THE BUSHMAN'S REST.
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In the old days it had been merely a small hut, with stables at the back where Cobb & Co.'s coaches changed horses. But a diggings breaking out some eight or nine miles away, the owner had added to the building, and turned it into a general store and wayside public-house combined, greatly to the annoyance of the surrounding squatters, whose hands made it a resort whenever they had an hour or two, as well as upon every high day and holiday.

It was called 'The Bushman's Rest,' and did a good trade with travellers and station employés, who often put up there for a night instead of camping out in the bush.

The man who kept it was named Burgiss. At one time he had been a driver for Cobb & Co. on that very road, and a very popular driver too, but drink, the universal curse of these colonies, had overtaken him and totally unfitted him for the position; so, with
the little ready-money he had managed to save, he bought out the original proprietor, and with his wife took possession and started the joint business. For a hundred miles and more the place had a notoriously bad name—every one on or off the road knew it; and though none could exactly define the reason of its bad reputation, all felt that it was not unfounded. Burgiss was by birth a colonial. Who his forebears had been, history sayeth not, though it was hinted by more than one of his mates that Burgiss' father had been—

'One of that patriot brood
Who left their country for their country's good.'

He had been at one time rather a fine-looking young fellow, and, before he lost his nerve, what bushmen call a smart hand among horses. Indeed, when a youth he had been a jockey for Mr. De M——, one of the largest owners of racehorses in the colonies. His wife was a barmaid in a West Maitland hotel when he met and married her, but since her marriage she had fallen into ill-health, and at the time my story opens was totally incapacitated from attending to the house, and in consequence they had determined to engage a housekeeper to take her place.

Now it chanced that Mrs. Burgiss had a friend in Sydney, a Mrs. Holland (wife of a solicitor), who had also been a barmaid, but had risen considerably in the social scale, owing to her marriage. To her she wrote, telling of her illness, and begging her to engage and send her up a housekeeper of good appearance and address—some one, in short, who could
be trusted to take entire charge during her absence, for it was purposed that Mrs. Burgiss should go to Sydney for medical advice and treatment directly the new housekeeper arrived.

As soon as Mrs. Holland received her friend’s letter, she at once drove to the depot, a large number of immigrants having arrived only the day before.

After interviewing a great number of girls, and finding none who would suit in the double capacity she required of them, she was about to leave the place to try elsewhere, when her attention was arrested by a young woman who entered the room at the moment, crying bitterly. She was a tall, handsome girl to outward appearance; and, notwithstanding the veil she wore over her face, Mrs. Holland noticed that she was decidedly prepossessing. As she seemed to be in great trouble, Mrs. Holland inquired of the matron the cause.

‘Well, poor thing, she expected friends to meet her,—an aunt, I believe,’ was the reply. ‘And when she got here, the first newspaper she saw contained a notice of the death of her aunt. She came out second-class, but made friends with some of the girls on the ship, and asked to come with them here, as she had no friends to go to, and no money to speak of, poor young thing. She has other friends in the colony, but she don’t know where to find them, even to send them a letter.’

Mrs. Holland thought for a moment, then she said, ‘Do you think she would take a situation? I really
think she would just do for the place I mentioned, if she could be persuaded to take it.'

'I don't quite know, ma'am, what her plans are, or if she has made any yet, poor girl, but you can speak to her yourself,' the matron replied; and, calling the girl over, she explained to her what Mrs. Holland was there for, and what she required. A pound a week, full charge of the house, her own mistress, and nothing menial required of her, it sounded very suitable,—the very thing, in fact, that she wanted in her helpless position. As there appeared no chance of finding her friends, it would be foolish to miss so good a chance of securing a home and a living.

Mrs. Holland was more than ever struck with her appearance when she raised her veil. Her complexion was beautifully fair and clear, eyes dark blue, and innocent and trusting as a child's; in short, Ellen Dunne, for such was her name, was a very lovely English country girl, far too beautiful and pure-minded to be homeless in such a country as this.

The preliminaries were soon arranged, and an agreement drawn up; and before she well knew what she had done, she had signed it, thus pledging herself to a six months' contract. However, once having determined upon accepting the situation, Nelly Dunne was not going to let herself look back or repine over the inevitable. She was alone, friendless, and without sufficient money to keep her more than a week or two, so felt inclined to congratulate herself upon her good fortune in having found a home so soon.
So one morning very early, before the great heart of the city began to move, she found herself and her modest belongings in the coach, en route for a town with a strange outlandish name, where she at last arrived just at dark, tired, dispirited, lonely, and very sad.

Imagine, reader, if you can, a young girl coming all the way from England alone, expecting to meet friends, kindly and loving, who would cherish and protect her at her journey's end. Then to meet no one save strangers, who knew her not nor wanted her; to live three days constantly on the watch for a familiar or kindly face, to hear a step and run to meet it hopefully, and to find only the cold vacant stare of an utter stranger. At last she thought she must have forgotten her aunt's appearance, and so had perhaps missed her among the crowds that on the first day thronged the ship in search of friends. Then she sallied forth into the streets of the great strange city, in the vague hope of recognising the loved face among the countless thousands who passed and repassed.

It was during one of these wearying walks about the city that she entered a pastry-cook's and asked for a drink of milk and a bun, more for the sake of the rest than because she was hungry or thirsty. She bought a few cakes to take back with her, and these the woman wrapped in a piece of an old newspaper. Going slowly along, for she was heart-sick and weary, her eye caught the name of Marston,—it was her aunt's name,—and she read,—
'At Newcastle, on the 5th inst., Mary Ellen Marston, widow of the late Rev. Edward Marston of Hinton, aged 50 years.'

She turned the paper over; it was a month old. Yes, her aunt was dead. Then there could not be two Mary Ellen Marstons, widows of clergymen, and of Hinton too,—she remembered that was the name of her uncle's parish. She did not faint or scream, she only felt a numb despair come upon her, and a feeling of utter desolation. What was to become of her? She could not stop on board the ship much longer; indeed, it was only through the courtesy of the captain that she had been allowed to stay so long. Mechanically she walked on, seeing nothing, hearing nothing around her, till suddenly a hand grasped her arm, and a voice said cheerfully, 'Why, Miss Dunne, I didn't know you!' It was one of the immigrants, a young girl whom Nelly had spoken to several times on the voyage.

'Did your friends come for you yet, miss?' she asked kindly.

'No, Alice; my aunt is dead,' was the reply. 'I have just seen her death in this piece of paper;' and, as she pointed to the notice, her strength gave way, and she began to cry weakly.

'Ah, poor soul! I am sorry for you; but what will you do now?'

'I don't know, I am sure,' was the hopeless answer. The girl stood for a moment thinking, then she said,—

'Will you come along to the depot and see the
matron there; she is a real good sort, and maybe could think of some way to help ye.'

Without more ado she turned with Alice and proceeded to the depot. Her story was soon told, and, under the advice of the matron, she determined to take her chance with the other girls who were in search of work. We know the rest. She had only just returned to the depot from having bidden farewell to the captain and officers of the ship, when Mrs. Holland noticed and engaged her. This was Nelly Dunne's position. Think of it, you among my fair readers who have home friends and kindly voices to welcome you always.

When she found herself at the hotel, whither she had been conducted by the driver of the mail-coach, who had received instructions from Mr. Burgiss to bring the young woman along, she sat down on the small trunk which contained all that was left of her worldly possessions (for she had been obliged to part with some of her things to enable her to buy a few necessaries for her journey and her new situation) and cried as though her heart was breaking. Was this the grand free life in sunny Australia of which she had heard so much, and the glowing accounts of which had made her discontented with her humble village home?—that home which now, as she saw it in imagination, looked so lovely, so happy, so different to her present surroundings. What would she not give for the privilege of returning to it, of even only telling those she had left of her sore need of
their help and pity! However, she was tired, body and spirit; and youth, thank God, does not fret long. She drank a cup of tea, and ate some bread-and-butter, then went to bed, and, strange to say, slept soundly till they called her at daylight to prepare for the journey before her, which in the days I am writing of was an ordeal for any woman, however strong.

The driver of the coach, though a rough, coarse-spoken bushman, had a tender heart, and sympathy for all young women who travelled with him. He was a widower with one child, and that one a crippled daughter sixteen years of age; but oh, such a sweet young girl, full of hope and love! Her affliction was all the more sad, that it had not been of long standing, but was the result of a foolish wager on the part of her father, who had sworn that she, a child of twelve years of age, could drive a pair of half-broken horses over a certain piece of road. The child was terrified, but dared not disobey, so drove them, the result being they ran away. She was dashed against a tree, and had her thigh broken and her spine injured, while one horse was killed and the other had to be shot, and the vehicle was smashed to atoms. Agnes had ever since remained an invalid; and for her sake her father was gentle and pitiful to all young women, though still remaining outwardly coarse, hard-featured, and rough.

When Nelly came out that morning, heavy-eyed and sad-looking, Bill the driver, as he was called, was very gentle with her, even whispering a word or two
of encouragement as he assisted her to the box-seat beside him.

I need not describe the journey in detail. No doubt most of my readers at some time of their lives have taken a journey by coach. Every ten miles the weary horses were taken out and fresh ones substituted. The heart of the lonely girl grew heavier and heavier as she was borne farther and farther away from civilisation, into what seemed to her the heart of a wilderness.

She had heard and read many tales of station life, and the difficulties often to be encountered in reaching these far-off homes, but nothing she had ever dreamt of approached at all near to the terrible roads and wild bush which they were passing through. She could hardly realize that these vaguely defined tracks which the coach followed were a high road. As they wound round and through the trees, lurching over stony or boggy ground alike, she grasped Bill's arm, and looked the fear she had not power to express.

When engaging her, Mrs. Holland had told her that the place she was going to was a station. Possibly she spoke in all sincerity, and as she had been led to believe, for it is the custom for people who live in the bush, even if they only possess half an acre and a couple of cows, to speak of their place as a station. Any one who owns a few head of cattle and sufficient land to run them on, is a squatter in his own opinion, and when away from home will frequently enlarge upon the capabilities, beauty, value, etc. etc., of his
run. So it is quite likely Mrs. Holland spoke in good faith.

All up the road the young stranger's beauty and refined appearance attracted admiration, and at each stopping-place she was beset with unwelcome attentions from the men who lounged about the bars; particularly after it became known that her destination was the notorious 'Bushman's Rest,' for they argued that (to use their own words) 'she couldn't be much chop, or she wouldn't go there.'

It was well for Nelly that she did not understand their rude jests and coarse wit, or her sensitive feelings would have been shocked twenty times a day.

It was nine o'clock at night when the four horses pulled up before the door of the wayside inn which was to be Nelly Dunne's home for a time.

'Here you are, safe and sound, wind and limb,' said the driver; 'and I guess you ain't sorry neither, miss?' he added kindly, as he looked down upon the tired face of the girl beside him from his superior height.

'Is this the station?' she inquired simply, staring round her in bewilderment, and wondering where the house was, for she recognised directly that this was a public-house before her.

'This is "The Bushman's Rest," miss, and here comes the boss. Now then, steady while yer get down, or ye'll fall. I guess ye're a bit stiff after all the sittin'.'

She descended from the high seat, and, while they
unstrapped her box and took out sundry parcels from the coach, she looked round her on a scene the beauty of which could not but strike one so unaccustomed as she was to such wild, grand scenery. The moon was at the full, and hung in the cloudless heavens like a great white globe, lighting up the surrounding country with its clear, weird light. On all sides rose hills one above another; even the house stood upon one. The road along which the coach had just come continued its winding course down into the valley below, from whence stretched several miles of perfectly level country. In the distance, to the left, a river was visible, looking strangely white in the moonlight. For the moment the girl stood looking upon it all lost in admiration at its beauty, her spirit having flown away to another scene of which this reminded her a little; and it was with a great start she came back to the present, when Mr. Burgiss touched her arm familiarly and begged her to walk inside.

'S'pose you're dead beat?' he said, conducting her to a room behind the bar, from whence she saw the driver and two or three men drinking.

She sat down on the nearest chair, saying as she did so, 'Yes, I am very tired, I wish this was the end of my journey; but I suppose it is not far now?' Then, looking up eagerly, she inquired, 'Is Mr. Burgiss here yet to meet me?'

Mrs. Holland had told her that she supposed they would meet her at the coach, so naturally she concluded that there must be some distance yet to go
that this wayside inn was her destination never for an instant occurred to her. So her surprise can be better imagined than described, when to her query her companion said with a laugh, 'Why, bless you, I'm Burgiss.'

'You!' she exclaimed, in wide-eyed astonishment; then, looking round her hurriedly, 'There must be some mistake, I think. I am Miss Dunne; I was engaged in Sydney by Mrs. Hol and to take'—

'It's all right; yes, I know all about it,' he replied, interrupting her abruptly. 'Mrs. Holland—she's a friend of my wife's—engaged you to be housekeeper, barmaid, and general help while my missus goes down to see the doctors. Oh yes, it's all right, miss, you're on the right track.'

All right, indeed! it was all wrong; in her amazement she had risen from the chair; but when the full meaning of it all burst upon her she sat down again, trembling in every limb, and white to her lips. But Ellen Dunne was a brave girl, and though her heart was so full she was afraid to trust her voice. She gathered at once the full meaning of the mistake, her position and helplessness. She had signed an agreement to do the work of housekeeper and general help—lady-help had been the term used by Mrs. Holland. Certainly she had said no word about a bar, or about her having to wait behind a bar. And Nelly felt her blood run cold at the mere idea; for, like most girls in her position, she had been brought up with a holy horror of public-house bars, and more than all of bar-
maids. Yet here she was, without money or friends, in the wild bush, at a low public-house, the like of which she would have shuddered to enter at any other time. What was she to do? Hastily viewing her position, she determined that her only course was to put a good face on the matter, and bide her time, till she could see a way out of her difficulties. So, swallowing down her tears and disappointment, she begged to be shown to her room, saying she required nothing to eat, but would like to go to bed if she might.

'Oh yes, the best thing you can do,' was the reply from Burgiss, who had been standing at the door apparently gazing out into the night, but in reality watching Nelly. 'You needn't see the missus tonight,' he continued, 'she's had a real bad day, and ain't up to talking to-night.' He led the way along a dirty passage which smelt strongly of stale liquor. On either side were rooms, through which she could see either untidy beds, or else tables with gaudy cloths upon them, and chairs with elaborate crochet antimacassars over their backs; these were the rooms —parlours, Nelly supposed—wherein the men drank, and with which she would have to become acquainted as barmaid and waitress.

The weary girl followed, wondering whether her room was quite away from the rest of the rooms, and whether she would be able to make any one hear her in the night should she need help. To her dismay, they crossed a sort of yard, where half-a-dozen low-
looking men—some of them half-tipsy—were smoking, talking, and laughing loudly round the stables; then up a flight of ladder-like steps, and she found herself in the most squalid, poverty-struck apartment it had ever been her lot to enter.

'This is your camp; it's a bit rough, but yer won't need to be in it 'cept of nights,' her companion remarked, as he set the dirty candlestick he carried down on a packing-case, which did duty in the double capacity of dressing-table and wash-hand stand.

With a look of real dismay, which could not but be noticed by the man, it was so utterly blank and frightened, the miserable young girl sank down upon a gin case, which was the only seat in the room, and the next moment she had fainted dead away.

No whit alarmed, Burgiss laid her flat upon the floor, and hastened away for some water and a glass of wine. He was gone some minutes, and when he returned she had revived somewhat, and was sitting up leaning against the wall, crying bitterly.

Burgiss was not unkind; he was a rough, coarse man, mean and grasping by nature, and drink and his associates had not lessened those qualities. The life he led tended to make him what he was (excuse the word), a blackguard; but still deep down in his heart there was a soft spot which was very rarely touched, but which now made him pity this young creature so strangely brought into his disreputable home, for that it was disreputable none knew better than the master thereof. Kneeling down beside poor Nelly, he said
coaxingly, and very much as if he were addressing a favourite mare, 'Come, come now, cheer up a bit, and don't go to spoil those pretty eyes. Gently now, gently now, old lady, what's to pipe yer eye about?'

Had poor Nelly not been in such dire trouble and distress, she must have laughed at this strange address and manner of consolation, for Burgiss had possessed himself of one of her hands, and was stroking and fondling it in an absurdly comical manner.

After a while she dried her tears and rose from her lowly seat on the floor, saying as cheerfully as she could under the wretched circumstances, 'I am better now, thank you, sir.' She hesitated slightly over the word 'sir,' wondering whether she would be expected to use it upon all occasions. 'I will go to bed now, and in the morning, no doubt, I shall feel better. Thank you for being so kind to me just now, it was very stupid of me to faint; I don't know what came over me;' and, quite forgetful of her new position as servant to this man, she held out her hand to bid him goodnight. But evidently Burgiss saw nothing extraordinary in the offer of her hand. On the contrary, he seemed pleased; and before taking the offered hand, which in reality, if the truth were known, looked too white and pretty to be grasped off-hand, he rubbed his own horny palm down the side of his trousers, saying apologetically, 'They ain't real dirty, yer know, but I was helping Bill to put the hosses in;' then, taking it very gingerly, as if fearful of hurting her, he shook it stiffly and awkwardly, as he returned her
good-night, then sprang away down the ladder at two bounds, mentally voting the new girl a stunner.

Left alone, Nelly Dunne gazed round her in dismay at the appointments of this her future apartment. Never, even in the poorest cottage home in her father's parish, had she seen so poverty-struck and unwholesome an apartment. The bedstead, or what did duty for such, was a rough stretcher evidently made on the place, as also had been the mattress, which made a peculiar crackling sound when she pressed it. The mosquito nets, which hung above from a nail in one of the rafters, were on their last legs, evidently past mending even, besides being filthily dirty. In one corner was the packing-case already alluded to, and on it a tin basin like those usually used in bush kitchens for setting the bread in. This too, upon examination, she found to be in a dilapidated state, a piece of rag stopping up a good-sized hole in the bottom. There was no jug, no receptacle for water at all. Beside the bed a box stood on its end, having at one time done duty as stand for a candle, as was apparent from the quantity of sperm dropped all over it and on to the floor beside it too. There was no cover on this box, nor was there any on the packing-case either. With the gin case on which she had sat down, this concludes the inventory of her bedroom furniture. Was it any wonder that the lonely girl felt utterly and supremely wretched? for, though never accustomed to luxury in
her English home, it had been as comfortable and pretty as clever, loving hands and moderate means could make it. There was no water in the room, and she wondered if it would be possible to find any if she went down into the yard; at any rate she must try, she had not had a wash for nearly twenty-four hours, and could not go to rest without getting rid of the grime and dust of her long journey. Taking the basin, for lack of any other receptacle that would hold water, she descended to the yard. The moon was shining brightly as day, lighting up every part of the establishment distinctly, particularly the squalid back premises, with its array of half-ruined outhouses and dirty pig-sties, the occupants of which greeted her approach by a series of grunts and snorts. After a few seconds spent in peering here and there in search of a pump or tap, she spied a tank close to the main building, and to this she at once turned her steps, filled her basin (which, by the way, leaked woefully in spite of the rag plug), and was on her way back to her room, when she almost ran into a young girl carrying an armful of dry clothes, evidently just from the drying ground. The two met in the middle of the yard, and Nelly, pleased to see one of her own sex, said civilly,—

‘Good evening!’ then, with a smile, ‘You see I am making myself at home—the was no water in my room.’

But the other girl made no reply whatever, only staring insolently at her. Nothing daunted, however,
she made some other trifling remark, and asked for a bit of soap.

'There's some down in the wash-'us,' was the ungracious reply, as, pointing carelessly over her shoulder to indicate the direction of the said 'wash-'us,' the girl disappeared, leaving Nelly, if possible, more disheartened than before.

She set her basin of water down while she went in search of the soap, which, after a long hunt among tubs, buckets, and kerosine tins, she at last found. After washing her face, neck, and arms as best she could in the small quantity of water she had managed to get as far as her room, and drying them on her pocket handkerchief, for towels were evidently an unthought-of item in the appointment of her chamber, she undressed wearily and crept into her comfortless blankets, for sheets, too, were considered unnecessary luxuries, apparently. And there, in the silence of the night, she cried herself to sleep, wondering whether she would ever be able to live through the time she had engaged for.

Another and very different scene was being enacted this same evening, a few miles from 'The Bushman's Rest,' on a station which I will call Morven Plains.

The mail-bag had not long arrived, and in the comfortable bush room two young men were seated on either side of the table, intent upon their separate correspondence. They were cousins, and joint-owners of the station; their names, Herbert and Paul Wright. Herbert, whose letters had not been very numerous
or voluminous, had finished reading them, and was engaged upon the English papers, which he turned and twisted at intervals, making them crackle and rustle in a manner truly irritating to himself as well as to his silent cousin.

Paul Wright held before him a closely-written letter, which every now and again he crushed convulsively in his hand as if he would read no further; then the next minute smoothed out again, and read on. All this was unnoticed by his cousin, until a muttered oath escaped, and made him look up quickly from his paper, and exclaim,—

‘Halloo! what’s up, Paul? Bad news, eh?’ But, receiving no reply, he returned to his paper, and after a short time rose, and, carelessly bidding his companion good-night, left the room. For a while the other read on; he had mastered the contents of those delicate pink sheets at the first reading, but yet he returned to them again and again, reading every word deliberately and carefully, till all were impressed upon his brain like a well-learned lesson. After about the twentieth reading, he crushed the letter in his hand and sat buried in thought for more than an hour, from which he roused himself only to pace restlessly up and down the room, much after the manner of a wild beast confined in an iron-barred cage. From end to end of the long bush room he walked, and one could, with very little imagination, fancy him a wild beast labouring under suppressed though impotent fury. Having to a certain extent walked down the
evil spirit that possessed him, he once more threw himself into his chair, smoothed out the crumpled letter, and began another perusal of its disturbing contents. It ran as follows:—

"KELLMINGTON, SOUTH WALES,

"MY DEAR PAUL,—A painful duty is left me, and I hardly know how to enter upon it, for the words I am forced to write you to-day will, I know, come upon you with a great shock, and also be a cruel disappointment, I fear. I should have told you before this; and perhaps you will blame me, or even call me hard names, but I trust you will always believe that I have acted for the best, and with a strict sense of the duty I owe to my mother, to you, and lastly to myself.—You told me in your last two letters that you had had some spells of ill-luck since you bought into the station; that the seasons had been against you,—your losses at one time heavy,—and that you feared I would have to rough it if I were to come out to you in the present state of affairs.—Now, my darling (for such you must ever be to me, whatever happens), I have thought it all over calmly and dispassionately, looking our position in the face, and after mature deliberation I have come to the conclusion that I would be acting most selfishly and against your best interests, present and future, if I kept you to this engagement any longer. You may not be able to come home for years, and my mother will never consent to my going out to you unmarried. So, Paul
dear, though it breaks my heart to write it, or indeed even to think of it, we must part. I give you back your freedom. I set you at liberty to choose another for the wife you need to help you to bear your troubles. Do not think too hardly of me; believe me I am acting more for your good than my own. And, Paul darling, you know I am not a free agent. My mother and Uncle Dick both claim my obedience; the latter constantly tells me I must marry money for all our sakes. Your cousin is constantly here, and we meet him out a great deal more often than of old.—He has asked me to be his wife, and I fear that uncle will insist on my answer to him being a favourable one. You know where my heart is, and who owns it. Dear Paul, try and forgive me if you can; and still with fondest love, I am, and always will be, yours at heart,

MAUD.

With a curse he folded the letter up and put it into the envelope; then unfolding another sheet of paper, he read a printed advertisement which was pasted on to the middle of it, and which read as follows:—

'On the 11th inst., at St. Luke's, Kellmington, by the Rev. Samuel Bryce, Sir Philip Wright, only son of the late Algernon Wright of Mallons Park and the Old Hills, Derbyshire, to Maud Derrington, only daughter of the late Sir Astley Havers, and niece of Mark Hanbury of the Priory.

He read it over and over again as if he would fix it;
on the tablets of his memory. As he did so, a thought seemed to strike him, and once more he unfolded the letter and looked for the date; but it bore none, and with a smile he turned to the envelope, the post-mark of which was dated the 10th June, only one day earlier than the advertisement he had just read. Then she had only written to break with him the day before she wedded his cousin. With an unnatural laugh that rang through the room, he turned and began to pace up and down, his thoughts finding vent now and then in muttered words and ejaculations.

'Ten blessed years of my life wasted on a woman—and such a woman! And now I'm thrown over for a puppy, just because he has money that should by right be mine. And I am a beggar, doomed to live the life of a dog in this God-forsaken country. Money, money!—woman's God. Oh, Maud, Maud, it can't be true; you were such a bonny darling, and you were mine! You did love me, or else you lied damnably. Good God! is there one woman in all the wide world capable of an honest attachment? And Philip's got her, my own cousin, and the only man I ever hated. I hope she'll grow to hate him; and she will, if she's the woman I take her for, as sure as there's a God in heaven. Philip, with his refined vices and his low estimate of the sex! Well, I could hardly wish her a worse fate than tied to my polished sensualist cousin. And Maud's son, if she have one, will stand between me and my birthright; that is all he wants, an heir. I can see her future as
plainly as though it were written before me. He'll begin by neglecting her after the novelty of ownership has worn off, then possibly he'll ill-use her—he's quite capable of it; and serve her right, the false-hearted jade. Damn her—yes—damn her—damn him—and damn them both!

For hours he remained alone in the room, walking to and fro, thus giving vent to the thoughts that filled his angry mind, till the chill breeze, when the night and morning met, blew in through the open window and caused him to shiver. Pausing in the centre of the room for a moment, he turned towards the sideboard, where stood a pocket-flask of brandy, opened that evening to give a glass to the mail-boy when he brought the letters. 'Shall I have a taste of the old stuff,' he whispered half-aloud, 'to drink damnation to her and him?' For a few seconds he stood, hesitating on the brink of temptation; and it seemed as if his good angel would win the battle. From the sideboard he glanced towards the mantelpiece, where stood a handsome cabinet photo of his old love. The effect was instantaneous: he broke into a mirthless laugh, and strode towards the bottle, saying, 'Yes, I will; your influence is at an end, madam; we'll drink to the dissolution; what matter now how soon I go to the devil?' Thus apostrophising the picture, he poured out half a tumbler of the spirit, added a slight modicum of water from the filter close by, and raised it to his mouth, as with mock politeness he bowed to the senseless photograph. But ere the spirit touched
his lips, he put it down and shuddered violently, as though the smell of the liquor turned him sick. 'Seven years since I made a beast of myself,' he murmured; then took another turn or two up and down the room, each time he neared the glass looking eagerly, almost greedily towards it. Oh for some kindly hand to take that glass away, some womanly influence to save him from himself! He paused before the tumbler, stretched out his hand, and then drew it back; and as if reasoning with himself, he said, 'Why should I not have a taste of the stuff? Just a glass to put heart into me—I needn't get drunk. And even if I do, every man gets drunk once in a way. I'd like a taste of the old madness, I've nearly forgotten what it's like. Yes, I've kept straight seven long years for her sake. Oh, Maud, Maud, you could have made a good man of me, but now'—He leaned heavily against the sideboard, and presently through the fingers of the hand with which he had covered his eyes the tears trickled slowly, while his chest heaved with the sobs he at last gave way to. What sadder sight can be seen or imagined, than that of a strong man tempted by his besetting sin vainly struggling to get the better of the devil that possesses him! And saddest of all is the sight when that devil is drink. In a few moments he regained the mastery of his feelings. 'What a fool I am,' he muttered, 'to be so upset because a woman has thrown me over for another fellow. I must be terribly out of gear, likely as not a nip will do me all the good in the world; any-
THE BUSHMAN'S REST.

way I must have something to steady my nerves, so here goes;' and, seizing the glass, he drained the contents at a draught, as if he were fearful of changing his mind again.

The effect was magical, the spirit acted almost at once. In less than ten minutes he was a different man; he laughed as he sauntered from one part of the room to another, examining books, pictures, ornaments, everything, in fact, that was there and caught his eye. He sang snatches of song, threw himself first into one chair, then another—in short, behaved like one labouring under some powerful influence or excitement. He seemed unable to keep still, the demon of unrest possessed him. Once more he took out the all-important letter and read it through, laughing loudly at certain passages. Then the impulse seized him to learn it by heart, repeating the words as he paced to and fro. When he had mastered it, and could repeat it word for word, he tore the letter into pieces and threw them savagely into the fireplace. Then he walked to the window, and drew aside the blind to look out over the moonlit plains. 'What a glorious night for a ride across country,' he muttered. 'I've a great mind to go over to the "Bushman's;" there may be a choice spirit or two there to cheer my loneliness. I can't stop here doing nothing, that's certain; perhaps another nip may decide the question.' Ever since the first glass of spirits had made the blood course through his veins, he had been craving for another; at the same time he
had been mentally pushing it away from him, fearing to give way—fearing to acknowledge to himself that the old man was upon him with all the intensity of a long drouth. The restlessness, the pretence of occupying himself with Maud’s letter, all meant the same thing, and the whole time he was using his utmost strength of will to overcome the craving. He walked to the table and laid his hand upon the bottle, took up the glass, and was about to pour out the spirit—‘No, I won’t,’ he said, and set the bottle down. Then with a sudden impulse he took it up, and, approaching the window, flung it out far into the garden. It fell with a thud, but did not break, and he turned irresolutely from the window. ‘I wonder did it break?’ he muttered; ‘didn’t sound as if it did.’ He stood in the middle of the room. ‘Shall I go and see? Yes; if I leave it there Jacky will get hold of it—better see and break it.’ He went out through the French-light on to the verandah, still debating with himself as to whether to go or not; on the steps he paused, his attention arrested by the peculiar cry of a passing night-bird. He walked to the tree on which it had lighted, and peered up among the branches, just as the bird rose again and flew away into the night. As he turned, his steps mechanically took him in the direction of the flask. He could see it lying upon a tussock of grass, the moonlight glinting upon the glass. He picked it up and walked slowly back to the house, as if guided by a will stronger than his own. Up the steps and along to
the French-light he went, nor paused till he stood beside the table and held the tumbler in his hand. Without waiting now, he poured out a small quantity, added a little water, and drank it greedily. He had ceased to struggle (mentally) with himself. Virtually he was vanquished, his devil had got the upper hand, and Paul Wright knew it. Without moving from the table, he now poured out nearly another glass of brandy, diluted it slightly, and drank off the draught as before. A fourth glass followed that. 'I may as well finish the bottle now I've gone so far,' he said, holding it up to the light, 'there's barely another nip.' This he poured out quickly, and drank without a drop of water, and then threw himself into the only easy-chair the room contained. Very soon he began to nod; but, rousing himself, he took up the lamp and deliberately proceeded to the storeroom, returning in a few minutes with a fresh bottle, intending to leave it unopened on the sideboard. But the evil spirit within him was not satisfied even yet; and Paul Wright, having given way so far, was no more capable of holding back, or of saying, 'Hold, enough!' until that devil was appeased, any more than he could have arrested a fall in mid-air.

He drew the cork clumsily, being very unsteady by now, though not yet actually incapable, then poured out half a glass, and drank it. By the time he had had two or three more small glasses, the fiend was satisfied, and he was quite drunk, could barely stand,—a fact that seemed to amuse him.
'I'm drunk again,' he said. 'Richard's himself again!—drunk, drunk; it's fine to feel drunk. I'd forgotten what it was like; I'll get drunk for a week, 'stonish old Herbie; what a joke!' and with the last words he fell in a heap upon the rug before the fireplace, and lay in a drunken stupor till Herbert, coming in at daylight to see the time, stumbled over his prostrate body.

'Good God! he's broken out again. What can have set him off?' was the exclamation that broke from him, as, glancing round, he noted the flask and bottle, one empty, the other nearly three-parts full. Without calling assistance, he shook up the senseless man and managed to get him to his bed. Then, locking up the remainder of the drink, he put the key into his pocket, and went out to his morning work, feeling very low-spirited at the turn things had taken.

Though Herbert Wright had never before seen his cousin in a state of intoxication, he had frequently heard of his excesses when a younger man; and Paul had himself told the story of his giving it up for the sake of the girl he had loved ever since she was fourteen.

He had drunk so heavily while at college, that finally he had been rusticated by the authorities. It had prevented his entering the Church, or indeed any other profession; and when his friends could do no more for him at home, for he drank himself out of every situation they put him into, they seized upon the fatal expedient of sending him to the
colonies, there to recover from his besetting sin, or else to lose himself in a country where he would not be a constant eyesore and heartache to every one belonging to him. When parents or guardians send a young man cursed with the craving for drink to the colonies to reclaim himself, they literally and metaphorically present him to the seven other devils of whom we read in Scripture, who were supposed to be worse than the sinner himself. In short, they simply throw him away to go his own road without let or hindrance.

A young man who comes to the colonies having the besetting sin of intemperance inherent in his blood, is as helpless and as sure to come to grief as a walnut-shell set afloat on the Pacific Ocean.

For three years after his arrival in the colonies Paul Wright went steadily down the social ladder. Then an uncle died and left him a few thousands, which necessitated his taking a trip home.

It may seem well-nigh incredible that a man of twenty-seven should fall in love with a child of fourteen, but stranger than that has happened, and is happening every day we live.

Paul had met and loved Maud Hilton when she was in the schoolroom. When he returned to England, Maud was on the point of coming out, and did come out too. They were thrown together in a country house for a fortnight (during one of Paul's rare turns of cessation from drink), and at the end of that time Paul proposed and was accepted by the
young lady, but scornfully rejected by her parent and guardian,—a matter that gave Paul very little anxiety when he knew that Maud loved him, and was prepared to wait till he had proved himself worthy and able to keep a wife.

After a year at home he returned to the colonies, bringing his cousin Herbert; and the young men bought Morven Plains with the few thousands they had. From the day of his engagement Paul was a different man, and gave up drink entirely; not even would he touch a glass of wine, knowing the fatal disease that he had within him.

Seven years had passed since then. Several times he had begged Maud to come out and marry him; and doubtless she would have done so but for her mother, who was an invalid now, and was as greatly averse to her daughter’s marriage with Paul as ever.

Paul had determined to go home for her at the end of the year, in spite of bad times; and no doubt it was the knowledge of this determination that led to her writing the letter we have seen, and which had such terrible results.

As Herbert Wright rode about that day, he constantly wondered what could have caused this outbreak in his cousin after all these years. ‘Can Maud have played him false?’ he wondered; and wondering thus the one cousin rode about in the fresh bright day, while the other lay in a drunken sleep on his bed alone.

A week had passed since the new housekeeper
had begun to reign at ‘The Bushman’s Rest,’ and already her presence was beginning to effect a change in the whole house. Rooms that had seldom, if ever, been cleaned before, were turned out, scrubbed, brushed, and put in order. The meals presented a different appearance,—were no longer flung on the dirty tablecloth, and flung off again.

Now, though coarse, the table-linen was spotless, and the plates and dishes no longer greasy; flowers were to be seen in the vases that stood on the mantels, the windows were clean; and, in short, a wonderful change had come over the house, owing to the presence of the young girl who had so strangely come there. Nelly was not afraid of work, in it she found the only distraction from miserable thoughts; so, with the help of the one other woman on the place, the girl she met the night of her arrival, and who had proved to be a young half-caste who had taken refuge there from the persecutions of her tribe, she worked from early morning till late at night, winning golden opinions from her master. There was only one thing Nelly had stipulated for, which was to be exempt from waiting upon the bar or parlours attached to it.

Before Mrs. Burgiss left (which she did the day after Nelly’s arrival), the girl had won a promise from her that she was not to be asked to serve drinks to the men either behind the bar or in the rooms. And Mrs. Burgiss had consented to her request in an off-hand manner, merely saying contemptuously, ‘Oh,
you'll get over that nonsense by and by; better than you have had to do it before now.'

The day after her arrival, during the afternoon, Paul Wright had ridden up to the house, dismounted, and had given orders to the boy who took his horse from him, to turn it into the paddock, and, to the great surprise of the whole household, he had remained there ever since drinking heavily. It was very seldom that either of the Wrights passed an hour at the 'Bushman's,' unless it was with the object of catching the coach on its way down country. For this purpose they had once or twice ordered a room for a few hours. But Burgiss knew that they were among his most bitter opponents, on account of being constant sufferers through the proximity of his house to their shearing shed, which the men often left on Saturday evening, to return heavy-eyed and incapable on Monday.

Hence his surprise at Paul's strange proceedings. At first he was inclined to think some ruse was intended to bring about the loss of his licence. But when he found that he only stayed there to drink and sleep, and sleep and drink again, he determined to encourage so good a customer, and laid himself out to do so.

When Paul wakened from the drunken stupor into which he had fallen after being placed on his bed by his cousin, it was nearly two o'clock. Herbert had not returned from his ride, and there was not a drop of spirit of any kind available; for, as we know, he
had taken the precaution to pocket the key of the storeroom when he put away the remainder of the whisky. Paul woke with a burning thirst upon him, and an irresistible craving for more drink. He was like a madman; all efforts to fight against his craving had now left him, and his one thought—the one idea that now possessed his brain—was to get more drink. The old housekeeper made and brought him a cup of tea, and with tears in her eyes begged him to drink it; but he turned from it roughly and rudely, and demanded the key of the storeroom.

"Mr. Herbert has taken it, I think, sir," was the reply.

"Then tell Jacky to run up my horse and saddle him at once," was the next order; and in less than half-an-hour she saw him stagger from the house, and, after several ineffectual attempts to mount, he finally scrambled into the saddle, and, to the horror and terror of his faithful old servant, galloped away through the bush.

"Follow him, Jacky," she said to the black boy, "and see that he don't come to any harm."

Jacky did as he was instructed, not returning to the station till late in the evening, when he informed the anxious household of their master's whereabouts.

The next day Herbert rode over and endeavoured to remonstrate with his cousin, and begged of him to return home; but to no purpose. He either could not, or would not, be stopped in his mad course now; and very sorrowfully Herbert Wright rode home again,
leaving him to his fate. For the first two days he merely sat in one of the parlours by himself, calling for drink after drink, until, completely overcome, he sank into stupor, and so was conveyed to bed by Burgiss and one of his men. After a while he became violent, occasionally breaking and destroying glasses, decanters, anything, in fact, that came in his way while drunk.

Though never before brought in immediate contact with drunkenness, Nelly had heard and read a good deal about it and its fatal effects; so it was with very great sorrow that she observed the hold it had taken of this fine young fellow. Instinct told her he was worthy of a better fate. That he was a gentleman she had heard from those in the house, even had she not discovered the fact for herself from his manner and address when sober, and therefore she all the more deplored his terrible conduct and dreadful language when under the influence of drink. Seeing him day by day falling lower and lower, becoming more imbecile and sottish every hour, she pitied him from the bottom of her tender womanly heart, and whenever circumstances threw her in his way, tried to say a word or two of warning to him. She had very soon learnt the nature of much of the business done in the house. Her attention had been drawn to several cases of what she called dishonesty—such as cheques abstracted from the pockets and swags of sleeping men. Though she had not actually seen it done, she knew it was so; and the iniquitous charges made for a
few nights' lodging, items charged for that never were ordered,—these sort of doings soon opened Nelly's eyes to the kind of house 'The Bushman's Rest' was, and made her long the more for the months to slip by till she could be free to leave. She had felt drawn to Paul Wright from the first, on account of a fancied resemblance he bore to an old friend in England whose brother had married her only sister.

Day after day passed, and still Paul remained at 'The Bushman's Rest' drinking. He was seldom sober for more than an hour or so at a time; it seemed as if he could not keep from the drink long enough to put the craving from him. One evening, when he had been about ten days at the house, she was standing leaning over the low paling fence which enclosed one side of the vegetable garden; she was at the very corner, and overshadowed by a thick vine of creepers which shut in the whole end of the verandah. It was quite dark, there being no moon, and the hour was late. Nelly had wandered out to think, for complications in her position were beginning to distress and alarm her. That very day she had been grossly insulted by a teamster who was camped within a short distance of the house; and it was not the first time such a thing had occurred, though she had not been yet a month there. The poor girl was utterly miserable, and so deeply engrossed with her own thoughts, that she did not hear footsteps on the verandah immediately above her till her attention was arrested by the following words:—
‘You're too blooming soft; there's Burgiss lambing him down fine, why shouldn't you and me have our whack at him? I tell ye he's got better nor seventy notes on him. This very evening I seen Bill the driver hand 'em over when he came. And by the same token, I 'eard Bill say, “You'd best let some one keep it for yer, Mr. Wright, ye'll be losing it when ye're a bit on.” But the other chap only laughed, and said something 'bout the best man could keep it.'

Nelly listened breathlessly for the continuation of the conversation; her heart was beating so loudly that she feared its being heard. After a few minutes, during which she could gather that one of the men, perhaps both, were filling their pipes, she heard the match struck, and the odour of strong tobacco was borne to her on the night air. After a few preliminary puffs, the conversation was resumed.

‘What's yer dodge?’ asked the man who had not yet spoken. ‘I don't care about too much violence, it don't pay.’

‘Whose agoin' to use violence?’ said the first speaker, expectorating freely first. ‘I've got a plan cut and dried. I've a bottle of sleeping stuff; it's easy to drop a few drops of that into his grog, even while ye're a-talking to him, and come back in half-an-hour to find him as quiet as a hinfant; then just whip open 'is coat, and ye'll find the notes in a inside pocket, or else in his trouser pocket, I dunno which he favours for keepin' of his cash.'
'Can't we do it without this stuff? He mightn't never wake, yer see, and that'd be awkard for us.'

'Do without the stuff? No, we can't, it ain't safe,' was the reply. 'He's a stiff 'un in a row, and as fly as a fox even when he is drunk,—keeps his pockets buttoned, in case o' accidents. I seen him do it many a time the last week, and I heard him tellin' Bill.'—

There was a long pause, as if both men were considering the matter, then at last the other said,—

'Oh, all right, mate; I'm with yer, and the sooner we get about the business the better and the quicker it'll be over. Here, where's yer sleeping stuff?—come on.' And both speakers moved away beyond hearing; but not till Nelly had gathered their full meaning, and also recognised both men. One was the bullock driver who had attempted to kiss her that morning; the other, a young fellow who had arrived to join him in the down coach the day before.

I have already said that Nelly felt a strange interest in Paul Wright, confirmed drunkard though he appeared to her. She was grateful to him for many little attentions he paid her. Whenever he was sober for an hour or two, he would usually find his way into the little parlour where Nelly sat with her work or the accounts; and though she instinctively felt that he looked upon her as no better than a superior servant, she had too much common sense to resent it, for she reasoned, what does he know of me or my history? Two days before, he had knocked a tipsy jockey off his chair at the breakfast table for addressing a rude
remark to her. Was it any wonder, then, that her
starving heart grasped at ever so small a kindness,
even from one who appeared so depraved as our hero?
For a few moments after the men had ceased speak­
ing, Nelly waited in her secluded corner, half-frightened
at her own thoughts, which urged her to protect this
tipsy young man from these robbers. She crept
through a hole in the fence, intending to cross the
road and pass before the house, which was lighted
brilliantly, for the purpose of seeing where the con­
spirators were. It was dark, the sky being covered
with dark clouds, which portended a heavy downpour
before morning, so she easily gained the opposite side
of the road. Here she stood, almost too terrified to
carry out her design; but a shadow on the window­
blind of the room where she knew Paul Wright was
either sitting or sleeping decided her, and she ran
along quickly, till by stooping she could get a view
under the blind—which did not quite reach to the
bottom—of all that went on in the room. She saw
Paul Wright's figure leaning back in his chair, his feet
elevated to the table, his pipe in his mouth, his eyes
closed in sleep,—apparently he was quite incapable,
and in a drunken stupor. Beside him stood a bottle
and a glass, the latter half full. She reached her
coign of vantage just in time to see one of the men
she had heard talking, in the very act of pouring
some liquid from a small bottle into the tumbler
beside the drunken man.

He stood close behind Paul's chair, his hand, in
which was the bottle, raised some six or eight inches above the glass. She could almost count the drops as they fell into it. Once the sleeping man stirred, and the pipe fell from his lips on to his lap. The conspirator merely closed his hand on the vial and turned round, pretending to examine the clock upon the mantel-shelf. But Paul slept on, and once more the hand was extended, and a few drops from the bottle again poured into the tumbler of spirits. At first Nelly’s impulse had been to call out and surprise the man and waken the sleeper. But an instant’s thought decided her to watch, and in some other way try and frustrate the designs of the two robbers, and bring them to justice. As she gazed upon the scene before her, and beheld what she supposed was poison being deliberately put for a helpless and unconscious man to take, she could hardly breathe for nervous excitement; several times she nearly betrayed her presence by an exclamation of horror, for though at the opposite side of the road to the house, she was quite near enough to be both heard and seen had she spoken or moved. But her spirit was roused now, and she resolved to save Paul Wright from the thieves he had fallen amongst. She saw the man raise the small bottle to the light to see how much there still remained in it. For a few seconds he appeared debating with himself as to whether to give more or not; then, with a glance at the sleeping man beneath him, he once more held the bottle above the glass, and poured all that was left into it. Then, to
her great relief, she saw him steal softly from the room without awakening the sleeper, as she had at first supposed he would. She waited to see him join his companion on the verandah, then very quickly she retraced her steps, crept through the fence as before, and regained the house just as Burgiss, half tipsy, was staggering off to his bed, having just put all the lights out. She knew the two men were on the verandah, evidently intending to wait a certain time for the house to become quiet, and their victim under the influence of the drug they had prepared for him. Nelly trembled so terribly that she found herself obliged to stand still every few steps or she would have fallen; she was in a pitable state of nervous fright that Paul would waken and drink the stuff prepared for him before she could reach him and prevent it. She had to wait till Burgiss had disappeared within his room before she could enter the house, which, after the usual custom in the bush, was left open all night; then, very swiftly and silently, she sped through the passage, and reached the door of Paul Wright's sitting-room, which she opened very softly, and, gliding in, closed as softly behind her. The room was in total darkness, Burgiss having turned out the lamp; however, she knew where the glass was, having seen it from across the road, and, reaching the table, she now began to feel about for it. Her heart was beating like a sledge-hammer within her bosom, and her hands trembled as if she had palsy. A hidden fear came upon her (as she failed to find the tumbler)
that Paul had drunk its contents while she had been coming to him, and in the excitement of her movements and gropings about the table the bottle was knocked over, and fell to the ground. It did not break; but the cork was knocked out, and the contents consequently flowed all over the floor, filling the room with the all-powerful odour of whisky. She stooped to pick up the bottle, and, as she rose with it in her hand, a match was hastily struck, almost in her face, and she met Paul Wright's eye fixed upon her in unfeigned half-tipsy astonishment.

'What do you want?' he asked angrily, just suppressing an oath, as he saw the intruder was a woman.

A burning blush suffused the fair face of the embarrassed girl, and she would have flown from the room, but she remembered that the fatal tumbler was not yet found. She did not know how to explain her errand; her courage had all deserted her, and she felt as if about to faint. After some little difficulty, Paul had managed to relight the lamp; but his hands shook so, that he was quite unable to place the globe on it, and after several futile efforts he desisted, letting the light flare and smoke upon the table between them. He was about to address his companion, when he stopped and glanced at the bottle, now very nearly empty. 'Not much there,' he said, 'you'll have to get me another bottle.' At that instant Nelly noticed the tumbler, and to her great relief it was still half full. Paul saw it at the same moment, and, with a nod and tipsy smile, lifted it to his lips. But the next instant
tumbler and contents were both dashed out of his hand on to the floor, astonishing him past all power of speech. Though considerably muddled, he was not so tipsy as Nelly imagined; his sleep had sobered him to a great extent, and her extraordinary onslaught brought him completely to his senses, though he could only look at her in surprise and wonder. When she met his astonished gaze, she whispered hurriedly,—

'Pray forgive my violence, sir; but I came here purposely to prevent you drinking that glass of spirits. It was drugged. I saw that man who came by the down coach yesterday, dropping some liquid into it while you lay asleep in your chair there,' pointing to where he had been seated. 'For God's sake, Mr. Wright,' she continued, laying her hand upon his arm in her earnestness, 'don't drink any more in this house. If you must drink, let it be in your own home, where there is no danger of your being robbed or murdered, as there is in a disreputable house like this.'

She spoke so quickly and nervously, that the half-stupefied man could barely catch her words. He smiled at her eagerness, and asked thickly,—

'If it's so disreputable, why do you stop here, then?'

'Ah, why indeed?' was the answer; 'because I can't leave it,—because I've no money to take me away till my time is up. But you—you have nothing to prevent your leaving, save this wretched drink! Ah, Mr. Wright, do leave it and go home; you are just killing yourself, and wasting your manhood,'
For a moment or so he appeared to feel her words, and looked away as if ashamed to meet her eyes. But suddenly turning roughly upon her, he exclaimed,—

'What's it got to do with you, I'd like to know? Here, pass me that bottle, there's another nip in it.'

Nelly had her hand on the bottle all the while she was speaking. As he asked for it, and stretched out his hand to take it, she looked fixedly at him, and replied,—

'No, sir, I will not give it to you. Don't you believe what I have just been telling you, that at this moment thieves are only waiting till they think you sufficiently far gone to rob, perhaps murder you. Don't you understand me, or do you not believe my word?'

'Oh yes, I believe you right enough, and I'm much obliged to you for letting me know. But I must have another nip to steady me to face them,' he said, still unable directly to meet her glance.

'No; you shall not have any more drink,' she returned decidedly; 'if you do, you will not be able to grapple with those men if they do attack you. Go to your room, sir, and lock the door, that will be the best plan; and leave me to tell Mr. Burgiss to-morrow about what I saw and heard.'

'All right,' he said. 'Give me just one more nip and I'll go,—I must have it, see how I shake all over; and I am too far gone now to stop in a hurry,—just give me that drop you have in the bottle, and then I'll go off to bed quietly.' There was an anxious, wild look in his eyes, and he kept glancing over his
shoulder, as if fearing an attack from some one behind
him. Nelly stood considering a while whether to
give him what was still left in the bottle or not. She
could hear the footsteps of the teamster and his mate,
as now and then they passed the window, no doubt
wondering what she was doing in their would-be
victim's room. It was this sound that decided her,
and very reluctantly she handed over the bottle,
saying,—

'Well, here you are, sir, drink it, and then pray go
to your room for the night.'

He seized the bottle and glass from the mantelpiece,
and, pouring out what there was of the spirit, he drank
it greedily without adding any water at all. Then, put­
ting down the tumbler, he let her lead him towards his
bedroom door. She saw him disappear within; then
turning out the lamp, she closed and locked the out­
side door of the parlour, thus locking Paul in, and
retired to her own room, having first convinced herself
that the two men were still upon the verandah, waiting,
no doubt, till the house was in darkness ere they
visited their victim.

Next morning Nelly informed Burgiss of all she
had seen and heard, and consequently the teamster
and his ruffian mate were turned away from the
house; nor were they seen again at 'The Bushman's
Rest' for many a long day.

Signs of delirium now began to show themselves
in Paul Wright, which was not very surprising, con­
sidering that for the last fortnight he had been
drinking on an average between two and three bottles of spirits a day. Burgiss, who apparently was well skilled in the disease, took charge of him entirely, and Nelly, as she passed the room wherein the sick man lay, was horrified at his fearful ravings and cries of terror. One afternoon he escaped, and rushed away into the bush, under the impression that some one was pursuing to kill him. But they brought him back again, and from that day till he was considered nearly well, he was closely watched and guarded. For ten days he was very ill, and then came the long and weary convalescence, when the once strong, handsome young man emerged from his room a perfect wreck of what he had been only so short a time back. It was during these days he first began to notice that the pretty young girl, acting as servant and housekeeper in this wretched wayside public-house, was superior to any of her class whom he had come across.

And now sprang up a sincere friendship between the two. How it first began neither of them exactly remembered, but from the night Nelly had warned him of his danger from the teamster and his mate, and had actually saved him from them, Paul Wright began to feel an interest in the young girl, and when well enough to walk about he sought her society constantly, and bit by bit heard from her her sad story, and how she came to be in her present position.

There was no flirtation between them, it was
simply a case of pure friendship, and on Nelly's part pity for one who was cursed with so terrible a vice as intemperance. Her heart was very tender at all times, and more especially now that she was so lonely.

When once more the craving for drink possessed Paul, she tried to persuade him not to give way to it, using all her eloquence on behalf of his better nature. She made him the strongest beef-tea and soups, and coaxed him to take them, in the hope that they would supply the want. But in vain; the madness was upon him, the terrible thirst for stimulant, and before it all her efforts were as grass before flame. And yet he did fight against it, tried with all his strength to resist the temptation. He would often put down the glass just as it touched his lips, and go away to his room for perhaps an hour at a time. He sent to town for all the advertised remedies against drunkenness,—so-called cures,—which he swallowed eagerly, and in the hope of casting out the devil that possessed him. Sometimes for a day or two he would fancy himself cured, then disturbing thoughts would come. Maud's fair face would rise before him, reminding him of her loss—thoughts of his dreary future without her, and without anything to live for. And in desperation to get rid of his wretched thoughts, and to forget how low he had fallen, he would rush to the bar, and before he could reason against it, would swallow glass after glass, till his brain was clouded and reason gone. At other
times it would be the smell of the spirits as he passed the bar. In vain he would walk away out of the house, away into the paddock, in the fresh sweet air that should have been nectar to an unvitiated palate. Yet after a while he would find himself impelled by a force within him, and stronger than his better nature, to turn and retrace his steps, till he stood before the bar, and held the drink to his lips.

'Let it kill me,' he said, in reply to Nelly's warning that such would be his fate. 'Let it kill me, I do not care.'

'And are there not others to care, Mr. Wright? How will they feel when they hear of your terrible end?' she continued.

'There are no others to care,' he said gloomily. 'I haven't a relation in the world, or a friend either, who will care a brass farthing what becomes of me, or what death I die;' and with these words, and a sneer upon his still handsome face, he raised the glass of whisky to his lips.

But Nelly quickly placed her hand over it, and his moustache just brushed the back of her fingers. 'I care, Mr. Wright,' she said,—'I care very, very much. You are the only friend I have in all the country, the only one who has said a civil word to me since I landed in Australia.'

He laid the glass down with a strange look in his eyes, saying,—

'I daresay you wonder what makes me so reckless just now? I never used to be. They could tell you
here that I never drank a glass of anything stronger than lemonade until five weeks ago. I gave it up for good and all, I thought, seven years back, when a girl at home promised to be my wife. She vowed she'd wait for me till I had a home for her. This year I meant to go and fetch her; but my cousin, a rich man, stepped in, and she has married him. She jilted me for him,—a little hop-o'-my-thumb, who wears stays, curls his hair, and is at heart the lowest little brute in creation. By Jove! if ever I do go home, I'll kick him first, and wring his wretched little neck after!'

Nelly laughed at his vehemence, as she said,—

'If he is all you say, surely he is not worth losing your temper over?'

'No, he is not, I admit,' he answered quickly. 'Nor is she either, I suppose; but it is she who has sent me to the devil this time, curse her!'

'Oh, hush, hush!' Nelly said, horrified. 'Remember, "curses, like chickens, come home to roost."'

Again he would have raised the glass of whisky to his lips, when she said gently,—

'Come, Mr. Wright, be a man, and don't give any woman the chance of boasting that you loved her so much that you couldn't live without her, or that you killed yourself for her sake. See, let me throw out that nasty stuff and bring you a glass of milk instead.'

'Indeed I won't,' he said sullenly, and drank off the spirits.

Grieved and disappointed, Nelly gathered up her
work and left the verandah, where they had been sitting together; nor did she appear again for some hours. When Paul did come across her again, her eyes were red as though she had been crying.

'You've been crying,' he said at once, in surprise. 'Has any one been bullying you?'

'No, oh no, Mr. Wright,' was the reply; 'I had a bad headache,' and she escaped from his questioning gaze.

But Paul Wright pondered it over, and wondered vaguely whether it could be on his account that those handsome eyes were swollen and red. The thought that perhaps it was the case gave him a strange quick thrill of pleasure, and in the very act of refilling his glass he paused, and the next moment flung the contents of both glass and bottle out over the verandah. Then going to find Nelly, he told her what he had done and why, and was rewarded by such a sweet smile and words of encouragement, that he began to think seriously of attempting to give up drink again for Nelly's sake. He was not at all in love with her; indeed, no thought of the kind had ever crossed his mind in relation to her. His thoughts were all about Maud, when he was sober enough to think at all; and his heart was so sore at her desertion and cruel treatment, that there was no room as yet for another.

At the same time, he was in that state when a clever woman could have caught his heart in the rebound by laying herself out to do so.
But Nelly Dunne was not that kind of girl; and, apart from the sorrow and regret she could not help feeling for Paul himself at times, she felt a loathing and horror of his besetting sin. Never once had it crossed her mind to engage even his attention, much less his love; and though they had drifted upon occasions into very confidential conversations, it had all been on the spur of the moment, and on her side at least had been regretted afterwards. Her only reason for allowing him to sit so much with her, and in her sitting-room, was because she hoped thus to keep him from drinking in the bar, and mixing with the rough company that frequented the place.

As may be supposed, the intimacy between the two was not allowed to go unnoticed or unremarked, and jests were made and bandied about from one to the other very freely on their account. At a house such as was 'The Bushman's Rest' they are not very particular, and often things are said—remarks passed and laughed over—which in reality are not meant, or even really believed by those who say them.

Thus remarks were made, Nelly's and Paul's actions and words watched, and meanings attached to them which neither of them ever intended or thought of. Nelly it was who heard most of this. The men 'chaffed' her, and talked at her, and in her hearing, till the poor girl was nearly mad with disgust, shame, and fear lest such things should come to Mr. Wright's ears, and shock his sense of refinement, or
make him think her as vulgar and coarse-minded as those with whom she lived.

Thinking and brooding over all this, it was little wonder that she began to avoid Paul, and, when they did meet, became as stiff and cold in her manner as possible; the result being that, left to himself, thrown as it were back upon himself and his own miserable thoughts, he again gave way to drink.

When Nelly had first come to 'The Bushman's Rest,' Burgiss had taken a violent fancy to her; and, being an unprincipled, bad man, had endeavoured to make her aware of his feelings, greatly to her horror and disgust. Upon two occasions he had attempted rough familiarities with her in an apparently good-tempered manner, and each time had been pretty severely punished for his horseplay. The first time an ornament in her hair had scratched his face from eye to chin, making an ugly scar for some days. The next time a fork she held in her hand at the moment, and with which she defended herself, had pierced his arm, and made a rather bad wound. But his actual wounds were nothing to the soreness of his feelings, for the young girl hurled the bitterest terms of loathing and contempt at him. Over and over again he had returned to the charge, till Nelly was well-nigh desperate, and thought seriously of asking Bill the driver to give her a free passage down in the coach as far as the nearest town. But Mrs. Burgiss was expected home any mail day, and Nelly lived in the hope that when she returned she would either be
allowed to leave, or else her life be made more bearable. Whatever Burgiss' feelings had been in the beginning for Nelly, they had very soon turned to bitterest hatred, though he covered it with a pleasant face, while biding his time to pay her out for the fancied slights she had put upon him. For one thing, he resented her interference with Paul's doings, telling her plainly that it was her duty to encourage him to drink rather than discourage him, on account of his custom. One day he said to her, 'What business have you to keep telling him to go home? you ought to make yourself pleasant enough instead, to keep him dangling after you. The more he drinks, and the longer he's here, the better for me. And I pay you to do my business; and part of it is to draw fellows to the house, not to send them away. Now, mind that, Miss Slyboots, or I may have to make yer.'

Poor Nelly had felt humiliated enough before, but when she was actually told that she was expected to attract men to the house to drink and spend money, her feelings were very much outraged, and, had she been able to get away at all, or even had sufficient money to take her to the next town, she would have gone in spite of her agreement. But, alas! she had only a few shillings in the world, and Bill, who might have helped her, was away taking another driver's place for a month or so. No, she was helpless, and no one knew it better than Burgiss.

Two or three nights after the above incidents,
Nelly went to bed earlier than usual, with a bad headache. She lay awake thinking for some time, but finally dropped off to sleep, and was suddenly awakened by the feeling, more than the sound, of some one moving in her room. She sat up in the bed and asked, 'Is that you, Kitty?' thinking that possibly the half-caste girl had come in to see how she was, as she often did when Nelly was not well. But there was no reply; and, after she had twice put the question, she concluded that she was mistaken, or that possibly a cat in the stable below her room had caused the sound, and she lay down again. But she had hardly dozed off, when once more awakened, this time by what sounded suspiciously like a stealthy footstep on her floor, and she also fancied she could hear some one breathing close to her. Terrified now, and trembling in every limb, she stretched out her hand for the matches, which as usual she had left on the corner of the box-table within her reach. She secured them, and was just about to strike a light, when her hand was grasped and held as in a vice, while a voice hissed out the words, 'Screech, and I'll put a knife into you.'

Utterly regardless of the terrible threat, she gave two or three piercing shrieks for help, which very promptly brought Paul Wright to her assistance. It happened that Paul, who, as usual, had been drinking heavily all day, towards night had fallen into a sound sleep, from which he wakened sober, or nearly so; and, beginning to think about himself, and all Nelly had
impressed upon him as to the probable result of his course of conduct, he suddenly asked himself if there was nothing he could live for? He was conscious that his feelings had undergone a change with regard to the young housekeeper within the last three days. Accidentally he had overheard part of a conversation between her and Burgiss, and her emphatic reply to the effect that she would never cease her efforts to prevent him drinking so long as she had breath to speak, had touched a chord in the drunkard's heart, and made him wonder how it was this girl took such an interest in him, and why he could not repay her better than he did.

Burgiss had said to her sneeringly, 'If yer think he's after yer to marry yer, yer can put the notion out o' yer head. He'd sooner cut his throat than marry a girl out o' this house, or any other o' the gents either,—so there!' And Nelly had replied bitterly, 'I never had such a thought, and you have no right to say I had. Do you think I don't know that no honest man, gentle or simple, would dream of offering marriage to a girl who has lived in this house? Do you think I don't feel the indignity of living beneath this roof, and that it will cling to me always? Yes, you may well say no man would ever marry a girl from here,—and Mr. Wright least of all. But as I am here, I'll try and do some good. I'll save him from your toils, see if I don't. Let me once see you trying to drug his drink again, as you did the other night, and I'll tell him there and then. I can't always
save him from you, but I’ll give him the means of saving himself by telling him.’

Paul had been lying half-asleep in one of the parlours when this conversation began, but he was very wide-awake before the end, and was just meditating discovering himself, when some one entered the room where the speakers were, and so put an end to it.

It had taken place in the afternoon, and all night Paul lay awake thinking over it, and also thinking a great deal about Nelly, and what she had said both to and of him. Did she care at all for him, or whether he lived or died? How would it be if he were to marry her? He knew her to be a good, honest girl, far superior to most of the girls he had met in the bush. He wanted an object in life; he firmly believed that if he had one he would reform. Nelly was miserable in this house; why should they not marry and be a mutual help to each other? Many men and women had come together from more ignoble causes. He took a sudden resolve to follow Nelly’s advice, and leave ‘The Bushman’s Rest’ at once, late as it was. Yes, he would ‘sober up,’ and then if Nelly would marry him he would be grateful and do all he could to make her happy.

He knew there was a horse in the small paddock adjoining the house, one his cousin had led over that morning, in the hope that Paul would be induced to come home with him on his return from a neighbouring station, where he was going on business. Fearing to let his good resolution cool, he started at once for
the stable to procure a halter with which to catch the horse, and it was just as he reached the gate leading to the stables that Nelly’s terrified scream for help fell upon his ears. He had to stand still and listen before he could be sure from where the sound came, or in which direction he should turn to render help. As soon as he realised that it was from the room over the stables, he was not long in making his way there. He stumbled up the narrow staircase or ladder, and, when his foot was on the last step, he was almost thrown back by a man rushing from the room past him. He tried to stop him, but in saving himself from being thrown to the bottom, the other wrenched himself out of his grasp and fled away in the dark.

When he reached the room and struck a match, he was horrified to find Nelly lying in the middle of the floor in a dead faint. For a second or two he gazed at her and around him in bewildered astonishment.

‘What was the meaning of it all?’ he asked himself. ‘Was it a bad dream, or was he still under the influence of drink?’ The squalid room, the mean bed, the young girl (whom he had really believed to be good and pure), and the strange man rushing away like a thief or worse. ‘What did it mean? Was he wronging her in his thoughts? Was she all he had fancied her, and was this man who had rushed past him in the darkness a scoundrel, a destroyer?’ Thus wondering, he stooped down and gently raised the senseless girl in his arms and laid her on the bed,
lightly throwing over her its mean and scanty coverings. Then he found some water and bathed her head, dipping his handkerchief into the tumbler. The only evidence of ill-usage apparent was a dark bruise on the left temple. While thus occupied, he could not help noticing the extreme purity of the young girl's complexion, and the sad curves of the drooping mouth, which could be firm and stern enough in denunciation of evil. A strange tenderness and great pity came over the dissipated man for the lonely young girl, so defenceless in this bush public-house. He thought of her as he had seen her so often, treating with silent contempt the jests and jokes of the ribald men who frequented the house, and who seemed to look upon her as fair game for their low, coarse wit. Now that he was sober he loathed himself, and the hot blood came to his face as he remembered the state of disgusting intoxication in which Nelly had so often seen him; he felt utterly contemptible before this girl, whom he intuitively knew to be good and pure, and whose influence had constantly been used to save him from himself. All her words and advice came back to him with tenfold force, and there and then he registered a silent vow to try and deserve her good opinion in future. In the meantime the tired soul of poor Nelly came slowly back to its earthly tenement. With a soft little sigh she opened her bewildered eyes, to gaze in horror and amazement on the face of the man for whom she was conscious of feeling more than ordinary regard,
'Oh,' she exclaimed, with a great disappointment sweeping over her fair face, 'was it you? Oh, Mr. Wright, what made you come here? What have I done that you should think—

'For God's sake, Nelly,' he interrupted, 'don't so mistake me; I'd as soon think of insulting my own sister as you. I heard you scream as I was coming to the stable for a halter to catch my horse, for I had made up my mind to follow your advice and to clear out of this cursed place, and I came to your assistance, to find you insensible on the floor, so I lifted you on to the bed; that's the true explanation of my presence here. And now, as you are all right again, tell me if you can what happened, and who the scoundrel was, do you think, whom I met rushing from the room? I'll go and settle with him.'

She covered her face with her hands and tried to think; her head felt sore and stupid; but after a few minutes she remembered what had taken place, and in a few hurried words told Paul. Then quite assured that she was better, and not likely to faint again, he was on the point of leaving the room, when the door was pushed back, and the angry, evil-looking face of Burgiss appeared.

'What the d—— is the meaning of this row?' he asked; but without waiting for any reply he turned to the girl with a diabolical sneer, saying, 'O ho! my lady; so after all ye're no better than the rest o' 'em, with all yer fine airs.'

Hardly were the words out of his mouth before
Paul Wright sprang upon him; and doubtless the brute would have fared badly, but suddenly the thought of the defenceless girl, in whose room they were, made him withhold the blow, and say to Burgiss, 'If you have an ounce of manhood in you, remember where we are, and come away out of this—we'll have it out below.' Then he turned to leave the room; but before he was half down the ladder Nelly was beside him, her hand firmly grasping his arm.

'Mr. Wright, oh, sir, don't fight him,' she begged. 'He is a bad, bad man, and will kill you,—I know he will,' and she burst into tears.

'Don't be foolish, Nelly,' he said to her. 'Go back to your bed, and try and get some sleep after this excitement. You'll have to leave here in the morning, for you can't possibly stay on after all this; so, like a good girl, go and rest, and leave it all to me. As I've got you into the row, I'll see you through it.'

'But you won't fight him, sir,—promise me you won't?' she begged again.

Paul stood thinking for a minute, then he said, 'Well, no, I won't fight him, if that will satisfy you; now, go back and get some rest before daylight.'

And then she went, though only half satisfied.

Burgiss was that pitiful thing, a bully; and when he saw that Paul Wright was determined to fight, he tried to laugh the whole matter off as a practical joke. But Paul was thoroughly angry—the excitement had done him good, and made a man of him again. When he saw that Burgiss was not willing to fight him, he
strode away through the yard to his room, returning in a few minutes with the cutting whip he usually carried when not out on the run.

Burgiss was standing in the centre of a group of men, teamsters, bushmen, and loafers, who had been awakened by the noise, explaining to them the reason of it all, or rather he was giving his own version of the scene, which I may say was hardly within miles of the true one. As Paul Wright approached they did not see him, and he had time to hear one or two expressions uncomplimentary to Nelly fall from Burgiss' lips before he was observed. Directly he came among them the men fell back, and one or two of them slunk away into the stable shamed; but Burgiss stood his ground till he noticed the whip in his opponent's hand, and then with one spring he made for the ladder to Nelly's room, doubtless intending to protect himself in her presence. But Paul was too quick for him, and caught him just as his foot was on the last step. He dragged him down and out into the yard, where he administered to him as sound a thrashing as only the arm of an angry man can; then he flung him into a corner on to a heap of broken bottles, where the pitiful cur lay groaning and crying till some of his hired creatures carried him away to his bed.

Paul returned to his own room, and vainly racked his brains trying to think of a way to help poor Nelly out of her present difficulty. Suddenly he remembered a young couple who were living on a selection some
miles the other side of the station, and he began to wonder whether they might not be persuaded to give the helpless girl shelter until such time as she could obtain another situation, for he knew there could be no question of her stopping at 'The Bushman's Rest' after what had taken place. He would go and see these people, and ask them as a personal favour to himself to take Nelly for a while. Having made up his mind, he drew out his note-book and wrote upon one page,—

'I go to try and find a new home for you with friends; will be back by dinner time, if possible. Trust me, and believe me your friend,

'PAUL WRIGHT.'

He tore out the page, folded it in half, and then once more started out to catch his horse. As he had to go to the stable for his bridle, he went up the ladder to Nelly's room and pushed his note underneath the door; then, satisfied that she would not think he had deserted her in her trouble, he went down the paddock, caught and saddled his horse, and was soon galloping away through the sweet crisp morning air towards his own home.

In the meantime poor Nelly was suffering all the pangs of fear for Paul's safety, and reproaching herself for being the cause of the trouble. It was quite beyond her power to take rest, she did not even try, so, huddling on her clothes, she wrapped a waterproof round her and sat down by the open window (for it
had only a wooden shutter) to think. She had hardly
taken this position when she heard Paul's voice, the
rush up to her door, and then the abject cries of the
pitiful coward as he received the beating he so richly
deserved. As she listened to the merciless blows that
fell from Paul's strong arm, she found it in her heart
to pity the unfortunate creature though he so richly
deserved it. It was nearly an hour after this that
she again heard steps upon the ladder leading to her
room, and just as she had begun to prepare herself for
some further development of her employer's spite, she
saw the slip of white paper pushed under the door,
and when the footsteps had once more died away she
secured it, and read the message Paul had sent to
reassure her in her loneliness. And it had the effect
of comforting her. She felt, after reading those few
words, that he was, and really meant to be, her friend;
and with a sigh of relief she threw herself upon her
bed and sobbed herself to sleep.

The people whom Paul Wright purposed appealing
to on Nelly's behalf were a young couple named
Carrington, living on a small selection some four or
five miles from Morven Plains. They were people
who had at one time been very well to do. Mrs.
Carrington's father was a Presbyterian minister,
who periodically went round the different stations
holding services, performing christenings, marriages,
burials, etc. He was almost entirely supported by
the squatters and selectors in the district, though, as
a matter of fact, he had a church and manse in one of
the neighbouring towns. Of late years, however, the old man had elected to live with his daughter and her husband almost entirely, giving up his manse to a younger man. He was not dependent upon his people; on the contrary, he was in receipt of an income from property at home of £200 a year. His name was Garvie, and a very popular, good old man he was, while the Carringtons were no less popular. The Wrights had known Mr. Garvie ever since they had been in the district, and since the Carringtons had come to live so close to them a great intimacy had sprung up between the two families. Paul Wright was a special favourite with Mrs. Carrington, to whom he had confided all his love story; and when she had heard from Herbert about his unaccountable outbreak, her woman's instinct had led her to the true solution of the mystery.

The Carringtons were just sitting down to their breakfast when Paul rode up to the house.

'You are just in time for breakfast, Mr. Wright,' was Mrs. Carrington's greeting as she shook hands with him in the passage between the house and the kitchen. 'Go to George's room and get a wash—I think you'll find him there too;' and the kindly little lady bustled away to lay a plate and get a cup and saucer for the unexpected guest.

Paul did as desired, hoping for an opportunity at breakfast to introduce the subject of his early visit.

Mr. Carrington and Mr. Garvie were no less kind in their welcome than Mrs. Carrington,—all strove to
do him honour, and to ignore his late outburst. Indeed, he began to ponder whether they knew of it or not, and wondered if he would have to give an account of his own doings as a reason for knowing all about Nelly. However, when breakfast was over, Mr. Carrington was called away, and Mr. Garvie had a letter to write which he wished Paul to post, so finally Paul found himself alone with his hostess, and free to tell his story. And this he did, at first with many haltings and breaks; but when he came to the events of the night before, his words flew glibly enough, and he became quite excited.

'Then what is it you want me to do?' she asked, when he had finished his strange story.

'Just what your own kind heart dictates,' was his reply. 'It is quite certain the girl cannot stop where she is after what has happened, and I, of course, would do more harm than good by appearing at all in the matter except through some woman.'

'Yes, I understand the position,' Mrs. Carrington said thoughtfully. 'And you say she is, you think, a lady by birth?'

'Yes, I am certain of it,' Paul Wright replied impulsively.

'Well, I must see George; and if he says yes, I will go back at once with you and see her, and offer her an asylum here.'

'Oh, you are good, Mrs. Carrington!' Paul said, grasping her hand warmly. 'I shall be so grateful, for I feel as if it were almost my fault.'
Oh, I don't see that exactly,' was Mrs. Carrington's reply; 'for, of course, you only did as any man worthy of the name would have done in going to her relief. However, here comes George—I will go and see what he says; and you can tell one of the boys to run up the buggy horses, for I know George will say go.'

But Mr. Carrington was not so willing to allow his wife to pay a visit to 'The Bushman's Rest,' or to accept any one from there as an inmate of their home even in the capacity of a servant. Like every other man in the district, he had heard of the place and its lawless character, and therefore was very doubtful about any one who had been, or was, an inmate of the house. However, the matter was decided by old Mr. Garvie, who said that he would go back with Paul and George, and if Nelly appeared all that he represented, they would offer her a home, and bring her back with them.

By eight o'clock that night Nelly was an inmate of Mrs. Carrington's little home, having favourably impressed the old minister as well as his son-in-law, George Carrington, who had gone to 'The Bushman's Rest' quite prepared to find her the very reverse of what she appeared.

And now began a very happy time for Nelly Dunne. Mrs. Carrington was her firm friend; the two women had been drawn towards each other by many similar tastes. Nelly sketched well, so did Mrs. Carrington, so they often took their materials and drove out together to different spots about the station for the purpose of
sketching. Then Nelly played and sang well and brilliantly, accomplishments her hostess was not perfect in; so Nelly undertook to give her lessons while she was there, for she had at once put an advertisement into the Sydney papers for a situation as governess. And all the time Paul Wright used to visit the selection on an average four times a week, on the pretence of helping Mr. Carrington with some fencing he was doing. Several times the ladies had been to Morven Plains to spend a day, or to sketch some specially interesting piece of scenery. Mrs. Carrington saw plainly what his motive was in coming so often; but she was too wise to speak to Nelly about it, though she most honestly hoped that a match would result between the two.

One afternoon when the mail-bag arrived there was a letter for Miss Dunne from a lady near Sydney, who wanted a governess and companion to travel with her and two little girls. It appeared to be a most suitable situation, the very thing to suit Nelly; but though admitting all this, Mrs. Carrington was loath to let her send a reply until Paul Wright had heard of it. So, having persuaded her to wait till next mail-day, Mrs. Carrington wrote and told Paul Wright that Miss Dunne had found a situation, and would be leaving them very shortly, unless he could manage to prevent it. And she wound up by advising him to come over on the following day and take Nelly for a last ride,—a hint he was quite willing to accept.

Accordingly next morning he rode over just at
lunch-time, and during the meal asked the ladies if they would go for a ride. Nelly never had ridden alone with Paul Wright, and Mrs. Carrington guessed she would not do so now, unless she contrived in such a way that she could not avoid it. So she at once said, 'Oh yes, they could go, she thought;' and Nelly expressed her willingness also. But when the horses were led up saddled and ready, and Nelly had even mounted, Mrs. Carrington came on to the verandah in her morning gown, looking the picture of (pretended) misery, and declaring 'that she had the most excruciating faceache, and could not possibly go for the ride.

'But you can go, Nelly; it need not make any difference to you, and particularly as this may be your last ride, dear.'

'Oh no, I'd rather not go,' Nelly began hurriedly, and preparing to dismount from her saddle, when Paul Wright came up to her and whispered, 'Why will you not go, Nelly? You may trust yourself to my escort, believe me,' in such an earnest tone, that she could not refuse him.

They rode along for three or four miles conversing on indifferent subjects,—Paul fearing, yet anxious to make the request that was trembling on his lips, and Nelly wondered why he was so unusually excited; for, though conscious that she loved him, she had never once allowed herself to dream of a future in which Paul Wright should have a part. They had both been silent for some moments, when suddenly Nelly said,—
‘Did you hear, Mr. Wright, that I have at last the prospect of getting a situation?’

‘Yes, Mrs. Carrington told me something about it, but I trust it is not true, Nelly. Surely you are not so tired of us all that you want to run away?’

‘No, no; that is not the question at all. I must work and earn my living, Mr. Wright. I cannot afford to live on in idleness.’

For several moments Paul Wright made no reply, and they rode on in silence. He was debating in his own mind whether he had any right to ask this girl to share his life when he had so little confidence in himself. At last he said,—

‘Nelly, you know the worst of me—you have seen me make a beast of myself, and you know my story. Yet, in spite of it all, will you marry me? Don’t answer in a hurry, dear. I believe I could make you happy; and more than that, I feel quite confident that your influence could and would keep me straight. I am not such a bad fellow at heart. I am weak, I suppose, but for any one I loved I could do anything. And, Nelly dear, I do love you. I know what you will say—that it is not so long since I told you I loved some one else; that is true enough, but since I have known you that is altered. I could at this very moment find it in my heart to write and thank Maud for having thrown me over. ‘You want a home, Nelly, and I want a wife; say you’ll marry me, and continue the good work you have begun.’

‘No, Mr. Wright,’ Nelly replied. ‘You have
made a mistake; it is only pity you feel for me, and by and by, when I am away, you will be glad that I did not take you at your word.'

He turned from her impatiently, a frown upon his face. 'Nelly, do you hate me?' he asked.

'Indeed, no,' she replied.

'Do you like me a little bit, then?' he continued.

'Yes, oh yes; better than any one in this'— She had spoken impulsively, and was going to say 'in the world,' but she suddenly stopped and blushed.

'Go on,' he said. 'What were you going to say—in the colony, was it? Then there is some fellow in the old country, is there?' and he asked the question eagerly.

'I love no one in the old country.'

'Then were you going to say you liked me better than any one in the world?' He saw by her face that he had guessed aright, and he drew closer to her as he asked,—

'Nelly, can't you make liking become loving? Couldn't you try to love me, Nelly?'

Firmly believing that he only asked her to marry him under a mistaken idea that he had injured her, and so should thus make reparation, Nelly was on the point of answering in the negative; but a glance at his face, so near her own, and something in his eyes, prevented the untruth passing her lips; she kept silence.

'Nelly, I am waiting. I asked you if you could love me if you tried. Now give me an answer, Nelly;
and be sure you don't tell me an untruth, or I shall know it by your face. I am awfully vain, and I believe at this moment that you love me. Now, for the third time, Nelly, do you, or do you not?

Still no reply came, and a spirit of mischief began to twinkle in Paul Wright's brown eyes.

'Well, silence gives consent all the world over, Nelly. Am I to draw my own conclusions from your silence?'

'No, sir,' she said at last.

'What does "No, sir," mean—that you don't love me? Oh, then I shall go back at once to 'The Bushman's Rest,' and drown my disappointment in another month's spree. I'm a weak-minded fellow, and I can't stand being disappointed,' and he turned his horse round as if intending to carry out his threat. Nelly put out her hand in sudden alarm, for she knew his weakness, or thought she did.

'Oh, sir, you will not go? Please do not.'

'Well, will you love me, Nelly?' he asked, taking her outstretched hand and looking into her troubled face.

'I daren't, Mr. Wright,' she said, her voice trembling with agitation. 'What would your people say if you married me?'

'Oh, that's beside the question altogether,' he replied quickly. 'My people have nothing whatever to do with it. I'm not in leading-strings, Nelly, though I'll willingly be led by you if you will promise to become my wife.'
She shook her head sadly, saying, ‘It is all so sudden, sir; and I know you are only making me an offer because you think my character has suffered through the affair at ‘The Bushman’s Rest.’ No, Mr. Wright, I cannot marry you, but I am deeply grateful for your offer.’

‘Oh, very well, then, there is no more to be said. You will be all right, Miss Dunne, if you follow this cattle track; it will take you right up to the Carringtons’ yards, and from there you will see the house.’ With these words he made her an elaborate bow, and rode away back along the track they had come. For some minutes Nelly sat still on her horse, fully persuaded that Paul was playing with her, and would come back in a few minutes; but when she turned her head he was out of sight, and she could hear the regular canter of his horse through the bush at some distance. Fully alive to her position, and terrified that he really meant to carry out his threat and leave her alone in the bush, she began to cry, and, slipping from her saddle, sat down on a tree-stump in a state of dejection not free from alarm. Her horse was restive, and kept neighing after his companion, and Nelly was a very timid horsewoman as yet.

She did love Paul Wright with all the strength of her young heart, but feared lest he were asking her to marry him from a mere sense of duty. Some weeks previously, before he had ever thought of her save as the barmaid of ‘The Bushman’s Rest,’ Paul had said to her in fun,—
'You had better marry me, Nelly. Here we are, you homeless and alone in the world, and I just jilted: let's make a match of it, and astonish the natives!'

He had spoken the words in pure jest, just as many a man talks to a girl whom he looks on as outside the possibility of his marrying. At the same time, had Nelly taken him at his word there and then, he would most likely have carried out his offer, for he was madly reckless at that time, and ripe for any folly. Paul had forgotten the words ten minutes after he uttered them, but not so Nelly; and now when he had said them again uninfluenced by drink, they had come back to her very vividly, and rankled in her mind. He had been unfortunate in alluding to her unprotected and friendless condition when making his offer, consequently she had jumped to the conclusion that he saw no other way of protecting her good name than by offering her his own. And she was too proud to suffer him to sacrifice himself on her account, though she knew quite well that the whole story of that night's incidents at 'The Bushman's Rest' was known and talked about throughout the entire district.

So she sat on the log crying quietly, wishing that she had dared to be happy and accept Paul's love, if he really did love her, as he said he did. She glanced up to see if he was returning, for that he meant really to go away and leave her alone she could hardly believe. But there was no sign of him. Tearfully she sat watching her horse as he clipped
the tufts of long grass close by, till after a time the stillness of the afternoon began to oppress her; there seemed to be nothing moving save the insect world around her. She was utterly alone, and forthwith began to get frightened, being indeed a most arrant little coward in the bush, with no more knowledge of tracks or roads than a baby. What would happen to her if Paul never came back? she wondered would she be able to find the Carringtons' selection; and if she did, what story could she tell to them to account for Paul leaving her? Oh! it was terrible. She stood up and looked round; nothing was to be seen or heard save the birds and bees as they flew here and there. Was she really and truly alone? Where were the wild blacks she had heard so much about in the old country? were they indeed watching and spying upon her from behind the huge gum trees which grew on all sides? Would they wait till night and then fall upon her and kill her? She was fast losing her head and becoming hysterical, from pure nervousness and fright, as her horse started and snorted suddenly, frightened by the falling of a small branch, which some bird had dislodged above him. It frightened Nelly also—it was the last straw. She all at once realised that she was left alone to die there in that horrible bush, to be eaten by blacks and wild dogs, and the poor half-crazy girl threw herself down upon the grass in an agony of real terror and grief.

'Oh, Paul, Paul!' she cried, 'how could you be so cruel, and I do love you so—oh, so dearly!'
"Why didn't you say so, then," replied a voice at her side; and, starting up, she found herself clasped in Paul's arms, with no prospect of escape until she had admitted all, and replied to all his questions to his entire satisfaction.

He had ridden away out of sight, then turned, dismounted, and came back behind her.

"Then you do love me, Nelly?" he inquired for the twentieth time, holding her close to him. "And you will marry me, dearest?"

"I did not say so," she returned softly.

"But you will say so now—in fact you must, before I will let you go; and as we can't stand in this position all day, however amusing it may be for the jackasses, and as also we are some miles from home, I suggest that the sooner you say it the better. Come, let me hear you say, "Paul, I do love you, and I will marry you."

But Nelly was still silent.

Paul waited several minutes for her answer, but when it did not come, he said,—

"Nelly, you think I want to marry you because of that night's work at the "Rest;" but, darling, you are wrong; though I tell you plainly, the thought did cross my mind that no one would dare to talk about you as my wife, and I even decided to offer myself to you without delay on that account. But, dearest, I did not do this, and I can honestly and truly say that I love you for your own sweet sake. I believe I loved you before that affair, for I really did value your good
opinion; and I had it in my mind to clear away from "The Bushman's Rest," get square, and then come and see you again. I had, really, though doubtless you find it hard to believe me. Nelly, I may not be a very good fellow, but you will be able to keep me straight. I am not altogether bad; I have no real love for drink. It is seven years and more since I had a turn like this, and if you'll only marry me, I'll sign the pledge, make any promise you like, and I'll not touch one drop of liquor again as long as I live.'

He read her answer in her eyes, and in that instant gathered her slight form to his breast; and poor Nelly was sobbing softly, very happy, yet half afraid of what she had done. She did at last believe that Paul loved her, and had she followed the dictates of her heart she would have given in at once; but she could not reconcile it to her conscience to let him—a man of good birth and good position—marry her, as it seemed, all in a hurry, as if to save her reputation.

'Then I am not to go to the dogs, Nelly?' Paul asked, smiling into the flushed face of the girl he loved. 'You will take me, faults and all, Nelly, knowing of what has been my besetting sin?'

The answer came at last, bravely spoken, 'Yes, if you wish it so much, and really do love me.'

With a glad cry he bent his head and pressed his first kiss upon her pure lips; and it was no disgrace to his manhood that there were tears in his eyes as he did so.
'And you won't think the less of me for having been at that place?' she asked anxiously.

'The less of you, my own darling! I think the more of you for coming through the ordeal so grandly. I knew more of your trials than you ever told me, even though I was then so much under the influence of drink.'

'One kiss of your own free giving, Nelly?'

She raised her ripe red lips to meet his, and for several seconds there was a silence between them, more eloquent than any words that could have been spoken.

The sun had set when Nelly and Paul returned to the Carringtons'; and while the latter changed her habit, Paul told his story to the kindly little woman who had been such a good friend to the poor and lonely girl, and who now rejoice at the good fortune that had befallen her.

At first Herbert Wright was very angry, and averse to the match; for, like many others, he looked upon Nelly as merely a barmaid, completely overlooking the fact of her being of gentle birth. However, after hearing the whole story, he was forced to admit that perhaps it was not such a very unwise step for Paul to take, now Maud had thrown him over. He felt convinced that unless some other powerful interest could be brought into his life, Paul would give way to drink, and eventually go to the bad completely. This was a state of affairs to be avoided for all their sakes, and greatly for his own (Herbert's), as it was Paul who...
managed the station, and through whose unflagging industry, perseverance, and determination they had, despite bad seasons, reached their present condition of prosperity. So Herbert was inclined favourably to consider any marriage of his cousin's under these circumstances. And, after all, he said to himself, 'She is very presentable, quite as much so as most of the girls one meets.'

Months afterwards, Herbert Wright admitted that his cousin had done well and wisely in marrying the girl he did, and eventually Nelly had no stauncher friend in the colonies than her husband's cousin.

It was just five weeks from the day she left 'The Bushman's Rest' when Nelly and Paul stood together before old Mr. Garvie, the minister, to be made man and wife. No sister could have been kinder than Mrs. Carrington proved to the friendless girl. It was she who stood beside her, and encouraged her with brave words and sympathy during the most solemn moment of her life, when she gave herself before God to a man of whom she knew little or nothing, save that he was cursed with the terrible vice of intemperance.

'And was it a happy marriage?' I can reply in all truth, 'Yes, it was; not a more united or more affectionate couple exist than Paul Wright and his wife.'

Many years have passed since these incidents took place. Paul Wright is a rich man now; and he has kept to his promise faithfully, never once has he touched spirits since he married.

There are still a few ill-natured and envious people
who point to pretty Mrs. Wright, and whisper, 'She was a barmaid, you know, when he married her,—and at a dreadfully low public-house, too. Such a pity, my dear!'

But these very people are none the less friendly when they meet Nelly, and never refuse an invitation to the Wrights' hospitable home. 'The Bushman's Rest' exists now under a new name, having become so notorious after Nelly's departure that the licence was taken away, and Burgiss had to leave that part of the country. It was granted again to a new proprietor, and is a respectable house under the present management.