

The Passionate Elopement

learned a new restraint, gained a new dignity from the wondrous ride and with scarcely a perceptible quiver in his voice begged to point out to his friend Mr. Lovely that if he shot him, he should not scruple to shoot Mr. Clare were the latter to stand in his way.

"But what if you're shot, Sir?" cried Charles, betraying in his eagerness the true reason for his desire to force an instant encounter, "as by G—— you deserve to be for murdering the poor little Major."

Vernon was perplexed.

"The Major? Is he dead? I had nothing to do with his death." The simplicity of the denial almost convinced his listeners that he was speaking the truth.

"Come, Sirrah, will you meet me?" said Charles, lifting his crop.

"Listen, you pair of puppies," said Vernon between his teeth. "I could have put a bullet into either of you at any time during the last five minutes, and by heavens, I don't know why I kept my finger from the trigger. Yes, I do," he shouted. "I've got a chance of happiness and I'm not going to throw it away by having your blood on my head. You're an interfering pair of fools, but I cheated one of you at cards and I played a low game over the book, and by G——, I believe my father was a gentleman. I'll meet you, Mr. Lovely, now."

With these words he flung down on the grass at Charles' feet the two pistols which the skirts of his riding-coat had concealed.

"I'll step fifteen paces," said Mr. Clare, hiding his emotion with a piece of practical utility. And, as he began to measure the ground, away down in the broken chariot Phyllida woke with a start. She was surprised by the daylight and called to her lover. Only birdsong answered her voice. In sudden dismay, presentiment hanging over her like the aftermath of an evil dream, she jumped from the chariot. Intuition, perhaps the remembrance of last night's fear, made her look towards the summit of the slope. In silhouette against the golden sky, she saw three figures.