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UP HILL AND DOWN DALE

A Tale Of Country Life

BY

EDITH L. CHAMBERLAIN

IN THREE VOLUMES

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UP HILL AND DOWN DALE

CHAPTER I

TEDDIE

IT will be remembered that Lettice had long ago fallen out with Cornelia Andrews, and dismissed her from her service on account of a grave misdemeanour, and that it was only through a sort of accident that she returned to the Dale in the character of foster-mother to the little Edmund Dawes. So long as her presence was necessary to his welfare, his mother suffered Cornelia to remain an inmate of her house; but when, in due time, the child was weaned, Mrs Armell Dawes coldly informed the nurse that her services would be required no longer. Then followed a scene; Cornelia

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wept, wrung her hands, seized her nursling, hugged him to her breast, and vowed that she could not, would not leave her darling—her beautiful boy.

Lettice, as we know, disliked scenes, but it was not her way to end one by giving up the point which had raised it. She now drew herself up, and, ignoring cries and tears, repeated the notice to quit more coldly than before, adding that she did not choose to have in her house, or as a nurse to her son, a woman of bad character.

When Cornelia wept afresh, and began sobbing out some justification of her conduct, Lettice quietly took Teddie from her, and giving her some small order about work to be

done, left the room with her boy in her arms. In the afternoon she went to the Hill Farm. It was late in the autumn, and Mrs Dawes sat by the fire at work. Lettice took a seat opposite her; and after some talk about her young turkeys and the progress of the ploughing, she said suddenly,

'I have given Cornelia notice.'

'Whatever possessed you to do that?' asked Mrs Dawes, eyeing her daughter-in-law sharply, and with some displeasure.

'You must know the reason. I could not keep her before when I found out her character. I was

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not aware of her coming back to the house—none of us could help it. But now she is not wanted, I shan't keep her.'

There was an obstinate tone in Lettice's voice that might have warned her mother-in-law that discussion was useless, but Mrs Dawes did not observe such things.

'It's ridic'lous of you, Lettice. I told you so be-before. Farm servants is all like that, and must be put up with. Cornelia was very useful to you in a many ways; you'll not get another like 'er. Why didn't you speak to me about it afore you did such a thing?'

'She's *my* servant,' said Lettice with dignity.

But Mrs Dawes left this remark unnoticed. She pondered a while, then said reproachfully, 'A fine job I shall have to get her to stay.'

'She is not going to stay. I shall not keep her,' repeated Lettice more decidedly than before.

'You're a fool. What 'arm could Cornelia do you?'

'I won't have such a woman about Teddie.'

'What 'arm could she do to a child like Teddie?' asked Mrs Dawes with a sneer.

'She would put things in his head when he grew older,' cried Lettice almost passionately, 'she

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would make him rude, and coarse, and wicked; and he would think lightly of sin.'

'Sin! Pouf! Nonsense! I never 'eard such rubbish in my life. You must be crazy Lettice. It's well you've got me to look after you, or a nice mess you'd make of it with your 'igh flown notions. I tell you, you 'ad ought to keep Cornelia.'

'I will not keep her. I am willing and thankful you should advise me with the farm, but Teddie is my own—my very own; and I will manage him myself.'

'Go and do it then, you fool! and make the best you can of it. I'll wash my 'ands of you altogether,' said Mrs Dawes furiously, rising as she spoke, and emphasizing her words by sweeping vigorously into the fire, some shreds of calico that clung to her woollen apron. Lettice took her at her word, and went home straightway, fluttered a little by the second storm she had gone through that day—a little fearful of how her worldly affairs might prosper without the guidance of her husband's mother, yet glad on the whole, that she had asserted her right and intention to have the superintendence of her own child, and comforting herself with the thought that Joe Porter's ready counsel was always at her service.

During the next few days Cornelia was pale,

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silent, and sulky; she watched her mistress carefully, but took very little notice of Teddie who was restless and cross over the operations of dressing and feeding by his mother's unaccustomed hands.

One afternoon Cornelia came to her mistress, and standing before her with downcast eyes and blank expressionless face, asked leave to go out. This was very willingly granted, for Lettice was fretted by the very sight of the woman, especially when Teddie cried to go to her; and she hoped that Cornelia might be going in search of a new place; she watched her down the lane, and almost wished she might not return. Cornelia trudged along through the autumn mud in her best attire —a dress of claret-coloured merino, the full skirt adorned with a single flounce; a short, straight-cut, loose jacket of black cloth, edged with a narrow beaded trimming; a fawn-coloured silk bonnet having a bunch of blue flowers at the side, and a pair of crumpled green kid gloves completed her costume. She held her large umbrella tightly by both hands, her eyes were bent on the road before her, and she seemed deeply lost in thought. She went along the lane

leading to the village, then presently turned off the high road up another lane, mounting the steep ascent towards the Hill Farm.

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Half-way up this 'bonk' as the Brookshire folks call it, she observed that the gate was open of a field in which a ploughman was at work with his team of horses, and a small boy in attendance. When Cornelia heard the shout of 'Aw-oot!' to the horses, she paused, then walked to the gateway, whence she could see the plough turning at the end of a furrow on the further side of the field. She raised her hand above her eyes to assist her sight; and then, apparently having found what she wanted she dropped her hand, and waited until the plough had worked its away across the field once more. When the horses' feet rested on the 'adlands,'* she stepped into the field and shouted,

'John Turner!'

The ploughman looked round, started, stared open-mouthed at the figure by the gate; then recovering himself, said something to the boy, and with his slow, slouching gait, approached the spot where Cornelia awaited him, standing under the hedge, among the wet docks, coltsfoot, and rank grass that grew on the adlands.

'Be that you, Cornelie?' said the man. 'W'at brings ya 'ere at this time o' daay?'

* A piece of ground left at the ends of the furrows for the ploughs to turn on.

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'Why, I walked 'ere,' said Cornelia, sharply, 'I come 'cos I wanted to see you.'

'Did 'ee now? Well, I never! Wuoy 'ow smart ya be!' he said with a chuckle. 'Well, w'at is it, Neelie? I munna lave them danged 'arses long. That thar b'y, 'e's a gallus 'un'—

'Just come into the lane a minute,' implored Cornelia, 'an' then I'll tell 'ee w'at I comed for.'

'Well —ya mun look sharp,' continued the ploughman, following his visitor into the lane; but when there, the lady seemed to have grown suddenly bashful. She stirred up a puddle with the end of her umbrella, and then began to make an elaborate network of holes with the same weapon in the soft, wet sandstone of the high hedge-bank.

'Ya mun look sharp,' repeated John Turner. Still she did not speak, and he shifted uneasily from one leg to the other.

'I 'a no time to loose, I mun finish this piece to-daay—missis 'ave give ma a daay off o' Thursday ta go ta the Match,' he said. 'Speak up, Neelie— w'at is it, lass?'

Thus encouraged she looked up at him, and blurted out—

'You remember w'at you axed me at Michaelmas, John?'

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'Aye—I does.'

'An w'at you axed me at 'aymakin'—and at the Christmas?'

'Aye, far sure; an' I'd 'a axed ya at Candlemas on'y'-

'Well,' said Cornelia gazing into the puddle at her feet, 'w'at I've come 'ere to saay is—that if you wants me now, you can 'ave me.'

There was no immediate reply; Cornelia looked up at the man, and he gave a long low whistle.

'W'at d' you mean John? Don't you want ta marry me after all?'

He shuffled his feet again, then leant against the tall red bank for support. Seeing Cornelia looking at him, he said slowly,

'T'aint that. I be in a proper fix, surelie!'

'A mess, John! W'at do you mean?'

Cornelia's pale cheeks glowed with a faint red, and her eyes gleamed with a dull fire.

'P'r'aps you don't cahr for me any longer,' she said. 'I aint so young as I was, I knows, an' I baint good-looking like some on 'um—but I'd 'a made you a good wife John—an' 'taint so long ago as you thought so yer own sen.'

"Taint that neither,' said John, deliberately. 'Ya sees, Neelie, I'd axed ya agen an' agen, an' 'twuz allus "No;" an' a chap wants some 'un to make it a bit

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comfurtubble far 'im, an' so, thinken 'twuz no good, I ups an axes that owd Molly Green down yander,' pointing to the village with his thumb. 'Aye, so I did, last Toosd'y evenin' as ever wuz—blamed if I didn't!'

'Molly Green at the beershop?' enquired Cornelia, in a tone of genuine alarm.

'Aye, sure! 'Ers got a nice bit o' brass, ya knaow, Neelie; but 'ers an owd cat fur ahl that, an' if so be as I'd thought as you'd come round, I oodn't 'a axed 'er, not if it 'ad bin ever so. W'ats maad ya chaange yer mind ahl uv a suddin like this?'

Cornelia informed this strange lover that she was to leave the Dale, and added, with a burst of crying,

'I can't bear to go away. I mightn't get a place this side o' Braybridge again; an' I loves that child as if 'e wuz my own!'

John rubbed his big hand over his forehead.

'Well, dinna cry lass,' he said consolingly. 'I mun think w'at I can do. P'r'aps I can get shut o' the widda.'

He rose as he spoke and came closer to Cornelia, who crept up and laid her hand on his arm, and said half anxiously, half caressingly,

'I'll be as good to ya, John, as never was!'

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'There, there,' he replied, patting her vigorously on the back. 'I'll get shut on 'er, Neelie, I'll get shut on 'er. I canna stop now, or us 'ull ave the missus down on us, an' 'er 'ull make ever such a 'ow-d'ye-do. S'pose ya meets me by the bridge over the marshes to-morra evenin', an' I'll make shift to fix wa't to do afore then.'

He wound up his speech and the conversation at this juncture, by bestowing a kiss on Cornelia's cheek, and then disappeared into the field.

It was evening when Cornelia returned to the Dale, and finding no one in the kitchen, she went upstairs, guided by certain well-known sounds, to the door of a bedroom, at which she knocked, and then opened without waiting for an answer. She could scarcely restrain a smile at the sight of her mistress, hot and flushed, sitting with Teddie stretched on her knee, he shrieking with passion, his plump white limbs so rigid that his young mother could, by no means, invest him in the little night-dress she held ready.

'Let me take 'im, ma'am,' said Cornelia, gently and Lettice, quite worn out, was almost glad to own herself beaten, and with a sigh of relief gave up the boy to his nurse.

His screams soon ceased when he felt himself

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lifted by the familiar arms, his stiffened muscles relaxed, and he only heaved an occasional sob while Cornelia finished preparing him for bed, and talked and petted him into quietness.

By the time she laid him down, his thumb was in his mouth, and a look of supreme content on the baby's face. Lettice hated to see it, since it was not called there by her, while Cornelia smiled out of pure pleasure in looking at her chubby foster-child.

The mother and nurse stood side by side, watched in silence till Teddie was fast asleep, then Cornelia turned to her mistress.

'O ma'am, I cannot leave him!' she said very earnestly. 'I cannot bear to leave the little darling! and he is so used to me—you see that, don't you? You won't send me from him?'

'I have told you I would not keep you, Cornelia; what is the use of asking me again?'

'Oh, it is cruel! cruel! If I were *married* would you let me stay?'

'Married! Are you going to be married?'

'Yes'm; to a very respectable man 'm; and we might take a cottage near, and me come 'ere days, just the same.'

'Whom are you going to marry?'

'John Turner, ma'am.'

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'At the Hill?'

'Yes'm. 'Ee's axed me ever so often, an' now it's settled, an' you know 'e's at work all the day, there'll be nothin' 'ardly for me to do all my time, an' I might just as well come 'ere! An' I'll turn my 'and to anythin', and do the work o' two if you'll let me stop. It 'ull be a savin' far you too, for I 'oodn't want but my dinner an' tea,' sobbed Cornelia, piling up every argument she could think of, as she saw no sign of relenting in the fair calm face before her.

'Such an arrangement would never do,' said Lettice coolly. 'It is of no use for you to say more, Cornelia, I shall not alter my mind; and you will only wake Teddie by your crying. Come down stairs.'

But Cornelia only sobbed the louder for this injunction, she tried to speak but could not do so, till at last she drew one hand savagely across her eyes, while with the other she felt in her large pocket for a minute handkerchief of spotted calico. She blew her nose vehemently, and then after a few sniffs, she subsided all at once into her usual stolid self.

'I'll ax you nothin', no more, Mrs Dawes,' she said. 'Don't you fear. But I shan't be far off.

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I shall see the child sometimes? You won't object to that?'

'I don't know. I will think about it,' said Lettice, hesitatingly. She was surprised and puzzled by this sudden change of manner, and was, in fact, anything but pleased to know that Cornelia would remain in the parish.

The next morning when she came downstairs her younger servant met her with wide-opened eyes.

'Please'm 'ave you seed Cornelia?'

'No; why do you ask?'

'Then, please 'm, she's gone!'

'What do you mean, Jane?'

'She's nowhere about, 'm. I thought there was somethin' wrong last night—she seemed that low, an' couldn't eat 'er supper. An' afore you went to bed she went into your room, and I saw 'er myself kissin' the baby, an' cryin' over him like as if she'd break 'er 'eart. An' when we was gone to bed, she cried, an' moaned, an' carried on so that I couldn't get to sleep. An' 'twasn't till four o'clock—I 'eard it strike—as she seemed to get quiet like. I went straight off to sleep then—I was that tired. An' when I woke this mornin', I knowed it was late, an' thought she'd gone on down. But when I come down, she were nowheres to be found, an' the back

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door was open. An' would you please come upstairs an' look at her room, ma'am?'

The bedclothes were thrown back, as if by a person rising hastily, the little room was altogether in disorder. All Cornelia's things, (and she had many possessions) were gone, with the exception of one box, which stood ready packed, locked, and corded.

Lettice gazed round the room, then walked to the window, and opened it; she set a chair straight, and stripped the bed, so as to air it more thoroughly. Then she said very quietly to the astonished Jane, 'I suppose she will come back to fetch her box. Go and get the milk for baby's breakfast.

'This is a queer go!' said Jane to herself. 'One 'ud think missis 'ad 'elped Cornelia to run away. I wonder if she thinks I can do all the work, an' mind the baby, an' make the butter! A likely thing indeed!'

Jane was surprised to find how hard the mistress worked that morning.

Lettice was on her feet till late in the afternoon, and Teddie was almost neglected that day.

Towards evening Lettice had occasion to go to her work basket, and pinned to the top of it she found a folded bit of coarse paper, on which was written,

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'Yu cann send Corneelia Andrews's bocks an' wayges too mee at the Kraus Kees Inn, Long Upton.'

Having deciphered this with some trouble, for it was soiled and smudged, as well as ill spelt, Lettice despatched Joe Porter with the box and the money to the little public house in the village: and then she flattered herself she was well and entirely rid of her son's late nurse.

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CHAPTER II

CORNELIA *versus* THE WIDOW

THE Kingsford papers of the following week, contained notices of a ploughing match held under the auspices of the Braybridge Agricultural Society; and Marjory laughed as she read in the *Gazette* that one of the most coveted prizes had been gained by John Turner, in the employ of Mrs Dawes, the Hill Farm, Long Upton.

She laughed as she recalled the ploughman's shaggy head; long, pointed, brown face; tall thin figure, knock knees, and slouching gait; his awkward appearance and slow dull manner, which veiled a great amount of cunning, were an old source of amusement to her.

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She would have laughed still more had she known the issue of John's success.

We are not concerned with him in this story and must not linger to describe at length this crisis of his life; suffice it to say that when he resumed his work after the interview

with Cornelia in the lane, he turned over in his mind every reason for and against each of the rival candidates for his hand.

Molly Green had the 'bit o' brass'—but Cornelia was the younger and 'more comfortable' of the two.

John found it difficult to choose between them, and before he finished ploughing the piece, he had come to the curious conclusion that he would leave it to the ploughing match to select his wife for him. If he lost the prize for which he meant to contend, he would console himself with Mrs Green's savings; if he won, he would marry Cornelia, and 'get shut o' the widda'.'

It wanted three days to that fateful Thursday, and in the interval John was stolid and indifferent over his work, as though no such important question hung in the balances; and when he heard his name announced as the winner of the first prize in class II, he merely exclaimed,

'By gam! so that's 'ow it's ta be!'

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Then, in accordance with a plan he had already formed, he returned to Long Upton immediately after receiving his prize money, instead of remaining to make merry in Braybridge with his fellow competitors.

He proceeded, not to the Cross Keys, where Cornelia was pining to know her fate, but to the beer-house of Mrs Molly Green. Here he talked loudly of his success, treated one or two friends who came in, and shortly grew so uproarious and quarrelsome on such a comparatively short allowance of beer, that the hostess gazed at him in reproachful amazement, and after a time, in fear of a scandal, had him expelled from the premises.

On the following day he called and addressed the widow in a tone of injured innocence,

'I've stepped in to tell 'ee, Mrs Green, ma'am, as 'ow it 'urts ma very much ta think 'ow ya served ma last night. An' I dunner think it's 'ow ya did ought ta ha' done, bein' as things wuz as thaay wuz between we. An' if ya've got no more thought far me than that—grudgin' a chap a bit o' pleasure when 'e's earned it well—my notion is, as us 'ad best part.'

Whereupon Mrs Green—a tall gaunt woman of fifty summers—flung up her head, and replied, 'I quite agree with you, Mr Turner, for my

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part. I've got a house over my head an' a good business, an' can get along, thank goodness, without a man in the place—let alone a 'usband—let alone a ploughman! An' I'm one as likes things straayt forrud, an' scorns double dealin'; an' if some folks meets other folks down by the Marsh, it stands to reason thaay don't do it fur nothin', they means summat by it; and you needna' suppose but what I've got friends as 'ood come an' tell me when I wuz bein' made a fool on in that fashion! An' w'at I 'eerd about yer, John Turner, this mornin,' is w'at I'd never a 'a' believed, if it 'adn't bin fur your be'aviour last night, which it wuz disgraceful, an' never come o' w'at you 'ad in this 'ouse. You'd bin up at the Cross Keys a drinkin' along o' that other 'ooman afore ever you came a-nigh me. An' all I 'opes is as she'll never live to repent o' listening to ya. I'll not put up wi' such falseness; an' I 'opes you'll never darken my doors again!'

This wish was religiously observed, and on the following Sunday the banns of John Turner and Cornelia Andrews were put up in Long Upton Church.

At the beginning of December he took his bride home to his curious little slice of a house, which looked as though it had been cut out of the middle of a row in some back street of a town, and dropped

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down casually in the corner of a field on the Hill Farm.

'One marriage makes many,' it is said, but Mrs Dawes quoted a different proverb, when (after hearing Cornelia's banns asked for the second time) 'Melia came to her, and announced that she and Peter were about to be married.

'One fool makes many,' said Mrs Dawes, 'but Turner's gettin' on in years, and Cornelia's no chicken, an' 'e's got a 'ouse an' furniture an' all; and if they chooses to get married it's their own look out—but *you*—a couple o' children, as can't neither of you do a day's work without you're followed all the while—it's the silliest thing I ever 'eard tell on, all my days!'

She poured forth such vials of wrath and scorn on the heads of the devoted pair, that when, in the midst of a tirade, she accused them of supposing she would keep, feed, house, and clothe them both for the rest of their lives, they turned upon her and said that

neither of them would stay in her service at any price. At this she pronounced them guilty of base ingratitude, and dismissed them at once.

Peter had no home to go to, so he accompanied 'Melia to the abode of her parents, where she wept over their misfortunes as she sewed her wedding

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garments, but tried to brighten up in Peter's presence, and did her best to console her betrothed, who had taken the taunts of his late mistress very much more to heart than she had done.

Meanwhile Mrs Dawes was left with only Martha Short to assist her, and soon made herself ill with overwork.

Then the ploughman's bride came to the rescue, and proved herself so capable, that positively no fault, worth mentioning, could be found with what she had done while Mrs Dawes was laid aside.

Not only had she done her work well, but she contrived to infuse new life into poor scared little Martha, who had grown daily more frightened and helpless, since that terrible occasion when 'Melia fell out with the mistress.

When it was arranged that Mrs Turner should work at the farm four days a week, both contracting parties were well pleased, for Mrs Dawes felt that she should be better served, and at less cost, than when she kept two 'gurls' in the house; while Cornelia had already found that her days spent alone in the narrow red cottage, were dull and uninteresting.

Moreover, she must earn something for herself, since the astute Mr Turner had given her to understand, after their marriage, that he would not make

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a home for those pale children in Braybridge Union; nor should one penny of his go to pay the sum demanded by the parish for their maintenance. Thus it happened that Cornelia only left the service of the younger Mrs Dawes to enter that of the elder one; and now the latter, having re-arranged her own household affairs so satisfactorily,

turned her attention once more to those of her daughter-in-law, on whom she had not the slightest intention of relaxing her hold.

Her innate love of managing was far too strong to be quenched by anything Lettice had done or was likely to do. So after leaving her to her own devices for some five or six weeks, and finding that no appeal was made, as she had expected, to her to overlook past offences and advise as before, Mrs Dawes made a virtue of necessity, and went to the Dale, one day shortly before Christmas, to invite Teddie and his mother to dinner on Christmas Day.

She determined to ignore the late rupture between herself and her daughter-in-law, so she rapped sharply at the door, and then burst it open, as usual, without waiting for a response. Lettice was walking up and down the kitchen looking weary and anxious; Teddie was in her arms, his head hanging over her shoulder. He uttered an incessant fretful cry; his eyes were

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swollen, his cheeks tear-stained, and a bright red patch burnt on each of them.

"Ow d'ye do, Lettice—cold enough, ain't it? There'll be a sharpish frost to-night I know. If you're goin' to send the team to Morley Edge for coal to-morrow, them 'arses must be roughed. I've bin tellin' Joe about it, an' 'e ought to wauve a piece o' sackin' or somethin' over them swedes as is lying yonder, or they'll be frosted as sure as you're alive. I've come to ask if you'll bring Teddie, an' come to dinner o' Christmas day—it 'ull be lonesome for you with on'y the child— Marjory's comin' over. What ails the little chap? Teethin' I suppose. Give 'im to me; you look reg'lar wore out. Why, what a mouth to be sure! 'E's got three teeth comin' through at wunst—no wonder 'e's fretchet. Why ever didn't you come to me? I'd ha' give you somethin' to ease it a bit.'

If Lettice had not been really wearied out and unhappy about her boy, it is probable that she would have received her mother-in-law very coldly and have declined both her invitation and her advice.

But in truth she had had a very bad time of it lately with Teddie, who had given her no rest day or night. She, poor girl, knew nothing of teething, except that it was sometimes accompanied by

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convulsions—if Teddie had convulsions what should she do? Mrs Porter had prescribed first some simple remedy which proved inefficacious, then another which sounded to Lettice ominously like a spell—and so she would have none of it.

The sight of her mother-in-law was therefore a welcome one; and again the two women made peace over Teddie; while, on Christmas Day a third reconciliation was brought about by his means. When Lettice arrived at the Hill, she was admitted by Cornelia, whom Teddie recognised, and greeted with a series of crowing chuckles, which were so near to speech as to delight and melt his mother's heart.

Marjory was very silent that day; she could not but think, often and sadly, of the two previous Christmas Days, when Armell had been with them, but she kept her thoughts to herself, for no such recollections appeared to trouble her mother or Lettice. The latter wore a black dress, it is true; and looked a little older and graver than she used to do; but Teddie had cut those troublesome teeth, and his mother's face was serenely proud as she displayed the tiny ivory dots, and listened to the grandmother's comments on her bonny boy. And Mrs Dawes—had she no longing for the touch of a vanished hand?

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Down in the depths of her heart was a passionate desire to know what had become of her son, and what had been the cause of his disappearance. She had parted with him so early in his life, and understood him so little when he returned to her, that she felt no keen sense of horror at the thought of his guilt—only a fear of shame to herself, Marjory and Teddie. This fear was so strong as to overcome even her naturally intense curiosity, and though she longed to ask Robert Midgely what evil he knew of her son, yet she never summoned up courage to do so.

But had anyone told her suddenly of some terrible crime committed by Armell, she would have expressed little or no surprise; for we know that 'extremes meet,' and that it is only very unscrupulous people, or very charitable ones who hear such tidings, without loud exclamations of wonder, anger, or disgust.

Whatever feelings animated Mrs Dawes this Christmas-tide, were successfully concealed by her loud talk and laughter.

She had asked the Midgelys to dinner, and made some cakes which she meant to outshine Miss Midgely's Yorkshire ones; and she had sold a 'fat beast' for rather more than the steward had received for his; therefore she was triumphant.

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As they went home, the brother and sister remarked to each other that they should have had a pleasant afternoon enough, had it not been for the baby—'that little pest,' Louie called him.

This was by no means her last complaint of Teddie, and presently she noticed with some surprise that each time she remarked to her brother 'how spoilt and tiresome that child was,' he agreed with her more warmly.

He trusted his sister to a great extent, and she knew much concerning him that was not suspected by the Brookshire public, yet he had secrets even from her, and she never guessed, at that time, how more than one of his plans was baulked by the very existence of the little lisping boy at the Dale.

* * * * *

Three quiet uneventful years passed away at Long Upton.

Mr Metcalfe worked in his unobtrusive loving way among the flock committed to his charge; spending and being spent for them; only his servants remarked that he grew a little greyer, a little older, more silent, and even more studious than he used to be.

'He wants the young squire back to liven him up a bit,' they said.

Mrs Dawes farmed, schemed, and laid plans for

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the future of her little grandson, more ambitious than any she had entertained for her own children. Lettice did her duty to God and her neighbour, as far as she knew it, in her own precise unbending fashion; only reserving for her boy a passionate love, and intense sympathy which made her— where he was concerned—quite another woman.

Cornelia quarrelled with her husband, and proved to herself very completely, that marriage is not a cure for all evils.

Turner had his ideas of wifely decorum, and although he spent many evenings at the Cross Keys, and frequented fairs, races, and other merrymakings when able to do so, he

would not allow his wife to partake of these—the only pleasures she knew of. She felt the need of something to amuse, excite, and fill up her time and thoughts when she was not engaged at the farm, and so she devoured large quantities of greasy novels, and periodicals of the sensational order, which she obtained weekly from a small library at Braybridge.

One day when Teddie was just four years old, two letters arrived at Long Upton, one for the rector, the other to the housekeeper at the Hall, the contents of which were made known in the village, and roused the inhabitants to a pitch of excitement hitherto unparalleled in their history.

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Mr Temple was in England; he was to be married at Easter to Lord Marleigh's youngest daughter, and would bring his bride home at Whitsuntide.

Here was news indeed!

Would the squire live among them again?

It seemed almost too good to be true.

But the rector had said so, and he was sure to know!

Before all the wonder and speculation was exhausted, a whole regiment of workmen, as it seemed to the unsophisticated villagers, arrived at the Hall; masons, and carpenters, followed in turn by painters, decorators, and upholsterers. Never had any woman so many callers as Mrs Baker in those days; and she, good-natured body, was ready enough to tell all she knew. The housekeeper's character was usually summed up by the expression, 'she's too stand off,' which signified that she made no acquaintances herself, even among the farmers' or tradesmen's wives, nor did she encourage communication between her underlings and the village.

Under these sad circumstances, what oracle so good as the head gardener's wife, who inhabited a curious Gothic residence at the garden entrance on the Braybridge road, and must therefore be able to answer any question as to the preparations at the

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Hall. Moreover, she was a Brookshire woman herself, and had some feeling for the thirst for information which tormented all the Long Upton folks at such a time.

After a while some one enquired whether there would not be a 'do' when the squire came home. It was remarked that the last 'do' at the Hall had been the ball, immediately after which Mr Temple left home—five years ago now. Some imaginative and romantic person observed that Lady Marleigh had been at that ball with some of her daughters. Perhaps Mr Temple had fallen in love with her then, and went to foreign parts after her, or because of her.

Mrs Baker knew that the squire had written from Rome to announce his engagement, and that the Marleigh family were there at the time; so this suggestion was well received, and finally adopted by the gossips of the neighbourhood, till it was overthrown by the discovery that the bride was now only eighteen, and therefore could not have been present at a ball five years ago.

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CHAPTER III

LONG UPTON *EN FÊTE*

MRS DAWES first heard the news from Mr Midgely; and he was not a little puzzled by the strong exclamations she uttered in her first surprise, and at the guarded manner she assumed immediately afterwards. When he was gone, she reflected on the intelligence he had brought with mingled regret and satisfaction.

Mr Temple might have asked Marjory once again, she thought; though, to be sure, it would be of no use, for she would only refuse him. Still it was something to be proud of that a gentleman of his age and standing, who might have his choice from all the young ladies in England, should have

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remained so long unmarried for the sake of Margaret Dawes. And if he *must* marry—which, of course, he must in his position—and if Marjory would not consent to be his wife, why the next best thing he could do was, obviously, to marry a daughter of the house of Marleigh, the only family in England for which she, Pamela Dawes, had an unbounded respect. For the bride-elect, the Honourable Grace Marleigh, she felt a contemptuous pity—the young lady had to put up with the shattered remains of a heart that her daughter had rejected and broken. But though that aspect of the matter was not unpleasing, yet Mrs Dawes still cherished a grudge against the squire himself because

he had been so easily repulsed, and had taken Marjory's first 'No' for an answer. She would have been injured indeed had she known the actual facts of Hugh's engagement to Grace Marleigh.

He had gone abroad after his rejection by Marjory, in a sore and unhappy frame of mind; and a fellow feeling led him to protect and befriend little Grace, who was then at the 'ugly duckling' stage, and much snubbed and tormented by her elder sisters, who argued that 'the child,' as they called her, should have been left at Marleigh with her governess, and not taken to the Riviera with a party of grown up people whose pursuits

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she could not share. Grace was indeed childish for her years, and accepted Hugh's little kind attentions, with all a child's freedom, loudly expressing her opinion of his looks and merits. The girlish devotion and affection were wonderfully consoling to the lonely young man, who felt his loneliness the more when among the merry family parties of Bentley and Marleigh.

He kept a warm recollection of Grace, and was first distressed, then piqued, at the cold, stiff dignity with which she greeted him after two years' absence. How he quarrelled with her, went away, and was miserable; how she cried when he left; how he came back and told her he had been cross because he cared for her so much—because he loved her; and how after a long time, she confessed that she had never loved anyone but him—all this was a pretty little romance never known to the Long Upton people.

When the bride came home they looked at her tall slight figure, fair hair, and large grey eyes, and they said she looked delicate, and was very young; and they did not guess, though in time they found out, what strength of character lay under that pale Marleigh face, with its aquiline nose, and small curved mouth. Grace was very quiet in society, and shy, yet graceful and dignified; but though

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silent, she was very observant, had a real enjoyment of life, and a sense of fun which had made her lately the light of her home, and would henceforth be the delight of her husband.

Midgely had written to Mr Temple, and told him that the tenants were preparing to receive him and his wife with processions, arches, ringing of bells, &c., and that their

fear was that he might arrive at night, when some of their preparations would be useless. He thought it best to inform Mr Temple of this intention on their part, lest the public reception should be disagreeable to him.

The letter was a clever one, and cost some time and trouble, but it produced the desired effect— that of gaining credit for the writer, both from his employer, and from the tenantry.

Mr Temple wrote thanking his steward for the hint; and announced that he and Mrs Temple would drive over from Marleigh, arriving about twelve o'clock, so that full justice should be done to the procession, and other kind attentions paid them by their neighbours. And he gave directions that a dinner should be provided for the men, and a tea for women and children; a band was to be engaged from Kingsford, a tent for dancing erected on the lawn, and games to be held in the meadows beyond. Midgely was in his element while carrying out

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these instructions; and he took care to let it be known that to *him* the people would owe their entertainment on this great occasion.

Grace insisted that she and Hugh should send out the invitations themselves, though her husband rather shrank from it, being uncertain whether or not to include Marjory in the one sent to Mrs Dawes. The bride sat with a list of names before her, and questioned Hugh about the people, their family, and circumstances, as they filled in the printed invitation cards.

She was bent on knowing them all.

'Dawes, Hill Farm,' she read. 'Mrs Dawes—and who else, Hugh?'

'Mrs Dawes—and there's a daughter; I suppose we must ask her?'

'Of course we must. Mrs and Miss Dawes. I can fancy them—with big noses and croaky voices! What sort of people are they, Hugh?'

'Oh, respectable enough. But we shall never have done if you chatter so! Go on. Mrs A. Dawes, Dale Farm.'

From the bottom of his heart Mr Temple hoped that both these invitations might be refused. He fully meant to tell Grace some day about his old love for Marjory Dawes; but if the mistress of the Hill Farm came to his wedding festivities, the

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confession must be made first, for Mrs Dawes would certainly find occasion to claim his wife's acquaintance on the score of her former connection with the Marleighs; and when her tongue was once set going who knew where it would stop?

Mrs Dawes did accept the invitation, after having relieved her feelings by sarcastic remarks on the new-fangled fashion of cards, on Mrs Temple's hand-writing, and other small matters.

She never told Marjory that she was asked, but thought it necessary to go herself, since her absence would certainly be remarked by the neighbours, if not by the squire himself. So she shook out her black satin dress, had her bonnet retrimmed, and took Teddie with her to the Hall; for Lettice would not go. It was only when any question arose of showing herself in public, that she seemed to feel her peculiar position; she said nothing, but her reason was understood; how should a woman take part in rejoicings, who knew not if she were a wife or a widow?

Robert Midgely expressed great regret that she had not come, and Mr Cox asked after her, but was too keenly disappointed at missing Marjory, to give much thought to Lettice.

No one else noticed her absence, for indeed half the country seemed to be there, gentle and

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simple; and the gardens, shrubberies, lawns and meadows were so thronged with people that you could not hope to do more than recognise a few of your friends in the crowd.

Mr Cox had been specially asked, as a recognised genius in the ordering of processions.

Mr Weaver, the village schoolmaster, a queer, little shrivelled-looking old man, was very jealous of his Braybridge rival, to whose school the blacksmith, the carpenter, and some of the farmers sent their big boys; but he did not pretend to be able to decide which of these worthies should walk first, or present an address, or carry a banner. He felt he had done all that was befitting, when he had nailed up a strip of pink calico across the front of his house, bearing these words in white letters,

'We praise thee O God, man was not made to live alone.'

Cornelia was allowed a day out for this once, and flaunted about in odds and ends of faded finery. Mrs Porter was there in the neat old-fashioned garb that suited her so well; and Joe and Dick with gorgeous new neckerchiefs,—yellow, red, and green.

The weather was clear and fine, but not warm; a keen air made the girls shiver in the pink print dresses, which most of them wore; having washed,

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and starched, and ironed, and goffered them with infinite pains, as being the most suitable raiment for the occasion.

Everyone who has lived in the country knows something of such galas as this; how constrained and awkward are the guests before 'feeding time;' how oppressively silent and absorbed over their food; how all, in a minute, their tongues begin wagging when the meal is over; how races are run and poles climbed; and how unique is the style of the dancing.

The *fête* at Long Upton was no exception to the rule, only that perhaps at those held in honour of weddings, the brides do not always take such an interest in their poorer guests as Grace Temple did.

'There's a delightful old woman, Hugh, let's go and speak to her; who is she?'

'Oh, that's Betty Crundell, she used to be laundry maid at the Hall long ago. How do you do, Betty? This is Mrs Temple, she wants to know you.'

'It's very good on 'er, I'm sure, the dear young critter,' quavered Betty, putting out a brown and palsied hand. 'I used to wash fur yer 'usband's faather, my dear, when 'e were a fine young man, an' went out to fight the French—no, it were 'is gran'faather—oh, my poor 'ead!'

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'Mother's very bad to-day,' said a stout, elderly woman who bustled up to old Betty's side. 'She gets moitherin' so, an' doesn't know who she's talkin' to. I 'ope, ma'am, if she's said anything she oughtn't, as you'll kindly overlook it on account of 'er age—eighty-seven come next August.'

'What a great age! Do you live with her?' asked Grace.

'Yes, ma'am, leastways she lives along o' me. I'm a widda', with a large family, ma'am.'

'Is that rosy little girl of yours at the Rectory still?' asked the squire.

'No, sir; she learnt very nicely there off the housekeeper, but the wages is small an' I thought 'er ought to be gettin' more. An' Mr Metcalfe, 'e were very kind, an' got 'er a place with some friends of 'is a long way off. I don't know for certain where it is, only it's as far off as it can be to be in England, sir. An' she's bin there three years, but she's lost all 'er roses, sir, an' the doctor says she mustn't stop there, for it's too embracin' for 'er; that's what 'e says, "the air is too embracin,'" he says.'

Hugh felt his wife's arm tremble with her suppressed laughter, and after shaking hands with Betty he turned away, and in doing so he narrowly

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escaped a collision with an elderly woman who was passing.

'Oh, Mrs Dawes, is that you? Who is this little boy?'

'My grandson.'

'Ah! poor Armell's child. I suppose you never heard-?'

'No, never.'

'His wife is still at the Dale, isn't she?'

'Yes. Teddie! what are you doing? you'll pull my arm off! Come along this minute!'

'What a cross-grained woman, Hugh! One would think you had done her some injury!'

'She used to be a great talker; but she has had trouble, and I suppose that has changed her,' explained Hugh, more thankful than he could say that Mrs Dawes had been so sparing of her words. As the young couple moved off, Mrs Dawes' attention was drawn to a strange figure advancing towards her. In the thin drawn face and whitening hair she recognised with some difficulty Mrs Bourne of Rippidge Mill.

Her clothes were very old, and seemed as if they would hardly hang together, yet there was a trace of her former self in the jaunty way she wore them.

'How d'ye do, Mrs Dawes?' she said, with a sprightly manner, and almost patronising air.

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'Bless an' save us! Is that you, Mrs Bourne. I should 'ardly a known ya, ya look that bad! Why, you've gone into an old woman, all at once!'

'We ain't none of us no younger than we was, I suppose,' retorted Mrs Bourne, airily. 'It's a long time since we've met—you an' me.'

'Aye, so it is. But I'm to be seen at Braybridge, most Fridays; you never seem to come. I'm surprised to see you 'ere to day.'

'Why shouldn't we be asked as well as other folks?'

'I've no objection, I'm sure. Only I didn't think to see ya, as ya never goes out.'

'Oh, I thought I'd come to day,' said Betsy, shaking out her thin shawl with quite a juvenile grace, that provoked Mrs Dawes exceedingly.

'Because you could get your tea an' nothin' to pay, I suppose,' she said sharply. 'Is the miller 'ere?'

'No, 'e ain't,' retorted the miller's wife, with equal sharpness. ' Is that Lettice's child?'

'Yes, 'e is. Don't touch them flowers, Teddie.'

'H'm. A deal too fat to be 'ealthy, I should say. She didn't ought to let 'im eat so much.'

'Oh, don't you think so, indeed, Mrs Bourne?'

'Lettice must be gettin' on pretty well to dress the child up like that. A lace collar and all!

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Anybody 'ud think 'e was a lord's child. It's downright wicked extravagance, I call it.'

'Teddie, do you 'ear what your grandfather's wife says about you? You'd better ask her if she can't give you some old things to cut up; your grandfather is mighty careful of 'is clothes, I know.'

'I don't know what you mean by your insinuations, Mrs Dawes. Mr Bourne 'asn't anything to give 'is daughter; 'e said when 'er 'usband went away an' and left 'er'-

'Ah, 'e was frightened then, no doubt, but she did not ask 'im for nothin', and won't yet! But it's nonsense to tell me as he's got nothing, Betsy Wall, an' tho' no doubt you'll try and set 'im against 'is daughter, an' get all you can for yourself, yet Teddie 'll 'ave 'is rights some day, or my name's not Pamela Dawes.'

Here Teddie, not unnaturally, began to cry. He saw that his grandmother was very angry, and heard his own name mentioned, and he raised so fearful a howl that Mrs Dawes was obliged to devote her whole attention to quieting him; and when she had succeeded, and looked round for Mrs Bourne, that lady had disappeared.

We will hope that this was the only discordant scene that marred the recollection of this eventful

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day at Long Upton. To all appearance the whole affair was most successful; and though the young bride was very tired when all was over, yet she expressed herself much delighted with her surroundings.

'The people are delightful, mother,' she said to Lady Marleigh in the evening, 'and so amusing. Only fancy the housekeeper from the Rectory telling Hugh she was thankful he'd come back to keep the master in some sort of order, for it was more than she could do. She had been to the study one morning and found Mr Metcalfe putting the fire into the coal-box instead of coal on the fire; and she had said to the housemaid, "If the squire doesn't come home soon, we shall all be burnt in our beds." They all think so much of Hugh.'

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CHAPTER IV

TEDDIE'S EDUCATION

IT was a summer afternoon, and Mrs Dawes sat near the open door of her back kitchen, her person half concealed by a huge white apron: a great basin of yellow ware was in her lap, into which she was stripping black currants from their stalks. A large basket full of the dark shining fruit was placed on a stool beside her. From the front kitchen beyond could be heard the ticking of the big clock, and the kettle just beginning to 'sing' upon the fire; all else was silent, and the house seemed deserted. Nor was the yard outside the door more lively, for the poultry were straying over the newly mown fields, and Peter's successor had gone

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to bring up the cows for milking. The air was sweet with the fresh scent of hay from the great ricks in the corner; had you stepped behind these, and looked over the low wall that divided the yard from the garden, you would have seen further signs of the times in two white sun bonnets, moving up and down among the currant bushes.

Presently the wearer of one of them raised herself, straightened her back, and stretched her arms a little, but in a constrained fashion as if she were ashamed to show any sign of fatigue. She then spoke a few words to her companion, stooped to pick up a heavy basket, and walked slowly with it towards the house.

It is Lettice; her figure slight and trim as ever, her complexion as fair, her hair as silky; only the suspicion, as it were, of fine lines about her eyes and mouth tell of the added weight of years and cares.

She entered the back kitchen, and set down her load upon the floor.

'We have nearly gathered them all now,' she said. 'I cannot stay longer, but Martha will be able to finish by herself.'

'Oh, you'd better stop tea now you are 'ere. I'll have done these directly, an' it 'ull be ready in a minute. What d' ya want to go for?'

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'I must see if the butter is ready for market to-morrow, and there are raspberries to go too. They've got to be picked yet; and if I don't see after it, they'll get unripe ones that won't sell.'

'Our raspberries won't be ready for another week yet; you're earlier than we are with everything—it is so cold up here! Let me know what you get for raspberries, Lettice; and what was it you said that 'Iggler gave you for your black currants.'

'Three half-pence.'

'My! it's little enough. I'll try if I can get twopence for some of mine. P'r'aps Mrs Shepherd 'ull buy some for jam; I'll send to Marjory and see. On'y she *is* such a girl—she never tries to 'elp 'er own, as you may say—she's too proud to ask the gentry she gets among, to buy their eggs an' things off you an' me. There! I've finished them currands; I'll give 'em a boil up presently. You'd better stop an' 'ave your tea, Lettice. I'll get it now.'

'No, thank you, I must go home,' said Lettice, taking off the sun bonnet she had borrowed from Martha, and putting on her own prim little hat.

'Do you know where Teddie is?'

'No; I've not seen 'im since you went into the

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garden, P'r'aps 'e's gone along of Bill to fetch up the cows.'

'Oh, dear, I hope not! I thought he was with you. Did you not see where he went?'

'No, I didn't, that's a fact. I didn't see nor 'ear 'im; an' never gave 'im another thought. P'r'aps Martha knows where 'e is?'

'I'll go and ask her,' said Lettice, hurrying back to the garden.

'Martha, have you seen Teddie?'

'No, I anna. Baint 'e in the 'ouse along o' the missis?'

'No; and she does not know where he is.' 'Then, most in likely 'e's gone down to Mrs Turner's.'

'Oh, no, Martha, that isn't at all likely.' 'Wuoy—'e goes there most in general everytime 'e's 'ere!'

Lettice opened her eyes, drew herself up stiffly, and replied,

'Oh, indeed! I'll go there and see.'

She returned to her mother-in-law and said, half reproachfully,

'Martha thinks he's with Cornelia.'

'Oh, very likely—'e generally runs off there. It seems to amuse 'im.'

'I did not know he had ever been there.'

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'Oh, dear, yes! When I brings 'im over for the day 'e goes there, unless she's 'ere. It's natural enough. But if you're going there. I'll come along, for I must get 'er to come an' 'elp Martha with them currands; the girl is that slow, she'll never get 'um done afore dark if she's left to 'erself.'

The path to Turner's cottage lay across a meadow, and through a cornfield, in one corner of which stood the narrow red house surrounded by a square patch of ground, railed in from the field to form a garden. This was ill-kept; the potatoes, beans, and cabbages being over-grown with the same weeds that flourished at the edges of the cornfield; while the gooseberry bushes and railings were garlanded with bindweed.

One or two marigolds at the gate, a 'tea tree' that drooped above the door, and a straggling elder overhanging the roof, were the only attempts at ornament.

The unprepossessing exterior was familiar to both the visitors now approaching the cottage, but neither of them had ever entered there, and both stopped short to gaze at the scene that was visible through the open door.

By the fireside sat Cornelia, untidily dressed, lolling in a rocking chair, one arm resting on the

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round deal table at her side, a smile of lazy contentment on her face. A piece of dirty sacking was stretched upon the hearth by way of a rug, and here, at Cornelia's feet, sat Teddie, intent upon an illustrated paper which he held in his hand, while round him, half covering the brick floor, were similar papers, soiled, crumpled, but full of pictures; and similar pictures were pasted round the room forming a primitive 'dado' about four feet in height. The kitchen was not neater than its mistress; some stockings, and other small articles hung to dry from a cord stretched across the room; a suit of Turner's clothes, mud-stained, and much in need of mending, lay heaped upon a chair: unwashed plates and cups, spoons, and knives were piled on the dresser, while the greasy book which was open on the table, showed how Cornelia had been engaged. 'My Brother's Blood; or, the Hangman's Hostage,' was doubtless a literary work of consuming interest; yet Cornelia had found employment more pleasing still, and was devoting her attention to Teddie.

In her right hand she had a toasting-fork, with which she pointed to the large letters at the top of the paper which the child held.

'Now, Teddie, find me round O. That's right.

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What's this next letter? Have you forgotten again? L—come, you know the rest!'

'I—C—E—N—E—W, and crooked S,' said the little boy slowly, following the guidance of the toasting-fork.

'Well done, you'll soon be a scholar, and able to read all them pretty stories 'Neelie's told you about, and ever so many more. Now you may turn over and look at the pictures, while I'-

'Well, Cornelia! I've allus 'eard that them as cleaned for other folks were never too particular about their own 'ouses; but it do surprise me to see you settin' down comfortable in the middle of this mullock. If I 'adna seen it for myself, I'd never 'a believed you kep' your place like a pig-stye.'

Lettice was burning to speak, but, as usual, Mrs Dawes had managed to get the first word. Cornelia started when she heard the voice at the door; but soon recovered herself, jumped up from her seat, laughed good-humouredly, pulled out two chairs into the middle of the room, dusted them with her apron, and asked her visitors to sit down.

'I'm sorry you should 'appen to catch me lik this,' she said glibly. 'I was washin' this mornin', and so left things till the afternoon, an' just when I was beginning to tidy up a bit, Teddie come in.

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I've bin teachin' 'im 'is letters, an' I didn't want you to know till 'e could say 'em all,' she explained, with an apologetic glance at Lettice, 'but 'e's very quick, bless 'im, an' 'e can tell most of 'em now.'

'How dared you,' cried Lettice, standing up in the middle of the kitchen, rejecting the proffered chair, 'how dared you teach him at all, or tell him your horrid stories, or show him such a wicked paper as that! He should never have come near you with my knowledge, and he shall never come again. I always said you were not fit to have to do with him, and you have began to pollute him already with this filth! What business was it of yours whether he knew his letters or not?'

Teddie had scrambled up from the floor and stood by Cornelia while his mother spoke; but now he came forward, and caught Lettice by the hand.

'Never mind, mammy,' he said. 'I knows my letters now. I'll wead you nice books about wobbers and things all day long. Come and look at Neelie's pwetty pictures!'

He tried to drag her to the wall, and draw her attention to his favourite picture of a fight, where two men struggled over the prostrate body of a policeman, but, for once, she turned a deaf ear to his entreaties; she held him tight, and, stooping

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over him, said gravely, 'They are bad pictures, and Cornelia is a bad woman. Teddie must never come here any more.'

'Well, I'm sure,' said Cornelia, in an injured tone of voice, ' I on'y wanted to teach the boy 'is letters, for 'e's good; being as everyone cries shame on you that 'e's never bin taught anything yet, an' 'im seven years old last February! There's children o' four an' five, down in the village, as can read easy words, an' count, an' say little pieces quite pretty; an' I didn't like for Teddie to be behind 'em all. An' it can't 'urt such a child to learn 'is letters of! the paper, though p'r'aps it ain't proper readin' for young folks. I'd 'a got a alphabet book for 'im with pleasure if I'd a known you'd mind. But the pictures

seems to amuse 'im, an' I on'y wanted to do what was right by 'im. I'm sure I takes the greatest of care of 'im—don't I, ma'am?' she concluded, turning to the elder Mrs Dawes.

This lady, hearing herself addressed, put down one of the offending papers, which she had picked up and studied during the conversation. She had been taken by surprise, when she saw for the first time what manner of home Cornelia's was, and felt really ashamed that she had so often connived at Teddie's going there, while she herself had never entered the house.

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This unwonted sensation of shame had kept her silent, but now she felt herself called on to speak, and deal out justice to the disputants before her.

'Those are foul pictures, Cornelia, an' I wonder at you knowin' no better than to show them to an innocent child like that. But it's done now, Lettice, so it's no use to put yourself about so; and Cornelia is right enough in sayin', Teddie ought to 'a learnt 'is letters before now; an' you must see about sendin' 'im to school at wunst. An' Cornelia, I don't wonder at your 'usband grumblin' at you, an' goin' to the Cross Keys of an evenin' as you say 'e does, if you don't get the place more comfortable for 'im than this. I come 'ere to ask you to come up an' 'elp Martha to pick currands this evenin'; but I won't trouble you now; it 'ull be as much as you can do to get your kitchen tidied up afore Turner comes in, an' if you take my advice you'll set about it at wunst. Come along, Lettice.'

Mrs Dawes swept out of the house, followed by her daughter-in-law and Teddie, leaving Cornelia in an aggrieved and melancholy frame of mind.

She wept copiously as she collected the scattered copies of the *Police News,* made up the fire, filled the kettle and put it on: the effect of her mistress' rebuke was strong enough to lead her to carry the

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dirty plates and other unwashed articles from the dresser into the little scullery, to roll up the torn garments and hide them in a small cupboard under the stairs, and to take down from the line such of the stockings and clothes as were dry. Then— reflecting that till she had some hot water ready she could not wash up, and that till she had washed up

she could not lay the tea things—she sat down again in the rocking-chair, and soon forgot her grievances in the exciting pages of 'My Brother's Blood.'

Such was the commencement of Teddies education; and for some months this seemed likely to be the end of it also, for Lettice was so beset with doubts and fears in the selection of a teacher for her boy, that she could not for a long time come to any conclusion on the point.

The village school she would not hear of; and she was too thoroughly taught herself to have any faith in the select school at Braybridge which Mrs Dawes considered to be a very high road to gentility. No; Boswell House, under the management of the Misses Johnson, who admitted a few little boys among their young ladies—quite as a favour, of course—was not the place for Teddie; but he was too young for the Grammar School, and too tender

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for the rough companionship he would get at the Braybridge National School

Shoemakers' children, we know, are left unshod; and it often happens that teachers, or ex-teachers, neglect the education of their offspring. Lettice now tried to teach Teddie a little every day: but she could ill spare the time; and he was so completely her master, that the lessons were attended to or not, just as he chose. Her plea for letting him run wild so long was his supposed delicacy, which had never been perceptible to anyone but herself.

A sturdier, handsomer boy of his age, would have been difficult to find; and there was no trace of weakness, physical or mental, in his erect, well-knit figure, strong straight limbs, and shapely head, covered with silky light brown hair like his mother's, but having a crisp curl inherited from Armell. His features and complexion were his mother's — an oval face and straight nose, though cast in a manly mould—colouring delicate in tint, though perfectly healthy. His fairness rendered more striking a pair of bright dark eyes—Marjory's in shape and hue, but with a bold, defiant, rebellious look in them that belonged to no one else but his grandmother.

The rector spoke seriously to Lettice about

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her spoilt boy; the squire hinted it was time the young monkey went to school; Marjory urged it whenever she saw his mother; and even grandfather Bourne came over one day, for the first visit he had ever paid his daughter since her marriage. His object was to tell her that she must bring up her lad to earn his living, and not look for anything from him to keep the boy in idleness.

Lettice angrily denied that she had any such expectations, when Mrs Bourne, who had accompanied her husband, explained that their coming was in consequence of a conversation she had overheard in Braybridge Market, where two Long Upton women had told each other that young Mrs Dawes meant to bring up her boy as a gentleman, because he would have all the miller's money. Lettice very truthfully denied any such intentions, and quite re-assured her father by her evident belief of his statement that he had nothing to leave.

The thought that care for Teddie had brought him to the Dale, fully compensated for his neglect of herself; and her simple heart was touched by the hungry, poverty-stricken appearance of her father and his wife. Not only were their clothes old and ragged, but their faces were sunken and

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pallid, their hands bony, and their whole appearance was that of semi-starvation. She asked them to stay to tea, and provided a large dish of ham and eggs, which the strange pair devoured ravenously; and while Lettice was filling up the teapot at the fire, she distinctly saw Mrs Bourne pocketing some slices of the substantial home-made cake.

Unobservant as she was by nature, it was yet impossible for her not to notice the suspicion with which they eyed one another, and each listened to what the other said. Both seemed anxious to speak with her alone, yet neither of them allowed such an opportunity to occur. Lettice could not understand this, and looked after them with a very puzzled expression as they drove off up the lane in a small rickety cart, drawn by an emaciated donkey. Poor Diamond had long ago gone the way of all horseflesh, and the miller had then sold his large light gig, and bought a donkey and cart with part of the proceeds.

It was this visit more than anything, that made Lettice feel she must take some steps for Teddies education. He was now more than eight years old, and she was ashamed that he

had been saucy to his grandfather, and had refused to sit down to tea with Mrs Bourne, on the score that she was 'an ugly old thing.' He must be kept away

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from the Hill, that was certain; all his shortcomings were in her eyes, due to the influence of Mrs Dawes and Cornelia, in whose society he delighted.

When Mr Cox appeared, a few days later, she consulted him; and the result was that he offered to teach Teddie for two hours every day when school was over. Lettice was almost effusive in her thanks, being quite unaware of any interest Mr Cox might have in the matter beyond that of Teddies welfare. But the hardly-worked little schoolmaster had not undertaken this extra task without thought of reward.

Marjory had several times lamented her nephew's ignorance in his hearing; and on the next half holiday he arrayed himself in his best, took the train to Kingsford, and walked direct from the station to Roselands. Miss Dawes was at home, Simmons said, and showing Mr Cox into the dining room, he remarked that it was a fine day, and that Miss Dawes would be down directly. The march of time had at least done this for Marjory, that the old servants at Roselands had ceased to be suspicious of her, and now treated her and her friends with respect and civility. When Marjory appeared there was much news to tell her. The new Mineral-water factory had brought an increase of population to Braybridge, and more children to the school, so

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that the long talked of class-room was to be built at last, and at the same time a master's house.

The plans were out; and Mr Cox might say that his future residence was really commodious, and would be quite an ornament to Church Street—indeed to the town.

'Mrs Cox must be pleased,' said Marjory kindly.

'Well, you will think it strange, Miss Dawes, no doubt, but my mother does not at all like the prospect of living in Church Street. She is quite attached to the little house we have occupied so long, and thinks that the new one will be cold and damp. She cannot walk any distance, you know; and it makes a pleasant little change for her to go in and see one or two friends she has close at hand; but they will be out of her reach when we move. She talks of taking a couple of rooms in that street, so as to remain there when I

go' to the schoolhouse. We have been so happy and comfortable together, for so long a time, that it will be a trial to part. I should be able to see her daily, of course; but a house is lonely without a female,' concluded Mr Cox with a sigh.

'You must get married, Mr Cox,' said Marjory laughing.

'Oh, Miss Dawes!' he ejaculated in a deep voice, while he looked at her reproachfully. 'But I must

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not take up your time with talking only about myself and my affairs,' he said, brightening. 'I was at Long Upton the day before yesterday.'

'Were you? Who did you see there? Are they all well?'

'I went to the Dale and saw only your sister-in-law; but she did me the honour to ask my advice about Master Teddie.'

'Oh, I am glad of that.'

'She won't be persuaded to send him to school, so at last I offered to take him for a short time every afternoon.'

'How good of you, Mr Cox—when you are so busy, and must be quite tired of teaching by four o'clock!'

'I never did such a thing before,' said he, slowly and significantly, 'indeed I have always said that nothing should induce me to take private pupils, and I foresee that there will be great difficulties in this case, and that the arrangement cannot go on for long. Still, it will be a break, as it were, both for the little fellow and his mother; and when she finds the inconvenience of sending him to and fro in the evenings, she may consent to let him go to school altogether. Besides, if I mistake not, the boy is ambitious, and when he has once discovered how deficient he is in knowledge, he will give her

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no peace till he gets every educational advantage that she can give him.'

'I hope it may be so,' said Marjory, 'at anyrate you are doing a kind and good work, and I am more grateful to you than I can say.'

'Oh, no—don't say so, Miss Dawes—Marjory,' said Mr Cox, breathless, almost sobbing; drawing nearer and nearer, as he spoke, to the object of his adoration. 'Your friendship has been of such inestimable advantage to me, a source of such sweet pleasure— that—

that it is for me to talk of gratitude. But Miss Dawes — Marjory — though I said just now that I did not come here to talk about myself, yet such was, and is my intention to-day.'

He paused, quite overcome by his own eloquence, and Marjory, though much surprised and alarmed, felt that she must say something, and murmured a few words to the effect that she was glad to hear of any matter that concerned him which he liked to tell her: she owed him that, for he had listened so often to her little troubles.

'Oh, no, the obligation is all on my side, as I remarked before. But Miss Dawes— Marjory— you said yourself just now that I should need a mistress for my new school-house. There is'— (with a heavy sigh) 'here is but one that can ever reign there for me. Ever since the moment when

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I first beheld you in Braybridge church on the occasion of your poor brothers wedding, (excuse my naming it) my heart has known no other mistress. Margaret—best and most beautiful of women—permit me to lay myself, my new school-house, and my increased salary at your feet!'

Mr Cox rose from his chair, clasped his hands, and knelt in a theatrical attitude before Marjory, who was silent because she was trying not to laugh. But he felt that his eloquence was taking effect, and was happy with the thought that he was really pleading his cause in a fashion unrivalled by any lover that he had ever read of. 'Dearest,' he said softly, laying one hand upon her lap, 'Do not be afraid of me! Put your little white hand in mine, if you cannot find words to speak your feelings.'

'Will you please stand up, Mr Cox.' 'No, let me kneel on, I will kneel before you till'-

'Then I must leave the room. Please get up.'

'Oh, certainly. I do not understand this,' said the little schoolmaster scrambling up with a very different air from that with which he had fallen on his knees.

Marjory rose also; and said firmly, but gently,

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'I am more sorry for this than I can say. I looked on you as a kind friend, Mr Cox, and never had the least suspicion that you regarded me in any other light. I feel flattered that

you should have thought me worthy to occupy the—the house of which you spoke, but I must decline your offer. I hope you will forget that you made it, and that we shall be'-

'It is such a *nice* house,' said he ruefully, 'and I have always fancied you in it. You must surely have known I meant to ask you to marry me when I had an opportunity!'

'Indeed, Mr Cox, I never knew it. If I had, I should have asked you to leave off coming here.'

'But why? What objection have you to me? You can have none I am sure! And I always meant to ask you if—if I could make my mother comfortable away from me. You see she is used to her own way, and would, perhaps, not be very agreeable to a younger woman, even though she were my wife. And now, you see, it has fallen out that she is making a home for herself by her own desire. And only on Sunday she said to me that I must marry. She couldn't have kept my house for ever; but would like to see me settled with a wife before she died, only, she did not know where I could find

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a suitable one—young women are so good-for-nothing now-a-days. But I thought to myself, "I know." And now do you mean to say you will not have me?'

'Oh, Mr Cox, I am very sorry,' cried Marjory in despair; 'I am very sorry, but I could not marry you!'

'Not yet, not just yet; the house won't be ready till next year!'

'I hope you will find a better wife, and a better mistress for your house than I should be.'

Mr Cox paused.

'Well,' he said at last, 'I will wish you good afternoon, Miss Dawes. I must say I am surprised —exceedingly surprised at the manner in which you have received my—a—my advances.'

He turned to go, but came back again to say,

'Perhaps, should we ever chance to meet again on some future occasion, you will not allude to this —a—*most* painful interview?'

Marjory gave this promise very readily, and though really sorry that she had been obliged to offend her former friend so deeply yet, on the whole, she felt for both their sakes that it was best Mr Cox should take the view he had done of her refusal. Had she tried to propitiate him, he might

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have assumed that she meant to recall what she had said. And if he grew so hotly angry with her, it was surely a sign that the wound he professed to feel did not go deep, and would the sooner heal.

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CHAPTER V

OLD FRIENDS

MARJORY understood from Mr Cox's parting request, that he wished the fact of his offer and her answer, to be kept a secret. But this could not have been his meaning, for on his return home he made his woe-begone condition so evident that his mother could not avoid asking the cause of such gusty sighs, ruffled hair, and fits of absence, followed by unnatural gaiety.

He told his tale with all the pathos he could command, and considered that it added greatly to the romance of the situation when Mrs Cox was angry—angry with him for subjecting himself to 'the airs of a highty-tighty girl;' and angrier

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with Marjory for rejecting her son, 'who might have married anybody, almost.'

Besides this, Mr Cox went at the first opportunity to the Dale, and there told Lettice that he would continue to teach Teddie till she could make some other arrangements, but that circumstances had occurred which made this task a pain, when it might have been a pleasure, a labour of love.

He was so mysterious and wordy that straightforward Lettice told him flatly she could not understand why—if she had not offended him, nor Teddie been very unmanageable—he had so changed his ideas within a fortnight.

When she at last perceived that Marjory was the offender, her natural impulse was to say, 'Why, she always laughed at you! Didn't you know it?'

But luckily she remembered in time that this would be rude, and refrained from any further expression of her opinions; only, she secretly wondered over the whole affair, until she saw her mother-in-law, to whom she repeated Mr Cox's story, laying, perhaps, most stress on the unfortunate consequences for Teddie.

'Bless us all, Lettice, you must be as blind as a bat not to see long ago that Mr Cox 'ad a fancy for Marg'ate! An' what's more, I really did think it wasn't unlikely she'd 'ave 'im; but there—she's that

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obstinately set on bein' an old maid, it's my belief as nothing 'ull move her! I did my best for er wunst, an' she wilfully throwed away such a chance as not one girl gets in a 'undred; an I'll interfere no more—she may please 'erself! As for 'im, no fear but what 'ell get over it, though I don't doubt 'e takes it a bit 'ard now; 'e's too pleased with 'imself to relish the notion as everybody ain't in love with 'im. But 'e 'on't 'urt, I reckon; e's one o' them as allus falls soft. But it really do seem as if that boy never ould get his schoolin'; you'll 'ave to send 'im to Miss Johnson's now, Lettice.'

In the meantime Marjory was perhaps more unhappy than her rejected lover; not that she regretted her decision, but that now when Mr Cox's visits were at an end, she realised for the first time how much she had depended on them for news of her own world details that filled in the spaces between her occasional days spent at Long Upton, items which were in no way supplied by her mother's hurried calls on market days, or the stiff little notes that came now and then from Lettice.

Mrs Shepherd had grown very infirm, and of late her sight and hearing had failed; yet she was kind and considerate as ever, and seeing her companion pre-occupied and drooping, she proposed, one

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afternoon, that Marjory should go to the cathedral service for a treat.

'You have not been for a long time now, my dear; you get quite moped sitting shut up with me in these close rooms—I am sure they are too warm for a young person. I can't get out because of this tiresome bronchitis, but you will certainly be better for a little air and exercise. And you might take this book to the library as you go, and bring *Blackwood* back with you if it is in, and Miss Lovell has not kept it as usual.'

Marjory thankfully accepted this proposal, for a feeling of depression was so strong upon her, that it was almost unendurable to her to sit quietly working, reading, or listening to Mrs Shepherd's rambling talk on numerous subjects devoid of any special

interest. So she gladly put on her hat and jacket, took the books, and walked slowly down the hill into the town.

'I wonder what is the matter with me. If I were the heroine of one of these books,' she said to herself, thinking of the novel under her arm, 'to feel as I do would be a sign that I had "mistaken my feelings," as they call it, but I certainly am not in the remotest degree in love with Mr Cox! Can it be a presentiment of anything wrong at Long Upton? If Mrs Shepherd

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were not so poorly, I would ask her to let me go over on Sunday just to satisfy myself that all is going on well. Mother looked worried, I thought, when she came here last; I wonder if Mr Midgely can have anything to do with it: she began to talk about him, I remember, and left off in the middle which is not like her at all. I do distrust that man somehow; yet if there were anything wrong about him Mr Reynolds would have found it out long ago, if the squire hadn't.

'He has been steward for so long a time now that he is looked upon as belonging to the place. Eight years—yes eight years since we lost Armell! Eight years, and I haven't got used to it yet! Oh my brother, sometimes I feel a frantic longing to know what has become of you, as if I must see and speak to you—as if I could call up your ghost if I only knew you were dead! Ah, what a fool I am!

'Marjory Dawes you must not be so sentimental and absurd—one would think you were the ill-used, down-trodden companion of a fine lady in a story book! Be practical—here you are at the library.'

She succeeded in getting the *Blackwood,* then finding it was nearly time for service she hastened her steps; the quicker motion and the gentle bustle of the High Street had the effect of making her

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feel less sad than she had been. The quiet peaceful air that pervaded the cathedral stole through her as she entered; by the time she rose from her knees the melancholy that had oppressed her was gone, and as she sat listening to the organ, there only remained a keenly sensitive condition of mind, in which every note of the music seemed to thrill throughout her whole being.

'What was the voluntary?'

'Oh, what was it? There was a phrase she knew quite well—yes, there was another. It was something she had been familiar with long ago, or could it only be that she had heard it played here before? How provoking not to remember!'

It was only when a few notes of the anthem occurred in the same succession as one of the familiar passages, that she suddenly recalled what the voluntary was, and how she came to know it. It was a Prelude of Bach's that her music master used to play to her sometimes on Saturday evenings when her lesson was over. She had put down the *Blackwood* on the bench beside her, and, with some bit of lovely melody from the anthem ringing in her ears, she left the cathedral, and had walked half across the close before she remembered the magazine. In turning round to go back for it she narrowly escaped being knocked down by a tall

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gaunt man, who was striding along with a book under his arm, his eyes on the ground, and his thoughts—apparently—in the clouds.

'Mr Leddington!' she exclaimed.

'Miss Dawes!' cried the man, stepping back and looking doubtfully at her, 'is it you indeed?'

'It is really! Do I look like a ghost?'

'N—no, but I did not expect to see you here; and it is so long since we met; and—I did not know—a'-

'What did you not know?'

Mr Leddington kicked away a small pebble that lay on the great flags under his feet; then turning away from Marjory, he said in a low voice,

'I did not know if I was right to address you as I did.'

Marjory laughed.

'What could you do but address me when we stumbled against each other in that way? more especially as it was your fault!'

'My fault! Was it? I am an awkward fellow, I know. Will you forgive me—a—Miss Dawes?'

'Yes, that *is* my name, Mr Leddington, and I will forgive you—the offence was not very terrible. But I must not stay talking here; I have left a book in the cathedral and must go to fetch it.'

She hastened to the porch, and he stood still in

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the middle of the close looking back at her. Just as she reached the door he strode after her, struck by a happy inspiration. 'Could I get it for you?'

'Perhaps you could; yes, you shall, if you don't mind. It's *Blackwood's Magazine,* and I left it on the second seat on the right-hand side just below the choir.'

'Is this it?' asked Mr Leddington anxiously, when he reappeared with the book. He, poor man, thought it quite likely that more than one copy of the same magazine might have been left on that particular seat.

Marjory assured him it was right; after which he asked hesitatingly whether she were going down the High Street, and if he might walk with her.

'I see you are just the same as ever, Miss Dawes,' he said, when she had laughingly given him leave to accompany her.

'In what way? I am ever so much older than when you knew me.'

'But you are as merry as ever; always laughing at—at other people.'

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'Perhaps not. It is a long time since we saw each other. I do not quite know how long, but I remember the occasion perfectly.'

'Do you? When was it? Ah, I know!'—she broke off suddenly, and the bright colour flew to her cheeks.

'It was at a ball at Long Upton Hall,' he said slowly and pointedly, looking at her as he spoke, and noting that her blushes deepened under his gaze. Then he asked abruptly, 'How is Mrs Dawes?'

'She is well, thank you; but I do not live at home now, you know. I am in a situation.'

'A situation! Are you? Where, if I may ask?'

'In Kingsford. I am companion to an old lady at North Hill. She is very kind to me, and I have been there a long time now.'

'Oh! And do you often come to the cathedral?'

'I come to the afternoon service sometimes. Do you?'

'I am assistant organist, you know.'

'No, I did not know. Then how is it we never met before, I wonder?'

'I was only appointed last week. St Jude's is a long way from North Hill, and I live there, you know.'

'Am I? I have certainly no occasion to do so,' she said with a smothered sigh. 'I don't think you have seen enough of me now to judge what I am always doing.'

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'I remember. Shall you come nearer the town now?'

'No; I must keep on St Jude's for the present— I have only three services a week at the cathedral as a rule.'

'Is your mother well?'

'Yes—she is well,' he replied very fervently.

'How pleased she must be about your getting this organistship.'

'I daresay she is—no doubt she knows.'

'What? Does she not live with you still?'

'No. She died three years ago,' he answered, very quietly.

'Oh, I beg your pardon! I am so sorry,' stammered Marjory in distress. 'Then do you—you are alone now?'

'No, not alone,' he said, gently. 'I have my— Miss Dawes, if you do not mind I should like, to take you to my house some day.'

'Thank you. I should like to go very much. I turn up this lane so we must say Good bye. No doubt we shall see each other sometimes.'

'I hope so. Good bye, Miss Dawes.'

Marjory went soberly homewards, thinking to herself 'no doubt he is married.' "My wife," is what he was going to say. Well, I am glad I met him, for even after all this time I should like him

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to think better of me than he did on that wretched night at Long Upton, when his eyes seemed to follow me everywhere, and reproach me! I daresay he has thought all this while that I married Mr Temple—*sold* myself to him! He never used to read the papers I

know, or to hear any news, much less gossip; and so as mother stopped my music lessons directly afterwards, he thought no doubt that I was married. So his mother is dead! That delicate mother for whom he worked so hard. And he has a wife now; well, I'm glad he has a sufficiently good opinion of me to wish to introduce me to her.

When Marjory read the *Kingsford Gazette* for, that week, to Mrs Shepherd, she found in it a notice of Mr Leddington's appointment as assistant organist at the cathedral, the *Gazette* being true to its principles, and a week behind-hand with the news. The days on which Mr Leddington would take the organ were recorded, and Marjory having told her mistress that he had been her teacher, Mrs Shepherd became interested in the matter, and as soon as she could get out, went to an afternoon service at which the new organist officiated.

She took a fancy for his playing and attended the cathedral very frequently on his days, or if she could not go, would generally send Marjory. So it

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came to pass that the former master and pupil saw each other occasionally, and that by-and-by he learnt the history of Marjory's life since the rupture of their old acquaintance. He had liked Armell, and expressed his sympathy with regard to him, in a clumsy, yet heartfelt manner that was very consoling to the faithful sister, and which somehow more than reconciled her to the loss of Mr Cox's visits. In time the organist grew bold enough to walk with Marjory to the gate of Roselands, though no persuasion would ever get him within it; and she was disappointed that he never made any further proposition as to her visiting St Jude's.

She was soon relieved of any compunction she might have felt with regard to Mr Cox, for within two months of the day when he paid his last visit to Roselands, she heard that he was engaged to Louie Midgely.

It was only natural that he should console himself with some one who was the very opposite of Marjory—tall, big boned, sandy haired, loud voiced, bouncing—and that, while sore from the rebuff he had met with, he should fall a victim to those charms which Miss Midgely displayed so lavishly for his benefit, when she heard a rumour of the increased salary and the new schoolhouse. She

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had felt for some time past that it behoved her to settle in life; moreover, her brother had hinted in a manner decidedly hurtful to her feelings, that he would be glad to get her off his hands. None of the Brookshire swains had danced to her piping, so it was no wonder that when she set her shrewd determined mind on the little schoolmaster, he was soon safe within her net.

Considering the masterly way in which she had gone to work and effected her purpose, it was certainly a little hard that Robert, when she told him of the engagement, merely expressed some vexation that she had not chosen a lover who could have married her immediately, instead of Mr Cox, whose house must be waited for, and who had an old mother to be considered.

Robert was very uneasy and very irritable just then, but did not confide in his sister, though she was able to guess pretty correctly, some, at least, of the causes of his trouble. Most people were beginning to look grave at that time. There had been two bad harvests in succession, and that now in the fields was unpromising both as to yield and condition. In due time this evil promise was fulfilled; nor did the autumn bring a more hopeful state of things, for heavy rains, and floods on the low-lying

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lands, destroyed seed already sown, or prevented the sowing altogether.

The Dale Farm suffered very much at this time, for some of its richest meadow-land was on the banks of the Bray, where summer floods had ruined the hay, and winter ones carried away sheep, and reduced the land to the condition of a swamp, quite unfit for cattle. Formerly her neighbours were half envious of Lettice's prosperity; but now they shook their heads and said,

'She do 'ave wonderful bad luck, poor thing!'

She was worn and anxious, and suffered many a heartache on Teddie's account. She did not mind being poor for herself, but he—he to whom she had hitherto given everything that he wished for—how could she bear to stint him? She cut down her expenses as closely as possible, and tried to do with fewer hands on the farm.

In all her efforts she was bravely seconded by the faithful Joe; but he, alas! was an old man now, and his strenuous attempts to do everything, and be everywhere at once, were too much for his work-worn frame. One cold spring night he was out among the sheep,

and caught a cold which at once attacked his lungs, and, after a few days' illness, he died.

'Thee's bin a good wife to me, missis,' he gasped

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painfully, as Mrs Porter leant over him at the last, 'thee's never give me an ill word. Thee's bin allus weakly, and I didna think as I'd 'a bin the first to go. But, 'tis better so—the Almighty knows what e's a doin' of. Thee'll staay be'ind ta tak cahr o' Dick—stick to 'im missis, till 'e gets a wife as good as thee. An' thee stick to the young missis—poor thing! 'Er 'll want ahl the friends 'er can get afore long! Boys an' gurls, ahl on ya!' he said, speaking loud, and trying to raise himself a little, so as to see with his failing eyes, the children and grandchildren who were gathered round him, 'if you wants yer faather's dyin' blessin', ye'll promise me ahl on ya, that ye'll never see ya mother come to want.'

The promise was given readily and earnestly, though the voices that gave it were choked with sobs.

'Then God A'mighty bless ya ahl, an' bring ya safe 'ome when yer time comes. Axe the parson to come in.'

Mr Metcalfe entered, and Lettice with him; a little table with a snowy cover stood ready; and with his sons and daughters, and the young mistress he had served so well, Joe Porter received his last Sacrament. Afterwards he kissed them all, and lay very quietly, holding his wife's hand till he died.

People said at the funeral that it was a sight to

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see the family—stalwart men, and comely women— so sorrowful for the loss of their father, so thoughtful for their mother.

Some of them who were married, and well-to-do, begged Mrs Porter to make her home with them; but she mindful of her husband's last wish, stayed on to keep house for Dick, who was the youngest of them all, and perhaps the roughest, for the others had all gone out to service early in life, and had lost their Brookshire accent, and dressed and behaved almost like ladies and gentlemen, Dick thought. He was now two or three and twenty, but having been treated as a boy, had remained one hitherto. It was pleasant to see his efforts to be grave and manly now that he was left in charge of his mother; how

he toned down his boisterous grief into gentle consideration for her; and how her pride in her boy's goodness consoled the poor widow. It was not until Joe was gone that his 'young missis' began to realise all he had been to her; she had never known how much she leant on his staunch and ever-ready aid; his mother-wit, and good common-sense. Still less had she guessed that the ignorant old man, as she thought him, had possessed a stronger influence for good over Teddie, than she had herself.

Some indignant words addressed by Dick Porter

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to Ben, a lad who worked under him, were overheard by her; and she found that her boy—whom she believed so innocent—had been gambling and using bad language in company with Ben in the stable.

'I'll gin it ya if ya tries them games agen,' said Dick. 'If my faather 'd bin 'ere, y'ad never 'a' dahred to 'a done it, nor Master Teddie neither!'

Poor Lettice! This was indeed a blow to her; and for the first time in her life, she broke completely down. She poured forth a torrent of reproaches to Teddie, who received them with a cool,

'Well, mother, men must do such things. What's the use vexing a woman by telling her of them? They always make such a fuss!'

But the boy was affectionate in spite of his faults; and seeing that his mother was really in trouble, he came and kissed her.

'Don't cry, mother; please don't cry! I wouldn't have done it if I'd thought you'd mind so much. There, look; here's threepence-halfpenny I won from Ben; I'll give it him back again, and I'll promise you never to—to get in the stable with him again. There! Will that satisfy you?'

His caresses were balm to Lettice, who thought that never was any boy so willing to own his fault, or make such 'divine amends.' Still she was

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troubled sorely as to her farm; and when, shortly afterwards, Mrs Dawes came over, and saw the sodden meadows, the water lying in the ridges of the hopyards, the small stock of weakly lambs, the bad condition of the cattle, and last, but not least, the backward state of the fruit trees, she shook her head and looked very grave.

'The fact of it is, Lettice, that you must give the place up. You've give it a fair trial, an' done your best, that I will say for you; but this ain't the sort o' land as you can do any good with in seasons like these we've 'ad of late. If the weather 'ud kep' anythin' like you'd 'a done very well—an' you deserved to—but it's no use to try to go on when everythin' sims agen you. There's on'y one thing to be done—you must give the squire notice, and you an' Teddie must come an' live along o' me at the Hill. We're out o' flood's way there any'ow; an' I could do without Cornelia wi' you in the 'ouse; and we must see if we can't make both ends meet —you an' me—till such times as—well, till we see if things takes a turn for the better.'

This arrangement was finally decided on, but was not adopted by Lettice without much argument, and many doubts. When she saw Mr Temple after sending in the notice to leave her farm, he expressed his regret that she found herself

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unable to keep it on, but he seemed to think that she could not do better than accept her mother-in-law's offer. He helped her very considerably in one respect, by procuring free admittance for Teddie to the Braybridge grammar school, he being a trustee to some old fund, by which four fatherless boys of respectable parentage, from Braybridge or the adjoining parishes, obtained their education gratis. Teddie had drifted from one school or tutor to another, since the time when Mr Cox gave him up, and had between them all, picked up a sufficient amount of learning to enable him to be entered at the grammar school. He rode to and fro on an old pony of his grandmother's, with his bag of books slung over his shoulder, and very often with another packet of books under his arm. These last he would take between school hours, to a quaint little bow-windowed shop in Riverlane, the abode of John Harvey who drove 'the fly' of Braybridge.

The bow window was divided into two compartments by means of a board covered with green paper. On one side of this partition were displayed various soiled books in yellow bindings, together with newspapers, pennyworths of note-paper, and ink bottles; on the other side were three tall stands bearing aloft caps of black net,

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adorned with purple satin and red roses, while propped against the stands was an embossed card, inscribed: *'Miss Harvey, Dressmaker and Milliner.'* Harvey's wife kept a

circulating library, and his daughter was the dressmaker. No one branch of business in Braybridge was sufficiently remunerative to support all the members of a family, while on the other hand, there was a strong feeling in favour of keeping the younger ones at home, rather than sending them into the wicked world outside; and so it happened that under most roofs of the humbler sort, three or four different callings were pursued at once.

'Mrs 'Arvey's libr'y' was a delightful place in the eyes of Teddie Dawes: where else could you turn over such newspapers, and magazines, and pictures, all free of charge, while you waited in the shop for some one to answer your knock? Where else could you subscribe so small a sum, and procure so large an amount of splendid, horrible stories, that made your hair stand on end as you read them?

Cornelia made him her messenger to and from the 'libr'y;' and he was now a subscriber on his own account, and generally contrived to smuggle one story book into school, to be studied in the intervals of lessons, which he learnt unfortunately, so quickly that he had plenty of time for his

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researches into the natural history of pirates and brigands, while his slower companions were still floundering in the midst of their sums or exercises. But Teddie was not very happy at school in spite of this solace; the masters thought him clever, but a decidedly unsatisfactory pupil, with no notion of discipline. They were very strict with him; but it was from his schoolfellows that he suffered most at first. They soon found that he had been 'cock of the walk' at home, and in the smaller schools he had attended for short periods; and they believed he had the presumption to think that he could lord it over them. He must be taught better at once, and therefore in all the methods known to the ingenuity of boys, they bullied and tormented the unfortunate Teddie; laughing at his pretty face; at his belief in the superiority of Long Upton; at his frequent mention of his mother; at his old pony; and most successfully of all, at his being educated by charity.

A big boy named Higgins took up this last cry most warmly: he was stupid, and hated little Dawes for getting so easily ahead of him in class. He came from the Field Farm near Rippidge Mill, and rubbed up his dull memory for tales he had heard of Dawes' miserly grandfather. The boys listened eagerly and teased Teddie to tell

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them why his rich grandfather did not pay for his schooling. He was made angry and miserable by their taunts yet had too much of the real boy spirit to complain of them at home. Lettice had not told him of her losses, but he knew instinctively that she was in trouble, and resolved not to tell her anything that would vex her further. His thoughts having been directed to his grandfather, he began to wonder—for the first time— how it was that his mother never had any help from that quarter. He thought he should like to see the mill of which he now heard so often, and therefore, when one day an unexpected half-holiday was given in honour of an 'old boy' who had distinguished himself, Teddie turned his pony's head towards Rippidge, and as he trotted along almost made up his mind to call on his grandfather, and inform him of his daughter's misfortunes.

When he came in sight of the mill he drew up, and said to himself that it was a 'beastly hole' then he rode slowly past it and back again, and set off homewards at full galop, greatly disappointed

What the boy expected I do not know; probably from the kind of literature that he affected, he had gained an impression that a miser, who had hidden hoards of gold, should inhabit a ruined castle, or a grim haunted house, with a bell at the door which

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should echo when rung by stray visitors, through ranges of vast and empty apartments.

'I'm sure,' said Teddie, 'it can't be true about grandfather's having so much money, or he wouldn't live in a little place like that, and not keep it in some sort of order. Why, if mother were ever so poor she'd make her house look better than that does. He must be as poor as a church mouse, I know!'

In truth the mill was very unattractive in those days; no one ever came to look at it now; no artist stayed to sketch it. The plaster had fallen in patches from the walls of the house, and even these patches had never been removed from the grass or path on which they fell; every vestige of paint had long disappeared from doors and window frames. Many panes of glass were missing, both in mill and house, while even in the latter place no repairs had been attempted for the last ten years.

One by one the miller had dismissed his men— first, because one wanted higher wages, secondly, because there was little to do with wheat at such a price as *he* could not give

for it; and lastly because he wasn't going to spend his money on putting the mill in order in these dear times. So the mill stood still, and the miller and his wife lived on the produce of their garden and poultry,

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and they had their premises and the lane leading to them, all to themselves, except when a dealer, maybe, to whom Bourne had sold his fruit, sent men to get it from the garden or orchards.

The lives of those within the house were not less unlovely than its squalid exterior. Betsy Wall, though parsimonious and without sense for beauty, had yet in the old days been clean and neat in her domestic appointments. Now it seemed as though soap were a thing unknown in the Mill House, and even water was used sparingly as if it were of marketable value.

Betsy Bourne, when she rose in the morning, and put on her wretched clothes, would creep down to the cold kitchen, and perform the easy task of preparing breakfast. Dry bread and water were soon ready, and there was little need for washing up when the meal was over. She then hunted up such bits and scraps as she could find for the satisfaction of the noisy fowls that clamoured in the yard; then she would go and hunt for eggs, which was a work of time, for the fowl house had fallen into ruins long ago, and the hens wandered at their will, and made their nests in all sorts of places.

How greedily she hunted in every nook and corner, and how she gloated over the eggs as they

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accumulated in her ragged apron! Then, if it were not market day, she would commonly find her husband, and tell him in a shrill scream that there were fewer eggs than yesterday, and that he must buy food for the poultry now he wasn't working the mill. And he would decline, telling her to kill the birds and sell them, if they couldn't keep themselves.

When that subject had been discussed, she would collect a few bits of wood, and make a fire to boil some potatoes for their dinner.

In such wise the days wore away, with little variety; and at all times, whatever happened, the pair watched and spied upon each other, as they had done when they visited the Dale Farm.

The miller spent a good deal of time up in the top of the mill, where were stored a goodly collection of sacks—not empty sacks, but well filled with the best wheat, which he, in his overweening avarice, was keeping till some day (which he was always picturing, but which never arrived) when the price of wheat should reach some fabulous height, and he gain sufficient money thereby to start the mill again. Meanwhile the sacks were perforated by rats and mice, which he must have known, though he stoutly denied the fact when it was thrown in his teeth by Betsy. Why didn't he

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get a cat, she asked? But he replied that he couldn't afford to feed a cat, and that there was nothing for her to eat unless she were fed. Now and then he would inadvertently leave his keys within her reach, and Betsy would hastily climb up the ladder, and grope among the sacks, always to return as wise as when she went.

In the days when she was his housekeeper she had felt sure that the miller had money concealed in the house; she had tried the box in his bedroom with the same result as Mrs Dawes; she had tried to peep through the keyhole when he shut himself up in his room, but had never seen anything to gratify her curiosity. Still she had never doubted but that he was rich; and fancied that when once she was his wife he would confide in her on this as on other matters.

But she soon found her mistake. He urged economy on her more strongly than ever, but never encouraged her by making known to her any proofs of its success. When she had vainly tried every means in her power to discover his secret, she began to think it behoved her to acquire a private store, lest it might be that he had nothing after all, or meant to leave it all to Lettice. Then it was that the meals at Rippidge grew scantier and scantier; and soap disappeared from the necessary items in her

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household expenditure; and a certain proportion of eggs were sold for her own benefit every week; and pence, scraped together, here and there, were stored in Mrs Bourne's own box, of which she kept the key hidden inside her dress. Still none the less did she

watch for any clue to Daniel's secret; indeed she kept closer watch on him than before, fearing lest he should find her savings and add them to his own.

And he watched her because she had watched him; and he knew she had been too sharp for him once, and did not mean it to happen again; and he suspected her of deceiving him in a hundred little ways; and suspicion of everybody had grown to be a part of himself. But scanty fare, hard work, and anxiety will tell on the hardiest frames. The miller had become prematurely old and infirm; while the once sprightly Betsy was thin and worn, stooped from weakness, and dragged herself slowly and painfully, yet with undaunted courage, to and from market with her eggs and small purchases.

'I bain't very well some'ow,' she said to herself; 'I shall be better when the warm weather comes.'

But one cold, dark morning the miller called his wife, and got no answer. Having tried to arouse her, he hunted the house for a match, and getting a light at last, he peered, almost afraid of what

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he might see, into her face, and found that she was dead.

There was an inquest on the body; and the squalid condition of the corpse and its surroundings were described at some length in the local papers. A severe censure was passed upon the husband, with the verdict that Elizabeth Bourne had died from insufficient nourishment.

Yet when he was left a widower once more the miller made no difference in his way of living, and continued to move his treasure—whatever it might be—from one spot to another, as though he still wished to baulk curious watchful eyes. Possibly such precautions were not entirely needless. Rippidge was not often visited by a policeman; and though there had long been a very black mark against it in the common directory of the fraternity of tramps, yet in these days, its ruined and deserted appearance sometimes tempted a belated traveller to spend the night in some sheltered corner of the premises. And more than this the miller had several times, on entering his back kitchen at night, heard sounds of fast-retreating footsteps in the yard; and once, when he was stooping over the sink below the little window there, he had suddenly raised his head and caught sight of dark glowering a face at the

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window, watching him. It did not add to his comfort to know that this face belonged to Smith, a man whom he had summarily dismissed on the suspicion of stealing wheat; and who had (after some months of enforced idleness, when he, his wife, and children were nearly starved), been employed by 'Mother Higgins' at the Field Farm, in whose service he had remained ever since.

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CHAPTER VI

BAD TIMES

WHEN Mrs Dawes pronounced that the Dale must be given up, and Lettice and Teddie go to live with her, she had spoken of the arrangement as temporary; yet when she tried to assign any limit to it, she had stopped short, and left her half-finished sentence in the middle. Now I do not think that Lettice had ever broken off a sentence in the middle during her whole life; unless, that is, she were prevented from finishing it by some interrupting person, or circumstance. Clever, ambitious, sentimental, timid, or doubtful people are those most guilty of incomplete utterances, because their thoughts flow faster than their words; and before

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they can state their case, there occurs to them some possible danger, humiliation, sorrow, alarm, or uncertainty involved in the matter, and they become suddenly silent, hoping no doubt that those to whom they speak will sympathetically perceive all these contingencies.

Lettice had so much on, and in her mind just then, that possibly she did not notice her mother-in-law's hesitation; had she thought of it, she would have considered the undefined period to refer to an improved state of things to be brought about in the future by fairer weather, and better crops.

But the far-reaching mind of Mrs Dawes, foresaw a dozen events which might shorten or lengthen the joint occupancy of the Hill Farm by herself and Lettice. For instance, a very bountiful season next year might embolden her daughter-in-law to make a fresh venture on her own account; a very bad one might make it doubtful whether even the Hill could be retained; the miller might die, and his daughter become, all at once, a rich

woman, able to send Teddie to Harrow (where the Marleighs always went) and to Oxford; again, Lettice might marry; or she herself might do so —who knew?

Years of close and constant intercourse between these two very different women, had accustomed

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them to each other, while their mutual devotion to Teddie's interests was a strong bond of union, though even that differed in kind. Lettice believed that there never had been so handsome, so strong, so clever, so affectionate a boy; while the grandmother rejoiced in his high spirit, courage, and love of exciting adventure. When he came home with a black eye, after a school-fight, he was greatly applauded by his grandmother, and anyone less concerned than his mother would have laughed on entering the kitchen when he was in the midst of a vain-glorious recital of his encounter.

'So after Walker said that, Coles junior said, (he is a cockney, you know, and drawls like this) "Daw—awes is a terrible fellow to fi—ight—he goes to work li—ike a country bumpkin at a fair—ra" —he speaks just like that grannie, Coles junior does. And so I said, 'Well! Well, I said!'"

Here Teddie paused to puff and swell himself out, double his fists, and assume a warlike attitude.

'"Well," I said! "come on, and see how a country bumpkin can fight!" And so after that I licked them all!'

'Well done, our Ted! You're your great grandfather's own lad. Licked 'em all, did ya?' cried the grandmother delightedly.

Then she jeered at Lettice for scolding the boy,

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and crying over his eye, and the poor mother stood by listening with horror to the tales Mrs Dawes told Teddie of her father, the gigantic wheelwright of Marleigh; hero of a hundred fights in the 'good old times,' but whose huge bones now rested quietly enough under the old yew tree in the churchyard.

Teddie soon found that those expressions which he was ashamed to use in his mother's hearing, made his grandmother laugh; that when he swaggered, swore, bullied the 'gurl,'

or the farm lads, set the dogs to fight, or got into any dangerous scrape, she seemed pleased rather than not.

So, on the whole, though at first he thought it humiliating to give up their own home, he now approved of the adjournment to the Hill— 'it was so much jollier somehow.' He did not guess, for a time at least, how anxious a life it was for the two women who loved him, each in her own fashion, and who gave him all that he wished for.

That season was a better one and the crops good; had it not been so, Mrs Dawes told herself, she would not have been able to go on. Excepting when Teddie made her laugh, her face was very gloomy, but she told no one the reason of her gloom; and

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Lettice did not observe it, for she had troubles of her own to think of.

The manners and customs of the house at the Hill were very uncongenial to her, though she was neither so shocked, nor so vexed by them as she would once have been. She hated to feel under any obligation to her mother-in-law, and only bore it for Teddie's sake. A smaller trouble was that she grieved to be unable still to employ Dick Porter, though he had, indeed, been fortunate since she parted with him, for the squire had immediately engaged him, saying he knew him to be a good, honest, deserving fellow.

Mr Midgely had been desired to find employment for him; and Dick had now very good wages, and a pretty, comfortable cottage for his mother in the village and near the church; which facts were important to the old woman, who had of late years been unable to manage the walk from the Dale. A more friendly feeling for Mrs Porter had now revived in Lettice than she had ever felt since the morning of her wedding day. She often visited her in her new house; and it was here, about twelve months after she took up her abode at the Hill, that she received the news of the death of her father's wife— Dick having heard it in Braybridge.

It was a great shock to Lettice, who was unable

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to believe that anything but actual want could have brought about such a state of things at the mill as that described by rumours, and confirmed by the printed reports that shortly appeared. She went home from the Porters' cottage very unhappy at the thought that her father was starving; and the contemptuous snorts and incredulous exclamations

with which Mrs Dawes listened to her story seemed to her most heartless and unkind, especially when that lady remarked sarcastically,

'Don't tell me that your father is poor! You must know better than to believe that yourself! But s'posin' 'e is so bad off as 'e'd 'ave us all think, why, 'e'll be all the better off fur losin' 'is wife!'

When, however, Lettice declared her intention of going to see her father Mrs Dawes warmly seconded it; though she might have changed her opinion had she seen Lettice in her room that night, looking anxiously at the small store of money put by in her desk. Here she kept the sum that remained to her after the sale and settlement of her affairs at the Dale.

Mrs Dawes had declined to receive any of it, saying it should be put aside for her own and Teddie's personal use. A large hole had already been made in it on Teddie's account, while a few shillings covered her own share of the expenditure;

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and she had spent many an anxious moment over the question of how to replenish her purse for the future. Now, after long thought, she took out five shillings and put it in her pocket before setting out for Rippidge.

Her father gave her no welcome, no words of thanks for her trouble in coming, no acknowledgement of the sympathy she tried to express; he only eyed her with suspicion, and made strange allusions to her 'coming after him' and ended by assuring her angrily he had nothing to give her.

She was astonished at his manner, and horrified by the wretched aspect of the house; presently she drew out the five shillings, rather shyly, and began a little innocent speech, about hoping he would not be offended, wishing she could have spared more, and so on. When he saw the gleam of the silver in her hand, he came close to her, looked greedily at the money with his short-sighted eyes, stretched out his bony hand, of which the fingers worked impatiently, and said, in a hoarse voice, half wheedling, half threatening,

'Is that for me? How good of you to bring it! A girl *is* some use after all. How rich you must be to give away your money like that! Give it me quick! When will you come again?'

He put his shaggy head close to hers, she felt his

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breath upon the hand that held the money; and for the first time Lettice comprehended the covetous spirit that ruled her father. She concluded that his love of money had driven him mad, and, in her fear and horror, she dropped the silver on the kitchen table, and ran out of the house, and down the lane, as fast as she could go.

The miller picked up the coins one by one, and tried each to see if it rang true, then he collected them altogether, and fondled them between the palms of his hands. Looking round he saw that his daughter had left him.

'She's gone,' he muttered. 'Afraid I frightened her. What a pity! Might have come again— perhaps would have brought more next time What a pity! Ha, ha! Fool and money's soon parted. Ha, ha!'

Lettice was very much tired and overdone when she reached home that evening; she said little about her visit, till Teddie, who still felt great curiosity about his grandfather, followed her to her room, and coaxed out of her some account of her reception.

She did not tell him much, but he was furious at what he heard.

'Fancy his snubbing you, poor mother, when

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you'd walked all that way to see him! If you take my advice you'll never go near him again!'

The boy strode up and down, vowing vengeance on the 'unnatural old villain,' which conduct, though no doubt gratifying to himself, did not tend to console his mother.

Poor Lettice! she was very unhappy in those days, and probably thought it impossible that there could be any deeper descent for her into the valley of humiliation. Like most women of narrow intellect, and limited range of affections, she was inclined to be jealous: and just now she was furiously jealous of the enjoyment which Teddie found in the company of his grandmother; of Cornelia; of the squire's gamekeeper; of everybody and everything that led him away from her side. It was natural that she should feel so, now that her son was the only thing left her of her own. Yet he had never seemed less her own. He was becoming a general favourite, and made himself at home in every

house in the parish, to say nothing of many in Braybridge, where he was asked on half-holidays by the parents of his schoolfellows.

'Now they had knocked the nonsense out of him,' the boys cried, 'Dawes was a first rate fellow—so long as you didn't put him in a passion.'

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They were proud of his unusual strength, height, and skill in all kinds of games.

Elder people could not help liking his handsome face, pleasant manners, and free, fearless ways: yet they shook their heads over his pride, wilfulness, and want of self-control, and said they didn't know what he'd come to.

'But 'e's to be pitied, poor lad, losin' 'is father so young,' said Mrs Baker one day, 'and then as if 'is mother, poor thing, 'adn't sp'ilt 'im enough, 'ere 'e is now bein' trained up in Mother Dawes' own school; an' she is as wicked as she is sharp—an' that's sayin' a good deal, goodness knows!'

In the meantime the new schoolhouse at Bray-bridge was finished, and standing empty; yet Mr Cox seemed in no hurry to take possession—how was this?

His mother and Louie Midgely had never taken to each other from the time they were first introduced; and Louie felt as if it were to spite her that the old woman fell ill, and died within a month of the time fixed for the wedding. The devoted son was inconsolable, and protested that he could not marry for another six months at least, quite regardless of Louie's representations that she was put to unheard of inconvenience by the delay.

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She did not disguise her anger, and kicked so strongly against this decision, that the schoolmaster was aghast at such a display of temper, want of sympathy, and proper feeling on the part of his lady-love. His mild remonstrances in nowise expressed the disgust he felt; he stayed away from the Marsh for a fortnight, and Robert Midgely took fright.

'You must keep him up to, it Louie; you'll have him slip through your fingers now, if you don't mind!'

'Oh, there's not much fear of that,' she replied. 'but he ought to have called certainly. I'm going to Braybridge to-morrow, and I'll tell him what I think of him.'

So she descended on the schoolmaster as he sat at tea, accused him of having neglected her cruelly; and she sat down in his mother's chair, made herself quite at home, and helped herself to a piece of cake.

She was quite unconscious that Mr Cox thought her indelicate for coming at all; and that it was particularly hurtful to his feelings, to see her occupying the seat which he deemed sacred to his mother's memory.

When she was gone, he said to himself that he almost wished to break off the engagement; but in

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the bottom of his heart he knew that he dared not do so. Poor Mr Cox!

But there were worse things in store for him yet.

The next six months appeared to him to go terribly fast; but, before they were quite numbered, Robert Midgely came to his sister one morning, with a very white, though determined face, and a letter in his hand.

'Louie, I want to speak to you. You are sure Polly won't come in?'

Louie went out, coolly bade the servant leave the work she was about, and sent her on some errand to the village shop. Then she returned to her brother.

'What is it, Bob?' she asked, rather nervously.

'It's all up, Louie! I must be off. I'm sorry for your sake; I did hope you'd have been married before it came to this; but it isn't safe to wait a day longer, and so there's no help for it.'

'What is it?' she asked again, with trembling lips. 'And where are you going?'

'I'm off to,'- he began, sinking his voice.

'But no, you mustn't know; that will be the only safeguard for you. I'll tell you just what you must do. Tomorrow morning you must send this note up to the Hall. Look, I have said that I am

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called away suddenly by my father's illness, but shall be back in a week at the outside.'

'That won't do, Bob; the squire mayn't know that father's dead, but most of the folks do.'

'That's your fault, d— you! Why must you go talking and telling people what it can't concern them to hear? Well, I'll alter it; say brother. At the end of this week, when he

doesn't hear, he'll ask you, and you must only know I went to Joe's, and give his address. When they find I'm not there, and haven't been there, the murder 'll be out; by then I shall be safe out of the way, and you'll be married, I hope.'

'You've thought of yourself pretty well,' she said angrily, 'but how am I to be married with you not here, nor anybody else.'

'Oh! you must manage it somehow! For Heaven's sake don't make difficulties—you must get old Baker to give you away—and the wedding must be quieter than ever, because your brother's ill, you see; you'd have put it off altogether, only for Mr Cox's convenience—eh?'

'That 'ull do I suppose,' she said sourly, 'only I hope to goodness he won't hear about the brother, cause you see he knows Joe's only our cousin, and he is so dreadful particular.'

'Confound it, Louie, you must manage that—you

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can make up some story to tell him—no one better! I've no time to lose over it. I have some things to put together upstairs, and in half-an-hour I'm off.'

He turned to go, but Louie stopped him.

'Shan't I know where you are?' she asked half sulkily.

'I'll write to you from—that is, I'll write in three months time to you at Joe's—no, that won't do—at the Post Office at York; that 'ull be safe enough. Don't keep me now.'

In half-an-hour he was gone, and Louie had the whole day before her to realise the predicament in which she had been left, and lay her plans for the coming week. She repeated the story of the sick brother glibly enough to various enquirers, but it chanced that Mrs Baker, more curious than the rest, asked where the brother lived, and she gave, without a moment's thought, the address of her cousin.

Now Mr Cox had received various condolences on the unfortunate absence of his future brother-in-law at the time of the wedding, and when his friends alluded to the sudden illness of the supposed brother, he merely thought the mistake had arisen in the passage of news from mouth to mouth.

On the evening before the wedding, Baker, good-

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naturedly enough, called at the schoolhouse, to have a look at the new furniture, and assure the schoolmaster of his good-will, and intention to back him up bravely during the trying ordeal of the next morning.

'Tis a pity,' said he, 'that the baillie should 'a bin obbligated to go away jus' now, but the brother's a goin' on well now, thaay tells me, so there'll be nowt fur your good lady to fret 'erself about. I wonders Midgely didna try ta git back agen to-morra', but it's goodish waay to this 'ere Stannin'ly, I reckon, where his brother lives.'

'Cousin,' corrected Mr Cox.

'No, mon—brother.'

'Cousin, indeed; they have no brother.'

'Nonsense, mon, *brother*—Louie towd my missus on'y yesterday; "an' 'e lives at Stannin'ly, near Leeds," says she.'

'Mrs Baker must have been mistaken, I think,' began Mr Cox, apologetically.

'Mistaken! Not she. You axe Louie yoursel'.'

Mr Cox agreed to do so, and when Baker had left he walked out to the Marsh in a perturbed state of mind.

It had seemed unnatural to him that Robert should have gone off, in the middle of harvest-time, to see relations with whom he had openly

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declared he had quarelled, and with whom he had had no communication since he came to Brookshire, now nearly twelve years ago.

If Louisa, as he always called his *fiancée,* could not give him a satisfactory account of all the conflicting facts, he would decline to marry her to-morrow.

Yes, he would!

He did not own, even to himself, that such a course would be a welcome escape from a marriage which grew more and more distasteful to him the nearer it drew.

It was late when he knocked at the Midgelys door, which was opened by Lousia herself, very guardedly; and though she made a desperate effort to look delighted at the unexpected appearance of her lover, yet he did not fail to remark that she was suspicious, uneasy, and anxious.

'How good of you to come over to see me this last evening!' she exclaimed. 'Being alone, I didn't like to ask you to come; but I am so glad to see you; it's dull here by one's self.'

'I daresay it is,' said Mr Cox seriously, avoiding rather skilfully the kiss which Miss Midgely stooped her tall head to give him.

He entered the parlour, sat very upright in a straight-backed chair, and said ceremoniously,

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'I came this evening because I had things of importance to say to you, Louisa'

'Have you, indeed? What can they be, I wonder?'

'It has struck me on several occasions, and more particularly of late, that you did not fully realise the great—I may say vast importance of the step we are about to take. The relations between man and wife are so very close that the most entire harmony of thought and feeling are requisite, if— a—if the union is to be a happy one. Now with regard to ourselves, we have, during the unfortunately prolonged period of our engagement, been placed in a somewhat peculiar position. You had the advantage of knowing my dear late mother, and from her were enabled to procure any facts relating to my former life you or your brother might wish, very properly, to know. For my part, I had your brother to appeal to, but as you are aware, he insisted on referring me to you on all points, saying that you were your own mistress, and had no other relations but himself who were in any way concerned in your—a—your matrimonial choice. Now, Louisa'—

'Isn't it rather hard to—to lecture me to-night, of all nights?' asked Louie with a pout, and a little deprecatory gesture which had been very effective on former occasions.

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She pulled a half-faded rose out of a glass on the table, and began tearing it to pieces.

'Do be nicer to me, Jem!' she said, coaxingly.

Mr Cox hated to be called 'Jem' no one else had ever called him so; it was sadly undignified he thought. He frowned, and it now struck him for the first time that Louisa was too big, and too deep-voiced for those childish airs and graces, which she was so

fond of assuming. He continued with a courage that surprised him afterwards when he thought of it.

'I must conclude what I have to say. You have always given me to understand, that your only relation, except Robert, was a cousin, your uncle's son, at Stanningley, but that he had behaved so ill that you could not possibly recognise his rights as a relation—in fact he was a disgrace to the family, and you would have nothing to do with him under any circumstances. Now I hear that Robert has suddenly gone to Stanningley to see, not a cousin, but a brother. I wish to know, Louisa, what explanation you can give of this apparent deception you have practised upon me.'

'It's ve—very unkind of you to say I have deceived you! I'd n—never have b—believed it of you, never!' sobbed Louie, with her pocket-handkerchief to her eyes.

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'Do not cry, Louisa; there is no occasion for that. I merely want to hear you account for this discrepancy between the story you have told me, and that you seem to have told other people.'

'Other people, meaning Mrs Baker!' said Louie, indignantly.

'You would not have me suppose that you would tell Mrs Baker what you will not tell me?'

'Everybody knows she is a nasty gossiping old thing! I can't think how you could listen to what she says.'

'I have not listened to her, nor even seen her, I assure you. Be good enough to tell me whether you have a brother at Leeds?'

'Yes—no,' sobbed Louie; 'no, only a cousin.'

'Then this is simply a mistake on the part of Mrs Baker and others?'

'Yes; I suppose so. People are so stupid!'

'Has Robert then seen reason to think better of his cousin? You will forgive my asking these questions, Louisa; they concern me now, you must remember.'

'Oh, yes, of course. Well, you see, when a man is dying, one forgets old scores.' 'Dying? Is your cousin dying?' 'Oh, yes; he can't live many days longer.' 'Then, excuse me again, Louisa, but do you not

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think that under those afflicting circumstances tomorrow's ceremony'—

'There! I believe what you want all the time is to break off our engagement! It's always put off— and put off—but I won't have it, I can tell you!'

Mr Cox rose from his chair, with great dignity.

'I am surprised,' he said, 'I was not prepared for such an outbreak, of, what shall I call it—of language so unbecoming a female!'

'Well, there, Jem—forgive me this once! It's all so vexatious things happening this way when we were looking forward to such a pleasant time, you know, and—what's that at the door?'

She left the room hastily, and opened the house door with the same caution she had shown when admitting Mr Cox. He listened anxiously, half-hoping it might be Robert Midgely who was returning, with the news perhaps of the cousin's death. But he heard Louie exclaim in tones of surprise,'

'Oh, it's you, sir!'

And then the clear pleasant voice of Mr Temple replied,

'Good evening, Miss Midgely. Sorry to trouble you so late, especially on your last evening here. I walked over after dinner because I want your brother's address. Mr Reynolds is at the Hall, and

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there is a letter from Wood, of the Spout Farm, we can't quite understand I haven't the least doubt it's all right, and should have waited till Midgely came back, but that Mr Reynolds is off for his holiday directly. I won't come in, thanks: if you'll just tell me the address I'll copy it down in my pocket-book. There—thank you. I won't keep you longer now: I hope it will be fine for you to-morrow, it looks well this evening. Oh, by the way, I hope you hear better accounts of your brother who is ill?'

'Yes, sir, thank you.'

'Good evening.'

Louie shut the door and came back to the parlour.

She was thankful the squire had not stayed longer, nor asked more questions; but it troubled her that Robert's supposed address should be asked for two days earlier than he had calculated on; and fears lest this might involve detection before he could escape,

and she be away from Long Upton, made her forget that Mr Cox must have heard all that passed at the door.

She only felt that she must do all in her power to secure that the wedding should take place in the morning; and so she approached him with some flattering remark about the inopportune moment of the squire's visit. She did not at first realize

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what he could mean when he waved her back from him.

'What!' he cried, 'I have been mistaken in you indeed, if you come to me thus boldly with a lie fresh on your lips!'

'A lie!' she said, shrinking back. 'What do you mean?'

'What do *you* mean, madam, by telling me one minute that your "cousin" is dying, and the next saying to Mr Temple that your "brother" is better?'

'Brother? Oh!' she cried wildly, as she perceived the mistake she had made, 'did I say brother?'

'No; but he said it, and you did not contradict him. There is something not above board in this conduct of yours, and your brother Robert's. Until it is satisfactorily explained, I decline to marry you.'

'Oh, Jem! Dear Jem! Don't be so harsh; I will tell you all!' Mr Cox drew himself up.

'The appellation of "Jem" is odious to me' he said, 'especially now, and under these circumstances. Do not misunderstand me, Miss Midgely; until your brother returns, and this mysterious affair is made clear, I shall not see you again.'

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'But you are bound to marry me! you can't help it! I'm not going to let you off for a paltry excuse like this!'

'My excuse is not paltry; it is perfectly valid; It is useless to work yourself into a rage. I see the mothers of my pupils do that pretty frequently, and I am hardened to screams and threats. When your brother returns we shall meet again, and it may be that we—that I shall again be enabled to revive the feeling I once entertained for you: but until then I—a—withdraw! I will call on Mr Metcalfe and inform him that his services will not be required to-morrow: that will perhaps save you the trouble of an awkward explanation. Good evening, madam.'

'Get away; out of my sight, sir! You shall suffer for this! A young woman in this country isn't treated in such a way for nothing!—*Little beast!* hissed Louie through her teeth, as she watched Mr Cox's parting figure. 'I'll make him rue the day he played fast and loose with me. Sneak! Wretch! He shall feel my revenge through every inch of his miserable little body!' She proved herself too clever for him at once by rushing off to the Bakers, and there relating, amid tears and sobs, such a tale of grief and ill-requited love, that the gardener and his wife were

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both up in arms on her behalf; and it was only her earnest entreaties that withheld the honest Baker from descending on the recreant schoolmaster and pounding him to a jelly.

The story spread through the means of this worthy, but credulous couple, caused Mr Cox to be looked upon as a 'mean-spirited creature;' while the fair Louie was regarded as an injured maiden; and the ignominy which was shortly attached to her brother's name did not reflect upon her. By general consent she was voted innocent, and ignorant of Robert's misdoings; and she figured in the light of the good-natured dupe who had come in for the shame and trouble which her guilty brother had escaped.

A skilful representation of her case to the much-abused Joe Midgely, procured her an invitation to make his house her home until she could find some suitable employment.

When she left for Yorkshire Mr Cox was unspeakably thankful—but he crowed before he was out of the wood; for a short time afterwards his peace was utterly destroyed by the receipt of a letter from some lawyers at Leeds, containing threats of an action against him for breach of promise of marriage, unless he immediately consented to wed their client, Miss Louisa Midgely.

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Horrible as was the thought of figuring in such a case, the prospect of marrying Louisa was now far worse in Mr Cox's eyes; and so in due time the action came on, and there being no witnesses to uphold the cause of the hapless schoolmaster, such damages were awarded to the forsaken damsel as set her up in business.

Poor Mr Cox's life had now become a burden to him, and the neighbourhood of Braybridge unendurable, by reason of the notoriety he had gained there; his savings too

were all swallowed up, so he sold his new furniture, took a sad farewell at the Hill Farm, where were the only friends who had stuck to him in his late troubles, and left Brookshire for ever.

He eventually obtained the post of schoolmaster on board a training ship, and let us hope that he will some day meet with a happier fate than that which has hitherto attended his love affairs.

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CHAPTER VII

MUTUAL EXPLANATIONS

THE Squire's letter to his steward, addressed to the care of Joseph Midgely, was returned to him, with only a few words written in a sprawling hand across the top.

'Know nothing of my cousin, Bob, nor don't wish to.'

An answer so unsatisfactory and unexpected, was of course followed up by strict and searching enquiry.

Joe was written to; Louie interrogated; accounts overhauled; tenants examined; and each step that was taken, proved the more conclusively that the late steward, who was thought so clever a manager,

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had been only too clever for his employer and the agent, and had managed to line his own pockets well, and to make off just as detection became inevitable.

As the evidence against him grew and multiplied, there came to light deep-laid schemes of fraud, which had been carried on long and successfully.

Hugh Temple was consumed with unavailing rage, as he learned by degrees the villany of the man whom he had trusted so blindly, that when the first shadow of doubt was cast on Midgely's integrity, he was ashamed to notice it.

He had not known why various tenants of his— occupying small out-lying farms, separated from the bulk of the Long Upton estate—had of late shown signs of disrespect and dislike to himself. It was not, as he had imagined, that some political agitator had poisoned their minds against landlords; it was because Midgely had contrived bit by bit to get the entire management of this part of the property, even receiving the rents independantly of Mr Reynolds. And when of late years the rents of larger, better farms

had been lowered, Midgely had exacted the full sum here, and pocketed the difference. It was a dangerous game to play, but he knew that his other delinquencies must be found out sooner or later, and therefore

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lost no chance of enriching himself while opportunity remained. It was this that led to his detection, for one of these small farmers, a man named Wood—desperate, and on the brink of ruin —wrote a frantic letter to the squire, laying at his door many misfortunes for which no human being was responsible, but including among many groundless accusations, one of unfairness in granting reductions to richer tenants which were denied to the poorer ones.

The only person who had been at all aware of Midgely's course of deception was also the only one to perceive the blunder with which it closed —a blunder which, in her eyes, was worse than crime. Louie could not forgive her brother for the clumsy and unnecessary lie he had put in her mouth respecting the invalid whom he was said to have visited when he fled from Long Upton. She had foreseen at the time that it might lead to complications with Mr Cox; but when Robert was gone, she felt obliged to tell her neighbours the same tale as he had written to the squire. His object was merely to gain time; and in order to give a better colour to the excuse put forward for his sudden absence, he bestowed a nearer relationship on the cousin who lived at Leeds. This gratuitous stupidity, as she deemed it, was visited on Louie,

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who thereby lost her lover, and her chance of 'settling' in life.

All other sufferers by Robert Midgely were ready to admit his cleverness, even while cursing their own folly in having allowed him to influence them. He was a stranger, and Brookshire folks were usually distrustful of strangers; yet they had allowed this man to prey upon them, and all flattered themselves that they were doing wisely.

That was the provoking part of it! For Mr Temple was not the only dupe of this canny Yorkshire man. His income, which had decreased steadily for the last five years, would now be considerably smaller; he must give up a certain hunter he had hoped to buy; he could not go to Norway with Captain Bentley; Grace would have no season in town next spring. But worse than any of these things was the reflection that, through his

influence mainly, Midgely had been made a church-warden, and treasurer or secretary to various parochial charities, the funds of which were now unaccounted for. And again he was troubled to find that his steward had successfully persuaded many a thrifty neighbour to place his, or her, savings in his hands; on the ground that he could invest them in American mines, or railways, to immense advantage. To these simple people he

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had now and then paid what seemed a fair rate of interest, and had lulled any doubts that arose in their minds, with specious reasons carefully adapted to each case. There was scarcely one family among the middle class of the district upon whom he had not imposed in one way or another, and the news of his disappearance came on them like a thunder-clap.

'Here's a go! Where's mother? Oh, here's a nice go!' cried Teddie Dawes, bursting into the kitchen, one morning, to the amazement of his grandmother, who had seen him ride off to school only five minutes ago.

'You back again?' she said testily. 'It's anythin' in the world but *go,* with you, I think. I sha'n't listen to ya, so it's no use you talkin', lad. Be off wi' ya! You'll be ever so late again!'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed he, heedless of her remonstrances, but holding his sides and rocking to and fro with laughter, real or pretended.

'Ha, ha, ha! I can't help laughing to think how he's taken you all in. It's splendid!'

'Ah, you'll laugh on the wrong side o' your mouth afore long, my young gentleman, when the master canes ya well, which your mother wrote an' ast 'im to the very next time you was late. Where is she? Why, in the dairy, and she'll be that

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vexed to think as you've come back—drat the b'y, are ya gone silly?'

'Oh to think of it!' roared Teddie, in an ecstasy of amusement. 'The great Mr Midgely turning out so!'

He was going towards the dairy, still rolling with merriment, when his grandmother, catching his last words, dashed after him and seized his arm.

'Midgely, did you say? What about him? What 'as he turned out?' she asked breathlessly.

'Well, grannie, you needn't pinch a fellow's arm like that; and why do you look at me so queerly? Let go, and I'll tell you what I heard—though it's more than you deserve, 'cos you wouldn't listen when I wanted to tell you.' Here he paused, leant against the dresser, and rubbed his arm in a leisurely manner.

'You impudent, aggravating,' good-fur-nothin' young dog, tell me this minute! 'Ow durst ya keep me waitin' like that?'

'Oho! what a hurry we are in, to be sure! "He who will not when he may," etcetera'

'I'm not goin' to stand *your* sauce; where you learn such ways passes me—goin' to the Grammar School an' all! Are ya goin' to speak out, you young rascal, or are ya not?'

'Then get me a mug o' cider first.'

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'That I shan't!' replied the old woman, angrily; but Teddie waited, and she turned to the cupboard, took out a big blue mug, and hurried off to the cellar to fill it.

'There you are; drink it down quick,' she said, nervously, as she put the mug into her grandson's hand. She stood watching impatiently as he sipped the cider appreciatively, and with evident desire to make it last as long as possible. Before he had finished it, his mother came in from the dairy.

'Why, Teddie! When did you come back? and why? Is anything the matter?'

'I came back to tell you some news.' 'And what have you got there? Cider! Oh you bad boy! And how could you let him have it, at this time in the morning?' she said, looking reproachfully at Mrs Dawes.

Teddie enjoyed teasing his grandmother, and rather liked to hear her call him opprobrious names in her anger, which he always knew how to turn off into a laugh; after which he always got what he wanted, and went his way without any qualms of conscience. But he could not bear to see his mother vexed; she said little, but the pained look in her eyes went to the boy's heart, and he could not go away happily until she had given him a kiss of forgiveness.

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'Bless us all!' began Mrs Dawes, in a highly exasperated state of mind; but before she could go on, Teddie put down his empty mug on the dresser, and began,

'It's my fault, mother, not grannie's one bit. I asked her for the cider, and would not tell her anything till she brought it. Now I'll tell you, and be off to school. You know about Midgely's going off to Yorkshire last week?'

'Yes, what of that?' asked both women together;

'Well, he isn't there, and didn't go there. No one knows where he is, and he's made away with a lot of Mr Temple's money.'

Teddie looked in amazement at the two women before him; surely these few words could have no import for them? Yet there was grannie holding tight to the kitchen table, and her cheeks and lips were such a queer colour; while his mother stood more upright than usual, and pressed her hands together, as she asked in a low voice,

'How did you hear this? Are you sure it's true?'

'Young Mr Baker told me; he's been at his father's, and says there's no end of a row at the Hall. They only found it out for certain last night, and the police are after Midgely, but they'll never get him now, you know; he's had a week

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to get away in. He's borrowed some money off old Baker too, I believe; everyone's as savage as can be, 'cos you see they all thought such a lot of him. *I* never did believe in him for my part. So now you know what your favourite is grannie; You'll hear plenty more of him before night. Good-bye. I'm really off now.'

Neither of the women spoke or moved till they heard the rattle of Teddie's pony's heels across the stone paving of the yard, and the swing of the gate that closed behind him. Then Lettice turned and looked at her mother-in-law—a curious, searching, puzzled look.

Mrs Dawes sank into a chair and put her hand to her side.

'I'm bad,' she gasped faintly. 'Some water!'

Lettice gave herself an almost imperceptible shake, as if to throw off thought of herself, and then she hastened to aid the older woman, on whom some heavy blow had evidently fallen.

She brought her water, and sal-volatile, and persuaded her to lie down, as soon as she was able to move, on the roomy, old-fashioned couch by the fire. Here Mrs Dawes lay,

very silent, watching Lettice as she came in and out, and began to prepare the dinner. Presently she saw a tear fall from her

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daughter-in-law's eye, and splash among the beans she was putting into a saucepan.

'Lettice!' she said, loudly and suddenly, but with a rough kindness unusual to her.

'Lettice, come here, child!'

Lettice put down the saucepan, and went up to the couch, pale, trembling slightly, and with downcast eyes. Mrs Dawes caught her by the hand.

'Lettice, what was Robert Midgely to you? Don't tell me that he has taken you in, like the rest of us.'

'He was my banker,' answered Lettice, very sadly and softly, 'He had all the money I had saved—at the Dale—before we had such bad luck there—and now I suppose it is all gone—and I meant it for Teddie!' ended poor Lettice with a burst of tears.

'There, there—cry a bit, poor thing, it will do you good,' said Mrs Dawes, patting Lettice's small hand with her own large one. 'How much had he of yours, my dear?'

'Three hundred pounds.'

'Ah well, there isn't so much cause fur you to fret; there's time an' chance enough fur you to save up that much agen, for you're young, an' there'll come better times after a bit surelie! But *me*!' here Mrs Dawes raised herself from the sofa,

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and sat bolt upright so suddenly, and energetically as to make Lettice start— 'but me; there's no fool like an old fool, that's true enough. To think as I should be that soft to listen to 'is oily tongue, and let 'im 'ave all my savin's; my savin's that were safe in Kingsford Old Bank, where they'd been ever since I was in service, an' then fur me to go an' take 'em out, an' let that fella 'ave 'em to make ducks an' drakes on, all through me listenin' to 'is tales about 'Merriky! An' I'm an owd 'ooman— an owd 'ooman, as 'ull never live to save up above a pound or two now—if I does that.'

Mrs Dawes rose to her feet and cursed Robert Midgely, in words that made Lettice cower, and shake, and stop her ears. Then overcome by her own vehemence, she sank back again on the sofa. 'And I curse my own folly,' she said, for believing 'im. I ought to

'a knowed better at my age, than fancy as a young man, that I might 'a bin the mother of, should want to marry me like 'e pretended to!'

'Marry! marry *you?'* cried Lettice, drawing nearer again, and staring incredulously at her mother-in-law.

'Aye, 'e did, sure enough. 'E axed me three or four times, and talked and argued away about it that reasonable, that I 'ad come to think there wuz

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many things more unlikely! I don't see what call you 'ave to be so surprised at it, Lettice; p'r'aps you 'ud 'a liked to 'ave 'im yourself?'

'He asked me to, at anyrate,' said Lettice, half-indignantly.

'What!' screamed Mrs Dawes, 'axed you to marry 'im too? Upon my word! 'e *'ad* some cheek an' no mistake! What did you say to 'im, Lettice?' she asked with a scornful laugh.

'I said I should not marry again. I could not do so, of course, when—I didn't know for certain about poor Armell.'

'Oh, that was what you said, was it? If you'd a bin sure you wuz a widda you'd 'a give Mr Midgely " Yes " fur an answer, I suppose.'

'Probably I should,' said Lettice calmly.

'An' w'at 'ood 'e 'a done then, I wonder!' laughed Mrs Dawes. "E'd 'a bin in a pretty plight, I reckon.'

'Why?' asked Lettice, opening her eyes.

'No doubt 'e'd made offers to all the widdas an' old maids in the country-side, an' 'e didna want, any one on 'em to say "Yes " to 'im.'

'I do not think that,' returned Lettice, bridling, 'he always admired me, I know.'

She put on the little conscious air that at any other time would have tickled Mrs. Dawes' sense of

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humour, but now it only made her angry that Lettice should be simple enough to believe Midgely was more honest in his profession of affection than he was in his demands on her purse.

'Bless and save us, child! he on'y wanted to get round ya, like 'e did with the rest of us. 'E didna propose to ya till after 'e knowed you'd saved up a bit, I'll bet. 'Twas your money 'e cared for—not you.'

'It may be so, for he was a bad man, I fear,' replied Lettice, still somewhat offended. 'But he did admire me, I know. He showed it even while Armell was at home, and he didn't like it; he spoke about it, and I was vexed he should think anything of it.'

Mrs Dawes gazed at her daughter-in-law in silent astonishment.

Lettice had a spice of vanity and coquetry that she had never suspected until now.

'Poor Armell! I wonder if this blackguard Midgely got 'im into some mess; or whether— Oh, I've got such a pain come in my 'ead! I must lie down again for a bit; an', Lettice, you get on with the dinner—folks must eat, though they've bin robbed of all their savin's.'

After this, Mrs Dawes complained very frequently of pains in her head.

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She seemed shaken, and though she went about her work, it was in a dull, stunned fashion, from which she was only roused occasionally by outbursts of passion; she seemed to have lost the pleasure and pride she used to take in Teddie, and she found fault with him, and blamed his mother for his faults, till the boy would scarcely stay in the house with her.

'He didn't care for himself,' he said, 'he could give grandmother as good as he got from her, any day; but he wouldn't stand her bullying mother.'

Lettice was very uneasy. She tried in vain to get her mother-in-law to see a doctor, and went about herself oppressed with the feeling that some further trouble was at hand. She felt dazed, as it were, and yet was well aware that she had never stood so much in need of a clear head as now.

The capital, small though it was, which had given to both women at the Hill a sense of security throughout the bad seasons of the last few years, was now gone, and it certainly behoved them to think very seriously of the future. Yet it was plain that Mrs Dawes was unequal to thought just now; and Lettice went to Kingsford to see Marjory and ask her opinion.

She was not clever at descriptions, and hardly

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succeeded in making Marjory understand her mother's condition.

'She's only turning over some plan in her head, Lettice, you may depend on it. She'll astonish you some day coming out with it suddenly. I know her ways so well, especially when she's in any difficulty; and she had plenty of them at one time, when I was a child, and Armell in Yorkshire. Has nothing been heard of Mr Midgely yet?'

Lettice shook her head.

'Except that he went to Liverpool, they have found out nothing. They think he's in America, 'ond that they'll not be able to find him.'

'I hated him always,' said Marjory, clenching her fist, 'but I never thought him so bad as all this. How it was that mother trusted him with her money, I can't think! I've heard her abuse companies, and speculations of all sorts, by the hour together. And then you, Lettice—oh, don't cry, please don't cry, dear. I didn't mean to blame you!' said Marjory, in great distress, for she had never before seen her sister-in-law shed tears.

'I can't help it, Marjory; I'm so anxious; and your mother doesn't seem able to see to things. If it wasn't for Teddie I should give up and go out to service, or anything rather than keep on with farming. Luckily we've a good bit of wheat, and

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the turnips look splendid. I've sold some barley pretty well already, but your mother used to see to that always, you know, Marjory, and now she don't seem to think of it.'

'Poor Lettice! you are quite overdone. I'll tell you what I will do, I'll get a week's holiday and come and help you a bit, and then I can see for myself how mother is Mrs Shepherd's niece is coming to stay with her on Monday, and I can leave quite well while she is here.'

She was touched and pleased by the warmth with which Lettice welcomed this suggestion; it had often troubled her that her sister-in-law seemed to care so little for her.

'And, Lettice,' she continued, 'you must remember that what is mine is yours and mother's. Of course I have not wanted to spend all my salary, and Mrs Shepherd gives me so many presents, that I have been almost too well off; and I know I might not get a situation—such a good one, I mean, again,' said Marjory, hesitating and blushing,' and

so I put by all I could, and you must let me know when you want anything, will you not?'

It was not till Lettice had gone that Marjory realised the anxieties that must weigh upon her; but when she recalled what she had heard about her mother, she began to feel very uneasy, and

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longed for the day when she could go home, and share, for a week at least, the hard work, and plain fare, the thought of which made her feel so idle and luxurious, as she sat at Mrs Shepherd's table or drove with her mistress in the carriage. In this frame of mind she was not so shocked as she might have been, when two or three days after Lettice's visit, Teddie rode up to the door of Roselands, his pony hot and panting, and himself pale and breathless.

'Aunt Marjory, you must come home at once; grandmother has had a stroke.'

And when she arrived at the Hill, she found her mother in bed, helpless down one side, and unable to speak plainly. It was painful to see the poor woman following every movement of those about her with her small dark eyes, and vainly trying to articulate, working herself into a dangerous state of anger, when they failed to understand her. Lettice was not fitted by nature for a sick nurse, neither had she hitherto had much experience in that line. Cornelia had of late years grown stout, unwieldy, and habitually untidy; and though willing and good-natured, was likely to drive her former mistress distracted by her torn and soiled dress, dirty fingers, and general carelessness.

She had not worked at the farm for some time past;

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they had not been able to afford her help; and though she and Teddie had remained as fast friends as ever, Mrs Dawes and Lettice had seen little of her.

She had volunteered her help when she heard *of* Mrs Dawes' illness, but she proved of little use, since she could not carry a cup of tea upstairs without spilling half of it by the way; and she seemed to have forgotten even how to wash the tea-cups in cleanly fashion. Thus the invalid was really glad to see her daughter, and in her helpless way, greeted her with more affection than she had shown since Marjory's great offence, in refusing to marry the squire—now thirteen years ago.

The doctor was so delighted at the appearance of a nurse who could please his patient, and understand her without trouble, that he insisted on Marjory's staying with her mother, and she herself now felt that it was certainly her duty to leave her kind and indulgent mistress, and help her sister-in-law at home. She wrote and told her decision to Mrs Shepherd's niece, asking her to try and find another companion for the old lady at once.

Mrs Macfarlane arranged to take her aunt home with her for a time, until she could meet with a successor to Miss Dawes.

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Before this move was made Marjory was able to leave her mother for one day, and go back to take leave of Mrs Shepherd, and pack her own goods for removal to the Hill. The sorrow of her mistress at parting with her was a little trying to her, for, much as she loved the old lady, she could not help feeling that the fresher air and freer life of the farmhouse would be a relief. The chief thing she would miss would be the books and music, the concerts Mrs Shepherd had sent her to, and—the cathedral services. She wondered if she should ever see Mr Leddington when she went away from Kingsford: she would have liked to say Good-bye. Mrs Shepherd's voice broke in upon her thoughts.

'My dear, I don't know what in the world I shall do without you. I cannot understand what people say; I can't always hear even what Fanny says. Now, I am so used to your voice I never had any difficulty with you. While you were away on Monday, I think it was—no, Tuesday—that little Miss Miller called here. She is very good, I'm sure; but so shy she seems afraid to speak above a whisper. And by what I could make out she had a very sad story to tell about some people at St Jude's. The father was scalded drinking out of a tea-kettle, I think she said; and the baby broke its arm falling from a ladder; and would I send them some

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orange jelly, because there were six other children, and the mother was an idiot? Now, that's very sad, you know, my dear; but I can't help thinking there's some mistake, because, you see, with the father unable to work they'd want something more substantial than orange jelly, though they are very welcome to that, I'm sure. But what I meant was,

would you just go and see what really is wanted? Fanny is going into the town and might drive you to the bridge, and then you're at St Jude's directly by turning up that lane to the left. You might walk back, or if you're tired, take a cab. But you look pale, as if you wanted fresh air after nursing your mother. Should you mind, my dear?'

Marjory professed herself perfectly willing to go on this errand of mercy, only, where was the house? Mrs Shepherd had taken the precaution of asking Miss Miller to write down the address; and after much fumbling in her workbag, she produced a letter from Mr Metcalfe, on the edge of which was written in pencil,' No. 4, Alexandra Terrace.'

Marjory found it without difficulty, and after investigating the case of this unfortunate family, she asked the mother (who turned out to be in possession of all her senses) whether the church was far away.

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'Go straight up the Terrace, ma'am, and turn to the left, and then to the right, and you'll come out close agen the church, ma'am.'

Marjory hardly knew what she expected from going to look at the little district church, but she followed the directions given her, and as she came in sight of it, she started and her heart began to beat. A small congregation was streaming out from the afternoon Service, and behind them all came the tall figure of the organist with a book under his arm as usual. Marjory turned half round, and, for an instant only, contemplated running back down the steep lane she had just mounted. Then she grew bolder, and, crossing the road, met Mr Leddington on the further side of the church.

'Miss Dawes—you—here?' he said in surprise, much as he had done on a former occasion.

'Yes,' she said, very quietly. 'Mrs Shepherd asked me to come to a cottage here, and I hoped I should meet you to say Good-bye.'

'Good-bye?' he repeated, in a puzzled tone of voice.

'Yes, to say Good-bye. I am leaving Kingsford to-morrow. My mother is ill, and I have to go and live at home.'

'At home—ah! at Long Upton. Shall you like it?' he asked abruptly.

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'Yes; no; I can't tell,' stammered Marjory, with tears welling up in her eyes, for at that moment she felt she should not like it all.

'Ah!' said the organist, looking keenly at her; then he fixed his eyes on the ground and was silent, apparently lost in thought.

This was embarrassing for Marjory; with a slight feeling of disappointment, she stretched out her hand.

'Well, Good-bye,' she began, rather coolly; 'I have to walk back to North Hill, and must be going.'

'Oh—Good-bye,' said he, hastily; and she turned away, wishing very heartily that she had never come.

She had not reached the end of the church-yard wall, when he ran after her.

'Marjory—I beg your pardon—Miss Dawes, you said once that you would come and see my house. Could you come now?—it is quite close. I should very much like you to do so,' he added eagerly.

Marjory paused.

Why could he not have asked her before? Why did he look unutterable things at her now, out of his big dark eyes, when only a moment back he had seemed to forget her existence?

Then she remembered the shy, proud, curiously-

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unsophisticated nature of the man, and she looked up pleasantly at him, and said she was ready and willing to go. He looked pleased, but said little as he led the way across the wide space where three roads met by the church, then walking a few yards up the narrowest and oldest of these roads, he suddenly turned in under an archway formed in the middle of an ancient timbered house, once a splendid mansion, but now dilapidated and cut up into several small dwellings. Behind this, in what had no doubt, been the garden of the old house, were three or four bright little cottages, with bow-windowed parlours, and gay flowers growing about them.

The organist opened the gate of the brightest and gayest of them all, and just as Marjory thought how unlike it was to the home she should have expected to find him in, he

ushered her into the room with the bow-window, and she became aware of two women sitting by the fire.

Women, I said, for both were women in age, though one of them was not so in appearance.

She sat on a low stool, and her face, her smoothly-brushed fair hair, her pink dress and white pinafore, and her low chuckling laugh were those of childhood; but her tall bent figure, her long, thin, nerveless fingers, and a

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certain worn look on her features, told that she was a woman in years.

Her companion was tall and dark, very neatly dressed, like a respectable servant; but she had nevertheless a majestic carriage, and a suppressed fire about her, that were very unlike a servant. She was knitting, and continued to knit, fast and furiously, the whole time of Marjory's visit.

When the poor girl on the stool heard the door open, she lifted her drooping head, and seemed to listen, then she chuckled a little louder than before, and said very rapidly and indistinctly,

'Is that you Mel? Mel—Mel—Mel's come home!'

Melchior put down his book on the table, and stooped over her, kissed her, and stroked her head with his long dark fingers—like her own, yet so different.

'Yes, it's Mel come back to you, Emmie; and here's a lady come to see you too. Julia, this is Miss Dawes.'

The woman got up, and made a stately curtsey; then gave Marjory a chair, and retired to the window, where she stood knitting, and looking as if quite indifferent to all that happened.

'This is my sister,' said Melchior, looking up at

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Marjory with a meaning glance, and her eyes said plainly back to him,

'I understand you.'

'Is she blind?' she asked softly.

'Nearly so. She can see bright colours,' he answered, in the same tone.

'Speak to this lady, Emmie.'

Marjory left her seat, and knelt on the rug beside Emmie, took her hand, and tried to talk to her; but it was not easy, and Mr Leddington did not seem very able to help in the one-sided conversation. At last the woman in the window turned round.

'Wouldn't she like to see over the house?' she asked of her master, pointing to the visitor with a knitting-needle. He looked pleased, and asked Marjory if she wished to do so, whereupon she accepted the offer, thinking it would gratify him.

Julia led the way into the small but convenient kitchen at the back, displayed the little pantry, the wash house, the yard, and kitchen garden; then mounted the stairs. In the small bedrooms everything was spotlessly clean, comfortable, and bright; if the master's own room was a little less so than the rest, it was because the inkstains on his table were irradicable, and the strewn sheets of

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music, and piles of books, were sacred from the brush and duster.

Julia showed all these things in a perfunctory manner, giving necessary explanations with a hard cold voice; but at last she returned to the largest bedroom, where she slept with Emmie, and shutting the door suddenly faced her visitor, as she asked almost fiercely,

'You'll be good to Emmie?'

'I do not understand you,' gasped Marjory, in alarm.

'You'll be good to Emmie, I say; you'll be good to Emmie, won't you?'

'If I can do anything for her, I would willingly; but I can't. I leave Kingsford to-morrow, and am not likely to come here again.'

Julia's face grew blank. 'Oh!' she said, 'I ask your pardon; I was under a mistake. I thought that perhaps you was coming to live here altogether soon.'

'Oh, no,' said Marjory, her cheeks burning hotly, 'but,' she added, with a pleasant smile that softened the grim Julia for the time, 'but I am glad all the same that you think so much of Emmie. I used to know Mr Leddington many years ago, but not his family. I have lately met him again, and now, as I am going away, he asked me here to say Good-bye.

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That's all. Tell me about Emmie; has she always been like that?'

'Yes, always. She's eight-and-twenty, and she's always been what you see her now—half-blind, half-witted, and crippled; but a more loving little creature you won't find anywhere, and it's my belief she'd try her best to kill anyone that harmed her brother. And well she may think all the world of him; what would her life have been but for him? A nice burden for a young man, wasn't it, to be left at nineteen with Emmie as she is, and his mother always flat on her back—something wrong with her spine? And he'd a friend I believe—a gentleman that took him up because of his cleverness, who would have sent him to a music college, or some such place, and put his mother and sister into an institution. But he gave it all up to stay and make a home for them. He's one in a thousand, he is.—You haven't been giving yourself airs with him, have you?' she ended suddenly and suspiciously.

'Airs! No, indeed; why should I? I knew he was good—but not *how* good. He's not one to talk about himself, you know.'

No, he isn't; and that's why he often gets put upon by those that isn't fit to black his shoes—and it makes me mad, so it does! When his mother

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died, he took the trouble to find me, and offered me a home to look after Emmie for him. I was a cousin of their father's and none of the family were very proud of me—I won't say it wasn't my fault either. But Melchior—he was always good to me, and when he asked me to come as a favour, and keep his house, and wait on poor Emmie, I could scarce believe my ears! And if anyone wants his character, you send 'em to me!'

She ended quite suddenly again, and with a threatening voice and manner that would have led any chance hearer to suppose she was abusing her master heartily.

A sort of insane desire to laugh came over Marjory, while a great lump was swelling in her throat. She thought she now knew all her friend would wish her to know about his home and family, so she turned to go down stairs before Julia could pour forth another torrent of words. She made her adieux very quietly; and slowly and thoughtfully set out on her walk back to North Hill. Her duties and those of Melchior Leddington were plain, and lay far apart. His were to make as happy as possible the life of his afflicted sister, and to tame this half-wild woman, whom no doubt he had saved from some sinful course or other; and hers was clearly to go back to Long Upton, nurse

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her mother, help her sister-in-law, and if possible, to control her spoilt nephew. Not a pleasant prospect!

But it would often help her to think of all that Melchior had borne for his family.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE RESULT OF TEDDIE'S EDUCATION

MARJORY had rightly supposed that her life at the Hill would be a hard one, and it was well she had braced herself to the prospect of work, poverty, and trials of temper, and patience. After a time Mrs Dawes' speech became more distinct, but she remained bodily helpless, and in this condition she was so miserable, discontented, and fretful, as to make those about her feel that they should have been almost thankful if her mind were less clear than it was.

A wet cold season brought fresh anxieties to Lettice and Marjory, and though they tried to be as cheerful as possible in their mother's presence,

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she was far too keen to be taken in by them, and too active in mind to omit asking questions about the condition of every crop, and every field on the farm.

The ill reports which they had to give, caused her to worry herself, and advise, blame, or pity them, as the case might be, almost beyond their endurance. One day she would cry out that it was no wonder things went wrong with two such silly, good-for-noughts to manage them. Another time she would say they had better give up trying, and all of them go to the workhouse; what was the use of Lettice and Marjory wearing themselves to skin and bone if everything was against them, and the weather like Noah's flood! Sometimes she would lament her own condition, and declare she didn't know what she had done to deserve it.

'I've alius dealt honest by everyone, an' kep' my church, and lived respectable, and see what trouble I 'ave. It's on'y them as cheats, an' lies, an' drinks, an' acts any'ow as seems to get on in this world! I dunno what the Almighty means by it! An' none on ya seems to cahr for me lyin' 'ere like a log, w'en I wuz use to get about an' keep things summat like straight. There's that gurl gigglin' i' the back kitchen now, an' she ain't the only one as

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shirkin' 'er work, I'll be bound! If I could get at 'em on'y just fur wunst—*I'd* let 'em knaow!'

Then she would turn on Marjory or Lettice and vehemently reproach her for some piece of mismanagement, and having said every stinging word that occurred to her, would see them go away in tears, and begin to lament that she was a poor creature now, whom nobody took any thought for, and who was left to mope by herself if she did but speak a bit sharp.

In those days Teddie took upon himself to decide that he should leave school. His mother did not oppose him, and his grandmother applauded his decision.

'She couldn't see what anyone was the better for such a lot of book learning. Teddie knew enough to hold up his head with the best of them. He could stop at home, and keep her company for a bit, he'd be scholar enough to spend his money like a gentleman when he got it.'

'I don't know where this money is to come from that you talk of, mother. It's a pity to put it in the boy's head that he will be rich, when it's certain he will have to earn his living. If he does leave school he ought to begin working at once.'

'Oh, indeed; and pray what is he to work at?'

'He ought to work on the farm; he's thirteen

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now, and could help a good deal if he liked. Think of all those Wilson boys used to do at his age; and there is young Wood at the Spout, driving his fathers team; and the Walkers are all very useful. Teddie is in no better position than they are, indeed, he is not half so well off as the Walkers; and if he is not to go to work on the farm, I don't see why he need leave school. His schooling costs nothing, and he will need all the education he can get if he is to be a clerk, or anything of that sort.'

'Clerk indeed!' repeated Mrs Dawes, laughing scornfully. 'You're a fool, Marg'ate, an' don't know what you're talkin' about! mind your own affairs; an' Teddie an' me 'ull mind ours.'

'I don't know what you are talking of, certainly,' said Marjory indignantly, 'but you are doing the boy a great wrong by letting him think he can be brought up in idleness. I do

not want to interfere in anyone's affairs, mother; but I don't think that in this house we should have secrets from each other.'

Marjory stopped short, hoping that her mother might understand what was in her mind; she was too generous to throw in Mrs Dawes' teeth the fact that it was only thanks to her, that they could hope to carry on the farm through the next twelve months. The present season involved absolute

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loss, and if Marjory had not had ready-money to fall back upon, it would have been impossible for the Dawes family to remain at the Hill. When her mother talked of Teddie's prospects and independence, Marjory could not help feeling that such talk must be utterly vain, unless she herself were unfairly dealt with.

'Who said they 'ad any secrets?' asked Mrs Dawes.

Marjory put down her work, and came to her mother's side, looking very grave.

'I understand that you and Lettice lost all you had put by, through Mr Midgely.'

'So we did. Who said anythin' to the contrary?'

'It sounds as though you had still something to fall back on, when in these bad times you talk of Teddie's doing nothing.'

But Marjory could get nothing further from her mother, and when she remonstrated with Lettice, she could obtain no answer, beyond that 'Teddie must do as he liked, he was not strong enough to work on the farm, and was too young to go into an office.'

'Then he is too young to leave school,' urged Marjory,' surely you can oblige him to stay there Lettice; he must obey you if you use your authority! And if he comes home to do nothing

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hew ill just turn into a loafer; you wouldn't like that?'

But in spite of all his aunt's efforts, Teddie did leave school, and her prediction was fulfilled to the letter. No other word in the language will so well express his mode of life as to say that he *loafed*. He loafed about the house, talking or reading to his grandmother when the fancy took him; he loafed about the farm, lending a hand here and there in any work that happened to interest him; he loafed at the Turners' cottage, at

the gamekeeper's house, at a neighbouring farmer's where there was a pretty daughter some four years older than himself.

He was a well-known visitor at the Cross Keys, he would condescend to ride to Braybridge for anything that was wanted there, but was wonderfully long over these errands; and would come back laden with books and papers from Mrs Harvey's library.

'Why don't you forbid Teddie to get such horrid things to read?' Marjory would ask.

'I'm afraid they are not very nice; I never look at them myself,' said Lettice, blushing, 'but he is so young! When he is a little older he will like better books.'

And this was the same Lettice who judged so

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hardly of her husband—who used to be particular even to puritanism! Surely it is mother's love, more than any other, that should be called blind!

Throughout the second year after Marjory's return to the farm, cares and anxieties grew upon her, but none weighed so heavily as the thought of her nephew.

The lad was beautiful to look at, and loveable in spite of his many faults; but his wasted talents, perverted energies, and idle life seemed to her inexpressibly sad. The certainty that next year they must leave the old house where she was born, and the probability that such an uprootal would kill her mother, were light troubles compared with considerations as to Teddie's future.

It was little comfort that he hated to vex his mother, when one knew that he never hesitated to do what she disliked out of her sight, and without her knowledge. And though his grandmother lauded him to the skies for his self-denying good-nature in sitting by her bed or chair, to read and talk to her by the hour together, the self-denial was hardly apparent to others, who knew that Teddie read to Mrs Dawes only what he would have otherwise read to himself; and that she, on her part, told him such anecdotes of her past days as fostered his pride, idleness, and ill-directed ambition.

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'Grannie, here is another murder in Ireland,' he said one morning, rushing into the kitchen just after she had come down stairs, and was established for the day in her big armchair near the fire.

'Bless us all! What is the boy about? Come in, can't you, and shut that door? There's such a nerkin' wind this mornin', as is fit to cut you in two. I canna get wahrm any'ow; give me that shawl as lies there, and put it round me—that 'ull do. Oh what a thing it is not to be able to 'elp oneself! There, now sit down, lad, an' tell me all about it. Another murder, did you say?'

'Aye,' said Teddie, 'the Duke of Ulster's agent has been shot as he was going to collect the rents. Cornelia told me of it, and I went and got this paper. Here's all the whole history of it; shall I read it to you?'

'To be sure, lad. What folks them Irish are to be sure! I never could abear 'em. There was a footman we 'ad at Marleigh as 'ud do nothin' but laugh, an' joke, an' play the fool; an' when my lord couldn't stand it no longer, an' give 'im notice, 'e turned spiteful all at wunst, and went on that on-reasonable that some o' the servants was frightened to go to bed at night along of 'im. Well, let's 'ear what they've bin doin' now.'

It was a curious and pitiful sight to see the two

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together—the boy so young and strong, so fair, fresh-coloured, and bright; the old woman so shrunken, pallid, and dull; yet both intent on the horrid story, and gloating over each sickening detail of the latest crime. While they were still discussing it, Marjory came in; and knowing that she had little sympathy with their taste for horrors, Teddie paused in the middle of his sentence, and Mrs Dawes looked up at her daughter with some trivial remark about the weather.

Marjory did not respond so readily or so cheerfully as usual, and her mother observing her more closely, saw on her face the traces of tears. Something must be very wrong if Marjory were crying; 'she has such a sperrit,' Mrs Dawes would say to herself, when sometimes she was forced into an unwilling admiration of her daughter's courage and perseverance.

'You've been cryin', Margate, what's the matter now? There's nothin' but misfartins in this house now-a-days, I do believe.'

'Never mind mother, it's nothing very new; I shall find some way out of it, I daresay;' said Marjory, trying to speak carelessly.

'What is it? Tell me directly, will you? Do you think I can't see when things is wrong? I'm not a child to be kep' in the dark by you and

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Lettice! This is my 'ouse. an' I will know what goes on in it; I'm not gone silly I 'ope, though I ave lost the use o' my one 'and, an' foot. Will you tell me what is the matter, or will you not?'

'Do not be so angry, mother; you know I do not want to vex you, or to keep you in the dark. Lettice and I are in trouble this morning because there is a bill for seeds and manure come in from Jenkin's at Braybridge; he has failed, and all accounts have to be paid at once; we did not think he would want his money just yet, there was coal to be paid for last week, and Lettice promised Powell we'd pay him to-day; and next week there will be the rent!'

'But Mr Temple will take something off?'

'Yes, I know; we have reckoned on that; we couldn't have got enough to pay him the full rent,' said Marjory, sadly.

Mrs Dawes thought awhile, and asked several questions; then as if struck with a sudden thought, she said,

'I'll tell you what, Marjory; you must go to the squire and tell him yourself 'ow things are with us, an' ask him to wait a bit for the rent.'

'I couldn't do that, mother; you know I couldn't.'

'You never can do what I want you to, I think. I never see such a girl fur contrariness!'

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'Well, mother, you are mistress here, as you said just now; if you wish to apply to Mr Temple you should do so yourself.'

'Myself! A pretty notion, when I can't move out o' my chair!'

'You can send Lettice, then; the farm is let to you and her.'

'No, no; that 'on't do, it's *you* that must go. After all that's past between you an' 'im, 'e'll not say no to you, Marg'ate.'

'For that very reason I'll not ask him anything. Why, mother,' said Marjory, her eyes flashing, 'didn't you do him wrong enough in those days to make you ashamed to seek favours of him now.'

'Hoity toity! Wrong—favours, indeed! Is that the way to speak to your mother after all she tried to do for you, you ungrateful thing?' began Mrs Dawes, furiously; but before she could finish, Marjory left the room, unable to trust herself longer in her mother's presence.

Teddie had sat silently listening to this conversation, with his elbows on the table, and his head on his hands. Now he looked up at his grandmother:

'You shouldn't bully Aunt Marjory so, grannie,' he said severely, 'she's awfully proud and plucky;

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but she'll not stand being bullied like that; she'll go away from here some day, unless you let her alone; and how should we get on then? I didn't know we were so poor as all this, grannie; why didn't some one tell me? I could earn some money, 'I should think,' he added thoughtfully, rising from his chair and stretching his tall lithe figure to its full height.

'Bless the boy, 'ow 'e talks! You earn money indeed! It's a sin an' a shame, it is!'

'What do you mean? What is a sin and shame?'

'That your owd grandfather over at Rippidge there 'ull let 'is own flesh an' blood slave their-selves to death, an' starve maybe, an' 'im never give them a penny! Of course 'e ought to come forrad an' 'elp your mother now; what's the good of 'im 'oardin' up all 'is money till 'e's dead?'

'But do you really think he is rich, grannie?'

'Well, lad, you know what I told you about me 'idin' in 'is bedroom that day your mother was married?'

'Aye, that I do! It's the best joke I ever heard! I wish I'd been there to see you behind the coat! But then you didn't *see* any money, did you?'

'Not exactly money—not silver, nor gold, you know—but paper, lad; notes and that. An' it stands to reason he must 'ave saved up a lot more

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since then, for 'im an' 'is wife were birds of a feather, an' scraped an' scratted together every penny they could lay their covechous 'ands on. Now Teddie, lad, I'll tell ya what

you should do; you go to Rippidge, and see 'im yourself, and try whether you can't get somethin' out of 'im.'

'I shouldn't like to do that, grannie.'

'Why, 'twas but a minute ago you was wantin' to 'elp! It 'ull be a long time afore you earns anything as 'ull do your mother any good, and yet when there's nothin' to do but to go to the mill, and ask your grandfather to do what 'e ought by 'is own, you cry out, "I don't like it." Do you suppose you'd like work any better, after you've been let do as you please all this while?'

'I can but try,' said Teddie, proudly. 'I'll go and talk to aunt Marjory,'

With that he flung out of the kitchen, and, after some search, discovered his aunt engaged in sweeping her mother's bedroom; he watched her for a little time, and then said rather awkwardly,

'Aunt Marjory! I want something to do!'

'Do you, indeed, Teddie? Why, what can be the matter with you?'

'Don't laugh; I really mean it. Surely I am big enough to work at something, and help you and mother!'

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There was an earnest pathetic ring in the boy's voice, that showed Marjory how he had been roused to a sense of his false position as an idler, and that he was sincere in his wish to make up for lost time.

'I won't laugh at you, Teddie,' she said. 'There are loads of things you can do if you will, and it is. as well to tell you that in a very short time you would have had to work—or starve. It is far better you should begin now, and of your own accord. Your mother will be so pleased; I think there is one little piece of business you might manage for us this morning; come and let us ask her.'

It will be easily imagined how Lettice received her son's proposal; no mother ever had such a good, dutiful, thoughtful, affectionate boy, she was sure. She thought he should certainly have a holiday to-day, and if possible some little treat, to mark the occasion.

But Marjory knew how to strike when the iron was hot, and very soon afterwards Teddie might have been seen riding off to Braybridge in great haste, and with many virtuous resolves; entrusted with the proud commission of calling on Mr Powell,

druggist and grocer, to ask him if he would take a load of hay in payment of the bill he had sent in last week.

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Teddie set about his task with real tact and judgment; but, alas for his good intentions, he met with a sad rebuff. Some other debtor had glutted Mr Powell's lofts with hay, and the struggling tradesman told young Dawes that he would take cash only from his mother.

'If she can afford to keep you like a gentleman, kicking up your heels, and doing nothing all your time, young fellow, she can surely pay a poor man like me. I don't deny that the bill is a long one, but that's no fault of mine; your grandmother is taking medicine constant, and all your beasts being bad in the autumn, makes it mount up.'

It was with a very crestfallen air that Teddie rode away from Powell's door, and slowly walked his pony across the Top of the Town. He could not bear to have failed in his errand; aunt Marjory would never trust him again. He had promised her not to go to Harvey's, nor to put up his pony, and hang about the White Hart yard, so he bravely withstood both those temptations; still he felt very hopeless and depressed, until suddenly a thought struck him, and turning his pony's head, he galloped off at full speed towards Rippidge.

When he came in sight of the mill, he dismounted, and tied his pony to the stile that led to the path across the fields. The house and mill looked much

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shabbier and more tumble-down than when he visited them before; not a creature could be seen, but Teddie climbed the weed-grown steps, pushed open the wicket, and crossed the garden to the front door. It was, by some accident, left slightly ajar, and he went in without waiting to knock. He knew the house pretty well from his grandmother's description, though his mother had never told him anything about the home of her girlhood.

This was the kitchen—ugh; what a cold, bare place it looked, so dirty, and with a damp mouldy smell about it! The parlour was opposite—empty. Not a chair left, nor a table; nor one of the ornaments which had been the pride of the first Mrs Bourne. The paper

hung in strips from the walls, a quantity of soot was in the rusty grate, a heap of old iron in the middle of the floor, and some rotting sacks were thrown down in one corner.

Seeing and hearing no one, Teddie went boldly up the creaking stairs, and turned unhesitatingly in at the nearest door—the miller's bedroom.

He looked at once for the old clothes, so often described to him by his grandmother, and he was rather disappointed to find them all gone. A crazy chest of drawers, and a truckle bed, covered by a dirty blanket, formed the furniture of the room. Teddie remembered the secret door, and could not

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resist trying to find it. He said to himself that he was no thief, he did not care if his grandfather heard him or not; so he walked heavily across the bare floor, and stood facing the wall on the right-hand side of the fireplace. Now that nothing hung above the panel, he could, by looking carefully, distinguish the outline in the wall, just where he thought it would be—the question was how to open it? He passed his hand over it, but at first could feel no sign of the spring that guarded the treasure; but at last some chance pressure of his fingers fell on the right spot, and the panel slid back. Teddie's heart beat high, as he peeped anxiously into the small dark space within. When his eyes grew accustomed to the light he distinguished something lying there—a small roll of paper dim with age.

He took it out, and unwrapped it, with trembling hands—wild visions flashed through his brain; what should he find? A priceless gem perhaps, to gain which the miller had sacrificed all he had. A cold sweat broke out on the boy, followed by a hot flush, as his highly wrought nerves received a shock, similar to that experienced by Mrs Dawes fifteen years ago. In the little roll, so carefully put away in the secret cupboard, were five sovereigns—neither more nor less.

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Teddie stood looking at them for a while, then put them back amid the dust, and crumbled mortar, where they had lain so long. He did not know how to close the opening, and did not trouble himself to find out. He turned away, and went downstairs; he wanted to find his grandfather.

Half-way down the stairs was a small window overlooking the garden, the yard, and part of the orchard; through this Teddie looked out, and saw the miller standing in the yard, talking to a man who seemed very angry. It was a baker and general provision dealer from Braybridge, and the boy wondered what he could want at the mill.

He went into the back kitchen, and there overheard part of the conversation. The baker was demanding payment for bread, and other necessary articles obtained from his shop. He threatened to sell the miller up if his account were not settled immediately; and at the same time, laughed loudly at the notion of selling up so rich a man. The miller listened patiently, only making some deprecatory gesture at the allusion to his wealth. When the baker paused he whined out some excuses—the charges were too high; he did not think it right to pay them; he hadn't a penny—on his soul, he hadn't.

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'Don't strike me!' he cried, shrinking back as the baker made an angry movement of his arm.

'Miserable, shuffling, lying old coward!' exclaimed Teddie as he listened He felt inclined to go away without seeing his grandfather after all; but on second thoughts, he stayed, and when the miller succeeded in getting rid of his persecutor, and slowly entered the house, chuckling feebly to himself, he was frightened out of all his self-gratulation by the unexpected sight of a tall, fair-haired, handsome boy, who came towards him cap in hand.

'Who—who are you?' asked the miller, motioning his visitor back, with a trembling hand.

'I am your grandson.'

'Grandson? Oh, no, that can't be. He is a little boy.'

'I am your grandson, Edmund Dawes; and I am fourteen years old. You have forgotten how time goes,' said Teddie, with a patronising air. The old man was half-childish, he thought.

'Perhaps so. I can see you're like your mother,' said the miller putting his unshaven face close to Teddie's. 'It's very good of you to come and see your poor old grandfather. Your mother came a long while ago, and brought me five shillings; perhaps she has sent you now to help me a little?'

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he concluded with a whine, for he had grown less sparing of his words in his old age.

The colour rushed to Teddie's cheeks. 'No, I've brought you nothing, grandfather. I came on quite a different errand. I wanted to ask you to help mother!'

'What! me help her! how can I do it? Am very poor, I am! you are well off—the idea of coming asking help from me!'

As the miller said this he pointed to his own ragged garments, and suspiciously to the neat suit of blue serge worn by his grandson.

'My clothes are clean and whole, but I can tell you they've been mended pretty often,' said Teddie, angrily. 'If you like to go about like a scarecrow, it's your own affair, but it doesn't prove that you aren't better off than we are. You must know how bad farming has been of late'——

'Come to beg from me! Oh, for shame, and you looking like a gentleman!'

With such taunts as these the old man received everything that his grandson said. Teddie tried his best to speak quietly, and reasonably, and to make clear his mother's just claim on her father; but rendered desperate at length by jeers and disappointment, he rushed out of the house, untied

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his pony, and rode home in a bitter and furious frame of mind.

Marjory thought he had broken his promise, and looked reproachfully at him as he came in.

He told her half-sulkily of his ill-success with Powell, but none of the three women took that to heart as he had expected. A fresh calamity had fallen upon them during his absence; a valuable cart horse, indeed the only good one that remained to them, had met with an accident which necessitated its being shot immediately.

It was Mrs Dawes who told Teddie of this, with tears and lamentations over the 'bad luck' that seemed to attend her family now-a-days. His mother's quiet despair, and Marjory's troubled face conveyed to him more clearly still, how serious was the state of affairs. He was very silent and thoughtful all the afternoon, and when tea was over, he rose and abruptly announced his intention of going to the gamekeeper's cottage. 'I'm going down to Davis', mother.' 'Very well, dear. Don't be late,' she responded meekly.

'No; I shall be back again very soon. I only want to ask him one question.'

Marjory sighed when Teddie was gone; Davis was not a good companion for him, she thought;

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he idled away so much of his time at the gamekeeper's. She was agreeably surprised when within an hour's time, she heard her nephew mount the stairs to his bedroom.

He brought some books down with him; some of those yellow and red books that Marjory hated to see him with. He appeared to read all the evening, never speaking unless he were spoken to, until bedtime came, when he informed his mother that he was going out early, and shouldn't be at home to breakfast.

'You shouldn't go out without your breakfast,' she said. 'Where are you going?'

'Oh! I am going out with Davis, I'll get something to eat somewhere!'

But though he was astir early the next morning, Lettice was before him, and surprised him by coming out of the kitchen as he stole down stairs, hoping to get away unseen, and unheard.

'Come here, Teddie.'

'Oh, mother, what did you get up for? Can't you trust a fellow just for once, to look after himself?' he said angrily.

'It was only to get you some breakfast, dear,' she replied, in humble apology. 'It won't hinder you, for it's all ready. Come in.'

Very impatiently he turned into the kitchen, where

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hot coffee, bacon, and bread, were prepared, as neatly and daintly as though this big strong lad had been a fanciful invalid.

'Oh! Teddie, where did you get that gun?'

'It's one of Davis'.'

'Then he had no business to lend it you; I must speak to him; you are too young to have a gun. Are you sure it isn't loaded?'

'It's all right, mother. Don't make such a fuss,' said Teddie, with his mouth full of bread and bacon. 'How hot this coffee is! Can't you give me some more milk—there, that's better. Now, I've done, and must be off. Don't you fret, mother; I shan't come to any

grief! And when I come back, we'll see what can be done about that grasping old Powell. Good-bye.'

Teddie talked so fast that his mother, who loved to hear him, didn't get in another word; his parting kiss, rough though it was, sent her back to her work a happy woman.

The boy set off at a rapid walk, in the direction of Braybridge. Presently he met Baker, to whom he nodded, and shouted ' Good morning' as he passed.

'Hallo, youngster! You're early this morning. Where are you off to with that gun?'

Teddie looked back over his shoulder at the

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gardener, and shouted something of which Baker only caught three words— 'Davis—quices—wheat.' 'What a hurry the lad's in,' muttered Baker, 'going to take the gun to be mended, I suppose. Mother Dawes has no wheat down along this 'ere road.'

Teddie went on and on, through the town, along the high road, and then turned up the little lane near the bridge, leading to his grandfather's house and mill.

The miller was early too this morning. He had been terribly alarmed by the discovery of the open panel in his bedroom, and was very little re-assured when he found the five pounds were safe. It was dark before he found this out; and having no candle wherewith to search, he had sat up all night, trembling at every sound, on the watch for thieves. His first impulse had been to go to Higgins' farm, and get some one to watch with him, and a messenger to fetch a policeman; but then he reflected that the place might be robbed in his absence. His love for his gold overcame his natural cowardice; and he remained alone to face the ruffians whom he believed to be concealed somewhere on the premises.

As soon as it was light in the morning he crept out and looked round the garden, yard, and ruined outhouses. He was very infirm now, and the

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process was a long one. By-and-by he came back to the mill, and unlocked the door nearest the house, took a last suspicious glance, back at the garden and across the lane.

'Higgins' man would be coming for the cows very soon,' he said to himself, 'he didn't want him to see what he was doing—a prying rascal. Mother Higgins would find him out some day—lucky for her if Smith didn't rob her.'

But when the miller had climbed the dusty, rickety steps inside, and reached the top storey of his mill, where still lay the sacks of mouldering wheat, some one ran across the lane, from the shelter of the opposite hedge, and came softly to the door of the mill, pushed it gently open, and looked in. Ah, what a dim, dark, damp, ghastly place, with its walls coated with flour and dust, and roof and beams hung with powdered cobwebs!

It was so still, too!

No; there were sounds above—pushing, dragging, falling, groaning, panting! Little showers of dust, dirt, and dry husks, came trickling down through the cracks in the floor above, and fell upon the head of the boy who stood below.

He stood there listening for a very long time, the grim, dreary place seemed to exercise a spell upon him so that he could not stir. Presently the old

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man began to descend the crazy ladder, muttering to himself as he came.

'Won't do—'tisn't safe—must try the orchard.' Teddie stepped back behind a straggling laurel in the garden, and watched the miller come through the door, put down a bundle that he held, and lock up the mill again.

He was covered with dust, his hands shook more than ever, his eyes and his lips worked incessantly, and large drops stood on his forehead. He crept round the house, and found a battered broken spade, which he dragged along by one feeble hand, into the orchard. Here he put down the spade and bundle, and walked slowly along the row of trees nearest the garden, he stopped, hesitated, went back again; examined each tree in turn, then stood still, rubbed his head in sore perplexity, and once more began his search.

'O my God!' he cried in an agonised tone, 'I've forgotten the tree! My poor head—my poor head!'

He tried once more, and at last seemed satisfied; he went back to fetch the spade, bringing the bundle, and laying it down under the tree he had selected. He stooped down, and slowly and painfully began digging at the foot of the apple tree.

It was hard work for an old man; he had scarcely made any impression on the closely grown

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turf, when he was startled by a noise behind him, and raising himself he saw a tall slight figure in blue serge, with a gun at its shoulder, that had sprung from he knew not where.

'Your money or your life!' said a strong, clear young voice.

'You—it is you, is it? you young thief. You shan't have one penny o' my money.'

The old man seemed to have grown bold all at once; he made a threatening movement with his spade, and stretching out one foot drew the bundle close to him, standing over it as if to defend it.

'You're a lying, heartless old miser! There's your daughter, your only daughter, can scarcely keep a roof over her head. Will you give her some of the gold you've hoarded up all these years? Will you, or will you not?'

'Murder—murder! He'll shoot me! But you sha'n't have the money!' shrieked the old man, raising his spade.

'I'll give you one more chance. Will you help mother?—if not, you're a dead man.'

'Yes, yes, there—you shall have a few shillings. Put the gun down, there's a good boy.'

'Shillings! What use are shillings? What! you'll hit me with that spade, will you?'

Teddie's finger was on the trigger.

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At the hasty passionate movement of the desperate old man before him, the boy flinched; and the next moment a flash half-blinded his eyes; a low groan sounded in his ears, and when his sight grew clearer he saw his grandfather stretched on the turf at his feet.

Dead? oh, yes, stone dead. Teddie was sure he knew enough to tell him that. Had not the tests and signs been all too vividly described in the stories he used to be so fond of? Involuntarily he knelt down and examined the body, then stood up and leant against the apple tree, faint and sick with horror.

'Davis said it wasn't loaded—it wasn't loaded!' he moaned. 'Oh, mother, mother!'

Higgins' man was driving the cows along the lane, and suddenly caught sight of some one in blue serge breaking through the miller's orchard hedge, a little ahead of him.

'Hallo!' he shouted; but the fugitive was across the lane, over the stile, and out of sight before the plodding cowman came up.

'Thar's some un been robbin' the owd miller,' he said. 'Drot 'em, 'ow did they manage it, I wonder? I mun go an' tell 'im; 'e'll be in a fine way, surelie.'

And so it was that the body was found; with a gun lying beside it that belonged to Mr Temple's gamekeeper.

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CHAPTER IX

IN A STRANGE LAND

ON a sultry evening, at the close of a long hot day of hard work, three men were lounging together, beneath a group of blue gum trees, sheltering a farm-house in Natal. They were very silent, and there was an indescribable air about them of quiet expectation. As a matter-of-fact they were waiting for two things; first, for supper, which the wife of one of them was engaged in preparing; secondly, for a breath of cooler air, which might be hoped for after dark, following on the steps of the sunset. At the present moment the atmosphere was almost more oppressive than it had been throughout

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the day, and the house, under its roof of corrugated iron, was simply unbearable. All three men were tired, hot, and expectant, yet there was a difference in their manner; two of them were smoking; they stretched their legs, abused the tormenting insects, fidgetted impatiently; in short they seemed as keenly alive to small discomforts as well-to-do Englishmen usually are in their hours of leisure. The third man had no appearance of being at leisure; he sat a little apart from the others, motionless, his eyes fixed on the ground; his thoughts, which did not seem to be happy ones, were evidently far away.

Presently one of the others rose, and sauntered away from the small enclosure round the house, to take a last look across the veldt before darkness should settle down upon it. He was the older man of the three, and head partner in their joint business of sheep farming.

'Beastly tobacco this!' observed the second smoker, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and looking at it discontentedly.

'I hope some one will go down to Pietermaritzburg soon, so that we may get some more. I wonder if Mrs Hardman wants anything—you don't know I suppose—eh Dawson?'

The third man thus addressed, looked up.

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'Is it?' he asked absently, perfectly unconscious of what his companion had been saying.

'Is *what how?*' returned the other half angrily. You are the worst company in the world, when there's no work going on! I never saw such a fellow! I asked you if you knew whether Mrs Hardman wanted—hallo, here's Hardman running; What can be the matter? He's found an old ostrich straying about, or seen a fire on the veldt, or something equally exciting.'

'Here are visitors coming,' said Hardman hurriedly, 'two fellows on horseback. You go and meet them, Williams, and I'll tell Fanny.'

He went into the house, while Williams knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and rose from his seat, saying, 'That's better than I hoped for; it's a precious long time since we had any visitors; they all go to Shaw's I think. Come along, Dawson, and let's see who they arc. I wonder where Mahlateen can be? Couldn't find him when I came in just now—had to see to the horses myself.'

He did not wait to see if Dawson followed; but took it quite as a matter of course that the latter should be waiting to take the strangers' horses, as they rode slowly up the enclosure. He was already

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deep in eager question and answer with the new arrivals, and only broke off to say,

'You'll look after the horses, won't you, Dawson?' before he led the way into the house, and introduced the host and hostess:

'Mrs Hardman, Major Bentley, and Captain Marleigh.'

The first named stranger was a tall, lean, sinewy man, with closely cut dark hair, moustache, and beard, and a complexion tanned by exposure to tropical heat; he walked with a slight limp. His companion was young and fair, almost to effeminacy; but an aquiline nose, well-shaped mouth, and an air of high-bred courage, saved him from that charge.

There is little ceremony about first meetings under such circumstances; no awkward pauses, no delicate hesitation that delays enquiries as to each other's antecedents. The guests are only too glad to find themselves made welcome in comfortable quarters, and the hosts are delighted to see fresh faces, hear news of the outer world, and, perchance,

of mutual acquaintances. It seldom happens that any visitor turns up, with whom his entertainers can find no link through friends at home.

The arrivals at Hardman's Drift were no exception to this rule, they had scarcely been ten

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minutes in the house, before it was discovered that Williams' brother was in Captain Marleigh's regiment, and that Major Bentley had met Mrs Hardman's sister, only a few months before.

'Do you live here?' asked the captain of Williams.

'Yes; Hardman is "boss;" Dawson and I the *subs*. 'Tisn't a bad sort of life.'

'Very jolly, I should think,' said young Marleigh. 'Shouldn't mind it myself. Everyone is so friendly and hospitable here that one is at home directly. I asked if you lived here because we have found fellows staying in most of the houses we've been at as yet, and they seemed likely to stay for any length of time, I thought. It's jolly for you to be three together.'

'Yes; I had a berth at Durban when I first came out; lived at an hotel there, you know—queer sort of life—and awfully queer lot of people there. This suits me much better; Mrs Hardman is a first-rate little woman, and he's the right sort all over. Dawson too: he's a good fellow!'

'Was that Dawson who took our horses?'

'Yes; he is great at horses—indeed, at any sort of work. He works like a nigger,— the ideal nigger you know; but he has a perfect talent

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for silence—hell go for hours and never speak a word.'

'You do the talking,' suggested Captain Marleigh, with his saucy schoolboy air.

'They'd be precious dull without me; I know that. Here comes Dawson.'

A tall, broad-shouldered man entered the room; he was younger than Hardman, and older than Williams. He looked about seven or eight and thirty, had thick dark hair and beard, and a pair of good brown eyes, out of which he gave a searching glance at the two men who were now introduced to him.

He sat down at the table without a word, and his silence through the meal that followed attracted the attention of Major Bentley, who said to himself that this must be a sulky, ill-conditioned fellow.

On observing Dawson more closely, he altered this opinion, and came to the conclusion that his serious face, and self-contained, peculiarly quiet manner, were probably due to some previous trouble, and to a knowledge of the fact that he was slightly inferior in social position to his partners.

Presently a Kaffir lad came running up to the house, howling and making a great noise.

'It's that little Mahlateen, confound him!'

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exclaimed Williams, 'he's got into some scrape, I suppose.'

'I'll go and see what he wants,' said Dawson; he rose and left the room, and both his partners seemed satisfied, taking it for granted he should go, and trusting to him to settle the matter, whatever it might be.

He was absent for some time, and when he returned, pipes and grog were the prevailing order of things.

Hardman looked up at Dawson as he entered.

'Anything wrong?' he asked.

'All right now,' was the laconic reply, after which Dawson sat down in a corner, rather behind the rest of the party, and Major Bentley resumed what he had been saying.

'It is simply impossible in these days to escape one's friends—or one's foes either for that matter. As I told you, I was badly wounded in the Zulu War, and was invalided for ever so long. The fuss one's women-kind make over one is rather trying,' said the major, in a lamely apologetic fashion, at which young Marleigh burst out laughing.

'Now, Bentley, that's not fair on Lady Charlotte! You know very well that what you couldn't stand was the being lionised by the world at large, and having to pose as a conquering hero.'

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'Don't talk nonsense, Jem,' said the major roughly, while a dull red tinge came up on his brown cheek. ' I wanted to leave England anyhow, and I got the doctor to order a sea-voyage, and for twelve months I've been knocking about, seeing different countries,

choosing those where I had not been quartered, and was not likely to go with my regiment. I'm on my way to rejoin it in India now; but Marleigh persuaded me to spend the last week or two with him here, and look up a cousin of his whose place we shall arrive at in time, I suppose. The one thing that has struck me most, wherever I have been, is the constant meeting with people I knew, or who knew my people. The strangest case of all was at San Francisco, where I saw a man stabbed in the street in some gambling row. I walked casually up to look at the corpse, and recognised it as that of a rascally bailiff, who had robbed a cousin of mine in very wholesale fashion, and bolted with his spoils.'

'What!' cried Captain Marleigh, in great excitement, 'do you mean Midgely, who cheated Hugh Temple so fearfully?'

'Yes; didn't you know he was dead? I thought I had told you; or if not, I wonder that Grace did not do so.'

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'She hasn't written to me for sometime; that newspaper is all I've had from Brookshire lately.'

'A newspaper!' said Williams, 'might we have a sight of it? We've seen none lately, and it would he a real treat to me at anyrate.'

'Oh, certainly; but unless you know Brookshire, it won't interest you. It's a provincial paper—local, I should say, and contains little or no general news. But I'll fetch it.'

'We are thankful for small mercies here, in the newspaper line,' said Williams.

'If you like trials, there's a full report of a case tried at the Kingsford Spring Assizes,' said Major Bentley. 'A boy shot his grandfather under rather peculiar circumstances. It may not seem worth your reading perhaps, but it was interesting to me because the lad came from the village where my cousin lives; and it seems that his mother, who is a widow, was half-ruined by that blackguard whom I saw killed at F'risco.'

'Here's the paper—the *Kingsford Times,* a stupid, twaddling production,' said Captain Marleigh, 'They sent it me because there's an account of the shine they got up in honour of the birth of my brother's son and heir—poor little beggar. You won't care about it much, I expect; but here

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are some goodish cigars, would anybody like one?'

'Cigars—oh, that's first-rate! It will be luxury to smoke a good cigar again; the paper may wait,' said Williams, while the captain turned to offer a cigar to Dawson.

This silent person did not immediately reply—he looked appealingly at the young fellow standing before him; his lips moved, but no sound came from them, till at last he said hoarsely,

'The *Times* please.'

'It's only the *Kingsford Times,'* repeated young Marleigh, doubtfully, as he handed the paper to Dawson.

'I know,' murmured the latter, with a strange confusion in his manner, that made everyone turn to look at him.

'Do you know Brookshire?' asked the major.

'Yes—I used to know it.'

'Shake hands, then; I'm a Brookshire man myself,' said the little captain delightedly. 'Have you ever been to Marleigh?'

'No.'

'Perhaps you know Braybridge, a little town in the south-west of the county?' asked Major Bentley again.

'I've heard of it.'

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'Oh, everyone will hear of Braybridge now; this murder will make it quite famous,' said the captain.

'Murder? Did this boy kill his grandfather, then?' asked Williams.

'Yes; the old fellow was a miser, and lived at a mill—you've been to meets at Rippidge Mill, haven't you, Bentley—why, what's the row?'

As Captain Marleigh was speaking, a low groan came from the corner of the room. Dawson suddenly rose from his seat, staggered to the door, and left the room, taking with him the newspaper.

'Oh, he doesn't like company—dreadfully unsociable fellow,' grumbled Williams; 'but he needn't have carried off the paper. I wanted to look at it when I'd finished my cigar—beastly selfish conduct I call it.'

'You are the last person who should call Dawson selfish,' remarked Mrs Hardman, 'he fags for you from morning till night, He's in some trouble, I'm afraid. I'm sure there's something in that paper that concerned him.'

'Poor fellow, he looked awfully cut up,' said Captain Marleigh, penitently. 'I'm sorry I brought the wretched paper, if there's anything to upset him in it.'

'Don't you know where he comes from?' asked Major Bentley, of Hardman.

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'No; we know very little about him to tell the truth, though he's been with us two years now, and has proved himself a thoroughly good fellow in every way. He had been at the diamond fields before he came to us; and he was in Texas at one time. But he says very little about himself; there's some mystery I expect, but if he doesn't choose to tell, of course we don't ask. You and he are great friends, Fanny; did he ever confide in you?'

'A little,' she said, smiling to herself.

'Did he ever mention Brookshire?'

'Yes; that is his county. But I can't tell you more; he has been foolish, I think, and very unfortunate, but has done nothing wrong. I hope he is not in any fresh trouble.'

In this wish the gentlemen heartily joined; then a fresh subject of conversation was started, and they forgot Dawson. Mrs Hardman soon afterwards wished her guests Good-night. She did not feel satisfied about the absent man, and seeing that there was a light in his room, she listened outside for a minute, then knocked gently. There was no answer, and she knocked louder again and again; then growing anxious, she opened the door. A light stood on the chest that served for a table, the newspaper was spread open, and before it knelt

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Dawson. His face was deadly pale; and his eyes, starting from his head, seemed immoveably fixed on the page before them; his lips were slightly apart, and he seemed held in breathless interest by some horrid fascination.

'Mr Dawson!' said Mrs Hardman softly; but he did not hear, or move till she came closer, laid her hand on his shoulder, and repeated,

'Mr Dawson! Is anything wrong?'

He looked up at her with his horror-struck eyes, and pointed silently to the paper.

'What is it?' she said kindly. 'Tell me about it, if you can. You cannot bear it all alone.'

She sat down on the bed and waited, seeing plainly enough that he would be relieved by telling her, yet that he had hardly the courage to begin.

Presently he rose from his knees, and put the paper into her hand, saying abruptly, 'Look there.'

He pointed to a column, headed '*Kingsford Assizes,'* and underneath, in larger type, the first case reported, was distinguished as '*The Rippidge Mill Murder Case.'*

'It's my boy.'

'Who? What? I do not understand,' stammered Mrs Hardman.

Dawson pointed to some words printed lower down.

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'An old man shot by his grandson.' 'That old man was my wife's father,' he said hoarsely, 'and the boy is my son.'

'Your son! Oh, John I am so sorry! The baby that you told me of?'

'Yes—that baby. Good God—to think of him now! But read—read it,' he said impatiently, and fetching the light, he held it for her, as she hurriedly skimmed the sad story.

She hated to read it, but felt that it would spare her friend the recital of this family tragedy, if she Could glean the facts from the newspaper report.

It began by a vivid account of the scene in court; of the personal beauty of the young prisoner; of the sorrow-stricken mother, who excited universal sympathy. The confession of the prisoner was given, in which he owned to having gone secretly to the mill wishing to frighten his grandfather, (who was said to be wealthy) into helping his mother who—owing to farming, and other losses—was hard pressed for money.

The boy said that his grandfather had turned upon him, which he had not expected, that he had raised the gun which he carried, still only meaning to frighten the old man, and believing it not to be loaded; in starting back to escape a blow from a spade with which he was threatened, he

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unintentionally pulled the trigger, and the gun went off. He had borrowed the gun from a gamekeeper, who had expressly told him it was not loaded. When he ascertained that

his grandfather was dead, he had run away, with some notion of tramping to Braymouth, and going to sea as a stowaway; but he was taken after three days, while resting under a haystack.

Mrs Hardman then glanced at the evidence; that of thè man who had found the body in an orchard, with a gun lying beside it; of the doctor who had examined the body, and described the position of the bullet, adding that he had remarked a blow upon the head which would have been sufficient to cause death, and seemed to indicate that the prisoner had struck his grandfather as well as shot him—unless the old man, in falling, had struck his head against a tree, which seemed possible.

Then the first witness was recalled, and swore to having noticed that the head was resting on a projecting root of the apple tree beneath which the body lay.

A gamekeeper, Davis, identified the gun as one he had lent to the prisoner, Edmund Dawes, under the impression that he needed it to shoot a horse that had been injured; he had met the lad in the road at some distance from his house, and told him

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which gun to take, not wishing to let him have the loaded one to carry.

An under-keeper deposed to having gone to Davis house, and taken away the unloaded gun, just before the prisoner came there.

There was a great deal of other evidence; some relating to the character of young Dawes, some to the habits of the deceased miller, and the circumstances of his daughter, the prisoner's mother.

There was no defence; part of the judge's summing up was given, and the report closed suddenly with the announcement that at this point the court adjourned.

As Mrs Hardman read on, the deeper grew her interest, and she had almost held her breath as she fancied the verdict was coming. At this sudden incomplete ending she looked up with a cry of disappointment.

'Oh, is this all?'

'That is all,' repeated the unhappy father, in tones of despair.

'Oh, it's cruel!' I never heard of such a thing! Are you sure there is nothing more?—Not a little paragraph somewhere, just to tell the end?' she asked, turning the paper over in eager search.

'Do you think I have not looked?' he asked. The misery of his voice and attitude reminded her

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that however keen might be her feeling for the son and mother far away, her active sympathy was needed here for the wretched man at her side. She laid down the paper and took his hand.

'I am so sorry,' she said, 'so very sorry for you and them! But it is of little use to tell you that— you must go back to them, and be John Dawson no more. What is your real name?'

'Armell Dawes.'

'Then, Armell—I may call you so, mayn't I? We will be friends still? You must just go home by the very next ship.'

'Oh, I cannot!' he cried, shrinking back. 'I cannot!'

'Think of your wife.'

'Do you suppose I do not think of her? Do you think it could be any comfort to her to see me now? No. I hope she thinks I am dead—it would only be a fresh trouble to her to see me.'

'How could it be so? Remember her grief-poor mother! They say she doted on that poor boy and spoiled him; she probably thought he was all that was left to her to love. Do you suppose she has suffered no anxiety for you? that she does not care for you? and that it would be no consolation to her in this terrible trouble if her husband returned to her?'

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'Ah, no! she never really loved me. I used to think she didn't, couldn't know what love was till I saw her with the child. Oh, my poor lad!'

'Poor lad, indeed! He never knew his father.'

'Yes, it's all my fault—all; there's no need to tell me that! I ought not to have left them! I was a coward, a wretched coward when I did so. Do you think I don't feel that—that I haven't felt it? You see what it says of the lad: how he idled away his time, and filled his head with mischievous rubbish, and was beyond the control of his mother, who had been deserted by her husband? You saw that?'

'Yes, I saw it?'

'Well, how can you suppose that Lettice would like to see me now; wouldn't she say to herself. "It's his fault, all his fault!" And wouldn't the sight of me only remind her of her troubles? My poor Lettice, I meant to do the best for you! I thought you would get on better without me; and this is what it has come to—poverty, ruin, and the gallows! My poor little Lettice! So young, so pretty and tender—yet she could be so hard too!'

His voice was broken, his eyes streaming with tears. He stretched out his arms as though he would have taken his wife to his heart, then let them fall at his side with a gesture of despair.

'If she were hard, she has been punished for it

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now,' pleaded Mrs Hardman. 'Believe me, she will have learnt to love, and to appreciate love after all she has gone through.'

'I didn't want her to be punished,' he said 'I thought she would be happier and better off without me.'

'But Armell—have you never considered that there was another wrong you might do her? Suppose some one else had wanted to make her his wife, how could she tell whether she were free or not?'

'I have thought of that, many and many's the time. I believed there *was* a man that she would like to marry instead of me. You cannot tell what a strange life she had led before I knew her—so lonely, I mean, and hardly ever seeing anyone except her father. Afterwards when she came to know others, it was not unnatural she should prefer them to me; and there was a man—but he has only robbed her, as he robbed everyone else! And I had hoped they would think I was dead, that she could do as she pleased!'

'Oh, Mr Dawes! you *wished* her to do wrong?'

'It would have been no wrong for her if she believed I was dead.'

'I did not expect to hear this from you,' said Mrs Hardman, coldly, rising from her seat, and in

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moving away from Armell. 'I had a better opinion of you, Mr Dawes, than to think you would open the way for your wife to sin.'

'Sin! *I* should have been guilty, *she* would not! I only wanted her to be happy—was that wrong too? Oh, what have I done?—Do not *you* turn from me, my only friend!'

She walked several times up and down the little room in silence, then she stood before Armell once more.

'You have been wrong—horribly wrong,' she said; 'but it is not for me to judge you, and there has suffering enough come of it already. Your Lettice is still Mrs Dawes, you see—perhaps she has been waiting and watching for you all these years. Go to her, Armell, and comfort her, now that her boy—your boy, is in prison.'

'Prison! Perhaps they have—hanged him!' said Armell in a hoarse whisper.

'Oh, no; I am sure they have not! They could not do it Armell. He is so young, and it must be clear to everyone that he did not intend to kill the old man. It was accident—a sad terrible accident: and *she* will feel it more than anyone! Oh, say you will go back to her Armell! You love her still?'

'Love her? My little Lettice—do I not?'

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Mrs Hardman put her hand on Armell's shoulder, as he sat on his bedside looking up into her face.

'Go back to her,' she said, 'and take my word— a woman's word for another woman—that she loves you now.'

Her earnest tones carried conviction with them.

'I will,' he said simply. Then he seized her hand and kissed it. 'And I will thank God always for having sent me such a friend as you.'

Her eyes filled with sudden, happy tears. 'I am so glad,' she said, 'so glad!' You must bring your Lettice to see me some day. Now let us go to the others and tell them; it is better they should know at once. Captain Marleigh said something about a ship; he will tell us when you can sail. Come.'

And he followed her out of the room—away from the battlefield where good had fought against evil, and had prevailed.

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CHAPTER X

THE MISER'S HEIRESS

TWO women sat together in a small and dingy room attached to the county court at Kingsford. One was a very old woman in widow's weeds, yet her rosy wrinkled cheeks, and her bright brown eyes, looked almost more youthful than the fair, but unutterably sad face of her companion. They were Lettice Dawes and Mrs Porter, waiting to hear the verdict given in the 'Rippidge Murder Case.'

In these days of her supremest anguish Lettice had turned for comfort and support to the old friend of her girlhood. She had held more or less aloof from Mrs Porter ever since her wedding day,

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but now—after fifteen long years—the consciousness had come to her that it was she who had been in the wrong, and that the warnings which she then regarded as an insult had possessed all the force of a prophecy.

Mrs Porter proved equal to the demands made upon her, and had undertaken the trying and melancholy task of accompanying Lettice to Kingsford, though it was twenty years since she had been so far from home, and at her age an occasional journey to Braybridge was a formidable expedition.

It was well that Lettice had so kindly, wise and sympathetic a friend, for Marjory could not leave her mother, and Mrs Baker, who had proffered her services, was despite her good-nature, so talkative, so curious, so full of idle speculations, that her company would only have been an additional trial to the unhappy mother, trembling for the fate of her boy. As to Cornelia, she had been helplessly hysterical ever since she heard of the catastrophe, and John Turner had been driven nearly beside himself between exasperation at his wife's conduct, and a selfish fear lest when the 'break-up' came at the Hill Farm, he should be thrown out of work, and find it difficult, in these bad times, to obtain another situation.

So it was old Mrs Porter who sat on the bench

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in the waiting-room, holding Lettice's burning hand in her own work-worn fingers, and uttering, from time to time, some kind word of encouragement.

'It can't be long now, my dear. Keep up your heart, and hope for the best. Thaay says that young keeper 'ull make it all right for him; the p'liceman taowd my Dick so last night.'

'If I could be punished for him! I deserve it Why could I not keep him out of bad company and bad ways? You have done better for Dick than I did for Teddie: and he was my only one, and I loved him so!' cried Lettice, with a burst of tears.

'There, there, my dear; cry a bit and ease your heart; 'twill do you good. You mustn't blame yourself too much; there's some lads as never will be controlled by women; I dunno 'ow I should 'a done with Dick upontimes if it 'adn't bin for poor Porter. You wuz over-weighted, my dear, with so much left on your 'ands, an' you so young.'

'Ah, that was my fault again! I neglected my husband till he hated his home, and his life, and left me. You told me how it would be, and I see it now; I understand now how he loved me, and how good he was to me. He did a little wrong, and I could not forgive him: now, Teddie has done this great wrong, and I can forgive and pity him, and only love him the more!'

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Lettice, in her agony of self-abasement, slipt from the bench, on which she had been sitting, down to the stone floor, and crouched there, hiding her face in the folds of Mrs Porters dress. The old woman patted her shoulder, and soothed her like a child; but let her talk on, since even these bitter self-accusations were better than silent suspense.

'I can remember now,' continued Lettice, 'how Armell came to me with a letter in his hand, and wanted me to read it. It was something against Midgely, and I wouldn't hear it—I thought Armell was jealous of him. If I had listened then, how different everything might have been! So many troubles came from that! And I scarcely remembered it until lately—it seemed of no consequence.'

'A letter, my dear! Did you say as Armell got a letter about Midgely?'

'Yes; did you know anything about it?' asked Lettice, raising her head in surprise.

'There wuz a deal o' talk about that letter,' answered Mrs Porter. 'Thaay said as poor Armell were goin' to shaownd it 'em all at the White 'Art when there were a dinner given there to Midgely. But 'e'd 'ad a drop too much, poor fellow, an' nobody 'd listen to

'im. It's a straaynge thing as you never 'eard tell on it, my dear; but you never wuz one for talkin'. An' thaay 'ad it all over again about

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that thar letter when Midgely made off the year afore last. To think as it wuz true after all!'

'How many people have suffered for my not attending to what Armell said! Mr Temple, the Bakers, the school, the poor people, and all of us! Oh, it's *I* that ought to be in prison! Mrs Porter,' said Lettice, suddenly, kneeling and looking up in her old friend's face, 'do you think that Armell knows—wherever he is—that I am sorry now, and that he forgives me?'

'My poor dear, I canna tell; I'm no scholard, thee must axe the minister to tell 'ee that. But, God above knaows all, an' it's His forgiveness we've all on us got to look for in the end.'

Then Lettice was silent for a while, still leaning against Mrs Porter, till the old woman was cramped and weary with sitting so long in one position; though she bore it gladly, hoping that sleep had brought forgetfulness to her unfortunate charge. But the miserable mother could not rest; her thoughts reverted to her present trouble all the more strongly, because of their temporary diversion. She was racked with hopes, fears, doubts, and anxieties about her boy, To all she said Mrs Porter listened, and made answer as best she might with unwearied patience, and stedfast kindness. Yet even to her the time seemed terribly long, and she

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doubted if her own strength, or Lettice's endurance, could hold out much further. At length she heard steps outside, and voices; the door opened, and Mr Metcalfe came in.

'Lettice, my dear, rouse up; here's the rector,' she whispered.

'Has she fainted, poor thing?' asked Mr Metcalfe, looking down at Lettice, who now lay silently, and almost prone upon the dirty floor. But when she heard him speak, she raised herself slowly. Mrs Porter rose, and Lettice sat up on the floor, holding tightly to the bench for support.

'Is it over? Tell me!' she asked in a low thick voice, looking up into the rectors face, as if she would draw the answer from him with the gaze of her troubled, tear-washed eyes.

He sat down on the bench, and laid his hand kindly on her shoulder.

'Yes, it is over; and I have good news for you on the whole. He is found guilty of manslaughter, with a strong recommendation to mercy on account of his youth, and—and other circumstances,' said Mr Metcalfe, who shrank from telling the mother then that her son's unwise bringing-up was one of these other circumstances.

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She rose to her feet, and with clasped hands and eager face, asked hurriedly,

'Then will they let him go?'

'Oh, no,' said Mr Metcalfe, sadly, 'you could not expect that. Don't look so disappointed! The sentence is one month's imprisonment, and four years in a reformatory'-------

'Four years! Oh, Teddie, my darling, the light of my eyes, will they keep you from me all that time! Oh, I cannot bear it!' cried Lettice wildly, spreading out her hands; then suddenly she fell in a dead faint upon the floor.

When she had recovered sufficiently, Mr Metcalfe took her and Mrs Porter to an inn, and made them both take some refreshment, and rest, until the time arrived when Lettice had permission to go to see Teddie. Having made all the arrangements he could for their comfort, and safe conveyance home, the old rector left them to fulfil another painful task he had undertaken. This was to carry the news to the Hill Farm, where Marjory was in close attendance on her mother, torn between anxiety for her, and longing to be by Lettice's side at Kingsford.

It had fallen to Marjory's share to tell her mother of Teddie's disappearance, of its supposed cause, finally of his capture by the police, of his

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being taken before the magistrates at Braybridge, and being committed by them for the murder of Daniel Bourne. She had told the sad tale as gently as she could, and had tried to let no shadow of reproach appear in her voice or manner, yet she was frightened by the silence, and the stony stare with which her mother listened. At last when Marjory told her that her grandson was in Kingsford gaol, she uttered a stifled cry.

'My lad, my poor lad—and 'twas I that put 'im up to it! I never meant any 'arm! Will they put me in prison too, Marjory?' she wailed, clutching her daughter's arm.

While Marjory tried to re-assure her, she fell in her chair, speechless and helpless. A second stroke had seized her, depriving her of all use of her limbs, and she never spoke again. The doctor was at first of opinion that she would only last a few days longer; but her hold on life seemed strong, and she lingered on, taking up all Marjory's time and attention, since she could do nothing for herself, except move her head a little as it lay upon the pillow. It was piteous to see the once strong and busy woman reduced to this condition; she followed every movement of those about her with her dark keen eyes, and she would

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struggle to speak, only to end in weeping when she failed to make herself understood. They gathered that she wished to hear of Teddie, and told her about him from time to time. She would listen to nothing else; when Mr Metcalfe came and spoke gravely to her of her end which was so plainly drawing near, she turned her head away and shut her eyes, the only signs she could make of her unwillingness to hear. She had gone on her own way always, and declined anyone's interference with her worldly affairs; so now she accepted no directions with regard to the next life. She refused almost all food, and though she grew visibly weaker day by day, yet she was as wilful as ever.

As Mr Metcalfe rode towards Long Upton he mentally compared the position of the sisters-in-law, and felt that in spite of the great trouble that had fallen on Lettice, yet Marjory's task was the saddest. Happier days might yet be in store for the mother and son whom he had left in close embrace within that small, white-washed cell in Kingsford gaol. But what hope was there in the end of the old woman, who lay stricken and helpless in her great bed at the farm—remorseful perhaps for the young life she had helped to blight, but

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with no feeling of penitence, or aspiration for pardon for herself.

Very white, worn, and hopeless did Marjory look, as she came downstairs to meet her old tutor.

'What is it?' she asked, dropping into a chair, as if too weary to stand.

'Poor child, poor child!' he said kindly, smoothing her small dark head with his hand. Her eyes filled with tears, and her lips twitched a little.

'Oh, don't,' she cried, 'please don't make me cry! Tell me about Teddie.'

He told her of the verdict and of Lettice, and then she asked him to go upstairs.

'She is sinking, I think, but she knows everything; and I don't believe she can die till she has heard.'

Strangely still and straight lay Mrs Dawes beneath, the heavy coverings that could impart no warmth to her numbed limbs. She watched the rector as he crossed the room and came to her side, then she looked up at him anxiously with her questioning eyes. He leant over her, and told her gently of the result of the trial. As he finished, a sort of spasm passed across her face, but what it signified they could not tell; it might be involuntary, for it was evident that she was fast passing

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away. The rector must make one more effort; so, after speaking a few grave words, he knelt down at the foot of the bed, facing her, where she could see and hear him, and began a prayer; but before he had said many words, Marjory, who was watching her mother, saw her turn away her head for the last time; and when they rose from their knees, Mrs Dawes was dead.

The rector was now an old man, and was exhausted by the scenes he had gone through that morning, yet, before going home, he rode to the Hall, according to a promise he had made to Mrs Temple, that he would bring her the news, should he reach Long Upton before her husband.

Hugh Temple had been a firm friend to the Dawes family in this last great trouble; he had even proposed to secure, at his own expense, the services of a well-known counsel to defend Teddie; but this was deemed unnecessary after the boys confession, and the discovery of the unconscious part in the tragedy played by the second keeper. This man, Moore by name, had been sent off rather suddenly to Morley Edge—where were some covers belonging to the Temple estate, which lay so far from Long Upton as to be specially liable to be poached, and at all times of the year offered irresistible temptation to the colliers and miners of the

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district. Moore was absent for a week, and so it was that his evidence as to the removal of the unloaded gun was not given before the magistrates, who had therefore no

alternative but to commit Teddie for murder. Davis was of opinion that young Dawes had taken both guns, and concealed the second for some purpose of his own; he was unaware of Moore's proceedings, and did not find out until too late, that some accident having befallen the second keeper's gun, the man had, at the last minute, borrowed one of his without leave.

'I can't think now,' said Grace Temple to the rector,' why those stupid old magistrates could not call it manslaughter from the first. They always blunder so when Hugh isn't there! I am told it was notorious that the miller was a great coward—afraid of his own shadow almost—and it really seems natural enough that the poor boy should have thought he could frighten him. I think it was a piece of wanton cruelty to call it murder.'

Mr Metcalfe could not help smiling at Grace's energetic way of speaking.

'They could do no otherwise, I think,' he said 'they had only the lad's own word for it, that he had no intention of hurting his grandfather; and unfortunately his word did not go for much, as he told two distinct lies with reference to the gun.'

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'You mean his telling Davis it was wanted to shoot the horse? What was the other?'

'He met Baker in the road, as he was on his way to the mill, and he said he was going to shoot wood-pigeons. With regard to his intentions, poor lad, I think the person who knew most of them is she who has passed away to-day.'

'His grandmother? Wretched old woman! One can't help feeling relieved to think that she is gone. It will now be easier to help those other two, poor things! Oh, here you are Hugh—you see Mr Metcalfe brought me the news first. Do you know that old Mrs Dawes is dead?'

'No. So she is gone at last, poor woman! Did she not live to hear the verdict?'

'She was dying when I reached the farm,' said Mr Metcalfe; 'but I told her what the sentence was, and I think she understood it.'

'Poor Marjory! how is she?'

'We must do something for Marjory now, Hugh,' said Grace, significantly.

'Marjory will not want friends,' interposed the rector, half-indignantly. He was jealous for his favourite, and had long been puzzled by the fact that the squire and his wife, who

were constant and welcome visitors among their other tenants, had kept aloof from the Hill; and, as it seemed to

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him, had ignored the manifest superiority of Marjory and Lettice Dawes to the wives and daughters of the other farmers. Why should Mrs Temple begin to patronise Marjory now?

'Mrs Shepherd would gladly have her back,' he continued; 'but I mean to ask her if she will come to the Rectory and live with me as my daughter.'

'Oh, that would be charming! I do hope shell consent—but of course she will,' cried Grace, with an enthusiasm that seemed, in the rector's eyes, to be forced and unnatural. In anyone else he would have set it down as affectation, but that was the last fault of which he could accuse Mrs Temple. From her first arrival at the Hall she had treated her husband's old tutor with such respect and affection as had won for her a very warm corner in the lonely man's heart.

It must be something to do with Mrs Dawes, he now concluded, that had hitherto been a barrier between the Hall and the Hill Farm. It was quite possible that she might have given offence without his knowledge, for the woman by whose deathbed he had knelt that day, was always an unfathomable mystery to him.

'It will be poor little Mrs Armell who will want help, I fear,' said the squire.

'She want help! Why, Hugh, I thought she

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would be quite rich now, with all her father's money!'

'This much talked-of money doesn't seem to be forthcoming.'

'Was it all in that bundle do you think? The bundle poor Teddie saw, which has disappeared?'

'I cannot tell. It seems as if the boy must have fancied a good deal. I really believe he meant what he said about the scene in the orchard, and his grandfather having a bundle and a spade, but the cowman denies having seen either of them. The police can find nothing of the sort, and it is unlikely young Dawes could have taken them to any distance, they would have hampered him in his flight. It is very unfortunate that there was so much delay in sending for the police, and that a crowd of people from Higgins'

farm and the cottages near, should have collected, and carried the body and the gun into the house before the police came. Of course someone may have removed the spade, and Smith might have been too scared to notice it; he is as stupid ignorant a lout as ever I saw.'

'He certainly gave his evidence very badly yesterday,' said the rector, 'I wondered they didn't send him down.'

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'He was the most important witness of all, you see. It seems that he worked for the miller once, and they fell out, as Bourne seems to have done with all his men, sooner or later. He treated Smith very hardly I believe; turned him off without a character at a minute's notice, when his wife was very ill. Still, the fellow must have some sort of feeling for his old master, for they say he has never been the same since he discovered the body; he goes about trembling and quaking, and declares he has seen the miller "walk" in the orchard at night.'

'Well, I really think there is some excuse for him, after making such a horrid discovery,' said Grace.

'But about young Mrs Dawes—there's the mill I suppose, even if no money can be found?'

'I saw White from Braybridge yesterday,' said the squire, 'he is managing her affairs for her, you know; and he says as she could not bring herself to go to Rippidge, she authorised him to search the premises for her. He found a few small sums of money put away here and there but they only amounted to a few pounds. There is very little furniture left in the house, for it seems that Mrs Bourne carried off a number of the smaller things, and sold them bit by bit to Adams the broker at Braybridge. When the husband found

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out what she was after, he continued the practice himself, until the house was fairly stripped. Adams says they brought the strangest assortment of old clothes, scraps of iron, broken boxes, and odds and ends. They would haggle for half-an-hour to get a penny more, and would carry away even a few half-pence with as much care as if it was gold. As to the place, it is in such bad condition that it will want nearly rebuilding

before it is habitable: of course Mrs Dawes can't afford to do that. As she cannot live there, or let it as it is, the only thing will be to sell it as it stands, and White says it will go for next to nothing. He tried to sell some land close to Rippidge quite lately, and the bids were so small he had to withdraw it.'

'How dreadful to think that this should be the end of all that old man's pinching and saving! We must do something for his daughter that's clear. I wonder if—do you think they would consider me intruding if I went there to-morrow?' asked Grace, turning to the rector.

'Oh, you'd better wait till after the funeral,' said Hugh. You can't ask her just yet what she means to do, or offer her help.'

'I didn't mean that; only to tell them how very sorry I am for their troubles.'

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'You know how to sympathise, Mrs Temple; you can comfort them both. Let your wife go, Hugh; she will be welcome, I know,' said Mr Metcalfe, rising. 'Now I am going home to rest, so Good-bye.'

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CHAPTER XI

CHANGES AND CHANCES

IT was a fine evening on the borderland between spring and summer, Marjory stood leaning on the low rail that divided the garden at the Hill Farm, from a meadow that sloped away to the West. The sun was slowly disappearing behind the crest of Morley Edge, and Marjory's eyes wandered sadly over the lovely prospect, yet did not seem to take it in; her little figure in it's deep mourning dress looked forlorn, weary, and drooping.

She had been hard at work all the day, seeing her mothers lawyer, and the auctioneer from Braybridge; going over complicated accounts—trying, in short, to understand and arrange her mother's affairs,

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which were apparently in a state of inextricable confusion, despite the high character that Mrs Dawes had always borne for business capacity.

Mr Temple had offered to take the farm off the hands of Marjory and Lettice, as soon as it suited them to leave, but there was so much to settle first that Marjory had no leisure to reflect on her own future. Mrs Temple had found a situation for Lettice, as matron in a school, and the rector had made his proposition to Marjory the day following her mother's funeral. To his surprise she had asked for time to think it over, and the kind old man had left the farm with a foreboding that this long-cherished dream of his, was never to become a reality.

Marjory was trying to think it over now, but in her fatigued and overwrought condition she could not fix her thoughts on this, or any other point. She hated herself for her ingratitude to Mr Metcalfe, in not accepting his offer thankfully and unhesitatingly; yet she felt she would willingly go out, even as a servant, rather than do what he asked.

Why was this? she asked herself reproachfully. What did she expect? How was it she could not contemplate the task of tending her earliest, best friend in his old age?

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'I *cannot* make up my mind to it,' she said. 'It is very wrong of me to keep Mr Metcalfe waiting for an answer. I will try to decide to-morrow, but to-night I am too tired?'

She lifted her arms from the railing, and began to walk slowly to and fro. Presently she heard her name called from the house.

'Here I am,' she answered, hoping that there were no further demands to be made on her that day.

'Miss Marjory, there's a gentleman wants to see you in the parlour,' explained Martha, running down the path towards her mistress.

'A gentleman! Oh, Martha, it isn't Mr White again, is it?'

'No, ma'am.'

'Nor the auctioneer?'

'No, ma'am.'

'Then who is it?'

'Please 'm I dunno; I never seed un before. A gentleman from Kingsford, he said—no, a *friend* from Kingsford—that were it.'

'From Kingsford! Oh!' said Marjory; and with that she hastened into the house. Lettice was in the kitchen, and stopped her as she passed.

'Poor Marjory! I am sorry you have more business to do to-night, when you are so tired. I went

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in and asked if I should not attend to it instead of you. but the man said no. I hope its nothing very disagreeable, and that he won't keep you long, dear.'

'Never mind, thank you, Lettice. I am rested now,' answered Marjory.

She went quickly and softly along the passage to the parlour; her fingers lingered a moment on the handle of the door, then she entered, and was not at all surprised when, out of his old seat in the corner by her long silent piano, rose the tall figure of her music-master. He came forward, and put out his hand awkwardly, saying, with his stiffest manner,

'How do you do, Miss Dawes?'

But she met him half-way, clasped his hand warmly, and said frankly,

'I thought it must be you.'

'Did you?' he replied, and then stood silently looking at her. Was this grave, sad face really Marjory's? Why, she used always to be in good spirits; what had become of her old cheerfulness? But there had been trouble in her family, he recollected—terrible trouble. Of course he had heard and read something of it. He wanted to sympathise with her—he had walked all the way from Kings-ford for that purpose—yet it had not occurred to him that she would look different from usual. He

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did not know how to express himself, and began abruptly,

'You are very much altered!'

'Am I?' she returned, half-hurt by his manner, 'I—we have been in great trouble here, you know. I have had much to do, and one cannot always look the same/

' No, I suppose not/ he said, and paused again.

'Will you sit down?' asked Marjory, rather at a loss how to continue the conversation. 'I will fetch my sister-in-law; you do not know her, I think.'

'No, I do not; and I do not want to—that is, I will make her acquaintance another day, if you please; I came to see *you* this evening.'

'It is very kind of you.'

'Not at all.'

'How is your sister—Emmie?'

'She is very well, thank you, Miss Dawes—very well for her.'

'And do you still live in the little house at St Jude's?'

'Yes; for the present.'

'And the woman who kept house for you—I forget her name—is she with you still?'

'Yes, she is?'

'Do you still play at the cathedral on Tuesdays

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and Fridays?' asked Marjory, wondering desperately what question she could ask next.

'No; not now,' he answered. 'Oh, Miss Dawes, it is good of you to remember and ask about all these things, when you must have so much of your own to think of! I was never good at saying what I feel, as you know; but I came to tell you how sorry I am for all that has happened in your family lately.'

'It is very kind of you,' she repeated.

'No, it isn't; don't you think that I would do more for you, if I could, than walk a few miles to tell you I was sorry?'

'It is not everyone who would do that.'

'Anyone would do it who knew you,' he said, with a downright earnestness that made Marjory blush Point-blank compliments are so much more confusing, and difficult to receive with a good grace, than the delicate little shafts of flattery shot by those well-practised in the art.

'You must think I was not very friendly not to have been here before. A friend is not good for much who only turns up when the worst is over,— but—but I wanted to tell you that I have been fortunate lately, and have been away from Kingsford.'

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'Have you? Where have you been?' asked Marjory, somewhat mystified by this preamble.

'At Hilton. I have got the appointment of organist at the minster there.'

'Oh, I am very glad! Only I had hoped you would get the cathedral some day.'

'At Kingsford? Oh, no, that was not likely.'

'Why, I'm sure you play better than old Mr Drone; Mrs Shepherd, and all her friends thought so.'

Melchior smiled grimly.

'Even if I did,' said he 'they would not give the organistship to me, who held such an obscure place. But Hilton will very likely be a step to something better, if I should desire it.'

'If? Of course you will! When do you move there?'

'That is not settled yet. But, Miss Dawes, I seem to do nothing but talk about myself—will you not tell me something of your plans? I hear that you do not remain here.'

'No, we cannot. My sister-in-law has got a situation in London. I—I hardly know what I am going to do.'

'Do you not, really?' he asked, anxiously.

'Well, I should not say that exactly, because I

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had a home offered to me; but I haven't decided whether to accept it or not.'

'Is it—if I may ask—is it in this neighbourhood?'

'Yes; in Long Upton itself. The rector, who taught me when I was a little girl, you know, has offered to adopt me.'

'And you hesitate about accepting such an offer?'

Mr Leddington spoke quite severely, and Marjory's eyes filled with tears.

'Yes,' she said with an unsteady voice, 'it is ungrateful of me, I know. Mr Metcalfe has been my best friend always, but yet—do *you* think I ought to accept his offer?' she asked, pleadingly, looking up at the organist

'What else could you do?' he said harshly.

'I could—work,' Marjory murmured, apologetically.

'Work! You! I did not often agree with your mother in the old days when I used to come here to teach you, Miss Dawes; but there was one observation she made very frequently in which I perfectly coincided—that you were not fit for hard work; you were meant to live like a lady. Now the chance has come, and do you mean to reject it?'

He had risen from his chair and drawn nearer to Marjory; she also rose, and now standing before

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him, asked half-defiantly, 'Then *you* advise me to take this offer?'

'Yes—oh, yes. I always knew that you were too—too far above'——

The organist's voice faltered, and his manner had changed. Marjory's heart began to beat faster and her breath came quickly, which was, as she told herself, absurd. She had some difficulty in commanding her voice sufficiently to say softly, 'May I not know what it was that you always thought about me?'

'That you were too good for me,' he said, passionately, 'that it was presumption in me to think of you as—as my wife! There—I did not mean to say it; forget it, please. What right have I to put my selfish wishes in your way, when you are at an end, I hope, of your troubles and difficulties. Go: you will live a happy, easy life with your old friend at the Rectory, and always be ——— Why, what is it?

You are crying! Have I said anything to hurt you?'

'Oh, no—but why, why should you ask me to forget?'—began Marjory, in a very low whisper; she could get no further, but she raised her eyes to his, and they finished the sentence for her.

'Oh, Marjory, Marjory, you don't mean that you

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care for me? That you would rather come to me, —to me and poor Emmie, than go to live at the Rectory? Oh, take care how you answer! Can you really love me enough for that?'

'If you will have me, I would rather be your wife than live with any one else in the world.'

'Oh, no—it can't be! You cannot really *love* me, Marjory?'

'As for that, why, I've loved you ever since the last music-lesson you gave me, in this very room. Will that satisfy you, sir?'

This touch of Marjory's old spirit brought a smile to her lover's lips; and the violent trembling which assailed her as she made her confession, was quieted immediately by the support of his encircling arms. What need is there to describe the further rapture of this pair of faithful lovers? Cannot each imagine that for himself? How many explanations they had to give; how Melchior admitted that his visit was made with a

view to this happy result, but how his courage failed when he saw Marjory, and he thought it ungenerous to ask her to share his lot, when he heard of the other prospects open to her; yet how he had tried for the post at Hilton, only because it would enable him to marry.

'There is a house as well as the salary and the pupils. It is a pretty house, close to the minster:

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it's too good for me and Emmie, but it's almost good enough for you, my darling.'

So it was that a ray of sunshine gleamed out over the gloom of departure from the Hill; and when the sale was over, and everything settled, a quiet wedding took place from the Rectory, and Mr Metcalfe married Marjory instead of adopting her. He bore the disappointment well, on the whole, and consoled himself by giving the bride a very handsome present, towards her outfit and furnishing expenses. He also proclaimed his intention of making her his heiress, so that Melchior declared he should never have ventured to marry Marjory, after all, had he known what an important person she was.

We must dismiss Mr and Mrs Leddington to their pretty new home in the minster yard at Hilton, where we will leave them very happy together, and each busy enough in their different ways: she by her brightness gradually drawing her husband out of his old, shy self-distrust, and infusing new pleasures into the narrow life of poor Emmie; he devoted to his art only one degree less than to his wife, and with the probability of making his name well-known and honoured in the musical world.

Meanwhile the Hill Farm stood empty, and so

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did the mill at Rippidge. A sale had been held of such furniture as remained to the miller at the time of his death; and to this sale flocked half the country-side, partly from desire to see the place and partly because it was whispered abroad that certain of the articles to be sold might prove valuable acquisitions, as containing some of the miser's hidden stores. The result was that many of the worn and dingy pieces of household furniture sold for more than their original cost; and it is believed in the neighbourhood that a few, at anyrate, of the purchasers were not disappointed of their lusts.

But when all was said and done, there was only a very small sum left for Lettice to start afresh, and she was eager to be off. As long as Teddie was in the gaol at Kingsford she had liked to feel herself near him; but now he had been removed to a reformatory at some distance, and his mother knew that she would be better away from the scenes of her troubles. Mr White had thought that the mill might sell best if put into an auction at Kingsford, which would take place late in the summer, and so when Lettice went away, large notices of the coming sale were still plastered here and there on all the walls, barn doors, and gate posts.

She was thankful to be gone, and soon settled into

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her place at the school, where her work was chiefly of a monotonous kind that suited her well. The change undoubtedly did her good, and the new matron was highly approved of by the boys, big and little, while the sight of them was balm to her sore heart, made wider, softer, more sympathetic by her trials. She 'mothered' the younger lads, and entered into their feelings with a self-abandonment that would, only a few months ago, have been impossible to her.

The chapter of exciting history, which had worked itself out that spring, appeared to be closed; and Braybridge and its neighbourhood sank back into their usual condition of drowsy quietude. If anyone rode or drove through the street on other than a market day, all the trades-folk came out at their doors to look, and the news that Miss Jones had gone out in Harvey's fly, was deemed worthy of frequent repetition. When Mr Temple rode into the town one Thursday, half the population was agog; before he had put up his horse at the White Hart, and 'passed the time of day' with the landlord, there were heads on the watch for him at every door and window in the Top of the Town.

The good people of Braybridge, like those of some larger places, were very jealous for their

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town. They were indignant that the neighbouring gentry should ever spend their money elsewhere; parcels that came and went by the small station, or by the Kingsford carrier, were subjected to the severest scrutiny. The news that a bonnet box had arrived from London for Mrs Temple, or a parcel of books from Cambridge for the rector of Long

Upton, would create a thrill throughout the little circle of Braybridge tradesmen. Yet it may be remarked, by the way, that these people who were so staunch to their united cause, were by no means true to each other in this matter. It was a standing grievance to Powell, the grocer, that Morris, the draper, bought his tea and sugar at Kingsford; Miss Harvey, the milliner, thought that Mrs Powell might patronise her for caps, while Morris never could discover any reason why Powell should send away for his coats.

Mr Temple went to Powells, and left a message from the housekeeper; and to Jenkin's, where he gave an order for some railings, which rejoiced the soul of the struggling ironmonger, who eked out his scanty means by an agency for seeds and artificial manures.

So far so good; but his next step sent the squire down several degrees in the estimation of Braybridge. He turned into Howard's shop, and

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Howard was a 'foreigner;' that is, he did not belong to Brookshire, still less to Braybridge, when he had taken a shop ten years ago, and was still regarded as an upstart intruder. He was a watchmaker by trade—a steady, inoffensive, hard-working man; good-natured too, and anxious to be friendly, but somehow the Braybridge people would have none of him, and they discovered all of a sudden that old Green, who had a dingy little shop in Love Lane, was wonderfully clever and honest (when he was sober), and that it behoved everybody to have their watches and clocks set to rights by him, and him only.

They were surprised that 'the gentry should take up with Howard—a fellow that nobody knew anything about;' but, in spite of this opposition, Howard grew and prospered, depending on the surrounding country for his customers.

Mr Temple had brought his watch to be looked at, and wanted Howard to go out to Long Upton to examine the stable clock. Howard stuck a glass in his eye, and closely inspected the watch: there was not much the matter, he announced; he could put it right at once, if Mr Temple could wait a minute.

'This is a queer old clock you are working at,' observed Hugh, as he waited.

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'You are right, sir, it is an old one. It has been a good one too in its time, but it has been standing still for years, and is in the foulest state I ever saw. Who do you suppose that clock belonged to?'

'I'm sure I can't tell.'

'The old miller, sir, that was shot a short time back.'

'Did it? Then its condition is not to be wondered at, for the whole place at Rippidge was filthy. The only thing that surprises me is that he had not sold it long ago.'

'Perhaps he found some use for the clock, sir, though it did not go. By the way, that reminds me, I have something I should like to show you, if you are not in any particular hurry, sir.'

'No; I can wait if it won't take long. Is the watch ready? Please put it on the chain for me. Who brought the clock to you?' asked Hugh, idly, as he played with some small parts of the works which lay on the counter.

'Well, sir, that has to do with what I was going to show you. That clock was brought here last Friday by Mrs Smith, wife of the cowman, you know, sir, at the Field Farm, near Rippidge.'

'I know; the man who found the miller's body. Well, they bought the clock at the sale, I suppose?'

'Yes, so Mrs Smith said; and when she had asked

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me to clean it, she hung about the shop, and after a bit she pulled out *this,* and asked if I would change it for her.'

Howard had unlocked a small drawer at the back of his shop, and out of it he took a five-pound note, which he handed to Mr Temple, saying, 'Please to look at it well, sir.'

'Eastborough City and County Bank. Where could she have got this, I wonder.'

'That I asked her, and she seemed very confused, but said at last that they had found it in the clock. Perhaps you heard, sir, that it was said after the sale at the mill, that money was found in some of the things, but no notice was taken of it; so I changed the note for her. But no sooner was she gone than I began to think I acted foolishly; and when I came to examine the clock, and saw how dirty it was in every part, I said to myself "that

note was never hidden here—it's too clean, and it hasn't been folded up, for it isn't creased." Yet it is an old note, you see, sir, and must have lain by for a long time.'

'How can you tell that?' asked Mr Temple. 'Oh, I see, here is a date and a signature showing that it was issued two-and-twenty years ago. Still it may have come recently into Mr Bourne's possession, though, as you say, it must have lain by

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for a long time, since a note of this age could not be so clean if it had been in circulation all these years.'

'Well, sir, as it happens, I am an Eastborough man myself; my brother was once clerk in that very bank, and I remember they altered their notes as much as twenty years ago. They called in all the old ones they could, and gave the people new ones instead. They don't have that ornamental sort of border round the new notes. Now, sir, it seems to me that Smith can't have got that out of the clock. I feel sure from the wife's manner that she wasn't telling the truth; and what was very curious too, I happened to see that she had another note in her purse. The question is, where did they get them?'

'It is a strange thing, certainly,' said Mr Temple, thoughtfully, as he still contemplated the note. 'But you see we have no grounds for assuming that the money belonged to old Bourne.'

'I think we have, sir.'

'What makes you say that?'

'Because, sir, his wife once called here, soon after I came first; she brought the miller's watch to be mended, and inside was the name of the watchmaker at Eastborough that I was apprenticed to. It's odd, sir, isn't it, how things come out? I remarked on it

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as a curious circumstance, and she said "Oh, that was when Mr Bourne had a school before he came into his property, and took to the milling." I always remembered it, because it amused me to hear her speak so grand, as if her husband was a very great man, and she looked so poor and shabby herself, that it didn't seem in character.'

'This is a strange story, and it must be enquired into.'

'I think so, sir; it has been quite on my mind all this past week; but I didn't exactly know what steps I ought to take. I'm very thankful you came in, and I'll leave it in your hands

if you please. I was very vexed with myself that I'd let Mrs Smith have her change, but I'm glad now, because it may lead to that poor Mrs Dawes getting her rights. They've robbed her somehow, you may depend. It seemed strange to me, sir, that so little was said about that bundle which young Dawes saw in the old man's hand. Don't you think that some of those people at Rippidge got and opened it, and, perhaps, divided the money, before the police came up?'

'It is possible; I believe those Higginses don't bear a very good character; but Smith denied the bundle entirely, and the magistrates ignored that part of the boy's story, so it was scarcely mentioned

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at the assizes. It did not affect the case against young Dawes.'

'You weren't among the magistrates that examined him, were you, sir?'

'No; I preferred not to sit on the bench that day, as he was a tenant's son. Well, Mr Howard, if you will trust me with this note, I'll take it to Mr White and consult him. It may lead, as you say, to the recovery of some of Bourne's money for his daughter.'

The curious public, who kept watch on Mr Temple's movements, could not imagine why he was so long at Howard's. One person, more ingenious than the rest, decided that the watchmaker had overcharged the squire, who was occupied all this time in going over his account.

When Mr Temple at last re-appeared, and was seen to enter the lawyer's office, everyone was convinced that he meant to seek advice how to escape the extortionate demands of 'that Howard.' Had they known the real object of his visit, or entertained the dimmest notion of its consequences, then Braybridge would have waked from all its sleepiness, and Howard have received sufficient attention to make up for all the neglect shown to him throughout the past ten years.

When Mr White saw the note, and heard Hugh's

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story, a smile crept over his astute countenance, and instead of showing any surprise, he merely observed,

'This explains a letter that came into my hands this morning, about which I was writing to Mrs Dawes.'

He then took up an envelope that lay on his desk, and gave it to Hugh; it was addressed—

'To the Executors of Mr D. Bourne,

'Rippidge Mill,

'Braybridge,

'Brookshire.

It contained a letter, dated from the City and County Bank at Eastborough, saying that the managers having become aware of the death of their depositor, Mr Daniel Bourne, and having waited for some weeks for instructions from his representatives, now wrote to ask in what name they should enter the sum of £5000 now lying at their Bank to the credit of the late Daniel Bourne.

'So Mrs Armell Dawes *was* an heiress, and the old miller had a banking account after all,' said the lawyer.

'Why do you say, "after all?"'

'Oh, you would not remember—years ago when old Bourne bought these fields — which, unfortunately, will not sell now for half what he gave

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for them—there was a great discussion as to whether or not he had a banking account. Everybody in Brookshire (at least in this part of it), knows more of his neighbour's business than of his own, and when the miller paid for the land all in sovereigns, the story was got up which has been believed ever since, that he kept all his money hidden about the place. The old fellow was wiser than I gave him credit for; he didn't choose that all these chattering fools should know his affairs, and he continued to bank with these Eastshire people, unknown to anyone here.'

'He would have been wiser had he made a will,' said Hugh, 'or let his daughter know a little of his affairs. I am glad there is something for her after all; but what do you think about this note?'

A long consultation followed, which ended in Mr Temple's going home with the lawyer to luncheon, which all the gossips agreed 'looked bad for Howard.' It was not until late in the evening that the squire returned to Long Upton with news that drove his wife nearly wild with excitement.

Smith, the cowman from Higgins' farm, was in the police-cell at Braybridge, and would be brought before the magistrates on the following morning, on a charge of robbery and murder. In a box at his house had been found Daniel Bourne's bank-book,

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wrapped in a coloured handkerchief. The handkerchief answered to the description given by young Dawes of that containing the bundle which his grandfather had brought from the mill into the orchard.

And more than this, while making further search for possible notes or money, the police had found hidden beneath some coal under the stairs, a battered spade, on the handle of which was roughly carved 'D. P.'; and the handle bore a small dark stain—a stain of blood, sticking to which were a few grey hairs.

When this story had travelled through the servants'-hall and kitchen, to the stables at Long Upton, Dick Porter came forward and claimed the initials on the spade as his handiwork; and he afterwards saw the spade, and recognised it as one that was left behind by his father, when he removed from Rippidge to the cottage at the Dale.

No one who had known the miller, would doubt his immediately appropriating any stray article that lay within his reach, unclaimed; and many were the moralisings over the fact, that the old spade which once was the object of his greed, had proved the instrument of his destruction.

Teddie's assertion that his grandfather had tried to strike him, now received credence; and it was

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clear that his shot had not killed Daniel Bourne, whose hidden stores of wealth had been a constant theme of Smith's conversation, coupled with the remark that 'he'd be even wi' the owd miller yet!'

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CHAPTER XII

PADDINGTON STATION

IT seemed to the impatient Armell that there was no end to the obstacles which rose in his homeward path. The delay of a day or two, caused by some small accident, made him too late to take his passage in the vessel of which Captain Marleigh had spoken.

This involved waiting a week at Durban, which he left at last in a small sailing ship, since his feverish haste to be of, would not permit him to stay for the next mail steamer. All the week through he had paced the Sandy Bluff, gazed across the blue waters below, or strolled along the streets of the town quite unconscious of his surroundings:

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or he sat in the flower-decked court of his hotel, so deeply lost in thought that the other visitors who lounged there, smoked, drank coffee, and took their ease, began to regard him with suspicion; and some of them made bets as to the cause of his abstraction, the generally received opinion being that he had lost' a pot of money at the fields.'

He had a nervous dread of asking for news, and though he was several times on the point of enquiring from a neighbour at dinner, whether he knew the result of that trial at Kingsford assizes, yet he could never bring himself to do so, fearing to betray his personal interest in the case, by want of self-control.

At last, on the day before he sailed, he chanced to find a copy of the *Daily Telegraph* which someone had left on a table. He searched eagerly through its columns, and in a leading-article there was a casual allusion to Edmund Dawes, a youthful criminal, held up to point a moral. From this source Armell gleaned some outline of the sentence passed upon his son; but, strange to say, instead of relief, it only brought him fresh occasion for doubts and fears.

In truth, his state of mind was so morbid that he could take comfort from nothing. During the fourteen years of his voluntary exile, he had never

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lost sight of the troubles and misfortunes that drove him from home. He had found no relief, except in hard work, yet had never been able to take any pleasure in the success of his labours Restlessly he had wandered from one colony to another, prosperous in whatever he attempted; yet throwing up one successful venture after another in a fashion that seemed culpably reckless to those about him.

What was wealth to him, cut off from home and wife; child, and friends?

Until he threw in his lot with the Hardmans, he had associated with no one throughout his wanderings. Perhaps it was the influence of living a home-like life once more which led him, little by little, to make a confidant of Mrs Hardman. Then suddenly and

unexpectedly had come news from home; terrible news truly, but the kindness and sympathy shown by his partners and their visitors when they heard his story, had softened and encouraged him both at once.

When he left them there came upon him a fresh sense of loneliness, and loss of companionship, and to this might be attributed chiefly the access of melancholy from which he now suffered. He fancied he might get the better of this when he had once sailed, but the monotony of life on board ship was

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hardly calculated to overcome it. During the first fortnight of the voyage, he tormented himself more than ever.

Lettice still had her son alive—it was the less likely she would welcome her husband. When he had reasoned himself out of this fallacy, he asked, 'What am I going home for? Where, and to whom?' He had heard that sudden shocks, even of joy, were injurious. What if he did Lettice some great harm by his unexpected appearance? Should he write to her, and wait in London for her answer? But the letter might alarm her as much as the sight of him. His mother? No, he would not write to her; she was not the person to break news gently to anyone. Marjory? How could he tell where she was to be found? The rector? He might be dead.

At last he bethought himself of Mr Cox; he had often laughed at the little schoolmaster in the old days, yet he could appreciate his good points, and now remembered that Mr Cox was always specially thoughtful for Lettice. So he set to work at once and wrote and re-wrote a long letter to Mr Cox explaining the circumstances of his return, and asking him to go to Lettice, and discover if she were willing to receive her husband. He himself would wait in London for the answer. When this

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letter was written, ready to post so soon as he should land, a happier, better spirit took possession of Armell. He began to take an interest in the progress of the ship; and he noted, almost with pleasure, the signs that gradually shewed they were nearing home. He no longer held aloof from all society, but found it easier everyday to talk, and mingle with his fellow-passengers. He even began to play with some children who were

on board, and was soon established as their favourite story-teller, "Cos he's been all yound the world,' as the youngest one expressed it.

By the time they came in sight of English shores he was his old self again—friendly, helpful, unassuming, and when the parting came, many a 'Good-bye' was said to him regretfully.

He posted his letter, not without trepidation, certainly, but in a far more hopeful frame of mind than that in which he had written it. Then he established himself at a quiet hotel, and waited for the answer. Two days, three days passed, and no reply came. Armell grew impatient, but still he tried to persuade himself that there might be good reason for the delay. He waited two days longer, and his heart began to sink within him; he thought that Lettice must have refused to see him, and that Mr Cox shrank from telling him so. A whole

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Seeing an open door he ushered both of them into the compartment Armell had just quitted, and banged the door; conveniently blind to the fact that it already contained more than its full complement of passengers.

'Guard! guard! This won't do! We're too full. I say, this won't do!' shouted the old gentleman, with his head out of the window.

'I'll stand,' said Armell, soothingly, 'I'm afraid there is no room anywhere else; all the other carriages are equally full.'

'Nonsense!' growled the old gentleman. 'Guard! I say guard, I'll report you for this!'

'Can't help it, sir,' said the guard carelessly appearing for one moment at the window, with his whistle to his lips. 'Some of these gentlemen will be changing for Beech wood at Cross Junction— only half-an-hour.'

With that he blew his whistle, and the train moved off, while the old gentleman was still muttering irately, 'I'll report you, I'll report you!'

No one took any pains to make Armell's position easier to him; he had to stand in the middle of the compartment, supporting himself by holding on to the hat rack. Fortunately he was tall, and his arms were long, or he would have been more uncomfortable than he actually was. The other men

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evidently thought him a fool for his pains, and some did not hesitate to say so, while others made him far more angry by their open remarks on the woman he had helped. How she bore it he could not see, for with truly English bad manners, they had obliged her to make her way as best she could, through the narrow space between their knees, to a seat at the further end of the carriage, to which Armell's back was turned.

It seemed a long time before the station was reached at which the racing men got out. Armell was very glad to sit down again when he found himself left alone with the woman and the old gentleman. He took a seat opposite the latter, feeling that it would look like fishing for thanks, if he chose the other end.

Nevertheless he could not help feeling that he had a right to expect a few words, at least, of gratitude, or of regret for the inconvenience he had suffered.

No such words came, and presently he turned to look stealthily at the ungrateful woman, as he could not but think her. She leant one elbow on the window ledge, and rested her head on her hand; she was looking out upon the fields, and a quiet, happy smile played round her mouth. Some pleasant thoughts were evidently in her

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mind, making her forgetful of the little event that had seemed important to Armell.

For the rest, she was slight, of middle height, and wore a deep mourning dress; he could see no more. His thoughts reverted to his own affairs, and having his head full of them, when after a time some slight movement on the part of the woman, caused him to look round, it suddenly occurred to him that she was not unlike Lettice. 'But that's absurd,' he said to himself. 'Why should I think that of the first woman with whom I have been brought into contact, after my return to England?'

Still he could not refrain from looking again; the delicate complexion, the grey eyes, the soft smooth brown hair, touched here and there with silver, bore some distant resemblance to his wife, as time might have made her. But there was an expression in this woman's face that Lettice had lacked, and she looked so happy too!

It was impossible to imagine that Lettice—his poor Lettice—could be otherwise than sad after all that had come and gone. Besides, what could bring *her* in London?

'So you go as far as Kingsford, sir?' enquired the old gentleman, fiercely.

'No—yes'—stammered Armell, aware that he

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had been caught staring very unnecessarily at the passenger at the further end of the carriage. 'Yes, I am going to Kingsford.'

'I asked because I thought that perhaps you would join me in making a complaint to the company, sir, concerning the disgraceful overcrowding of this train, and the conduct of the guard. It is my intention to take down his name when we reach Kingsford, and to'——

'I'm afraid I can't help you, sir; I am going on beyond Kingsford, and as we are behind time, I cannot do more than catch my train.'

'What train is it, may I ask?'

'Braybridge branch,' said Armell.

'Oh, poof! You'll find no difficulty in catching that train—little pottering line—trains always wait. You can't know Braybridge, sir, or you'd have no fear about losing your train. Why, sir, if I want to be at Braybridge by twelve o'clock, I go by the train that is down on the time-table to get in at ten. That's the sort of thing there, sir.'

'Is it?' said Armell, half-amused, half-bored by the old gentleman's persistence. The woman now looked round, and the grumbler, pleased to find a second auditor, turned to her.

'Are *you* going to Kingsford, madam?'

'Not all the way,' she said, 'only to Plumpton.'

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'Lively place that!' he growled.

'I don't stay there,' she added, apologetically; I only change there for Hardingford.'

'Hardingford, eh? That's where the big reformatory is, isn't it?'

'Yes,' she replied, with an uneasy glance at her questioner; after which she again looked out of the window.

'Queer mistakes made sometimes,' pursued the old man, stretching out his legs, and looking up into the roof of the carriage. 'There's a boy, now just dismissed, or going to be dismissed from that place, and the evidence against him seemed as clear as possible.'

The woman looked round again, coloured, sighed, made a little movement as if to speak, then restrained herself, and turned her head away. Nevertheless, Armell, watching her closely, saw her handkerchief taken out, and quietly pressed to her eyes.

'Boy that shot his grandfather—a young rascal! Suppose you've heard of it?' 'Yes, I've heard of it.'

'Well, sir, what do you think of the account in this morning's paper?' 'I have not seen it.'

'Not seen the paper, sir? Why'——

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'I have only just returned to England after a very long absence, and I haven't yet got into the way of reading newspapers regularly.'

As Armell spoke the woman looked at him with a searching glance. She seemed struck by something in his voice or manner—her eyes fell as she met his gaze, but he felt instinctively that, when he turned away, she looked at him again. It was evident that he had the same attraction for her as she had for him. Some subtle influence seemed to pass from one to another of them. He longed to speak to her, but could not break the spell that held him silent and exposed to the fierce glare of the old gentleman's double eyeglasses.

'Better begin reading the papers as soon as possible, sir. You'll find yourself nowhere—nowhere at all—if you're not up in the news of the day. But about this boy. It has turned out that though he shot his grandfather, another man (the very one that gave the alarm, and got the boy taken up) found that the old man was not quite dead, and knocked him on the head in order to secure some money he had about him. The fellow has confessed to it now, and it seems that the Home Secretary has ordered the release of the boy. Now, sir, in my opinion, they would have done better to keep that lad in the reformatory—much the better place for him, eh?'

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'I can hardly judge, sir. Could you lend me a paper?'

The old gentleman fumbled in his bulky leather bag, and produced an assortment of newspapers from which he gave Armell his choice. The latter cared little for the nature of the paper, he selected one at random, and used it as a screen, and an excuse for silence. The old gentleman took another, and soon was deep in the intricacies of an

important debate. When Armell saw this, he moved softly, under cover of the paper, to the other end of the carriage.

'I think you said you know Braybridge?' he asked, in a low voice, of his opposite neighbour.

'I did not say so,' she answered in great confusion, with a look of alarm and surprise. 'But I do know it,' she added.

'Then can you tell me,' asked Armell, looking straight into her eyes. 'Can you tell me anything of a schoolmaster named Cox, who used to live there?'

'No, I cannot; he left some time ago, and I have not heard of him since.'

'Is there no one who knows his address?'

'I should think not—but I can't tell,' she replied, speaking with difficulty, while the colour came and went in her cheeks, and her quivering eyelids, and

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trembling hands, showed that she was not indifferent to Armell's gaze.

'Then that accounts for my not receiving any answer to a letter I wrote to him last week. I have been waiting to hear, and could not think why he did not write. I never suspected he had left Braybridge; I had hoped'——. He broke off with a sigh.

There was a short silence during which the train entered a large station, and stopped so suddenly as to take Armell by surprise. He started, and the old gentleman looking up, noted for the first time the changed position of his companion.

'Suppose these automatic brakes are new to you, sir—rather startling when one isn't used to them. Don't half like 'em myself. This is Meadham, we have to wait five minutes here; the inspector knows me, I shall get out to speak to him about the guard. Perhaps you will see, sir, that no one takes my seat.'

So saying he left the carriage, and Armell and the woman were alone.

'I have something to ask you,' he began, nervously, urged on by the feeling that he must use this short opportunity while he might. But before he could say more, her hands were stretched out towards him, with a curious fluttering

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movement, and she cried with a sob,' Who—oh, who are you?'

'I am Armell Dawes,' he answered, in a voice choked with emotion. Then his eyes fell. He dared not lift them to his wife's face, but covered them with his hands.

Would she denounce him? Had she not every right to do so?

But the next minute, to his unspeakable relief, surprise, and joy, her arms were round his neck, and she whispered with an earnest devotion, very unlike the Lettice of old,

'Armell, O Armell, my love, my husband! my dearest! Have you come back to me? Can you forgive me?'

When the train stopped at Plumpton the old gentleman saw, with astonishment, both his fellow-travellers get out, cross the line, and enter the Hardingford train together.

'Poor fellow!' he exclaimed with contemptuous pity. 'Taken captive as soon as he gets ashore! Caught by the very first female he sets eyes on! She's a widow, I suppose. Artful minx!'

Little did he guess that he was gazing after the

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happiest couple to be found in England that day— a husband and wife re-united after years of separation.

Still less did he guess that they were the parents of the boy who was leaving the reformatory, free from the stain that had fallen on his name. Lettice had left London that morning in order to meet Teddie, and go with him to Hilton, where Marjory and her husband had invited them to stay, until they could form plans for the future.

It was a very happy party that met round the organist's table that evening, but withal a quiet one; for such happiness as theirs—so unexpected, so dearly bought, lies too deep for words.

There was much to explain, and much to forgive, but forgiveness was assured, and there would be ample leisure for explanations, since there was now no fear of hardship, nor any pressing necessity for setting to work. Lettice had come into her little fortune at last, while Armell did not return empty-handed from his wanderings.

Besides this it was presently discovered that uncle Edmund had to the last refused to believe in Armell's disappearance, and at his death, some few years back, he had left directions in his will, which had caused him to be regarded by his lawyer as the victim of a hopeless infatuation. These were to the

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effect that for a certain term of years his farm was to be let in trust for his great-nephew; if, after that period had elapsed, there should still be no news of Armell, or if the fact of his death should be ascertained, then the property was to go to other relations. This appointed time was not yet over, and so it came about, that as neither Armell, Lettice, nor Teddie cared to return to Brookshire, they settled down at length in the northern home where Armell had spent the happiest days of his youth.

We have followed the fortunes of our heroine, 'Up Hill and Down Dale,' for fifteen long years of toil and trouble; we will leave her now, happy in the devoted love of her husband and son; happier still, in that she herself has learnt to love, with the love 'that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things.'

THE END