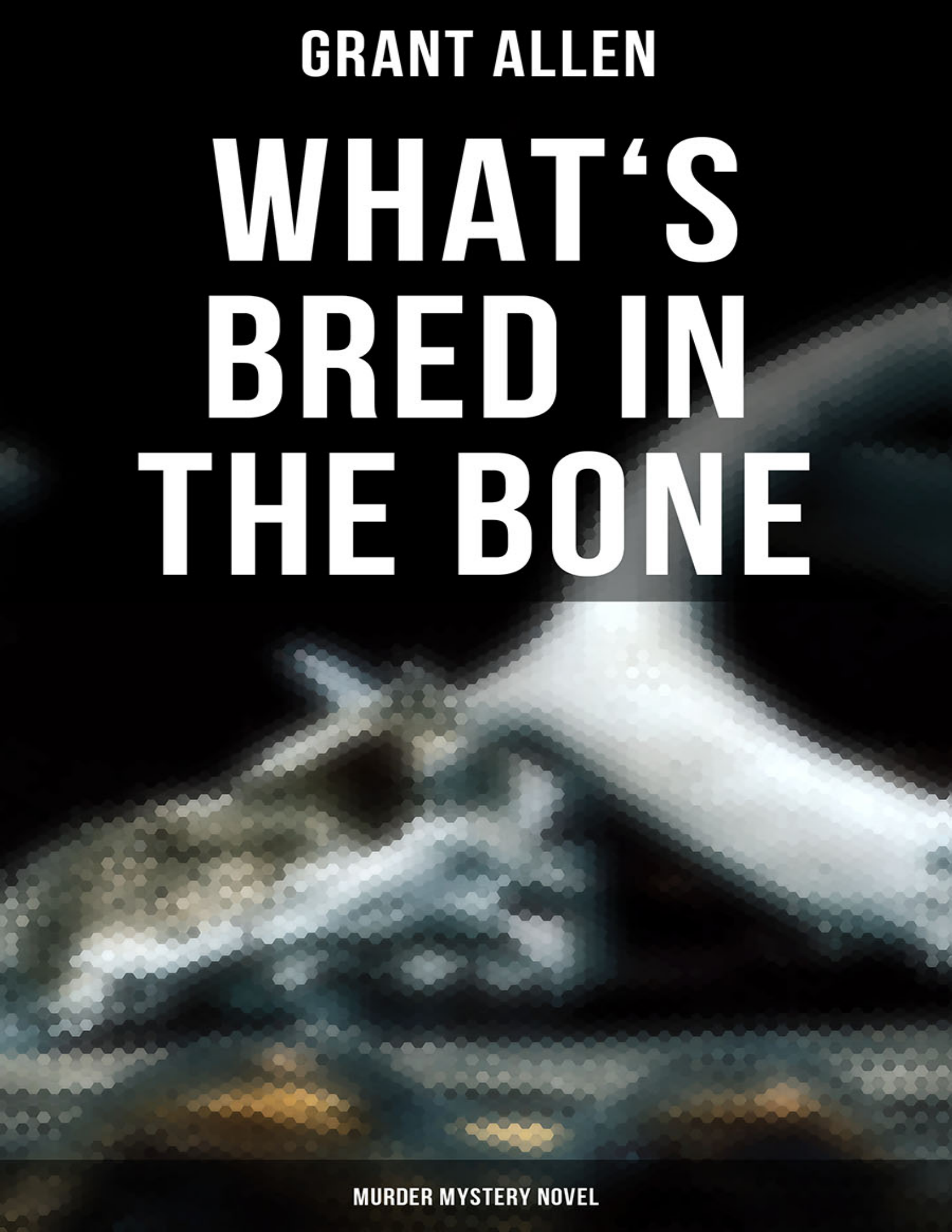
GRANT ALLEN

WHAT'S BRED IN THE BONE



MURDER MYSTERY NOVEL

Grant Allen

What's Bred in the Bone

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CHAPTER I. — ELMA’S STRANGER.

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It was late when Elma reached the station. Her pony had jibbed on the way downhill, and the train was just on the point of moving off as she hurried upon the platform. Old Matthews, the stout and chubby-cheeked station-master, seized her most unceremoniously by the left arm, and bundled her into a carriage. He had known her from a child, so he could venture upon such liberties.

“Second class, miss? Yes, miss. Here y’are. Look sharp, please. Any more goin’ on? All right, Tom! Go ahead there!” And lifting his left hand, he whistled a shrill signal to the guard to start her.

As for Elma, somewhat hot in the face with the wild rush for her ticket, and grasping her uncounted change, pence and all, in her little gloved hand, she found herself thrust, hap-hazard, at the very last moment, into the last compartment of the last carriage—alone—with an artist.

Now, you and I, to be sure, most proverbially courteous and intelligent reader, might never have guessed at first sight, from the young man’s outer aspect, the nature of his occupation. The gross and clumsy male intellect, which works in accordance with the stupid laws of inductive logic, has a queer habit of requiring something or other, in the way of definite evidence, before it commits itself offhand to the distinct conclusion. But Elma Clifford was a woman; and therefore she knew a more excellent way. HER habit was,

rather to look things once fairly and squarely in the face, and then, with the unerring intuition of her sex, to make up her mind about them firmly, at once and for ever. That's one of the many glorious advantages of being born a woman. You don't need to learn in order to know. You know instinctively. And yet our girls want to go to Girton, and train themselves up to be senior wranglers!

Elma Clifford, however, had NOT been to Girton, so, as she stumbled into her place, she snatched one hurried look at Cyril Wiring's face, and knew at a glance he was a landscape painter.

Now, this was clever of her, even in a woman, for Cyril Waring, as he fondly imagined, was travelling that line that day disguised as a stock-broker. In other words, there was none of the brown velveteen affectation about his easy get-up. He was an artist, to be sure, but he hadn't assiduously and obtrusively dressed his character. Instead of cutting his beard to a Vandyke point, or enduing his body in a Titianesque coat, or wearing on his head a slouched Rembrandt hat, stuck carelessly just a trifle on one side in artistic disorder, he was habited, for all the world like anybody else, in the grey tweed suit of the common British tourist, surmounted by the light felt hat (or bowler), to match, of the modern English country gentleman. Even the soft silk necktie of a delicate aesthetic hue that adorned his open throat didn't proclaim him at once a painter by trade. It showed him merely as a man of taste, with a decided eye for harmonies of colour.

So when Elma pronounced her fellow-traveller immediately, in her own mind, a landscape artist, she was

exercising the familiar feminine prerogative of jumping, as if by magic, to a correct conclusion. It’s a provoking way they have, those inscrutable women, which no mere male human being can ever conceivably fathom.

She was just about to drop down, as propriety demands, into the corner seat diagonally opposite to—and therefore as far as possible away from—her handsome companion, when the stranger rose, and, with a very flushed face, said, in a hasty, though markedly deferential and apologetic tone —

“I beg your pardon, but—excuse me for mentioning it—I think you’re going to sit down upon—ur—pray don’t be frightened—a rather large snake of mine.”

There was something so comically alarmed in the ring of his tone—as of a naughty schoolboy detected in a piece of mischief—that, propriety to the contrary notwithstanding, Elma couldn’t for the life of her repress a smile. She looked down at the seat where the stranger pointed, and there, sure enough, coiled up in huge folds, with his glossy head in attitude to spring at her, a great banded snake lay alert and open-eyed.

“Dear me,” Elma cried, drawing back a little in surprise, but not at all in horror, as she felt she ought to do. “A snake! How curious! I hope he’s not dangerous.”

“Not at all,” the young man answered, still in the same half-guilty tone of voice as before. “He’s of a poisonous kind, you know; but his fangs have been extracted. He won’t do you any injury. He’s perfectly harmless. Aren’t you, Sardanapalus? Eh, eh, my beauty? But I oughtn’t to have let him loose in the carriage, of course,” he added, after a short

pause. “It’s calculated to alarm a nervous passenger. Only I thought I was alone, and nobody would come in; so I let him out for a bit of a run between the stations. It’s so dull for him, poor fellow, being shut up in his box all the time when he’s travelling.”

Elma looked down at the beautiful glossy creature with genuine admiration. His skin was like enamel; his banded scales shone bright and silvery. She didn’t know why, but somehow she felt she wasn’t in the least afraid of him. “I suppose one ought to be repelled at once by a snake,” she said, taking the opposite seat, and keeping her glance fixed firmly upon the reptile’s eye; “but then, this is such a handsome one! I can’t say why, but I don’t feel afraid of him at all as I ought, to do. Every right-minded person detests snakes, don’t they? And yet, how exquisitely flexible and beautiful he is! Oh, pray don’t put him back in his box for me. He’s basking in the sun here. I should be sorry to disturb him.”

Cyril Waring looked at her in considerable surprise. He caught the creature in his hands as he spoke, and transferred it at once to a tin box, with a perforated lid, that lay beside him. “Go back, Sardanapalus,” he said, in a very musical and pleasant voice, forcing the huge beast into the lair with gentle but masterful hands. “Go back, and go to sleep, sir. It’s time for your nap…. Oh no, I couldn’t think of letting him out any more in the carriage to the annoyance of others. I’m ashamed enough as it is of having unintentionally alarmed you. But you came in so unexpectedly, you see, I hadn’t time to put my queer pet away; and, when the door opened, I was afraid he might slip

out, or get under the seats, so all I could do was just to soothe him with my hand, and keep him quiet till the door was shut to again."

"Indeed, I wasn't at all afraid of him," Elma answered, slipping her change into her pocket, and looking prettier through her blush than even her usual self. "On the contrary, I really liked to see him. He's such a glorious snake! The lights and shades on his back are so glancing and so wonderful! He's a perfect model. Of course, you're painting him."

The stranger started. "I'm painting him—yes, that's true," he replied, with a look of sudden surprise; "but why 'of course,' please? How on earth could you tell I was an artist even?"

Elma glanced back in his face, and wondered to herself, too. Now she came to think of it, HOW did she know that handsome young man, with the charming features, and the expressive eyes, and the neatly-cut brown beard, and the attractive manner, was an artist at all, or anything like it? And how did she know the snake was his model? For the life of her, she couldn't have answered those questions herself.

"I suppose I just guessed it," she answered, after a short pause, blushing still more deeply at the sudden way she had thus been dragged into conversation with the good-looking stranger. Elma's skin was dark—a clear and creamy olive-brown complexion, such as one sometimes sees in southern Europe, though rarely in England; and the effect of the blush through it didn't pass unnoticed by Cyril Waring's artistic eye. He would have given something for the chance of transferring that delicious effect to canvas. The delicate

transparency of the blush threw up those piercing dark eyes, and reflected lustre even on the glossy black hair that fringed her forehead. Not an English type of beauty at all, Elma Clifford's, he thought to himself as he eyed her closely: rather Spanish or Italian, or say even Hungarian.

"Well, you guessed right, at any rate," he went on, settling down in his seat once more, after boxing his snake, but this time face to face with her. "I'm working at a beautiful bit of fern and foliage—quite tropical in its way—in a wood hereabout; and I've introduced Sardanapalus, coiled up in the foreground, just to give life to the scene, don't you know, and an excuse for a title. I mean to call it 'The Rajah's Rest.' Behind, great ferns and a mossy bank; in front, Sardanapalus, after tiffin, rolled spirally round, and taking his siesta."

This meeting was a long-wished-for occasion. Elma had never before met a real live painter. Now, it was the cherished idea of her youth to see something some day of that wonderful non-existent fantastic world which we still hope for and dream about and call Bohemia. She longed to move in literary and artistic circles. She had fashioned to herself, like many other romantic girls, a rose-coloured picture of Bohemian existence; not knowing indeed that Bohemia is now, alas! an extinct province, since Belgravia and Kensington swallowed it bodily down, digested, and assimilated it. So this casual talk with the handsome young artist in the second-class carriage, on the Great Southern line, was to Elma as a charming and delightful glimpse of an enchanted region she could never enter. It was Paradise to the Peri. She turned the conversation at once, therefore,

with resolute intent upon art and artists, determined to make the most while it lasted of this unique opportunity. And since the subject of self, with an attentive listener, is always an attractive one, even to modest young men like Cyril Waring—especially when it's a pretty girl who encourages you to dilate upon it—why, the consequence was, that before many minutes were over, the handsome young man was discoursing from his full heart to a sympathetic soul about his chosen art, its hopes and its ideals, accompanied, by a running fire of thumb-nail illustrations. He had even got so far in the course of their intimacy as to take out the portfolio, which lay hidden under the seat—out of deference to his disguise as a stock-broker, no doubt—and to display before Elma's delighted eyes, with many explanatory comments as to light and shade, or perspective and foreshortening, the studies for the picture he had just then engaged upon.

By-and-by, as his enthusiasm warmed under Elma's encouragement, the young artist produced Sardanapalus himself once more from his box, and with deftly persuasive fingers coiled him gracefully round on the opposite seat into the precise attitude he was expected to take up when he sat for his portrait in the mossy foreground.

Elma couldn't say why, but that creature fascinated her. The longer she looked at him the more intensely he interested her. Not that she was one bit afraid of him, as she might reasonably have expected to be, according to all womanly precedent. On the contrary, she felt an overwhelming desire to take him up in her own hands and stroke and fondle him. He was so lithe and beautiful; his

scales so glistened! At last she stretched out one dainty gloved hand to pet the spotted neck.

“Take care,” the painter cried, in a warning voice; “don’t be frightened if he springs at you. He’s vicious at times. But his fangs are drawn; he can’t possibly hurt you.”

The warning, however, was quite unnecessary. Sardanapalus, instead of springing, seemed to recognise a friend. He darted out his forked tongue in rapid vibration, and licked her neat grey glove respectfully. Then, lifting his flattened head with serpentine deliberation, he coiled his great folds slowly, slowly, with sinuous curves, round the girl’s soft arm till he reached her neck in long, winding convolutions. There he held up his face, and trilled his swift, sibilant tongue once more with evident pleasure. He knew his place. He was perfectly at home at once with the pretty, olive-skinned lady. His master looked on in profound surprise.

“Why, you’re a perfect snake-charmer,” he cried at last, regarding her with open eyes of wonder. “I never saw Sardanapalus behave like that with a stranger before. He’s generally by no means fond of new acquaintances. You must be used to snakes. Perhaps you’ve kept one? You’re accustomed of old to their ways and manners?”

“No, indeed,” Elma cried, laughing in spite of herself, a clear little laugh of feminine triumph; for she had made a conquest, she saw, of Sardanapalus; “I never so much as touched one in all my life before. And I thought I should hate them. But this one seems quite tame and tractable. I’m not in the least afraid of him. He is so soft and smooth, and his movements are all so perfectly gentle.”

“Ah, that’s the way with snakes, always,” Cyril Waring put in, with an admiring glance at the pretty, fearless brunette and her strange companion. “They know at once whether people like them or not, and they govern themselves accordingly. I suppose it’s instinct. When they see you’re afraid of them, they spring and hiss; but when they see you take to them by nature, they make themselves perfectly at home in a moment. They don’t wait to be asked. They’ve no false modesty. Well, then, you see,” he went on, drawing imaginary lines with his ticket on the sketch he was holding up, “I shall work in Sardanapalus just there, like that, coiled round in a spire. You catch the idea, don’t you?”

As he spoke, Elma’s eye, following his hand while it moved, chanced to fall suddenly on the name of the station printed on the ticket with which he was pointing. She gave a sharp little start.

“Warnworth!” she cried, flushing up, with some slight embarrassment in her voice; “why, that’s ever so far back. We’re long past Warnworth. We ran by it three or four stations behind; in fact, it’s the next place to Chetwood, where I got in at.”

Cyril Waring looked up with a half-guilty smile as embarrassed as her own.

“Oh yes,” he said quietly. “I knew that quite well. I’m down here often. It’s half-way between Chetwood and Warnworth I’m painting. But I thought—well, if you’ll excuse me saying it, I thought I was so comfortable and so happy where I was, that I might just as well go on a station or two more, and then pay the difference, and take the next train back to Warnworth. You see,” he added, after a pause, with

a still more apologetic and penitent air, “I saw you were so interested in—well, in snakes, you know, and pictures.”

Gentle as he was, and courteous, and perfectly frank with her, Elma, nevertheless, felt really half inclined to be angry at this queer avowal. That is to say, at least, she knew it was her bounden duty, as an English lady, to seem so; and she seemed so accordingly with most Britannic severity. She drew herself up in a very stiff style, and stared fixedly at him, while she began slowly and steadily to uncoil Sardanapalus from her imprisoned arm with profound dignity.

“I’m sorry I should have brought you so far out of your way,” she said, in a studied cold voice—though that was quite untrue, for, as a matter of fact, she had enjoyed their talk together immensely. “And besides, you’ve been wasting your valuable time when you ought to have been painting. You’ll hardly get any work done now at all this morning. I must ask you to get out at the very next station.”

The young man bowed with a crestfallen air. “No time could possibly be wasted,” he began, with native politeness, “that was spent—” Then he broke off quite suddenly. “I shall certainly get out wherever you wish,” he went on, more slowly, in an altered voice; “and I sincerely regret if I’ve unwittingly done anything to annoy you in any way. The fact is, the talk carried me away. It was art that misled me. I didn’t mean, I’m sure, to obtrude myself upon you.”

And even as he spoke they whisked, unawares, into the darkness of a tunnel.

CHAPTER II. — TWO’S COMPANY.

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Elma was just engaged in debating with herself internally how a young lady of perfect manners and impeccable breeding, travelling without a chaperon, ought to behave under such trying circumstances, after having allowed herself to be drawn unawares into familiar conversation with a most attractive young artist, when all of a sudden a rapid jerk of the carriage succeeded in extricating her perforce, and against her will, from this awkward dilemma. Something sharp pulled up their train unexpectedly. She was aware of a loud noise and a crash in front, almost instantaneously followed by a thrilling jar—a low dull thud—a sound of broken glass—a quick blank stoppage. Next instant she found herself flung wildly forward into her neighbour’s arms, while the artist, for his part, with outstretched hands, was vainly endeavouring to break the force of the fall for her.

All she knew for the first few minutes was merely that there had been an accident to the train, and they were standing still now in the darkness of the tunnel.

For some seconds she paused, and gasped hard for breath, and tried in vain to recall her scattered senses. Then slowly she sank back on the seat once more, vaguely conscious that something terrible had happened to the train, but that neither she nor her companion were seriously injured.

As she sank back in her place, Cyril Waring bent forward towards her with sympathetic kindliness.

“You’re not hurt, I hope,” he said, holding out one hand to help her rise. “Stand up for a minute, and see if you’re anything worse than severely shaken. No? That’s right, then! That’s well, as far as it goes. But I’m afraid the nervous shock must have been very rough on you.”

Elma stood tip, with tears gathering fast in her eyes. She’d have given the world to be able to cry now, for the jar had half stunned her and shaken her brain; but before the artist’s face she was ashamed to give free play to her feelings. So she only answered, in a careless sort of tone—

“Oh, it’s nothing much, I think. My head feels rather queer; but I’ve no bones broken. A collision, I suppose. Oughtn’t we to get out at once and see what’s happened to the other people?”

Cyril Waring moved hastily to the door, and, letting down the window, tried with a violent effort to turn the handle from the outside. But the door wouldn’t open. As often happens in such accidents, the jar had jammed it. He tried the other side, and with some difficulty at last succeeded in forcing it open. Then he descended cautiously on to the six-foot-way, and held out his hand to help Elma from the carriage.

It was no collision, he saw at once, but a far more curious and unusual accident.

Looking ahead through the tunnel, all was black as night. A dense wall of earth seemed to block and fill in the whole space in front of them. Part of one broken and shattered

carriage lay tossed about in wild confusion on the ground close by. Their own had escaped. All the rest was darkness.

In a moment, Cyril rightly divined what must have happened to the train. The roof of the tunnel had caved in on top of it. At least one carriage—the one immediately in front of them—had been crushed and shattered by the force of its fall. Their own was the last, and it had been saved as if by a miracle. It lay just outside the scene of the subsidence.

One thought rose instinctively at once in the young man’s mind. They must first see if any one was injured in the other compartments, or among the débris of the broken carriage; and then they must make for the open mouth of the tunnel, through which the light of day still gleamed bright behind them.

He peered in hastily at the other three windows. Not a soul in any one of the remaining compartments! It was a very empty train, he had noticed himself, when he had got in at Tilgate; the one solitary occupant of the front compartment of their carriage, a fat old lady with a big black bag, had bundled out at Chetwood. They were alone in the tunnel—at this end of the train at least; their sole duty now was to make haste and save themselves.

He gazed overhead. The tunnel was bricked in with an arch on top. The way through in front was blocked, of course, by the fallen mass of water-logged sandstone. He glanced back towards the open mouth. A curious circumstance, half-way down to the opening, attracted at once his keen and practised eye.

Strange to say, the roof at one spot was not a true arc of a circle. It bulged slightly downwards, in a flattened arch, as

if some superincumbent weight were pressing hard upon it. Great heavens, what was this? Another trouble in store! He looked again, still more earnestly, and started with horror.

In the twinkling of an eye, his reason told him, beyond the shadow of a doubt, what was happening at the bulge. A second fall was just about to take place close by them. Clearly there were TWO weak points m the roof of the tunnel. One had already given way in front; the other was on the very eve of giving way behind them. If it fell, they were imprisoned between two impassable walls of sand and earth. Without one instant's delay, he turned and seized his companion's hand hastily.

"Quick! quick!" he cried, in a voice of eager warning. "Run, run for your life to the mouth of the tunnel! Here, come! You've only just time! It's going, it's going!"

But Elma's feminine instinct worked quicker and truer than even Cyril Waring's manly reason. She didn't know why; she couldn't say how; but in that one indivisible moment of time she had taken in and grasped to the full all the varying terrors of the situation. Instead of running, however, she held back her companion with a nervous force she could never before have imagined herself capable of exerting.

"Stop here," she cried authoritatively, wrenching his arm in her haste. "If you go you'll be killed. There's no time to run past. It'll be down before you're there. See, see, it's falling."

Even before the words were well out of her mouth, another great crash shook the ground behind them. With a deafening roar, the tunnel gave way in a second place

beyond. Dust and sand filled the air confusedly. For a minute or two all was noise and smoke and darkness. What exactly had happened neither of them could see. But now the mouth of the tunnel was blocked at either end alike, and no daylight was visible. So far as Cyril could judge, they two stood alone, in the dark and gloom, as in a narrow cell, shut in with their carriage between two solid walls of fallen earth and crumbling sandstone.

At this fresh misfortune, Elma sat down on the footboard with her face in her hands, and began to sob bitterly. The artist leaned over her and let her cry for a while in quiet despair. The poor girl's nerves, it was clear, were now wholly unstrung. She was brave, as women go, undoubtedly brave; but the shock and the terror of such a position as this were more than enough to terrify the bravest. At last Cyril ventured on a single remark.

"How lucky," he said, in an undertone, "I didn't get out at Warnworth after all. It would have been dreadful if you'd been left all alone in this position."

Elma glanced up at him with a sudden rush of gratitude. By the dim light of the oil lamp that still flickered feebly in the carriage overhead, she could see his face; and she knew by the look in those truthful eyes that he really meant it. He really meant he was glad he'd come on and exposed himself to this risk, which he might otherwise have avoided, because he would be sorry to think a helpless woman should be left alone by herself in the dark to face it. And, frightened as she was, she was glad of it too. To be alone would be awful. This was pre-eminently one of those many

positions in life in which a woman prefers to have a man beside her.

And yet most men, she knew, would have thought to themselves at once, “What a fool I was to come on beyond my proper station, and let myself in for this beastly scrape, just because I’d go a few miles further with a pretty girl I never saw in my life before, and will probably never see in my life again, if I once get well out of this precious predicament.”

But that they would ever get out of it at all seemed to both of them now in the highest degree improbable. Cyril, by reason, Elma, by instinct, argued out the whole situation at once, and correctly. There had been much rain lately. The sandstone was water-logged. It had caved in bodily, before them and behind them. A little isthmus of archway still held out in isolation just above their heads. At any moment that isthmus might give way too, and, falling on their carriage, might crush them beneath its weight. Their lives depended upon the continued resisting power of some fifteen yards or so of dislocated masonry.

Appalled at the thought, Cyril moved from his place for a minute, and went forward to examine the fallen block in front. Then he paced his way back with groping steps to the equally ruinous mass behind them. Elma’s eyes, growing gradually accustomed to the darkness and the faint glimmer of the oil lamps, followed his action with vague and tearful interest.

“If the roof doesn’t give way,” he said calmly at last, when he returned once more to her, “and if we can only let them know we’re alive in the tunnel, they may possibly dig

us out before we choke. There’s air enough here for eighteen hours for us.”

He spoke very quietly and reassuringly, as if being shut up in a fallen tunnel between two masses of earth were a matter that needn’t cause one the slightest uneasiness; but his words suggested to Elma’s mind a fresh and hitherto unthought-of danger.

“Eighteen hours,” she cried, horror-struck. “Do you mean to say we may have to stop here, all alone, for eighteen hours together? Oh, how very dreadful! How long! How frightening! And if they don’t dig us out before eighteen hours are over, do you mean to say we shall die of choking?”

Cyril gazed down at her with a very regretful and sympathetic face.

“I didn’t mean to frighten you,” he said; “at least, not more than you’re frightened already; but, of course, there’s only a certain amount of oxygen in the space that’s left us; and as we’re using it up at every breath, it’ll naturally hold out for a limited time only. It can’t be much more than eighteen hours. Still, I don’t doubt they’ll begin digging us out at once; and if they dig through fast, they may yet be in time, even so, to save us.”

Elma bent forward with her face in her hands again, and, rocking herself to and fro in an agony of despair, gave herself vip to a paroxysm of utter misery. This was too, too terrible. To think of eighteen hours in that gloom and suspense; and then to die at last, gasping hard for breath, in the poisonous air of that pestilential tunnel.

For nearly an hour she sat there, broken down and speechless; while Cyril Waring, taking a seat in silence by her side, tried at first with mute sympathy to comfort and console her. Then he turned to examine the roof, and the block at either end, to see if perchance any hope remained of opening by main force an exit anywhere. He even began by removing a little of the sand at the side of the line with a piece of shattered board from the broken carriage in front; but that was clearly no use. More sand tumbled in as fast as he removed it. He saw there was nothing left for it but patience or despair. And of the two, his own temperament dictated rather patience.

He returned at last, wearied out, to Elma's side. Elma, still sitting disconsolate on the footboard, rocking herself up and down, and moaning low and piteously, looked up as he came with a mute glance of inquiry. She was very pretty. That struck him even now. It made his heart bleed to think she should be so cowed and terrified.

"I'm sorry to bother you," he said, after a pause, half afraid to speak, "but there are four lamps all burning hard in these four compartments, and using up the air we may need by-and-by for our own breathing. If I were to climb to the top of the carriage—which I can easily do—I could put them all out, and economize our oxygen. It would leave us in the dark, but it'd give us one more chance of life. Don't you think I'd better get up and turn them off, or squash them?"

Elma clasped her hands in horror at the bare suggestion.

"Oh dear, no!" she cried hastily. "Please, PLEASE don't do that. It's bad enough to choke slowly, like this, in the gloom. But to die in the dark—that would be ten times more

terrible. Why, it’s a perfect Black Hole of Calcutta, even now. If you were to turn out the lights I could never stand it.”

Cyril gave a respectful little nod of assent.

“Very well,” he answered, as calm as ever. “That’s just as you will. I only meant to suggest it to you. My one wish is to do the best I can for you. Perhaps”—and he hesitated—“perhaps I’d better let it go on for an hour or two more, and then, whenever the air begins to get very oppressive—I mean when one begins to feel it’s really failing us—one person, you know, could live on so much longer than two… it would be a pity not to let you stand every chance. Perhaps I might—”

Elma gazed at him aghast in the utmost horror. She knew what he meant at once. She didn’t even need that he should finish his sentence.

“Never!” she said, firmly clenching her small hand hard. “It’s so wrong of you to think of it, even. I could never permit it. It’s your duty to keep yourself alive at all hazards as long as ever you can. You should remember your mother, your sisters, your family.”

“Why, that’s just it,” Cyril answered, a little crestfallen, and feeling he had done quite a wicked thing in venturing to suggest that his companion should have every chance for her own life. “I’ve got no mother, you see, no sisters, no family. Nobody on earth would ever be one penny the worse if *I* were to die, except my twin brother; he’s the only relation I ever had in my life; and even HE, I dare say, would very soon get over it. Whereas YOU”—he paused and glanced at her compassionately—“there are probably many to whom the loss would be a very serious one. If I could do

anything to save you—” He broke off suddenly, for Elma looked up at him once more with a little burst of despair.

“If you talk like that,” she cried, with a familiarity that comes of association in a very great danger, “I don’t know what I shall do; I don’t know what I shall say to you. Why, I couldn’t bear to be left alone here to die by myself. If only for MY sake, now we’re boxed up here together, I think you ought to wait and do the best you can for yourself.”

“Very well,” Cyril answered once more, in a most obedient tone. “If you wish me to live to keep you company in the tunnel, I’ll live while I may. You have only to say what you wish. I’m here to wait upon you.”

In any other circumstances, such a phrase would have been a mere piece of conversational politeness. At that critical moment, Elma knew it for just what it was—a simple expression of his real feeling.

CHAPTER III. — CYRIL WARING’S BROTHER.

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It was nine o’clock that self-same night, and two men sat together in a comfortable sitting-room under the gabled roofs of Staple Inn, Holborn. It was as cosy a nook as any to be found within the four-mile radius, and artistic withal in its furniture and decorations.

In the biggest arm-chair by the empty grate, a young man with a flute paused for a moment, irresolute. He was a handsome young man, expressive eyes, and a neatly-cut brown beard—for all the world like Cyril Waring’s. Indeed, if Elma Clifford could that moment have been transported from her gloomy prison in the Lavington tunnel to that cosy room at Staple Inn, Holborn, she would have started with surprise to find the young man who sat in the arm-chair was to all outer appearance the self-same person as the painter she had just left at the scene of the accident. For the two Warings were truly “as like as two peas”; a photograph of one might almost have done duty for the photograph of the other.

The other occupant of the room, who leaned carelessly against the mantelshelf, was taller and older; though he, too, was handsome, but with the somewhat cynical and unprepossessing handsomeness of a man of the world. His forehead was high; his lips were thin; his nose inclined toward the Roman pattern; his black moustache was carefully curled and twisted at the extremities. Moreover, he

was musical; for he held in one hand the bow of a violin, having just laid down the instrument itself on the sofa after a plaintive duet with Guy Waring.

“Seen this evening’s paper, by the way, Guy?” he asked, after a pause, in a voice that was all honeyed charm and seductiveness. “I brought the St. James’s Gazette for you, but forgot to give you it; I was so full of this new piece of mine. Been an accident this morning, I see, on the Great Southern line. Somewhere down Cyril’s way, too; he’s painting near Chetwood; wonder whether he could possibly, by any chance, have been in it?”

He drew the paper carelessly from his pocket as he spoke, and handed it with a graceful air of inborn courtesy to his younger companion. Everything that Montague Nevitt did, indeed, was naturally graceful and courteous.

Guy Waring took the printed sheet from his hands without attaching much importance to his words, and glanced over it lightly.

“At ten o’clock this morning,” the telegram said, “a singular catastrophe occurred in a portion of the Lavington tunnel on the Great Southern Railway. As the 9.15 way-train from Tilgate Junction to Guildford was passing through, a segment of the roof of the tunnel collapsed, under pressure of the dislocated rock on top, and bore down with enormous weight upon the carriages beneath it. The engine, tender, and four front waggons escaped unhurt; but the two hindmost, it is feared, were crushed by the falling mass of earth. It is not yet known how many passengers, if any, may have been occupying the wrecked compartments; but every effort is now being made to dig out the débris.”

Guy read the paragraph through unmoved, to the outer eye, though with a whitening face, and then took up the dog-eared “Bradshaw” that lay close by upon the little oak writing-table. His hand trembled. One glance at the map, however, set his mind at rest.

“I thought so,” he said quietly. “Cyril wouldn’t be there. It’s beyond his beat. Lavington’s the fourth station this way on the up-line from Chetwood. Cyril’s stopping at Tilgate town, you know—I heard from him on Saturday—and the bit he’s now working at’s in Chetwood Forest. He couldn’t get lodgings at Chetwood itself, so he’s put up for the present at the White Lion, at Tilgate, and runs over by train every day to Warnworth. It’s three stations away—four off Lavington. He’d have been daubing for an hour in the wood by that time.”

“Well, I didn’t attach any great importance to it myself,” Nevitt went on, unconcerned. “I thought most likely Cyril wouldn’t be there. But still I felt you’d like, at any rate, to know about it.”

“Oh, of course,” Guy answered, still scanning the map in “Bradshaw” close. “He couldn’t have been there; but one likes to know. I think, indeed, to make sure, I’ll telegraph to Tilgate. Naturally, when a man’s got only one relation in the whole wide world—without being a sentimentalist—that one relation means a good deal in life to him. And Cyril and I are more to one another, of course, than most ordinary brothers.” He bit his thumb. “Still, I can’t imagine how he could possibly be there,” he went on, glancing at “Bradshaw” once more. “You see, if he went to work, he’d have got out at Warnworth; and if he meant to come to town

to consult his dentist, he'd have taken the 9.30 express straight through from Tilgate, which gets up to London twenty-five minutes earlier."

"Well, but why to consult his dentist in particular?" Nevitt asked with a smile. He had very white teeth, and he smiled accordingly perhaps a little oftener than was quite inevitable. "You Warings are so absolute. I never knew any such fellows in my life as you are. You decide things so beforehand. Why mightn't he have been coming up to town, for example, to see a friend, or get himself fresh colours?"

"Oh, I said 'to consult his dentist,'" Guy answered, in the most matter-of-fact voice on earth, suppressing a tremor, "because you know I've had toothache off and on myself, one day with another, for the whole last fortnight. And it's a tooth that never ached with either of us before-this one, you see"—he lifted his lip with his forefinger—"the second on the left after the one we've lost. If Cyril was coming up to town at all, I'm pretty sure it'd be his tooth he was coming up to see about. I went to Eskell about mine myself last Wednesday."

The elder man seated himself and leaned back in his chair, with his violin in his lap; then he surveyed his friend long and curiously.

"It must be awfully odd, Guy," he said at last, after a good hard stare, "to lead such a queer sort of duplicate life as Cyril and you do! Just fancy being the counterfoil to some other man's cheque! Just fancy being bound to do, and think, and speak, and wish as he does! Just fancy having to get a toothache, in the very same tooth and on the very same day! Just fancy having to consult the identical dentist

that he consults simultaneously! It'd drive ME mad. Why, it's clean rideeklous!"

Guy Waring looked up hastily from the telegraph form he was already filling in, and answered, with some warmth—

"No, no; not quite so. It isn't like that. You mistake the situation. We're both cheques equally, and neither is a counterfoil. Cyril and I depend for our characters, as everybody else does, upon our father and mother and our remoter progenitors. Only being twins, and twins cast in very much the same sort of mould, we're naturally the product of the same two parents, at the same precise point in their joint life history; and therefore we're practically all but identical."

As he rose from his desk, with the telegram in his hand, the porter appeared at the door with letters. Guy seized them at once, with some little impatience. The first was from Cyril. He tore it open in haste, and skimmed it through rapidly. Montague Nevitt meanwhile sat languid in his chair, striking a pensive note now and again on his violin, with his eyes half closed and his lips parted. Guy drew a sigh of relief as he skimmed his note.

"Just what I expected," he said slowly. "Cyril couldn't have been there. He writes last night—the letter's marked 'Delayed in transmission'; no doubt by the accident—'I shall come up to town on Friday or Saturday morning to see the dentist. One of my teeth is troublesome; I suppose you've had the same; the second on the left from the one we've lost; been aching a fortnight. I want it stopped. But to-morrow I really CAN'T leave work. I've got well into the swing of such a lovely bit of fern, with Sardanapalus just

gleaming like gold in the foreground.’ So that settles matters somewhat. He can’t have been there. Though, I think, even so, I’ll just telegraph for safety’s sake and make things certain.”

Nevitt struck a chord twice with a sweep of his hand, listened to it dreamily for a minute with far-away eyes, and then remarked once more, without even looking up, “The same tooth lost, he says? You both had it drawn! And now another one aches in both of you alike! How very remarkable! How very, very curious!”

“Well, that WAS queer,” Guy replied, relaxing into a smile, “queer even for us; I won’t deny it; for it happened this way. I was over in Brussels at the time, as correspondent for the Sphere at the International Workmen’s Congress, and Cyril was away by himself just then on his holiday in the Orkneys. We both got toothache in the self-same tooth on the self-same night; and we both lay awake for hours in misery. Early in the morning we each of us got up—five hundred miles away from one another, remember—and as soon as we were dressed *I* went into a dentist’s in the Montagne de la Cour, and Cyril to a local doctor’s at Larwick; and we each of us had it out, instanter. The dentists both declared they could save them if we wished; but we each preferred the loss of a tooth to another such night of abject misery.”

Nevitt stroked his moustache with a reflective air. This was almost miraculous. “Well, I should think,” he said at last, after close reflection, “where such sympathy as that exists between two brothers, if Cyril had really been hurt in