his mate stood waiting. "Shall I take off the cover, sir?" he asked.

Sir Redways nodded assent, having turned his chair so that he could see what was going on, and forgetting for a moment the lateness of the train.

Both servants stooped and pulled at the cover, but it still stuck fast.

"Give it a jerk, James," said Sir Redways.

James obeyed, and at the same time uttered a stifled cry. He and his companion looked at each other, and, lowering the cover, stepped with one accord between their master and the box.

"What's the matter now?" testily inquired the invalid. "Have you torn your clothes or hurt your fingers on a nail?"

"No, sir, no—I—it isn't that," responded James, in a strange voice—so strange that Robert Lester looked quickly and searchingly into his face. The footman caught the look and returned it with an imploring gaze.

"Well, then, what is it? Can't you speak up?" Sir Redways went on.

"I think, sir—that—that you were right. There must have been a mistake about the box," James stammered, he and his fellow servant both yellow-white to their trembling lips. "I—if you'll allow us, sir, we'll take it downstairs again. It's not fit to—to open here."

At this, without waiting for permission, the two men stooped to lift the box, but the younger of the two staggered, dropped his end and leaned against the wall, a visible dew breaking out on his pale forehead.

Until this moment Sir Redways, to whom servants were more or less automatons, had not thought of observing the footmen's faces. But as the end of the box thumped down on the floor again, he started and looked at the men with an angry frown. For a long moment he looked in silence, from one to the other, then he said, slowly: "Open that box here—and now."

By this time the doctor was on his feet suspecting, fearing he scarcely knew what, for the faces of the two men were eloquent. "Remember, Sir Redways," he said, quickly, "you're an invalid, and my patient. I can't have you exciting yourself. If there's anything unpleasant in the box—some hoax, perhaps, played on you by an unprincipled person, or that detestable creature, a practical joker——"

"There's no joke about this, whatever else it may be," broke in Sir Redways. "Look at those fellows—they're green. You're a doctor—you could see that a minute ago Henry was on the point of tumbling over in a faint. Open the box, I say—or have I got to do it myself?"

With a veined hand on either arm of his big chair he lifted himself up and took a step toward the box, which had been placed on the floor at a distance of four or five yards from him.

"No, sir, for heaven's sake!" implored James, springing forward with a new lease of courage. "It—it isn't for you to look at, sir. Wait—I beg you'll wait. Let the doctor see, and then——"

But his master, pushing him roughly aside, strode to the box and tore off the cover.

Robert Lester's eyes were ready to snatch at the sight which should be revealed, and he and Sir Redways saw it together.

"Great heavens! My girl! She's been murdered!" cried the old man in an awful voice—a voice with the agony of death in it. For there, on a bundle of sacking that was stained with dark, unmistakable stains, lay scattered the shorn glory of golden hair which had been one of Cecily Grant's most radiant beauties.

It was her hair. Even Dr. Lester, even James, the footman, neither of whom had seen her for a year, were sure of that; sure, without a doubt. For there was no other hair like it in all the world—no other as pure gold, with a wonderful, rippling wave spread over its shining surface, like the ruffling of a clear sheet of bright water in a breeze. No other hair was so silky fine, or so long and thick down to the very ends, that curled as they lay on that ugly, red-spotted sacking, into soft, pathetic rings.

Sir Redways put out his shaking hands as if to touch the hair, then drew them back with a groan. "I can't—I can't!" he faltered. "My God! What's under the sacking?"

"Not what you fear, I hope," said Lester, trying to speak soothingly, though he too was very pale and his voice unsteady. "For heaven's sake, let me help you to your room, and when I have—have found out all I can of this mystery, you shall hear everything. You are not fit——"

"Not fit?" echoed the old man. "I was once a soldier. I'm not a coward now. What if it kills me! Do I want to live if she is dead? And do you think it possible that I would go—now?"

"Then at least let me——" began Lester, coming closer, but Sir Redways stopped him with a gesture. The invalid was weak no longer. Once again he put out his hands and this time did not draw back. Softly, caressingly, he touched the disordered mass of lovely hair, which must have been cut close to the head it had once adorned, for as he tenderly lifted it from the box two or three long golden ropes separated themselves from the rest and trailed along the Persian rug before Sir Redways could lay the whole glittering heap on a table close by.

Lester saw the old man's lips tighten and heard the deep breath he drew as he lifted the sacking which covered the remaining contents of the box. It was an effort not to turn away the eyes in fear of what might be beneath, but neither would yield to the impulse which both must have felt, and as the coarse stuff was thrown back the two men breathed the same words: "Thank heaven!" for no fair dead body lay crumpled in that narrow space.

Instead, there was a bundle of clothing, roughly folded. A pretty gray cloth skirt with an edging of chinchilla and a glimpse of silk frills and lining to match. A jacket of the same materials, a gray felt hat with soft feathers, once smartly shaped and turned up at the side with a jeweled buckle, now crushed and broken down by the pressure of the box cover; a little chinchilla muff, with a bunch of real Parma violets pinned upon it—poor violets, dead now, and all their beauty gone! Besides these things there was a mass of pale blue silk and lace and delicate cambric, rolled into a ball, and underneath was a large dressing bag of alligator skin, with a rent in the side where a monogram, doubtless of gold, had been roughly torn off.

"These were her things," said Sir Redways. "She wore this dress and hat and muff the last time I saw her, about six weeks ago. They were new then, and I remember well how she asked me if I liked them, smiling all the time, because she knew what I would say. And the bag—that was hers, too. I gave it to her on her last birthday. It has a lot of gold bottles inside."

As he spoke, he attempted to lift the dressing-bag from the box, but it was surprisingly heavy, and, letting it remain, he opened it bunglingly, because of the trembling of his fingers. All the gold fittings were gone, like the monogram, and the bag had been filled with stones and gravel, enough alone to account for the weight of the box. But on top of the stones was something else—a little pair of shoes with high heels and smartly pointed toes; and tucked into one of these was a folded bit of white paper which Sir Redways snatched with a desperate eagerness.

Outside it was blank; but within a few words had been printed, not written, in ink of a dull red color. "A Christmas box for Sir Redways Grant. All that he will ever see of his daughter."

Silently he held out the open sheet of paper to Robert Lester, who read it, horrified and wondering. "This is a case of revenge," said the doctor. "An enemy has done this thing—sent you this box, I mean; for I do not believe that—that she has been murdered."

"You say that wishing to buoy me up with false hope," answered the old man—who looked years older now. "But it's no use, Lester. Some villain has robbed me of all that made life worth living, except—except to bring him to justice. Revenge this may be, yet what enemy have I—unless——"

He broke off abruptly, a dark flush creeping up to his forehead. "There is one man," he went on in a changed voice, "Lord Carrismoyle."

"Good heavens, Sir Redways!" exclaimed Lester. "You don't know what you're saying. Carrismoyle—a murderer? Why, he worships your daughter. He'd give his life ten times over to save her. Surely you don't accuse him of taking it?"

"How should I know?" retorted the other, with sudden fierceness. "He hated me, as his father before him hated me. His conduct last year showed that he could stoop to deceit and treachery, why not go a step further and put a girl beyond the reach of any other man, since he knew he could never have her for himself?"

"You would not say, or even think such things, if you were not half crazed for the moment by the awful shock you've had," said Lester. "Why, Carrismoyle is at my house now. He came to-day. I was trying to tell you this when——"

"I shall have him arrested!" cried Sir Redways.

"But this is monstrous," began the doctor, indignantly; then quickly checked himself. Presently, when Sir Redways was sane again, he would probably forget these unworthy, absurd suspicions, and for the moment it was best not to combat his intentions, perhaps. "But you must not take it for granted that your daughter is dead," he went on instead. "Why, she may even yet arrive. Wouldn't it be well to send over to Martinscombe Hall at once, and find out if Lady Stanton——"

"Yes! And I've been a fool not to think of that. Heavens!—and only a few moments ago I was expecting my poor little girl!" His voice broke, but with hard, dry eyes he turned to the two footmen, who, half-dazed, had remained, in the vague hope that they might be called upon for help of some sort.

"Send a message instantly to Lady Stanton," Sir Redways commanded. "If she has come home, request that she drive here as soon as possible; she'll not delay, I know, if—if she's safe. Send to Waycross for the police, and wire Scotland Yard. Not that it will do any good, but—there, don't stand staring. You've had my orders. Go—go."

The two servants waited no longer, but hurried from the room. Hardly had they gone, however, when James returned, hesitating at the door. "Lady Stanton is here, sir," he stammered. "She has just been shown in, as I——"

Sir Redways, who had been on his knees by the box, raised himself hastily to his feet, and stood erect, though swaying for a moment, giddily. "Where is she?" he asked. "Request her to come to me at once."

As he spoke there was a rustling of silk, and Lady Stanton, who had evidently come up with the footman, walked quickly into the room. Instinctively Dr. Lester took a step or two, and placed himself between her and the table where lay the mass of gleaming yellow hair. He liked Lady Stanton, as did everybody who knew her, and he wished to spare her as much as he could.

"What's the matter here, Sir Redways?" cried a cheerful voice, which rang out in the tragedy-charged air like a false note in music, pleasant though it was in itself. "Your servants look as if they'd just crossed the channel in a storm, or something of the sort, and"—glancing anxiously from face to face—"why, there is something wrong! What is it? Cissy isn't ill, I trust? or——"

"It's of Cissy I would ask you," said Sir Redways, imploringly, as if, after all, some hope might be left. "I was expecting you both, only a little while ago, saying that the train was always late—"

"But the train was not late," broke in Lady Stanton, bewildered. "I drove all the way home, thinking I'd wait till to-morrow to see Cissy, and then I changed my mind and came back thinking I'd still have a few minutes here before it was time to dress for dinner. I wanted to find out, if you didn't think that very rude of me, why you sent to Ashburton House for Cissy in such a hurry."

"I did not send," Sir Redways answered, the faint, hopeful brightness dying out of his eyes.

"What! You didn't wire for Cissy to come home alone last Saturday evening and telegraph me at the same time?"

"No! I did nothing to disturb the old arrangement. I was expecting you and Cissy to arrive together this evening."

"Good gracious! Then she isn't here? And—you don't know where she is?"

"Would to heaven I did!"

"How terrible! Why, I can hardly believe it. What can have happened? Oh, is it possible that—that she——"

"Don't be afraid to speak, Margaret."

"Well, then—I wouldn't suggest such a thing if—if we need not think of every contingency—can she and Carrismoyle have run away together?"

"Lord Carrismoyle is at my house," said Lester, quickly.

"Ah! then he can't—yet might he not wish to throw you off the track, Sir Redways, until they could get a license and that sort of thing? Or could they have managed to be married without, in Scotland?"

"You don't understand all yet, Lady Stanton, or I don't think you'd hint at Carrismoyle's hand in this," went on Lester. "Shall I tell her, Sir Redways?"

Carrismoyle took from his pocket a sovereign and laid it on the table.

The old man bowed his head. And in a few moments Lady Stanton knew as much as the others. She was spared the sight of the sacking with its ugly, ominous strains; but she saw the beautiful hair and cried over it.

"I can't—I can't believe my sweet little Cissy is dead!" she sobbed. "It's an awful mystery! But it will all be found out. And she will be found, too, alive and well. There are plenty of clews which clever detectives would pick up. Of course you'll wire Scotland Yard?"

"Yes," said Redways. "I shall do all I can to bring the murderer to justice. For there has been murder! I've no longer any hope. I shall never see my girl again. Strange that you, too, Margaret, should have mentioned Carrismoyle's name. Something tells me he's in this."

"Nothing could make me believe that, now I know everything," exclaimed Lady Stanton, almost sharply. "I thought he might have run away with her, for you were very cruel to him, Sir Redways. But this—it's not to be thought of. At your house, is he, Dr. Lester? Has he said anything about Cissy to you?"

Lester flushed and turned away his eyes. For the last few minutes he had been dreading this question; but it had to be answered.

"Very little. I haven't had much talk with him since he arrived. He came quite unexpectedly."

"But something," urged Lady Stanton, in her pretty coaxing way that was still very charming, though she was nearly 40. And it was especially charming to Robert Lester, because he had been secretly in love with her for the past twenty years. "He did say something about her?"

"He—er—said that he had seen her—not very long ago."

Sir Redways lifted his head and his eyes sent out a flash. "Ah! he admitted that?"

"It wasn't a case of 'admitting' anything," said Lester, standing up for the friend he admired and liked, "for he was accused of nothing. I am so sure Carrismoyle has had no hand in Miss Grant's disappearance—so sure it will be the greatest shock of his life to hear what has happened—that I beg, Sir Redways, you will send for him to come here—now—while you are waiting for the police, while there's nothing further you can do, and question him, without his having been in any way prepared."

"I have no wish to see the fellow," ejaculated Sir Redways.

"But if he could, indirectly, throw light on this dreadful mystery?" pleaded Lady Stanton.

"Well, then, let him come if he will," Sir Redways said. "But I—you send for him, Lester."

Hastily the doctor scribbled a line or two on a leaf of his notebook, and tearing it out folded the paper several times, addressing it in pencil. Then he rang the bell, as he knew the master of the house would wish him to do.

In a moment James, the footman, appeared once more, and, having taken the order, still paused. "Everything you directed has been done, sir," he announced. "And—if you please, Miss Grant's maid, who went into the village to post a letter, and came back by way of the cliffs, has been telling a very strange tale, sir, of something she saw and heard in the smugglers' cave—No Man's, you know, sir. I—it's just possible it may have some connection with—with—"

"For goodness sake don't stammer, you'll drive me mad!" exclaimed Sir Redways, savagely. "Send the young woman up, send her up. And get that note off to Dr. Lester's house as quick as you can."

Now, every second seemed long; yet few minutes passed before Nella Kynaston was almost pushed in at the door, white as a sheet, with wind blown hair and great frightened eyes—a very different creature from the neat, pretty, peach-faced girl Sir Redways Grant's housekeeper had engaged a few days ago to wait upon the adored young lady of the house.

She had come back half-fainting, panting and breathless after the wild rush she had made for home; and then, before she had had time to recover, the new horror—already, through the footmen, become the property of the servants' hall—had been sprung upon her. The poor girl would have given anything to escape an interview with Sir Redways, but there was no help for it. She had been forced into his presence, and she must speak, even though what she would have to tell proved the old man's death blow and struck him down before her eyes.

At first her lips were so dry and her heart beat so chokingly fast that she could not utter two consecutive words, but Lady Stanton's kind face, dimpled and pretty despite its cloud of trouble, and Lady Stanton's soft gray eyes gave her courage.

She was confused still, however, mixing details of no importance with those that were most significant, dwelling upon how she had thought that she could get back in plenty of time; how she had met her cousin and been delayed; how the darkness had fallen. But she had not been afraid, at least hardly afraid at all, until she had heard the voices and that horrid sound of shoveling, shoveling—oh, could she ever get it out of her ears? She knew that she would dream about it. And then the touch of that cold hand! It was enough to kill her. It almost seemed now as if she must die. At this she had to go back and explain and begin over again, and Sir Redways in his agony of impatience would have been rough with her had not Lady Stanton begged him to let her ask the questions. If it had not been for Lady Stanton, poor Nella could never have finished her terrible story at all. But even at best it took a long time; and she had only reached the ghastly climax, her teeth chattering as she told how she had dug and dug, until at last in hers she had clasped a cold dead hand—small and delicate—she could feel it still—when the footman announced "Lord Carrismoyle."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT THEY FOUND IN THE CAVE.

Sir Redways Grant and Lord Carrismoyle bowed gravely to each other.

"You sent for me?" said the younger man.

"When did you last see my daughter?" Sir Redways flung the question at him.

Carrismoyle's blue eyes, which could laugh so merrily, were far from merry now. They were the color of the sea in a storm, and the black brows drew together, for the tone was one to resent, and he and Sir Redways Grant were old enemies. Carrismoyle would not have come to this house if Lester's hurried note had not been worded so urgently. And now Lester, seeing the imminent storm, threw an imploring look at his friend.

"I saw Miss Grant on Saturday afternoon," Carrismoyle answered, quietly, in deference to that look.

"Where if you please? It was scarcely"—with a slight sneer—"at Ashburton House?"

"It was at a tea place in Bond street, where Miss Grant was with a chaperon and several of her school friends."

"Was the meeting accidental, Lord Carrismoyle?"

"I think, Sir Redways, you have scarcely a right to ask that question."

"I have every right. My daughter has disappeared—we fear has been murdered. It was on Saturday that she left school. Now you understand."

Carrismoyle's face was burned a healthy brown, but he was pale under the tan, and his eyes suddenly seemed to grow dark as night.

"Disappeared—murdered?" he echoed, for Lester, true to his word, had explained nothing, saying in his note only "Come at once. It is urgent."

"If she's dead I shan't be long in following her," Sir Redways said, huskily. "You and I are not friends Lord Carrismoyle. I consider myself deeply injured by you, but I don't think that you'll have the heart to keep anything back that can help now. Did you meet Cecily by appointment?"

"I had written her that—I might be in Bond street."

"Oh, you wrote to each other after all?"

"Once or twice, yes. It was absolutely necessary."

"Tell me what passed between you on Saturday."

"Very few words indeed. Only what everybody could hear."

"You exchanged no notes?"

"We did exchange them, Sir Redways. Further than that, even at such a moment as this, I can't go. Nothing else that I could tell you would help in the least. I swear that. Miss Grant and the others went out of the tea-room and left me there. Naturally, I did not follow. I did not see her after she went by the windows. But I did come here to-day partly in the hope of seeing her again. Now that I've answered your questions as well as I can, I beg you'll give me some idea of what has happened. You may deny that I have any right, but—great heaven, Sir Redways, I love her!"

"Look, then!" the old man exclaimed, fiercely, sweeping a wild gesture toward the box and its late contents. "Look at that murderer's work. A few moments ago I thought that was all I should ever see of her—my beautiful girl!—but there's a chance now of better luck, perhaps." He spoke strangely, with a look almost of madness in his eyes. "There's a dead woman, it seems, lying in a cave down by the sea a mile or two away. I'm going to see whether that cave holds anything of mine, and you can go with me if you choose, since you say you loved here so well."

"Sir Redways, I beg that you will listen to my advice——" began Dr. Lester, only to be instantly cut short.

"I will listen to no advice!" cried the old man. "I would go—and you know that I would go—if I were sure it were to my death."

If there were any logical train of thought in Sir Redways' distracted brain when he offered to make the man he hated his companion on so dreadful an expedition, his idea was that if Carrismoyle knew more than he had told the sight which might be waiting for him in No Man's Cave would wring the truth from his lips, as though his limbs had been put to the torture of the rack. And, perhaps, too, there was, in addition, the vague, half-vindictive feeling that since he must endure his white-hot agony there would be a savage consolation in the knowledge that another heart was wrung.

As for Robert Lester, he objected no more, for he understood that protest was useless, and if Cecily Grant had indeed been done to death, all the prudence and precaution in the world would scarcely suffice to preserve her father's broken life. The old man must have his way, let the consequences be what they might.

Again the footman was recalled, more orders were given and presently, with the policeman who by this time had arrived from Waycross, Sir Redways, Lord Carrismoyle and Dr. Lester left Lady Stanton to wait in terrible suspense for news, while they drove in a closed carriage to the junction of the road and the footpath over the cliffs.

They carried with them lanterns and spades for the grisly work they meant to undertake, but no servant was to accompany them after they left the carriage.

Not three hours had passed since Nella Kynaston had fled from the cave to gasp out at the abbey the almost incredible story of her experience, but already the snow lay white upon the ground, giving a strange, glimmering effect of light in darkness. Not one of the party uttered a word during the ordeal of that walk over the cliffs to the beach until they arrived at the mouth of the cave. Then Carrismoyle spoke, pointing downward, and holding the lantern he carried closer to the ground.

Elsewhere the newly fallen snow lay smoothly spread over the sand like the frosting on a freshly made Christmas cake, but here, in front of the cave, it showed many footmarks not yet obliterated by the soft, feathery masses which came whirling down faster and faster every moment.

"That looks as if men had been here very lately," Dr. Lester volunteered; "later than the girl who——"

"It's hard to be certain of that, sir," broke in the policeman. "The sand is so tumbled about at this place that it may be a mere effect. We're not sure, either, how long the snow has been falling so fast." He pushed the old door, which was not quite shut, and it was Sir Redways who entered the cave first.

"For heaven's sake, let's get to work," he said, harshly, "and end this horror—one way or the other. So far the girl told the truth. There's the mound of sand in the corner. Anything might be underneath."

Yet the spades shoveled away the sand and pebbles—carefully, with a kind of fearful tenderness lest at any moment they might come upon that which was sought—and found nothing. They had all calculated, though no one had spoken out the thought, that from Nella Kynaston's account the dead hand she had felt could not have been buried very far below the surface.

"Can it be that the girl imagined the whole experience?" said the doctor. "I've had hysterical patients who were quite capable of it. Still, she didn't seem like that sort, and, Carrismoyle, did you hear an odd sound then?"

"Yes, I thought my spade touched metal, but now I can't come upon it again," answered the other. "Wait!" And he drew aside the spade, going down on one knee with the lantern in his left hand, his right groping in the sand.

Suddenly Sir Redways gave a start forward, and snatched something up, almost from under Carrismoyle's hand.

"A locket!" he exclaimed. "That girl was right. There has been strange work here. Perhaps the men she saw got suspicious and came back to undo what they had done; there's been more than time since. But, thank heaven, I don't think this thing belonged to Cissy. She had little jewelry that I or Lady Stanton did not give her, and I never saw this trinket before. Ah, after all, perhaps I may hope again."

"Not from the locket, Sir Redways," said Carrismoyle, sadly, "for—it was hers. I gave it to her, with a thin gold chain that is not with it now. There's a photograph of myself inside. She told me that—that she wore it sometimes under her dress."

The old man's spirit cried out within him at this confirmation of his worst fear, at the moment when he had allowed himself to hope. Had he been alone or had Lester, his old friend, been his only companion, he would have covered his face with his hands and groaned aloud, but now pride gave him the power of self-restraint.

"If the locket was given by you it is yours now, Lord Carrismoyle," he said coldly. "For me, you are welcome to keep it. At least she is not here, and now I have made sure of so much I will go. Will you return with me as you came, or——"

"I will stay and see the end of this as far as may be," answered Carrismoyle, with a glance at the policeman, who, having thrown aside his spade for a look at the locket, was industriously jotting down notes in a small book. "Just one thing first," and he followed Sir Redways Grant and Robert Lester out into the whirling snow. "I should like to ask whether you still suspect me of knowing more than I have told?"

"Why not?" the old man retorted, sullenly. "You have done nothing so far that I can see to disprove that theory."

"I will yet do something to disprove it," Carrismoyle exclaimed. "If she lives I will bring her back to you."

"I would sooner trust the police for that," said Sir Redways. "Not these provincials—I'm not talking of them. One has to begin with them, that's all. But give me the trained intelligence of Scotland Yard. It's only in novels that the amateur detective scores, Lord Carrismoyle."

"There is something that sharpens the wits of an amateur, and gives him an advantage over the 'trained intelligence' of the expert," Carismoyle answered.

"And that something?"

"It is love, Sir Redways."

"Come, Lester, we will go," said the old man. "You and I are no longer needed here. You will go home with me?"

"Yes," returned Lester, with one eloquent look at Carrismoyle.

"If she is alive, I swear to you that I will bring her back to you," the young man repeated.

Sir Redways, who had taken the doctor's arm, and had already begun to move toward the path that led homewards, stopped and turned abruptly. "Do you think by saying that to remove all suspicion from my mind?" he asked, harshly. "What's to prevent my supposing, if you come with news that the police have failed to get, that you haven't had more knowledge to begin with than they? That all along it has been your plan to affect surprise and horror with the rest of us, and bribe me by saying that, if I'll give you my daughter when she's found, you'll bring her safely back to me—you, and no other? Aren't you giving me reason to think that? Yet, base as it would be so to play on my feelings, heaven knows that I'd forgive you all if only at this moment you could tell me she was alive and unharmed. Forgive you? Why, I'd play into your hands. I'd promise her to you, Lord Carrismoyle, if you do know anything of her—only speak, and the game's yours. You've only to make your own terms."

"I did not understand before how badly you thought of me," answered the young man, in the deepest chagrin.

His voice pleaded his innocence, an eloquent advocate, and Sir Redways was pricked with a faint stab of remorse. "I don't say that I do think it of you," he retorted. "If I did I should have given you in charge of the police. No, Lord Carrismoyle, I don't think so badly—even of you. I merely spoke of what might be, for I'm struck down so low that I'm at any man's mercy; I'd make any bargain to have my girl again."

"You shall have her if she's alive—and I believe she is," answerd Carrismoyle. "But I make no bargain; I shall ask nothing in return for what I hope to do—what I shall give my whole life to doing till it's done."

Sir Redways looked at him fixedly in the queer mingling of lantern-light and snowlight. "Yet if you should do what you say," he exclaimed, on a sudden impulse, "I would forget all the past and—and give you everything."

With that he bowed his white head and passed on, leaning on the arm of the doctor. For a moment or two Carrismoyle stood gazing after the two dark figures, and the tremulous yellow star of their lantern; then he turned and went back into the cave. But he and his companion found nothing more. The locket was the only real proof that Nella Kynaston had not spoken out of the richness of her imagination.

* * * * * *

Lord Carrismoyle had come to Waycross avowedly with the intention of spending Christmas with Robert Lester and Robert Lester's sister—a delightful old maid, who consoled the doctor as well as a sister could for the great disappointment of his life. Carrismoyle was fond of the Lesters, but they knew if Cecily Grant had not been coming home from school at this time that in all probability they would not have had a visit from their young and popular friend. They were none the less glad to see him because of this, and Miss Mary Lester was of the opinion that Carrismoyle had been abominably treated by Sir Redways; and now they were neither surprised nor offended at their guest's sudden change of plan.

Mary Lester was horror-stricken at the news from Stonecross Abbey, and before her brother returned from there it was arranged that Carrismoyle should take the 11:30 train back to London. If he did not catch that he could not arrive in town much before noon next day, and in his desperate impatience he wished to begin his quest as early as possible in the morning.

"But why isn't there just as much chance of finding out things here?" asked Lester, when he had come back at last from the abbey. "I should say this was the end to work from. You could find out whether those telegrams really were sent from Waycross to Lady Stanton and to Miss Grant—"

"The police are equal to learning that—even the Waycross police," broke in Carrismoyle, scornfully, "and also where that box came from. It isn't to that technical sort of thing that I mean to apply myself. I don't expect or want to be scientific in what I do, or begin at the right end and all that. What I want is to find Cecily."

"Ah, that is what we all want!" sighed Lester, with a quick vision of the beautiful girl as he had seen her last, and a shuddering afterthought of the box and its contents, the mound of sand in the cave and the trampled sand and snow outside. "But, Carrismoyle, I haven't much hope."

"I have," answered the other; while Mary Lester listened with uneven breaths and the stinging of tears at her eyelids.

"Will you tell me what you have to go upon—what ground for hope, after all we've seen and heard to-night?"

"I've simply this: my own feeling that she can't be dead. And the one fact that—that her dear dead body wasn't in the box. That was sent out of pure brutality, to frighten her father. If she had been murdered I think that the horror would have been intensified to the full. The only reason it wasn't so, was because, as she's alive, that was not possible."

"I can't say I think we've much to go on."

"Not much, but something. And I'm in a condition to catch at straws."

"By to-morrow morning Scotland Yard will be at work," said Lester. "I fancy, somehow, that their attention, after finding out how she left the school and that obvious sort of thing, will mostly be concentrated on this neighborhood. And you—have you any definite plan of action, if you don't mind my asking?"

"I don't mind. And my definite plan has gone no further than calling at Ashburton House, where she was at school. Good heavens! If you only knew what it is for me to feel that if it were not for me this awful thing would never have happened."

"How do you make that out?" Mary Lester asked quickly.

"She was sent to school, you know, as a punishment for—caring about me. If she had been at home with her father she would have been safe."

"Then it's her father's fault for sending her away from him," pronounced the spinster. "Poor old man—my heart aches for him now; but I wonder if that thought's not in his mind to-night? Oh, Roy," turning impulsively to Carrismoyle, "if only you're right; if only you could find her and give her back to him, what a triumph, what poetical justice it would be for you!"

"I'm not thinking of the triumph," Carrismoyle said, humbly; "I don't dare look far ahead—the way is so dark."

Somehow, it was upon the past that he dwelt most as he traveled back to town that night, alone, in a first-class compartment. His thoughts even went as far back as the quarrel between his father and Sir Redways Grant. To this day he did not know the cause, though he had gleaned a vague impression that it had been about a woman, and when both men had been young—his father, now dead, the younger of the two.

A year and a half ago he had not only been in ignorance of this old feud, but had not even been aware that such a person as Sir Redways Grant existed. Carrismoyle Castle, the dilapidated but still beautiful home of his ancestors—a great many of them, each generation a little poorer and more improvident than another—was in Ireland, and though, as a matter of fact, the young man had not spent much time there since he had first been packed off to Eton, naturally people were of vast importance in Devonshire had little interest for him, and he had only known the Lesters because they visited cousins of his in his own county. But about eighteen months ago he and an Oxford friend of his, the young Duke of Clonmare, went to Switzerland together for some climbing. They began to find themselves stared at, at the hotels they frequented, because people found out who they were; and it is not every day that a Swiss hotel contains a bachelor Duke and a Viscount, even if both are "only Irish titles."

They had not come for "that sort of thing," as the Duke complained, and he proposed that he and Carrismoyle should in future travel as plain George Dennis and Royal West. They had had a right to these names, so that they would not be going about under false pretenses, and it would be "more of a lark."

It was not ten days after the change when they met Sir Redways Grant and Cecily at Zermatt. "Mr. Dennis and Mr. West" had, in company with their guides, done some very good things on the mountains, and Sir Redways, who had once, a long, long time ago, been a climbing man, was favorably inclined toward them. They talked in the big hall of their hotel, drank black coffee, listened to music together and discovered that they had mutual friends in Robert and Mary Lester. After that Mr. West's enthusiasm for the mountains sensibly cooled. He even condescended to take some ladies for a climb that was possible to them, and, of course, Cecily was one of the number, or the expedition never would have gone out under Carrismoyle's escort.

He thought Cecily Grant the most radiantly lovely girl he had ever seen, even in his dreams. When he was with her he could scarcely take his eyes from her