



# Cry of the Peacock

*V.R. Christensen*

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## **Cry of the Peacock** V.R. Christensen

An illustrious marriage, a fortune, a position of wealth and influence. These are the dreams and ambitions of any Victorian woman of sense. Or are they?

Perhaps not for Arabella Gray.

The death of Abbie's father, the overseer of a large country estate, leaves her without means or resources, without, even, a place to live. Her landlords, in an extraordinary display of charity, invite her to live at Holdaway Hall. But the invitation is as puzzling as it is generous. Why are the Crawfords, who have never paid her any notice before, so concerned with her wellbeing now?

It's a question the younger Crawford brothers would like to have answered as well. Certainly Miss Gray is a mercenary upstart. Certainly their brother is mad for fancying himself in love with her. Such a union would make them a laughing stock. They mean to put a stop to it, but when they learn that her past is closely—even disturbingly—connected with their own, they are brought up short, forced to ask themselves some very hard questions.

As Abbie herself soon learns, there is a great mystery at the heart of her landlords' extraordinary offer. Everything she has ever dreamt of might be hers for the taking, but is the price worth it? More than her happiness alone rests upon her decision. If she refuses Ruskin Crawford's offer of marriage, will she be able to live with the consequences? If she does, will she be able to live with herself?

In the end, all must ask themselves some very hard questions. What does it mean to be a man or woman of honor and integrity? What does it mean, after all, to be a gentleman? And what, exactly, is the price of a woman's heart?

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