

"Miss Hardenbrook's very poorly to-day," another remarked. "She ain't expected to live the week out. Miss Isabel will drop into a good thing, when the old girl goes off the hooks. She'll be the richest and handsomest gal in Lancashire."

"And this young chap, with the black mustache, and diamond ring, comes down beforehand to make sure of his game. A fortune hunter, or a gambler, most likely. They all look like that—black mustaches, diamond rings, tall hats, and lots of cheek."

The young man, thus unflatteringly discussed, reached the hotel meantime, secured his room, ordered his supper, and ate it with an appetite. His watch pointed to six as he came from the table.

It was quite dark now—moonless and starless; a bleak, bitter night.

"Pleasant, this," the young man muttered—"an inky sky above, an inky earth below. My dear girl will hardly venture out in this March tornado; but, like a true knight, I must brave the elements, and be at the place of tryst."

He buttoned up his overcoat, drew his hat far over his eyes, and sallied out into the gusty darkness.

There were no street lamps in primitive Framlingham, and the lighted windows were so obscured by tossing trees, that they illuminated his path but little. The path was strange to him, too; but he plunged carelessly forward with an easy trust in luck and himself, that was characteristic of the man, humming the fag end of an old ballad,

"Oh, hang it!" as he stumbled over an obstruction. "Miss Hardenbrook would lock the door and keep the key, too, if she dreamed George Wildair was within a score of miles of this delectable, happy village. I hope Issie will keep tryst; one doesn't mind breaking one's shins for the girl of one's heart; but if the girl doesn't come—— This ought to be the spot, I think."

He was out on the verge of a bleak marsh, just discernible and no more. Pollard willows waved and cracked, and a low clump of furze-bushes dotted it—black spectres, this bad March night,

"This is the spot, and this is the hour," Mr. George Wildair muttered to himself; "and a more desolate spot, and a more dismal hour, my adored Isabel couldn't have chosen, if she had tried a life-time. May the gods that specially watch over fools and lovers send her soon, or I shall be found here, to-morrow morning, frozen as stiff as Lot's wife."