DR. RUMSEY'S PATIENT

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from

Auntie.

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DR. RUMSEY'S PATIENT

A VERY STRANGE STORY

BY

L. T. MEAD

Elizabeth Thomasina Meade Smith

AND

DR. HALIFAX

(JOINT AUTHORS OF "STORIES FROM THE DIARY OF A DOCTOR")

NEW YORK

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DR. RUMSEY'S PATIENT.

CHAPTER I.

Two young men in flannels were standing outside the door of the Red Doe in the picturesque village of Grandcourt. The village contained one long and straggling street. The village inn was covered with ivy, wistaria, flowering jessamine, monthly roses, and many other creepers. The flowers twined round old-fashioned windows, and nodded to the guests when they awoke in the morning and breathed perfume upon them as they retired to bed at night. In short, the Inn was an ideal one, and had from time immemorial found favor with reading parties, fishermen, and others who wanted to combine country air and the pursuit of health with a certain form of easy amusement. The two men who now stood in the porch were undergraduates from Balliol. There was nothing in the least remarkable about their appearance—they looked like what they were, good-hearted, keen-witted young Englishmen of the day. The time was evening, and as the Inn faced due west the whole place was bathed in warm sunshine.

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"This heat is tremendous and there is no air," said Everett, the younger of the students. "How can you stand that sun beating on your head, Frere? I'm for indoors."

"Right," replied Frere. "It is cool enough in the parlor."

As he spoke he took a step forward and gazed down the winding village street. There was a look of pleased expectation in his eyes. He seemed to be watching for some one. A girl appeared, walking slowly up the street. Frere's eye began to dance. Everett, who was about to go into the shady parlor, gave him a keen glance—and for some reason his eyes also grew bright with expectation.

"There's something worth looking at," he exclaimed in a laughing voice.

"What did you say?" asked Frere gruffly.

"Nothing, old man—at least nothing special. I say, doesn't Hetty look superb?"

"You've no right to call her Hetty."

Everett gave a low whistle.

"I rather fancy I have," he answered—"she gave me leave this morning."

"Impossible," said Frere. He turned pale under all his sunburn, and bit his lower lip. "Don't you find the sun very hot?" he asked.

"No, it is sinking into the west—the great heat is over. Let us go and enliven this little charmer."

"I will," said Frere suddenly. "You had better stay here where you are. It is my right," he

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added. "I was about to tell you so, when she came in view."

"Your right?" cried Everett; he looked disturbed.

Frere did not reply, but strode quickly down the village street. A dozen strides brought him up to Hetty's side. She was a beautiful girl, with a face and figure much above her station. Her hat was covered with wild flowers which she had picked in her walk, and coquettishly placed there. She wore a pink dress covered with rosebuds—some wild flowers were stuck into her belt. As Frere advanced to meet her, her laughing eyes were raised to his face—there was a curious mixture of timidity and audacity in their glance.

"I have a word to say to you," he accosted her in a gruff tone. "What right had you to give Everett leave to call you Hetty?"

The timidity immediately left the bright eyes, and a slight expression of anger took its place.

"Because I like to distribute my favors, Mr. Horace."

She quickened her pace as she spoke. Everett, who had been standing quite still in the porch watching the little scene, came out to meet the pair. Hetty flushed crimson when she saw him; she raised her dancing, charming dark eyes to his face, then looked again at Frere, who turned sullenly away.

"I hope, gentlemen, you have had good sport," said the rustic beauty, in her demure voice.

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"Excellent," replied Everett.

They had now reached the porch, which was entwined all over with honeysuckle in full flower. A great spray of the fragrant flower nearly touched the girl's charming face. She glanced again at Frere. He would not meet her eyes. Her whole face sparkled with the feminine love of teasing.

"Why is he so jealous?" she whispered to herself. "It would be fun to punish him. I like him better than Mr. Everett, but I'll punish him."

"Shall I give you a buttonhole?" she said, looking at Everett.

"If you'll be so kind," he replied.

She raised her eyes to the honeysuckle over her head, selected a spray with extreme care, and handed it to him demurely. He asked her to place it in his buttonhole; she looked again at Frere,—he would not go away, but neither would he bring himself to glance at her. She bent her head to search in the bodice of her dress for a pin, found one, and then with a laughing glance of her eyes into Everett's handsome face, complied with his request.

The young fellow blushed with pleasure, then he glanced at Frere, and a feeling of compunction smote him—he strode abruptly into the house.

"Hetty, what do you mean by this sort of thing?" said Frere the moment they were alone.

"I mean this, Mr. Horace: I am still my own mistress."

"Great Scot! of course you are; but what do

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you mean by this sort of trifling? It was only this morning that you told me you loved me. Look here, Hetty, I'm in no humor to be trifled with; I can't and won't stand it. I'll make you the best husband a girl ever had, but listen to me, I have the devil's own temper when it is roused. For God's sake don't provoke it. If you don't love me, say so, and let there be an end of it."

"I wish you wouldn't speak so loudly," said Hetty, pouting her lips and half crying. "Of course I like you; I—well, yes, I suppose I love you. I was thinking of you all the afternoon. See what I gathered for you—this bunch of heart's-ease. There's meaning in heart's-ease—there's none in honeysuckle."

Frere's brow cleared as if by magic.

"My little darling," he said, fixing his deep-set eyes greedily on the girl's beautiful face. "Forgive me for being such a brute to you, Hetty. Here—give me the flowers."

"No, not until you pay for them. You don't deserve them for being so nasty and suspicious."

"Give me the flowers, Hetty; I promise never to doubt you again."

"Yes, you will; it is your nature to doubt."

"I have no words to say what I feel for you."

Frere's eyes emphasized this statement so emphatically, that the empty-headed girl by his side felt her heart touched for the moment.

"What do you want me to do, Mr. Horace?" she asked, lowering her eyes.

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"To give me the flowers, and to be nice to me."

"Come down to the brook after supper, perhaps I'll give them to you then. There's aunt calling me—don't keep me, please." She rushed off.

"Hetty," said Mrs. Armitage, the innkeeper's wife, "did I hear you talking to Mr. Horace Frere in the porch?"

"Yes, Aunt Fanny, you did," replied Hetty.

"Well, look here, your uncle and I won't have it. Just because you're pretty——"

Hetty tossed back her wealth of black curls.

"It's all right," she said in a whisper, her eyes shining as she spoke. "He wants me to be his wife—he asked me this morning."

"He doesn't mean that, surely," said Mrs. Armitage, incredulous and pleased.

"Yes, he does; he'll speak to uncle to-morrow—that is, if I'll say 'Yes.' He says he has no one to consult—he'll make me a lady—he has plenty of money."

"Do you care for him, Hetty?"

"Oh, don't ask me whether I do or not, Aunt Fanny—I'm sure I can't tell you."

Hetty moved noisily about. She put plates and dishes on a tray preparatory to taking them into the parlor for the young men's supper.

"Look here," said her aunt, "I'll see after the parlor lodgers to-night." She lifted the tray as she spoke.

Hetty ran up to her bedroom. She took a little square of glass from its place on the wall and

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gazed earnestly at the reflection of her own charming face. Presently she put the glass down, locked her hands together, went over to the open window and looked out.

"Shall I marry him?" she thought. "He has plenty of money—he loves me right enough. If I were his wife, I'd be a lady—I needn't worry about household work any more. I hate household work—I hate drudgery. I want to have a fine time, with nothing to do but just to think of my dress and how I look. He has plenty of money, and he loves me—he says he'll make me his wife as soon as ever I say the word. Uncle and aunt would be pleased, too, and the people in the village would say I'd made a good match. Shall I marry him? I don't love him a bit, but what does that matter?"

She sighed—the color slightly faded on her blooming cheeks—she poked her head out of the little window.

"I don't love him," she said to herself. "When I see Mr. Awdrey my heart beats. Ever since I was a little child I have thought more of Mr. Awdrey than of any one else in all the world. I never told—no, I never told, but I'd rather slave for Mr. Robert Awdrey than be the wife of any one else on earth. What a fool I am! Mr. Awdrey thinks nothing of me, but he is never out of my head, nor out of my heart. My heart aches for him—I'm nearly mad sometimes about it all. Perhaps I'll see him to-night if I go down to the

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brook. He's sure to pass the brook on his way to the Court. Mr. Everett likes me too, I know, and he's a gentleman as well as Mr. Frere. Oh, dear, they both worry me more than please me. I'd give twenty men like them for one sight of the young Squire. Oh, what folly all this is!"

She went again and stood opposite to her little looking-glass.

"The young ladies up at the Court haven't got a face like mine," she murmured. "There isn't any one all over the place has a face like mine. I wonder if Mr. Awdrey really thinks it pretty? Why should I worry myself about Mr. Frere? I wonder if Mr. Awdrey would mind if I married him—would it make him jealous? If I thought that, I'd do it fast enough—yes, I declare I would. But of course he wouldn't mind—not one bit; he has scarcely ever said two words to me—not since we were little 'uns together, and pelted each other with apples in uncle's orchard. Oh, Mr. Awdrey, I'd give all the world for one smile from you, but you think nothing at all of poor Hetty. Dear, beautiful Mr. Awdrey—won't you love me even a little—even as you love your dog? Yes, I'll go and walk by the brook after supper. Mr. Frere will meet me there, of course, and perhaps Mr. Awdrey will go by—perhaps he'll be jealous. I'll take my poetry book and sit by the brook just where the forget-me-nots grow. Yes, yes—oh, I wonder if the Squire will go by."

These thoughts no sooner came into Hetty's

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brain than she resolved to act upon them. She snatched up a volume of L. E. L.'s poems—their weak and lovelorn phrases exactly suited her style and order of mind—and ran quickly down to a dancing rivulet which ran its merry course about a hundred yards back of the Inn. She sat by the bank, pulled a great bunch of forget-me-nots, laid them on the open pages of her book, and looked musingly down at the flowers. Footsteps were heard crunching the underwood at the opposite side. A voice presently sounded in her ears. Hetty's heart beat loudly.

"How do you do?" said the voice.

"Good-evening, Mr. Robert," she replied.

Her tone was demure and extremely respectful. She started to her feet, letting her flowers drop as she did so. A blush suffused her lovely face, her dancing eyes were raised for a quick moment, then as suddenly lowered. She made a beautiful picture. The young man who stood a few feet away from her, with the running water dividing them, evidently thought so. He had a boyish figure—a handsome, manly face. His eyes were very dark, deeply set, and capable of much thought. He looked every inch the gentleman.

"Is Armitage in?" he asked after a pause.

"I don't know, Mr. Robert, I'll go and inquire if you like."

"No, it doesn't matter. The Squire asked me to call and beg of your uncle to come to the Court to-morrow morning. Will you give him the message?"

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"Yes, Mr. Robert."

There was a perceptible pause. Hetty looked down at the water. Awdrey looked at her.

"Good-evening," he said then.

"Good-evening, sir," she replied.

He turned and walked slowly up the narrow path which led toward the Court.

"His eyes told me to-night that he thought me pretty," muttered Hetty to herself, "why doesn't he say it with his lips? I—I wish I could make him. Oh, is that you, Mr. Frere?"

"Yes, Hetty. I promised to come, and I am here. The evening is a perfect one, let us follow the stream a little way."

Hetty was about to say "No," when suddenly lifting her eyes, she observed that the young Squire had paused under the shade of a great elm-tree a little further up the bank. A quick idea darted into her vain little soul. She would walk past the Squire without pretending to see him, in Frere's company. Frere should make love to her in the Squire's presence. She gave her lover a coy and affectionate glance.

"Yes, come," she said: "it is pretty by the stream; perhaps I'll give you some forget-me-nots presently."

"I want the heart's-ease which you have already picked for me," said Frere.

"Oh, there's time enough."

Frere advanced a step, and laid his hand on the girl's arm.

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"Listen," he said: "I was never more in earnest in my life. I love you with all my heart and soul. I love you madly. I want you for my wife. I mean to marry you, come what may. I have plenty of money and you are the wife of all others for me. You told me this morning that you loved me, Hetty. Tell me again; say that you love me better than any one else in the world."

Hetty paused, she raised her dark eyes; the Squire was almost within earshot.

"I suppose I love you—a little," she said, in a whisper.

"Then give me a kiss—just one."

She walked on. Frere followed.

"Give me a kiss—just one," he repeated.

"Not to-night," she replied, in a demure voice.

"Yes, you must—I insist."

"Don't, Mr. Frere," she called out sharply, uttering a cry as she spoke.

He didn't mind her. Overcome by his passion he caught her suddenly in his arms, and pressed his lips many times to hers.

"Hold, sir! What are you doing?" shouted Awdrey's voice from the opposite side of the bank.

"By heaven, what is that to you?" called Frere back.

He let Hetty go with some violence, and retreated one or two steps in his astonishment. His face was crimson up to the roots of his honest brow.

Awdrey leaped across the brook. "You will please understand that you take liberties with Miss

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Armitage at your peril," he said. "What right have you to take such advantage of an undefended girl? Hetty, I will see you home."

Hetty's eyes danced with delight. For a moment Frere felt too stunned to speak.

"Come with me, Hetty," said Awdrey, putting a great restraint upon himself, but speaking with irritation. "Come—you should be at home at this hour."

"You shall answer to me for this, whoever you are," said Frere, whose face was white with passion.

"My name is Awdrey," said the Squire; "I will answer you in a way you don't like if you don't instantly leave this young girl alone."

"Confound your interference," said Frere. "I am not ashamed of my actions. I can justify them. I am going to marry Miss Armitage."

"Is that true, Hetty?" said Awdrey, looking at the girl in some astonishment.

"No, there isn't a word of it true," answered Hetty, stung by a look on the Squire's face. "I don't want to have anything to do with him—he shan't kiss me. I—I'll have nothing to do with him." She burst into tears.

"I'll see you home," said Awdrey.

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CHAPTER II.

THE Awdreys of "The Court" could trace their descent back to the Norman Conquest. They were a proud family with all the special characteristics which mark races of long descent. Among the usual accompaniments of race, was given to them the curse of heredity. A strange and peculiar doom hung over the house. It had descended now from father to son during many generations. How it had first raised its gorgon head no one could tell. People said that it had been sent as a punishment for the greed of gold. An old ancestor, more than a hundred and fifty years ago, had married a West Indian heiress. She had colored blood in her veins, a purse of enormous magnitude, a deformed figure, and, what was more to the point, a particularly crooked and obtuse order of mind. She did her duty by her descendants, leaving to each of them a gift. To one, deformity of person—to another, a stammering tongue—to a third, a squint—to a fourth, imbecility. In each succeeding generation, at least one man and woman of the house of Awdrey had cause to regret the gold which had certainly brought a curse with it. But beyond and above all these

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things, it was immediately after the West Indian s entrance into the family that that strange doom began to assail the male members of the house which was now more dreaded than madness. The doom was unique and curious. It consisted of one remarkable phase. There came upon those on whom it descended an extraordinary and complete lapse of memory for the grave events of life, accompanied by perfect retention of memory for all minor matters. This curious phase once developed, other idiosyncrasies immediately followed. The victim's moral sense became weakened—all physical energy departed—a curious lassitude of mind and body became general. The victim did not in the least know that there was anything special the matter with him, but as a rule the doomed man either became idiotic, or died before the age of thirty.

All the great physicians of their time had been consulted with regard to this curious family trait, but in the first place no one could understand it in the second no possible cure could be suggested as a remedy. The curse was supposed to be due to a brain affection, but brain affections in the old days were considered to be special visitations from God, and men of science let them alone.

In their early life, the Awdreys were particularly bright, clever sharp fellows, endowed with excellent animal spirits, and many amiable traits of character. They were chivalrous to women, kind to children, full of warm affections, and each and all of them possessed much of the golden gift of

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hope. As a rule the doom of the house came upon each victim with startling suddenness. One of the disappointments of life ensued—an unfortunate love affair—the death of some beloved member—a money loss. The victim lost all memory of the event. No words, no explanations could revive the dead memory—the thing was completely blotted out from the phonograph of the brain. Immediately afterward followed the mental and physical decay. The girls of the family quite escaped the curse. It was on the sons that it invariably descended.

Up to the present time, however, Robert Awdrey's father had lived to confute the West Indian's dire curse. His father had married a Scotch lassie, with no bluer blood in her veins than that which had been given to her by some rugged Scotch ancestors. Her health of mind and body had done her descendants much good. Even the word "nerves" had been unknown to this healthy-minded daughter of the North—her children had all up to the present escaped the family curse, and it was now firmly believed at the Court that the spell was broken, and that the West Indian's awful doom would leave the family. The matter was too solemn and painful to be alluded to except under the gravest conditions, and young Robert Awdrey, the heir to the old place and all its belongings, was certainly the last person to speak of it.

Robert's father was matter-of-fact to the back bone, but Robert himself was possessed of an essen-

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tially reflective temperament. Had he been less healthily brought up by his stout old grandmother and by his mother, he might have given way to morbid musings. Circumstances, however, were all in his favor, and at the time when this strange story really opens, he was looking out at life with a heart full of hope and a mind filled with noble ambitions. Robert was the only son—he had two sisters, bright, good-natured, every-day sort of girls. As a matter of course his sisters adored him. They looked forward to his career with immense pride. He was to stand for Parliament at the next general election. His brains belonged to the highest order of intellect. He had taken a double first at the University—there was no position which he might not hope to assume.

Robert had all the chivalrous instincts of his race toward women. As he walked quickly home now with Hetty by his side, his blood boiled at the thought of the insult which had been offered to her. Poor, silly little Hetty was nothing whatever to him except a remarkably pretty village girl. Her people, however, were his father's tenants; he felt it his duty to protect her. When he parted with her just outside the village inn, he said a few words.

"You ought not to allow those young men to take liberties with you, Hetty," he said. "Now, go home. Don't be out so late again in the future, and don't forget to give your uncle my father's message."

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She bent her head, and left him without replying. She did not even thank him. He watched her until she disappeared into the house, then turned sharply and walked up the village street home with a vigorous step.

He had come to the spot where he had parted with Frere, and was just about to leap the brook, when that young man started suddenly from under a tree, and stood directly in his path.

"I must ask you to apologize to me," he said.

Awdrey flushed.

"What do you mean?" he replied.

"What I say. My intentions toward Miss Armitage are perfectly honest. She promised to marry me this morning. When you chose to interfere, I was kissing my future wife."

"If that is really the case, I beg your pardon," said Awdrey; "but then," he continued, looking full at Frere, "Hetty Armitage denies any thought of marrying you."

"She does, does she?" muttered Frere. His face turned white.

"One word before you go," said Awdrey. "Miss Armitage is a pretty girl——"

"What is that to you?" replied Frere, "I don't mean to discuss her with you."

"You may please yourself about that, but allow me to say one thing. Her uncle is one of my father's oldest and most respected tenants; Hetty is therefore under our protection, and I for one will see that she gets fair play. Any one who

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takes liberties with her has got to answer to me That's all. Good-evening."

Awdrey slightly raised his hat, leaped the brook, and disappeared through the underwood in the direction of the Court.

Horace Frere stood and watched him.

His rage was now almost at white heat. He was madly in love, and was therefore not quite responsible for his own actions. He was determined at any cost to make Hetty his wife. The Squire's interference awoke the demon of jealousy in his heart. He had patiently borne Everett's marked attentions to the girl of his choice—he wondered now at the sudden passion which filled him. He walked back to the inn feeling exactly as if the devil were driving him.

"I'll have this thing out with Hetty before I am an hour older," he cried aloud. "She promised to marry me this very morning. How dare that jackanapes interfere! What do I care for his position in the place? If he's twenty times the Squire it's nothing to me. Hetty had the cool cheek to eat her own words to him in my presence. It's plain to be seen what the thing means. She's a heartless flirt—she's flying for higher game than honest Horace Frere, but I'll put a spoke in her wheel, and in his wheel too, curse him. He's in love with the girl himself—that's why he interferes. Well, she shall choose between him and me to-night, and if she does choose him it will be all the worse for him."

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As he rushed home, Frere lashed himself into greater and greater fury. Everett was standing inside the porch when the other man passed him roughly by.

"I say, Frere, what's up?" called Everett, taking the pipe out of his mouth.

"Curse you, don't keep me, I want to speak to Miss Armitage."

Everett burst into a somewhat discordant laugh.

"Your manners are not quite to be desired at the present moment, old man," he said. "Miss Armitage seems to have a strangely disquieting effect upon her swains."

"I do not intend to discuss her with you, Everett. I must speak to her at once."

Everett laughed again.

"She seems to be a person of distinction," he said. "She has just been seen home with much ceremony by no less a person than Awdrey, of The Court."

"Curse Awdrey and all his belongings. Do you know where she is?"

A sweet, high-pitched voice within the house now made itself heard.

"I can see you in Aunt's parlor if you like, Mr. Horace."

"Yes."

Frere strode into the house—a moment later he was standing opposite to Hetty in the little hot gaslit parlor.

Hetty had evidently been crying. Her tears

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had brought shadows under her eyes—they added pathos to her lovely face, giving it a look of depth which it usually lacked. Frere gave her one glance, then he felt his anger dropping from him like a mantle.

"For God's sake, Hetty, speak the truth, ' said the poor fellow.

"What do you want me to say, Mr. Horace?" she asked.

Her voice was tremulous, her tears nearly broke forth anew. Frere made a step forward. He would have clasped her to his breast, but she would not allow him.

"No," she said with a sob, "I can't have anything to do with you."

"Hetty, you don't know what you are saying. Hetty, remember this morning."

"I remember it, but I can't go on with it. Forget everything I said—go away—please go away."

"No, I won't go away. By heaven, you shall tell me the truth. Look here, Hetty, I won't be humbugged—you've got to choose at once."

"What do you mean, Mr. Horace?"

"You've got to choose between that fellow and me."

"Between you and the Squire!" exclaimed Hetty.

She laughed excitedly; the bare idea caused her heart to beat wildly. Her laughter nearly drove Frere mad. He strode up to her, took her hands with force, and looked into her frightened eyes.

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"Do you love him? The truth, girl, I will have it."

"Let me go, Mr. Horace."

"I won't until you tell me the truth. It is either the Squire or me; I must hear the truth now or never—which is it, Squire Awdrey or me?"

"Oh, I can't help it," said Hetty, bursting into tears—"it's the Squire—oh, sir, let me go."

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CHAPTER III.

FRERE stood perfectly still for a moment after Hetty had spoken, then without a word he turned and left her. Everett was still standing in the porch. Everett had owned to himself that he had a decided penchant for the little rustic beauty, but Frere's fierce passion cooled his. He did not feel particularly inclined, however, to sympathize with his friend.

"How rough you are, Frere!" he said angrily; "you've almost knocked the pipe out of my mouth a second time this evening."

Frere went out into the night without uttering a syllable.

"Where are you off to?" called Everett after him.

"What is that to you?" was shouted back.

Everett said something further. A strong and very emphatic oath left Frere's lips in reply. The innkeeper, Armitage, was passing the young man at the moment. He stared at him, wondering at the whiteness of his face, and the extraordinary energy of his language. Armitage went indoors to supper, and thought no more of the circumstance. He was destined, however, to remember it later. Everett continued to smoke his pipe with philo-

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sophical calm. He hoped against hope that pretty little Hetty might come and stand in the porch with him. Finding she did not appear, he resolved to go out and look for his friend. He was leaving the Inn when Armitage called after him:

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Everett, but will you be out late?"

"I can't say," replied Everett, stopping short; "why?"

"Because if so, sir, you had better take the latchkey. We're going to shut up the whole place early to-night; the wife is dead beat, and Hetty is not quite well."

"I'm sorry for that," said Everett, after a pause; "well, give me the key. I dare say I'll return quite soon; I am only going out to meet Mr. Frere."

Armitage gave the young man the key and returned to the house.

Meanwhile Frere had wandered some distance from the pretty little village and the charming rustic inn. His mind was out of tune with all harmony and beauty. He was in the sort of condition when men will do mad deeds not knowing in the least why they do them. Hetty's words had, as he himself expressed it, "awakened the very devil in him."

"She has owned it," he kept saying to himself. "Yes, I was right in my conjecture—he wants her himself. Much he regards honor and behaving straight to a woman. I'll show him a thing or two. Jove, if I meet him to-night, he'll rue it."

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The great solemn plain of Salisbury lay not two miles off. Frere made for its broad downs without knowing in the least that he was doing so. By and by, he found himself on a vast open space, spreading śheer away to the edge of the horizon. The moon, which had been bright when he had started on his walk, was now about to set--it was casting long shadows on the ground; his own shadow in gigantic dimensions walked by his side as he neared the vicinity of the plain. He walked on and on; the further he went the more fiercely did his blood boil within him. All his life hitherto he had been calm, collected, reasonable. He had taken the events of life with a certain rude philosophy. He had intended to do well for himself—to carve out a prosperous career for himself, but although he had subdued his passions both at college and at school, he had never blinded his eyes to the fact that there lived within his breast, ready to be awakened when the time came, a devil. Once, as a child, he had given way to this mad fury. He had flung a knife at his brother, wounding him in the temple, and almost killing him. The sight of the blood and the fainting form of his only brother had awakened his better self. He had lived through agony while his brother's life hung in the balance. The lad eventually recovered, to die in a year or two of something else, but Frere never forgot that time of mental torture. From that hour until the present, he had kept his "devil," as he used to call it, well in check.

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It was rampant to-night, however—he knew it, he took no pains to conceal the fact from his own heart—he rather gloried in the knowledge.

He walked on and on, across the plain.

Presently in the dim distance he heard Everett calling him.

"Frere, I say Frere, stop a moment, I'll come up to you."

A man who had been collecting underwood, and was returning home with a bagful, suddenly appeared in Frere's path. Hearing the voice of the man shouting behind he stopped.

"There be some-un calling yer," he said in his rude dialect.

Frere stared at the man blindly. He looked behind him, saw Everett's figure silhouetted against the sky, and then took wildly to his heels; he ran as if something evil were pursuing him.

At this moment the moon went completely down, and the whole of the vast plain lay in dim gray shadow. Frere had not the least idea where he was running. He and Everett had spent whole days on the plain revelling in the solitude and the splendid air, but they had neither of them ever visited it at night before. The whole place was strange, uncanny, unfamiliar. Frere soon lost his bearings. He tumbled into a hole, uttered an exclamation of pain, and raised himself with some difficulty.

"Hullo!" said a voice, "you might have broken your leg. What are you doing here?"

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Frere stood upright; a man slighter and taller than himself faced him about three feet away. Frere could not recognize the face, but he knew the tone.

"What the devil have you come to meet me for?" he said. "You've come to meet a madman. Turn back and go home, or it will be the worse for you."

"I don't understand you," said Awdrey.

Frere put a tremendous restraint upon himself.

"Look here," he said, "I don't want to injure you, upon my soul I don't, but there's a devil in me to-night, and you had better go home without any more words."

"I shall certainly do nothing of the kind," answered Awdrey. "The plain is as open to me as to you. If you dislike me take your own path."

"My path is right across where you are standing," said Frere.

"Well, step aside and leave me alone!"

It was so dark the men only appeared as shadows one to the other. Their voices, each of them growing hot and passionate, seemed scarcely to belong to themselves. Frere came a step nearer to Awdrey.

"You shall have it," he cried. "By the heaven above, I don't want to spare you. Let me tell you what I think of you."

"Sir," said Awdrey, "I don't wish to have anything to do with you—leave me, go about your business."

"I will after I've told you a bit of my mind.

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You're a confounded sneak—you're a liar—you're no gentleman. Shall I tell you why you interfered between me and my girl to-night—because you want her for yourself!"

This sudden accusation so astounded Awdrey that he did not even reply. He came to the conclusion that Frere was really mad.

"You forget yourself," he said, after a long pause. "I excuse you, of course, I don't even know what you are talking about!"

"Yes, you do, you black-hearted scoundrel. You interfered between Hetty Armitage and me because you want her yourself—she told me so much to-night!"

"She told you!—it's you who lie."

"She told me—so much for your pretended virtue. Get out of the way, or I'll strike you to the earth, you dog!"

Frere's wild passion prevented Awdrey's rising.

The accusation made against him was so preposterous that it did not even rouse his anger.

"I'm sorry for you," he said after a pause, "you labor under a complete misapprehension. I wish to protect Hetty Armitage as I would any other honest girl. Keep out of my path now, sir, I wish to continue my walk."

"By Heaven, that you never shall."

Frere uttered a wild, maniacal scream. The next instant he had closed with Awdrey, and raising a heavy cane which he carried, aimed it full at the young Squire's head.

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"I could kill you, you brute, you scoundrel, you low, base seducer," he shouted.

For a moment Awdrey was taken off his guard. But the next instant the fierce blood of his race awoke within him. Frere was no mean antagonist —he was a stouter, heavier, older man than Awdrey. He had also the strength which madness confers. After a momentary struggle he flung Awdrey to the ground. The two young men rolled over together. Then with a quick and sudden movement Awdrey sprang to his feet. He had no weapon to defend himself with but a slight stick which he carried. Frere let him go for a moment to spring upon him again like a tiger. A sudden memory came to Awdrey's aid—a memory which was to be the undoing of his entire life. He had been told in his boyhood by an old prize-fighter who taught him boxing, that the most effective way to use a stick in defending himself from an enemy was to use it as a bayonet.

"Prod your foe in the mouth," old Jim had said —"be he dog or man, prod him in the mouth. Grasp your stick in both hands, and when he comes to you, prod him in the mouth or neck."

The words flashed distinctly now through Awdrey's brain. When Frere raised his heavy stick to strike him he grasped his own slender weapon and rushed forward. He aimed full at Frere's open mouth. The stick went a few inches higher and entered the unfortunate man's right eye. He fell with a sudden groan to the ground.

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In a moment Awdrey's passion was over. He bent over the prostrate man and examined the wound which he had made. Frere lay perfectly quiet; there was an awful silence about him. The dark shadows of the night brooded heavily over the place. Awdrey did not for several moments realize that something very like a murder had been committed. He bent over the prostrate man—he took his limp hand in his, felt for a pulse—there was none. With trembling fingers he tore open the coat and pressed his hand to the heart—it was strangely still. He bent his ear to listen—there was no sound. Awdrey was scarcely frightened yet. He did not even now in the least realize what had happened. He felt in his pocket for a flask of brandy which he sometimes carried about with him. An oath escaped his lips when he found he had forgotten it. Then taking up his stick he felt softly across the point. The point of the stick was wet—wet with blood. He felt carefully along its edge. The blood extended up a couple of inches. He knew then what had happened. The stick had undoubtedly entered Frere's brain through the eye, causing instant death.

When ths knowledge came to Awdrey he laughed. His laugh sounded queer, but he did not notice its strangeness. He felt again in his pocket—discovered a box of matches which he pulled out eagerly. He struck a match, and by the weird, uncertain light which it cast looked for an instant at the dead face of the man whose life he had taken.

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"I don't even know his name," thought Awdrey. "What in the world have I killed him for? Yes, undoubtedly I've killed him. He is dead, poor fellow, as a door-nail. What did I do it for?"

He struck another match, and looked at the end of his stick. The stick had a narrow steel ferrule at the point. Blood bespattered the end of the stick.

"I must bury this witness," said Awdrey to himself.

He blew out the match, and began to move gropingly across the plain. His step was uncertain. He stooped as he walked. Presently he came to a great copse of underwood. Into the very thick of the underwood he thrust his stick.

Having done this, he resolved to go home. Queer noises were ringing in his head. He felt as if devils were pursuing him. He was certain that if he raised his eyes and looked in front of him, he must see the ghost of the dead man. It was early in the night, not yet twelve o'clock. As he entered the grounds of the Court, the stable clock struck twelve.

"I suppose I shall get into a beastly mess about this," thought Awdrey. "I never meant to kill that poor fellow. I ran at him in self-defence. He'd have had my blood if I hadn't his. Shall I see my father about it now? My father is a magistrate; he'll know what's best to be done."

Awdrey walked up to the house. His gait was uncertain and shambling, so little characteristic of

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him that if any one had met him in the dark he would not have been recognized. He opened one of the side doors of the great mansion with a latch key. The Awdreys were early people—an orderly household who went to roost in good time—the lamps were out in the house—only here and there was a dim illumination suited to the hours of darkness. Awdrey did not meet a soul as he went up some stairs, and down one or two corridors to his own cheerful bedroom. He paused as he turned the handle of his door.

"My father is in bed. There's no use in troubling him about this horrid matter before the morning," he said to himself.

Then he opened the door of his room, and went in.

To his surprise he saw on the threshold, just inside the door, a little note. He picked it up and opened it.

It was from his sister Ann. It ran as follows:

"DEAREST BOB.—I have seen the Cuthberts, and they can join us on the plain to-morrow for a picnic. As you have gone early to bed, I thought I'd let you know in case you choose to get up at cock-crow, and perhaps leave us for the day. Don't forget that we start at two o'clock, and that Margaret will be there. Your loving sister, ANN."

Awdrey found himself reading the note with interest. The excited beating of his heart cooled

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down. He sank into a chair, took off his cap, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"I wouldn't miss Margaret for the world," he said to himself.

A look of pleasure filled his dark gray eyes. A moment or two later he was in bed, and sound asleep. He awoke at his usual hour in the morning. He rose and dressed calmly. He had forgotten all about the murder — the doom of his house had fallen upon him.

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CHAPTER IV.

"I WISH you would tell me about him, Mr. Awdrey," said Margaret Douglas.

She was a handsome girl, tall and slightly made—her eyes were black as night, her hair had a raven hue, her complexion was a pure olive. She was standing a little apart from a laughing, chattering group of boys and girls, young men and young ladies, with a respectable sprinkling of fathers and mothers, uncles and aunts. Awdrey stood a foot or two away from her—his face was pale, he looked subdued and gentle.

"What can I tell you?" he asked.

"You said you met him last night, poor fellow. The whole thing seems so horrible, and to think of it happening on this very plain, just where we are having our picnic. If I had known it, I would not have come."

"The murder took place several miles from here," said Awdrey. "Quite close to the Court, in fact. I've been over the ground this morning with my father and one of the keepers. The body was removed before we came."

"Didn't it shock you very much?"

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"Yes; I am sorry for that unfortunate Everett."

"Who is he? I have not heard of him."

"He is the man whom they think must have done it. There is certainly very grave circumstantial evidence against him. He and Frere were heard quarrelling last night, and Armitage can prove that Everett did not return home until about two in the morning. When he went out he said he was going to follow Frere, who had gone away in a very excited state of mind.

"What about, I wonder?"

"The usual thing," said Awdrey, giving Margaret a quick look, under which she lowered her eyes and faintly blushed.

"Tell me," she said, almost in a whisper. "I am interested—it is such a tragedy."

"It is; it is awful. Sit down here, won't you, or shall we walk on a little way? We shall soon get into shelter if we go down this valley and get under those trees yonder."

"Come then," said Margaret.

She went first, her companion followed her. He looked at her many times as she walked on in front of him. Her figure was full of supple and easy grace, her young steps seemed to speak the very essence of youth and springtime. She appeared scarcely to touch the ground as she walked over it; once she turned, and the full light of her dark eyes made Awdrey's heart leap. Presently she reached the shadow caused by a copse of young trees, and stood still until the Squire came up to her.

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"Here's a throne for you, Miss Douglas. Do you see where this tree extends two friendly arms? Do you observe a seat inlaid with moss? Take your throne."

She did so immediately and looked up at him with a smile.

"The throne suits you," he said.

She looked down—her lips faintly trembled—then she raised her eyes.

"Why are you so pale?" he asked anxiously.

"I can't quite tell you," she replied, "except that notwithstanding the beauty of the day, and the summer feeling which pervades the air, I can't get rid of a sort of fear. It may be superstitious of me, but I think it is unlucky to have a picnic on the very plain where a murder was committed."

"You forget over what a wide extent the plain extends," said Awdrey; "but if I had known"—he stopped and bit his lips.

"Never mind," she answered, endeavoring to smile and look cheerful, "any sort of tragedy always affects me to a remarkable degree. I can't help it—I'm afraid there is something in me akin to trouble, but of course it would be folly for us to stay indoors just because that poor young fellow came to a violent end some miles away."

"Yes, it is quite some miles from here—I am truly sorry for him."

"Sit down here, Mr. Awdrey, here at my feet if you like, and tell me about it."

"I will sit at your feet with all the pleasure in

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the world, but why should we talk any more on this gruesome subject?"

"That's just it," said Margaret, "if I am to get rid of it, I must know all about it. You said you met him last night?"

"I did," said Awdrey, speaking with unwillingness.

"And you guess why he came by his end?"

"Partly, but not wholly."

"Well, do tell me."

"I will—I'll put it in as few words as possible. You know that little witch Hetty, the pretty niece of the innkeeper Armitage?"

"Hetty Armitage—of course I know her. I tried to get her into my Sunday class, but she wouldn't come."

"She's a silly little creature," said Awdrey.

"She is a very beautiful little creature," corrected Miss Douglas.

"Yes, I am afraid her beauty was too much for this unfortunate Frere's sanity. I came across him last night, or rather they passed me by in the underwood, enacting a love scene. The fact is, he was kissing her. I thought he was taking a liberty and interfered. He told me he intended to mary her—but Hetty denied it. I saw her back to the Inn—she was very silent and depressed. Another man, a handsome fellow, was standing in the porch. It just occurred to me at the time, that perhaps he also was a suitor for her hand, and might be the favored one. She went indoors. On my way

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home I met Frere again. He tried to pick a quarrel with me, which of course I nipped in the bud. He referred to his firm intention of marrying Hetty Armitage, and when I told him that she had denied the engagement, he said he would go back at once and speak to her. I then returned to the Court.

"The first thing I heard this morning was the news of the murder. My father as magistrate was of course made acquainted with the fact at a very early hour. Poor Everett has been arrested on suspicion, and there's to be a coroner's inquest to-morrow. That is the entire story as far as I know anything about it. Your face is whiter than ever, Miss Douglas. Now keep your word —forget it, since you have heard all the facts of the case."

She looked down again. Presently she raised her eyes, brimful of tears, to his face.

"I cannot forget it," she said. "That poor young fellow—such a fearfully sudden end, and that other poor fellow; surely if he did take away a life it must have been in a moment of terrible madness?"

"That is true," said Awdrey.

"They cannot possibly convict him of murder, can they?"

"My father thinks that the verdict will be manslaughter, or, at the worst, murder under strong provocation; but it is impossible to tell."

Awdrey looked again anxiously at his compan-

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ion. Her pallor and distress aroused emotion in his breast which he found almost impossible to quiet.

"I'm sorry to my heart that you know about this," he said. "You are not fit to stand any of the roughness of life."

"What folly!" she answered, with passion. "What am I that I should accept the smooth and reject the rough? I tell you what I would like to do. I'd like to go this very moment to see that poor Mr. Everett, in order to tell him how deeply sorry I am for him. To ask him to tell me the story from first to last, from his point of view. To clear him from this awful stain. And I'd like to lay flowers over the breast of that dead boy. Oh, I can't bear it. Why is the world so full of trouble and pain?"

She burst into sudden tears.

"Don't, don't! Oh! Margaret, you're an angel. You're too good for this earth," said Awdrey.

"Nonsense," she answered; "let me have my cry out; I'll be all right in a minute."

Her brief tears were quickly over. She dashed them aside and rose to her feet.

"I hear the children shouting to me," she said. "I'm in no humor to meet them. Where shall we go?"

"This way," said Awdrey quickly; "no one knows the way through this copse but me."

He gave her his hand, pushed aside the trees, and they soon found themselves in a dim little

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world of soft green twilight. There was a narrow path on which they could not walk abreast. Awdrey now took the lead, Margaret following him. After walking for half a mile the wood grew thinner, and they found themselves far away from their companions, and on a part of the plain which was quite new ground to Margaret.

"How lovely and enchanting it is here," she said, giving a low laugh of pleasure.

"I am glad you like it," said Awdrey. "I discovered that path to these heights only a week ago. I never told a soul about it. For all you can tell your feet may now be treading on virgin ground."

As Awdrey spoke he panted slightly, and put his hand to his brow.

"Is anything the matter with you?" asked Margaret.

"Nothing; I was never better in my life."

"You don't look well; you're changed."

"Don't say that," he answered, a faint ring of anxiety in his voice.

She gazed at him earnestly.

"You are," she repeated. "I don't quite recognize the expression in your eyes."

"Oh, I'm all right," he replied, "only——"

"Only what? Do tell me."

"I don't want to revert to that terrible tragedy again," he said, after a pause. "There is something, however, in connection with it which surprises myself."

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"What is that?"

"I don't seem to feel the horror of it. I feel everything else; your sorrow, for instance—the beauty of the day—the gladness and fulness of life, but I don't feel any special pang about that poor dead fellow. It's queer, is it not?"

"No," said Margaret tenderly. "I know—I quite understand your sensation. You don't feel it simply because you feel it too much—you are slightly stunned."

"Yes, you're right—we'll not talk about it any more. Let us stay here f r a little while."

"Tell me over .gain the preparations for your coming of age."

Margaret seated h rself on the grass as she spoke. Her white dress—her slim young figure—a sort of spiritual light in her dark eyes, gave her at that moment an unearthly radiance in the eyes of the man who loved her. All of a sudden, with an impulse he could not withstand, he resolved to put his fortunes to the test.

"Forgive me," he said, emotion trembling in his voice—"I can only speak of one thing at this moment."

He dropped lightly on one knee beside her. She did not ask him what it was. She looked down.

"You know perfectly well what I am going to say," he continued; "you know what I want most when I come of age—I want my wife—I want you. Margaret, you must have guessed my secret long ago?"

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She did not answer him for nearly a minute—then she softly and timidly stretched out one of her hands—he grasped it in his.

"You have guessed—you do know—you're not astonished nor shocked at my words?"

"Your secret was mine, too," she answered in a whisper.

"You will marry me, Margaret—you'll make me the happiest of men?"

"I will be your wife if you wish it, Robert," she replied.

She stood up as she spoke. She was tall, but he was a little taller—he put his arms round her, drew her close to him, and kissed her passionately.

Half-an-hour afterward they left the woods side by side.

"Don't tell anybody to-day," said Margaret.

"Why not? I don't feel as if I could keep it to myself even for an hour longer."

"Still, humor me, Robert; remember I am superstitious."

"What about?"

"I am ashamed to confess it—I would rather that our engagement was not known until the day of the murder has gone by."

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CHAPTER V.

MARGARET DOUGLAS lived with her cousins. the Cuthberts. Sir John Cuthbert was the Squire of a parish at a little distance from Grandcourt. He was a wealthy man and was much thought of in his neighborhood. Margaret was the daughter of a sister who had died many years ago—she was poor, but this fact did not prevent the county assigning her a long time ago to Robert Awdrey as his future wife. The attachment between the pair had been the growth of years. They had spent their holidays together, and had grown up to a great extent in each other's company—it had never entered into the thoughts of either to love any one else. Awdrey, true to his promise to Margaret, said nothing about his engagement, but the secret was after all an open one. When the young couple appeared again among the rest of Sir John Cuthbert's guests, they encountered more than one significant glance, and Lady Cuthbert even went to the length of kissing Margaret with much fervor in Awdrey's presence.

"You must come back with us to Cuthbertstown to supper," she said to the young Squire.

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"Yes, come, Robert," said Margaret, with a smile.

He found it impossible to resist the invitation in her eyes. It was late, therefore, night, in fact, when he started to walk back to Grandcourt. He felt intensely happy as he walked. He had much reason for this happiness—had he not just won the greatest desire of his life? There was nothing to prevent the wedding taking place almost immediately. As he strode quickly over the beautiful summer landscape he was already planning the golden future which lay before him. He would live in London, he would cultivate the considerable abilities which he undoubtedly possessed. He would lead an active, energetic, and worthy life. Margaret already shared all his ambitions. She would encourage him to be a man in every sense of the word. How lucky he was—how kind fate was to him! Why were the things of life so unevenly divided? Why was one man lifted to a giddy pinnacle of joy and another hurled into an abyss of despair? How happy he was that evening—whereas Everett—he paused in his quick walk as the thought of Everett flashed before his mind's eye. He didn't know the unfortunate man who was now awaiting the coroner's inquest, charged with the terrible crime of murder, but he had seen him twenty-four hours ago. Everett had looked jolly and good-tempered, handsome and strong, as he stood in the porch of the pretty little inn, and smoked his pipe and looked at Hetty when Awdrey

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brought her home. Now a terrible and black doom was overshadowing him. Awdrey could not help feeling deeply interested in the unfortunate man. He was young like himself. Perhaps he, too, had dreamed dreams, and been full of ambition, and perhaps he loved a girl, and thought of making her his wife. Perhaps Hetty was the girl—if so—Awdrey stamped his foot with impatience.

"What mischief some women do," he muttered; "what a difference there is between one woman and another. Who would suppose that Margaret Douglas and Hetty Armitage belonged to the same race? Poor Frere, how madly in love he was with that handsome little creature! How little she cared for the passion which she had evoked. I hope she won't come in my path; I should like to give her a piece of my mind.

This thought had scarcely rushed through Awdrey's brain before he was attracted by a sound in the hedge close by, and Hetty herself stood before him.

"I thought you would come back this way, Mr. Robert," she said. "I've waited here by the hedge for a long time on purpose to see you."

The Squire choked down a sound of indignation—the hot color rushed to his cheeks—it was with difficulty he could keep back his angry words. One glance, however, at Hetty's face caused his anger to fade. The lovely little face was so completely changed that he found some difficulty in recognizing it. Hetty's pretty figure had always

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been the perfection of trim neatness. No London belle could wear her expensive dresses more neatly nor more becomingly. Her simple print frocks fitted her rounded figure like a glove. The roses on her cheeks spoke the perfection of perfect health; her clear dark eyes were wont to be as open and untroubled as a child's. Her wealth of coal-black hair was always neatly coiled round her shapely head. Now, all was changed, the pretty eyes were scarcely visible between their swollen lids—the face was ghastly pale in parts—blotched with ugly red marks in others; there were great black shadows under the eyes, the lips were parched and dry, they drooped wearily as if in utter despair. The hair was untidy, and one great coil had altogether escaped its bondage, and hung recklessly over the girl's neck and bosom. Her cotton dress was rumpled and stained, and the belt with which she had hastily fastened it together, was kept in its place by a large pin.

Being a man, Awdrey did not notice all these details, but the *tout ensemble*, the abject depression of intense grief, struck him with a sudden pang.

"After all, the little thing loved that poor fellow," he said to himself; "she was a little fool to trifle with him, but the fact that she loved him alters the complexion of affairs."

"What can I do for you?" he said, speaking in a gentle and compassionate voice.

"I have waited to tell you something for nearly two hours, Mr. Robert."

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"Why did you do it? If you wanted to say anything to me, you could have come to the Court, or I'd have called at the Inn. What is it you want to say?"

"I could not come to the Court, sir, and I could not send you a message, because no one must know that we have met. I came out here unknown to any one; I saw you go home from Cuthbertstown with Miss Douglas." Here Hetty choked down a sob. "I waited by the hedge, for I knew you must pass back this way. I wished to say, Mr. Robert, to tell you, sir, that whatever happens, however matters turn out, I'll be true to you. No one shall get a word out of me. They say it's awful to be cross-examined, but I'll be true. I thought I'd let you know, Mr. Awdrey. To my dying day I'll never let out a word—you need have no fear."

"I need have no fear," said Awdrey, in absolute astonishment. "What in the world do you mean? What are you talking about?"

Hetty looked full up into the Squire's face. The unconscious and unembarrassed gaze with which he returned her look evidently took her breath away.

"I made a mistake," she said in a whisper. "I see that I made a mistake. I'd rather not say what I came to say."

"But you must say it. Hetty; you have something more to tell me, or you wouldn't have taken all this trouble to wait by the roadside on the

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chance of my passing. What is it? Out with it now, like a good girl."

"May I walk along a little bit with you, Mr. Robert?"

"You may as far as the next corner. There our roads part, and you must go home."

Hetty shivered. She gave the Squire another furtive and undecided glance.

"Shall I tell him?" she whispered to herself.

Awdrey glanced at her, and spoke impatiently.

"Come, Hetty; remember I'm waiting to hear your story. Out with it now, be quick about it."

"I was out last night, sir."

"You were out—when? Not after I saw you home?"

"Yes, sir." Hetty choked again. "It was after ten o'clock."

"You did very wrong. Were you out alone?"

"Yes, sir. I—I followed Mr. Frere on to the Plain."

"You did?" said Awdrey. "Is that fact known? Did you see anything?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why in the name of Heaven didn't you come up to the Court this morning and tell my father. Your testimony may be most important. Think of the position of that poor unfortunate young Everett."

"No, sir, I don't think of it."

"What do you mean, girl?"

"Let me tell you my story, Mr. Awdrey. If it

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is nothing to you—it is nothing. You will soon know if it is nothing or not. I had a quarrel with Mr. Frere last night. Nobody was by; Mr. Frere came into Aunt's parlor and he spoke to me very angrily, and I—I told him something which made him wild."

"What was that?"

Hetty gave a shy glance up at the young Squire; his face looked hard, his lips were firmly set. He and she were walking on the same road, but he kept as far from her side as possible.

"I will not tell him—at least I will not tell him yet," she said to herself.

"I think I won't say, sir," she replied. "What we talked about was Mr. Frere's business and mine. He asked me if I loved another man better than him, and I—I said that I did, sir."

"I thought as much," reflected Awdrey; "Everett is the favored one. If this fact is known it will go against the poor fellow."

"Well, Hetty," he interrupted, "it's my duty to tell you that you behaved very badly, and are in a great measure responsible for the awful tragedy that has occurred. There, poor child, don't cry. Heaven knows, I don't wish to add to your trouble; but see, we have reached the cross-roads where we are to part, and you have not yet told me what you saw when you went out."

"I crept out of my bedroom window," said Hetty. "Aunt and uncle had gone to bed. I can easily get out of the window, it opens right on the

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cow-house, and from there I can swing myself into the laburnum-tree, and so reach the ground. I got out, and followed Mr. Frere. Presently I saw that Mr. Everett was also out, and was following him. I knew every yard of the Plain well, far better than Mr. Everett did. I went to it by a short cut round by Sweetbriar Lane—you know the part there—not far from the Court. I had no sooner got on the Plain than I saw Mr. Frere—he was running—I thought he was running to meet me—he came forward by leaps and bounds very fast—suddenly he stumbled and fell. I wanted to call him, but my voice, sir, it wouldn't rise, it seemed to catch in my throat. I couldn't manage to say his name. All of a sudden the moon went down, and the plain was all gray with black shadows. I felt frightened—awfully. I was determined to get to Mr. Frere. I stumbled on—presently I fell over the trunk of a tree. My fall stunned me a bit—when I rose again there were two men on the Plain. They were standing facing each other. Oh, Mr. Awdrey, I don't think I'll say any more."

"Not say any more? You certainly must, girl," cried Awdrey, his face blazing with excitement. "You saw two men facing each other—Frere and Everett, no doubt."

Hetty was silent. After a moment, during which her heart beat loudly, she continued to speak in a very low voice.

"It was so dark that the men looked like shad-

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ows. Presently I heard them talking—they were quarrelling. All of a sudden they sprang together like—like tigers, and they—fought. I heard the sound of blows—one of them fell, the taller one—he got on to his feet in a minute: they fought a second time, then one gave a cry, a very sharp, sudden cry, and there was the sound of a body falling with a thud on the ground—afterward, silence—not a sound. I crept behind the furze bush. I was quite stunned. After a long time—at least it seemed a long time to me—one of the men went away, and the other man lay on his back with his face turned up to the sky. The man who had killed him turned in the direction of——"

"In what direction?" asked Awdrey.

"In the direction of——" Hetty looked full up at the Squire; the Squire's eyes met hers. "The town, sir."

"Oh, the town," said Awdrey, giving vent to a short laugh. "From the way you looked at me, I thought you were going to say The Court."

"Sir, Mr. Robert, do you think it was Mr. Everett?"

"Who else could it have been?" replied Awdrey.

"Very well, sir, I'll hold to that. Who else could it have been? I thought I'd tell you, Mr. Awdrey. I thought you'd like to know that I'd hold to that. When the steps of the murderer died away, I stole back to Mr. Frere, and I tried to bring him back to life, but he was as dead as a stone. I left him and I went home. I got back to

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my room about four in the morning. Not a soul knew I was out; no one knows it now but you, sir. I thought I'd come and tell you, Mr. Robert, that I'd hold to the story that it was Mr. Everett who committed the murder. Good-night, sir."

"Good-night, Hetty. You'll have to tell my father what you have told me, in the morning."

"Very well, sir, if you wish it."

Hetty turned and walked slowly back toward the village, and Awdrey stood where the four roads met and watched her. For a moment or two he was lost in anxious thought — then he turned quickly and walked home. He entered the house by the same side entrance by which he had come in on the previous night. He walked down a long passage, crossed the wide front hall, and entered the drawing-room where his sister Ann was seated.

"Is that you, Bob?" she said, jumping up when she saw him. "I'm so glad to have you all to myself. Of course, you were too busy with Margaret to take any notice of us all day, but I've been dying to hear your account of that awful tragedy. Sit here like a dear old fellow and tell me the story."

"Talk of women and their tender hearts," said Awdrey, with irritation.

Then the memory of Margaret came over him and his face softened. Margaret, whose heart was quite the tenderest thing in all the world, had also wished to hear of the tragedy.

"To tell the truth, Ann," he said, sinking into a

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