

***SILAS
K. HOCKING***



***THE SQUIRE'S
DAUGHTER***

Silas K. Hocking

The Squire's Daughter

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

AN IMPERIOUS MAIDEN

CHAPTER II

APPREHENSIONS

CHAPTER III

A NEW SENSATION

CHAPTER IV

A BITTER INTERVIEW

CHAPTER V

THE CHANCES OF LIFE

CHAPTER VI

WAITING FOR THE BLOW TO FALL

CHAPTER VII

DAVID SPEAKS HIS MIND

" Sir John raised his hunting-crop, and struck at Ralph with all his might. "

CHAPTER VIII

CONFLICTING EMOTIONS

CHAPTER IX

PREPARING TO GO

CHAPTER X

RALPH SPEAKS HIS MIND

CHAPTER XI

UNCONSCIOUS SPEECH

CHAPTER XII

DOROTHY SPEAKS HER MIND

CHAPTER XIII

GATHERING CLOUDS

CHAPTER XIV

THE STORM BURSTS

CHAPTER XV

SIR JOHN GETS ANGRY

CHAPTER XVI

THE BIG HOUSE

" Ruth threw her arms about her mother's neck and burst into a passion of tears. "

CHAPTER XVII

DEVELOPMENTS

CHAPTER XVIII

A CONFESSION

CHAPTER XIX

A SILENT WELCOME

CHAPTER XX

WILLIAM MENIRE'S RED-LETTER DAY

CHAPTER XXI

A GOOD NAME

CHAPTER XXII

A FRESH START

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ROAD TO FORTUNE

CHAPTER XXIV

LAW AND LIFE

CHAPTER XXV

IN LONDON TOWN

CHAPTER XXVI

TRUTH WILL OUT

CHAPTER XXVII

HOME AGAIN

CHAPTER XXVIII

A TRYING POSITION

CHAPTER XXIX

A QUESTION OF MOTIVES

CHAPTER XXX

SELF AND ANOTHER

CHAPTER XXXI

A PARTNERSHIP

CHAPTER XXXII

FOOD FOR REFLECTION

CHAPTER XXXIII

A PROPOSAL

CHAPTER XXXIV

A FRESH PAGE

" William, breathless and excited, burst in upon him. "

CHAPTER XXXV

FAILURE OR FORTUNE

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE PENALTY OF PROSPERITY

CHAPTER XXXVII

LIGHT AND SHADOW

CHAPTER XXXVIII

LOVE AND LIFE

CHAPTER XXXIX

PERPLEXING QUESTIONS

CHAPTER XL

LOVE OR FAREWELL

CHAPTER XLI

THE TABLES TURNED

CHAPTER XLII

COALS OF FIRE

CHAPTER XLIII

SIR JOHN ATONES

Mr. Silas K. Hocking's

THE FLAMING SWORD.

PIONEERS.

CHAPTER I

[Table of Contents](#)

AN IMPERIOUS MAIDEN

[Table of Contents](#)

The voice was soft and musical, but the tone was imperative.

"I say, young man, open that gate."

The young man addressed turned slowly from the stile on which he had been leaning, and regarded the speaker attentively. She was seated on a high-stepping horse with that easy grace born of long familiarity with the saddle, and yet she seemed a mere girl, with soft round cheeks and laughing blue eyes.

"Come, wake up," she said, in tones more imperious than before, "and open the gate at once."

He resented the tone, though he was charmed with the picture, and instead of going toward the gate to do her bidding he turned and began to climb slowly over the stile.

She trotted her horse up to him in a moment, her eyes flashing, her cheeks aflame. She had been so used to command and to prompt obedience that this insubordination on the part of a country yokel seemed nothing less than an insult.

"You dare disobey me?" she said, her voice thrilling with anger.

"Of course I dare," he answered, without turning his head. "I am not your servant."

The reply seemed to strike her dumb for a moment, and she reined back her horse several paces.

He turned again to look at her, then deliberately seated himself on one of the posts of the stile.

There was no denying that she made a pretty picture. With one foot on the top rung of the stile he was almost on a level with her, and he was near enough to see her bosom heave and the colour come and go upon her rounded cheeks.

His heart began to beat uncomfortably fast. He feared that he had played a churlish part. She looked so regal, and yet so sweet, that it seemed almost as if Nature had given her the right to command. And who was he that he should resent her imperious manner and refuse to do her bidding?

He had gone too far, however, to retreat. Moreover, his dignity had been touched. She had flung her command at him as though he were a serf. Had she asked him to open the gate, he would have done so gladly. It was the imperious tone that he resented.

"I did not expect such rudeness and incivility here of all places," she said at length in milder tones.

His cheeks flamed at that, and an angry feeling stole into his heart. Judged by ordinary standards, he had no doubt been rude, and her words stung him all the more on that account. He would have played a more dignified part if he had pocketed the affront and opened the gate; but he was in no mood to go back on what he had done.

"If I have been rude and uncivil, you are to blame as much as I—and more," he retorted angrily.

"Indeed?" she said, in a tone of lofty disdain, and an amused smile played round the corners of her mouth. She was interested in the young man in spite of his incivility. Now that she had an opportunity of looking more closely at him, she could not deny that he had no common face, while his speech was quite correct, and not lacking in dignity.

"I hope I am not so churlish as not to be willing to do a kindness to anybody," he went on rapidly, "but I resent being treated as dirt by such as you."

"Indeed? I was not aware——" she began, but he interrupted her.

"If you had asked me to open the gate I would have done so gladly, and been proud to do it," he went on; "but because I belong to what you are pleased to call the lower orders, you cannot ask; you command, and you expect to be obeyed."

"Of course I expect to be obeyed," she said, arching her eyebrows and smiling brightly, "and I am surprised that you ——"

"No doubt you are," he interrupted angrily. "But if we are lacking in good manners, so are you," and he turned and leaped off the stile into the field.

"Come back, you foolish young man."

But if he heard, he did not heed; with his eyes fixed on a distant farmhouse, he stalked steadily on, never turning his head either to the right or the left.

For a moment or two she looked after him, an amused smile dimpling her cheeks; then she turned her attention to the gate.

"I wonder what I am to do now?" she mused. "I cannot unfasten it, and if I get off, I shall never be able to mount again; on the other hand, I hate going back through the village the way I came. I wonder if Jess will take it?" and she rode the mare up to the gate and let her smell at the rungs.

It was an ordinary five-barred gate, and the ground was soft and springy. The road was scarcely more than a track across a heathery common. Beyond the gate the road was strictly private, and led through a wide sweep of plantation, and terminated at length, after a circuit of a mile or two, somewhere near Hamblyn Manor.

Jess seemed to understand what was passing through her mistress's mind, and shook her head emphatically.

"You can do it, Jess," she said, wheeling the mare about, and trotting back a considerable distance. "I know you can," and she struck her across the flank with her riding crop.

Jess pricked up her ears and began to gallop toward the gate; but she halted suddenly when within a few feet of it, almost dislodging her rider.

The young lady, however, was not to be defeated. A second time she rode back, and then faced the gate once more.

Jess pricked up her ears, and shook her head as if demanding a loose rein, and then sprang forward with the swiftness of a panther. But she took the gate a moment too soon; there was a sharp crash of splintered wood, a half-smothered cry of pain, and horse and rider were rolling on the turf beyond.

Ralph Penlogan caught his breath and turned his head suddenly. The sound of breaking wood fell distinctly on his

ear, and called him back from his not over-pleasant musings. He was angry with himself, angry with the cause of his anger. He had stood up for what he believed to be his rights, had asserted his opinions with courage and pertinacity; and yet, for some reason, he was anything but satisfied. The victory he had won—if it was a victory at all—was a barren one. He was afraid that he had asserted himself at the wrong time, in the wrong place, and before the wrong person.

The girl to whom he had spoken, and whose command he had defied, was not responsible for the social order against which he chafed, and which pressed so hardly on the class to which he belonged. She was where Providence had placed her just as much as he was, and the tone of command she had assumed was perhaps more a matter of habit than any assumption of superiority.

So within three minutes of leaving the stile he found himself excusing the fair creature to whom he had spoken so roughly. That she had a sweet and winning face there was no denying, while the way she sat her horse seemed to him the embodiment of grace.

Who she was he had not the remotest idea. To the best of his recollection he had never seen her before. That she belonged to what was locally termed the gentry there could be no doubt—a visitor most likely at one or other of the big houses in the neighbourhood.

Once the thought flashed across his mind that she might be the daughter of Sir John Hamblyn, but he dismissed it at once. In the first place, Sir John's daughter was old enough to be married—in fact, the wedding day had already been

fixed—while this young lady was a mere girl. She did not look more than seventeen if she looked a day. And in the second place, it was inconceivable that such a mean, grasping, tyrannical curmudgeon as Sir John could be the father of so fair a child.

He had seen Dorothy Hamblyn when she was a little girl in short frocks, and his recollection of her was that she was a disagreeable child. If he remembered aright, she was about his own age—a trifle younger.

"Why, I have turned twenty," he mused. "I am a man. She's only a girl."

So he dismissed the idea that she was Sir John's daughter who returned from school only about six months ago, and who was going to marry Lord Probus forthwith.

Suddenly he was recalled from his musings by the crash of the breaking gate. Was that a cry also he heard? He was not quite sure. A dozen vague fears shot through his mind in a moment. For a second only he hesitated, then he turned swiftly on his heel and ran back the way he had come.

The field was a wide one, wider than he had ever realised before. He was out of breath by the time he reached the stile, while his fears had increased with every step he took.

He leaped over the stile at a bound, and then stood still. Before him was the broken gate, and beyond it——

For a moment a mist swam before his eyes, and the ground seemed to be slipping away from beneath his feet. Vague questions respecting his responsibility crowded in upon his brain; the harvest of his churlishness had ripened with incredible swiftness. The word "guilty" seemed to stare at him from every point of the compass.

With a strong effort he pulled himself together, and advanced toward the prostrate figure. The horse stood a few paces away, trembling and bleeding from the knees.

He was almost afraid to look at the girl's face, and when he did so he gave a loud groan. There was no movement, nor any sign of life. The eyes were closed, the cheeks ghastly pale, while from underneath the soft brown hair there ran a little stream of blood.

CHAPTER II

[Table of Contents](#)

APPREHENSIONS

[Table of Contents](#)

Sir John Hamblyn was walking up and down in front of his house, fuming, as usual, and with a look upon his face that betokened acute anxiety. Why he should be so anxious he hardly knew. There seemed to be no special reason for it. Everything appeared to be moving along satisfactorily, and unless the absolutely unexpected happened, there was no occasion for a moment's worry.

But it was just the off-chance of something happening that irritated him. The old saying, "There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip," kept flitting across his brain with annoying frequency. If he could only get another month over without accident of any kind he would have peace; at least, so he believed.

Lord Probus was not the man to go back on his word, and Lord Probus had promised to stand by him, provided he became his—Sir John's—son-in-law.

It seemed a little ridiculous, for Lord Probus was the older man of the two, and to call a man his son-in-law who was older than himself was not quite in harmony with the usual order of things. But then, what did it matter? There were exceptions to every rule, and such exceptions were of constant occurrence.

When once the marriage knot was tied, a host of worries that had harassed him of late would come to an end. He had

been foolish, no doubt. He ought to have lived within his income, and kept out of the way of the sharks of the Turf and the Stock Exchange. He had a handsome rent-roll, quite sufficient for his legitimate wants; and if things improved, he might be able to raise rents all round. Besides, if he had luck, some of the leases might fall in, which would further increase his income. But the off-chance of these things was too remote to meet his present needs. He wanted immediate help, and Lord Probus was his only hope.

Fortunately for him, Dorothy was not old enough to see the tragedy of such an alliance. She saw only the social side—the gilt and glitter and tinsel. The appeal had been made to her vanity and to her love of pretty and costly things. To be the mistress of Rostrevor Castle, to bear a title, to have a London house, to have any number of horses and carriages, to go to State functions, to be a society dame before she was twenty—all these things appealed to her girlish pride and vanity, and she accepted the offer of Lord Probus with alacrity, and with scarcely a moment's serious thought.

No time was lost in hurrying forward arrangements for the wedding. The sooner the contract was made secure the better. Any unnecessary delay might give her an excuse for changing her mind. Sir John felt that he would not breathe freely again until the wedding had taken place.

Now and then, when he looked at his bright-eyed, happy, imperious girl, his heart smote him. She had turned eighteen, but she was wonderfully girlish for her years, not only in appearance but in manner, and in her outlook upon life. She knew nothing as yet of the ways of the world, nothing of its treachery and selfishness. She had only just

escaped from the seclusion of school and the drudgery of the classroom. She felt free as a bird, and the outlook was just delightful. She was going to have everything that heart could desire, and nothing would be too expensive for her to buy.

She was almost as eager for the wedding to take place as was her father; for directly the wedding was over she was going out to see the world—France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, Egypt. They were going to travel everywhere, and travel in such luxury as even Royalty might envy. Lord Probus had already given her a foretaste of what he would do for her by presenting her with a beautiful mare. Jess was the earnest of better things to come.

If Dorothy became imperious and slightly dictatorial, it was not to be wondered at. Nothing was left undone or unsaid that would appeal to her vanity. She was allowed her own way in everything.

Sir John was desperately afraid that the illusions might fade before the wedding day arrived. Financially he was in the tightest corner he had ever known, and unless he could tap some of Lord Probus's boundless wealth, he saw before him long years of mean economies and humiliating struggles with poverty. He saw worse—he saw the sale of his personal effects to meet the demands of his creditors, he saw the lopping off of all the luxuries that were as the breath of life to him.

Hence, though deep down in his heart he loathed the thought of his little girl marrying a man almost old enough to be her grandfather, he was sufficiently cornered in other ways to be intensely anxious that the wedding should take

place. Lord Probus was the head of a large brewery and distilling concern. His immense and yearly increasing revenues came mainly from beer. How rich he was nobody knew. He hardly knew himself. He had as good as promised Sir John that if the wedding came off he would hand over to him sufficient scrip in the great company of which he was head to qualify him—Sir John—for a directorship. The scrip could be paid for at Sir John's convenience. The directorship should be arranged without undue delay. The work of a director was not exacting, while the pay was exceedingly generous.

Sir John had already begun to draw the salary in imagination, and to live up to it. Hence, if anything happened now to prevent the wedding, it would be like knocking the bottom out of the universe.

In the chances of human life, it did not seem at all likely that anything would happen to prevent what he so much desired. It seemed foolish to worry himself for a single moment. And yet he did worry. There was always that off-chance. Nobody could ward off accidents or disease.

Dorothy had gone out riding alone. She refused to have a groom with her, and, of course, she had to have her own way; but he was always more or less fidgety when she was out on these expeditions.

And yet it was not the fear of accidents that really troubled him. What he feared most was that she might become disillusioned. As yet she had not awakened to the meaning and reality of life. She was like a child asleep, wandering through a fairyland of dreams and illusions. But

she might awake at any moment—awake to the passion of love, awake to the romance as well as the reality of life.

The appeal as yet had been to her vanity—to her sense of self-importance. There had been no appeal to her heart or affections. She did not know what love was, and if she married Lord Probus it would be well for her if she never knew. But love might awake when least expected; her heart might be stirred unconsciously. Some Romeo might cross her path, and with one glance of his eyes might change all her life and all her world; and a woman in love was more intractable than a comet.

Sir John would not like to be brought into such a position that he would have to coerce his child. Spendthrift that he was, and worse, with a deep vein of selfishness that made him intensely unpopular with all his tenants, he nevertheless loved Dorothy with a very genuine affection. Geoffrey, his son and heir, had never appealed very strongly to his heart. Geoffrey was too much like himself, too indolent and selfish. But Dorothy was like her mother, whose passing was as the snapping of a rudder chain in a storm.

The gritting of wheels on the gravel caused Sir John to turn suddenly on his heel, and descending the steps at the end of the terrace, he walked a little distance to meet the approaching carriage.

Lord Probus was not expected, but he was not the less welcome on that account.

"The day is so lovely that I thought I would drive across to have a peep at you all," Lord Probus said, stepping nimbly out of the landau.

He was a dapper man, rather below the medium height, with a bald head and iron-grey, military moustache. He was sixty years of age, but looked ten years younger.

"I am delighted to see you," Sir John said, with effusion, "and I am sure Dorothy will be when she returns."

"She is out, is she?"

"She is off riding as usual. Since you presented her with Jess, she has spent most of her time in the saddle."

"She is a good horsewoman?"

"Excellent. She took to riding as a duck takes to water. She rode with the hounds when she was ten."

"I wish I could ride!" Lord Probus said, reflectively. "I believe horse exercise would do me good; but I began too late in life."

"Like skating and swimming, one must start young if he is to excel," Sir John answered.

"Yes, yes; and youth passes all too quickly." And his lordship sighed.

"Well, as to that, one is as young as one feels, you know." And Sir John led the way into the house.

Lord Probus followed with a frown. Sir John had unwittingly touched him on a sore spot. If he was no younger than he felt, he was unmistakably getting old. He tried to appear young, and with a fair measure of success; tried to persuade himself that he was still in his prime; but every day the fact was brought painfully home to him that he had long since turned the brow of the hill, and was descending rapidly the other side. Directly he attempted to do what was child's play to him ten years before, he

discovered that the spring had gone out of his joints and the nerve from his hand.

He regretted this not only for his own sake, but in some measure for Dorothy's. He never looked into her fresh young face without wishing he was thirty years younger. She seemed very fond of him at present. She would sit on the arm of his chair and pat his bald head and pull his moustache, and call him her dear, silly old boy; and when he turned up his face to be kissed, she would kiss him in the most delightful fashion.

But he could not help wondering at times how long it would last. That she was fond of him just now he was quite sure. She told him in her bright, ingenuous way that she loved him; but he was not so blind as not to see that there was no passion in her love. In truth, she did not know what love was.

He was none the less anxious, however, on that account, to make her his wife, but rather the more. The fact that the best part of his life was gone made him all the more eager to fill up what remained with delight. He might reckon upon another ten years of life, at least, and to possess Dorothy for ten years would be worth living for—worth growing old for.

"You expect Dorothy back soon?" Lord Probus questioned, dropping into an easy-chair.

"Any minute, my lord. In fact, I expected her back before this."

"Jess has been well broken in. I was very careful on that point." And his lordship looked uneasily out of the window.

"And then, you know, Dorothy could ride an antelope or a giraffe. She is just as much at ease in a saddle as you are in that easy-chair."

"Do you know, I get more and more anxious as the time draws near," his lordship said absently. "It would be an awful blow to me if anything should happen now to postpone the wedding."

"Nothing is likely to happen," Sir John said grimly, but with an apprehensive look in his eyes. "Dorothy is in the best of health, and so are you."

"Well, yes, I am glad to say I am quite well. And Dorothy, you think, shows no sign of rueing her bargain?"

"On the contrary, she has begun to count the days." And Sir John walked to the window and raised the blind a little.

"I shall do my best to make her happy," his lordship said, with a smile. "And, bachelor as I am, I think I know what girls like."

"There's no doubt about that," was the laughing answer. "But who comes here?" And Sir John ran to the door and stepped out on the terrace.

A boy without coat, and carrying his cap in his hand, ran eagerly up to him. His face was streaming with perspiration, and his eyes ready to start out of their sockets.

"If you please, sir," he said, in gasps, "your little maid has been and got killed!"

"My little maid?" Sir John questioned. "Which maid? I did not know any of the servants were out."

"No, not any servant, sir; but your little maid, Miss Dorothy."

"My daughter!" he almost screamed. And he staggered up against the porch and hugged one of the pillars for support.

"Thrown from her horse, sir, down agin Trelliskey Plantation," the boy went on. "Molly Udy says she reckons her neck's broke."

Sir John did not reply, however. He could only stand and stare at the boy, half wondering whether he was awake or dreaming.

CHAPTER III

[Table of Contents](#)

A NEW SENSATION

[Table of Contents](#)

Ralph Penlogan's first impulse was to rush off into St. Goram and rouse the village; but on second thoughts he dropped on his knees by the side of the prostrate girl, and placed his ear close to her lips. For a moment or two he remained perfectly still, with an intent and anxious expression in his eyes; then his face brightened, and something like a smile played round the corners of his lips.

"No, she is not dead," he said to himself. And he heaved a great sigh of relief.

But he still felt doubtful as to the best course to take. To leave the unconscious girl lying alone by the roadside seemed to him, for some reason, a cruel thing to do. She might die, or she might return to consciousness, and find herself helpless and forsaken, without a human being or even a human habitation in sight.

"Oh, I hope she will not die," he said to himself, half aloud, "for if she does I shall feel like a murderer." And he put his ear to her lips a second time.

No, she still breathed, but the rivulet of blood seemed to be growing larger.

He raised her gently and let her head rest against his knee while he examined the wound underneath her auburn hair. He tried his best to repress a shudder, but failed. Then he pulled a handkerchief from his pocket, and proceeded to

bind it tightly round her head. How pale her face was, and how beautiful! He had never seen, he thought, so lovely a face before.

He wondered who she was and where she lived.

The horse whinnied a little distance away, and again the question darted through his mind, What was he to do? If he waited for anyone to pass that way he might wait a week. The road was strictly private, and there was a notice up that trespassers would be prosecuted. It had been a public road once—a public road, indeed, from time immemorial—but Sir John had put a stop to that. In spite of protests and riots, and threatened appeals to law, he had won the day, and no man dared walk through the plantation now without first asking his consent.

"She can't be very heavy," Ralph thought, as he looked down into her sweet, colourless face. "I'll have to make the attempt, anyhow. It's nearly two miles to St. Goram; but perhaps I shall be able to manage it."

A moment or two later he had gathered her up in his strong arms, and, with her bandaged head resting on his shoulder, and her heart beating feebly against his own, he marched away back over the broken gate in the direction of St. Goram. Jess gave a feeble whinny, then followed slowly and dejectedly, with her nose to the ground.

Half a mile away the ground dipped into a narrow valley, with a clear stream of water meandering at the bottom.

Ralph laid down his burden very gently and tenderly close to the stream, with her head pillowed on a bank of moss. He was at his wits' end, but he thought it possible

that some ice-cold water sprinkled on her face might revive her.

Jess stood stock-still a few yards away and watched the operation. Ralph sprinkled the cold water first on her face, then he got a large leaf, and made a cup of it, and tried to get her to drink; but the water trickled down her neck and into her bosom.

She gave a sigh at length and opened her eyes suddenly. Then she tried to raise her head, but it fell back again in a moment.

Ralph filled the leaf again and raised her head.

"Try to drink this," he said. "I'm sure it will do you good." And she opened her lips and drank.

He filled the leaf a third time, and she followed him with her eyes, but did not attempt to speak.

"Now, don't you feel better?" he questioned, after she had swallowed the second draught.

"I don't know," she answered, in a whisper. "But who are you? And where am I?"

"You have had an accident," he said. "Your horse threw you. Don't you remember?"

She closed her eyes and knitted her brows as if trying to recall what had happened.

"It was close to Treliskey Plantation," he went on, "and the gate was shut. You told me to open it, and I refused. I was a brute, and I shall never forgive myself so long as I live."

"Oh yes; I remember," she said, opening her eyes slowly, and the faintest suggestion of a smile played round her ashen lips. "You took offence because——"

"I was a brute!" he interjected.

"I ought not to have spoken as I did," she said, in a whisper. "I had no right to command you. Do—do you think I shall die?"

"No, no!" he cried, aghast. "What makes you ask such a question?"

"I feel so strange," she answered, in the same faint whisper, "and I have no strength even to raise my head."

"But you will get better!" he said eagerly. "You must get better—you must! For my sake, you must!"

"Why for your sake?" she whispered.

"Because if you die I shall feel like a murderer all the rest of my life. Oh, believe me, I did not mean to be rude and unkind! I would die for you this very moment if I could make you better! Oh, believe me!" And the tears came up and filled his eyes.

She looked at him wonderingly. His words were so passionate, and rang with such a deep note of conviction, that she could not doubt his sincerity.

"It was all my fault," she whispered, after a long pause; then the light faded from her eyes again. Ralph rushed to the stream and fetched more water, but she was quite unconscious when he returned.

For a moment or two he looked at her, wondering whether her ashen lips meant the approach of death; then he gathered her up in his arms again and marched forward in the direction of St. Goram.

The road seemed interminable, while his burden hung a dead weight in his arms, and grew heavier every step he took. He was almost ready to drop, when a feeble sigh

sounded close to his ear, followed by a very perceptible shudder.

He was afraid to look at her. He had heard that people shuddered when they died. A moment or two later he was reassured. A soft voice whispered—

"Are you taking me home?"

"I am taking you to St. Goram," he answered "I don't know where your home is."

She raised herself suddenly and locked her arms about his neck, and at the touch of her hands the blood leaped in his veins and his face became crimson. He no longer felt his burden heavy, no longer thought the way long. A new chord had been struck somewhere, which sang through every fibre of his being. A new experience had come to him, unlike anything he had ever before felt or imagined.

He raised her a little higher in his arms, and pressed her still closer to his heart. He was trembling from head to foot; his head swam with a strange intoxication, his heart throbbed at twice its normal rate. He had suddenly got into a world of enchantment. Life expanded with a new meaning and significance.

It did not matter for the moment who this fair creature was or where she lived. He had got possession of her; her arms were about his neck, her head rested on his shoulder, her face was close to his, her breath fanned his cheek, he could feel the beating of her heart against his own.

He marched over the brow of the hill and down the other side in a kind of ecstasy.

He waited for her to speak again, but for some reason she kept silent. He felt her fingers clutch the back of his

neck, and every now and then a feeble sigh escaped her lips.

"Are you in pain?" he asked at length.

"I think I can bear it," she answered feebly.

"I wish I could carry you more gently," he said, "but the ground is very rough."

"Oh, but you are splendid!" she replied. "I wish I had not been rude to you."

He gave a big gulp, as though a lump had risen in his throat.

"Don't say that again, please," he said at length. "I feel bad enough to drown myself."

She did not reply again, and for a long distance he walked on in silence. He was almost ready to drop, and yet he was scarcely conscious of fatigue. It seemed to him as though the strength of ten men had been given to him.

"We shall be in the high road in a few minutes now," he said at length; but she did not reply. Her hands seemed to be relaxing their hold about his neck again; her weight had suddenly increased.

He staggered hurriedly forward to the junction of the roads, and then sat down suddenly on a bank, still holding his precious charge in his arms. He shifted her head a little, so that he could look at her face. She did not attempt to speak, though he saw she was quite conscious.

"There's some kind of vehicle coming along the road," he said at length, lifting his head suddenly.

She did not reply, but her eyes seemed to search his face as though something perplexed her.

"Are you easier resting?" he questioned.

She closed her eyes slowly by way of reply; she was too spent to speak.

"You have not yet told me who you are," he said at length. All thought of rank and station had passed out of his mind. They were on an equality while he sat there folding her in his arms.

She opened her eyes again, and her lips moved, but no sound escaped them.

In the distance the rattle of wheels sounded more and more distinct.

"Help is coming," he whispered. "I'm sure it is."

Her eyes seemed to smile into his, but no other answer was given.

He looked eagerly toward the bend of the road, and after a few minutes a horse and carriage appeared in sight.

"It's Dr. Barrow's carriage," he said half aloud. "Oh, this is fortunate!"

He raised a shout as the carriage drew near. The coachman saw that something had happened, and pulled up suddenly. The doctor pushed his head out of the window, then turned the door-handle and stepped out on to the roadside.

"Hello, Ralph Penlogan!" he said, rushing forward, "what is the meaning of this?"

"She got thrown from her horse up against Treiskey Plantation," he answered. "Do you know who she is?"

"Of course I know who she is!" was the quick reply. "Don't you know?"

"No. I never saw her before. Do you think she will recover?"

"Has she been unconscious all the time?" the doctor asked, placing his fingers on her wrist.

"No; she's come to once or twice. I thought at first she was dead. There's a big cut on her head, which has bled a good deal."

"She must be got home instantly," was the reply. "Help me to get her into the carriage at once!"

It was an easy task for the two men. Dorothy had relapsed into complete unconsciousness again. Very carefully they propped her up in a corner of the brougham, while the doctor took his place by her side.

Ralph would have liked to ride with them. He rather resented Dr. Barrow taking his place. He had a notion that nobody could support the unconscious girl so tenderly as himself.

There was no help for it, however. He had to get out of the carriage and leave the two together.

"Tell William," said the doctor, "to drive round to the surgery before going on to Hamblyn Manor."

"To Hamblyn Manor?" Ralph questioned, with a look of perplexity in his eyes as he stood at the carriage door.

"Why, where else should I take her?"

"Is she from up the country?"

"From up the country—no. Do you mean to say you've lived here all your life and don't know Miss Hamblyn?"

"But she is only a girl," Ralph said, looking at the white face that was leaning against the doctor's shoulder.

"Well?"

"Miss Hamblyn is going to be married!"

The doctor's face clouded in a moment.