

***GEORGE
CHETWYND
GRIFFITH***



THE MISSIONARY

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The Missionary

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CHAPTER I.

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It was the evening of Boat-race day, and as usual that province of Vanity Fair whose centre is Piccadilly Circus was more or less completely given over to joyously boisterous troops of undergraduates and 'Varsity men of all academic ranks whom the great event of the year had brought together from all parts of the kingdom, and even from lands beyond the sea.

The mild saturnalia which London annually permits in honour of the historic struggle between the rival blues was at its height. The music halls were crowded to their utmost capacity, and lusty-voiced undergraduates joined enthusiastically, if not altogether tunefully, in the choruses of the songs; but the enthusiasm was perhaps highest and the crowd the greatest at the Palace, where start and race and the magnificent finish with which the struggle had ended were being shown by the American Biograph.

As the series of pictures followed each other on the screen, the cries which a few hours before had been roaring along the two banks of the river from Putney to Mortlake burst out anew from pit and gallery, circles and stalls and boxes. Cambridge had won for once after a long series of defeats, but the Oxford boys and men were cheering just as lustily and yelling themselves just as hoarse as the others, for they were all Englishmen and therefore good sportsmen.

The crush in the First Circle was terrific, but for the moment Vane Maxwell was conscious neither of the heat nor the crowding. His whole soul was in his eyes as he

watched the weirdly silent and yet life-like phantoms flitting across the screen. It was only when the finish had faded into swift darkness and the thunders of applause had begun to die down that he became aware of the fact that someone was standing on one of his feet, and that just behind him someone else had got hold of his arm and was holding it with a convulsive sort of clutch.

Just then there was a lull in the applause, and he caught a faintly murmured "Oh, dear" in a feminine voice. He wrenched his foot free, and turned round just in time to slip his arm round the waist of a fainting girl and save her from falling.

The crush was loosening now, for the great attraction of the evening had passed, and a general move was being made towards the bars.

"If you please there, this young lady's fainting. Give her as much room as you can, please," he said loudly enough to be heard for some little distance round.

A number of undergraduates of both Universities managed to immediately clear a space about them, and one of his own college chums at Balliol who had come in with him said, "Take her to the bar, Maxwell, and give her a drop of brandy. Now, move up there, you fellows. Room for beauty in distress—come along!"

A couple of the stalwart attendants had also arrived on the scene by this time, and so a lane was easily made to the nearest bar. The girl opened her eyes again, looked about her for a moment, and then murmured:

"Oh, thank you so much, I think I can walk. I am getting all right now. It was the crowd and the heat. Please don't

trouble. It's very good of you."

"It's no trouble at all," said Maxwell. "Come and let me give you a drop of brandy. That'll put you all right."

As they went into the bar they were followed by not a few curious glances. Men and lads looked at each other and smiled, and women looked at them and each other, also smiling, but with plainer meaning, and one or two expressed themselves openly as to the neatness with which the whole affair had been managed.

Crowded as the bar was, Maxwell had no difficulty in getting a couple of brandies and a split soda for himself and his companion. Two men sitting at one of the tables had got up to let her sit down. One of them held out his hand to Maxwell and said:

"Why, Vane, old man, is it you? In luck, as usual, I see." He said this with a glance towards the girl which brought the blood to Maxwell's cheeks. Still, he took the other's hand, and said good-humouredly:

"Good evening, Garthorne. Up for the race, I suppose? Fine fight, wasn't it? I'm glad you won, it was getting a bit monotonous. Thanks for letting us have the table. This young lady is not very well, felt a bit faint in the crowd."

"I see," said Garthorne, with another look at her which Maxwell did not altogether like. "Well, good night, old man. Be as good as you can."

As the two moved away Maxwell's memory went back to a scene which had occurred behind the wheelhouse of a P. and O. liner about ten years before, and, without exactly knowing why, he felt as if it would give him a certain

amount of satisfaction to repeat it. Then he turned to the girl and said:

"I beg your pardon; I hope you haven't been waiting. You should have taken a drink at once."

"Oh, thanks, that's all right. I'm a lot better now," she said, taking up the tumbler and smiling over it at him. "Well, here's luck! It was awfully good of you to get me out of that crowd. I believe I should have fallen down if it hadn't been for you."

"Oh, please don't mention that," he said; "only too happy—I mean I was very glad I was there to do it. Here's to your complete recovery."

As he drank their eyes met over the glasses. Until now he had not really looked at her; things had been happening rather too rapidly for that. But now, as he put his glass down and began to scrutinize the half-saucy, half-demure, and altogether charming face on the other side of the table, it suddenly dawned upon him that it was exceedingly like his own.

The nut-brown hair was almost the same shade as his, but it had a gleam of gold in it which his lacked. The dark hazel eyes were bigger and softer, and were shaded by longer and darker lashes than his, but their colour and expression were very similar. The rest of the face, too, was very similar, only while his nose was almost perfectly straight, nearly pure Greek in fact, hers was just the merest trifle *retroussé*.

The mouths and chins were almost identical save for the fact that firmness and strength in his were replaced by softness and sweetness in hers. Not that hers were lacking

in firmness, for a skilled physiognomist would have put her down at the first glance as a young lady of very decided character; but the outlines were softer, the lips were more delicate and more mobile, and, young as he was, there was a gravity in his smile which was replaced in hers by a suspicion of defiant recklessness which was not without its mournful meaning for those who had eyes to see.

"That's done me a lot of good," she said, as she finished her brandy and soda. "Now, I mustn't keep you from your friends any longer. I'm very much obliged to you indeed. Good night!"

He rose as she did, and took the neatly-gloved little hand that she held out to him over the table.

"I don't see why we should say good night just yet unless you particularly wish it," he said. "I only came here with a lot of our fellows to see the Biograph, and I shan't stop now that's over. I'm getting jolly hungry, too. If you have no other engagement suppose we were to go and have a bit of supper somewhere?"

For some reason or other which she was quite unable to define, these words, although they were spoken with perfect politeness, and although she had heard them scores of times before without offence, now almost offended her. And yet there was no real reason why they should.

She had been out to supper with pretty nearly all sorts and conditions of men. Why should she not go with this well-groomed, athletic-looking young fellow who had already done her a considerable service, who was obviously a gentleman, and whose face and expression had now begun to strike her as so curiously like her own?

She really had no other engagement for the evening, and to refuse would be, to say the least of it, ungracious; so, after a moment's hesitation, she took her hand away and said with a quick upward glance of her eyes:

"Very well, I was just beginning to think about supper myself when I turned up out there in that absurd way, so we may as well have it together. Where were you thinking of going? Suppose we were to try the grill-room at the Troc. Of course everywhere will be pretty crowded to-night, but we have as good a chance of getting a table there as anywhere else. Besides, I know one or two of the waiters. I often go there to lunch."

"Very well," he said; "come along." And in a few minutes more they were rolling along in a hansom down Shaftesbury Avenue.

Vane Maxwell was in very good humour that night with himself and all the world. He had taken a double first in Mods., in History and Classics, after crowning a brilliant career at Eton with a Balliol Scholarship. He was stroke of his college boat, and had worked her four places up the river. In another year he might be in the 'Varsity Eight itself, and help to avenge the defeat which the Dark Blues had just suffered. The sweetheart he had won in that Homeric little battle behind the wheelhouse had been faithful to him ever since. He had an abundance of pocket money and the prospect of a fair fortune, and altogether the world appeared to be a very pleasant place indeed to live in.

When they got into the cab the girl half expected that he would slip his arm round her as others were wont to do when they had the chance, but he didn't, and she liked him

all the better for it. He did, however, put his hand through her arm and draw her just a little closer to him. Then he leant back in the cab, and, as the light from a big gin palace lamp flashed on to her face, he said:

"Well, this *is* jolly. I'm so glad you came. I feel just in the humour for a good supper in pleasant society."

"Thank you," she said, with a little toss of her head; "but how do you know my society is going to be pleasant?"

"Oh, it couldn't be anything else," he laughed. "You are far too pretty not to be nice."

"Thanks," she said gravely. "Are all the pretty girls you know nice? Don't you find some of them horribly conceited and dull? Lots of fellows I know say so."

"Lots of fellows!" he echoed. "Then you have a pretty extensive acquaintance——"

"Why, of course I have," she interrupted, cutting him short almost roughly. Then she went on with a swift change of tone, "Don't you see that a—a girl like me has *got* to know plenty of fellows? It's—well, it's business, and that's the brutal truth of it."

She turned her head away and looked out of the cab window as though she didn't want him to see the expression that came over her face as she said the last few words.

But though he did not see the change in her face, the change in her voice struck him like a jarring note in a harmony that he was beginning to find very pleasant. He felt a sort of momentary resentment. He knew, of course, that it was the "brutal truth," but just then he disliked being reminded of it—especially by her. She seemed a great deal too nice for *that* to be true of her. There was a little pause,

rather an awkward one, during which he tried to think of the proper thing to say. Of course he didn't succeed, so he just blurted out:

"Oh, never mind about brutal truths just now, little girl."

There was another pause, during which she still kept her head turned away. Then he went on with a happy inconsequence:

"By the way, has it struck you yet that we're rather like each other?"

"Is that a compliment to me or to yourself?" she said, half gravely, and yet with a belying gleam of mischief in her eyes.

"Oh, a likeness like that could only be a compliment to me, of course," he replied, and before the conversation could proceed any farther the cab stopped at the entrance to the Trocadero.

By great good luck they procured one of the little side tables in the inner room just as another couple were leaving it. One of the waiters had recognised her as she came in, and, with the astute alacrity of his kind, had taken possession of them and pre-empted the table before anyone else could get near it. There were, in fact, others waiting who had a prior right, but the gentleman in the plum coat and gold buttons made it impossible for the superintendent of the room to interfere by saying to Maxwell in his blandest tone:

"Good evening, sir; it's all right, sir. This is the table you engaged."

"He's a smart youth, that Fritz," said the girl as they sat down. "These fellows here know which side their bread's

battered on, and they look after their own customers."

"Yes, he seems to know his business," said Maxwell, "and now I suppose the question is, what are we going to have?"

Fritz had come back, and was swiftly and rapidly removing the débris left behind by their predecessors. The girl looked up at him with an air of familiarity which Maxwell didn't altogether like, and said:

"What's good for supper, Fritz? I am hungry."

"A few oysters, miss, grilled sole, and a nice little porterhouse steak between two. How's that, miss?"

She looked across at Maxwell and nodded, and he said, "Yes, I think that will do very nicely. Let's have the oysters at once, and some brown bread and butter."

"Yes, sir, certainly. Any wine, sir?"

The list was presented, opened, of course, at the champagne page.

"You'll have something fizzy, won't you?" he said, looking up from the list.

"I suppose we may as well," she said, "only I don't want you to think me too extravagant."

"Nonsense," he laughed, and then he told the waiter to bring a bottle of Kock Fils '89.

When the man had gone on his errand Maxwell said somewhat diffidently:

"By the way, we seem to be getting to know each other pretty well, but we've not exactly been introduced. I mean we don't know each other's names yet."

"Oh, introductions are not much in fashion in the world that I live in," she said with a little flush. "Of course you don't need telling which half of the world that is."

For the moment he felt an unreasonable resentment, either at the words or the half defiant way in which she spoke them. He was quite old enough both in years and the ways of the world to know exactly what she meant, and he was perfectly well aware that she would not have accepted his invitation to supper any more than she would have been in the promenade of a music hall unescorted if she had been what is conventionally termed respectable. Yet somehow he wanted to forget the fact and treat her with the respect he would have paid to any ordinary acquaintance in his own social sphere.

This feeling was probably due both to an innate chivalry and to the fact that one of his father's favourite precepts was, "My boy, whatever company you're in, never forget that you're a gentleman." Mingled with it there may also have been a dash of masculine vanity. The more he looked at the girl the more striking did her likeness to himself appear. Really, if he had had a sister she could not have been more like him, but he knew that he was an only child, and, besides, that thought was altogether unthinkable.

After a little pause, during which their eyes met and their cheeks flushed in a somewhat boy-and-girlish fashion, he laughed a trifle awkwardly and said:

"Well, then, we shall have to introduce ourselves, I suppose. My name is Maxwell—Vane Maxwell."

"Vane!" she echoed, "how funny! My name is Vane too—Carol Vane. It's not a sham one either, such as a lot of girls like me take. It's my own—at least, I have always been called Carol, and Vane was my mother's name."

"I see," said Maxwell, after another little pause, during which the oysters came and the waiter opened the wine. When he had filled the two glasses and vanished, Maxwell lifted his and said:

"Well, Miss Carol, it is rather curious that we should both have the same names, and also, if I may say so without flattering myself too much, be so much like each other. At any rate I shall venture to hope that your little accident at the Palace has enabled me to make a very charming acquaintance."

"That's very prettily put, Mr. Vane Maxwell," she said, nodding and smiling at him over her glass. "And now that we've been introduced in a sort of way, as we haven't got any more interesting subject to talk about, suppose we talk about ourselves. Which are you, Oxford or Cambridge?"

The conversation thus started rattled merrily along for over an hour. Without thinking any disloyalty to his own Enid, who was now a fair and stately maiden of eighteen, he found it quite impossible to resist the strange charm of Miss Carol's manner. She was obviously a lady by instinct, and she had also been educated after a sort. She had read widely if not altogether wisely, and she seemed just as familiar with the literature, or, at any rate, with the fiction of France and Italy as she was with that of England.

This she explained was due to the fact that until she was about twelve, that is to say some seven years ago, she had been constantly living and wandering about in these two countries with her mother and sometimes also with a gentleman who, as she put it, was pretty probably her father. She explained further that at the mature age of

thirteen she had run away from a French school in which she had been placed by some unknown agency and joined a wandering English circus-troop with which she had travelled half over Europe, leading a more or less miserable existence for some five years. She had then terminated her connection with the Ring by going into housekeeping with an English art-student in Paris. Meanwhile she had lost all trace of her mother, and had come to the conclusion that she had by this time drunk herself to death.

"I scarcely ever knew her to be quite sober," she said pathetically, and then she changed the subject.

It was not a very cheerful story, as story, but Miss Carol told it with such a quaint humour and such a vivacity of expression and gesture that, despite the under-note of tragedy, Maxwell thought it the most interesting story he had ever heard in his life.

As the courses disappeared and the empty bottle of wine was succeeded by a half bottle "just for the last," as Maxwell said, the conversation grew gayer and perhaps also a trifle freer, although Miss Carol never permitted herself any of those freedoms of expression with which too many of the so-called Daughters of Delight vulgarise themselves so hopelessly. When the half bottle was finished Maxwell wanted another, and to this Miss Carol promptly and firmly objected.

"If you will excuse me saying so to a new acquaintance," she said, "I wouldn't if I were you. We have both of us had enough of this stuff, nice and all as it is—at least, I have, and I think I'm more used to it than you. A coffee and liqueur if you like. That won't hurt us—in fact, it'll do us

good; but I can see something in your eyes that shouldn't be there."

"What do you mean?" said Maxwell, a trifle offended. "Surely you're not going to accuse me of the unpardonable crime of getting drunk in the company of a lady."

"Thank you!" she said simply, and yet with a decided dignity. "No, I don't mean that. It's a funny thing, you know," she went on, leaning her elbows on the table and staring straight into his eyes, "but there's a queer kind of light coming into your eyes, a sort of dancing, jumping yellow flame that makes them look almost red. Well, your eyes are almost exactly like mine, and mine are like my mother's, and whenever she'd got so far on with drink that she couldn't stop I used to see that light in her eyes. Of course I don't say that it means anything; still, there it is. I used to call it the danger signal, and keep away from her as much as I could till it was over, and I had to nurse her back to something like life."

"That's rather approaching the creepy," said Maxwell, with an almost imperceptible shrug of his shoulders. He had no feeling of offence now. She looked so pretty and she spoke so earnestly that it was impossible to be offended with her. Moreover, although he was far from even getting drunk, he felt a dreamy sensation stealing over him which seemed to be sapping his self-restraint and making him utterly careless of what he did or what happened to him so long as it was only pleasant.

"Really, it is decidedly curious," he went on. "I hope I haven't got the makings of a dipsomaniac in me. But I feel quite curiously happy, and I believe I could just go on

drinking and getting happier and happier until I landed in Paradise with you standing just inside the gates to welcome me."

"Don't!" she said almost sharply. "For goodness sake don't begin to talk like that. That's just how my mother used to feel, just how she used to talk, and she did go on—of course, there was no one to stop her. You should have seen her a couple of days after—a savage, an animal, a wild beast, only wild beasts don't get drunk. It's not a nice thing to say of your mother, even such a mother as mine was, but it's true, and I'm telling you because I like you, and it may do you some good."

"Thank you, Miss Carol! After that I shall certainly take your advice," he said, pouring his cognac into his coffee. "This is the last drink to-night, and that reminds me; it's getting rather late. How about going home?"

"I think it's about time," she said. "They close at twelve to-night, you know. Which way do you go?"

"Which way do *you* go?" he said, as he beckoned to the waiter for the bill. "By the way, I was going to ask you—I hope you have never seen that light, that danger signal, in your own eyes?"

She ignored his first question *in toto*, and replied:

"Yes, I saw it once when I got home after a pretty wild supper. It frightened me so that I went 'T.T.' for nearly a month, and just now I wouldn't drink another glass of that champagne if you gave me a thousand pounds to drink it."

"Well, I'm sure I shan't ask you after what you've said," he laughed, as he threw a couple of shillings on the plate which the waiter presented, and took up his bill. Then he got

up and helped her on with her cloak, and as she shook her shapely shoulders into it he went on:

"But you haven't answered my question yet."

"Which question?" she said, turning sharply round.

"Which way do you go—or do you intend to stop out a bit later?" he replied rather haltingly. "I thought perhaps I might have the pleasure——"

"Of seeing me home?" she said, raising her eyes to his and flushing hotly. "I'm afraid that's impossible. But go and get your coat and hat, and let's go outside. It's horribly close in here."

He paid his bill at the pay-box near the door, and when they got out into the street he took her by the arm and said, as they turned down towards the Circus:

"And may I ask why it is impossible, Miss Carol. I thought just now you said that you liked me a bit."

"So I do," she replied, with a little thrill in her voice; "and that's just why, or partly why—and besides, we're too much alike. Why, we might be brother and sister——"

"That is quite out of the question," he interrupted quickly; "I never had a sister. I am an only child, and my mother died soon after I was born. She died in India nearly twenty years ago."

"I can't help it," she said, almost passionately. "Of course we can't possibly be any relation, the idea's absurd; but still, it's no use—I couldn't, I daren't. Besides, have you forgotten what you were telling me about your fight on the steamer with that man we met at the Palace? Aren't you in love with the girl still? I quite understood you were engaged to her."

"Yes," said Maxwell frankly, "I am, and perhaps I ought to be ashamed of myself. That is two lessons you've taught me to-night, Miss Carol, and I shan't forget either them or you. Still, I don't see why we shouldn't be friends. Honestly, I like you very much, and you've said you like me—why shouldn't we?"

"Yes, that's true; I like you all right," she replied with almost embarrassing frankness; "but for all that it's something very different from love at first sight. It's funny, but do you know, Vane—I suppose if we're going to be friends I may call you Vane—although I think I could get to like you very much in one way, however different things were, I don't believe I could ever fall in love with you. But if you only mean friends, just real pals, as we say in my half of the world, I am there, always supposing that the friendship of such an entirely improper young person as I am doesn't do you any harm."

"Harm, nonsense!" he said. "Why should it? Well, that's a bargain, and now perhaps you won't object to tell me where you live."

"Oh, no, not now," she said. "I live at 15, Melville Gardens, Brook Green, with a very nice girl that you may also be friends with if you're good."

"Brook Green! Why, that's off the Hammersmith Road. We, that is to say dad and myself, live in Warwick Gardens, a bit this side of Addison Bridge, so if you really mean to go home we may as well get a hansom, and you can drop me at Warwick Gardens and go on."

"Of course I mean to go home, and I think that would be a very good arrangement."

They had crossed over to the pavement in front of the Criterion as she said this. It was on the tip of Maxwell's tongue to ask her to come in and have another drink. He certainly felt a greater craving for alcohol than he had ever done in his life before, and if he had been alone he might have yielded to it; but he was ashamed to do so after what he had just said to her, so he hailed an empty cab that was just coming up to the kerb. As he was handing his companion in, the door of the buffet swung open, and Reginald Garthorne came out with two other Cambridge men. They were all a trifle fresh, and as Garthorne recognised him he called out:

"By-by, Maxwell. Don't forget to say your prayers."

Maxwell turned round angrily with his foot on the step. If he had had that other drink that he wanted there would have been a row, but, as it was, a word and a gesture from Miss Carol brought him into the cab. There was an angry flush on her cheeks and a wicked light in her eyes, but she said very quietly, "Do you know, I am glad you thrashed that fellow once. He ought to be ashamed of himself shouting a thing like that out here. I suppose he thinks himself a gentleman, too."

"Oh, that's all right," said Vane. "Garthorne's a bit screwed, that's all. Everyone is to-night. But he's not at all a bad fellow. His father was a soldier in India, and did some very good service. He has a staff appointment at home. He's a baronet too—one of the old ones. His mother comes of a good stock as well. We've been very good chums since that first row. Fellows who fight as boys generally are."

"Oh, I daresay he's all right, but I didn't like it," said Miss Carol, leaning back in the cab. "And now suppose you tell me something more about yourself."

When the cab pulled up at the corner of Warwick Gardens and he said good-night, he asked her for a kiss. She blushed like a fourteen-year-old school girl as she replied:

"That's a great compliment, Vane, for I know how you mean it. But if you don't mind I really think I'd rather not, at least not just yet. You see, after all we've only known each other two or three hours. Wait until you know me at least a little better before you ask again, and then perhaps we'll see."

"Well, I daresay you're right, Miss Modesty," he laughed, as he got out. "In fact, you always seem to be right. Good-night, Carol."

"Good-night, Vane." As he stepped backwards from the cab she leant forward and smiled and waved her hand. A gentleman walking quickly from the direction of the bridge looked up and saw her pretty laughing face as the light of a lamp fell upon it. He stopped almost as suddenly as though he had run up against some invisible obstacle, and passed his hand across his eyes. Then the cab doors closed, the face vanished back into the shadow of the interior, and, to his utter amazement, Maxwell heard his father's voice say:

"God bless my soul. What a marvellous likeness!"

CHAPTER II.

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"Well, Vane!"

"Well, dad!"

"May I ask who that young lady in the cab with you was?"

Vane saw at once that he was in for it, and even if he had wished for any concealment, it was impossible under the circumstances. As a matter of fact, however, he had already made up his mind to tell his father the whole story of his little adventure, and so he said very gravely and deliberately:

"That, dad, is a young lady whose acquaintance I made to-night at the Palace. She nearly fainted in the crush just after the Biograph was over. She happened to be close behind me, and so of course she held on to me. I took her into one of the bars and gave her a brandy and soda. Then we noticed mutually how curiously like each other we were, and then—well, then I asked her to supper and she came. We have just driven here from the Trocadero. She has gone on to where she lives in Melville Gardens, Brook Green. I can tell you a lot more about her afterwards, if you like."

Sir Arthur Maxwell, Bart., K.C.B., K.C.S.I., looked keenly into his son's face while he was giving this rapid summary of his evening's adventure. There was and always had been the most absolute confidence between them. Ever since Vane had been old enough they had been companions and chums, rather than father and son, and so Sir Arthur had not the slightest doubt but that Vane was telling the absolute truth. He was only looking to see whether the telling of the

truth embarrassed him or not, and he was well pleased to see that it did not.

"Quite an interesting experience, I must say," he said, a little gruffly. "Well, I'm glad to see, at any rate, that you didn't accompany the young lady home. I presume you were invited."

"On the contrary, dad," replied Vane, this time with a little hesitation in his tone, "to tell you the honest truth——"

"That was a needless opening, Vane. My son could not tell anything else. Go on."

"Well, the fact is, dad, it was the other way about. I suggested it, and she refused point blank. I'm afraid I'd had rather too much fizz on top of too many brandies and sodas before supper."

"That will do, Vane," said his father, a little stiffly. "At any rate, thank God you are not drunk or anything like it. But this is hardly the sort of thing to discuss in the street. We'll go into the Den and have a chat and a smoke before we go to bed. You know I'm not squeamish about these things. I know that a lad of twenty is made of flesh and blood just as a man of thirty or forty is, and although I consider what is called sowing wild oats foolish as well as a most ungentlemanly pastime, still, I equally don't believe in the innocence of ignorance, at least not for a man."

"You seem to forget, dad," replied Vane, answering him in something very like his own tone, "just as I'm sorry to say I forgot for a minute or two to-night that I am engaged to Enid."

"Quite right, boy," said his father as they went in at the gate. "I didn't forget it though, and I'm glad you

remembered it."

"Only I ought to have said that it was the girl who reminded me of it," said Vane, as he put his latch-key into the door.

When they got into the Den, which was a sort of combination room, partly a library and partly study and smoking-room with a quaint suggestion of Oriental fantasy about it, Sir Arthur, according to his wont at that time of night, unlocked the spirit case, and mixed himself a whiskey and soda. As he did so, Vane found his eyes fixed on one of the bright cut-glass bottles which contained brandy. He would have given anything to be able to mix a brandy and soda for himself and drink it without believing, or at any rate fearing, that after all there might be something in Miss Carol's warning.

As Sir Arthur lit his cigar, he said in a rather forced tone:

"I suppose after what you've said it's no use asking you to have a nightcap, Vane?"

There was a little pause, during which Vane looked hard at the spirit-case. Then, with the gesture of one under strong emotion, he got up from his chair and said in a voice whose tone made his father look quickly towards him:

"I don't think I've ever knowingly disobeyed you in my life, dad, but if you were to order me to drink a drop of spirit to-night, I shouldn't do it."

"Why not, Vane?"

"Just look into my eyes, dad, and tell me if you see anything strange about them."

"What on earth do you mean, boy—there's nothing the matter with your eyes, is there?" said Sir Arthur, looking up

with a visible start, "what has put that idea into your head?"

"I'll tell you afterwards, dad, meanwhile, just have a look," replied Vane, coming and standing under the light.

He felt his father's hands tremble as he laid them on his shoulder, and as he looked into his eyes a tinge of greyness seemed to steal underneath the sun-bronze of his skin. In the clear depths of the lad's hazel eyes he saw a faint, nickering, wavering light, which gave a yellow tinge to them.

A reflection from the flames of hell itself could not have had a more awful meaning for him than that faint little yellow glimmer, but Arthur Maxwell was a strong man, a man who had fought plague and famine, storm and flood, treachery and revolt in the service of his Queen, and after a moment or two he was able to say quite quietly:

"Well, what's the matter, Vane? They look, perhaps, a little brighter than usual; but I don't suppose that's anything more than the excitement of the evening."

"Don't you see something like a little yellow flame in them?"

"Well, yes, I do," said Sir Arthur, looking away, "a reflection from the gaslight, probably. But come, Vane, what is all this about? Sit down and tell me. And, by the way, I want to hear the story of this new acquaintance of yours. Take a cigar; that won't hurt you."

Vane took a cheroot and lit it and sat down in an easy chair opposite his father, his eyes still wandering as though of their own accord towards the spirit-case. Then he began somewhat inconsequentially:

"Dad, what do you think that girl's name is?"

"Naturally, I haven't the remotest notion," replied his father. "I only know that she is exceedingly good looking, and I must say that from the glimpse I had of her, she seems very like yourself."

"Is that what you meant, dad, when you said, 'Bless my soul what a likeness,' or something like that when the cab stopped?"

Sir Arthur did not reply at once. His eyes were gazing vacantly up at a wreath of blue smoke from his cigar, then he replied suddenly:

"Eh? Oh, well, probably. You see, my boy, I was just a bit startled at seeing you get out, and when I saw your two faces in the lamplight, I confess that I was decidedly struck by the likeness."

Vane did not find this reply entirely convincing, for he remembered that as he got out of the cab his back was towards his father, and that Carol's face was no longer visible when he turned round and faced him. Still, he was far too well bred to put his father through anything like a cross-examination, and so he went on.

"Well, as I told you, I met this young lady—for although she is what respectable Society in its mercy call 'an unfortunate'—I am certain she *is* a lady—at the Palace, and we went and had supper in the Grill Room at the Trocadero, and there, as we had no one to introduce us, we introduced ourselves."

"The usual thing under such circumstances, I believe," said Sir Arthur, taking a sip at his whiskey. "Well?"

"I told her that my name was Vane Maxwell, and she said, 'Now that's curious, my name's Vane, too.'"

"What is that—her name!" said Sir Arthur with a start that nearly made him drop his glass. "Vane is not a girl's name."

"No, that's her surname. Her whole name is Carol Vane. Pretty, isn't it? Vane, she says, was her mother's name, and a nice sort of person she seems to have been. Poor Carol herself must have had a terrible time of it. There was no possibility of doubting a word of her story, she told it all so simply and so naturally, and yet it was tragedy all through.

"Well, we'd had a large bottle of fizz and a small one between us, and I'm afraid I was getting a bit on, for I wanted another. I wasn't drunk, you know, or anything like it. It didn't seem as though I could get drunk; only more and more gorgeously happy, and when I told Miss Carol, she put her elbows on the table and stared into my eyes and told me that they were just like her mother's, and that there was a light coming into them which she always used to see in hers when she was starting on one of her drinking bouts.

"Then she told me point blank that I'd had enough and said that she wouldn't drink another glass of fizz for a thousand pounds. We wound up with a coffee and liqueur, and afterwards when we came out I felt an almost irresistible craving for a brandy and soda, but I also felt convinced that if I took one I should go on all night.

"Still, somehow, what Miss Carol had been saying, although it hadn't exactly frightened me, certainly stopped me going into the Criterion and having one; besides, she was with me still, and I knew if I asked her she'd say 'No,' and somehow I daren't leave her and go in by myself. So as she lives out Brook Green way, we got into a cab and drove

home. And, would you believe it, she wouldn't even give me a kiss when we said good-night. She is a most extraordinary girl, I can quite imagine any fellow falling really and honestly in love with her."

While Vane was telling his story, his father had sat motionless, staring hard into the fireplace. He had apparently taken not the slightest interest in what he was saying. He had never once looked up, but as the story went on his face had grown greyer and greyer, and the lines in it harder and deeper, and every now and then the hand on which his cheek was leaning had trembled a little.

When Vane stopped speaking he looked up with a start, like a man waking out of an evil dream, and said in a husky, unsteady voice, which was quite strange to Vane:

"It is quite possible, my boy, that this girl, whatever else she may be, was really your guardian angel to-night. At your age, a craving for drink is a very terrible thing, and you must exert the whole strength of your nature to conquer it. You must fight against it and pray against it as you would against the worst of sins. You have a splendid career before you, but drink would ruin it and you. Still, we won't talk any more about this to-night. I am not feeling particularly well. I went round to dine with Raleigh, in Addison Gardens, to-night—by the way, Enid's coming back in a few days—and perhaps I caught a little chill walking home. I think I'd better turn in."

As he said this he took up the whiskey and soda and drained it, and Vane heard his teeth clink against the edge of the glass.

"And I think it's time I went, too," said Vane. "You certainly don't look very fit to-night, dad. Hope I haven't made you uncomfortable by what I've been saying. You needn't be afraid though. I don't think I shall forget the lesson I've had to-night."

"No, no, I don't think you will, Vane. Well, good-night. Put the spirits and cigars away, will you?"

"Good-night, dad! I hope you'll be all right in the morning."

As the door closed behind his father, Vane went to the table on which the open spirit-stand stood. His father had forgotten to replace the stopper in the whiskey decanter, and the aroma of the ripe old spirit rose to his nostrils. Instantly a subtle fire seemed to spread through his veins and mount up to his brain. The mad craving that he had felt outside the Criterion came back upon him with tenfold force. He raised the decanter to his nostrils and inhaled a long breath of the subtle, vaporous poison. He looked around the room with burning eyes.

He was alone. There was no guardian angel near him now. Moved by some impulse other than his own will, he took his father's glass and poured out half a tumblerful of whiskey, filled it with soda water from the syphon, and drank it down with quick feverish gulps. Then he set the glass on the table and went and looked at himself in an Indian mirror over the mantel-piece. The pupils of his eyes seemed twice their size, and in each a yellow flame was leaping and dancing.

His face seemed transfigured. It was rather that of a handsome satyr than of an English lad of twenty. The lips