hector treasured this innuendo for future use).

'I give him till twelve o'clock and then--'

'What?' said Hector McKill, hoping that Grindling would give himself away yet more and worse.

'I will get on a horse and ride to 'The Caravanserai,' said Grindling, who had a kind of stubborn courage of his own. 'Kahn has been extra careful this while back that nobody should see the books- not, that is, to make anything of them.'

Punctual to his word Grindling mounted his chestnut mare and rode off through the village of Kirktown; taking the road aforesaid, a pale lilac shaving set at an angle up the opposite brae, he was at 'The Caravanserai' in a quarter of an hour. He rang the bell, and began to question the boy in buttons who appeared at the door in answer to his summons.

'Mr. Kahn?' he cried, out of breath, 'can I see him? Most urgent!'

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'Mr. Kahn left yesterday afternoon in the motor, sir,' said the boy.

'Was Casimir with him?' panted the stout Grindling.

'No, sir, but when Mr. Casimir came in twen minutes afterwards, he went and got the big mercile (Mercedes), the one that goes so fast, and set off too. He grazed the gate-post going out, he was in sue a hurry!'

'Why didn't Mr. Kahn take the better motor?' said Grindling, slipping the boy half-a-sovereign.

'Don't know that, sir!' said the boy in buttons 'cept, p'raps he was more accustomed to the old one, as it were. He wasn't near the good driver that Mr. Casimir had come to be, sir! He was too nervish, to my thinking!'

'Then Casimir wasn't nervous?'

'Oh, no sir,' said the boy, 'but that's what he made us -yes, sir, he scared us sick- everybody about the place-always popping off pistols and fixin' up iron targets the size of your hand in the stable yard. He smacked them every time, it is true, but then how were you to know when he would miss, and very likely 'fetch' you as like as not?'

'I see,' said Grindling, 'he was not popular, then, this Mr. Casimir?'

'Him!' said the boy, with emphasis, and then recollecting himself, he added, 'not that I have anything to say against any of master's guests-you yourself, sir, have been here several times, and I am sure you would not wish to get a poor boy into trouble!'

'Certainly, not,' said Grindling, anxious at all hazards to make his point, 'I think that I have seen your face-son of Gregson, butler at Gorm Castle, are

you not?’

‘Yes sir, thank'ee sir!’ the boy jerked a bow.

‘Well, Master Gregson,’ said Grindling, severely, ‘if you want to keep your father in his place, you had better tell me all you know about Mr. Kahn and Mr. Casimir!’

‘What has that Casimir been doing, sir?’

The cry was quite involuntary, but the curious joy that lit the boy's face was the best certificate of the unpopularity of Mr. John Casimir. Strangely enough, nothing whatever was said about Mr. Kahn, who, among his other arts had that of making himself liked by his personelle. This was chiefly a calculated lavishness in the right place, together with a certain habit of firmness and justice in small things. ‘You knew when you had Mr. Kahn!’ his servants said when comparing him with the master of Gorm Castle.

‘I don't know much, beyond what I have told you,’ said young Gregson, ‘I only wish I did, if it has anything to do with my father!’

‘Well, tell me everything,’ said Grindling. ‘I will be the judge of its value-miss nothing!’

‘Well, Mr. Kahn-he lunched here yesterday,’ said the boy, ‘he didn't eat much. His appetite is noways grand. I took up his meal on a tray to his room. The door of the big safe was open--’

‘Is it shut now?’ cried Walter Grindling, ‘let me see!’

But the boy was, thus far at least, faithful to his trust. He got the door sufficiently close to click the chain. Walter Grindling could get his foot in but no more.

‘Sorry, Mist'r Grindling-very sorry,’ said Gregson Junior, ‘but though in a way you're a friend of

master's, I haven't the right. Put it to yourself now have I? I am left here in charge till master gets back, or a proper officer of the law comes along with a warrant. Oh, I know all about warrants and 'open in the name of the Law!' They are all in the story I am reading in *The Boys' Thriller*, price one penny, and free if you get other six subscribers. I get mine free.'

'Well go on,' Grindling curbed himself with difficulty. There were, he knew, only men in this bachelor establishment, and no doubt the butler and the valet would have taken the opportunity to be off to the town. Grindling knew as well as if he had been on the spot where he would find them.

'Master told me to lay down the tray,' said Gregson Junior, still through the crack of the door. 'He had his big motor-coat that goes down to his heels, all furry, lying over a chair--'

'Ah,' said Walter Grindling.

'Yes, sir, and when I went to take the tray again after he was gone a while the big iron safe was shut. It's shut now.'

'Thank you, young Gregson,' said Grindling.

'I hope you think I did right, sir?' the boy called out after him.

'Perfectly right this time!' said Walter Grindling. 'I may have to trouble you again, however, when I get the warrants and powers mentioned in *The Boy's Penny Thriller!*'

Turning his back on the 'Caravanserai,' Grindling, who had something of the man of action in him, rode straight as he could through the village of Kirktown, leaving the works to one side, and so took the hill road with its many windings which conducted him through the woods to Gorm Castle.

Here also the master was not at home. But

Gregson in person assured him that from his knowledge of his employer, and from certain conferences with the coachman, Mr. Grindling would be almost sure to find Mr. Romer on the Heugh of Portogarten, occupied in inspecting the new mine they were opening there-near the lighthouse old Dick Finnan was building on the point of the Rough Isle.

Here Gregson permitted himself to smile respectfully and indulgently. He also was evidently of the opinion that his master could not keep himself from mining speculation in some shape or form. It was, according to Gregson, an amiable weakness. We have all our failings, even butlers.

As soon as Walter Grindling knew this, he turned his horse's head about and set off in the direction of Portogarten. Hitherto the name had excited only mirth at the great Incubus offices-from which they controlled their half score of pits, and their whole regiments of men. But if, having sold out of the Kirktown collieries, Mr. Jacob Romer was inclined to interest himself in Portogarten, the affair took on quite another aspect for Walter Grindling.

What had been but the folly of a couple of ignorant old lighthousemen suddenly became worth looking into. But in the meantime, however, something was still better worth looking into. As he rode Grindling had before him the hasty toilet of James Kahn, the scarcely touched lunch tray, the door of the big safe first open, then shut-especially the great motoring coat flung over the sofa. He knew that coat. It was full of inside pockets in the lining-pockets which buttoned down, each with its great flap of skin. If James Kahn had disappeared, what did these pockets contain?

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As Walter Grindling strode through the birchen glades which clouded the moor-edges, he became conscious of the subtle change in the atmosphere which comes with the nearness to the sea.

But the great Heugh of Portogarten stood up before him shutting out the view. Only little railway cars trundled by, and Walter Grindling examined the piled ore with a professional eye.

'They've struck our Carron main lode or I'm a Dutchman!' he cried, slapping his mare with the flat of his hand so that she dashed away.

But the next moment he had something else to think of. Above him at the top of a little hill was the well-known Gorm Castle turret. Grindling knew it afar off. Once, before the days of Kahn, he had of ten been asked by 'the Chief' to help him choose his horses, and even now, though in a way passed by, he still took an interest.

He checked his horse, still inclined to dance a little. The coachman was on his proper side, one wheel in a nook vacated by a stone-breaker. So, like a well-bred Jehu he never once turned his head as the sounds approached.

'Mr. Romer anywhere about?' inquired Grindling. 'I have ridden over from the offices. I went up to the Castle, and Gregson sent me on here.'

'Yessir,' said the coachman, speaking over the multiplicity of his chins and the curving comfort of his lower waistcoat, 'you will find Mr. Romer on the hill-somewhere about that there new pit.'

'But what am I to do with my horse?' said Grindling 'If I were to ride round by the Cove I might miss him.'

'There is what they call a road, I believe,' said the coachman, jerking his thumb to the right. 'I've never

tried it. If I might advise, sir, I think she would be all right in the shepherd's house there. I see a ring let in by the door.'

The house was empty and roofless but there seemed to be nothing else for it. So Grindling dismounted and tied up his mare.

'I'll keep an eye on the chestnut, sir,' said the coachman; 'she seems fidgety.'

'She's all right,' said Grindling, already getting over the stile; 'but she can't bear a hand laid on her when she does not expect it. I-was thinking of something else.'

'You mustn't, sir! Not with horses, sir, you didn't ought really,' the coachman rebuked him gravely, 'it's enough for any grown man to be up to the tricks of one horse-let alone a mare-and chestnut at that!'

But Grindling had no time for theory. He was bound to have immediate speech with Jacob Romer, and there, as he mounted the Heugh of Portogarten, he saw his ancient master in close and familiar talk with Phil Calmont.

There was a certain dog-like fidelity about Grindling. His failings were of quite a different order from those of Hector McKill. He leaped at once to the conclusion that there was a plot against his old 'chief.' All the 'new hands' were in it- Kahn,

Casimir, and now this Phil Calmont was holding his master in talk while his accomplices got away with the booty.

Accordingly as he came on the levels of the moor he quickened his pace to a run, and arrived, purple-visaged and out of breath, before the cool, quiet figure of a man in grey.

'Mr. Romer-Mr. Romer - Sir!' he panted; 'we have been robbed-you have been robbed- robbed, sir, by a

gang, a gang--!

Here words failed him, and Jacob Romer turned on him the bold hawk's beak and dominating eye of other years.

'What is this, Grindling?' he said; 'out with it, man! Don't stand stammering there?'

For, indeed, the poor acting-superintendent was swaying from side to side, wringing his short plump hands, his usually ruddy complexion faded to an ashen pallor, with fine reticulations of purple running through the flesh tint like rivers on a large scale physical globe.

Mr. Romer waited a little, in order to allow his ancient subordinate to recover himself. Then he said authoritatively. 'Now, Mr. Grindling!'

'It's Kahn-Kahn!' he gasped, and could say no more.

'Well, what of Kahn?' There was at least some anxiety in the mind of the master of Gorm Castle. Kahn had much in his power and this man was in earnest.

'He has gone away,' said Grindling, at last steadying himself.

'Gone away,' cried Jacob Romer, his face now as pale as the superintendent's; 'Why, what makes you say that? More jealousy?'

'Oh,' cried Grindling, tortured in his conscience of a man of all sins save those of £ s. d. 'he does not owe you anything-the purchase money? He has paid it to you-oh, say he has paid it!'

Jacob Romer leaned heavier on his stick. He put his feet wider apart so as to stand firmer on the earth.

He felt the need. When he spoke it was in a changed voice, and there was a stupid, toppling

feeling his head.

'No,' he said: 'no-he has not yet paid but that is nothing. It is a large and difficult matter. It takes time to arrange. I trust him!'

'You have trusted him too long, Mr. Romer' groaned Grindling. 'Oh, you may be angry with me. As an office-boy I began with your uncle, and whatever I have done and been, no man can say that I defrauded Incubus, Romer and Co. of a single copper.'

'I know-I know, Grindling,' said Mr. Romer 'but what is this nonsense about Kahn?'

Grindling told him, the swift preparation, the hurried, hardly touched meal, the many-pocketed motor coat, and the open safe. Then it was time for the master of millions to pull himself together also.

'This much is true,' he said, firmly, 'Mr. Kahn was to meet me and my lawyer, Mr. Rivers, yesterday afternoon in the Kirktown Bank to make over to us the purchase money and the founder's shares.'

'The shares, too!' cried Grindling, 'he has sold them with the others! You are out of Incubus and Co.-oh, the villain; that I should live to see the day! And your private investments?' He spoke now like a cross-examining advocate getting at the facts.

'They have been in Mr. Kahn's hands for many years!'

'Oh, Mr. Romer!' cried Grindling, contorting himself in agony. 'And after what we all thought of you!'

Mr. Romer, pale to the lips, but still quiet and resolute, was searching his pockets.

'I should have a letter somewhere,' he said, 'one that was brought to the Bank by a messenger while we waited. It explained Mr. Kahn's failure to come-

as it seemed to us, most satisfactorily.'

He found the crumpled piece of paper, smoothed it out, and read it in the hearing of his late acting superintendent-for Phil Calmont had discreetly betaken himself to a distance.

'The Caravanserai,' Thursday 3.30 p.m.

'My dear Friend and Honoured Patron ('humph,' said Grindling who always addressed his lord as 'sir'), I have been seized with a painful sickness, a palpitation of the heart, which makes it impossible for me to be at the Bank today as promised.

I am well accustomed to this disabling, but happily quite temporary illness. I have just taken the remedy. Now I shall go to bed, and twelve hours' sleep will make me my own man again. I shall be at the Bank with all money and papers at the same hour tomorrow. Or if I am still somewhat suffering, would it be too much to ask you and Mr. Rivers to drive up to my house. I expect, however, to be all right long before that time. I have succeeded in everything you have committed to my care, far beyond my expectations or yours.

Regretting the unavoidable trouble I am giving, I am, dear and honoured sir,

'Very faithfully, your obliged servant, JAMES KAHN.

'To Jacob Gorm Romer, Esq.'

'Well, sir,' said Walter Grindling grimly, 'when that letter was dated, James Kahn was a good two hours on his way with the booty. Do you know, sir, who brought the letter?'

Mr. Romer had put his hand to his head. He seemed to be suffering there. At any rate he was not attending, for Grindling had to repeat the question

more than once.

'Casimir, I believe,' he said. 'Yes, I think I saw Mr. Casimir at the Bank!'

'Well, he also has taken his hook. He followed his master!'

The old man sat down rather heavily on the pine trunk, the same which Vida could see from her window through Billy's spy-glass. He was still holding his head and muttering. No one spoke to him for full five minutes. Then up through the scattering light and shade of the birches on the slopes came small flitting figure. Certain bright specks danced as he ran—a boy in buttons, and making more hast than such usually do.

He came close up to where Mr. Grindling stood, and Mr. Romer sat on the log

'Please, sir,' he began, as Mr. Romer raised his head to look at him; 'please sir, I'm Gregson's boy—your Gregson— I tried the safe door. It opened as easy as anything. There wasn't anything in it, except just this. I think Mr. Kahn took the rest!'

He handed the old man a strip of paper shaped like a cheque.

It was the birth certificate of one Vida Romer, the daughter of Jacob Romer and Caroline French or Romer, his wife.

The old man dropped as if felled, the paper still gripped in his fingers, while Grindling, marvelling greatly, stood and regarded him. It struck him for the first time in his life that there was something in what coroners' juries called 'the Visitation of God.'

CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

A FATHER'S HOMECOMING

Phil came running at once. He thought it was a mere faint, the result of some bad news, but the heavy, lifeless drop of the limbs of the left side, the open, staring eyes, the slight drawing of the muscles of the face, soon convinced him of something more serious.

Then they thought of the carriage, and Gregson junior (who denied having seen it, though he had passed that very way) ran to make sure, but the coachman, obeying instructions, had gone home. If Mr. Romer did not return before a certain time, it was understood that the carriage should proceed home, coming back to take him up at a certain hour in the afternoon. Mr Romer gave his servants no scope for thought.

'Don't think! Obey orders, and I will take the risk!' That had been his motto in dealing with them. Unfortunately, on this occasion, the coachman had taken him at his word.

There remained Grindling's chestnut mare, but a second glance at the sick man told them both that this was as impossible as the other.

A thought came to Phil. He and Vida had a code book of signals- 'Commercial and Universal'- in the use of which, either of her interim fathers down below were proud and anxious to initiate her. Without being precisely an adept, she could spell out Phil's bunting message, which, of course, was also seen from the lantern platform of the

newlighthouse- Billy and Dick keeping at all times a bright look-out.

'Man injured, shall I bring him down?' Phil signalled, as near as he could make out the code, always most complicated when one is in a hurry.

'Certainly, all ready!' came back, as fast as the flags could be run up the new staff.

And Vida started up the hill with what of bandages and liniments she could imagine and procure. She thought, of course, of an accident in the colliery. She knew what the deep darkness down there, the crushing uncertainty, felt like, and she made haste.

Little haste could be made up above. Gregson Junior (who had never mounted a horse) gallantly proposed to ride for the doctor. The suggestion was good, but not the person. Phil turned to Walter Grindling; he stood mournful and silent, looking as if he felt himself responsible for the harm his news had brought.

'Do you ride for my father,' said Phil, 'you will likely find him on the North Bound, that by Inchgormack; any one will show you how far he has got. Tell him to come to the Cottage down below there, at Rough Island Cove near the new lighthouse.'

'But--!' began Grindling, uncertainly. He was going to suggest other plans, but Phil was now in command.

'Go,' he ordered, as became a doctor's son; 'it is a partial paralysis, as far as I can make out, and the sooner he is in bed the better. His daughter will take care of him.'

Grindling being gone, the procession was speedily formed. Phil called out a double shift of his pitmen;

all skilled in carrying the wounded. He had also a stretcher which had never been used, with an adjustable 'L' in front, so that in descending a slope the patient might be carried fairly level. They met Vida half way up. As she came forward the left hand which gripped the paper fell, heavy and flaccid from the bearing poles. Vida said not a word. She asked no questions. Phil, as he replaced it, told her in a low voice all that he knew.

'His room is ready!' she said, simply. 'I took all the things out!'

And somehow he knew that the room was her own, and that it had been ready as soon as his signal had been read. For his poorest pitman it would have been the same as for Mr. Jacob Romer of Gorm Castle, and her own proper father.

The relays of four marched steadily down the very track by which, on a former occasion, Vida had gone up to advise with Phil as to the domestic affections.

They crossed the moor, leaving the pit and growing 'toom' behind them, wound through the pines, and after that the light-sown birches with their small, coined leaves permitted the men on the lighthouse to see them by glimpses.

Dick and Billy were at the foot of the hill to receive the slow-moving party, the four bearers in front, the four pit men of the reserve a little behind, marching stolidly two and two as if at a funeral, their countenances composed and serious. Behind were Vida and Phil, because at this point the way was narrow. They had come by the old footpath into Portogarten Cove, in order to save time.

At the sight of Mr. Romer thus borne inanimate into their very haven of shelter, Dick and Billy looked at one another. They would rather it had

been any other man in the world that they were called upon to succour.

They were at the door of the cottage now, on the little white plot of picked stones, the delight of Billy's heart, the solace of his idle afternoons.

'If we let him in, we shall lose her?' Billy murmured; 'certain sure we shall lose her. He will take her back with him to Gorm Castle. I wish he had broken his neck.'

But as they stood ranged about the stretcher, while the men were preparing to lay their burden down, in order to straighten their weary backs Mr. Romer's arm fell down, as Billy said, 'with a whop.' There was a paper between the fingers. As Billy replaced the hand across his breast, the strip of paper slipped away from the nerveless grip.

'Read that!' he said after a glance at it. And when Billy read, Dick shook his wise head and said 'He ordereth all things well. There were we, like two brutes, ready to deny the man his own, as God put his hospital certificate into his hand. He is her father-neither you nor I. Let him pass Billy. Hats off, you there. This is the doing of the Lord and wondrous in our eyes!'

But while Dick Finnan, with his hat in his hands preceded them up the stairs, Billy murmured, 'Yes he's her father, sure. He brought the certificate. It is good for its face, but all the same 'tis hard- turrible hard for us two old men who have done the carin' for her.'

'Hemiplegia, affecting the left side, not a severe case! Rest, electricity (I will send a battery- let one of your fellows come with me, Phil), and small doses of strychnine. I will send those also made up- about the 32nd of a grain I think. But above all- rest.'

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These were Dr. Calmont's ordinances, rapidly delivered. He was an energetic man in the exercise of his profession, and permitted no discussion or nay-say. 'Move him home? I thought you had more sense, Phil! He must stay where he is; that young lady down stairs will look after him, I make no doubt.'

'Yes, sir,' said Phil, who was respectful to his father, in a somewhat old-fashioned manner, 'she is his only daughter.'

'Ah, indeed,' said the Doctor, accustomed to family mysteries. Then a thought seemed to strike him, and he fixed his son with an arrogant eye.

'But what the sun, moon, and the seven stars have you got to do with that? Whether she is Mr. Romer's daughter or not, I mean?'

'Because, sir,' said Phil Calmont, gently, 'if the lady continues of the same mind, there is an excellent chance of her being your daughter also!'

'Ah,' said the doctor, 'well, you have provided yourself with a career without my interference. It is not my business if you do the same with a wife! Good-day, Philip!'

Many were the days of convalescence-many and weary-down in the small white house in Portogarten Cove. But at least the patient never grew any worse, which in itself is to improve. Dr. Calmont visited faithfully, but not more so than his son, in addition to which flags flickered and wickered all day long, answering each other between the cove and the Heugh and back again.

'All days come back again!' grinned Dick Finnan to Billy as they watched from the completed lighthouse-their private property.

'Don't!' said Billy. 'I suppose you won't know

Dick,' he added apologetically, 'but between sweethearts this here is something like eaves-dropping!'

'Well, I never did, what next? Can't I watch a string of bunting running up that says, 'Going on all well-how's yourself?' or something like that?'

'You never knew Molly Molloy,' said Billy, crushingly, 'or you would be more feelin?'

'Chut!' cried Dick, 'it was only when our Vida began to grow up and the lads came round, that we ever heard a word of your Molly Molloy and ship's cobblers!'

'Well, Dick, any way,' said Billy, temperately, 'I've been jilted, all through bein' a red-headed man and an island lighthouseman, so I can feel for others. If I was you, I should put down that navy glass!'

'I thought it was the right, real father with certificate you were afraid of,' retorted Dick Finn: withdrawing the glass reluctantly.

'I'm not takin' odds, Dick,' said Billy, 'but if I were I would stand a hundred to one that the young fellow on the cliff yonder could give points to stacks and shoals of fathers, sick and well, with certificates and without!'

CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

THE CONVERSION OF GRINDLING

'It won't affect us, of course,' said Walter Grindling, rubbing his third chin thoughtfully, 'but I'm low about the old man-yes McKill, I'm low. I've served him long!'

'No longer than I have,' retorted Hector McKill, brutally, 'and there never was a day when I stood calm and took his back-chat but I said, "The pride of the haughty shall be brought low. The horse and his rider shall be thrown into the deep of the sea!'

'McKill,' said Grindling, 'there are times when, if you were of my age, I could gladly punch your head.'

'Ah,' said McKill, 'there speaks the man of wrath!'

'Wrath,' cried Walter Grindling, 'don't you start any of mine, or all the faith-healing in the world won't keep you out of hospital when I'm through with you!'

'I meant no offence, Grindling,' said McKill, lifting up hands of shocked innocence, 'but you can't deny that in the days when his horn was exalted, Jacob Romer over-rode us unmercifully-Pharaoh and his chariots-yea, Pharaoh and his mighty men!'

'He was a good master to me,' said Walter Grindling, doggedly, 'and so he was to you, McKill; better than ever either of us will see under any Limited Company!'

'Then you think he's done-smashed?' asked Hector McKill, with a quite unholy joy on his long horse countenance.

'Kahn has taken away every cent he could

Grindling answered, 'and what he couldn't take he has speculated with. The castle and all will have to go. I can't think of an asset Mr. Romer will have in the world-the purchase-money is all paid and receipted for by the proper person-Kahn. The vendor's shares were saleable on the open market. They were sold there by the person in charge of them-Kahn. But where is Kahn? Where is Casimir? The police can't find them. They may end by finding the automobiles. Yes! But the money- not so much as a farthing!'

'Then the man is a bankrupt!' cried McKill rubbing his hands, gleefully.

'I did not say that,' said Grindling, wisely. 'I never yet saw a smash so big that with care some basketsfull might not be gathered up. But this is a big one and no mistake. Kahn had the charge of all his investments for years!'

'Ah,' said McKill, 'that would be what took the little 'Confidential,' so often to East Dene and Thorsby. I've had news that things are every bit as bad there!'

Meanwhile Jacob Romer lay on his daughter's bed in the little cottage, and heard from a great distance the sound of many waters. There was peace in the chamber-a great exceeding peace. Even Dr. Hugh Calmont approved, in his brusque manner, of the whiteness shaded and soft, of the open window, of the soft sough of the sea saying regularly 'hush,' 'hush' upon its pebbles outside; of the freshness of the June morning; above all of the girl beside the bed, dressed in close-fitting supple blue serge, and a white apron, who stood silent and took his instructions. Yes, Dr. Hugh Calmont approved all these.

'How do you keep everything so quiet?' he demanded, suddenly turning upon the nurse, 'my own place is like a rookery!'

'Besides Mr. Romer,' she answered smiling, 'there are only my two foster-fathers, Billy and Dick Finnan. And they are mostly down yonder at the lighthouse. Also up on the cliff there is Phil.'

'Ah,' said Dr. Calmont, grimly for him, 'up on the cliff there is Phil. You mean my son? Well, what have you to say to me about your prosects- you two young people?'

'But for me,' said Vida, frankly, 'Phil would have been part of the 'Rookery.'

The Doctor winced a little.

'Not quite that,' he said, in a more serious tone, than he had yet used. 'Phil was idle, but always quiet!'

'Well, sir,' said Vida, 'if I marry Phil I will see to it that neither of us asks anything from anybody!'

'Not even from me?' said the Doctor, 'now I can at least give you some good advice without charging for it, and I will begin now.'

They had passed out together and now stood, the long rocky peninsula of Rough Island glistening before them in the white sun, and the cliffs rising high up about the cove. There was a pleasant wash of cool water all about, the lispings splash of long seaweed in the pools, like clothes lifted and let drop in a washing tub, only cool and salt and June-like; above all, the tall lighthouse tower, and two little dots moving about upon its platform. Dr. Hugh smiled, and then he sighed.

'It is the ideal life,' he said, 'I envy Phil. But do you know that in taking Mr. Romer like this you are as likely as not to get him to keep? It seems that

nothing can be recovered of the estate, and for my part of the business, I foresee that he may be somewhat better, even perhaps be able to walk about a little. But he will be a charge to someone all his days! In the days of his riches he denied all about you, why then should you?’

The Doctor was trying the girl.

She drew from her pocket a little strip of parcel worn into creases with carrying in an envelope And Vida Romer handed to the Doctor her birth certificate.

‘He brought that with him, in his hand,’ she said, with the utmost simplicity in the world.

‘Ah, did he?’ said the Doctor, slowly returning the certificate, ‘and Phil thinks as you do?’

‘Of course Phil thinks as I do!’ said the girl indignantly, ‘he always does!’

‘Oh, Sacredest Innocence!’ murmured the Doctor, and stumped his unshod hazel staff hard on the ground, so that he might not smile. ‘Well, God bless you-you babes!’ he said, laying his hand on Vida's head. ‘Perhaps after all such a belief is the best capital to set up house on. Don't sell out till you can't help it!’

After Dr. Hugh Calmont was gone, Vida went hastily out to the flagstaff and flew the signal flag which asks for a pilot.

‘Hey, do you see that?’ cried Billy, seizing Dick by the arm, ‘there is something wrong at the house. The little one is asking for a pilot.’

Dick put his closed fist to his eye and turned to his mate with a smile which said that this time he held him.

‘Where's Molly Molloy now, and the jilted man that knows everything?’ he asked. ‘And where's the

man that wouldn't read signals exchanged between a young pair a-courting with a mile or so of air between them? Seen him anywhere about, that man? He was yarning to me t'other day till I couldn't hear myself speak. He made me feel as poor and mean as a half fried flounder- not a flap to my tail!

'Shut up, you Dick Finnan,' said Billy 'her- her father, Old Romer that is, may be taken worse! She may want advice. It may be a call for us.'

'Nonsense, man,' said the wiser Dick, 'It does not need a course of Molly Molloy to tell me that if Vida had wanted us, she would have run down to the foot of the garden and shouted. Besides-the flag says, 'Wanted-a pilot,' Now which of us does she want? I have the more knowledge-you have the more conceit No, depend upon it, the little girl only feels lonely and wants a talk with her beau--'

'Her beau!' snorted Billy, 'Are you not ashamed of yourself, Dick Finnan, using such words-and you an elder of the Kirk?'

Dick Finnan laughed with the unceasing chuckling mirth of an unhumorous man who after years of trial has hit upon a good thing at last.

'Billy Bryan,' he said, taking his 'ancient' confidentially aside, 'you are young and need experience. You trust an old fellow who has kept his eyes open, even if he never had a girl that sent him to the right-about for a ship's cobbler. Watch the opening of the woods yonder for a short quarter of an hour-that place where the grass is wearing thin-you pick it up-like the track to a field canteen. And if you don't see Phil Calmont coming out of those pines at a harvester's trot, call me Dutchman, and I promise to submit to Molly Molloy for the rest of my mortal life without the winking of an eye.'

Billy pretended that he was busy with some intricacies of the revolving apparatus, but nevertheless kept an eye on the prescribed spot. Presently, in quicker time than Dick had foreseen, Phil Calmont's slender figure, belted in the blue knitted 'jumper' and flannel trousers of his workaday life, was seen loping easily down the steep track.

'There you are, Billy,' said Dick, triumphantly, 'what did I tell you?'

Billy Bryan growled something unintelligible.

'If you want to do anything in the piloting way -if you still hold the opinion that it was you the little one signalled for-now's your chance. You have time to be in ahead yet!'

'Look here,' cried the exasperated Irishman 'whose lighthouse is this anyway?'

'Yours,' said Dick, promptly, 'but for some years to come, you couldn't bear to see another hand on that clockwork and connections other than Dick Finnan, your old mate's.'

'Faith and that's true!' said Billy, jumping across the platform, all his hasty anger vanishing, 'ye are an aggravatin' owld Scotch beast, but I can't do without ye, and that's a fac! But all the same, and whatever ye think, it's Heaven's own truth about Molly! I've always been sorry I ran away.'

'Then I take that back,' said Dick. 'I had no right to gainsay any man in his affections!'

Thus was peace re-established, and about the same time Vida, having made certain that her patient was not likely to require anything for half-an-hour, ran out to the shade of the single rowan tree at the gable-end where she was wont to meet her lover.

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Phil saluted with his hand officially.

'Come aboard, Captain!' he said, in the manner of the only pilot he had ever seen-Jim McBride, who ran the Incubus coal vessels over the bar of the Kirktown Waterfoot down by Coatestown.

'Phil,' said Vida, 'I wanted you immediately!'

At this he smiled upon her, seeing that it was nothing serious.

'So our foreman Silas on the 'tip' told me,' he laughed, "You had better get away pretty smart," he said, 'there's a flag flyin' that looks like 'urgent -this side up, with care!'"

'But he didn't know the code! How dared he?' cried Vida, indignant at the progress of education among the lower classes.

'No,' drawled Phil, 'but he guessed. You see a man who loves one woman, is pretty like a man who loves another woman. One knows an awful lot about the other. Now Silas Milton has not been married a year, and when his wife hangs one of his Sunday shirts out of a bedroom window at the Row, Silas drops his shovel and leaves. So that is how he knew to pass me the word.'

'I think it was a great liberty of him!' said Vida, in whose mind the Sunday shirt rankled.

'Well, I don't know,' said Phil, laying his hand gently on the girl's shoulder-his favourite caress,

'I wouldn't be too hard on Silas. If it hadn't been for him-I would have been off down the shaft, you see. But what is it-the pilot is at your service, Captain?'

'Your father has been here!' said Vida, opening the subject.

'Ah,' returned Phil, thoughtfully, 'said anything?'

'Lots of things,' continued Vida 'means it kindly,

but...'

'Annoyed you somewhat?' queried Phil, moving his hand up over the rippling curls, 'brought out that wrinkle again, did he? I thought I had done for him!'

And he smoothed her brow tenderly, with a hand that never made a mistake, a hand which felt the responsive sway of feeling, pleasure or displeasure, under the smooth touch as surely as the magnet turns the hidden needle.

'Phil,' she went on, 'are we to be poor? For myself I don't mind-please remember that! But your father said that he had better tell me--'

'I wish my father would mind his own busi...'

began Phil, angrily.

'No,' said Vida, 'you must not say that! He meant well.'

'Worst kind!' grunted Phil, with his father's exact manner. Vida stamped her foot, with hers.

'He is your father, and he only said that my father, Mr. Rumer, might never get better, and that as things looked now, he had lost all his money. We might have to support him all his life. But believe he only said that to try me. I could see him watching, and he was nice to me before he went away.'

'And what did you say?' Phil demanded.

'Well. I answered for you-for my lad-for my husband-as you would if you had been here.'

'My little girl.'

'No, not now! Let me tell you!' She held him off a moment.

Nevertheless, it was some time before Vida-with of course the best will in the world to expedite matters-could resume her story.

'You see, Phil, it's all right for me-because he is

my father. And it's all right for you, because you are going to have me! But it's not right, as I see it, that the present expense should come off Dick and Billy, who have been so kind to me all their lives!

'Oh, they-they can stand it!' said Phil, carelessly.

I know Billy is rich (or was before he began to put up that lighthouse), but all the same I'm not going to have it-do you not see? In a way they had got to think themselves my two fathers. It was funny, but true. They always treated me as a daughter-only better. And now when my real father comes, who has never done anything-well, to tell the truth. I think they feel it. Yet we can't turn him out-you and I?'

'I have no doubt that they do feel like that,' said Phil, drawing the girl beside him down upon a little seat under the rowan shadow- 'but do not let that trouble you. Look up yonder: (Phil pointed where the pit- wheels made a steady whirling, and in the wind from off the sea the smoke from the brick chimney stacks of Portogarten Mine curved down landwards and dispersed far away from Portogarten Cove. 'I don't say there is another 'Incubus' up there. We haven't the space-but there is a fortune or two, sufficient at least to pay any hospital charges, and to keep your father in comfort all his days.'

Already the girl looked brighter. Phil was so comforting. Some men are.

'We have shares, haven't you-I mean you have?' she queried.

'Sold most of them!' said Phil, sharply.

'What for?' She looked at him quickly, with a spark in her eye which might be anger. He had made her a present or two, concerning the provenance of which he could not always give clear

account. And if-well, with things as they were-she would fling them in his face. He ought to have known better. She would teach him so to do. Presents, indeed!

'Yes, I sold them,' he said, calmly, 'and do you know why-to pay the men's wages till we got the corner turned. Billy needed all his money for the lighthouse. Now the corner is turned, and well turned. We are making money each week, and with the demand for our class of coal for ships on the Clyde-perhaps even from the Navy--'

'Who bought your shares, Phil? They must have known you were in need? They would give you just nothing for them?' She threw the questions at him.

'Your father bought them-Mr. Romer,' he said, 'he-gave me ten thousand pounds, and I have sunk every penny of it in the Heugh up there! Now are you content?'

And after that, what was there to do but for the pilot to take his wages and go.

CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

THE TRACKING OF KAHN

While Jacob Romer was being nursed towards a slow-returning consciousness in the little white house in the cove of Portogarten, Walter Grindling, in connection with the police, launched himself on the trail of the fugitives. He took with him Phil Calmont and Inspector Henderson of the detective force—the latter a celebrated man in his way, both witty and wise. The policeman and Grindling had been organising the search from the hour when the latter discovered the flight of James Kahn.

The curious circumstance that during the last weeks Mr. Romer had gone each day to the new pit and had there conferred with Phil Calmont, seemed to the Inspector to have an undoubted bearing on the case. He must therefore see Phil. But once having spoken with that young man, he was so impressed with his straightforwardness and quickness of judgment, that of his own accord he invited him to make one of the search-party. Various men of the force were on the track already, but nothing of importance had been reported.

It became early evident that the tracks of the automobiles led away towards the south. James Kahn had not made for the great cities. Nor indeed would one have expected so simple a strategy from a man of his intelligence.

If the cities are full of people, they are also full of officers of justice. To Walter Grindling, at least, the design of Kahn seemed clear. The 'Confidential' had

had the command of the 'Incubus' coal and-ore fleet. He could call it together like an admiral or, according to his liking, disperse it to the four winds. This had been a privilege which the two acting superintendents, McKill and Grindling, had always envied him. Captains asked for cargo, for leave, for long voyages or for short, according to their needs. But there was nothing for it, save to send them to the general manager, Mr. James Kahn.

Grindling had borrowed an automobile from one of his friends, with a chauffeur in whom (so it was reported) they could place every confidence. A day of sun had followed the evening of soft 'growing' rain when James Kahn had started.

As soon as they were off-that is, Grindling, Phil, and Inspector Henderson, the detective proceeded to explain.

'He had meant to take Casimir with him But something happened. I don't yet know what. Casimir's coat and driving gloves were lying upon the table in the hall of 'The Caravanserai.' Therefore when James Kahn sent him on a mission-with the letter to Mr. Romer at the Bank, he did not take the automobile. That would have attracted too much attention. He rode a bicycle along the path that skirts the town, over by One Tree Farm, and then leaving it among some underbrush (where this morning I found his brass pump) he walked up to the door of the Bank, crossing the waste ground at the back, where in old times they used to burn the witches, handed in his letter, and so vanished.'

'Casimir went back to 'The Caravanserai,' though?' said Walter Grindling, thoughtfully, 'what did he do that for?-Why did he not join Kahn on the road? He had his cycle ready to his hand.'

'Kahn had promised to wait for him,' said the detective, 'promised-that is, and didn't-cleared out as soon as his back was turned.'

'Then Casimir took the big Mercedes and got after him,' broke in Phil, suddenly, the reasoning of the police officer striking him quite suddenly. But Grindling shook his head. His intelligence acted more slowly.

'Well,' he said at last, 'I suppose you fellows of the force ought to know best. But for me, who have seen them together day by day, these two, Kahn and Casimir were playing one game-a bad game maybe, but the same. They were fellow- countrymen. Have I not often heard them talking in their queer outlandish gibberish by the hour-no, not French-I can do a little boulevard parly-voing myself-nor yet German. I know 'Herr Ja, Nein & Co! But something sharp and snappy like a green log laid on the fire, hissing and spitting. Oh, I have sat and wondered what they were jawing about. You may depend that where one is, the other is not far off.'

The Inspector nodded cautiously.

'Perhaps,' he said. 'I agree that they were both in it-that is, till Casimir went to the bank with the letter.'

The pursuing automobile was not one of the most recent type, and twice it held the party half-an-hour en panne, which means 'in the sulks.' But the chauffeur understood his machine, and humoured it as he might have done a restive horse.

'Where are we going?' asked Grindling, as the long undulating west-country road unrolled itself before them indefinitely.

'To Dalmellington!' said the Inspector. 'That was where our man, Fox, last heard of them. We shall

have other news there. But I don't understand, either. To the south there is only the broken Galloway country, no big towns, one single thread of railroad cutting crossways-the short-sea to Ireland in one direction and in the other an eight hours' journey to London by the fastest train. No, it is quite incomprehensible!

'When I was in the Office,' interrupted Phil, with a certain apology in his voice, 'Incubus & Co. had often little steamers and sailing craft pottering about between Port Mary and the Cumberland coast-besides Balcary, Palnackie, and the mouth of the Nith. Sometimes even tugs were sent there to be ready for the big colliers-to tug them out, I mean.'

The Inspector glanced sideways at him, and then brought down his hand heavily on his thigh.

'I believe our young friend has it!' he said, 'Mr. Grindling, you don't happen to know what Incubus boats were at liberty during the last few days?'

Grindling shook his head. It was not in his department.

'Only the Office knew that-indeed for these last months, since Mr. Phil there left us, I may say that in such things the Office was Kahn, together with his partner Casimir.'

The officer looked across at Phil.

'I suppose you could offer no guess?' he said. 'I am afraid not,' said Phil, 'it would be a tug- almost certainly-a cargo-boat would be too slow.'

Since the firm got the big German naval contract, you see, they never knew where the Kiel fleet would want to coal. So Mr. Kahn had a whole fleet of tugs with powerful engines to take out the big loads to the rendezvous. Doubtless he ordered round one of these.'

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'A tug-yes! Meditated the officer, 'that explains, partly, at least-little ports, little ships. A tug would get him away to the continent-with all his 'stuff.' Something little and packed with engines it would be, like a racing car! Well, we shall get some more information at Dalmellington!'

'How's that?' queried Grindling.

The Inspector soon cast a look of pity at him.

'Of course Fox and Frost would send all that they knew to the police station there. It will be waiting for us.'

After that they were wholly silent. The car throbbed and jarred but did not stop any more, till the long street of the little town drew about them like an Inverness cape, and they stopped in front the County Constabulary Station.

Presently Inspector Henderson came out looking considerably disturbed in mind.

'Fox and Frost are two fools!' he said, tearing the message he had received into very small pieces 'They think that coming here is only a blind, and that the cars have turned and gone back by night along the hard Ayr road. No one here has seen them. They will wire if anything is found! There is no news. Nothing for it but to sit and suck one's thumbs till we hear something.'

'I beg your pardon, Inspector,' said Phil, 'but I think we should go on. That no one has seen them proves nothing, for the Dalmellington folk are good sleepers.'

'Eh?' cried the detective, 'what's that? Have you got an idea? Out with it. I never yet knew anybody's idea that wasn't at least worth considering. And yours, young man, seem to me of a superior order.'

This was indeed praise from Sir Hubert Stanley.

'I don't believe they turned back at all,' said Phil, 'if they had, they would both have got into the big Mercedes. No, they have gone on. I know these north Galloway roads-what isn't hard pebble and sand is rut and mud. We shall pick up their tracks where they have passed before we have gone five miles.'

The automobile sped on. The chauffeur had renewed his stock of fuel at Dalmellington, and soon the long valley of the Doon was laid out smoothly behind them, the landscape passing right and left over their shoulders as the sea is divided before the rush of a fast destroyer. There was a singing of wind in their ears when they reached the summit, and the car launched itself downwards towards the Ken.

Till now they had seen no traces of the fugitives, a d Inspector Henderson began to be restless. A few minutes more and he would have given the order to turn back. But at that moment Phil pointed out something which cut in long curves into the soft turf of the moor-side.

'There they are,' he cried, 'one car at least, and badly driven.'

They stopped and got out. Grindling recognised in a moment the diamond criss-crossings of the tyres of the smaller car-that in which James Kahn had escaped. But of the other there was no sign on the well-crowned hard-surfaced road. The tyres of the Mercedes would have left parallel ridges, and been easily distinguishable from the other. Here, however, not a pebble was lifted. Nothing gave evidence of anything uncommon except those occasional curves cut in the smooth turf of the wayside.

'It looks as if he had been hard-pressed, by something or some one,' pondered the Inspector.

'Perhaps after all Fox and Frost have been

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working 'on their own.' He spoke the last phrase with some bitterness. Working 'on their own' meant in the force- 'for their own honour and glory.' Inspector Henderson held it to be the blight and bane of all good police work-the sin unpardonable.

They passed through Carsphairn. Yes, they were on the track. They sang the long resounding song of speed (one single rising note), long-sustained and good to hear, down the green valley, and by the rippling waterside. They turned sharp down the steep hill to the Kirk of St John. And again, after a brief inspection of the ground, they swung as sharply to the right at the bank of grey granite which guards the entrance to the Royal Borough of New Galloway.

In the early morning, two cars had passed. Yes, it had been remarked-first, because few cars have only one man in each, and still fewer take the mountain road to Newton Stewart across eighteen miles of terrible surface and between moors so wide and desolate that only the little wayside house of Clatteringshaws is passed before reaching the wooded vale and the sea-edge by Palnure.

'We have them now,' said the Inspector, with comfort in his tone. And they left the little borough-village behind them, came out upon a magnificent glimpse of the distant Loch of Ken, and so bore away into the solitudes.

But it was no good place for any car, new or old-and before long something in the steering gear snapped and the chauffeur stopped at the bottom of the long hill before 'Rutherford's Monument.' It became evident that (as the driver said) 'she was willing to stand up to anything in reason, but this stone-shute was fairly breaking her heart!'

Then almost they had given up hope. But Phil, arguing that what was bad for a light machine like theirs must tell much worse on cars so weighted with machinery that they would sink at the axle, called out that at any rate he was going on.

'They can't be far ahead!' he insisted.

'I'm with you!' said Grindling, 'not that I'll be able to keep up. I am carrying too much ballast, my boy, these last years!'

The Inspector wavered a moment, demanding from the chauffeur (or rather from his legs, for the speaking part of him was far under his car) how long it would take to repair the damage.

'It depends on what they can do at Dumfries,' said the man, testily. 'I told you what it would be, breaking her heart over this rattle-trap 'free toom.' Now, nobody but Penman can put this right, and for him you must go to Dumfries.'

The Inspector joined them, leaving the disgusted driver in charge of his damaged car, privately resolving to 'put on the ex's' -which Incubus & Co. would have to pay-Incubus or another, he did not care who-so long as somebody suffered.

The three men hurried forward. They gained the top of the opposite hill. For at Rutherford's monument the road corkscrews up and down in a big capital S. No one was to be seen, however-only in the distance Phil spied a tiny yellow streak on the morass. It was at least a mile away.

All else about them was empty with the wide moorland stillness which goes from the Cairnsmuir to the Loch of the Lilies, from the Back Shore to the buttresses of Little Queensberry. They went forward at a run. Two tracks were now perfectly apparent - the heavier Mercedes planing directly forward like

an eagle in flight-the lighter, yellow car, having got out of hand from the ignorance of the driver or the roughness of the road, had swooped this way and that in short dashes like a bird closely pursued.

Phil's legs began to tell. He drew away in front - the Inspector was much older-Walter Grindling both old and stouter.

'Take care!' shouted the Inspector, 'don't run your head into a trap! If it comes to taking them, we shall need three at least-now that Fox and Frost have gone off on a wild goose chase.'

But Phil was far beyond any taking of advice. With his clear young eyes he could now see the overturned yellow car, lying all abroad as on a scrap-heap -the fine upholstery scraped away in its tumble over the rocky bank beneath which the stream brawled.

In falling the petrol had escaped, caught fire, flamed up, and burned a circle on the heath, till stopped by a long moss-hag, in which the water slept deep and black. A light haze of smoke hung all about, like a pall.

But Phil saw no living creature. The others came up, and Walter Grindling and the detective examined the yellow car with attention.

'She has been struck from behind,' said the Inspector after a careful examination.

'Rammed, by Jove!' shouted Grindling as he pointed out where the nose of the big Mercedes had taken the lighter French car, and tilted it like a feather over the slope.

'I have a brother in the Navy!' he explained with pride in the use of the correct term.

But neither underneath nor anywhere about, did they find the least trace of Casimir or James Kahn.

No well-lined coat of fur was in the car, packed with banknotes, nor could they find anything among the still hot heather roots, on the blackened and powdery peat.

But somehow Phil Calmont was not satisfied. Parallel to the road ran a long deep moss-hag or deep open ditch, its sides of crumbling peat, and the cleft or nullah filled half way up with water black ink. This Phil skirted running at speed. It was no more than a couple of hundred yards in length, but as he went he became conscious that other footsteps had followed the same margin not so long ago. Moisture was slowly oozing up into the deep trodden mossy tracks. He edged off so as not to 'mix' them. And at the northern end, behind a tuft of fern and yellowish-grey bent grass Phil stumbled quite unexpectedly. He went down headlong. Sitting up, he gave one look and then set up a cry of alarm and astonishment which brought the other two at a run to his side.

What he had stumbled over was the body of James Kahn, fallen on his face, his hands stretched out as if he had been running hard, and a bullet hole neatly drilled through his head from cerebellum to the middle of his forehead.

It had been fired from behind.

CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN

THE SLAYER SLAIN

James Kahn had been murdered-killed at least. From the view of the Inspector there was no doubt as to the motive. Kahn had robbed his master, and had himself been robbed in turn. He had promised his confederate a share, and had made off while Casimir was taking the letter to Jacob Romer, which was designed to keep all quiet for twenty-four hours. With the speed at their disposal—two automobiles to their hand and the tug waiting for them within the Isles of Fleet—they had nothing to fear

Still this did not explain all the facts. Why had Kahn, if he wished to deceive an accomplice with a nature so distrustful, left his flight so late? He could easily have gone off during the night, leaving Casimir to deliver the letter and bear the brunt. An excuse for departure could easily have been found. Nor was it sufficiently evident why, if he knew that he would be immediately pursued, he should have left the swifter and more powerful machine to his adversary. A man planning his flight in quiet and coolness would hardly have made that mistake.

It was clear from the first that there was something behind all this. By the green soft spots on the moor, along the side of the long moss-hag could be seen the tracks of the hunted man. He ran waveringly, even as his car had done. He dashed from side to side, doubtless with his head down to escape from some instant danger.

The pursuer had kept a little higher, on a rougher

but dryer part of the moor-indeed almost parallel with the road. Here and there he had stood stil and taken aim! At each of these places Phil, with his eyes plunging among the heather, found the empty shell of a 7.63 mm. Mauser cordite cartridge, self-ejected from the long-barrelled pistol on the spot where the murderer had stood. Once he had evidently entirely shot away his supply of bullets. For under a bush, glistening like an innocent slat of German silver, was the little holder by which such cartridges are held till they are pressed down into the repeating reservoir.

It was a terrible thought, that chase. Phil did not trouble himself about motives, but he could see things clearly enough. This man had shot down his foe calmly. running along as an eager sportsman may run a little after game, but stopping to reload with perfect calmness. He may not even have tried to kill-at first.

Phil's imagination could see the more powerful car, hanging back a little behind, waiting for the proper spot at which to pounce and overturn its leader. Then when all was done, finding Kahn still on his feet, the man had stopped the Mercedes, had taken out his Mauser pistol, adjusted the arm-rest (so making it into a carbine) and proceeded to stalk his man. The idea-the cruelty, were not of these lands or these peoples. It was in kind neither Norman nor Celtic, Danish nor Saxon. Only the countrymen of the royal murderers of the Belgrade Konyak could have imagined anything so strange and evil-something rubbed off from the Turk, Seljuckian, not remotely allied to the ways of the fighting Asiatic.

But what had actually happened to James Kahn

is a question the solution of which cannot longer be put off. The fullest information comes from a paper written in the hand of a certain John Casimir, intimately connected with these matters, and reveals a good deal of the past history of the 'Confidential,' quite unknown to Kirktown and to the man he had followed so long.

The manuscript is of considerable length, and is written in the English of a man mentally translating from another tongue. It was addressed to 'Jacob Romer, of Gorm Castle, Esquire,' and lay for many days among a pile of letters accumulating there, the dust thickening upon it, and he daily mountain ascending over its head, as the faithful Gregson went on piling them up.

These, when the castle was sold, came ultimately into the hands of Phil Calmont-and this is what he read.

The Declaration of me, John Casimir (so-called) now in safety, made concerning a certain sudden death.

'James Kahn's name was Negotin-a Serb of old race. But his father had left him poor, having sold all his property in the valleys of the Timok and Morava to Valaques-among whom, to his sorrow, was my father. The money of my father was faithfully paid down piece by piece. But Negotin the elder, being a man given to the vanity of spending, cast away our good Wallack money with both hands, and then, being a Serb, and his people in power, would not deliver the lands. The tribunals refused to receive our testimony, or recognise the receipts, even those in the hand of Nicolai Negotin, who was James Kahn's father (his mother being a Jewess). The Negotins were the stronger on the plain lands, so

there was nothing for it but for us Valaques to take to the hills. Besides we were young-I being the eldest. But one night, the man Negotin and his son (known to you, sirs, as James Kahn) came secretly with many men and setting the house on fire-a little square tower among the mountains, made the valley as bright as day. They had Mauser a rifle, and as soon as my father and mother were slain keeping door and window, and my brothers and sisters the little ones, being frighted, ran like rabbits, I also ran. And the Negotins and their friends sat and laughed and picked them off as they ran. I alone escaped. Wounded I was in four places, but young flesh heals fast, and being the last of the Casimirs (for I shall not tell our real name) I had the greater need to take care of myself, for much lay before me to do.

'So as I grew up I earned money, and foreswore my people, making myself wholly Serb, save only in heart. I went to Serb schools when I had enough money. I sold cooling drinks at Nich and also on the streets of Belgrade-I, a Valaque of good blood. For the sake of the Negotin I did this.

'And all this while James Kahn (for I need not always change the name) and his father Nicholai Negotin were the great men. The old man could not sell his land again. For, after the affair of the little mountain tower where perished our family, it was not counted wise to deal in business matters with the Negotin.

'So they were often pressed for money. But James Kahn grew clever, as indeed he was always, taking the blood from his mother. For full-blooded Serbs are as the donkeys of the Morava-all their wisdom lies in their heels. But James Kahn was full of wit and of ways of making money-far more than I, who

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am Wallack to my backbone. And indeed I have never cared for the making of money, having quite another matter always at the back of my head.

But there was great talk and contriving about this time, to make of all the states of the easterly peninsula one great republic, very strong-so that (with perhaps England to help us with her ships) we might cast out the Turk utterly, and also prevent the Austrian or the Russian from having any say over our land. There was much to do, however, a wide propaganda to make-and for this also money was needed. We could not act without the Greeks who are in all the towns-but money can always buy a Greek. So for this also money was needed.

Then in England and America there arose Armenian Committees and Albanian Committees and Macedonian Committees. Now the purpose of these is not as with hours, to slay and cause terror but only to talk and gather money. They gathered it, more and more and sent now a little and then a little, which was good. But then other things would happen in between – an earthquake in Chili, or the destruction of a city by a boiling mountain. So the members of the Committees took their dinners elsewhere and forgot about us-who depended upon them for keeping the Greeks quiet, and for money to make the new great power in the East (a second Japan) which was to be called Bal-kania. So to quicken the English Committees, we of the Balkanian one destroyed some Christian villages which were backward in their contributions or had among them rich kinless folk who refused our rule. We blamed these outrages upon the Turks, according to custom, and wrote many reports. So that the English newspapers sent reporters, and the

Committees sent Commissioners. These had great honour, but knew nothing of the language, and the foolish Turks, knowing themselves to be innocent (for this one time) gave them passports and facilities.

'We, however, showed men's heads on poles with Turkish inscriptions underneath-which was well, for both commissioners and reporters brought with them the photographic machine which is called Kodak. And with the pictures they made-the evening light is best, they said-they stirred the flagging energies of the English and much money resulted for a time.

'But the Balkanian Committee resolved that there must go forth one who should remain in England and Scotland all the time. They chose the young Nicholaivitch Negotin-he who was called James Kahn. after the style of his mother. For he was learned in languages-also so unscrupulous that he would slay his father and then weep at the funeral, as they say in our Wallack land. A very deceitful man James Kahn or Nicholaivitch Negotin - but thanks be to the Holy Ambrose of Seraskivo there are those with the blood-debt in their hearts, who can match him .

I, John Casimir had seen the little ones run like rabbits across the snow-my brothers and my sisters-till they pitched forward, making a little red flurry in the newly fallen white. And all the while the Negotins-sons and neighbours of old Nicholai, were laughing. So shall I do to you, James Kahn- aye, and more! Your father died and lies under a monument which I defiled when last upon the Morava. But nevertheless his soul escaped me- of his children all are dead in other quarrels-escaping me also because I was then so young and learning to

be a Serb of the city. But there still remains Nicholaiivitch Negotin, which is to say James Kahn. And he shall run like a rabbit and cover his head as did the little ones my brothers and sisters, staining the snow that day at the square tower among the mountains. It may not be snow, that day when James Kahn runs. But snow or no snow I shall laugh, and my heart shall be glad within me with a joy like that of Samson slaying the Philistines!

'And the second part of my story is that which tells of my coming to Britain where are the rich Committees, and money for the asking, and the ready belief in all that they cannot see. In the home councils I had never risen high. For I am not head-clever like the Serbs, especially those with Jewish blood particularly at the making of money, which I cared not at all for. Why should I-who have always before me the sight of the little one running and running-and then stumbling, not to rise any more. But I was counted just and faithful, the first of their men of action-as indeed I am. So, at length, as but little money came to the Balkanian Committees from James Kahn, and it became known that he had entered the service of a very rich man, and rode in steam carriages of his own, the Committee sent me over 'with powers.'

I say- 'with powers.' Now in our speech that would mean but one thing. And I say not but that the Committee had that in their minds. But first of all there was the money. I must get money-all the money I could for the rising-for the State- for Balkania! Oh, yes I would get the money. But I had been sent over 'with powers.' And-and then there were the little ones falling face down in the snow. I kept them in my mind-one who had not heard the

laughter of the Negotin would have expected them to rise up again, crying a little perhaps at the tumble, but anon, breaking into laughter. But they rose nevermore--not one of them. Not even Katarina the youngest, who was too young to run long in the snow, and whom my mother gave me to carry. She it was who saved me. For the silver and enamel icon she wore, turned away one deadly bullet from me. Yet spite of all I had to leave her, dead in the snow, deaf to the laughter of the Negotin.

'Well, then, I came to England 'with powers' from the Committees of the Balkanian Republic-- not that that made any difference to Nicholaivitch Negotin, called James Kahn. Ah no, no difference at all. I had bought my Mauser in Paris as I came, and away back on the Morava I had laughed once or twice, in the deeps of the forest, just to make sure that I had not forgotten how. It was so long since I had laughed. But in the villages, on the morning that followed, they put out the yearly reward against wolves.

"The pack is gathering early this winter!' they said.

This is the third part.

'And now that all is done and well done, I will tell you everything, and send word to the man's master, that none be blamed. I cannot send back the money, because I am a man who knows not his right hand from his left in the matter of wealth. I have done my deed. God shall judge me--the sooner the better. I desire none of James Kahn's money, nor yet of that which may belong to Jacob Romer. But while there, in that place called Kirktown, serving the son of Nicholai Negotin, I knew that such money was not well come by. If I could divide it among the

men dead in the mine, and the men yet alive, perhaps I should restore it, at least in part. But I shall take no such responsibility. I will deliver it to the Committee in full meeting in Salonika after all the talebearing Greeks are purged out with care. Then I shall tell my tale, and they can do what they will with the money which I found on James Kahn. Some of it is justly the property of the Committees. I saw the papers. But I know not how much-nor do I care. I have done my day's work. And now I shall tell how.

It was known to me for many months that James Kahn (like the true son of the Negotin) was planning to rob his master. (Jacob Romer was not my master, so it was none of my business). Kahn even pretended to take me into the secret. All was to be for the rising for the Republic, for the Great Twilight-to make an end of the Turk, to found a great Balkanian state. He should be president, I his secretary. And between us-ah, between us, in the snow, even as he spoke-the little ones ran and stumbled and lay very quiet-among them. Katarina whom I loved. And I sat still and listened to the man and nodded back, seeing all this (and especially Katarina) while the man lied to me.

He smiled, and I smiled, and we said that the plan was good. And so it was. All James Kahn's plans were good-especially that by which he paid his father's debts to my father and his family in the little mountain tower among the barren hills on which the snow lay like a pall of white, drawn close up like a winding sheet! Ah, I saw it. But now I have something else to see-a hill-side too. But hold! There, I must wait for the pleasure of telling that, till it arrives in the due course of the story.

'When first I left on the Orient Express for London, to be a student in the technical colleges, and afterwards to enter into some of the mines of English iron and coal, I was given an 'ordonnance' from the committee. In it the crimes of Nicholaiivitch Negotin were recited, and my name was given as his 'shadow,' with power to act in name of the committee. Given at Salonika, it was, and signed by our greatest, the first three only with numerals, but the others with names and seals. This was all done for my own satisfaction-not that I would have depended upon that for any favour, if, in the mysteries of fate, it should be mine to wear the police bracelets on the wrist. I should have eaten it and swallowed it bit by bit, as did Peter Karageorgovitch-to whose shade be peace.

'Oh, no! But I had another use for the writing. It happened thus. James Kahn sent me with a letter to the Bank in Kirktown. I was his confidant; he and I were to escape together. He told me where the little steamer would be waiting for us. I knew that no questions would be asked on board; I knew where we should be set ashore, which is not the place of the posting of this letter nor anywhere near it. So none seek, if they do, it will be in vain.

'But deep within me, my heart said, 'Ha! ha for I knew the treachery of a Negotin-of the last of all the Negotin race. He meant to go off alone, and leave me to face the brunt of the storm he had raised.

I was aware. I may be an ignorant Valaque, as James Kahn had often told me when angry, and me a clever Serb, city-bred, and his mother a Jewess but at all events I had learned much from watching this Nicholaiivitch Negotin. I had copied him as a school a boy, eager to write, follows, tongue on the

page, the master's copy heading. I had copied the Negotin,-ah, but I was not one of them. I wil not tell you my name ; I am but a son of my father and of my mother, and the brother of my brothers and of my sisters, and especially of little Katarina, whom I loved.

Therefore I copied the Negotin.

'At Kirktown, which but for James Kahn would have been a weary place, I went upon a Sunday into one of their churches; it was chill and quiet and cold; there were no pictures nor images nor incense. The priest whom they call 'minister,' preached concerning, 'Vengeance is mine-I will repay, saith the Lord!' And only to hear him made me feel so lonesome and far away from home, as if the Morava and the hills clad with new-fallen snow were so distant, that I could never breathe that cool clear breath again. So I rose and went out of the church, as one might in my country, meaning no offence. Only the man lived in another world, and perhaps only read one half of his Bible-not the same half as our Pope Nicholas Kirin who preached to us, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' the very night before he led us down to make an end of the last Turkish colony on the Timok.

'Next day I heard that the congregation had taken it ill, and called me heathen! So little did they understand! Yet how could they? I did not understand them, and they had never heard tell of Katarina, my little sister, nor felt about one finger the tender clutch of her little hand. Bah , at times even I am a weakling!

'But not at others-I will relate.

I unscrewed and laid aside the steering wheel of the big Mercedes. It was beyond him to repair it, and

I hid the gearing well. The other machine I left all ready, and on the leather cushion of the seat, with some things of my own as if put there in preparedness for the flight, I left the 'ordonnance ' which I had received from the Committee in Salonika before I sailed. He could not miss seeing it. The language and writing would catch his eye.

Then I rode peaceably off on my cycle-a good English-made machine that I was sorry to leave behind to rust in a thicket. But I had to give him time to be gone.

It happened even as I had foreseen. James Kahn had taught me well. He had shown me how to see his wickedness and how to forestall it. He had gone away in a great hurry. Many things were tossed on the ground, but the letter of the Salonika Committee, that he had with him.

He had found it, and instantly (oh, I know-I had thought of all) there had come on him the fear of death. It is nothing to die-oh, nothing at all, only to cease to live-a twinge like the drawing of a tooth perhaps, and then the night sweeping up with wings of crepe-nothing more! That does not hurt. Therefore why should I wish merely to kill James Kahn?

'Ah, no, but to know oneself condemned to certain death, to watch, to wait, not to know where or when it will strike-that is to die really. That brings the sweat out on a strong man's brow.

'Ah, he has found the parchment-Katarina-my dearest little Katarina, the slayer is not laughing any more.

Nevertheless I wasted no time, but put the gear in its place, for I was very expert with my hands far more so than the man Kahn. I was not afraid that he would get away, only that, perhaps, he should find

courage to kill himself too soon, before I could tell him about my father and the rest. I took store of petrol and started. He had told me the way. It was a splendidly dry night, and there were only a hundred miles or so before me which, had I wished I could soon have burned under the wheels of my big Mercedes.

I had a map also, but I did not want to catch him too early; I wanted our meeting to be in a place where there would be only he and I—neither man nor beast, nor place of refuge—only above the God of Vengeance, perhaps not so ill-content with my work as the Kirktown minister would have us believe for even the Most Holy, says Pope Nicholas, must work my instruments, and a Mauser is an instrument as good as another.

‘As I say, I hung back in my chase, fearful that the very sound of my Mercedes behind might frightened him and lead him off the track. It would have spoiled my intentions badly, if, for instance, he had taken refuge in some town, or even in an inn. He knew my mission. Fear sat deadly upon him. His back was cold and his hands dripped: I could tell as much by his driving, for, being at leisure, I could get off and look at his tracks. Only going up the hills did he steady his going; elsewhere he was so afraid of making shipwreck of his machine and being left there, wounded and helpless perhaps, to wait for my coming. No, he never got his money's worth out of the yellow Frenchman.

‘Ah, had he only known, this last of the Negotin, how careful I was of him—that is, till the appointed time. Why, I could have dandled him on my knees because of my little Katarina. Not hastily would I waste him or make an end foolishly. Had he not led

the laughter that day when they drew a circle about our home?

It was at a certain little village that runs down a hill, and then up again clean whitewashed and but for the hills about, Dutch-like that he made the turn I had been waiting for. The name of it is on the map. Thereafter I knew that he was at my mercy. So I let him pass well into the country, then put the Mercedes to her best pace, and from that moment overhauled him yard by yard. He heard behind the storming rush of the big car. Presently he came in sight, driving wildly, as I had foreseen. his head being turned over his shoulder half of the time.

I waved my hand at him and shouted to encourage him as if it had been a race-I with money upon him. But in his mind there was thought of that rescript of the Balkanian Committee condemning him -or at the least leaving him to my discretion. And he looked for no better than death. That was what he had justly to expect, though not exactly as he anticipated it. nor for the same reasons.

I ran the Mercedes at his, as if to pass, and I could see his head already ducking low to avoid the bullet. Then I manoeuvred to take him behind at full speed, in which case I would have thrown him high in the air even if I had not exploded both cars. But the Mercedes ran little risk because of its great size and weight. So pleased was I with this play that the solitary house called Clatteringshaws came too soon in sight. He looked anxiously at the dyke, at the little garden, at the shark backs of purplish-grey rock. But no one came out at the noise of our racing wheels. With a yell I rushed him, and in a moment we were past and out on the moor again. Yes, I played with him as a cat does with a mouse,

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now surging along as if to end him, and anon drawing slowly off. But a mile or two further there is a curious dip in the road down which we raced. A tall obelisk doubtless set there in memory of some great fighter of times long past—perhaps the Black George of Galloway—crowned a little heather mount to the right.

I could see the yellow French car slacken speed as it took the hill opposite. On the contrary the weight of my Mercedes carried her to the top with unabated force. He needed fuel, too, and was beginning to know it. Before me I saw the wide country spread to a horizon of low whale-backed ridges with the rocks I have spoken of (called 'clints'), all about—a dreary place, but fit for my work—that which the little cold hands of Katarina on my wrists called me to do. There was also a long ditch showing black among the turfy heather, all gashed into deep cracks and proper for my purpose as if it had been made so. As, sayeth Pope Nicholas, it was indeed. I have confessed to him already since my return, for he is high in the Committees.

Then because it was time to end I caused the heavy Mercedes to sweep up abreast of the lighter French car, from the right side. It was a narrow way. Fair on the chassis a little before the rear wheel I struck, and our weight and force turned the yellow car over into a little ravine. But Nicholaivitch Negotin, who was James Kahn, stood on his feet and leaped, casting his coat in which was the plunder of his master well before him. He landed fair, and stooped to gather up his treasure. But seeing my face, as I think, under the crook of his arm, he left all and fled for his life.

'Truly' sayeth our Papa Batuskin, the holy

Nicolas, 'all that a man hath will he give for his life.' He saw me stand up in the Mercedes, fitting the stock upon the Mauser pistol. He screamed and ran. I laughed

It sounded curious, even to myself, in that lonely place. You see, there was only I, the quiet clerk known to you as John Casimir. All of mine were dead, so they could not laugh-at least not aloud. But the curious thing is that as I drove the nickel cartridges off the little band of bent metal, I felt the little cold fingers which I had always had on my wrists slide upwards, helping me to press them into the reservoir. That must have been the little Katarina, whom I loved greatly.

Then there began that pursuit which will live with me all my days; that, indeed, for which I had prayed-if such as I can pray. Now James Kahn had lived hotly, and accordingly he was no match for me at the running-no more than his French car had been, so I ran higher on dryer ground, and, pausing occasionally shot high and low and every way about him. It is no child's tale to spin by the Christmas fireside, so I will make it short. He ran and screamed; and I-well, I ran the faster till he was all out of breath, finding however, the time to tell him over his shoulder of that day among the mountains, to remind him of his laughter and his father's; of the little ones who ran to seek the safety they never found, and of Katarina-especially of Katarina. And he hid his face and screamed-ah, as none of ours had done. The he came to the head of a long black gully filled with water; half-full it was, or a little more. As he made the half turn to save himself across the moor, I ran close beside him, keeping alongside like a friend; he had no life left in him,

scarcely even to beg for mercy. I do him this justice. I do not think that he did-knowing it altogether useless and vain (he held the document of the Committees in his inner pocket. I found it afterwards. That it was which took the spirit out of him, as it would out of almost any man).

Then I bade him laugh as he had done that red day of the white snow, from behind the boulders towards which the children ran, my brothers and my sisters.

‘And lo! he did it, hearing through his deadly fear my voice, as a condemned soldier hears the word of command which orders the platoon to fire.

Yes, he laughed, as when little Katarina dropped sideways across my shoulders. Yes, he laughed, running and laughing, believe me who will: It is true, and as he turned sideways at the end of the water-gorge, I shot him quietly and steadily, as if taking aim at a target. And then, for the first time, for years, the grasp of those cold little fingers dropped from off my wrists!’

CHAPTER THIRTY EIGHT

THE WRONG MAN

This narrative comes here in the proper place where it has been inserted by the editor of these memoirs. But of course, Phil Calmont, Walter Grindling and the inspector did not give up the search when they found the body of James Kahn: they did not know these things till long afterwards. On the hill-top the Inspector got hold of a small herd-boy whom he sent to the stationmaster at Dromore with a message. A hearse was to be wired for, and taken with relays of hones to the rail at Dalmellington-thence back to Kirktown.

'They will never believe,' he said, 'unless they see him with the hole in his head and the plumes nodding about him!'

The three went on, having covered the dead man carefully with the thick waterproof apron of the wrecked car. They placed a stone at each corner and so left him. Be sure that no one on that Galloway moor would have disturbed his rest for all the Romer fortune, even had it been there and untouched.

So the three continued their search. They could well leave their own car behind with their late angry chauffeur: they had only a few miles before them ere the wild hill track turned into the great Galloway shore-road, and they saw before them the town of Newton-Stewart smoking beneath its range of heights.

But Phil made them turn the other way. Creetown-the tug waiting between the Isles of Fleet

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and the mouth of the Cree, pointed clearly the road to the end of their search.

In front of an inn there was something of a crowd, as crowds go in Galloway; that is, two or three women, one man, and a dozen boys with satchels on their backs.

There was also the Mercedes car, standing on the road, and, half appearing beneath it, half lost unswayed the big power-box in front, were the legs of a man.

It was almost with a cheer that the Inspector, certain capture and a probable great trial before him, rushed forward, shouting, 'We have him - we have him now!'

Walter Grindling took one leg of the hidden man. The Inspector hauled at the other.

The man backed out eagerly. Apparently he did not wish to hide himself. On the contrary they heard a voice from under the machinery, which declared an immediate intention of assault battery, upon all and sundry as soon as he could at them.'

But at this they only dragged the more. The murderer of James Kahn was certainly a dangerous man-vigorous too in an uncommon degree. The Inspector summoned all good citizens to assist in the capture on pain of dreadful legal penalties. This however, only resulted in the prompt disappearance of the sole adult male Gallovidian, while even the women retreated within their doorcheeks, from whence they called to their offspring shrilly.

'Tammy, come here this meenit, or I'll tak' the hide off a' you!'

'Peter'-'Jim'-'Bob' -'Andra!' All were summoned, and all with one mind disobeyed. Such a thing did not happen in Creetown every day and there were

cases when maternal wrath might be safely discounted-as when there was something big to talk over with the neighbourhood-that is with the other vociferating mothers. So Peter, Jim, Andra and Bob, stayed on.

The man beneath crawled out backwards, muttering many five syllabled words in a foreign tongue. He was strong, able-bodied, and the kicks that he launched backwards at his captors, even before he got a sight of them, evidenced the excellent state of his training and general health.

He came out suddenly as a cork from a bottle. The next moment the Inspector went backwards, nearly taking the heel of a Wellington boot with him, and Walter Grindling sat groaning, nursing himself and speaking at large.

For Vic Morris towered over them both, irate, a solid screw-key in his hand.

'Now, what the thirty-one diablos do you mean by that?' he shouted. 'For one farthing sterling I would lay this wrench about your ears. You, Grindling, what do you mean? Eh, stand up, man. Explain! I never had any quarrel with you! Phil Calmont! Who is that windlestraw with the dog-collars?'

'Submit! In the name of the law!' cried the Inspector, advancing with a pair of handcuffs of the most recent description, and though a brave man, wishing that the criminal had not possessed such a powerful muscular development.

'Submit, indeed!' cried Vic, and with one movement of his hand he sent the shining bands of steel glittering and serpentine over the roofs of the nearest house. It is true that the houses of Creetown are not very high.

Inspector Henderson was very angry, as who,

indeed, would not be. Vic put his clenched fist down under the detective's nose by way of temporary certificate of character.

'Tell them, Phil, who I am!' he said. 'I have come off a Tharsis copper brig-got sick at Bilbao and needed a holiday. The 'old man' put in here under stress. By that time I had had enough of the sea, and so got ashore--'

'But what of the car?' cried Inspector Henderson, foaming with rage; 'we don't want to hear this rigmarole--!'

'Well, you've got to hear it-you asked for it you know!' said Vic, with strong common sense.

The inspector's hands trembled so much that he could hardly show Vic his little gold badge of office while Phil explained the quality of each to the other. His words were as oil on the waters.

'Oh, all right,' said Vic, easily, 'only don't go hauling an able-bodied man from under a sixty horse power Mercedes, and then expect him to bless you, because he won't-you hear me? Besides, he might have something in his hand which will hurt somebody. I very nearly did!'

'How did you come by this machine?' said Inspector Henderson: 'and how do you prove your identity, and the length of your stay in this country. It is a case of murder!'

Vic whistled.

'Oh, then, I apologise,' he said. 'But really, I couldn't stand those handcuffs! I don't play wi' such toys. As for the car, a young, darkish man explained that he was going on to join a ship, which had put in at Rascarrel, I think he said, for Heavy Spar. He told me that this Mercedes was Mr. Kahn's and that it needed a repair or two-also driving back to

Kirktown. Would I undertake it, as I had been with the firm? I don't know how he knew. 'Well rather,' I said: 'there or thereabouts! 'Why, the job just suited me. I told him that I saw she had been over some rough country, but nothing to hurt; I would take her home and glad of the chance. You see, I am a working engineer, as either of these gentlemen will tell you-Grindling after he has had a drink. Well, I was repairing the thing when you came along and began hauling me out. There was no trouble before that.'

'And the young man-which way did he go?' inquired the Inspector.

'Oh, any of these good people will tell you. I did not bother any more about him. I knew it was Mr. Kahn's machine, and that I was in luck to get my fingers on the driving gear of a Big 'Un. But anybody in Creetown will tell you. It was sometime yesterday, you see!'

At this the Inspector cast up his shoulders with a hopeless gesture.

'Then it is no use!' he cried; 'we may as well go home.'

In spite of this, however, he made his inquiries. Oh, yes, the men drawled as they lounged in disinterested attitudes about their doors. Each had been watching all the time with a corner of a little tuck of white lace curtain lifted-the same which obscured the bottom panes of every little window all down the long street. The good wives, however, were more voluble.

'A decent foreign lad?' they asked magnanimously. 'Certainly, he had been there but had not stayed.'

A saturnine woman, landlady of a hotel in a

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neighbouring Fleet village, interposed that she knew nothing about it, having just come over for a day's pleasuring, but that in her opinion, no foreigners whatever were decent. As for her, she was glad to be able to explain that she knew nothing about it.

'Then hold your tongue till you get to Gatehouse!' said the Inspector, whose mood by this time was by no means unruffled.

'He had a bonny big muckle coat ower his airm,' called out a little woman, who had come down some steps carrying a broom, in case there should be further violence; 'he was takkin' terrible care o't. I wadna wonder if it were worth the maist pairt o' five pond!'

'Hoots awa', Mistress!' cried the jealous crowd, 'ye are aye i' the mune, Mistress Elfie!'

But the Inspector had taken to Mistress Elfie at first sight. Here was a woman of restrained statement, who had actually seen the murderer, could tell about him with details.

Yes, he had gone on in a hurry-she thought toward the granite quarries. There had been a boat hanging off and on for several days. Her man worked at Sir James's-Cassencarie-she meant - and a grand maister he was. Mr. Elfie had seen it from the Pier, and was of opinion that it was waiting to pick up a muckle copper ore brig. But this young man had got off the Spanish boat, had been at the Hotel a couple of days-a very decent young lad before the dark foreigner had gone on board the tug!

But already the Inspector had had enough of Mrs Elfie.

'Can you run me along?' he demanded of Vic Morris, 'I want to see the place where they must

have taken him up.'

Then as Vic was getting ready to obey this second call of the law in the person of the man he had lately assaulted, Mistress Elfie cried out, 'Yonder's oor Weelum, ye had better tak' him wi' ye in yon 'fuff fuff machine.' He kens a' about it. For he handed in the bonny fur coatie after the young gentleman Aye, an' he gied him a' the coppers he had, sayin that he wad hae nae farther use for them; aye, kimmers, and there was a sovereign amang them! Na, na, Mistress McNae, Weelum's nane gaun to gie it back. Geein's geein! And gettin's keepin!'

The Inspector intimated that if Weelum would only guide them to the spot, nothing would be said about so small a matter as an English sovereign.

Weelum being pushed by his wife into the big Mercedes, without rightly understanding the why and the wherefore of the business, repeated over and over: 'As decent and saft-spoken a young man...'

'Hold your tongue,' said the Inspector, 'show us the spot where they took him on board!'

'Stop noo then!' cried Weelum to Vic on the driving seat. They slowed and stopped before a long, rough, stone pier, about which the muddy water of an estuary was bubbling and swirling. Across the road and under the brow of a hill, comfortable among thick trees, stood a large white house with a corner tower.

'That's the exact spot where the boat was waitin', there to the left,' said Weelum; 'three men in her, and gye and angry they were at being keepit sae lang, but he had that in his pooch that wad quiet them, I'll wager. I saw the man at the bow oar bite on something before ever he wet his blade i' the

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water. Aye, I bit on mine, too. It was good. He was a fine young man, though a furreneer!’

‘Let me see the coin,’ said the Inspector, unguardedly.

‘I’m rale vexed, but it’s spent,’ said Weelum Elfie (whose full name in baptism was Elphinstone).

‘But I dinna mind in what shop! I got nineteen and eleven change. Here’s the change!’

The search for the slayer of the slain was ended.

That same afternoon Vic Morris, having, as he said, ‘tinkered her to rights,’ put them through all the

long way to Kirktown, hearing from Phil, as he sat beside him, the astonishing news of the overturn in the fortunes of the greatest men in that village.

Vic Morris listened, his eyes on the various ‘bags of tricks’ with which the Mercedes was abundantly supplied. These interested intensely one part of his brain, but he was quite wide awake to every word Phil was saying. He made comments too.

‘Took him down to her own room, did she? And has tended him good ever since! I call that-well, I don’t know what to call it. I hope I shall think of a word before I see her!’

Again this was what Vic Morris said when, he was told of the present position of mining affairs at Portogarten Cove.

‘Your ‘hole’ paying its way already! Old Carron seam! Well, I’ll favour you with a call and a look over. I may put you on to something; I’ve had lots of ‘opening-up’ experience lately; Spain is the country for that But first and foremost I must call and pay my respects to Vida.’

He took the Christian name on his tongue too trippingly to please Phil, so much so, tha kindness

of the previous offer was lost upon him. He growled out a rejoinder, which was equally thrown away on the forceful engineer, used to living his life and thinking his own thoughts.

'She is much occupied with her father, Mr. Romer!' said Phil, 'if you come up to the mine first, I shall be happy to go down with you!'

'Gently, old lady,' (Vic was speaking to Mercedes, booming too closely round a corner. 'No, Phil, I will drop in on Vida all by my little and don't say a word. I trust you. I'm going take this round to Kahn's old place, and find a shed to sleep in somewhere, as I've only a bag along. I want my surprise party to begin tomorrow; not before!')

All this alarmed Phil--needlessly, of course, by then, of all Kirktown, only a certain minister's daughter, with a certain quite unusual colour of eye was in the secret of Mr . Ludovic Morris's recent private correspondence. But Phil was not going to let Vic give himself a cold if he could help it. After all he was his old chief, the first man who had given him a start. And if he went to see Vida alone--well it would be a poor love prospect if he could not trust Vida. Still he felt distinctly uncomfortable, till he had arranged with Grindling that the Mercedes should be installed at his place for the night.

The Inspector, though without any real hope of entrapping Vic as an accomplice, was nevertheless loath to lose him so quickly from sight. So both were to stay the night with Grindling, but nobody was to say a word of Vic's arrival in Kirktown .

They skirted the village by the high Gorm Castle avenue, now beginning to be somewhat grass-grown in spite of the manful efforts of Abram Fyfe, who had everything now to attend to.

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Presently they were at Grindling's, and Phil, on his way to the new mine on the Heugh, borrowed a cycle from the acting Superintendent, took some telegrams for the Inspector to the Post Office, and so rode anxiously on to the 'shack' which he occupied till the manager's house was finished. All was in order when he reached it before nightfall.

He ran to the flagstaff, and looked down at the little white house in the Cove. Far below was a fluttering array of bunting on Dick Finnan's mast.

'John Knox!' exclaimed Phil, 'it will take me a week to spell out all that!'

All the same he got his loose, well-thumbed code, and presently was at his task. Even with the second word something familiar tickled him. The next two decided him, and he threw down the book with a joyous laugh; it was Nelson's famous signal. She had had it all fixed and ready for him against his return.

'ENGLAND EXPECTS EVERY MAN TO DO HIS DUTY.'

He ran to the bunting cases in the 'shack,' and, in a moment more was hoisting the flags as fast as he could attach them to the halliards.

'CERTAINLY, AM COMING DOWN AT ONCE.'

In this way he would forestall Vic Morris, and he hugged himself on his wisdom in sending Vic to spend the night at Walter Grindling's under the stern eye of Inspector Henderson.

CHAPTER THIRTY NINE

VIC GOES VISITING

It was into the buzzing, question-asking, astonished world of Kirktown that Vic Morris looked on the morrow. He had put Grindling under pains and penalties not to reveal his presence-till the time should come. What that precise moment was to he did not deign to explain. It had some connection with certain visits he was going to pay. He had come a long way to do it. The business must not now be 'mulled.'

'Going to apply for the late Mr. Kahn's position?' broke in, not unkindly, Walter Grindling. They were now alone, for the baffled Inspector had been off by the first train.

'Purissima!' cried the engineer, 'but that's not at all a bad idea. Only it would be on conditions!'

'Getting your own way-a free hand, and so on,' said Grindling; 'well, the four directors are to be here tomorrow afternoon. If I were you, I should at least see them.'

'Can't,' said Vic, decidedly, 'I've an appointment for that day!'

'An appointment!' Walter Grindling was mystified, 'and you might be the acting head boss of Incubus and give us all the sack!'

'Oh,' said Vic, lightly; 'there's a job waiting for me out yonder where I come from. I'm not aching to be back in Kirktown.'

'Quarrelled?' said Grindling, arching his eyebrows, with the ghost of a wink.

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Vic Morris bent his brows upon him. His strong nose seemed to hook more broadly and fiercely than ever.

'No,' he said, 'I haven't quarrelled-yet! 'But you and I will, if you talk like that.'

'I meant no harm, I'm sure,' said Grindling; 'I tell you what, Morris, if you really mean that you won't apply for the management of the Incubus properties, well then, I will do it for you! I can quite understand that you mightn't like to do it when on a holiday-getting pay, and so on-'

'Not a cent!' said Vic, sharply. 'I'm looking round a bit 'on my own,' as our friend, lately departed, would have said. Thank you very much, but I would rather-'

'Look here,' said Grindling, suddenly, 'you don't want McKill to get the running of all these hundreds of men-a pretty thing that would be!

He would stop every improvement-and...'

'No, I should not want that,' said Vic, slowly, 'but why not yourself?'

'Oh,' said Grindling, with a sigh. 'I know my limitations and the name I get; I'm quite content. I could work with you, though. I can stand booting as well as the next man-that is, if the booter tells me what he is booting me for! But not McKill! That would break my heart. I say, Morris, suppose that the thing is offered to you-your Spanish people can't complain! What would you do?'

'I should consider it!' said Vic, knitting his brows.

'Well, that's enough for me-see there!'

Grindling swept his hand across all the red brick blocks of houses, all marked out as on a plan, down on the panorama of Kirktown spread below. 'I don't savvy myself much in the way of goodness, but it's a

plump up-and-down fact that I've had to fight for every improvement, every shilling of outlay on the pits, on the houses, oh-ah, well, there! You'll say I'm a queer specimen to be talking 'goody' like this, when-what is it they call my character? So frivolous. That keeps me out of the berth would give to McKill-good name for him too- is, if you don't let me stick up for you tomorrow with those four director fellows.'

'Humph,' said 'Vic, 'you act a lot better you talk! It's not common, Grindling.' He held out his hand. 'Shake,' he said. And quite gravely they took hands, gripping hard.

'Now,' said Vic Morris, 'kindly put your head in a bag, Grindling, just to oblige! I'm going to pay a visit, and, if you are asked, I want you to be able to say that you don't know where.'

'I could say that anyway!' grinned Walter Grindling.

'But not with the same conviction. It's hard to coerce a man in his own house,' Vic went on; 'here's the smoking-room that looks right on a brick wall with ivy on it. In with you, Grindling and don't set your nose out for twenty good minutes. You hear me?'

Again Walter Grindling smiled. He thought he knew exceedingly well where Vic Morris was go. But as the wise reader, of course, knows, he never more mistaken in his life.

Still there was a mystery surrounding the movements of Vic Morris. In face of a certain correspondence, he might have been expected betake himself directly to the Manse of the Valley.

Quite on the contrary he borrowed a trap from stables of the long-suffering Grindling and drove

over to the little village which nestled in the cove Portogarten, hiding some few hundreds of yards round the rugged coast and out of sight of the Promontory of Rough Island, and the cottage of two veteran amateurs in lighthouse-science, pharology, or whatever might be the name given to the common hobby of Billy and Dick.

True, Vic had been ready early, and there was no chance of seeing Janet under any circumstances favourable to private conversation before the afternoon. Still, with all his desire for secrecy, and his wish to arrive unknown in the village of Kirktown, it was somewhat strange that he should go all the way to Portogarten Cove without having seen again the sapphire, eyes with the sparks in them, about which he had written so much and often.

But Vic always had a reason for everything, though it was but seldom he troubled anybody else with that reason. Still, it sometimes appeared in the after course of circumstances.

Yes, Mr. Ludovic Morris was going to call on Vida. He might have said to his host that he was going over to see the new lighthouse, and Walter Grindling would have believed as much of that as he liked. But it was characteristic of Vic that he said nothing at all, made no apologies, not even to himself—which is the rarest thing of all, many men and most women passing their time in nothing else than explaining themselves to themselves. Vic was less complicated. He had something to say to Vida; he therefore went and said it. To anyone else it would have been difficult, but not to Vic Morris. He had never been able to understand the gulf between Willing and Doing; that is, unless the devil or the deep sea

intervened. And he had just crossed the one and did not much believe in the other, having completely threshed out that subject with Mr. Fowler of the Valley Kirk.

Accordingly he put up Walter Grinrlling's spirited nag at the little Portogarten Inn, and strolled round the headlands to the house with the cropped hedges, the white paths, the green borders, the flower beds and the pervading air of the ship-shape neatness. He came upon a tall flagstaff with a girl hauling at a string of bunting which seemed almost part of the outfit.

The young man came up behind the girl with his soft, elastic step, the catlike walk of big men.

'Hallo, Miss-ah, Vida, I beg your pardon. I can't get over the new name-let me help you! I suppose you are communicating with Dick and Mr. Bryan on the lighthouse-which means that you are alone!'

It was not often that Vida blushed. It was, perhaps, the first time that such a thing (in the memory of the editor) is recorded in this history; but at any rate she now blushed for all the other times. 'Red as a rose was she'--red indeed! Crimson!

From the first Vic regarded her with anxious eyes. He was not blind; he could see the wonderful beauty of the girl, and how some secret happiness had caused her to open out into a flower which bade fair to fulfil the budding promise of her youth.

But what he said was certainly very curious.

'Poor Janet!'

That was all. To the ordinary mind the exclamation conveyed but one thing, that he had come back with a mind in a strait betwixt two, and that the very first sight of Vida in the flesh had banished the memory of Janet Fowler's letters. They

had seemed treasures to him in far-away Spain, as he listened to the shout of the sailors rising up from the Nervion quays, or the tinkle of the mandolines which in summer are never silent in the sheltered patios of Huelva. All that, however, had been as a dream of the night. The day-star had arisen. 'Poor Janet,' indeed!

But it was not for the world to know Vic Morris. No ordinary rules of conduct bound him. And as for the signification of the involuntary exclamation, that is still to seek.

They stood mutely regarding one another, Vida and Vic; each with a secret in their hearts. But the man's gaze was calm and untroubled. He meant to carry through his programme to the letter; he was convinced of its righteousness, of its necessity. Therefore, being the man he was, nothing could move him from his intent.

The girl, on the other hand, blushed and blushed-above all things conscious of the import of that chain of coloured flags above her. Vic had fixed the knot in an exceedingly unworkmanlike way; not so much that he did not know how, as because he was looking at the girl before him.

'You are all alone?' he asked, simply and without the least shame. 'That is good, I want to speak to you.'

'My father is sitting upstairs in his room,' she answered; 'he is getting better, but cannot move yet; Mr. Romer, I mean! I suppose you have not heard!'

Vic nodded. 'Yes,' he had heard. 'Certainly, Miss Romer,' he hurried on. 'But the other two are at the lighthouse, then I can speak with you. I have much to say. I left Kirktown rather in a hurry; you may have noticed. Since then I have had time to reflect,

bitterly, long. And now I have come to ask you to forgive me!

Vida looked at him, paling slowly to the whiteness of unbleached linen, which is as far as her complexion would carry her in that direction.

'Forgive you?' she murmured, dreading what was coming. 'I do not understand.'

'Certainly,' said Vic Morris, firmly. 'I acted both wrongly and hastily; I have come to say so. I have reflected-I tell you, and here I am-determined to do right.'

They were in the exact spot where-well-where Phil and she were accustomed to 'redd out' their quarrels and-the rest. Whatever Vic Morris had to say to her, Vida could not bear to hear it under that rowan tree at the corner of the house. That was Phil's and hers. Its leaves seemed to whisper of many things-worse than the flags.

'Will you come indoors-into the parlour?' she said, 'then I shall be able to thank you-for- for saving my life.'

'Saving your life!' cried Vic, with great astonishment, 'yes, so I did. But it wasn't that!'

This made the girl wonder yet more what the mighty secret could be which could make such an act as that of Vic Morris's in No. 2 Pit seem but little, easily forgotten thing.

They entered the little parlour, gay as usual with fresh flowers. Phil sent them down to her every morning or brought a bunch each evening. He plundered Rose Nunsby's garden on purpose. The furniture was old but solid, and Vida had so polished it that under her hands it had attained the soft gloss of old mahogany-one of the most beautiful tints in the world. The window was open, and Vida,

indicating a chair for Vic Morris, sat herself down at the window, within sight of the fluttering flags—which in the code of love, contained a final message for Phil perched on the heights of his cliff a mile away.

Vic Morris was a resolved man, and rather oblivious of impressions, others than those which affected his immediate purpose. He could not feel mood and tenses like Phil, especially feminine ones. He knew if a crowd of workmen were plotting mischief and had his own way of dealing with such; but a girl—well, her thoughts did not affect his very directly. It seemed hardly worth while. So it was hidden from him that now Vida was possessed by a strong preoccupation.

‘Miss Br-Romer,’ began Vic, speaking sharply and rather unexpectedly, so suddenly indeed that he made Vida jump. ‘I have behaved very badly to you. You had a right to expect other things of me?’

‘How so?’ said Vida, ‘I was quite unconscious of anything of the sort.’

‘Of course I knew you would say that,’ he continued, ‘it is what is called right and womanly. But I have my own standards, and I know that I have behaved ill to you.’

‘To behave ill is, I suppose, to save a person's life at the risk of one's own,’ Vida was resolved to take it smiling.

‘It is,’ reiterated Vic firmly; ‘it is when a man runs away without performing his responsibilities!’

Vida became more and more amazed. She could not make out what the man was driving at. And the shame of that fluttering signal, which she had meant merely to hoist and then to lower, it made her blush anew. Yes, even when she could see it she

felt it like a shameful sunshine all down her back.

'CAPTAIN TO TAKE COMMAND THIRTIETH WITHOUT FAIL.'

She had picked the words one by one in her code, and it was the answer to the query which Phil had put to her the night before. In fact, Vida was fixing the date of her marriage! She had been pleased with the device when she had first thought of it. Especially with that studied dubiety as to which of the two was to be captain! Phil would taste that; she knew Phil. But now, under the firm gaze of Vic Morris, it all seemed a little silly.

But after all, he could not see it from where he sat. But what in the name of fortune had he come to say to her? He was as grave as twenty judges; as, indeed, well he might, for he was condemning himself without measure.

'I am seriously to blame-most seriously,' said Vic Morris, 'and I have come to ask your pardon if you are willing to forgive me. Somewhat thoughtlessly, I admit, I contracted responsibilities, but I will perform them gravely and truly!'

And there was not the least doubt that he would.

'Captain to take command thirtieth without fail- - fail-fail-fail!' The words rang in her ears above Vic's measured periods. What could the man be talking about?

'Yes-yes,' she answered him, a little fretfully, 'go on, please, or I must go up to my father.'

She could see from the window that no answering signal had been hoisted in front of the Portogarten manager's house-now in process of construction. And that meant, if it meant anything, that she might expect the incursion of a rejoicing Phil, a radiant Phil, a Phil who would be perfectly unrecognisable to

his former superior, sitting there and letting the words fall measuredly from his lips.

'Please don't interrupt me,' she heard him say. 'I have a difficult task to perform, but I mean to go through with it. It may cause pain to both of us—yes—great pain, but at any rate you shall have no reason to complain of me, if I can help it.'

(Bless the man, she had never dreamed of doing such a thing. Who did he think he was?)

Still he had saved her life, so she must listen as patiently as might be. It was his due. Only she did wish that those wretched flags were down, or that Phil would not make some idiotic answer which would be read from the lighthouse.

'Interrupt you, Mr. Morris,' she said, squinting up at the flagstaff on the Heugh; 'certainly not!'

All the same she did not know what she was promising.

'Vida,' he said, 'I think I may call you that—'

'Bless me,' she thought, 'the man is going to propose after all. He has come from Spain to do it! They all begin that way. They should be told not to!'

But Vic Morris went on remorselessly, without divining one of her thoughts, as Phil would have done (dear Phill!), or, indeed, without caring very much what these might be, even if they had been printed out plainly from a 'ticker' for his edification.

'I have to reveal to you my reasons for seeking this interview,' said Vic, looking straight into the girl's face. 'I have but little reason to be proud of them; but, at least, I will make a clean breast of it, and then you can do what you like in the matter.'

'This man is completely out of his mind,' decided Vida.

'Yes,' went on Vic, talking to himself, 'there was a

time when I believed that I loved you--'

'Now for it,' thought Vida, and had a consoling glimpse at the flag-staff-still blank.

'Indeed I may say I did love you. I even allowed you to see it. I went everywhere in order to be with you. I went to church-'

'Lawks-a-mussy now. Think o' that!' murmured Vida, after the manner of her charwoman, one Dame Betty Broadfoot, who came to do the morning's house-work, and much diverted the young mistress of the house with her exclamations. But Vida did not let the young man with the broad shoulders and the granite face hear her. She knew better. So he proceeded unchecked and confident.

'Yes, I came night after night to your cottage- Dick Finnan's cottage at the Glebe End, that is. I am aware that I excited comment by doing so; but then I thought that all time was before me. I did not hasten to speak-'

'The dear man,' murmured Vida, admiringly, 'just like them all; thinks he is the only one in the world!'

And she stole another glance up at the top of the Heugh. But still no band of fluttering colour was blowing out for her to decipher. Either Phil had not got her message, or, leaving the Portogarten Mine to look after itself, at that moment he was tearing down the slopes towards the cottage. She wanted to tell Vic Morris to get on-to give him a push-he was so slow. For Phil was as likely as not to hurl himself bodily into the open window and put his arms about her neck without saying 'By your leave.' She knew Phil.

She blushed again; she also moved a little farther from the window, but did not close it.

'Poor, poor Janet!' was again the unspoken

thought of Vic Morris, accompanied by a heavy sigh.

'Yes,' he continued bravely, 'I ought to have spoken-to have asked you to marry me! Yes, I had no right to run away like that, I acknowledge it. My duty was clear and I have come back to perform it-!'

And he threw his head back with a kind of noble air which annoyed the girl exceedingly.

'Mr. Morris,' began Vida, half rising.

'Hear me out-hear me out!' Vic Morris put up an authoritative hand, 'you promised! Of course you do right to be angry. But hear me out. I went away, however, fleeing from what ought to have been my pride and my pleasure. And I can hardly bring myself to tell you the rest-what followed!'

'Bless me,' thought Vida, 'has he killed somebody too?'

'During the time that I was in Spain,' Vic Morris went on, 'a correspondence grew up between myself and a young lady of this neighbourhood; followed, I fear, at least on my side, by a change in my affections-of my feelings with regard to you!'

Vida was too astonished to utter a word. Vic hurried on breathlessly, getting over the ground, lest he should be interrupted.

'But DUTY, DUTY, Miss Vida, is before all other things with me. Accordingly, as soon as I had heard of your father's misfortune, I started to do what I ought to have done before-offer you a good home and a faithful husband! I love another, it is true; that is my misfortune, not my fault. But you need have no fear. She shall never know it, and I will gladly subordinate my happiness, in order that you and yours may know a happy home. Love I would gladly give if I could. Once I thought that the feelings were under the control of the will of a determined

man. I have found out my mistake. But I am a man of duty, Miss Romer. True, I love another. It is best to be frank, but all the same it is my duty to make this offer to you, and I do make it in all honesty of resolve and purpose!

There was not the least reason to doubt it. But just at this moment the little French window was driven in two halves, and Phil Calmont leaped into the parlour. Coming straight and breathless out of the sunshine, he did not for the moment see Vic. The last accents of the dutiful and noble speech of the engineer had died away among the dull mahogany furniture, so that there was silence.

The next moment Phil had Vida in his arms.

'Oh, you darling!' he was saying, 'how good of you! To promise to marry me on the thirtieth! Oh, you-! Of course the house won't be ready, but I can get a substitute up at the Pit and we will have a long tour-Italy, Florence, Rome, Naples, and home by Switzerland. How's that? I deserve it-Eh-what? Who the-Vic Morris, by the Lord of the Isles!'

They gazed in mutual astonishment. But Vic Morris was not cast down. Far from it-Vic Morris's feet were dancing a little double shuffle. He could not keep them still for joy.

'I see, I see!' he exclaimed, 'I have come the day after the fair. You don't want to marry me then, Vida? You never did?'

'Well, hardly,' said that young person, demurely, 'it isn't legal, you know. Or at least it won't be after the thirtieth! Besides, there is that change in your affections--'

'Don't laugh,' he said, seriously, 'I will be Phil's substitute for your honeymoon, or find him one, if you let me off! I know it's a lot to ask, if you don't

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make a laughing stock of me. I don't ask it for my own sake. What an ass I have made of myself! Oh, I say, what an ass! How you must have laughed! I shall laugh too-by-and-by!

'Tell us who the girl is,' said Vida, 'and we won't tell either-we promise.'

'Oh,' cried Vic, 'it scared me stark I tell you coming out here and jawing away to you solemn as an owl. I made dead sure you would have me-'

'Thank you!' said Vida, very drily.

'But for the-the other lady-I really can't tell in the least whether she will have me or not. She is always laughing at me. She may send me by the board as you have done.'

'Which of you wrote the longest letters and answered quickest?' said Phil. It was a problem which pleased his sense of feminine probabilities.

'She did,' said Vic, promptly. 'She is much cleverer.'

'Then she will have you, Morris. Go where glory waits you.'

Vic held out his hand-both his hands to Vida and Phil, one each.

'I'm not sure whether you have broken my heart or made me the happiest man in the world,' he said. 'I'll tell you tomorrow-oh, this afternoon, I mean. I have Grindling's trap down there in the village. But that is such a beast of a way! Takes such a time.'

'Here is Grindling's bicycle,' said Phil, 'take that and get it over. I will drive the trap back in the afternoon and hear the news!'

'Who is she-oh, don't go like that? Tell us- tell me! Who is she?' called out Vida, beseechingly.

'Janet Fowler,' said Vic, jumping on the cycle Phil had been riding, and making off up the hill without

waiting for comments on his announcement.

'Well, I never!' cried the girl, who after all was like other girls; 'what can he see in her?'

'Probably,' said Phil, gently retaking his place, and speaking softly in her ear, 'very much what I see in you!'

And they were content to let it go at that—other things more immediate occupying their joint attention.

CHAPTER FORTY

THE WISDOM OF THE WISE

Vic Morris rode away from Portogarten, rapidly at first, but, though he was in the finest training and the loaned machine suited him to a marvel, he gradually went slower and slower till he could almost have walked as fast. Vida's easy dismissal of his offer-the completeness of Phil Calmont's victory had robbed him of his self-confidence.

That had always been his stronghold-his sequence, his four aces, his 'Austrian Army Awfully Arrayed,' as Janet had explained to him more than once. He remembered the last expression. He thought it sounded like Shakespeare. Vic Morris had never failed in anything before. Of course they had 'fired' him from the Incubus pits, but then anybody who does his work too well to please other people, must expect that. So Vic did not mind being simply 'fired.' His pride was not hurt by what man could do to him. But woman, girls-they were another matter. He had, as he said 'slipped up' with Vida. She had been laughing in her sleeve at him, him, Vic Morris, who up till now had always had his own way-or taken it. How had he? Why, by crashing through all peevish oppositions, with his head down, like a bull charging a hazel-coppice whose parted shoots smart his flanks.

But suddenly, from Vida's attitude, he conceived a dread of what was before him. The nearer to Kirktown he got, the less did he desire to enter without preparation into the presence of Janet of the

Eyes of Live Sapphire. He called to mind her letters. One by one he conned them. He remembered whole passages. Yes, sitting in the Hotel Colon or up on the brown sides of the Sierra, they had seemed pretty conclusive. But now, there was the shock of Vida, of Phil, once his assistant, the lad to whom he had taught the very A B C of his work, whom even yet he would hardly trust (so in his bitterness he told himself) 'to chop kindling wood without cutting himself.' Yet Phil Calmont had been preferred before him! It was unbelievable. Phil had held Vida in his arms. He, the rejected, Ludovic Morris, C.E., had heard her laugh even as she pushed Phil away, the laugh that only one man hears from a woman—the laugh that Vic Morris had never yet heard in his life. And he hummed 'The Voice that breathed o'er Eden!' Which did not make things easier at all.

Then something that his friend, Mr. Irongray, had said to him after he had been 'fired' by those Incubus people swam up from the under-deeps of consciousness. 'The last shall be first!'

Vic had snorted at the time, refused to receive it as philosophy, and had even called it 'preachiness' to his startled friend the Cameronian minister. Well, he had been wrong and Mr. Irongray right.

His thoughts turned towards the Kirk on the Hill. He would go up there, get some lunch at the Manse, and then in the afternoon, when all would be quiet at the Fowlers, he would—yes, he would go and have it out with Janet. But oh—in what a different spirit—in what a chastened mood, not Vic Morris, but another. Of course he would 'tell her all.'

He climbed up the little incline, the waggon ruts that led from the incubus mines dying away as the road forked and re-forked, till only the wheelbarrow

with which the minister himself or his beadle cultivated the Manse garden, could be seen mounting the slope as a single track.

Yes, the Reverend Benjamin was at home. A little thinner, a little paler, a little more compressed above the lips: thus Vic Morris found Mr. Irongray. Otherwise there was no difference in the Manse, save that silent housekeeper of mature years had taken the place of the voluble mother, who had run her son's head against so many stone walls during her ten years' conduct of the affairs of the Kirk on the Hill.

'Morris! Well! Morris!'

And a handgrip said the rest. Both were strong men, and the water that stood in their eyes may have been due as much to the muscular power developed as to affection. Perhaps there was a little of both.

'What brings you here, Morris?'

This, however, was easier asked than answered.

Vic had dwelt long enough in Scotland to know how to gain time by asking for Mr. Irongray's mother, for his brother-in-law, his sister, his nephews, his nieces, his relatives unto many generations. For a Scot may grow impatient at your asking questions as to his own health, but never when these concern the healths and appetites of his kindred, however remote.

'But what brings you here?' repeated Mr. Irongray, when all these points had been finally cleared up and disposed of.

'First, for something to eat.' Still Vic put off the evil day; but he himself saw that it could not be for long. The silent elderly woman of forbidding aspect was already setting the table. The cloth was laid. In

five minutes they would be left alone.

Vic resolved to open all his heart. He could not have decided better.

After he had spoken Mr. Irongray laid down his knife and fork.

‘I suppose that the first thing you will do, when you do see Janet Fowler, will be to tell her all about your recent interview with Miss Vida-ah- Romer?’

‘Of course,’ said Vic promptly, ‘I should not be an honest man unless I did so!’

‘Hum,’ said the minister, cutting himself a frugal slice of cheese to eat with his sister’s Ayrshire butter for all dessert. ‘I thought that would be your way of looking at things. Well, as a church we do not believe in compulsory auricular confession-least of all to a woman. A man has a little bag in which he drops things he wants to forget. He forgets them, because he wills it.’

And here the voice of the bachelor minister of the Kirk on the Hill took on a more solemn tone, changing almost as suddenly as if someone had pulled a lever.

‘And because of this, with reverence be it spoken, there is something God-like in the worst man. He can forget.’

Vic was silent, not yet seeing whither he was being led. The minister was at once so simple and so subtle.

‘Humanity hath sought out many devices, but a woman-god, as god of gods, hath it not found, and for this reason. Human or divine, a woman cannot forget, and therefore cannot truly forgive. There is always a barrier. Therefore, once again, speak not of the matter of Vida Romer, who was called Bryan, to Janet Fowler! That were indeed great folly.’

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‘It seems like the breaking of a butterfly on a wheel of great texts,’ said Vic, ‘so many heavy reasons for so light a thing!’

‘Nothing is light or heavy before the Lord or before a woman,’ said Benjamin Irongray. ‘Nor is anything to be treated lightly that may wreck your life, You tell me that you would never be a man again, a good, faithful, enduring man, unless you have this woman to wife?’

Vic nodded. This was putting the matter in a new way. But after all, that was the gist of the affair. He wanted to marry Janet, and he could not be happy without her. He felt that more and more. The minister was near enough the mark. Let it pass.

‘A little while ago I too should have bidden follow your thought. I-I did not then know how a man may desire the fellowship-the love of a woman. I thought it was a matter for children.’

He stopped to clear his throat. He had become suddenly husky in speech.

‘I too have been ill,’ he continued, ‘ill physically-morally also. I have been weak as water-I who strove to excel. There was a hymn, whereof I omitted the first verse, for you know that though we sing no hymns in public exercise, we are not debarred in private. The hymn-you may know begins: ‘Art thou weary, art thou languid, Art thou sore distressed?’

‘Now for years I passed that verse over scornfully. I even commented publicly on the flaccid stupidity of modern hymnologists as compared with the Hebrew psalter-a subject indeed, too much neglected. If a man were languid, and the rest, was because he had not enough to do! He needs stimulus and work! But deadly sickness and gnawing at the heart have taught me different. Strange, strange that a woman

may occupy such place in a man's thoughts, that because of her he may suffer, even to the wasting away of the body!

The Cameronian minister was silent for a while. One could almost hear his desires grinding on his will.

'I would tell you,' he said, 'Yes, confidence for confidence! But I have not the right. Some months ago I did my duty, or what I thought to be my duty. I debarred a man who had been a sinner from the communion; I did it publicly. He was the father of the woman I love. I thought beforehand that I had measured the bitterness of the cup given me to drink, and found that I was mistaken. It was tenfold more bitter. I had weighed the cost, and lo! it proved a hundred times heavier.' Again he paused, laying his hand affectionately on Vic's shoulder.

'Therefore, Mr. Morris, hearken to me. I, Benjamin Irongray, have the right to speak. Who hath it if not I? Would I do my duty again? Certainly, but in a different way, between man and man, face to face, not with public speech that makes dis-peace. So I might have found the Eve designed for me, the companion promised; but-ah, well, Morris, go your way. A man needs a good woman far more than she can ever need him. Therefore give her of your first and best. Do not take anything for granted; let her choose; leave her the open door of pity, as I, alas, did not do. I shut it in the face of my love, because of the man, her father. Knowingly I did it, being the man I am!'

And from his study window silently, sombrely, Mr. Irongray watched the young man depart on his errand. He noted with a certain approval, that Vic did not walk any longer as if all the town belonged to

him. But there were deeper things in the heart of Mr. Irongray than that-reproaches, and sufferings, and silences.

Presently the quiet of the house palling upon him, and printed books becoming an abhorrence, without meaning or power to hold the attention, he took up his hat and went out. He chose the little footpath which skirted the privet hedge, still marked by the curve which had been Phil Calmont's armchair, in the days when he came to confide in little Miss Nunsby.

The Reverend Benjamin Irongray stood a moment looking over the little green gate of the man to whom he had denied the sacrament, for words which he had deemed public profanity. He saw a brisk flitting shadow within that crossed and recrossed the open windows, round which thronged the roses and Virginia creepers. Then he sighed and went his way heavily, never dreaming that Rose Nunsby also had watched him from the very moment he had left his own door. And she had had to pass right from one side of the house to the other to do it, too!

But that, of course, was because her duty called her there.

CHAPTER FORTY ONE

'JANET! JANET!'

The engineer had not begun eloquently, so far as the written words go. It was the little room which was called the manse drawing-room, because the children were not allowed to romp there; at least, not to break anything very valuable. It was a small room, because in that house everything had to give way to the imperious needs of the minister's books, which pinched the space necessary for the kitchen stores and threatened to encroach on the coal cellar.

But at least Janet and Vic were alone. The loneliness of two is not the aloneness of one. Vic considered this an entirely new thought, as he remembered his vigils on the despoplados outside Huelva, and recalled the nights when he watched the northerly stars over the canal-like Nervion and the far chocolate wash of Bilbao bar. But his time was come now-also Janet's.

Was it for this he had come so far? For a girl, rather slim than otherwise, with hair sweeping back like a mane from a brow broad but not high, firm lips and a nose which the owner affirmed had been attached as an after-thought with putty? That was Janet Fowler-yes, that is, except for her eyes, and the quick wit that lay underneath the broad brow on which the hair grew so low and light.

'Janet! Janet! I love you!'

He did not say more. The girl said nothing at all. But she trembled. She would have given all she possessed-something on the under side of five

shillings-if she could have kept herself from trembling. But in spite of her will she shook like a leaf blown by the force of his strong words. She heard such for the first time. Janet Fowler stood with her hands by her side, alternately clasping at disentangling them, her face flitting from red to pale from ash to rose. She had written for this, hoped for this, almost prayed for this! And now it had come-it was quite different!

This big man with his commanding ways, his shoulders squared, his strong, set face of granite-did she hear aright, when she thought that she detected the sob in his throat?

‘Janet, I love you, Janet! Janet!’

She held him off whilst she asked a question. But Vic had been instructed in the subtle casuistry of the occasion. Mr. Irongray had read him his lesson. The wooer had learned it.

‘No,’ he answered. ‘I never really loved her, I never loved but you, Janet. You taught me to live. When I was far away your sapphire eyes were like nails driven into my soul. I could not get loose from them!’

All true, all to the point. But an hour or two before he would have tangled it all up with explanations and diminutions. Now the girl got it plain and strong, as, indeed, was the manly verity. For Vic Morris had loved only Janet-that is, as a man ought to love a woman.

How she wished now that she could think of something clever to say. If only he had told her all this a thousand miles off, and she had answered it with a pen in her hand! But no, there he stood before her, and she could not take her eyes off his face. She trembled so violently, that Vic saw it, and changing his tone suddenly charged her with loving

him in return.

'I don't, I don't!' she cried, so fiercely that he almost laughed, knowing different.

'Then stop shivering!' he retorted, triumphantly.

That, however, was far, far beyond her. And she knew it.

'I am cold,' she cried, 'but I don't love you!'

'The thermometer is marking eighty in the shade. It is because you love me that you are trembling. You are going to marry me. You had no business to have written all those letters to me, if you meant nothing! You know that very well.'

There was no answer. The old Vic was coming back.

'Shall I call my father?' she was trying desperate tactics now.

'You may,' said Vic, coolly, 'but he will not hear. You forget he has gone visiting in Block G.'

Janet had to bethink herself again. Nothing farther occurred to her at that moment. Possibly something might. Only Vic, quite unfairly, followed the example of his late subordinate and set the strongest pair of arms in Kirktown about her. He drew her to him. Instantly the trembling stopped, and she began to cry softly on his breast. He was so strong. It was comfortable though.

'Look at me!' he said; 'you dare not look at me!'

He was right-she dared not, after telling what was very like a 'story' about her father. She knew very well where he had gone. The Reverend John Fowler always visited on Thursdays. All the world knew that, even Vic Morris, when it was to his advantage.

'I dare you to look at me!' He said this not so much as a challenge but as an excuse to hold her longer.

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All at once she turned the depths of her sapphire eyes upon him. The spark in them was extinguished. It had become now only a mellow glow. Tears had moistened and softened everything. Janet's eyes were deep wells of youth and beauty; yes, and love.

Vic Morris was instantly and hopelessly conquered. He altered his tone. He was the vanquished, this time.

'Oh, Janet, can you love a fellow like me?'

Promptly the eyes filled up. Their blueness, as of the deep sea or of Henry Moore's pictures, had become mysteriously liquid, and was about to overflow. Vic hastily prevented this, in the way that suggested itself to him as the most convenient in the circumstances. He felt her shrink within his arms, then come closer again.

'You are sure you will never be sorry?' she said, catching the lapels of his coat—all she could do.

'Never, never!' cried Vic, 'only you are infinitely too good for me. You really cannot love me!'

'I do!' said Janet clear and firm as if she were giving (already) the marriage responses.

'Then I shall have to keep house for father,' said a voice behind them, which made them jump asunder. 'Please, Janet, give me the key of the jam cupboard now, and I won't tell. I Hope a mouse may jump on me if I do.'

They turned and beheld the small Violet Fowler, - youngest of the family.

'Violet!' cried her sister. 'How long have you been here?'

'Oh, just a while!' said that sweet, but practical young maiden, smiling evasively. 'I forget how long! Can I have the key of the jam cup-board?'

This was against all discipline, but necessity is all 'musts.'

'You can have it, Miss,' said Janet, 'but don't think it is because--because there is anything that I--we--I--that is, Vic and I are ashamed of. We shall tell father as soon as he comes in!'

'Oh, yes, that--' retorted the small maid, kicking the bars of the chairs. saucily. 'But about the k--'

'Get out, you little heathen!' cried Vic, 'there!' (he thrust a shilling into her hand) 'go and buy toffee for the whole crowd. But don't say a word to a soul. Boys shouldn't know anything. You understand, of course, but they wouldn't. What do Alf and Tim know--about things like this--secrets?'

The small girl regarded the shilling in the palm of her hand with some disfavour.

'If it's meant for the whole lot,' she suggested, 'the big boxes cost half-a-crown!'

Vic snorted with laughter, and found her half-a-crown, which he spun for her to catch. Violet caught it adroitly. One has not three elder brothers for nothing.

'Now give me back the shilling!' he said.

'I'll put it in my missionary box!' said Violet, 'father says that if we mean to do good to those in far countries, it is the same thing as doing it! Cos we can't always tell how it will turn out. So I shall mean well awful hard.'

Evidently Violet's missionary box was paved with good intentions.

'Mind,' he said, giving up the shilling to its fate, 'not a word to a soul!'

'Not till you are married to Janet, and I am to be best bridesmaid! You've got to give me a gold brooch and a bangle, though.'

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'Yes-yes--' said the reckless Vic; 'only be off now.'

'Oh, I know,' said Violet, tartly, 'so as you and Janet can begin kissing again! Huuh-I don't think much of kissin'-tried it once with Willie Calmont-but raspberry toffee's ten times better any day!'

Thus with the willing assistance of sister Violet did Vic Morris and Janet of the Valley Manse become engaged.

So much of the story as is presently available can be read in a letter written some three months after to Vic by his wife. Their friends had with one voice pleaded with them, suggested to them, even reproached them for their undue and indecorous haste in getting married. Miss Thomasina Merrylees who had only been engaged eighteen years to a bank clerk, was specially severe in her comments. But the Reverend Benjamin Irongray talked to Vic, urging him on no account to go out to Spain for his business affairs without making sure of the girl who loved him. Mr. Irongray spoke also to Mr. Fowler, his brother minister.

Vic was now the manager of the Incubus Coal and Iron Company, hereafter to be known as 'The Kirktown Companies, Ltd.' He would not be absent very long, he thought, this time, but he would be rushing about all the time, and Spain of the mine and wayside inn was no place for a woman. 'The Caravanserai' was being rebuilt for them, and, meantime Mrs. Vic Morris was staying on with her father at the Valley Manse. This was her letter, which shows in form and substance the sobering influence of holy matrimony.

Free Valley Manse, Kirktown, Scotland.
(no date).

'MY DEAR HUSBAND,

'How funny that looks! I have to pinch myself and turn the ring twice round on my finger to be sure, also I have to look at your picture on the wall. When you are here I call it the Great Stone Face, but when you are away I get quite to love it!

'Father is now getting quite accustomed to finding his wearing apparel, mostly by the simple process of tossing the contents of his chest of drawers on the floor and stirring them with the ferrule of an umbrella!

'But Violet is really making remarkable progress in housekeeping. She can put father's worst mess back into place again in ten minutes. It always took me twenty. She will be a good little Bridget when she stops nursing her dolly. But after all we shall only be over the way, though I would rather be in a smaller house than the Caravanserai. Still, it is good to be out of the gossip of Kirktown.

'I went and called on the Phil Calmonts yesterday. You never saw anything so funny in your life. The manager's house where they live is low, and has verandahs all round. Phil has made wind screens and they live mostly out of doors—receive out of doors—for all I know, sleep out of doors. Vida is prettier than twenty pictures. I think you must have been blind, dear old bat, ever to have thought of me when such a glorious creature walked the face of the earth. So there, Mr. Vic Managing Director to Ignoramus and Co., Unlimited!

'But the fun! Well, it was funny enough to make you cry-me at least. Hammock, tables, dishes, food—all playing skip-jack whenever a gust overturned one of Phil's patent screens! Phil ran and Vida ran, the two maids ran, and I ran in order to catch

everything before it went whirling over the cliff. And they have a code of signals on a pole- flags and pocket handkerchiefs fit to make a hedgehog laugh. In fact, I think we are the only sensible people in the world. I know you think so! You could sit right down and prove it too, dear wiseacre of my heart! But I shouldn't love you if you were the least bit different. For right well do I know that, though you can 'run' a thousand men, and 'make them' glad to fetch and carry, you can't 'run' your small petticoated Janet. And that is why you love her!

'And yet, and yet, your Janet would fetch and carry for you to the world's end and back again. And that is why she loves you!

'Oh, yes, and Phil Calmont has made a little pully hauly railway which you load with stones at the top of the Heugh, and the weight of them pulls the person up from down below! Mr. Romer lives with them up in the manager's house. Vida is so kind to him. But I think he prefers Phil-understands him better or something. He fusses almost like his old self if Phil is five minutes late for a meal. I think it is sweet of them, don't you, now, when Mr. Rom is so poor? But then, of course, they would! Dick and Billy stand shift at the lighthouse, and would not let any one else touch the handle of a door-that is, if they could help it. The Northern Lights people (whoever they may be) sent them an assistant. But he only remained a week, saying that 'For all the wages in Trinity House he would not stay there to be ordered about by a couple of disagreeable pemikkety old men.'

'From his point of view, I should not wonder if there was something in what he said. You will be glad to know that they have got Gregson to look

after the house for them on terms of mutual equality. 'He is tired of service' he says, and 'always liked lookin' through them telescopes'-which he seems to consider the whole duty of lighthousemen. But Vida says that he keeps everything ship-shape. Young Gregson, the 'buttons boy' who was with James Kahn, carries oil and coal, and is trusted with odd jobs down at the lighthouse. Billy says they may be able to make a real lighthouseman out of him one day, but Dick shakes his head, and refers with feeling to the spilling of a can of whitewash. He predicts a bad end for Gregson Junior-hanging being obviously too good for him.

'But the best I have to tell you, dear my gossip, is about Leebie Callum; you don't remember Leebie, I am afraid. She was the little servant-maid who has been so long with the Nunsby's. You may remember Mr. Nunsby, James Kahn's shadow. You will have to, any way, when you get back. He has been making himself so generally disliked, that the clerks in the Office would not stand it. So in their turn they made things too hot for him. He had all sorts of recommendations, dated a good way back, and is, I believe, (but for his temper), a clever man. Well, finally he has got another situation down about Wigan, and, of course, poor Rose has to leave the house and especially the garden they have had so long-just when she had got it so pretty, too. It is a shame.

'Well, I told you about Mr Irongray, and how he had made Rose so angry by refusing to receive her father at the communion table. Being English, of course she did not understand that in his position he could do nothing less. No one could explain that to her. Rose should really have arranged the place of

her birth better. There is no other remedy. You suffer from this, too, though your Welsh blood, dear Owen Tudor Llewellyn Glendower ap Jones, saves you from the stupidest and most English mistakes. Though all the same you did come near to making a mistake about me, thinking that I didn't love you, when (put your head down) I do, I do, twenty times more than ever! There, don't tell anybody, not even Violet this time!

'What I am writing now is what Rose told me, as near as I can put it down.

'She was sitting sewing and looking over the garden at the Calmonts' hedge and the white gable of the Hill Manse, thinking too that after next Wednesday she should never see any of them again, when Leebie Callum, affectionate, stupid, but faithful as a dog's tail is faithful to the dog, came in all blubbered with tears!

'What is the matter, Leebie?' said Rose Nunsby, looking up.

'Oh, Miss,' says Leebie. 'I can't bear it-indeed I can't. You'll be angry, but I really couldn't help it.'

'What can't you bear, Leebie?' Rose asked. 'To see that puir man wanderin' and wanderin', his hands behind his back or under the tails o' his black coat, like a craw in the rains-day and nicht; nicht an' day; I juist couldna bide, Miss Rose!

Sae I gaed up to him mysel' and says I,' Here Rose stood up, in a great hurry, as you'll imagine!

'You never made a fool of me?' she cried aghast at the idea of Leebie as ambassador.

'Na, na, mak' a fule o' you! The idea! Said Leebie, 'I only just telled him that it was a poor thing that wasna worth the askin' for, and a terrible puir man that was frichted o' a lass's faither! O I never

mentioned a word about you, Miss, I hae ower muckle pride. But I telled him that I loed weel, that I wad aye bide wi' ye, and that I was grand hand at bringin' up a young family, me hevin' seven brithers, a' younger than mysel'! And faith I believe, that's the minister's step on the gravt walk the noo!

'Rose was, as you may imagine, petrified. But in spite of herself, her engagement to Mr. Irongray was all over the town an hour afterwards.

'I saw to that mysel',' chuckled Leebie, this afternoon when I met her on the road; 'they are kittle cattle, thae ministers. And I thocht I wad fix him to it! Ha daurna draw back noo on accoont o' his congregation! And as for that auld Prince o' Babylon, her faither, he is gaun to bide wi' his sister at Wigan. She is twice as thrawn as himsel'. So the twa' o' them will hae a bonny hoose o't. But Leebie Callum is gaun to be manse lass up at the Hill. For Maister Irongray, ye see, bein' married, will no need a hoosekeeper ony langer. You juist wager ony money that Miss Rose and me will keep the manse as it has never been keepit afore; her the garden, me the hoose!'

'Here ends the first lesson according to Leebie.' Hector McKill also has gone off; retired after forty years' service, he says. Between ourselves, I think he was frightened of you, Vic. It is strange, for I am not a bit.

'Yes, I am keeping bright and being good when you are away. I know that is the only way I can help you with your work. But come home as soon as you can, dear big man. There is a little wife here who needs you. And if she thinks about you long, Vic, the writing blurs as she looks at the paper and she says all sorts of silly things! Vida Calmont owns that

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it is just the same with her when Phil is away, so you mustn't mind. All women, when they love like Vida and me, are by nature pesterful.

'But because I love you, dear Vic, I will be as little pesterful as I can. Now I am going to write some words that always make me feel very strong. These words are just,

Your loving little wife,
Janet Morris.'

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- 1926 Rogues' Island
- 2016 Peter the Renegade

Find out more about Crockett's life literature and legacy at: www.gallowayraiders.co.uk

www.srcrockett.weebly.com and The Galloway Raiders YouTube channel at www.youtube.com

'Mayhap that is the best fortune of all – to be loved by a few greatly and constantly, rather than to be loudly applauded and immediately forgotten by the many.'

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. R. Crockett". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized, with a prominent "S" and "R".