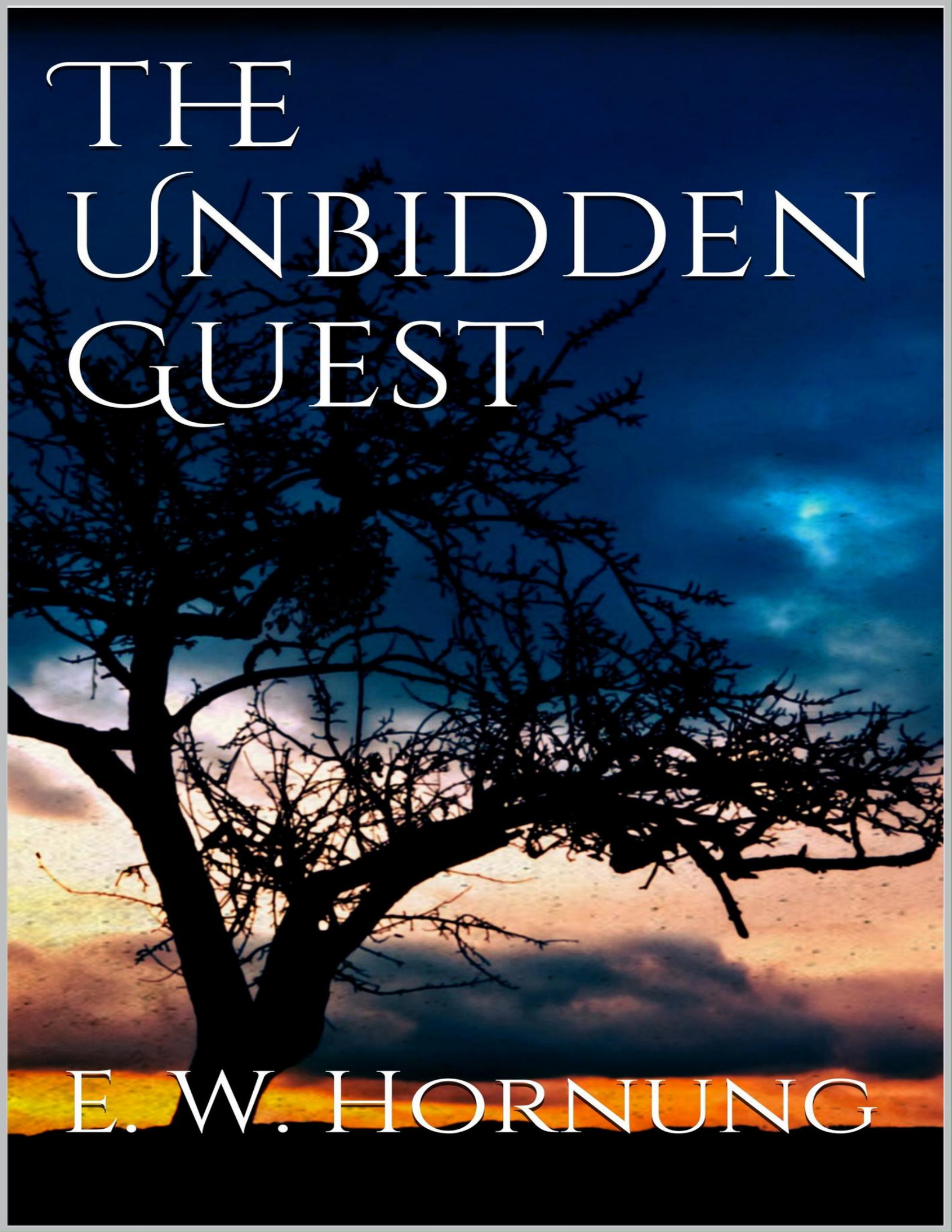
THE UNBIDDEN GUEST
E. W. HORNUNG

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CHAPTER I.—THE GIRL FROM HOME.

Arabella was the first at the farm to become aware of Mr. Teesdale's return from Melbourne. She was reading in the parlour, with her plump elbows planted upon the faded green table-cloth, and an untidy head of light-coloured hair between her hands; looking up from her book by chance, she saw through the closed window her father and the buggy climbing the hill at the old mare's own pace.

Arabella went on reading until the buggy had drawn up within a few feet of the verandah posts and a few more of the parlour window. Then she sat in doubt, with her finger on the place; but before it appeared absolutely necessary to jump up and run out, one of the men had come up to take charge of the mare, and Arabella was enabled to remove her finger and read on.

The parlour was neither very large nor at all lofty, and the shut window and fire-place closely covered by a green gauze screen, to keep the flies out, made it disagreeably stuffy. There were two doors, but both of these were shut also, though the one at the far end of the room, facing the hearth, nearly always stood wide open. It led down a step into a very little room where the guns were kept and old newspapers thrown, and where somebody was whistling rather sweetly as the other door opened and Mr. Teesdale entered, buggy-whip in hand.

He was a frail, tallish old gentleman, with a venerable forehead, a thin white beard, very little hair to his pate, and

clear brown eyes that shone kindly upon all the world. He had on the old tall hat he always wore when driving into Melbourne, and the yellow silk dust-coat which had served him for many a red-hot summer, and was still not unpresentable. Arabella was racing to the end of a paragraph when he entered, and her father had stolen forward and kissed her untidy head before she looked up.
"Bad girl," said he, playfully, "to let your old father get home without ever coming out to meet him!"
"I was trying to finish this chapter," said Arabella. She went on trying.
"I know, I know! I know you of old, my dear. Yet I can't talk, because I am as bad as you are; only I should like to see you reading something better than the *Family Cherub* ."
There were better things in the little room adjoining, where behind the shooting lumber was some motley reading, on two long sagging shelves; but that room was known as the gun-room, and half those books were hidden away behind powder-canisters, cartridge-cases, and the like, while all were deep in dust.
"You read it yourself, father," said Arabella as she turned over a leaf of her *Family Cherub* .
"I read it myself. More shame for me! But then I've read all them books in the little gun-room, and that's what I should like to see you reading now and then. Now why have you got yon door shut, Arabella, and who's that whistling in there?"
"It's our John William," Miss Teesdale said; and even as she spoke the door in question was thrown open by a stalwart fellow in a Crimean shirt, with the sleeves rolled up from arms as brown and hard-looking as mellow oak. He had a breech-loader in one hand and a greasy rag in the other.
"Holloa, father!" cried he, boisterously.
"Well, John William, what are you doing?"
"Cleaning my gun. What have you been doing, that's more like it? What took you trapesing into Melbourne the

moment I got my back turned this morning?"
"Why, hasn't your mother told you?"
"Haven't seen her since I came in."
"Well, but Arabella——"
"Arabella! I'm full up of Arabella," said John William contemptuously; but the girl was still too deep in the *Family Cherub* to heed him. "There's no getting a word out of Arabella when she's on the read; so what's it all about, father?"
"I'll tell you; but you'd better shut yon window, John William, or I don't know what your mother 'll say when she comes in and finds the place full o' flies."
It was the gun-room window that broke the law of no fresh air, causing Mr. Teesdale uneasiness until John William shut it with a grumble; for in this homestead the mistress was law-maker, and indeed master, with man-servant and maid-servant, husband and daughter, and a particularly headstrong son, after her own heart, all under her thumb together.
"Now then, father, what was it took you into Melbourne all of a sudden like that?"
"A letter by the English mail, from my old friend Mr. Oliver."
"Never heard tell of him," said John William, making spectacles of his burnished bores, and looking through them into the sunlight. Already he had lost interest.
Mr. Teesdale was also occupied, having taken from his pocket a very large red cotton handkerchief, with which he was wiping alternately the dust from his tall hat and the perspiration from the forehead whereon the hat had left a fiery rim. Now, however, he nodded his bald head and clicked his lips, as one who gives another up.
"Well, well! Never heard tell of him—you who've heard me tell of him time out o' mind! Nay, come; why, you're called after him yourself! Ay, we called you after John William Oliver because he was the best friend that ever we had in

old Yorkshire or anywhere else; the very best; and you pretend you've never heard tell of him."
"What had he got to say for himself?" said Mr. Oliver's namesake, with a final examination of the outside of his barrels.
"Plenty; he's sent one of his daughters out in the *Parramatta* , that got in with the mail yesterday afternoon; and of course he had given her an introduction to me."
"What's that?" exclaimed John William, looking up sharply, as he ran over the words in his ear. "I say, father, we don't want her here," he added earnestly.
"Oh, did you find out where she was? Have you seen her? What is she like?" cried Arabella, jumping up from the table and joining the others with a face full of questions. She had that instant finished her chapter.
"I don't know what she's like; I didn't see her; I couldn't even find out where she was, though I tried at half a dozen hotels and both coffee-palaces," said the farmer with a crestfallen air.
"All the better!" cried John William, grounding his gun with a bang. "We don't want none of your stuck-up new chums or chumesses here, father."
"I don't know that; for my part, I should love to have a chance of talking to an English young lady," Arabella said, with a backward glance at her *Family Cherub* . "They're very rich, the Olivers," she added for her brother's benefit; "that's their house in the gilt frame in the best parlour, the house with the tower; and the group in the frame to match, that *is* the Olivers, isn't it, father?"
"It is, my dear; that's to say, it was, some sixteen years ago. We must get yon group and see which one it is that has come out, and then I'll read you Mr. Oliver's letter, John William. If only he'd written a mail or two before the child started! However, if we've everything made snug for her to-night, I'll lay hands on her to-morrow if she's in Melbourne; and then she shall come out here for a month or two to

start with, just to see how she likes it."
"How d'ye know she'll want to come out here at all?" asked John William. "Don't you believe it, father; she wouldn't care for it a little bit."
"Not care for it? Not want to come out and make her home with her parents' old friends? Then she's not her father's daughter," cried Mr. Teesdale indignantly; "she's no child of our good old friends. Why, it was Mr. Oliver who gave me the watch I——hush! Was that your mother calling?"
It was. "David! David! Have you got back, David?" the harsh voice came crying through the lath-and-plaster walls. Mr. Teesdale scuttled to the door. "Yes, my dear, I've just got in. No, I'm not smoking. Where are you, then? In the spare room? All right, I'm coming, I'm coming." And he was gone.
"Mother's putting the spare room to rights already," Arabella explained.
"I'm sorry to hear it; let's hope it won't be wanted."
"Why, John William? It would be such fun to have a young lady from Home to stay with us!"
"I'm full up o' young ladies, and I'm just sick of the sound of Home. She'll be a deal too grand for us, and there won't be much fun in that. What's the use o' talking? If it was a son of this here old Oliver's it'd be a different thing; we'd precious soon knock the nonsense out of him; I'd undertake to do it myself; but a girl's different, and I jolly well hope she'll stop away. We don't want her here, I tell you. We haven't even invited her. It's a piece of cheek, is the whole thing!"
John William was in the parlour now, sitting on the horse-hair sofa, and laying down the law with freckled fist and blusterous voice, as his habit was. It was a good-humoured sort of bluster, however, and indeed John William seldom opened his mouth without displaying his excellent downright nature in one good light or another. He had inherited his mother's qualities along with her sharp,

decided features, which in the son were set off by a strong black beard and bristling moustache. He managed the farm, the men, Arabella, and his father; but all under Mrs. Teesdale, who managed him. Not that this masterful young man was so young in years as you might well suppose; neither John William nor Arabella was under thirty; but their lives had been so simple and so hard-working that, going by their conversation merely, you would have placed the two of them in their teens. For her part, too, Arabella looked much younger than she was, with her wholesome, attractive face and dreamy, inquisitive eyes; and as for the brother, he was but a boy with a beard, still primed with rude health and strength, and still loaded with all the assorted possibilities of budding manhood.

"I've taken down the group," said Mr. Teesdale, returning with a large photograph in a gilt frame; "and here is the letter on the chimney-piece. We'll have a look at them both again."

On the chimney-piece also were the old man's spectacles, which he proceeded to put on, and a tobacco jar and long clay pipe, at which he merely looked lovingly; for Mrs. Teesdale would have no smoking in the house. His own chair stood in the cosy corner between the window and the hearth; and he now proceeded to pull it up to his own place at the head of the table as though it were a meal-time, and that gilt-framed photograph the only dish. Certainly he sat down to it with an appetite never felt during the years it had hung in the unused, ornamental next room, without the least prospect of the Teesdales ever more seeing any member of that group in the flesh. But now that such a prospect was directly at hand, there was some sense in studying the old photograph. It was of eight persons: the parents, a grandparent, and five children. Three of the latter were little girls, in white stockings and hideous boots with low heels and elastic sides; and to the youngest of these three, a fair-haired child whose features, like those of

the whole family, were screwed up by a strong light and an exposure of the ancient length, Mr. Teesdale pointed with his finger-nail.
"That's the one," said he. "She now is a young lady of five or six and twenty."
"Don't think much of her looks," observed John William.
"Oh, you can't tell what she may be like from this," Arabella said, justly. "She may be beautiful now; besides, look how the sun must have been in her eyes, poor little thing! What's her name again, father?"
"Miriam, my dear."
"Miriam! I call it a jolly name, don't you, Jack?"
"It's a beast of a name," said John William.
"Stop while I read you a bit of the letter," cried the old man, smiling indulgently. "I won't give you all of it, but just this little bit at the end. He's been telling me that Miriam has her own ideas about things, has already seen something of the world, and isn't perhaps quite like the girls I may remember when we were both young men——"
"Didn't I tell you?" interrupted John William, banging the table with his big fist. "She's stuck-up! We don't want her here."
"But just hark how he ends up. I want you both to listen to these few lines:—'It may even be that she has formed habits and ways which were not the habits and ways of young girls in our day, and that you may like some of these no better than I do. Yet her heart, my dear Teesdale, is as pure and as innocent as her mother's was before her, and I know that my old friend will let no mere modern mannerisms prejudice him against my darling child, who is going so far from us all. It has been a rather sudden arrangement, and though the doctors ordered it, and Miriam can take care of herself as only the girls nowadays can, still I would never have parted with her had I not known of one tried friend to meet and welcome her at the other end. Keep her at your station, my dear Teesdale, as

long as you can, for an open-air life is, I am convinced, what she wants above all things. If she should need money, an accident which may always happen, let her have whatever she wants, advising me of the amount immediately. I have told her to apply to you in such an extremity, which, however, I regard as very unlikely to occur. I have also provided her with a little note of introduction, with which she will find her way to you as soon as possible after landing. And into your kind old hands, and those of your warm-hearted wife, I cheerfully commend my girl, with the most affectionate remembrances to you both, and only regretting that business will not allow me to come out with her and see you both once more.' Then he finishes—calls himself my affectionate friend, same as when we were boys together. And it's two-and-thirty years since we said good-bye!" added Mr. Teesdale as he folded up the letter and put it away.

He pushed his spectacles on to his forehead, for they were dim, and sat gazing straight ahead, through the inner door that stood now wide open, and out of the gun-room window. This overlooked a sunburnt decline, finishing, perhaps a furlong from the house, at the crests of the river timber, that stood out of it like a hedge, by reason of the very deep cut made by the Yarra, where it formed the farm boundary on that side. And across the top of the window (to one sitting in Mr. Teesdale's place) was stretched, like a faded mauve ribbon, a strip of the distant Dandenong Ranges; and this and the timber were the favourite haunts of the old man's eyes, for thither they strayed of their own accord whenever his mind got absent elsewhere, as was continually happening, and had happened now.

"It's a beautiful letter!" exclaimed Arabella warmly.

"I like it, too," John William admitted; "but I shan't like the girl. That kind don't suit me at all; but I'll try to be civil to her on account of the old man, for his letter is right

enough."
Mr. Teesdale looked pleased, though he left his eyes where they were.
"Ay, ay, my dears, I thought you would like it. Ah, but all his letters are the same! Two-and-thirty years, and never a year without at least three letters from Mr. Oliver. He's a business man, and he always answers promptly. He's a rich man now, my dears, but he doesn't forget the early friends, not he, though they're at the other end of the earth, and as poor as he's rich."
"Yet he doesn't seem to know how we're situated, for all that," remarked John William thoughtfully. "Look how he talks about our 'station,' and of your advancing money to the girl, as though we were rolling in it like him! Have you never told him our circumstances, father?"
At the question, Mr. Teesdale's eyes fell twenty miles, and rested guiltily upon the old green tablecloth.
"I doubt a station and a farm convey much the same thing in the old country," he answered crookedly.
"That you may bet they do!" cried the son, with a laugh; but he went on delivering himself of the most discouraging prophecies touching the case in point. The girl would come out with false ideas; would prove too fine by half for plain people like themselves; and at the best was certain to expect much more than they could possibly give her.
"Well, as to that," said the farmer, who thought himself lucky to have escaped a scolding for never having told an old friend how poor he was—"as to that, we can but give her the best we've got, with mebbe a little extra here and there, such as we wouldn't have if we were by ourselves. The eggs 'll be fresh, at any rate, and I think that she'll like her sheets, for your mother is getting out them 'at we brought with us from Home in '51. There was just two pairs, and she's had 'em laid by in lavender ever since. We can give her a good cup o' tea, an' all; and you can take her out 'possum-shooting, John William, and teach her how to

ride. Yes, we'll make a regular bush-girl of her in a month, and send her back to Yorkshire the picture of health; though as yet I'm not very clear what's been the matter with her. But if she takes after her parents ever so little she'll see that we're doing our best, and that'll be good enough for any child of theirs."

From such a shabby waistcoat pocket Mr. Tees-dale took so handsome a gold watch, it was like a ring on a beggar's finger; and he fondled it between his worn hands, but without a word.

"Mr. Oliver gave you that watch, didn't he, father?" Arabella said, watching him.

"He did, my dear," said the old man proudly. "He came and saw us off at the Docks, and he gave me the watch on board, just as we were saying good-bye; and he gave your mother a gold brooch which neither of you have ever seen, for I've never known her wear it myself."

Arabella said she had seen it.

"Now his watch," continued Mr. Teesdale, "has hardly ever left my pocket—save to go under my pillow—since he put it in my hands on July 3, 1851. Here's the date and our initials inside the case; but you've seen them before. Ay, but there are few who came out in '51—and stopped out—who have done as poorly as me. The day after we dropped anchor in Hobson's Bay there wasn't a living soul aboard our ship; captain, mates, passengers and crew, all gone to the diggings. Every man Jack but me! It was just before you were born, John William, and I wasn't going. It may have been a mistake, but the Lord knows best. To be sure, we had our hard times when the diggers were coming into Melbourne and shoeing their horses with gold, and filling buckets with champagne, and standing by with a pannikin to make everybody drink that passed; if you wouldn't, you'd got to take off your coat and show why. I remember one of them offering me a hundred pounds for this very watch, and precious hard up I was, but I wouldn't take it, not I,

though I didn't refuse a sovereign for telling him the time. Ay, sovereigns were the pennies of them days; not that I fingered many; but I never got so poor as to part with Mr. Oliver's watch, and you never must either, John William, when it's yours. Ay, ay," chuckled Mr. Teesdale, as he snapped-to the case and replaced the watch in his pocket, "and it's gone like a book for over thirty years, with nothing worse than a cleaning the whole time."

"You must mind and tell that to Miriam, father," said Arabella, smiling.

"I must so. Ah, my dear, I shall have two daughters, not one, and you'll have a sister while Miriam is here."

"That depends what Miriam is like," said John William, getting up from the sofa with a Hugh and going back idly to the little room and his cleaned gun.

"I know what she will be like," said Arabella, placing the group in front of her on the table. "She will be delicate and fair, and rather small; and I shall have to show her everything, and take tremendous care of her."

"I wonder if she'll have her mother's hazel eyes and gentle voice?" mused the farmer aloud, with his eyes on their way back to the Dandenong Ranges.

"I should like her to take after her mother; she was one of the gentlest little women that ever I knew, was Mrs. Oliver, and I never clapped eyes——"

The speaker suddenly turned his head; there had been a step in the verandah, and some person had passed the window too quick for recognition.

"Who was that?" said Mr. Teesdale.

"I hardly saw," said Arabella, pushing back her chair. "It was a woman."

"And now she's knocking! Run and see who it is, my dear."

Arabella rose and ran. Then followed such an outcry in the passage that Mr. Teesdale rose also. He was on his legs in time to see the door flung wide open, and the excited eyes of Arabella reaching over the shoulder of the tall young

woman whom she was pushing into the room.
"Here *is* Miriam," she cried. "Here's Miriam found her way out all by herself!"

CHAPTER II.—A BAD BEGINNING.

A t the sound of the voices outside, John William, for his part, had slipped behind the gun-room door; but he had the presence of mind not to shut it quite, and this enabled him to peer through the crack and take deliberate stock of the fair visitant.

She was a well-built young woman, with a bold, free carriage and a very daring smile. That was John William's first impression when he came to think of it in words a little later. His eyes then fastened upon her hair. The poor colour of her face and lips did not strike him at the time any more than the smudges under the merry eyes. The common stamp of the regular features never struck him at all, for of such matters old Mr. Teesdale himself was hardly a judge; but the girl's hair took John William's fancy on the spot. It was the most wonderful hair: red, and yet beautiful. There was plenty of it to be seen, too, for the straw hat that hid the rest had a backward tilt to it, while an exuberant fringe came down within an inch of the light eyebrows. John William could have borne it lower still. He watched and listened with a smile upon his own hairy visage, of which he was totally unaware.

"So this is my old friend's daughter!" the farmer had cried out.

"And you're Mr. Scarsdale, are you?" answered the girl, between fits of intermittent, almost hysterical laughter.

"Eh? Yes, yes; I'm Mr. Teesdale, and this is my daughter Arabella. You are to be sisters, you two."
The visitor turned to Arabella and gave her a sounding kiss upon the lips.
"And mayn't I have one too?" old Teesdale asked. "I'm that glad to see you, my dear, and you know you're to look upon me like a father as long as you stay in Australia. Thank you, Miriam. Now I feel as if you'd been here a week already!"
Mr. Teesdale had received as prompt and as hearty a kiss as his daughter before him.
"Mrs. Teesdale is busy, but she'll come directly," he went on to explain. "Do you know what she's doing? She's getting your room ready, Miriam. We knew that you had landed, and I've spent the whole day hunting for you in town. Just to think that you should have come out by yourself after all! But our John William was here a minute ago. John William, what are you doing?"
"Cleaning my gun," said the young man, coming from behind his door, greasy rag in hand.
"Nay, come! You finished that job long ago. Come and shake hands with Miriam. Look, here she is, safe and sound, and come out all by herself!"
"I'm very glad to see you," said the son of the house, advancing, dirty palms foremost, "but I'm sorry I can't shake hands!"
"Then I'd better kiss you too!"
She had taken a swinging step forward, and the red fringe was within a foot of his startled face, when she tossed back her head with a hearty laugh.
"No, I think I won't. You're too old and you're not old enough—see?"
"John William 'll be three-and-thirty come January," said Mr. Teesdale gratuitously.
"Yes? That's ten years older than me," answered the visitor with equal candour. "Exactly ten!"

"Nay, come—not exactly ten," the old gentleman said, with some gravity, for he was a great stickler for the literal truth; "only seven or eight, I understood from your father?"
The visitor coloured, then pouted, and then burst out laughing as she exclaimed, "You oughtn't to be so particular about ladies' ages! Surely two or three years is near enough, isn't it? I'm ashamed of you, Mr. Teesdale; I really am!" And David received such a glance that he became exceedingly ashamed of himself; but the smile that followed it warmed his old heart through and through, and reminded him, he thought, of Miriam's mother.
Meantime, the younger Teesdale remained rooted to the spot where he had been very nearly kissed. He was still sufficiently abashed, but perhaps on that very account a plain speech came from him too.
"You're not like what I expected. No, I'm bothered if you are!"
"Much worse?" asked the girl, with a scared look.
"No, much better. Ten thousand times better!" cried the young man. Then his shyness overtook him, and, though he joined in the general laughter, he ventured no further remarks. As to the laughter, the visitor's was the most infectious ever heard in the weather-board farmhouse. Arabella shook within the comfortable covering with which nature had upholstered her, and old David had to apply the large red handkerchief to his furrowed cheeks before he could give her the message to Mrs. Teesdale, for which there had not been a moment to spare out of the crowded minute or two which had elapsed since the visitor's unforeseen arrival.
"Go, my dear," he said now, "and tell your mother that Miriam is here. That's it. Mrs. T. will be with us directly, Miriam. Ah, I thought this photograph'd catch your eye sooner or later. You'll have seen it once or twice before, eh? Just once or twice, I'm thinking." The group still lay on the table at Mr. Teesdale's end.

"Who are they?" asked the visitor, very carelessly; indeed, she had but given the photograph a glance, and that from a distance.
"Who? Why, yourselves; your own family. All the lot of you when you were little," cried David, snatching up the picture and handing it across. "We were just looking at it when you came, Miriam; and I made you out to be this one, look—this poor little thing with the sun in her eyes."
The old man was pointing with his finger, the girl examining closely. Their heads were together. Suddenly she raised hers, looked him in the eyes, and burst out laughing. "How clever you are!" she said. "I'm not a bit like that now, now am I?"
She made him look well at her before answering. And in all his after knowledge of it, he never again saw quite so bold and *débonnaire* an expression upon that cool face framed in so much hot hair. But from a mistaken sense of politeness, Mr. Teesdale made a disingenuous answer after all, and the subject of conversation veered from the girl who had come out to Australia to those she had left behind her in the old country.
That conversation would recur to Mr. Teesdale in after days. It contained surprises for him at the time. Later, he ceased to wonder at what he had heard. Indeed, there was nothing wonderful in his having nourished quite a number of misconceptions concerning a family of whom he had set eyes on no member for upwards of thirty years. It was those misconceptions which the red-haired member of that family now removed. They were all very natural in the circumstances. And yet, to give an instance, Mr. Teesdale was momentarily startled to ascertain that Mrs. Oliver had never been so well in her life as when her daughter sailed. He had understood from Mr. Oliver that his wife was in a very serious state with diabetes. When he now said so, the innocent remark made Miss Oliver to blush and bite her lips. Then she explained. Her mother had been threatened

with the disease in question, but that was all. The real fact was, her father was morbidly anxious about her mother, and to such an extent that it appeared the anxiety amounted to mania.

She put it in her own way.

"Pa's mad on ma," she said. "You can't believe a word he says about her."

Mr. Teesdale found this difficult to believe of his old friend, who seemed to him to write so sensibly about the matter. It made him look out of the gun-room window. Then he recollected that the girl herself lacked health, for which cause she had come abroad.

"And what was the matter with you, Miriam," said he, "for your father only says that the doctors recommended the voyage?"

"Oh, that's all he said, was it?"

"Yes, that's all."

"And you want to know what was the matter with me, do you?"

"No, I was only wondering. It's no business of mine."

"Oh, but I'll tell you. Bless your life, I'm not ashamed of it. It was late nights—it was late nights that was the matter with me."

"Nay, come," cried the farmer; yet, as he peered through his spectacles into the bright eyes sheltered by the fiery fringe, he surmised a deep-lying heaviness in the brain behind them; and he noticed now for the first time how pale a face they were set in, and how gray the marks were underneath them.

"The voyage hasn't done you much good, either," he said. "Why, you aren't even sunburnt."

"No? Well, you see, I'm such a bad sailor. I spent all my time in the cabin, that's how it was."

"Yet the *Argus* says you had such a good voyage?"

"Yes? I expect they always say that. It was a beast of a voyage, if you ask me, and quite as bad as late nights for