

with a shock of surprise, that after all—incredible! impossible!—Ughtred had positively taken her at her word, and wasn't coming back at all to-night to her.

At that, the usual womanly terror seized upon her soul. Her heart turned faint. This was too terrible. Great heavens, what had she done? Had she tried Ughtred too far, and had he really gone? Was he never going to return to her at all? Had he said good-bye in earnest to her for ever and ever?

Terrified at the thought, and weak with crying, she rose and straggled down the narrow footpath toward the further crossing. It was getting late now, and Netta by this time was really frightened. She wished with all her heart she hadn't sent away Ughtred—if it were only for the tramps: a man is such a comfort. And then there was that dreadful dog at Milton Court to pass. And Ughtred was gone and all the world was desolate.

Thinking these things in a tumult of fear to herself, she staggered along the path, feeling tired at heart, and positively ill with remorse and terror. The colour

had faded now out of her pretty red cheeks. Her eyes were dim and swollen with crying. She was almost half glad Ughtred couldn't see her just then, she was such a fright with her long spell of brooding. Even her bright print dress and her straw hat with the popples in it, couldn't redeem, she felt sure, her pallor and her wretchedness. But Ughtred was gone, and the world was a wilderness. And he would never come back, and the dog at Milton Court was so vicious.

As she walked, or rather groped her way (for she couldn't see for crying) down the path by the hedge, at every stop she grew fainter and fainter. Ughtred was gone; and the world was a blank; and there were tramps and dogs; and it was getting dark; and she loved him so much; and Mamma would be so angry.

Turning over which thoughts with a whirling brain, for she was but a girl, after all, she reached the little swing-gate that led to the railway, and pushed it aside with vague numbed hands, and stood glazing vacantly at the long curved line in front of her.

sudden shock stunned and disabled her. Mad bull or drunken man, they might do as they liked now. She was bruised and shaken. She had no thought left to rise or recover herself. Her eyes closed heavily. She lost consciousness. She had fainted. She lost consciousness at once. She had fainted on the line, with the force of the situation.

As for Ughtred, from his seat on the telegraph post on the side of the line five hundred yards further up, he saw her pause by the gate, then dash across the road, then stumble and trip, then fall heavily forward. His heart came up into his mouth at once at the sight. Oh, thank heaven he had waited. Thank heaven he was near. She had fallen across the line, and a train might come along before she could rise up again. She seemed hurt, too. In a frenzy of suspense he darted forward to save her.

It took but a second for him to realise that she had fallen, and was seriously hurt, but in the course of that second, even as he realised it all, another and more pressing terror seized him.

Hark! what was that? He listened and thrilled. Oh no, too terrible. Yes, yes, it must be—the railway, the railway! He knew it. He felt it. Along the up line, on which Netta was lying, he heard be-



"SHE CRIED AND CRIED."

Suddenly, a noise rose sharp in the field behind her. It was only a colt, to be sure, disturbed by her approach, dashing wildly across his paddock, as is the way with young horseflesh. But to Netta it came as an indefinite terror, magnified ten thousand-fold by her excited feelings. She made a frenzied dash for the other side of the railway. What it was she knew not, but it was, or might be, anything. Everything,—mad bulls, drunken men, footpads, vagabonds, murderers.

Oh, how could Ughtred ever have taken her at her word, and left her like this, alone, and in the evening? It was cruel, it was wicked of him; she hated to be disloyal, and yet she felt in her heart it was almost unmanly.

As she rushed along wildly, at the top of her speed, her little foot caught on the first rail. Before she knew what had happened, she had fallen with her body right across the line. Faint and terrified already, with a thousand vague alarms, the



"IT WAS A TERRIBLE POSITION."

hind him—oh, unmistakable, unthinkable, the fierce whirr of the express dashing madly down upon him. Great heavens, what could he do? The train was coming, the train was almost this moment upon them. Before he could have time to rush wildly forward and snatch Netta from where she lay, full in its path, a helpless weight, it would have swept past him resistlessly, and borne down upon her like lightning.

The express was coming—to crush Netta to pieces.

In these awful moments men don't think: they don't reason; they don't ever realise what their action means; they simply act, and act instinctively. Ugh-