

"Well, if you will, you will," said Guy. "Mind the path, it's steep, and the light's almost gone. For God's sake be careful!" he exclaimed, so earnestly that Cuthbert looked at him in amazement.

"You look astonished at my anxiety!" cried Guy, going up to him and laying his hand on his shoulder, his eyes fixed on Cuthbert's, with a cold light in them that Cuthbert had never seen before. "Do you know I wouldn't have you fall and break your neck down the ravine there for a thousand pounds!"

Cuthbert took up the cup; "You are in a strange humor to-night," he said, "I cannot make you out," and then walked away for the water.

Guy watched him as he strode away towards the lake, and as he did so his face darkened and worked, as if his soul were being wrung with some fierce emotion. His dark eyes flashed with a glance of hatred, and his teeth clenched with suppressed passion. "There he goes!" he muttered, folding his arms and leaning against the door-post, his hairless brows lowered menacingly. "There he goes, Roderick Edgecombe, heir to Edgecombe Hull and Edgecombe money. A fool with sixty thousand a year, wandering about an Australian cattle-run. And here am I—his elder brother—by right, by God's natural right, the heir to all, dogging his footsteps, an outcast, a thief, a felon, a—bah! what matters it? I shrink at the word—turn quailing at the name, but do I turn quailing and milk-sop at the deed? No, my mother's—my wronged, injured mother's—my story is ringing in my ears; and when I remember how she loved and was betrayed, lived and was starved, and died, I feel my heart turned to stone, and my arm nerved to do anything, so that it brings harm to the son of the woman who took her place—to the man who stands between me and mine!"

As he muttered the last savage words beneath his breath, his face grew white, and his eyes lit up ferociously.

For a moment he was silent, then his head dropped on his bosom with a shudder, as he continued, "Murder, most foul and unnatural! Bah! I am turning a woman, but my God, how the words ring in my ears! Murder—no! Justice! They rob me of my right, because the world and its unjust laws are stronger; I seize the moment when the world's laws are powerless to reach me, and snatch from them that which is, by Nature's law, already mine! But—but!—why didn't I let him die with the old trapper? Curse him I let him live to tempt me!"

Then he fell to pacing up and down before the door, still with his arms folded, and his eyes bent upon the ground. "So like! so like! It's fate who does the wrong, if there be wrong, by giving us the likeness, and throwing him across my path. Fate! But there is no such thing as chance. What is to be will be, and what has been was to be! Yet, O God! how can I bring it about? If he would but give me cause to strike him down! If I could but get into the devilish rage I have never felt since—here he paused and shook his head, as if he would throw the agonizing thought of the past—of a time when a woman's love moved him, and a woman's voice turned him—from his brain. Then the sound of Cuthbert's footsteps was heard coming slowly up the glen, and, composing his face, the illegitimate son of Sir Harry Edgecombe stepped into the hut, and bent over the fire.

"Have I been long?" said Cuthbert. "If so, put it down to the water, for it looked so tempting that I must needs bathe my face. Here is some from the very top of the rill, and now for supper," and he threw himself down beside the fire.

"Aye! aye! now for supper," repeated Guy. "Here's some mutton, and here's some bread, and here's some brandy—royal fare, eh?"

"Too royal for such vagabonds as us," said Cuthbert, with a half smile.

"Not so," replied Guy, looking up at him; "who shall say mutton and brandy are too good meat and drink for my Lord of Edgecombe?"

Cuthbert started, and looked up curiously. He had never heard Guy speak like this before.

"My Lord of Edgecombe!" continued Guy, snatching up the flask, and raising it above his head; "what a grand old title, what a royal-sounding name! and to think that I am sitting opposite such a mighty personage! My lord, I drink to you," and bowing with a sardonic smile, he lifted the flask to his lips and drank deeply.

Cuthbert's face darkened. "You seem to forget," he said, gravely, "that I begged you to help me to forget that fact."

"But I can't!" said Guy, bending forward, and speaking in a whisper, "I can't! I think of it every moment of the day. I—"

"What is the matter with you!" exclaimed Cuthbert, rising, with a look of astonishment.

"Nothing!" replied Guy, in a different and calmer tone, "nothing, say I've been at this too much!" and he touched the flask lightly; "say—oh, say anything you like, but cat—you don't cat!"

Cuthbert pushed the meat away from him, and took up a piece of wheaten cake.

Guy watched him for a moment, eating fast and voraciously himself, and at every mouthful raising the brandy to his lips. It seemed as if he were trying to nerve himself for some deed. Suddenly he said—

"You don't seem to get any fonder of this life?"

Cuthbert shook his head.

"I'm afraid I'm but a miserable companion," he said; "for, though I don't whine much, yet I don't bark, and it's poor society a dumb man is."

"Moody, taciturn, morose—should I be far wrong in saying you are unhappy?"

"On the contrary, you would be quite right. I do not complain, I have nothing to complain of, least of all to you, who have been a friend indeed, because a friend in need; but—Tush! Why should I analyze my feelings on purpose to bore you. You watch me too closely, are too regardful of my feelings, my friend. Let me indulge my silent whim and gloomy bearing to the top of my bent. It is too late to change it. Now for to-morrow; which way do you think the cattle have taken?"

"Tired of this life, eh? So am I," said Guy, taking no notice of the question, and leaning his chin on his hand, so that his eyes were on a level with the face of the other.

"Look ye here; suppose we leave it?"

"With all my heart," assented Cuthbert, wearily. "I tell you, as I told you before, that my future is yours, or any man's who likes to take it. Go where you will. Do what you like."

"It is easily done," said Guy, thoughtfully, still eyeing the moody face with cat-like attention. "We can't be many days now from one of the towns, or, at least, the diggings. Why not? We have horses."

Cuthbert looked up.

"Yes, Van Oester's, our employer's," he said.

"Well," retorted Guy, "what matters it whose they are, so that we have them? Horra stealing—"

Cuthbert rose to his feet, a scarlet flush upon his cheek.

"You have been drinking," he exclaimed, significantly pointing to the flask.

"As sober as yourself," retorted Guy, not moving an inch. "Where's the offence? At the idea of taking a couple of the old Dutchman's bays? Why, man, a dozen horses shouldn't stick in your throat; a hundred wouldn't stick in mine!"

Cuthbert eyed him indignantly, but his voice was calm and cold.

"You ask me to steal my master's horse!" he said. "Well, you have kept the mask on well. Now I know you for what you are. You have saved my life more than once, and have been my companion for many months. I owe you much; but—Ah, well! how should you understand?" he broke off to mutter.

"I understand as well as you!" hissed Guy, leaping to his feet, and striding up to the upright figure of Cuthbert. "I understand as well as you!" he repeated. "You! Lord of Edgecombe, and I—Guy, the nameless outcast! There is a difference, eh? A difference, Roderick Edgecombe, believe me, and that makes it no strange thing for me to steal a horse and you to refuse to do so! You think that I—I, Guy—the thief and felon, can't understand these fine shades of feeling! You—curse you!" he hissed, his face close to the still, fixed one opposite him; "you look at me! You look! look! look! I tell you. Do you see much difference in the two faces? In our eyes—in our mouths—in our hearts! You want me! I tell you, Roderick Edgecombe, that your father was a greater scoundrel, a more damnable villain than I am!"

Cuthbert flushed a hot crimson, and sprang at him.

"Silence!" he cried sternly. "I owe you much, but I cannot, will not hear you blacken my father without telling you you lie!"

Guy's eager hands were round his throat in a second, and clasped in a mad embrace, the two men, after swaying for a moment like a huge tree bent by the wind, fell to the ground, with Guy's white face gleaming above the startled one of the heir to Edgecombe.

"You—-are mad," gasped, Cuthbert, struggling to rise.

"No—not mad—save with joy!" hissed Guy, pressing his hand heavier across his throat. "Roderick Edgecombe, I have waited months and months for this. I hate you! I have vowed to—"

"What!" gasped the fallen man.

"To kill you!" hissed the white lips, and the cry seemed to be taken up by the waving trees and to be echoed throughout the wild solitude, as if a million throats had screamed it instead of one.

"Kill me!" repeated Cuthbert, with a mighty effort regaining his feet, and determined to sell his life dearly.

"Aye, kill you!" screamed Guy, waving his long, shining blade in the air.

Cuthbert's eyes flashed fire, and his body swung together for one effort. He must overpower this madman, he thought, at one blow.

Catching up his rifle, which lay beside him, he hurled it with all his force at the distorted face, but Guy seemed possessed of the quickness of a demon, for he stooped and avoided the missile, and the next instant a yell broke out upon the silence, and Roderick Edgecombe felt the steel penetrate his flesh.

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An hour afterwards the rays of the Australian moon poured through the open door of the solitary hut, and upon two figures, one lying stark and motionless upon the ground, with a pool of blood at its side, and a red stream issuing from

a slit in its shirt, the other bending over it with a razor in its hand.

The dead man's face is livid and set, and has no eyebrows.

The face of the figure bending over it is white and stern, hairless even to the lip, and likewise browless. The two faces are exactly alike, it would be difficult for the woman who bore Roderick Edgecombe, were she standing in the doorway, to choose from the two her son.

Still shining softly and peacefully, the moon pours down her light upon the living figure as it emerges from the hut—still with hardened face and set lips—and mounts the horse tied on the other side of the hut.

The clothes the figure wears, and the horse it mounts, are those of Roderick Edgecombe, but their owner lies stiff and bleeding within the hut.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"NURSE GRACE."

"With footfalls light as angel's,
And Zephyr-breathing touch,
From death she snatched her loved one."

So many were the nights on which Bertie Lennox lay unconscious, that the roses faded from the cheek of the beautiful girl who had constituted herself—by her own appointment—chief and only nurse, and the eyes that never looked upon the flushed face and tossing form upon the bed without growing lovingly wistful, grew anxious.

Tom, who regarded his master as the first gentleman of England and the greatest hero that ever lived, began to doubt Miss Grace's humanity, and was gradually instilling into himself the belief that the beautiful woman who scarcely ever left his master's side was an angel in soft, noiseless merino.

Mrs. Wilson came often—sometimes accompanied by the squire—but they were both puzzled and over-awed by Grace's calm self-possession; and beyond gentle daily remonstrances for the first week, said nothing against their daughter turning sick nurse to a dragoon captain. I doubt, indeed, if things would have been altered very much if they had.

At last the ceaseless watching was rewarded, for, one evening, as Tom was sitting at the table pouring out some milk-and-watery compound, Grace, who was standing at the bedside, with her eyes fixed, as usual, wistfully upon the sick man's face, noticed a sudden change come over the wrinkled brow. The puzzled, pained expression took sudden flight, and left the face calm and peaceful.

For a moment, although the doctor had warned her of the change, she thought he was worse, and her heart seemed to stand still; but, recovering herself, she whispered, "Tom," and bent down closer over the captain.

Tom stole up—of course with a creak of the boots, the manner of men in a sick-room—and looked at his master.

"Is—is he worse, Tom?" asked Grace, tremblingly, a fearful anxiety upon her face.

Tom shook his head, a gesture he had got pretty well perfect by constant practice.

"I dunno, miss. An' sure an' I'll go for the doctor?" and he started off to the surgeon's.

Dr. Rawbourne hurried back with him, and smiled reassuringly when he saw the alteration in the face of his patient.

"It's the crisis, my dear young lady," he said, cheerfully. "He is asleep at last; when he awakes he will be conscious, and already on the road to recovery. And I'm quite sure that the first thing he does when he is in his right senses, will be to pour out his gratitude to the lady who has—yes, madam—saved his life!" and, astonished at his sudden eloquence, the worthy young *Mars-Medico* flushed doc-