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[i]

‘O purblind race of miserable men,
How many among us, at this very hour,
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves
By taking true for false, or false for true!
TENNYSON

[ii]

CLEVEDEN

BY

MARY LINSKILL

AUTHOR OF
'BETWEEN THE HEATHER AND THE NORTHERN SEA,' 'THE HAVEN UNDER THE HILL,' 'IN EXCHANGE FOR A SOUL,' ETC.

A NEW EDITION

LONDON
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1892

[iv]

Dedicated
WITH MUCH AFFECTION
TO MY VERY DEAR FRIENDS
AT BINGHAM RECTORY

[vi]

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CLEVEDEN

BOOK FIRST: MISTAKES.

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CHAPTER I.

THE OLD HALL.

'In the sweet spring days,
With whitening hedges and uncrumpling fern,
And blue-bells trembling by the forest ways,
And scent of hay new-mown.'
MATTHEW ARNOLD.

THERE is not in all North Yorkshire a prettier village than Cleveden.
Standing this bright May morning at the turn of the road leading from Bracken Gill, the scene spread out before us is one of exceeding beauty. Far away in the distance, purple

ridges of moorland rise against the sky; here and there the purple changes to tender blue, and here and there soft gray shadows come between. Nearer hills, exquisitely varied in form and colour, crowned with trees, and clad with trees quite down to the margin of the river, rise out of the emerald valleys. There is the low of cattle in far-off fields—the water
[4]
rushing down by the mill seems to find an echo in the hillside where we stand that is like the surging of a distant sea. There is a linnet twittering cheerfully in the furze bushes behind us, a lark carolling overhead, and all round that dreamy hum of insect life which is so indescribably pleasant on a lazy summer's day. The west wind comes softly to us from the hills on the other side of the valley, and over the sunlit landscape now and then a tiny cloud-shadow passes slowly.

At the foot of the opposite hills, just on the other side of the river Esk, which flows at our feet, lies the village of Cleveden—a perfect gem in colour and outline. The background—a long undulating upland, is mapped out into irregular and many-coloured fields; one or two farmhouses rise like little red specks over the heights; and exquisitely-grouped trees, tender yellow-green trees just bursting into summer leafiness, add grace and beauty to the scene. One of these groups, the largest and most varied, rises out of the swelling hillside just behind the new church and the Rectory—two buildings in vivid but not unpleasing contrast to the quaint and ancient-looking village. The cottages, small graystone or whitewashed tenements, with high-peaked, red-fluted roofs, form
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a long, irregular line leading from below the church to where the old Hall stands in picturesque dilapidation. The white orchard-trees lie between us and the village now; and there is a wide sweep of rich pasture-land on the opposite bank of the river, and a green hedgerow with quivering aspen trees.

Were we to follow the river downward for about a mile, we should come to the town of Port St. Hilda. But it is with Cleveden we have to do at present, more especially with Cleveden Hall.

It stands quite at the upper end of the village, the front of it rising in grim, brown-red stateliness not a dozen yards back from the road. The windows strike you first—they are so numerous; and the stone mouldings above—green and gray and weather-stained—are of such quaint and various device. These windows are stone-mullioned and diamond-paned—that is, where there are any panes at all, but panes are exceptional. Each window would bear separate description. One has its two lower divisions filled up with stone flags, and one flag is yellow, and the other is gray; and of the upper divisions one is of wood, and the other of straw. In another window the leaden framework still remains, but the tiny green panes are much broken, and behind is glaring new red brick
[6]
and white mortar: and in and out through the broken glass swallows are passing swiftly.

In front of the old house is a high-walled garden—garden once, almost thicket now! A variegated holly-tree bends over the wall, three lilac-trees bend in the same direction; further down are the almost bare branches of an aged laburnum; and underneath is a tangled mass of shrubs, plants, rank grass, and weeds. The paths are grown over, the gate is broken, the massive front door, unopened for years, is brown and cracked and seared-looking; and there is a general air of decay and desolation. At the back of the

house things are better. If the grass in the wide paddock is rank and coarse, it is of a brilliant green, and there is a middle distance of white orchard, with glimpses of winding river. Beyond is a background of hills—first the verdant hills, and then the tender hills, the blue and gray and purple mysteries I told you of before.
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CHAPTER II.

A DAUGHTER OF VANITY.

'I would not have the angel Gabriel
As hard as you in noting down my sins.'
GEORGE ELIOT: *The Spanish Gipsy.*

'THE coming of Abel Kirke and his daughter to Cleveden Hall had created some excitement in the little townlet. But that was six months ago. The excitement had subsided long before the time of which I write. Curiosity had, with much painful diligence, satisfied itself to the utmost.
Yet all that could be ascertained only amounted to this—that Abel Kirke had sold his farm over at Branthwaite; that he had preferred taking the old Hall just as it was, paying merely a nominal rent, to having it put into repair and paying the rent that would then have been demanded; that he was a Dissenter; that it was supposed that he had chosen Cleveden as a place to retire to because of its nearness to Port St. Hilda, where a favourite 'minister' was stationed; and that though he was himself a local preacher, and held in high repute for what was counted sanctity, yet that he was a keen hand at a bargain, and at all times slow to
[8]
untwist the canvas purse that required so much effort—physical as well as mental—before it could be drawn from the pocket of his corduroy knee-breeches.
A glance at the interior of the Hall would seem to verify the latter part of this information. Even this bright May morning it is chilly, and vacant, and dolesome. And how the smell of ancient dust still lingers! And what strange hollow sounds answer to the softest footfall from the old walls and the ceiling! It may be true that,

'All houses wherein men have lived and died
Are haunted houses,'

but very few were so palpably haunted as Cleveden Hall.
The rooms are, for the most part, empty, the stairs are carpetless, the windows curtainless, and in some of the lower rooms there is a damp heavy mouldiness in the air that is oppressive. There is only one sitting-room furnished—Jenny has done her best to make it habitable, but it is a very large room, and the few shabby horse-hair chairs, and the one sofa, look as if they had been brought into it by mistake. At the further end of the room there is a little old square piano with a limited
[9]
number of keys, and of this number a large percentage has no connection with the interior of the instrument. And near the window is an old brown desk—it is open now, and Abel is sitting before it, cautiously locking and unlocking little drawers and boxes, opening little brown-paper parcels, counting little rouleaux of bright gold sovereigns, and putting them back again exactly as they were before.

He is a notable-looking old man, tall and powerfully built; his hair white and silvery, his features striking, and his gray eyes deep-set and keen. He is dressed in his usual fashion, a long dark coat, blue worsted stockings, and a pair of much-worn drab knee-breeches. In this costume you might see him in the pulpit were you occasionally to attend Bethel Chapel, Port St. Hilda.

There is a singular look on his face just now—a look of anxiety, almost of pain; and as Jenny's sweet bird-like voice comes echoing down the stairs more clearly, this expression deepens on the old man's countenance. Jenny is dusting the bedrooms, and singing snatches of merry old songs, and she goes on carolling one after another, till at last Abel groans aloud; and when he can bear to listen no longer he ties up the last little parcel

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hastily, not forgetting to lock the desk, though his fingers tremble till he can hardly hold the key. And then he goes out, and stands in the shadow that is on the courtyard, and with uncovered head and hands beseechingly clasped together, he prays for his daughter aloud.

And his concluding petition, now and always, is that she may be snatched as a brand from the burning.

Doubtless, a good and wise prayer, did Abel offer it in the sense in which it is usually offered; but his private interpretation of the graphic Bible words needs brief explanation.

Strange to say, though Abel Kirke was a 'shining light' amongst the worshippers at Bethel Chapel, his daughter clung tenaciously to creeds more orthodox—tenaciously, if not understandingly; and these creeds, taught by the mother who was resting awhile over in Branthwaite churchyard, were, in Abel's opinion, without doubt, responsible for Jenny's shortcomings. Her love of pleasure, her fondness for dress, her unsedate ways, her irrepressible spirits—were not these, one and all, clearly traceable to the teaching of the Church Catholic? Abel Kirke considered the question an idle one, so decided was he in his own mind. And

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his prayer for Jenny was simply a prayer that she might be brought to sit contentedly at the feet of the 'Rev.' Luke Verdon, minister of Bethel Chapel, Abbey Street, Port St. Hilda.

But Abel's hopes of this were growing fainter every day. Jenny had negatived peremptorily the advances of Mr. Verdon, and of various members of his flock, and had made to herself friends amongst the carnal-minded people who worshipped at St. Martin's, at the other end of the village… It was a terrible grief to the old man, and one that oppressed him sorely at times; but he had ceased to speak of it.

This Jenny Kirke, whose story I am about to write, was an essentially feminine little creature, affectionate, inconsequent, impulsive, many-sided. Not a character to be traced in outline, there was too much light foliage about it, and under the foliage too many shadows.

She was not beautiful by any means, but nearer to beauty than to prettiness. She had large, wondering, honest brown eyes; rich, soft brown hair; beautiful white teeth, and a pretty, rosy, pouting mouth; but her complexion was sallow unless she was a little excited; and her nose was an indescribable nose indeed. Yet no one ever

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thought of analyzing the features of the changeful little face. The mobility of expression, the strong individuality that she had, and the atmosphere of brightness and happiness that was always about her, were sufficiently fascinating.
But, sad to say, Jenny knew that she was fascinating, though there were times when the consciousness lent her an added power; and it disposed her to cultivate little refinements of dress, habit, and manner that were native to her.
On the afternoon of this bright spring day, Jenny is in her own room—a wide, gray, half furnished room, with windows looking out over the forlorn front garden and the village street. Her toilette appears to be a matter of some importance to-day. Two dresses—dark ones—have been laid aside already, and she is looking dubiously at a third, a white muslin with tiny rose-coloured leaves dotted all over it. Jenny decides at last in favour of the muslin, as anyone with the slightest knowledge of her could have foretold. But she decides with a sigh. 'I have worn it so often at Mrs. Bede's,' she says to herself. 'Anthony will think I have no other.'
And over the muslin dress Jenny fastens a
[13]
broad pink sash, giving a little dissatisfied glance at herself in the looking-glass, because her waist is not quite so slender as it might be. And presently she puts on a tight-fitting black velvet jacket, and a perky little black velvet hat with a white feather; and after some further inspection of the muslin flounces and the sash, she gives a final curve to the pretty soft brown plaits that droop on her shoulder, looking in the glass as she does so, and saying to herself, with a half-smile of satisfaction, 'I wish I'd never worn my hair any other way but this. It suits me best, after all… Rachel might have told me that Anthony didn't like chignons. I wonder if he likes curls? Fred does; I heard him say so… I'll put my hair in papers to-night if I'm not too sleepy!'
And then Jenny goes tripping lightly down the broad oak staircase, trilling out half unconsciously, '*Oh, who will* o' *er' the downs so free?*' and stopping to open the low wide window to get a piece of scarlet japonica to fasten in her jacket.
She hesitates a moment in the hall; a look of thoughtfulness comes over the sunny face, and then she turns into the narrow passage leading to the kitchen.
'You'll remember to have my father's tea ready
[14]
exactly at four, Milly,' she says, with an amusing little mistress-of-the-house air.
Milly, a quick-eyed little maiden of fourteen, taking in Jenny's toilette at a glance, grins pleasantly, and says, 'Yes'm.' Jenny lingers to give a few more instructions, some of which might have been deferred; and at last, perhaps not without effort, she goes slowly back to the hall, and opens the door of the shabby gray sitting-room.
'Is tha gyne oot ageän?' Abel Kirke asks, with surprised eyes, and in an accent as purely Bœotian as it could well be.
'Yes, father… you know I told you that Mrs. Rede had asked me to tea to-day,' Jenny replies, adding, 'We're going to practise in the evening.' There is considerable deference in the intonation of her voice, and in her manner and attitude something of deprecation.
Abel, sitting with his hands on his knees; moves his white head to and fro as if new pain had come *upon* him, and a half-groan escapes him, but he makes no reply.
It is a hard moment for Jenny. The pink flush of pleasure dies out of her face, and the long eyelashes droop heavily over the bright eyes; a little
[15]

sigh has to be stifled, and a great effort has to be made; and then, moving forward impulsively, she lays one hand *upon* her father's arm, saying almost tenderly:
'Would you rather I didn't go? I'll stay at home if you like—only tell me.'
'Nay, nay; thou'd better go, since thy vain pleasure-seeking heart is there already,' Abel replies. There is a marked change in his voice and accent, and also in his manner—a change that Jenny understands fully, and she prepares herself for the exercise of patience.
A strange listener might not have needed to exercise this virtue consciously; he would probably have found Abel Kirke's eloquence sufficiently interesting. Strange eloquence it was! The old man himself could hardly have decided how much of it was really his, and how much of it was derived from long years of daily intercourse with the ancient prophets. His utterance, so commonplace on all ordinary occasions, rose to this Scriptural elevation on the slightest occasion extraordinary, rose perhaps too often, perhaps too readily.
At times, it wearied his daughter, and at other times almost irritated her; she could hardly
[16]
remember the time when the impression caused by it had been one of value. Yet to-day, as on all other days, she listens and looks perplexed, whilst Abel, with solemn yet impassioned earnestness, points out her sin, or prophesies her doom.
'The spirit of deep sleep hath been poured out upon thee; thou art cast into a net by thine own feet; thou hast altogether forsaken the island of the innocent. Light wonder shall it be if thou stumble, walking away from the ancient paths.

* * * * *

'What wilt thou do in the end thereof—in the day of grief, and of desperate sorrow—when the waters shall fail from the sea, when the strong city shall be as a forsaken bough, when the nations of the world shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind?

* * * * *

'A daughter of vanity art thou—one of the careless women; but the day cometh wherein thou shalt learn wailing and lamentation because of thine iniquity.'

* * * * *

There is light in the old man's eye—not a soft human light, not a loving divine light, but a gleam
[17]
as from the soul of a second Elijah, counting himself very jealous.
After he has concluded, Jenny stands watching him with half-sad yet loving eyes, and feeling much disquietude and misgiving. But moments like these are not new to her, and the experience of the past is that of to-day. She turns away with something that looks like reluctance, and there are very subdued tones in her voice as she says 'good afternoon'; but this uncharacteristic mood is of necessity transient. Jenny, walking down

the village street, gives at least two defiant glances for every curious one bestowed upon her.

CHAPTER III.

AT ESK COTTAGE.

'Silence, beautiful voice!
Be still, for you only trouble the mind
With a joy in which I cannot rejoice—
A glory I shall not find.'
TENNYSON.

DOWN at the lower end of this brightest and leafiest of villages' stands the mill, a wide, many-storied, red-brick building, with white windows open slantwise,
[18]
row above row on every side. There are quaintly gabled out-buildings near it; the river Esk rushes through it and by it, and there are tall trees beyond it, drooping quite over the road. There are sounds and signs of life and labour everywhere. Heavily-laden waggons pass to and fro; the measured strokes of the hammer come ringing from the blazing forge just opposite, and the men in front of the joiner's shop are merry, busy, and noisy over the making of a five-barred gate. There are children playing in the road too, groups of bright-faced, sturdy little creatures; and there are cocks and hens strutting about. Around and over all there is a most intoxicating glory of sunshine and green leaves.
Beyond, on the little hillside terrace, stands the cottage where Mrs. Rede lives. A pretty place it is—long and low, and almost hidden by the white blossom of pear and cherry trees. There is a garden in front with a trim hedge all round it, and there are carefully-kept beds of bright flowers—Dutch tulips, hyacinths, lilies-of-the-valley; near the house there are lilac and laburnum trees, and laurestinus in full bloom. Every little nook has something to show of gaiety or greenness.
Mrs. Rede, a patient-looking, sweet-faced little
[19]
widow, is the owner of Cleveden Mill, and also of a large farm over in the dales. Her son Anthony manages the mill, and acts as her steward generally. To-day he is at his usual post—the desk of the dingy little counting-house.
Jenny passing by with short quick steps, her head thrown back a little, the impertinent white feather fluttering over her hat, the pink-and-white flounces daintily gathered together, appears to have forgotten that the counting-house window looks out on to the road; her attention is fixed upon the cottage gardens opposite. Anthony, standing back a little from the window, smiles and looks gratified. He quite understands, or thinks he does, which is equally comforting.
'Should he go out and speak to her—just a passing word, a greeting?' He had asked himself this question even before she came in sight. Jenny's answering smile, the straightforward yet half-shy glance of her dark eyes, would be pleasant things to remember. Anthony had put away the desire for them resolutely. The Cleveden Mrs. Grundy had eyes wonderful for keenness, a tongue wonderful for readiness; but if he could help it neither eyes nor tongue should every busy themselves about the woman he loved and reverenced…
[20]

Jenny passes on, feeling somewhat disappointed. Anthony walks up and down the counting-house, indulging felicitous dreams.
He had a dark handsome face, and a tall, straight figure, and there were indications of sturdiness of fibre, both mental and physical, in his appearance. No man of his standing was more respected in Cleveden or the neighbourhood, no one's opinion more frequently quoted. 'Anthony Rede said so,' was considered a satisfactory conclusion to almost any argument. But in speaking of his character or his manner, people rarely agreed, unless they agreed to acknowledge that he was hard to understand. Perhaps they were right. His was a strong nature; and, like almost all such natures, twofold. The one Anthony Rede was calm, and self-possessed, and impassive; the other, little known to any, was full of fire and vehemence and passion. Something of this dual nature you saw in his physiognomy. His eye, dark and eager and penetrating, was not in keeping with the broad forehead; and his finely-chiselled nostril, dilating with every passing emotion, was strangely at variance with the firm mouth and deeply-cleft chin. His was not a face nor a figure that you could pass with slight notice, not even in
[21]
his working-dress—the light gray suit he is wearing to-day.
Jenny, sitting near the open window of Mrs. Rede's cosy parlour, feels a thrill pass through her in spite of herself when the straight gray figure comes up the garden-path. The proud little mother, glancing out, drops some stitches of her knitting, and Jenny offers eagerly to take them up—glad to have something to do when those inscrutable eyes come into the room. Rachel Rede, Anthony's cousin, a tall, dark, quiet-looking girl, with a drooping figure, is the only one of the trio who makes no sign.
What mysterious change has come over Anthony? In the counting-house, half an hour ago, he was in his softest, most impressible mood; Rachel, glancing up now, wonders much to see that his mood is hard and frigid. Not that the look on his face is new to her, but it must be altogether new to Jenny Kirke. His very manners and movements are cold and careless; and his voice, saying in an aimless way, 'How are you to-day, Miss Kirke?' has a forced indifference in it patent even to Mrs. Rede.
Rachel, watching him for a moment or two, a little anxiously, but unobtrusively, invents an
[22]
excuse for crossing the room, and coming back she glances towards him with a smile—a certain quiet soothing smile peculiarly her own; and she puts the new *Saturday Review* on the table beside him. Anthony, turning the pages over greedily, forgets to look stoical, but becomes absorbed to an extent quite irritating.
Jenny is vexed and puzzled, and gives her whole attention to Mrs. Rede's knitting, not forgetting to keep up an accompaniment of laughing and chattering. Her eyes grow brighter, her cheeks pinker, and her vexation grows deeper, finding that her smiles, her glances, and her little pleasantries are all thrown away.
For a time she is silent; and then glancing up once more with a troubled, beseeching, bewitching look, she finds to her surprise that Anthony is watching her intently. His eyes have in them love and admiration and pain.
Presently sudden smiles light up the two clouded faces, and over one face a rich warm flush spreads rapidly. The review is laid aside, Anthony crosses over to the sofa where Jenny is sitting, and sits down close by her—so close that his arm, thrown over the top of his chair, touches the sleeve of her dress, and for the second time this afternoon a

[23]
mysterious little wave of emotion thrills through her—not through her only.
'What makes you so industrious to-day?' Anthony asks. The tones of his voice are low and pleasant, and there is a soft intentness of meaning in his eyes powerful to irradiate most commonplace words.
'Am I more industrious than usual?' Jenny says, smiling, and lifting the long brown lashes for a moment.
'Yes, I should say so; I don't remember ever seeing those small fingers fly so fast before.' Then a new thought comes to him suddenly, lighting up an his face, and, taking the knitting from Jenny, he returns it to his mother—retaining one of Jenny's hands in his.
'I'm going to ten your fortune,' he says, opening the small brown palm and laying it in his own, somewhat tremulously. 'Have you any faith in my prophetic powers?'
'None whatever—neither in yours nor in anybody else's.'
'Sceptical little woman! Then I shall not be able to tell you so much as I might have done; your want of faith will act as a negative influence.
But there is a good deal of fate here; an event of
[24]
some magnitude is not far distant, and here is a surprise quite close at hand.'
'What kind of surprise—a pleasant one?'
'Yes; I suppose so.'
'You don't look as if the knowledge of it was particularly pleasant. Tell me something more about it.'
Jenny, looking up for a moment with that soft power in her glance of which she is so conscious, meets Anthony's eyes again; and Anthony, smiling and bending down a little to catch her expression more fully, replies:
'I cannot to-day; you are in such an incredulous mood. Try to appreciate my gifts better, and I shall be able to tell you anything.'
He permits the little hand to be withdrawn, with some reluctance. The past few moments have been pleasant, and very good to nourish hope upon. What a fool he had been to get into that dark, doubting mood, and all because of a dozen spiteful words said by a spiteful woman! Surely he had no cause for doubt. Truth was the very essence of Jenny Kirke's nature, and her eyes and her smiles could hardly be less truthful than her words and her deeds. But he would secure to himself perfect rest in this matter soon—very soon. With this
[25]
sweet, new assurance upon him, he might have spoken this evening, but for the surprise that was coming to Jenny.
Presently tea is brought in. Rachel, busy with the teacups, is brighter and more conversational than is usual with her, and Anthony subsides into a silence that appears to be very pleasant to himself. Yet, hardly silence—perhaps a more dangerous kind of conversation, for the eye is less diplomatic than the tongue, and unreserved to a degree most inexpedient. Jenny, understanding, smiles and chatters all manner of replies. It is so pleasant, she thinks, sitting at tea in that cosy room, with people talking to her and listening to her, and making much of her in every way. There are bright flowers in the windows and in the vases, and all round a homely litter of books and work, and magazines and newspapers. There is a fine-toned piano open at the other end of the

room, a canary in a cage, a lazy-looking tortoise-shell cat asleep on the rug; and there are pictures on the walls, some pretty brackets of carved wood, and on a side table some beautiful old china. Nothing is lost upon Jenny, for her day-dreams for years past have been of a home made homelike by such things as these. Tha people round her, too, are unlike
[26]
any other people she has known—strangely unlike. They are gentler and kinder, more considerate, and their manners are better and quieter, their voices lower and sweeter; and there is some undiscerned element that makes the atmosphere about them seem higher and purer than it is elsewhere.
After tea, Anthony, going back to the mill, lingers about the door for a moment or two, and Jenny, standing in the leafy porch, has little intuitions concerning his reluctance.
'Why don't you go back to your work?' she asks mischievously.
'I am going presently.'
'Why not go now?'
And perceptions of a certain intuitive nature come to Anthony. Is Jenny quite sure that she wishes him to go? he wonders, with a smile. For a moment he hesitates. He is not obliged to go; indeed, he very rarely goes back after tea; but there are some invoices to be sent off this evening. Yes, he must go.
'There is no *necessary* connection between liking a thing and doing it,' he says, thinking aloud.
The remark brings a thoughtful look to Jenny's face, and Anthony, seeing it there, cannot but perceive how it heightens what she possesses of beauty.
[27]
She only wants… What is it she wants? Various words come to his mind—culture, training, softening; but none of them seem to express the right thing. They would involve too much change in Jenny Kirke.

When Anthony had gone, Rachel and Jenny went out to the garden at the back of the house, a wide, sloping, old-fashioned place, with apple-trees covered with pink-and-white blossoms, green bristling gooseberry bushes, fruit-trees on the walls, and beds of all kinds of vegetable prose. There was a tiny new greenhouse at one end, quite full of new plants in new bright-red pots; there were straight gravel walks, with long flights of stone steps leading from the lower walks to the higher ones; and at the upper left-hand corner of the garden there was a shabby little red-brick summer-house, with a blue-green door.
The two girls, walking up and down, talked of the coming music meeting, of the solos and duets that were to be sung, and of the people who were to sing them—half a dozen or so of Cleveden people, who formed a kind of appendage to the Port St. Hilda Choral Society. Sometimes they met at each other's houses to practise; sometimes they went
[28]
'down to town'; and sometimes—three or four times in the year—they assisted at amateur concerts over at Port St. Hilda.
Presently, from beyond the apple-trees, there came a sound of footsteps and rustling silk. A black silk figure first, and then some blue silk came in sight; and then a fair-haired young man stroking a yellow moustache.
The black silk figure was Miss Stanier, a tall, stately-looking woman about forty years

of age, with a pleasant smile and a condescendingly winning manner. Jenny would not see the condescension. She liked to have her soft little brown cheeks crushed together between two large beautiful hands, to be kissed with an airy little kiss on the forehead, and to be talked to as if she were a spoiled, petted child. Horatia Stanier did all this, and did it in an elegant way that cast quite a spell over the little moorland-bred maiden who stood smiling in pink muslin.
On the other side of the path, a pretty, bright-looking girl was saying in a shrill voice to Rachel Rede:
'So you're not sorry to see us an hour before the time? That's strange! All the way as we came I was imagining how you would look when you saw
[29]
us. Not surprised, of course—you're too polite for that; and not annoyed, you're too much—no, I'll put it another way, you're too conscientious. I dare say you'd have all sorts of qualms if you made anybody feel uncomfortable for the tenth part of a second. And here am I making you feel as uncomfortable as possible, and enjoying it! But what did I begin about?—Oh, about our coming so early!—Don't you want to know why?'
'Yes, very much,' Rachel said, laughing. Maria Stanier was amusing always, and sometimes attractive—the latter when there was no spitefulness on the fluent tongue, no malice in the quick, sparkling eyes. There were no traits of this kind visible to-day, but a little exultation—a little gleam as of triumph to come.
'What is it all about?' Jenny asked, lifting her big brown eyes to Fred Stanier's face. Fred smiled and coloured a little, and passed his fingers lightly over his moustache; then he looked at his elder sister as if he were looking for help. He was not a man of many words.
'Ah! what is it about?' Horatia Stanier said, laying her hand affectionately on Jenny's shoulder. 'I wonder if it can be anything about Tuesday?—or about a certain exceedingly dear little friend of ours?'
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Tuesday—Jenny's twentieth birthday! How had they discovered it? What were they going to do? Was this the surprise of which Anthony Rede had spoken?
And Horatia Stainer went on:
'Don't look so perplexed, dear. No need for perplexity—for anything but pleasure. We are going to have a picnic on that day to Arnecliffe woods, unless you prefer any other place. We want to talk over the invitations. It is to be your fête, you know. The idea was Fred's. Don't you think it is a good one?'
'More than good,' Jenny said, with a strange new quietness. No thanks could be made audible. A little embarrassment, downcast glances, soft pink blushes—what was to be made of these? Fred wondered.
'And now I am going in to tell Mrs. Rede all about it,' Horatia Stanier says, smiling and sweeping gracefully away.
Jenny, watching her, wonders whether *she* can ever attain to such fine manners, to such an elegant presence, to such fluent and graceful speech—no, Jenny, not these things for you; but, on the whole, things much better.
By means of a little innocent diplomacy, Maria
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Stanier contrives to keep Rachel Rede sauntering to and fro on the paths at the lower end of the garden, and Jenny and Fred walk slowly up and down by the old wall where

pear-trees grow with beds of violets all round the roots.
Frederick Stanier was a clerk in the bank at Port St. Hilda. He was, as I have said, a young man, not more than one-and-twenty; but he was tall, and had a manly way with him, and looked much older. He was somewhat handsome, people said everywhere; and he had gray eyes of singular beauty—large liquid-looking eyes, glancing out lovingly, or shyly, or pathetically from under long golden-brown lashes, just like the eyes of a girl. It was a strange, adventitious kind of fascination they lent him; but sufficiently powerful and operative at times without effort of his will or consent of other people's.
He had a pleasant voice, too, musical and winning, and with intonations in it strangely sweet and suggestive. All Cleveden might have heard what he was saying. Descriptions of Arnecliffe, details of arrangements for the picnic, anticipations of pleasure, nothing more than these, but conveyed through these a good deal of other meaning.
Was it love that was in his heart, and in his
[32]
eyes, and in his voice? He thought that it was, and Jenny thought so, too. But Fred knew that he could deceive himself upon this point—that he had before so deceived himself, more than once. Therefore it behoved him to be careful, to consider well what love was; for with all his experience he was not quite sure that he knew. One thing he knew and believed in firmly—Jenny Kirke's love for him. There could be no doubt about that, he thought, smiling down at the little creature by his side; telling himself that she was well content to be there. And there came to him a desire to hear her say so—not in so many words perhaps, but Jenny would know how to make the confession. Just then an event of the day before occurred to him opportunely one might say, but it had never been much out of his thoughts. Had Jenny heard of it—of the new situation that had been offered to him?
'No,' Jenny said, and there was natural surprise in her tone and natural interest: but not much of either—not nearly sufficient.
Fred was disappointed, and a little silence followed. The birds fluttered away to their nests, the sun went down behind the green hill-top, little crimson-edged clouds went sailing overhead,
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green leaves quivered gently in the violet-scented breeze.
'You don't seem much interested,' Fred said at last.
Jenny looked up, surprised at the change in his voice. She had been thinking of other things.
'About the offer?' she said; 'I had almost forgotten. Is it a better situation?'
'Yes, much better.'
'You will take it then, of course?'
'I haven't decided… Perhaps I am not quite so ready to leave Cleveden as you appear to think!
'To leave Cleveden?'
'To leave Cleveden,' Fred echoed, with returning complacency.
Another little pause followed. Would Fred say where he was going? Would Jenny ask? She glanced up presently with that beseeching glance of hers, and Fred Stanier looked down. His beautiful gray eyes, intent, love-lit, were very irresistible.
'Tell me where you are going?' Jenny said softly, almost in a whisper.
'Where I *may* be going… The post that is offered to me is that of cashier in one of the

large Liverpool banks.'
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'Liverpool!'
Poor Jenny! How foolish of you! You might have found a dozen excuses for hiding that tell-tale face of yours for a few seconds, and your voice need hardly have had such emotion in it. But Liverpool had on the sudden become the end of your small world; and on the sudden, too, Frederick Stanier was the light of it.
There is nothing stranger in our lives than the self-revelations that come to us so abruptly at times. An acquaintance lifts a curtain for a moment, and we discover that we have hated him for years. Another unexpectedly lays his hand on your soul, and you know at once that that soul is his, has been his from the beginning; and straightway you lay it at his feet for all time—for beyond time.
A little more silent walking up and down, a little more satisfaction on one side, a little more disturbance on the other, and there Horatia Stanier's voice was heard again:
'Where are you, good people—where are you all hiding?... Oh, there you are! Come in—come in at once. We're waiting for you, been waiting ever so long; Professor Wynne is growing quite fidgety. Come, Fred. Very pleasantly engaged,
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I dare say; but pleasures don't last for ever in this world, do they, Jenny dear?'
Jenny's response is a smile, and a warm flush rises to her cheek. This is only the second time that Miss Stanier has called her Jenny, and it sounds so new, so sweet.
There was some confusion in Mrs. Rede's little parlour before everybody was properly placed and provided with music; and during this confusion, Fred Stanier contrived to secure for himself standing ground next to Jenny Kirke, Anthony Rede looking on with some inquietude.
'Schiller's "Lay of the Bell" this evening, if you please, ladies and gentlemen,' said Professor Wynne, tapping the music-stand with his baton.
'We will begin with the first chorus.'
The chorus was sung, then a duet, and after the duet another chorus; and by that time the singing began to be entered into heartily. Eyes grew brighter, faces more kindly, conversation more animated; everybody seemed to be more orless quickened—to forget the dull imperturbability proper in all other circumstances of daily life.
Little wonder, then, that Jenny Kirke was quickened. Sensitive, receptive, emotional at all times, tremulous now with new emotion—little
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wonder that every fibre of her soul responded to the touch of music. Strange new power was in her. Her eyes had never been more dangerously bright and fascinating, her voice had never before had such tones in it. When she and Fred sang the duet—

'Oh tenderest passion known to mortals!
Oh golden hours first blessed with love!'

Anthony Rede stood staring and listening like one in a dream. And other people stared and listened; and when the real business of the evening was over, Jenny was made to sing song after song, simply because of the pleasure it gave them to listen. Jenny was pleasant to look at, too, as she stood there, stirred, and eager, and glowing. Her head was thrown back a little, her hands lightly clasped before her, and there was a seeming unconsciousness and self-abandonment in her air and manner that was the greatest

charm of all, one man thought. But most people there thought only of the wondrous spell that her voice had in it— all the more wondrous because her powers were so entirely uncultivated. She could read music, read it fairly at sight, but she had not the slightest idea whether it was bad or good; and the people who heard it could hardly tell either,
[37]
so passionate, so sympathetic, were the inflections of her flute-like voice. Strangely sweet it was, and the rich full tones were poured out with a lightness and ease impossible to any but the possessor of high physical power. But there was more than this—something of artist soul within, instinct with pathos and tenderness, something that you heard with a thrill, with a longing to go down on your knees and worship something or somebody.
Stanier would have been quite ready to go down on his knees—at least figuratively—had circumstances permitted him to do so just then. For the first time in his whole life he had attained to something that in more sober moments he would have called recklessness. In the garden he had been very sober—counting costs with most commendable deliberation. He had acknowledged to himself that his sister Horatia, speaking of Jenny Kirke, had spoken wisely, that it would be rather a good thing for him, a young man with little beyond his salary as a bank clerk, to marry Abel Kirke's daughter. It might be that Horatia's advice had been given too persistently; but she was deeply impressed with the value of it. One of the grand struggles of her life was caused
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by the effort to keep up an appearance of ease and comfort on means altogether inadequate to the support of the reality. Her income, derived from a small fortune left her by a maiden aunt, was limited; but no one outside the somewhat pretentious-looking house was allowed to suspect its limitations. Fred knew something of the continuous effort. How could he help knowing? For years past, on every possible occasion, the probability had been brought before him that he could only avoid a life of similar negation for himself by making—not a mercenary marriage, but a marriage in which the desire for money should be carried as far as it would conveniently go. But, on the other hand, matrimony was not an attractive thing in his eyes. He was in the habit of telling himself that liberty was sweet. It had occurred to him, too, while walking by Jenny's side, that she was not altogether the ideal woman of his imagination; that bright and winning as she was, her manners were, to Break in mild terms, rather rustic; that her education had been of the most elementary description; that but for her innate passion for music she would have been wholly unaccomplished; and, worse than all beside, that her social position was not equal to his own—no light
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matter to a man sensitive to his neighbours' opinion.
Only two hours ago all this—what is the value of it now? It will go for little if Fred Stanier can only have the pleasure of walking with Jenny Kirke as far as the gate of the old Hall. He was not quite sure whether he could manage this. It had so happened that the music-meeting had only been once or twice at Mrs. Rede's since Jenny came to Cleveden; and he could not remember whether on these occasions she had gone home with the Wards, who lived on the top of the hill, or whether Anthony Rede had condescended to accompany her. There was only this little doubt about the way being clear. If fortune favoured him he would take advantage of the favour: he would not wait

for the opportunity that the picnic was to have afforded him. His sisters could walk home without his protection. They would only be too glad when he explained why he had left them.
Such were his thoughts while the numerous leave-takings were going on. He was left alone at last with Mrs. Rede and Anthony; and Mrs. Rede wondered to herself why he stayed, and why Jenny was so long upstairs putting her hat on. She came down presently, she and Rachel, and Jenny said
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'Good-night,' and then, turning to go, saw that the two men stood waiting for her, waiting silently, but for the fierce meaning on either face. They had not really understood each other's intentions till that moment, and it was a critical moment for both, more especially for the stronger man. Jenny perceived something of the situation, glancing timidly from one to the other; and when Anthony Rede, taking his hat, said in a voice hard with suppressed impetuosity, 'I shall see Miss Kirke safe home,' she looked up into his face so nervously that Stanier was half comforted. 'She marry such an overhearing fool as that!' he said to himself, during his solitary walk to the Poplars.
What pondered Anthony Rede to himself? He said nothing to Jenny Kirke, but, nevertheless, the thoughts of his heart were very busy about her. His fate had come, for good or for evil; this he felt, as one feels a sudden change in the atmosphere, and the longing to know what was to be his lot was growing almost irresistible. Once during the evening, while Jenny was singing, he had failed for the moment to see the necessity of resistance. Why should he not ask a question, receive an answer? Then, remembering what Maria Stanier had said in the afternoon, speaking of the picnic,
[41]
and as he remembered feeling afresh the keenness of the little arrows she had shot so skilfully, he acknowledged to himself, with something of bitterness, that it would be taking a dishonourable advantage were he to put his thoughts and desires into spoken words just now. His regret that he had not done so before—that he had waited to win Jenny's love before asking for it—was deep; but regret was useless. He walked on silently, the touch of Jenny's hand on his arm seeming to make a pain there, and the strange, new-born trouble that was about his heart making a pain that had in it no seeming.
Anthony Rede's silence was a new experience to Jenny Kirke—new, and not altogether pleasant. There was something oppressive in it. She would have broken it had she had the courage so to do; but courage failed her—this, perhaps, because her conscience was not quite clear. Nothing seemed quite clear to her at that moment. Would she have to give up caring for Anthony if—if she cared more for someone else? That was a very painful thought—hardly to be tolerated. Anthony was like a brother, she told herself, more like a brother than Fred Stanier. He was more thoughtful about her comfort in small things; he had a more homely
[42]
tenderness about him, and he did not seem to be so much above her, so far away, as Fred did; nay, in some unaccountable way, he made her feel always as if she were his superior. Yet, notwithstanding, she did not care for him in the same way that she had suddenly discovered herself to care for Fred. This was liking; that was love—a love the full return of which would exalt her, not only in her own eyes, but in the eyes of the world. Thus she decided, but the decision was not satisfactory. A brother! Anthony was

more to her than any brother could have been—for the moment she wished she might tell him so, and win him out of that silence, win him to speak to her as he had always spoken lately, gently and tenderly, and in words full of sweet, half-hidden meanings. Would he never speak so again? Then the new joy would lose half its joyfulness; nay, at that moment Jenny doubted whether it would ever be a real joy at all.

Only a minute or two they stood at the gate of the old Hall; Anthony Rede still subdued by the strength of the control he was exercising over himself, Jenny still longing, tremulously longing, for word or sign. But no sign was given, nor any word save a quiet 'Good-night.'

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CHAPTER IV.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

'Love, all agreeable as it is, pleases more by the manner in
which it shows itself than on its own account.'—LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

OVERHEAD, a bright blue sky, with shining white clouds; and rising up to it masses of golden-green foliage, swaying, tossing, drooping on every side.

Down at the bottom of the wood the river Esk ran swiftly, branching out here and there into little streams, dashing over rocks and stones, making 'falls' and 'fosses' in unsuspected little nooks. Foaming here, gliding there; now making you deaf with its rushing, and now singing, till you longed to sleep for awhile, and dream sweet dreams.

And all through and behind the trees huge lichened rocks, dark shale cliffs, or crags of white gritstone rising up everywhere; the foliage rustling between them, below them, above them. All about the bewilderment of winding pathways, large and abrupt masses of fallen rock scattered; some soft and bright, with richly-tinted mosses, and some with deep fissures in them out of which silver birches sprang. The white stems glittered, the feathery sprays waved gently overhead, and the

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sun gleamed through, lighting up a most rare luxuriance of woodland flowers and ferns. Wild-flowers of every hue were there, 'coming forth in clusters,' as Ruskin has beautifully written, 'crowded for very love; there was room enough for all, but they crushed their leaves into all manner of strange shapes only to be nearer to each other.'

And there, in the very heart of all this wild, bright beauty, was the picnic party from Cleveden. Noisy, merry, and, for the most part, happy; boiling tea-kettles in gipsy fashion, drinking tea, laughing and chatting, dancing and singing with a gaiety that knew nothing of eclipse; flirting with an enjoyment that knew nothing of disguise. Jenny Kirke—elected Gipsy Queen, in virtue of her birthday and her brown eyes—was most radiant in a new muslin dress and white straw hat, with pink rosebuds.

If anybody there was out of his element, it was Anthony Rede, who was not happy, though Jenny had made his tea, and had showered at least as many smiles, bright glances, and winning little words and ways upon him as upon Fred Stanier. Yet still, Anthony was disquieted, and also a little angular and ill at ease. He could neither dance

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nor sing, and he had never in all his life been at a picnic before; he half wished he had not come now. He asked himself why he had done so; but the answer was not difficult to find. Doubt as much as be might, nay, had he arrived at despair, there would still be a painful pleasure in being near Jenny Kirke.

This was an unfortunate mood to be in, when everybody else was bright and gay, and he

half despised himself for it, and began to make efforts to recover himself. A country dance had just begun; Jenny was dancing with Fred Stanier, and he did not care to stand looking on, so he sauntered listlessly away.
There were half a dozen little groups of people sitting or standing about, besides stray couples, and solitary individuals here and there gathering flowers. One of these solitary people was Rachel Rede; she had wandered to a little dell, where the ground was like a mosaic of turquoises and emeralds. Anthony joined her, and gathered flowers for her, forget-me-nots, for they grew in such profusion that there was no room for anything else to grow just there. There was a very tremulous little quiver at the corner of Rachel's mouth as she took them, though it was a big
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unsentimental-looking bunch, and given without the least intentness in the manner of giving. Yet still they were forget-me-nots, and Anthony had gathered them for her. Should she treasure them or not? she asked herself; and the answer was 'No,' so she put her own bunch and her cousin's together, giving no sign of the inward hesitation.
This was Rachel's way. She was no ideal woman, but flesh and blood, and beset with trial and temptation as we all of us are; yet she held no parley with the latter. This was to be done, not that. Her strength was centred on the one effort, not wasted in strife. Strife there was within her, had been often within her of late; but it was strife with sorrow, not with sin—surely not with sin, she said to herself, half doubtfully. To love was as natural to her as to breathe, and if her love for Anthony—a love cousinly first, then sisterly, had gone deeper,

'Like a holy thought
Which is a prayer before one knows of it,'

surely this was not a thing to be repented of? Something to regret it might be, to hold for ever as a regret; to hold deeply, silently, reverently, and to hold in a soul receptive of all light or strength that might come from such holding.
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While Rachel was thinking, Anthony gathering flowers and talking, and trying to persuade himself that he was acting philosophically, the Staniers were setting out on a quest for a certain fern, a three-branched polypody, or *Pouypodium dryopteris,* as Miss Stanier called it.
'You will come with me, Jenny dear,' she said, in her smooth beautiful tones. 'I want to show you some of the ferns that grow at Arnecliffe. I should like to teach you all about ferns; it is a most delightful study… You are coming too, Maria, and Fred, of course. If I do find the *dryopteris,* it will probably be in some out-of-the-way place where I cannot reach it.'
'I can't imagine Jenny caring in the least for ferns, or for anything else that wants "studying," ' Maria said, putting her arm round Jenny's waist.
Jenny laughed assentingly, and the two girls went dancing away together, down to a thicker part of the wood, Horatia and Pred following.
The fern was soon found, though out of reach, as Horatia had prophesied. It hung in feathery sprays from the side of a huge moss-covered stone, on the top of a craggy piece of cliff, the transparent yellow-green fronds waving over the warm brown moss most temptingly. Miss Stanier's exclamations
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of delight were manifold, and Fred was despatched to the top of the cliff without delay.
It seemed rather a dangerous adventure, and Jenny trembled and turned a little paler as she watched him springing about over the rocks. Miss Stanier saw the change, and patted the sallow little face in a very meaning manner. 'Don't be afraid, darling,' she said in a soft whisper.
Presently Fred came down again, bringing the fern with all its mossy roots about it. Jenny was relieved, Miss Stanier 'enchanted,' and begged Fred and dear Jenny to try to find another root or two.
Maria assisted in the search for awhile, but soon it was discovered that Horatia was missing, and Maria had to go in search of her. Fred did not seem to care any more about the fern; they would come a little later in the season, when ferns would be more plentiful. He would rather walk a little further up the gill just now—would Jenny come with him?
It was only a brief walk, and for the most part silent; the few words that did come were said in altered and self-conscious voices; yet for Jenny it was more than a pleasant walk. There was such a strange sweet mystery all around, such a tenderness
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in the trembling of the silver birches, such an eloquence in the sward, blue with forget-me-nots, such a thrill of a coming joy in the sunny atmosphere.
Joy was a new thing to Jenny Kirke; for all her bright, happy temperament, cause for abiding joy was a new thing. And it was to her as wine running through her veins, crowding upon her brain swift bright visions of things to be, throwing a halo of unspeakable radiance round the things that were.
But unfortunately, no such glamour was present for Fred Stanier just then, and a little dismay began to creep over him, finding that no glamour of any kind seemed possible. He believed himself to be in love; he had come there with the intention of making a confession of love; but never man at such moment was possessed of less lover-like emotion. It was Horatia's doing, he told himself. She had watched him all the day, and urged him all the week, until the thing she had urged had become a source of doubt and vexation. He knew she had done it for his good, but she had better have left him to find out what was good for himself. Yet it would be well not to act the part of a fool; and seeing that he had more than a suspicion of
[50]
rivalry, it would certainly be foolish to delay any longer.
Yet still, contrary to previous experience, he thought love-making a very difficult thing; and Jenny was making it needlessly difficult. Why wasn't she bright and chatty and coquettish, as she had always been before? There was nothing particularly fascinating in downcast eyes and silence. Then he put his hands into his pockets and whistled a little; and then begged pardon for forgetting himself so far.
Presently they came to a gate at the edge of the wood that stopped further progress; then turning back a little, Fred led the way to a moss-grown stone half hidden among the foliage. There was an opening between the trees in front, disclosing a distance of soft dark hills, and weird mist-filled valleys; and lying spread out in the vast foreground were dark fir-woods, gloomy crags, and wide undulating fields, where the golden glory of the western sun lingered tenderly on green hillsides, touching the soul with a touch like that of sad far-off music, or the memory of a last loving word… Stanier felt the mood that was upon him soften somewhat, and he drew nearer to the little Gipsy Queen

at his side. What was she thinking
[51]
and feeling? he wondered. Then he took her hand, and said in his gentlest tone:
'Were you ever so happy before, Jenny?' Jenny looked up for a moment, and it seemed to Fred that her eyes had less of happiness than of surprise in them. She *was* surprised, and annoyed too; the question was not at all of the kind she had expected. It was premature and ill-considered.
'Why should you suppose I am particularly happy just now?' she asked a little saucily.
Fred saw the mistake he had made, and it irritated him, and threw him back into the harder mood he had been in before. What *could* he say? What an idiot he was! And what a wicked little creature Jenny was to pretend to misunderstand him in that way!
'I do wish people could make themselves understood without having to put their thoughts into words,' he said at last; but it was not said tenderly, and his voice had very jarring inflections in it.
'Why should you wish that?' Jenny asked. 'I shouldn't wish it, if even it were possible.'
'Shouldn't you? Why?'
'Because words are so pleasant to remember.' Fred began to recover himself.
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'I should think that must depend upon the nature of the words,' he said, speaking once more in the tenderest tone he could command.
'Of course. I was thinking only of pleasant ones.'
There was another little silence; it was broken by Fred:
'Do you know I have been longing for pleasant words all day—nay, for many days; words that must be said by you to have real pleasantness in them… Will you say them, Jenny?'
Still the forced tone, the emotionless manner. And what a way of putting a question! What answer could be made to anything so pointless as that?
'Try to understand me, Jenny,' he began again, and this time his tone was that of a man deeply injured. 'Try to understand me. If you knew what love was—real love, you wouldn't be so—so perverse… I do love you; you know I do, and I want you to tell me that I'm not mistaken in supposing that you love me a little in return. Tell me I'm not mistaken, Jenny dear. One word will make me happy.'
But the word was not forthcoming, nor likely to be while that peculiar smile was on Jenny's lips
[53]
and in her eyes. It was not a pleasant smile; there was disappointment in it, and a vexed surprise.
This the love, the mere expectancy of which had hushed her soul into new humilities, new attitudes—graceful, tender, sympathetic? This the one passion of a life—a life like hers, instinct all through with chords waiting to be swept into music? This the one crown possible for her woman's forehead?
It was not in these exact words that Jenny sat questioning, but these hold her meaning. How, then, could any word be given of the nature required? Clearly it could not be given at all now, and it would be better honestly to say so.
But a way of escape offered. Turning accidentally, she saw through the trees two figures coming up the pathway.
'Here are Emmy Wright and Frank Roberts coming!' she exclaimed with evident relief.

'Are they?' said Fred, rising, 'so they are; but you've time enough to give me an answer.'
'Probably; but it seems to me another time will do as well,' Jenny said, her tone suiting the words.
And then, daintily mindful of the muslin flounces, she sauntered out into the road to meet Emmy
[54]
Wright; and Fred made a pathway for himself through the brushwood, tearing angrily along, as was natural to a man treated in such unheard-of fashion as he had been.

CHAPTER V.

A WORD THAT WAS REMEMBERED.

'Is this enough to say,
That my desire, like all strongest hopes,
By its own energy fulfilled itself?'
TENNYSON.

DOWN at the bottom of the wood a dark angular figure, sitting very upright on a ledge of overhanging rock, half hidden by trailing brier-sprays.
There is music in the distance—a flute and a violin, and much noise, with laughter and singing—every possible sound that can jar upon a soul out of tune; or so Anthony Rede thinks. He has been sitting here ever since Fred and Jenny disappeared.
An odd moment to choose for a review of the past, but probably Anthony did not choose. We all of us know how the closed pages have a way of
[55]
coming up for fresh notice now and then, opening of themselves at the marked passages. But the marked passages in Anthony Rede's life were few and far between. His early years had been very uneventful years; outwardly prosperous, with no contrary undercurrents worth speaking of. Yet all through, almost as far back as he could remember, there had been a sense of incompleteness, a need of something to widen his nature a little, to draw the egotism out of him. But he would have smiled had anyone told him that the thing he needed was the touch of that electricity (known before Galvani) that thrills through a man when he first finds himself loving much, and much loved… He is beginning to have a glimmering of the fact that scepticism on this point is misplaced.
That he does love much there is no doubt whatever, but this of itself is hardly a joy to him at the present moment. It has been said, he remembers, that the pleasure of loving is to love—that we are happier in the passion we feel than in that we excite; but this can only be true where we are sure that some—enough for satisfaction—has been excited. Anthony cannot be sure—what ground has he for being sure? Palpably none. But impalpably? With this question dominant
[56]
he goes back over the days since Jenny Kirke came to Cleveden eagerly, hopefully, perhaps with undue hopefulness, until at last a sense of assurance vibrates through him, holding him breathless for the moment, a moment he will never forget. Let Jenny's future words and actions be what they may, she *has* loved him; he will hold to this. Herein if nowhere else will he take comfort—he has been loved. But not yet will he set himself to learn lessons of resignation. For aught he knows, Jenny may be displaying her most winning fascinations in coquetry with Fred Stanier at the present moment, yet it may be nothing more than coquetry—an indulgence in something that gives her

pleasure, because nothing deeper than pleasure is hers. If more it should be… And the thoughts that follow are confused and painful; but strong underneath that sense of assurance lies.
And the golden light deepens among the brier-sprays; and in the distance the flute and the violin play a waltz; near at hand the birds twitter; down on the pathway below whispering lovers saunter along.
Lovers are they? no, sisters—Horatia and Maria Stanier—and Anthony, hearing the purr of low voices, begins to move. As he walks away
[57]
he hears a third step below, striding rapidly, and Maria asking in shrill tones:
'Well! Where's Jenny? Have you said anything?' And another voice, angry and loud, replies:
'Said! Yes; said all I have to say, and might as well have said it to a stone.'
Anthony Rede is not a man given to palpitations; but his pulse bounds a little wildly as he hurries up the wood. There is still dancing going on. Jenny is waltzing with Frank Roberts, and Emmy Wright is looking on a little disconsolately; but there is nothing disconsolate in the expression of Anthony's face as he stands there; wishing, for the first time in his life, that he could dance too.
The violin must have fallen into the hands of a second Paganini, so irresistible are its strains. It is intoxicating simply to look and listen.
By-and-by the waltz comes to an end, and Jenny, her face flushed, her eyes glowing, her dark hair straying over her forehead, sits down by Rachel Rede. Anthony sits down too presently; and Jenny asks reproachfully where he has been hiding ever since tea. There is no reply; but a handsome face is turned towards hers; dark eyes, intent, loving; a mouth curved pleasantly, but
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firm, and full of meaning. It is a questioning expression, Jenny feels, and her eyes droop under it; and, quite unconsciously, she becomes subdued, hardly able to breathe so freely as before.
Not much respite for the flute and violin. Twilight as it is, another quadrille is formed, and a little man with a blue tie and a Roman nose asks Rachel to dance. 'Are you going to dance again?' Anthony asks of Jenny, and Jenny says 'No,' without in the least knowing why. She had meant to dance undoubtedly, but instead she finds herself walking with Anthony Rede. Beyond the wood they go; sauntering by hillside paths with wild luxuriance of whin and fern, of bracken and brier on either side, with folding upland above, clad with waving ferns to the topmost ridge; with leafy rustling trees below, down to the very edge of the river. Then they come to some rugged steps cut in the steep hillside, leading down to a bridge. 'Beggar's Bridge,' Anthony says, pointing out the simple stone arch with its manifold timetints, its curious lichens, its grassy crannies; and he asks Jenny if she knows the legend connected therewith. Jenny says 'No,' looking very much as if she would like to hear it; and Anthony, nothing loath, begins the tale, under the 'perky
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larches and pine,' just on the other side. Jenny is a little disquieted; she takes her hat off, and with restless fingers twists the poor little pink calico rosebuds hither and thither. And Anthony smiles, and in a rough but pleasant voice begins:

'The dalesmen say that their light archway
Is due to an Egton man,
Whose love was tried by a whelming tide;
I heard the tale in its native vale,
And thus the legend ran:—

THE BEGGAR'S BRIDGE.

' "Why lingers my loved one? Oh! why does he roam
On the last winter's evening that hails him at home?
He promised to see me once more ere he went,
But the long rays of gloaming all lonely I've spent—
The stones at the fording no longer I see—
Ah! the darkness of night has concealed them from me."

'The maiden of Glaisdale sat lonely at eve,
And the cold stormy night saw her hopelessly grieve:
But when she looked forth from her casemen at morn,
The maiden of Glaisdale was truly forlorn!
For the stones were engulphed where she looked for them last
By the deep swollen Esk, that rolled rapidly past.
And vainly she strove with her tear bedimmed eye
The pathway she gazed on last night to descry.

'Her lover had come to the brink of the tide,
And to stem its swift current repeatedly tried;
But the rough whirling eddy still swept him ashore,
And relentlessly bade him attempt it no more.

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Exhausted he climbed the steep side of the brae,
And looked up the dale ere he turned him away;
Ah! From her far window a light flickered dim,
And he knew she was faithfully watching for him.

Then Anthony was silent a moment, and the restless little fingers were imprisoned.
‘The story isn’t finished?’ Jenny inquired, looking very much interested.
‘No. How should you like it to finish?’
‘I don’t know. I think I should like him to try to swim across again.’
‘And be drowned?’
One of Jenny’s hands was half clasped in Anthony’s. He felt the clasp tighten a little, and was satisfied.
‘Tell me what he did,’ she said impatiently.
‘He made this vow:

‘ “I go to seek my fortune, love,
In a far, far distant land;
And without thy parting blessing, love,
I am forced to quit the strand.

‘ “But over Arnecliff’s brow, my love,
I see thy twinkling light;
And when deep waters part us, love,
‘Twill be my beacon bright.

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' "If ever fortune favour me—
Saint Hilda! hear my vow!
No lover again in my native plain
Shall be thwarted as I am now.

' "One day I'll come to claim my bride,
As a worthy and wealthy man!
And my well-earned gold shall raise a bridge
Across this torrent's span."

'The rover came back from a far-distant land,
And he claimed of the maiden her long-promised hand;
But he built, ere he won her, the bridge of his vow,
And the lovers of Egton pass over it now.'*

'We are not of Egton?' Anthony said presently, with a smile and a glance of inquiry.
'No, and—' Jenny was about to add 'We're not lovers,' but she checked herself—too late, though. Anthony divined the unspoken words.
'You're right not to finish that sentence,' he said, a sudden strong emotion coming over him—too strong that moment for words. The river below, just seen through the young beech and hazel trees, went rippling on, green boughs waved through the arch of the bridge, beyond was a shadowy distance of stems, black and gray, silvery and brown. The sunlight was gone, but the world steeped in twilight was very beautiful.

* *Illuminated Magazine*, 1845.

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Then a tiny leaflet, that had burst into life only a few days before, died, and fluttered down from the tree above, nestling in Jenny's hair. Anthony took it out, carefully, tenderly, the touch of the soft brown waves stirring him all through.
'You were right not to finish that sentence,' he went on, in eager, tremulous tones. 'If love makes a lover I am yours—yours with my whole heart and soul, and have been since the very first day I saw you. Look at me, Jenny dear; speak to me. Tell me that I have not spoken too suddenly. I could hardly help it. My love is stronger than myself. Say that I may hope, dearest—just one whispered little "Yes," and I will be satisfied.'
Jenny trembled, and was silent. Beyond doubt this love was real—sterling enough for that crown she had dreamed of; but in her dream the crown had not been placed on her forehead by Anthony Rede. Things were very bewildering, but there was no time to think.
It has been said that strong and deep love is not a loquacious thing, any more than is strong and deep grief—that it is the more moderate passion that finds utterance in words. Yet the strongest love has its transcendent moments, moments wherein the soul, moved by emotion, finds that
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speech is its first instinct. Strong, daring speech it is, as a rule, and Anthony Rede's was no exception. There was a mastery in his words and in his eyes that Jenny was altogether powerless to resist, albeit her impulse toward resistance was strong. From the

first her love for Stanier had been deepest when she was away from him—it was so now. Perhaps, after all, she told herself, it had only been awkwardness that had prevented Fred from expressing himself with as much power and readiness as Anthony Rede; and it may be that in this she was doing Fred little more than justice; but reasoning of this kind availed nothing at that moment. If her love for Fred was best worth the name in his absence, the contrary had ever been true of her love for Anthony. There was for her a peculiar, almost magnetic, power in his presence—a power never before so potent as here by Beggar's Bridge.

Yet still no word came from her lips, and into Anthony's mind a vague, uneasy suspicion began to creep. Was it possible, after all, that her love was not for him—that her refusing of Fred Stanier had been a mere piece of coquetry? The thought was not to be borne.

'You must answer me,' he said, in pained,

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agitated tones. 'If you cannot love me, if you know certainly that you can never love me, tell me so at once—I must bear it—I think I can bear it. Tell me, Jenny, tell me never to trouble you again.'

Had there been less of suffering in his voice, it was just possible at that moment that Anthony might have been taken at his word, but the suffering was there. Jenny knew herself to be the cause of it, and she was one of those unfortunately-constituted people to whom such knowledge is intolerable.

'I cannot say that,' she said, looking up, and Anthony saw that her eyes were full of tears, and her face full of trouble; but neither the tears nor the trouble were rightly comprehended.

'Thank heaven you cannot!' he said, and the thrill of fervour with which he uttered the words swept the chords of the vibrant soul at his side into all manner of new harmonies. The strong love that was in his heart was lending him the power of strong inspiration to sway the heart he was pleading for.

He did not plead in vain. A few more moments of passionate entreaty for some word of assurance, and then the assurance was given—given with a

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burst of fulness and freedom as unexpected as it was welcome.

'I do love you,' she said, with a sudden, almost untender burst of earnestness, as if constrained by some half-prophetic spirit of truth to speak against her will; 'I do love you! I have loved you a long time.'

Then there was a silence, eloquent with an eloquence unknown to language, sweet with a sweetness not all of earth—only a brief silence, but long enough for the word Jenny had spoken to engrave itself on the heart and on the brain of Anthony Rede, long enough for him to hold her for a moment, one tender, reverent moment, in his arms. Lips to lips once, heart to heart once. There was no past for him, no future; love was life, and his whole life's love was in that ecstatic present.

* * * * *

Two or three hours later the lights were disappearing one by one in the little village of Cleveden; the tired dancers were going to rest, some happier far the day that had gone, some sadder. Jenny sat near the diamond-paned window of her own room, wondering

what happiness really was, and
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whether people ever forced themselves into believing they were happy.

She had wonderfully little self-knowledge—knew nothing of those self-questioning, self-analyzing processes that make up so much of the inner life of some people. Habits like these are generally born of some great sorrow or inquietude, and hitherto no shadow of this kind had fallen across Jenny's pathway. But yet there was disquiet written on the little face now, and doubt and perplexity.

Had she been true to herself? she wondered; or had she two selves within, and been true to the one and false to the other? It was all very strange, and something was wrong somewhere. She ought to have felt glad and happy all over; but instead there was a jar, a fear, a sadness. The very stars looking down seemed sad, and the sighing of the wind over the leaves was like a whisper of sympathy. Did people always feel like this when they had done anything that would influence their whole lives? Anything they could never undo, never shake off?

She began in a listless way to prepare for bed. Anthony had asked if he might come up to the Hall on the morrow evening, and she had said 'Yes.' There was pleasure in thinking of this, in
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anticipating the love that would be in his words and in his accents, and in his face—a thrill of pleasure so unmistakable that Jenny stopped to wonder at herself, at her own contrariety. If this was true, was the other feeling that she was trying to ignore—trying with all her might to put away, but which would keep on straining at her heart-strings—was this other feeling false? There was a tear or two on Jenny's eyelashes when she fell asleep.

And Anthony Rede—what was he doing while Jenny was perplexing herself with unanswerable questions? There was only one question for him. Was he worthy of the love he had won? Was it possible for him ever to be worthy of it? What was in him to deserve such a good?

This humility—truest sign of truest love—was the only thing that chastened his joy that night. There was no chill word on his mother's lip; no expression save a soft glad smile disturbed the tranquillity of Rachel's face. 'She's such a nice little thing,' Mrs. Rede said; 'always so cheerful and pleasant, and she never gives herself any airs.' Rachel, putting her hand into Anthony's, looking up with a clear happy light in her eyes, said simply, 'I am so glad, Anthony—so very glad.
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You don't half know how good and sweet Jenny is yet.' Anthony, in the exuberance of his love, bent down and kissed her; and told himself as he did so that Rachel would be doubly dear to him now, being Jenny's friend.

I wish my story could end here—a picture like Queen Elizabeth's portrait, without shadows.

END OF BOOK ONE

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BOOK SECOND: TEMPTATION.

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CHAPTER I.

NEW KNOWLEDGE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

'When we think upon it,
How little flattering is a woman's love!
Given commonly to whosoe'er is nearest,
And propp'd with most advantage.'

TAYLOR: *Philip van Artevelde.*

THE orchard—garden belonging to the old Hall lay a little to the left, partly on the side of a hill overlooking the river. The wide gate was arched over by the gray jawbone of a whale, relic of the days when Port St. Hilda was a centre for the Greenland whale fishery; and the old red-brick walls were rounded and tinted with a most luxuriant growth of moss and ivy. A big, rambling place it was, with oak-trees and apple-trees side by side, with laurel and laurestinus among the gooseberry bushes; and with shabby palings, rusty red or faded blue-green, standing or lying in most impossible places. In one corner there were the remains

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of an arbour, and a little plot of grass, with part of an old gray fountain in the middle; stone steps, green with lichen and worn, led up to it, and beyond were more stone steps, leading down to a dingy little tool-house, with broken flower-pots rolling out at the door.

There is a strange charm about the old place this blue, breezy morning. Grayness and greenness, sunshine and decay; the still, dead past and the living, moving present. Jenny walks dreamily up and down by the old fountain, trailing her white cotton hat by one of its blue strings, and three yellow butterflies chase each other among the ivy sprays that slant downward half a yard from the brick wall. In the distance there is a sound of footsteps moving hither and thither.

Presently, a tall lightly built figure bounds up the steps near the arbour, taking off a low-crowned felt hat, disturbing a mass of fair, tremulous curls that give out just a suspicion of perfume.

'Is that you?' Jenny says, with a flush of real surprise, real pleasure; and Fred Stanier, to whom the personal pronouns are a stone of stumbling, replies, 'It *is* me.' He smiles very pleasantly, takes Jenny's hand very warmly; and, while they stand for a moment thus, Jenny feels assured that

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he knows nothing of that deed that she did, that word that she said last night. This morning, standing there, she would give all that she is possessed of to be able to live the last twenty-four hours over again.

'How is it that you are not at the Bank to-day?' Jenny asks, sitting down on the stone coping that skirts the fountain.

And Fred sits down close by her.

'You are responsible for my absence,' he says, looking into her face with a soft, shy, loving look. If you had been your own kind, good little self,' Fred resumes, 'I might have gone to the Bank as usual this morning. No, not as usual, a thousand times happier—too happy to do any good there, most probably… What wicked spirit of mischief prompted you to behave so unkindly?'

'I don't know; indeed I don't know,' Jenny says, looking very much distressed—a

distress Fred half enjoys. She deserves it, he thinks, and it is very assuring to himself. He will comfort her by-and-by.
But Jenny is gathering herself up for an effort. There are brave instincts below the surface—brave, and strong, and true. She will tell him all; tell him that he can never sit there holding her hand
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again; never again look into her face with those large, liquid gray eyes of his, as he is looking now… There is a sharp struggle, but the tale is told at last—told in a strangely broken, unready way. Jenny is pale and cold, and Fred Stanier becomes paler and colder.
'Jenny,' he says, after a time, with ashy lips wavering into a smile, 'Jenny darling, it is a joke. You are trying me, to see how much I can bear.'
'It is all true,' Jenny replies in a hard voice, lifting her big, brown, frank-looking eyes to Fred's face. 'It is all true… I have promised Anthony Rede to be his wife.'
There was another silence—a space of time brief if measured by the clock, but not brief if measured by the agony of thought and emotion crowded into it. There was a little comfort for Jenny. She had done what was right in telling the truth at once; but there was no comfort for Fred, though his need of it was great—how great it would be hard to tell. The misery that had come upon him had come like a sudden sickness, unexpected, confusing, prostrating. He had never even suspected himself of such capacity for suffering of this kind. He had been vexed on the previous evening when
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Jenny had trifled with him, but his vexation had not for a moment disturbed his confidence. It was only delay, tiresome enough, to be sure, but nothing more than tiresome. Her love was his, and his was hers; how deeply hers he had not dreamed till now, and the knowledge had come, as such knowledge often does come, through gates opened by a blow from without.
He was desperately calm. Jenny expected reproaches, misery of the half-angry kind; and she would have preferred these—preferred anything to that still, stony acquiescence.
He spoke at last.
'Have you acted wisely for yourself, Jenny?' he said, in hoarse, altered tones. 'Have you done well to renounce a love like mine with so little thought?'
'I have told you how it was,' Jenny answered, still struggling to resist the pleading tone, the tenderly anxious glance. 'I have told you that I hardly thought at all—that I could not think.'
Had Jenny made a mistake? Did she know that she had done so? Was she confessing it? Hope began to rise again in Fred's heart rapidly, and the light came back to his eye, the colour to his lip and cheek.
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'Jenny darling,' he said, taking her hand in his again, drawing her closer to him, 'you ought never to have been trusted with your own happiness; you must trust it to me henceforth. I cannot let you make a wreck of two lives because of one unconsidered promise, a promise made in a moment of excitement. If Rede is the man people count him to be, he would scorn to hold you bound for a second, knowing that you wished to be free.'
Jenny's hard resolved mood began to give way; she was tremulous, agitated with hope and fear. To be free! The words were soon said, but there was for her no light upon any

possible way to freedom.
I have said that Stanier was not a man of many words; but he was in love, and he had arrived at a moment when success in love seemed to depend upon successful pleading, and words were not far to seek. But love's language is not an easy one to repeat; there are signs in it as well as words, and, like love itself, it is a thing of too great complexity for analysis.
And the words and signs together grew more and more earnest, more and more beseechingly tender and serious; and Jenny's power—nay, her
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desire—to be faithful to the word she had said but yesterday, grew rapidly less and less. She was very young. It was a terrible struggle. Even at this moment she knew in her own heart that she loved Anthony, that her pity for him would be intense, that all her life through the very thought and memory of him would have for her a thrill of something more—far more than interest. Yet still this love, if love it was, was a feeling that had less power to influence her thoughts, her hopes, her desires in the present, than the love that was in her for Fred Stanier. She had known this and felt it before, she knew it more certainly than ever now; and there was pain in the knowledge that was almost agony.
What was to be done? A heart so divided, on the surface of it an overmastering current running; in the depths of it a contrary current of almost equal strength! Almost? I write the word with a doubt. Was the strength of it equal, wanting but time and circumstance for its equal development? Was it that there was something in Fred's youth, his daintier manner, his lighter fascination, more attractive to Jenny's girlish fancy? That in some prophetic chamber of her brain there was prescience of days to be when something within
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her stronger than fancy would need to be satisfied? These things I cannot tell. But if there were any need so to do, I could tell how Jenny yielded to Stanier's pleading.
She yielded fully and freely, gladlier for the very distress her soul had been in; even as Fred's joy was deeper for the previous pain. There was no half-untender constraint in the word she said now; her manner was subdued to a sweetness, a timid self-abandonment, that dissolved any remnant of doubt that Fred might have held, dissolved everything but a happiness too intoxicating to be realized till a more sober moment should come.
Jenny's happiness was great too; but there was a shadow over it that Fred could not feel. Would it always be there, she wondered, that shadow of a broken promise? Thinking of it, would she always feel that thrill of remorse? There was not only the thought of the promise broken, that might perhaps be put away for the time being; but the mode of breaking it? that was a thought that must come into the present.
'How shall I do it?' she said, lifting up eyes with deepening love-light in them, a face with a deepening glow upon it. 'I dare not see him, I cannot tell him.'
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'I shouldn't try, dear, if I were you,' Fred said, with an air of tender authority that was very new and sweet to her. 'You must write to him; write an explanatory note this afternoon, and make it as kind as ever you like.'
Canon Kingsley has said that 'In every man, however frivolous, or even worthless, love calls up to the surface the real heroism, the real depth of character.' This is true; and it is also true that real lave calls up nothing so soon nor so certainly as a real wide charity.

Stanier's love for Jenny vibrated at that moment through a series of ever-widening circles till it extended, somewhat diluted of course,—even to Anthony Rede.
A little while longer they sat by the fountain; yellow lances of sunlight quivering through the trees, the roar of the water above the mill surging in the distance, the cuckoo down in the copse by the river… Gladness there was in the very air; fragrant incense rising up all around.
An incense with power to steal in upon the senses; to make the world and the things of the world seem other than they were. That day—and for many days—Jenny felt like one who has read a
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]noble poem, and walks with the music of it filling all his brain.

Abel Kirke's arm-chair, a three-cornered one, with a worn black leathern seat, was drawn up before the open desk. Abel was sitting there with a small basin of water before him, soap, two tiny brushes, and a piece of wash-leather. One by one a pile of sovereigns were being washed, brushed, and rubbed, till each as it left the old man's trembling fingers was like a coin new from the mint.
Jenny was moving restlessly about the room; removing imaginary specks of dust from the little square piano, polishing the big brass nails that studded the horse-hair sofa; coming gradually nearer to the brown desk; then darting off again to the flower-pots in the window. She was growing tremulous, too, and her face was hot and crimson; and more than once, standing near the old man with parted lips, she felt a sudden palpitation.
Courage came suddenly at last. Crossing the room, she laid one hand gently on her father's shoulder, and passed the other lightly through his long white hair.
'Father,' she said; 'you know Frederick Stanier, who lives at the Poplars… He's in the Bank!'
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'Stanier!—Stanier! Ay. Ah knaw him. What aboot him?' the old man asked somewhat fretfully.
'He was here this morning. I have known him a long time now—he wants me to marry him—and—and I've said that I would—sometime.'
There were no words at first. Abel's head drooped a little pathetically, and he raised a thin bony hand to support it. Then a groan escaped him, the half-natural, half-sanctimonious sound that Jenny knew so well. Poor Jenny! She grew a little paler, and her eyes filled with tears.
'What mun tha think o' marryin' for?' Abel asked presently, with a nervous quiver at the corner of his mouth. 'Isn't thy heäme good aneäf for tha? What wad tha be at? What is thy vanity hankerin' efter noo?'
'It isn't vanity, father,' Jenny said, as softly as she could; 'and it isn't that I want to leave home… I'm not thinking of leaving it now, perhaps not for years.'
'Like anuff nut for years!' said Abel, his lip curling slightly. 'Wheer's sike a nowt as that te git munny te keep a wife? Mebbe he thinks o' marryin' a wife 'at can keep hersel'! Thoo'd better think twice, Jenny. Ah like nowther egg nor shell
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on him. 'Twad gan sair ageän t' graäin te think of a fellow like that iver handlin' a penny o' mahne.'

Jenny looked sad and perplexed. What could she say? It was no use protesting that Fred did not care for money, cared for nothing but herself. Her father was suspicious at all times; it was quite natural that he should be doubly suspicious under such circumstances as these; perhaps it would be better to let time prove to him that his suspicions were unfounded.
'Thoo's allus been a sair trouble te me,' Abel continued, his voice and manner beginning to rise to that half-oratorical height that he reached so readily. 'Many a night I've lain heartsick on my bed because of thy wilfulness and vanity. But upon this day let a cloud rest; for thou hast wrought a great increase of trouble herein.
'Thou hast spoken a word that shall not stand—a word that shall take away thy strength. Thou shalt stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.
'Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own conceit. Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil.
'A time of sorrow shall come, and thou shalt pass through it hardly bestead and hungry; and it
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shall come to pass that thou shalt fret thyself, beholding trouble, and darkness, and dimness of anguish, and thou shalt be driven to tribulations exceeding great.'
Words falling from an old man's lips, throwing shadows on a young girl's heart; and through the ivy-sprays and the diamond window panes, other shadows creeping, with bars of sunshine between, lighting up the geraniums. Then the big unmanageable brown knocker falls heavily upon the door, Abel locks his desk hurriedly and disappears, and the two Misses Stanier come into the room. 'My darling, darling sweet one!' Horatia says, crushing the little brown cheeks, and kissing first one and then the other.
Jenny blushes and flutters; and the crimson cheeks, the bright brown eyes, and the blue cotton gown make quite a picture in the dingy room.
'How strange it is that being in love is equal to being beautiful,' Maria says, filling Abel's armchair with her pretty mauve dress.
'Not at all strange,' Horatia replies, with a little change of voice and manner—a little *accès* of reality. 'Beauty, according to my thinking, is entirely a matter of expression; and the expression must improve—must become clearer and deeper if
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a person becomes happier… You *are* happy, Jenny darling—really and truly happy?'
Jenny made no answer, only lifted her long eyelashes slowly, almost solemnly, and looked straight into Horatia's face.
'And a little proud? Now confess it,' Maria said in her shrill tones, and with her doubtful smile.
'I am very proud,' Jenny said, with a smile not at all doubtful, 'and I am very glad—all the more glad because you are so—so—'
'So proud and glad to have you for a sister, you dear little thing,' Horatia interposed.
And just then the big brown knocker sounded through the house again, and Milly opened the door for Rachel Rede. A gleam of prospective triumph passed over Maria's face.
'How opportune! come on the same errand as ourselves, of course—a visit of congratulation?' Maria said, drawing her chair aside to make room for Rachel. And Rachel looked up with a little surprise on her face. She had not expected that the Staniers would be pleased to hear of Anthony's engagement; and here they were, quite

radiant. And Jenny, why, was Jenny looking so confused, almost distressed? Had the Staniers been saying anything about Anthony?
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'When did you hear of it?' Miss Stanier said, turning to Rachel, with a softer voice—most people dropped their voices a little when speaking to Rachel Rede. 'Was it any surprise to you? I suppose not. The signs in the air have gathered thickly of late.'
'Yes, very thickly,' Rachel said, with one of her brightest smiles. 'I am glad that the meaning of them is made plain at last.'
'Are you really glad? or is your saying so a piece of diplomatic politeness?' Maria asked, looking keenly into Rachel's eyes.
Rachel hesitated, perhaps her mouth quivered a little. Then she said in a simple, tranquil way, 'I am really glad—why should you doubt it?'
'Oh! I don't know. I was thinking that perhaps you had had other ideas. Some people had.'
Poor Rachel! Three people watching her, seeing her pale face suddenly turn crimson, grow deeper and deeper crimson till the burning seemed something that they all could feel. Three people looking right into her heart, seeing there something that she had hidden away out of her own sight for ever and ever.
'How can you say such odd things, Ria dear?'
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Miss Stanier said with a shade of annoyance. 'I'm sure Miss Bede wouldn't have said she was pleased unless she had meant it. Everybody will be pleased, more or less. Jenny is popular in the neighbourhood already, and Fred has been a favourite ever since he was quite a child.'
Fred! Fred Stanier! What did they mean?
Jenny answered the wonder in Rachel's eyes with a beseeching, imploring look that silenced her at once. A half-terrified look it was, and Rachel saw that Jenny's hands trembled, and that her lips were pale and compressed. There was a mystery then, somewhere.
A mystery that came out in a partial way, presently… Rachel was slow to understand, perhaps unwilling, and when at last the outside of the truth did come to her she was too much bewildered for any kind of expression. There was no reproach in her eyes, and Jenny seeing this, seeing only a stony, absent look, began to feel a little relieved. She would tell Rachel all about it after. Rachel was so good, so tender, so ready always to think the best, that it would be a comfort to tell her. And thinking thus Jenny grew bright again, and chatted and blushed and laughed herself into a state of pleasant excitement that moved Rachel to
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a little anger, anger that subsided into contempt, then into pity.
By-and-by, Rachel, thinking of Anthony, felt a wild nameless thrill pass over her—sweep through her heart and brain with the power and swiftness of electricity. Was it joy?... A moment later she hated herself for the thrill.
After a time the Misses Stacier went away. Horatia was very affectionate at parting; Maria was flattering, and a little inclined to badinage, as she had been all through. Poor Jenny was bewildered to intoxication.
'Aren't they nice?' she said, seating herself—at a certain distance from Rachel, and trying to assume an air of ease and unconcern.

'Yes; very nice.'
'And you are very angry?'
'No: not angry. I was a few minutes ago. But I don't understand, Jenny. What does it all mean?'
'It means that I have been very foolish—perhaps wicked,' Jenny said, with a new set of feelings and recollections coming over her.
She was silent a little while; then she told Rachel how it had all come to pass; how she had been a mystery to herself all through, and was in
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some degree a mystery still. I am afraid Rachel felt much bitterness in her heart, and that Jenny did not know what real love was, perhaps was not even capable of it. 'Where doubt is no love can be,' she said to herself, and presently she said the same thing in other words to Jenny.
'But I don't doubt now,' Jenny said resolutely. 'I did a foolish thing yesterday. I have tried to set it right to-day. I am not sorry, except for Anthony.'
'Anthony doesn't know yet!'
'No. I wish he did. 'I meant to write to him this afternoon, but there isn't time now. What shall I do? He said he was coming up after tea. Oh, Rachel! I can't, I daren't see him. What shall I do?'
Jenny's distress was very real. Rachel saw that it was, and entered into it. But she could suggest no way out of the difficulty save facing it, and walking bravely through it.
More than once Jenny's lips were parted to ask Rachel to do this hard thing, but it seemed as if her very breath failed when she tried to utter the words. Was Rachel a little stern? she wondered, or was she simply indifferent?
Presently Milly brought tea in, and Rachel
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went away, pained and sorrowful—sick at heart when she thought of Anthony. She did not leave behind her that comfort that Jenny had expected; and Jenny, standing by the window, waiting for her father, felt that the want of Rachel's sympathy was like an ache somewhere. It was pleasanter to think of Miss Stanier's winning words and ways, pleasanter still to think of the words that had been spoken in the garden. But while Jenny was thinking, the hands of the old clock were moving onward in a way that sent a tremor through her every time she looked up.
'After tea,' Anthony had said. Jenny remembered the tones of his voice, the happy, confident look that was on his face, and she grew chill as she remembered. A moment after a new thought struck her, lightening all her brain. She would go out for a walk—go as soon as tea was over, and hide herself in Bracken Gill till quite late. Anthony would come, and Milly would say that Miss Kirke was out, and he would go away a little stunned—a little prepared for that letter that she would write in the morning.
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CHAPTER II.

BY MOOR AND MOUNTAIN.

'To-morrow we meet the same then, dearest,
May I take your hand in mine?
Mere friends are we?—well, friends the merest
Keep much that I'll resign.'

R. BROWNING.

CALM pale-blue ether overhead, and all along the west wild wind-driven clouds with gleaming sungilt edges; rolling, dissolving, glittering, and then fading away into gloom and grayness.

Is this any type of Jenny Kirke's life? It has been a calm life hitherto, and somewhat colourless, but now all manner of brightnesses gleam into it, and strange perplexities add a wildness, and movement is being forced upon her at a time when she had rather that things had remained a little longer as they were. Will there be any further similitude?

Jenny is not thinking of the clouds as she hurries away toward Bracken Gill, carrying herself as daintily as if there were no such thing as trouble or perplexity in the world. She is trying not to think of anything, and so thinks of a thousand things. Then she hums a march, and tries to keep

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step to it, up hill and down hill, with green furzy banks above, and straggling untidy orchard gardens below.

Beyond there are tall fresh green woods marking the course of the river; and the river itself is high with the incoming tide, sparkling, running, catching here and there a gleam from the setting sun. Then a blue-and-yellow boat rounds a little dark-green promontory; and there are girls in the boat with scarlet cloaks, and young men at the oars with white straw hats.

Presently another boat comes in sight, a pink-and-white boat with a brown sail; and Jenny stands a little (she is quite away from the village now), watching the people while they moor the boats in a tiny cove. Then they land, some of the girls give an affected little scream, the young men laugh; and then the brown sail is lowered, and behind the sail, in the middle of the boat, Anthony Rede stands. In less than a minute he has bounded out of the boat, across the bit of smooth green sward where the dance is to be, and is shaking hands with Jenny.

'I saw you ten minutes ago,' he says, with sparkling eyes, and a voice quiet, yet almost tremulous with suppressed joy. 'What are you

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doing here? I was coming straight to the Hall. I had to go down to Port St. Hilda this afternoon, and I've come up in the boat with Grey and his sister. Here, Grey! I must introduce you. My friend that always has been—my wife that is to be.'

Jenny shook hands with Mr. Grey—a slender young man with fair hair and keen eyes; but her smile was a very subdued one—her whole manner strangely unresponsive. Anthony saw that she was very pale too, and he blamed himself for what he had done; and then he drew her arm through his and turned toward the village.

But Jenny stopped and looked up into his face with an expression that made him feel as a man feels waking in the night, with a strong but indefinable sense of evil presence in his room. Had anything happened? Was she ill?

'No, I'm not ill,' Jenny said, withdrawing her arm, and speaking in an odd, nervous way. 'If you'll go for a walk, just up the wood a little way, I'll tell you.'

'What would she tell him?' Anthony asked, trying to make his voice sound natural and unconcerned; but Jenny made no answer, and they walked on in a strange, oppressive silence. Beyond the bridge and the cottage, up the stony hillside,

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down the narrow, broken pathway, to where two little bridges cross the beck, leading to

two diverging pathways.

'Which way shall we go?' Anthony said, breaking the silence.

'Oh, I don't know; anywhere! I don't care,' Jenny said, stopping just at the angle made by the bridges, and looking down at the clear brown water as it gurgled and rushed over the mossy stones. Such a strange, lulling sound it made. Winding round islets of fern and coltsfoot, round boulders grown green and feathery with grasses and stone plants, under and over a fallen tree that was lying across its course; fallen, but with life in it still to throw out young, green, vigorous-looking shoots. A water-wagtail was dipping about, and in the trees overhead sparrows were chattering. The smallest details of the picture impressed themselves mechanically for all time upon her memory.

Two or three minutes they stood, and then Anthony put his arm round Jenny, in a strong, impulsive way, and drew her to him.

'What is the matter, little one?' he said, bending downward to kiss her.

But, with an effort that required all her strength, Jenny freed herself, and, standing a step or two

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back, held out her hand to Anthony, and said, in a wild, passionate way:

'Forgive me; forgive me, will you? It has all been a mistake. I don't know what made me say what I said last night. I only cared for you as a brother; not as—as I care for someone else.'

Anthony had taken her hand when she held it out to him; he released it again, looking into her eyes with a white, stony stare, the muscles of his face tightening visibly. Then he folded his arms!, and drew himself up for a moment; but his head soon began to droop a little. Strong man as he was, the stems of the trees seemed to dance before him.

No questions came to him, no doubts, no hopes; nothing but stern truth. Fred Stanier had repeated his offer, and successfully.

Anthony had been slow to love, almost doubtful whether the power to love was his. But, as is usual in such temperaments, the development of the power had seemed as the birth of a new nature within him. His very soul seemed new, his daily life new, the old world and all that was in it new.

Less than twenty-four hours ago he had prayed that his cup of joy might not be too full, not so

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overfilled as to make the safe carrying of it through the world a hazardous matter. But he had trembled while he prayed, knowing that it was filled to overflowing already.

There was no shrieking to be done, no attitudinizing.

'Full desertness,
In souls as countries, lieth silent, bare
Under the bleaching, vertical eye-glare
Of the absolute heavens.'

He would risk no after-cast. He had strange consciousness of the little good that could come of any such risk… One day—nay, but one hour—a brief walk by budding elm-trees, a few words from a changeful girl, and here was a changed world, night in a man's soul, and in his heart a depth of love that seemed likely to turn to a depth of bitterness.

And Jenny? It was no smooth passage in her life. She stood pale with pain, pitying, self-doubting, longing with all her might to utter some word of comfort; but no word came.

'Say that you forgive me?' she pleaded at last, in a yearning, tremulous way.
Anthony gave a sudden start, and there was a flash as of fire in his eyes:
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'Forgive you! no, never. I never will, I never can forgive you. I should despise myself if I could. '
An involuntary expression of pain escaped Jenny's lips; not a sob, not a sigh, but some word uttered in a kind of convulsive whisper. There was no voice in it; it was as if a deep breath had forced itself into an exclamation. Anthony felt the reality of it. For a moment it thrilled him with the old tenderness, tenderness that in another moment added new strength to the bitterness that was in him. And again things began to reel round him, and he covered his face with his hands.
'I—I thought we might still have been friends,' Jenny said, in the same beseeching tone. The words seemed feeble, but it was so hard to be silent. If he only knew that she was suffering too!
Anthony uncovered his face, and said, slowly and sternly:
'Friends—never!' and there was scorn on his lips and in his eyes that was very painful to feel. Jenny felt as if the tears were rising in her throat, choking back her voice and her breath, yet she must make one more effort.
'Don't—don't hate me,' she said at last, half sobbing.
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Again the passion of Anthony's love became as the passion of anger.
'I *do* hate you,' he said, speaking rigidly, imperiously as before; 'hate you as I hate all things that are weak and false.'
Tears came now, tears of pain and relief, and Anthony, standing by, was moved to agony, and might not show that he was moved.
There was a long pause. Presently, Jenny, looking up through eyes half blinded, speaking with lips that quivered with every word, said:
'I must go home… Are we to part like this?'
Part! Another word with death-in-life echoes in it. Anthony turned himself a little, and there was a change in his face, a certain quiet, resolute sadness that only comes out when a pain at the heart goes very deep.
'Yes; we must part like this,' he said slowly. Then he hesitated a little, looking across to the broken red-and-yellow scaur on the other side of the beck, watching the fluttering of the green foliage that hung over the top like a fringe. Then two rustic lovers came down the gill, the man smiling and whispering, in a fustian jacket; the girl smiling and listening, in a bright-red dress.
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They passed slowly, hand-in-hand, looking proud rather than shy.
And Anthony looked at Jenny, wonderingly, perhaps a little appealingly, as some animal to whom she had given an unnecessary blow might have done.
He would risk no after-cast, make no reproach; yet there was strange longing in him to make audible some small part of the anguish of his soul. There would be silence after—a whole life of passionate, hopeless silence. Would that he had the power to put the aching of that silent life into one word and utter it now!
But no such power came. He could only put out his hand, take hers in his, and hold it with a warm, firm grasp for one strong moment. Then he released it.
'Jenny, Jenny, Jenny!' he said, 'I have loved you!'

* * * * *

Nothing more than this—this one cry that was neither entreaty nor expostulation. Darkness was coming up over the tops of the trees, there was a solemn silence; then big rain-drops began to patter down through the leaves.

Jenny and Anthony hurried away out of the gill,

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down the stony road, past the cottages. Lights were beginning to twinkle in the village, there was a red signal gleaming at the station, and people waiting for the train.

Only a minute they stood at the bridge. Anthony said, 'Good-bye,' and was turning away, but Jenny seemed to turn reluctantly.

'Make haste home,' he said, speaking as if nothing had happened; 'make haste home, and mind you don't get wet.'

Then he turned away. Somewhere in the twilight there was a great sob. Jenny did not hear it; she was crying softly to herself—softly, but very bitterly.

Once, at the turn of the lane, Anthony stopped, and peered over a gate to catch the last flutter of a muslin dress, but the wearer had gone out of sight. And it seemed to him that all things else had gone too—that human love had gone, gone from him for ever, the one thing that could brighten earth for a man—gone.

There was no going back to the life he had lived before—the old unstirred, untroubled life. Never again while he should live in this world would it be possible for him to be as if that idol of his had never been. Though he should never see her face,

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nor hear her voice any more, her memory would live in him, and embitter him to the end.

These things he said to himself flying along the dusky lanes, under dripping trees. A chill wind was blowing now, driving the rain in his face, giving him a sense of something to contend against that was pleasant rather than otherwise. He had no idea where he was going, why he was going; but it was good to be going somewhere. And the darkness was agreeable, the wind was bracing, the rain was refreshing.

An hour went past—two hours—more. The rain had ceased, over a wide, bleak moorland heavy clouds were breaking; a dreary barren moor with a dreary barren height beyond it, looming up weird and shapeless against the sky. Anthony Rede was wandering along still, listening to the hollow sounds that made the eerie silence audible—the falling wind wuthering round a solitary sheep-hut, over stunted whin-bushes, sighing away over the black turfy heath. There was something in the voiceless, hopeless desolation that touched him, and helped to dull his grief a little.

* Wuthering, a Yorkshire term peculiarly expressive of the wild, bleak, shuddering sound of the wind sweeping round a house or other object on the higher lands. Cf. Emily Bronte's 'Wuthering Heights.'

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Only a little, but words became possible, and tears—hot drops that came streaming through his fingers as he sat with bowed head on a stone. He was weary, stricken, almost unmanned. Was it all a nightmare? Had he 'clung to nothing, loved a nothing, nothing seen nor felt but a great dream?' Should he wake up presently, and find that he had slept a troubled sleep? No; he was waking now—waking to find that he had been

befooled.

Had he been to blame—weak in any way—credulous? Had his vanity made him ready to mistranslate Jenny's smile and blushes and meaningful looks? It was hard to believe this, hard to believe any other meaning in them than 'love me if you will.'

Then, too, the word she had said, 'I do love you—I have loved you long.' In his very soul he had felt that there was truth in the words when they were spoken. Truth! The truth of a changeful heart seems to turn to falsehood while it is being uttered.

But Anthony knew nothing of changefulness; it was so far from him that he could not understand it. As Jenny had said herself, all was a mistake—a strange mistake. She to love Fred Stanier! A graceful coat and hat, yellow curls, nicely fitting

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gloves, a little delicate scent, and a moustache—she to spend a passionate soul on these! A soul that had seemed to him—Anthony Rede—strong enough and high enough to reverence; a soul with depths in it that the man to whom she had given her love would never even suspect. It was hard to comprehend, harder yet to bear.

Yet he would have to bear, to go back into the busy little valley with the daylight that was coming over the hill, to begin again such life as might be possible for him. He was very pale as he went back. The pink dawn lent him no colour; the morning breeze gave him no strength.

And all the way, by moor and village, by beck and gill, by field and farmstead, there was this refrain in the air: Human love was gone, the one thing that could brighten earth for a man—gone.

The day came and went, and night followed, and after the night other days, bringing nothing with them but the ever-deepening knowledge that the world had in it for him no human love.

'Temptations in the Wilderness!' exclaims Carlyle, 'have we not all to be tried with such?'

How, save by trial, shall a man know what is in him? How find out his own strength?—or

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sadder, how find out his weakness—his own weakness, the weakness of his philosophies?

Temptations for spirit, soul and body, all with one meaning, all pre-arranged down to the minutest detail. No man nor woman causing an hour’s fret in another soul, but foreknowledge of it in Heaven. Is there a deeper meaning than we know in disappointed affection? It might be thought so. Otherwise, would it be the frequent thing it is?

Would so few of us be able, looking back honestly, to aver that we have never been baptized with this baptism?

A few try to find the meaning—no one finds without trying. The world, with a kind of vague pietism not rare in it, acknowledges that sorrows are blessings in disguise, but the blessing is not inherent in the sorrow: it has to be watched for, waited for, sought for—sometimes, so far as we can perceive, in vain.

Yet if we come out of the fire with hearts not hardened, sympathies not deadened, we cannot say there has been any curse.

END OF BOOK II.

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BOOK THIRD: AU DÉSESPOIR.

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CHAPTER I.

VIGNETTES.

'Love me, sweet, with all thou art,
Feeling, thinking, seeing;
Love me in the lightest part,
Love me in full being.
* * * * *
'Love me with thy voice that turns
Sudden faint above me;
Love me with thy blush that burns
When I murmur, Love me.
* * * * *
'Thus if thou wilt prove me, dear,
Woman's love no fable,
I will love *thee* half a year—
As a man is able.'

E. B. BROWNING.

A SUMMER evening at the old Hall. Abel Kirke at Port St. Hilda preaching a sermon; Jenny pretending to work, waiting for the sound of the brown knocker.

There is a change in Jenny—an improvement. A certain force of meaning on her face, and a soft

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shadow about her eyes that has come there from very excess of felicity. There is a new beauty, too, about the mouth, a smile that tells of happiness, quiet and secure, of satisfaction with the things that are.

There is a little change, too, in the wide, gray, bare-looking room. Old china punch-bowls filled with spreading ferns, china jugs filled with sweet peas, a wineglass with some starry jessamine in it; and on the little table where Jenny sits at work a basket of splendid roses, Gloire-de-Dijon, General Jacqueminot, Maréchal Niel, and Lamarque. Jenny bends admiringly over the roses, though they were not grown in the old Hall garden; and she fastens a soft-looking half-blown Lamarque in front of her pale-blue dress. Then she turns to the little glass, and re-arranges her hair for the sixteenth time, and plays admiringly with a small gold locket that she is wearing; and then she looks round to see if things are as bright and pretty as they can be made. She has almost a passion for colour. A piece of pink ribbon is looped carelessly over the back of the sofa, a shred of blue satin is near her work-basket, her work itself is chosen with an eye to effect.

The well-known knock comes presently; a warm

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flush rises over her face and throat: it does not subside for some moments—moments never, never to be forgotten. Fred Stanier's love is half a pain to him now, it is so passionate, so exigeant. He has no rest, no content, except in Jenny's presence. The days are long, work is weariness, all things unprofitable that are in no way connected with her. She is in all his thoughts, all day and all night. What can he say to her, what can he do for her, what can he buy? This last question comes out of the newest and most

striking trait of his character. He has never been a man given to buying, except on his own account, but now no week passes but something is bought for Jenny Kirke.
This time it is a bracelet, with an exquisite little painting after Raphael for a centrepiece. 'What a lovely face!' Jenny says, looking at the Madonna with rapt admiration; and Fred is delighted beyond measure. He is very eager, very boyish, in his love. And his face, as he stands by the fire, gay, animated, flushed a little with pleasure, is a face of which Jenny may well be proud. Not a face to stir any soul in one, but good for eyes to see that are weary and world-worn.
Then Jenny pretends to work again, and Fred
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sits on the sofa beside her, but no work is done, no word said. There is little left to say now. They know each other, are sure of each other, and require nothing more but permission to live this life of silent rapture side by side to the end.
A month later there is an amateur concert at Port St. Hilda. The concert-room is gaily decorated, the amateurs gaily dressed, gay songs are sung, gay music played. There is applause, gaslight, evergreens, excitement. There is an interval; the audience seems ungratefully relieved; the amateurs are unfeignedly self-satisfied. Behind the curtain there is a bowl of mild punch, compliments, jealousies, flirtations, heartaches.
It is a room belonging to the adjoining inn, where the amateurs rest; a high room with long dark curtains, and a dim chandelier somewhere up at the top. The twilight seems to favour the confusion of tongues. Fred Stanier, with flushed, eager face and intent, love-lit eyes, is saying passionate things to Jenny Kirke; Jenny is wondering a little, and in her own heart perhaps wishing that Fred Stanier would be more sensible. He is popular, his engagement has been much
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talked about, and Jenny feels that the eyes of the little world around her are searching her through and through. But Fred knows best. If he makes love to her there, that must be the right place for love-making. Jenny is very happy.
Presently Maria comes sweeping up in a cloud of white tarlatan.
'Do look at Sir Anthony Absolute!' she says.
Jenny looks, and a certain over-mastering sensation sweeps through her that she can neither resist nor define. It is not a pleasurable sensation. Anthony stands apart with folded arms, a dark weary face, weariness in his very attitude. He has been—quite unconsciously—proving for himself a truth of Shakespeare's, 'How bitter a thing it is to look into happiness with another man's eyes!' He cannot help looking. He may turn his face away, still he sees.
Once before the evening is over, Anthony and Jenny meet. A few commonplace remarks are made on either side, there is a crowd all round, Fred comes hurrying up with Jenny's cloak, the men begin to turn the gas out, and Anthony says 'Good-night.' There is a strange look in his eyes, not reproachful, not anything; but Jenny feels that he has still a hold somewhere in her heart.
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Yet she is very happy. The sunshine of sunshine is round her, and she walks in the light of it and is glad. Darkness and discord there may be somewhere in the world, but they are only names for her. Life is altogether harmonious. Experience is made up of music, and tender sympathies, and Elysian flowers, and love.

A boat gliding dreamily on a deep still river; green undulating hills on either side, park-like groups of trees, cattle in the fields, and a soft, silent beauty everywhere.

There are lovers in the boat, and they, too, are silent, drifting along by the luxuriant vegetation that fringes the river. Light rose sprays laden with pink and white blossoms wave in the breeze; the wild convolvulus twines round the bramble; purple vetch creeps out between; the air is heavy with meadow-sweet.

Will Fred never finish that cigar? Jenny wonders. He has not spoken for half an hour, and the little woman has no special love of this kind of silence. Still they drift along, the oars rest on the rowlocks; Fred leans lazily on his elbow. Jenny begins to excuse him a little to herself—this for her own consolation.

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'Man is content to know that he is loved,
And tires the constant phrase "I love" to hear;
But woman doubts the instrument is broke
Unless she daily hears the sweet refrain.'

Daily! The refrain has been wanting for several days, or so Jenny fancies. It may be that she has heard the refrain, and missed the sweetness.

'Pleasant it is!' Fred says at last, rousing himself and taking the oars; but Jenny vouchsafes no reply, save a meaning look. Fred sees the look, without in the least understanding it: perhaps is in too idle a mood to care to understand.

Presently the boat is moored under the trees by the bridge, and Fred and Jenny go back to the Hall.

'Are you coming in?' Jenny asks (in an indifferent manner, Fred considers).

'N-no,' he says, plucking a leaf or two from the ivy that hangs down from the wall. 'No; I think not.'

A look of vexation comes over Jenny's face, and Fred tells himself that she is out of temper—that she has not been herself for some days past.

No; he will not go in, and he will try the effect of a longer absence than usual. So he decides, and Jenny stands silent and hungry.

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By-and-by she lays an ungloved hand upon the wall—a little, plump, childlike hand nestling among moss and ivy. There is a ring, too, that Fred gave her only six weeks ago, and a remembrance of words said then, and of other things.

Will he take her hand now, as he has done so often and so tenderly? She tries to look unconscious, but instead she looks very much as if she would like to cry.

An unsatisfying 'Good-bye, dear,' is said presently, and a last kiss given—only one last kiss, and this is new. And it is given very carelessly, very lifelessly; and Fred strides away down the street, and Jenny crouches down under the chestnut-tree, sobbing a little.

Has Fred been somewhat mistaken in his estimation of Jenny Kirke? This he wonders as he walks towards the Poplars. He is afraid she is going to be a little disappointing.

Not that he doubts her love in the least—nay, he has a faint glimmering of the fact that it is an over-weight of love that is working some change in her. A love growing too deep, too grave perhaps, chaining her faculties, falling like a hush upon that wonderful brightness that had been her strongest fascination.

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It is only a thought. Is it true that word that Keats wrote?—

'A moment's thought is passion's passing bell.'

On the tiny lawn at the Poplars. It is a blue, bright September day, a little cold, perhaps, but exhilarating. Scarlet honeysuckle spreads over the porch, clematis and jessamine grow round the windows; the borders are gay with roses and geraniums. There is a small party playing croquet; Miss Stanier elegant in purple silk; Maria sparkling in green and white cotton. There are two or three people from Port St. Hilda; there is gossip, tea, flattery, bread-and-butter.

'Where are those disagreeable people, the lovers?' Maria asks. 'Of course they don't want any tea. Boiled-down dew-drops, elixir-of-moonbeams, or something of that kind would be more to their taste.'

There is a little laugh, but the lovers do not hear it; they are down in the paddock at the bottom of the garden. Jenny, in her favourite pink muslin dress and black velvet jacket, is sitting on a low camp-stool; Fred is sitting on the stump of a tree just above her. Jenny looks gentle and wistful; Fred looks bored and impatient.

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It is strange sometimes how feelings in a man, hardly recognised by himself, are in some subtle, indefinable way open to another.

You cannot speak an uncharitable word of your friend—nay, you shall not think an unsympathetic thought of him—but he shall see it in your face when you meet him, and hear it in your voice. If you write a letter it shall lurk in the tenderest words you can use. This dissonant note may be struck many times without perceptible result, but result is inevitable. There is discord at last, painful, jarring.

I do not know how much Jenny has been to blame. It has seemed to her that Fred has been growing less and less sympathetic day by day, and yet—and this is the worst of it—she has had nothing tangible to complain of; nothing that she could put into words without being reasonably accused of unreasonableness.

He has failed in few, if any, of the old forms of attention; and it would sound like a paradox to Hay that his tender things have been done in an untender mechanical way; but the paradox has truth in it, of this she is certain.

And this afternoon, yielding to an irresistible impulse, she says something that sounds in Fred's

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ears like a reproach. Fred flushes, and turns upon her angrily:

'Look here, Jenny, I can't stand this kind of thing. I never could. You are just going the way to work to bring about the very thing you seem to dread.'

Jenny had felt tearful, but a coldness falls upon her, and she turns paler. Fred, seeing this, softens a little.

'You know a man can't be always in a rapture with what he sees every day,' he adds in a rather fretful, pettish tone. ' I *do* love you, if you would only believe in me.'

'I do believe in you,' Jenny says; then she hesitates, and in a low, tremulous voice continues, 'but I don't think you care for me so much as you used to do.'

'What do you mean by so much as I used to do?' Fred demands a little fiercely. 'How can you tell? How can I tell myself? One cannot measure one's love as you measure your laces and ribbons—'by the yard.'

Jenny feels that something is wanting in this speech—affection perhaps, or logic, she hardly knows, but she makes no reply. She feels as she almost always does feel in Fred's presence now, as

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if some kind of spell had fallen upon her, taking away her breath, her voice, her words, her thoughts—everything but emotion; everything but a silent passionate longing for fuller love. Afterward, in her own room, a whole torrent of winning eloquence is at her command. She makes irresistible little speeches, has an answer apt and ready for every question, is free, and fearless, and natural. Now she sits wordless and drooping.
'Taking the deep-depression line again,' Fred says to himself. And he is glad when Horatia discovers them, and begs them to go back to the croquet-ground.
'To feel, or to suspect yourself neglected, and to become more amiable thereupon (in which, of course, alone lies hope) is difficult for any'—so writes Carlyle, in his 'Life of Frederick.'
Jenny had some glimmering of the value of such hypocrisy, but no capacity for seeing the full value. Fred was drifting away, unquestionably. How to win him back? that was the question. But Jenny never put it to herself in this form—better if she had. There might have been for answer—no tears, no reproaches, no scenes, no visible jealousies; but smiles rather, and extra small fascinations, with eyes closed to all things not seen, ears deaf
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to all things better not heard, and no memory except for things expedient to remember. In short, a smiling deceitfulness all through, if anything in the way of winning back is to be done.
A pathway by a large pool of still water. There are tall reeds all along the edge, there are autumn trees on the other side, green and brown and red and yellow; more trees growing downward in the pool; a cool gray and white sky drifting along the bottom of it; large moss-grown boulders at the foot of the copse; a fair young man and a dark eyed girl sauntering listlessly to and fro.
There is a shade as of prophecy creeping into Jenny's face, not yet a sadness, but a softness, a watchfulness. This afternoon she has something really to watch for—an opportunity, an assuring smile, a gentle look, something that shall give her courage to make a disclosure. She glances up frequently, but the something does not come. Fred is silent, preoccupied.
There is a contented look on his face, a dreaminess in his beautiful eyes, a pleasantness playing about his mouth, but these are not hers.
It must be said, this word she has to say. Perhaps it will bring about a change, a reawakening
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of sympathy; at any rate it will break this burdensome silence.
'Have you heard any news to-day?' she asked with an effort—'about anybody belonging to Cleveden, I mean.'
'No, nothing special. What has happened?'
It is difficult work—Fred's manner makes it more difficult, and Jenny is waiting tremulously for the effect of her words.
'My father is in trouble,' she says, speaking hurriedly now. 'The — Railway Company is insolvent; and he had invested some money in it.'
'I heard of the smash,' Fred says coolly. 'How much money?—What vague creatures women are!'
'Seven thousand pounds,' Jenny says, watching with breathless intentness.

Fred is silent, his face carefully expressionless, and Jenny adds:
'And he says he has very little besides.'
Still Fred makes no comment. Jenny is a little relieved—a little perplexed.
'I don't care about the money myself,' she continues, 'but my father makes a great trouble of it, and it is a trouble to me to see him.'
'Yes; it must be, I am sure,' Fred says, sweeping
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the tall grass backward and forward with his cane.
Another silence. Jenny is pained, wounded beyond endurance. Will nothing rouse him to a little tenderness? Cannot trial buy back a little sympathy? She is stung—she must speak.
'I didn't think you would have taken it so indifferently,' she says, with odd sharp tones in her voice.
'Indifferently, my dear Jenny!' Fred replies with smoothest courtesy. 'I am not at all indifferent… I shall always be interested in anything that concerns you.'
Always be interested… And the tone was more terrible than the words. Jenny felt as one stunned by a blow. There was a momentary mist and confusion of thought—then a chill and benumbed sensation.
Always be interested! What meaning was there behind? Were not their two lives as one—one for all time? So Jenny questioned, for with all her doubts and fears she was yet unable or unwilling to face the possibility of actual permanent change. Even when accusing him, she had had no depth of belief in the truth of her accusations. She had thought and spoken from fear rather than
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from certainty. Had ground for fear been wanting? That could hardly be said now.
'You know you are not alone in your misfortune, dear,' Fred resumes. 'Hundreds of people will suffer as well as your father. Mr. Clarke—the Captain, as people call him—will be a loser, I believe, though not perhaps to any great extent.'
They were wandering up to the old Hall through the garden now. It was very desolate. The paths were full of dead leaves, the borders full of dead flowers. There was a chill wind sweeping and sighing down the valley, a gray mist coming over the hills. Not at all an evening to linger over a parting. Yet Fred did linger—lingered with a certain tenderness, Jenny's quick perception of a pleasanter word, a kindlier look, not escaping him… Poor Jenny! 'He has not forgotten what gives me pleasure,' she said to herself, 'so he must know what gives me pain.'
Was it a little truth that made him set himself to bring back the old happy look to Jenny's face? I cannot tell. There are certain natures—natures capable of passion, of coldness, of pity, of cruelty, that are very hard to understand. They do not understand themselves… Fred went home with
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a comfortable sense of self-approval. Jenny went indoors quoting two lines of Coleridge's—

'O worse than all! O pang all pangs above!
Is kindness counterfeiting absent love!'

CHAPTER II.

MISS KABURY.

'Was it something said,
Something done,
Vexed him? Was it touch of hand,
Turn of head?
Strange! that very way
Love begun:
I as little understand
Love's decay.'

R. BROWNING.

THE days that followed were days of growing doubt, and pain, and disappointment. Fred came and went. One day he was listless and impassive, another day tender and affectionate; and again he would be fretful, and peevish, and restless. This changefulness acted upon Jenny as a perpetual irritant. It was impossible for her to recover any of that calm, trustful assurance that had been hers once.

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Her weak, suffering soul was made happy by a single loving look, one tender phrase, or warm pressure of the hand; but when no such look, nor phrase, nor pressure was given, when day after day passed by without sign at all, she fell into the habit of being unhappy. Fred saw the unhappiness, but it was no pain to him; it was a little pride, rather. Every shade of the misery that he caused was known to him. He could calculate, to the minutest degree, the effect of an indifferent glance, of a cold greeting, of an unsympathetic silence; and the effect was to him something of a satisfaction.

His love for her, the love that had been so passionate, so exigeant, so self-pleasing, had died out as rapidly as it had grown. And he knew that it was dead, that it would no more live again. Her love for him was growing in keenness, in strength, in capacity, for the pains and pleasures of love with every day of her existence. This also he knew, and these things were also a satisfaction to him.

One of these autumn days had been fixed upon for a croquet-party at the Poplars—the last of the season. 'You will come down, of course?' Fred had said, in a careless way, to Jenny, adding,

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after a pause, 'We expect Miss Kabury down too.'

'Miss Kabury?'

'Yes; Captain Clarke's niece. Haven't you seen her?'

'No; I didn't know he had a niece.'

'She's been abroad some time; 'governess, or companion, or something of the kind,' Fred replied. Then he changed the subject; yet he recurred to it more than once that evening, and on other evenings too.

But Charlotte Kabury did not come down to the croquet-party at the Poplars. She had taken cold; nettle-rash had supervened, and she had remained in bed three days, occupied chiefly with the contemplation of a hand-mirror.

She was well again now. Her aunt, Mrs. Clarke, had decided to give a 'party.' Invitations had been issued on pink paper; the day, the hour, had come, and Mrs. Clarke and the Captain were awaiting the first arrivals in the big 'best room' at Stonebrig Heights.

It was a new house; Captain Clarke had built it when he retired from his seafaring life only two or three years before. The furniture was new too, and the pictures, and the ornaments, and the

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coloured antimacassars. There was also a new grand piano, 'as good as could be bought,' Captain Clarke informed the three Miss Wrights; and he repeated the information for the benefit of the two Miss Staniers, adding that it had been his present to Charlotte on her birthday.
'You see, I don't intend her to go away no more,' he concluded. 'There's no need for her to be earnin' her own bread, when there's cake enough baked to last her her lifetime;' and the Miss Staniers exchanged significant looks.
It had been supposed till quite lately that a nephew of Mrs. Clarke's would inherit the Captain's savings, but the said nephew had given offence. This was the first public intimation that the offence was not to be condoned.
Captain Clarke began to fidget a little.
'What a time it takes you women-folk to pin on yer bows an' streamers!' he exclaimed.
There was a little laugh, and one or two pert replies. Between twenty and thirty people were in the room now; clouds of gauze and tarlatan, rustling of silk and satin, a purr of feminine voices, a dropping accompaniment of bass and tenor.
Tea was ready; there was a steaming urn on
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the table, hot cakes and brilliant flowers, glittering china, and glass and silver.
Mrs. Clarke began to grow pink and tremulous, and, in a loud whisper, sent a maid to tell Miss Kabury that 'the crumpets wouldn't be worth eatin' if she didn't come down.'
Presently the door opened; there was a flash of amber, sky-blue, and crimson. Had an Indian princess in native costume appeared on the scene, there could hardly have been greater astonishment.
For a second Miss Kabury stood in the doorway, the feathers in her hair almost touching the top; her keen eyes sweeping round the room with a swiftness that was amazing. Then, with a magnificent bow, she swept forward herself.
'Well now, I can that something like a rig!' Captain Clarke said *sotto voce.*
'Don't talk shop!' Miss Kabury replied, turning round sharply.
It was one of her peculiarities that she could say vulgar things with an air of grandeur. Now and then, too, her grammar was doubtful; but the doubtful word or phrase was used with most confident elegance of tone and manner.
She was a fine-looking woman, instinct with life and energy, conscious of a certain power—the
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source of it not easily definable—conscious, too, of the possession of one real talent. Not a very enviable consciousness, though, in these days of universal genius.
There were several introductions to be gone through; Miss Kabury's wonderful ease, her self-possession, her sharp, searching eyes, causing the spirits of one poor little guest to sink below zero for the moment.
Poor little Jenny! But she had not come there to be subdued. She had determined to forget that she had ever had any fears or pains—to ignore the fact that she had on an old white muslin dress, newly starched; old pink ribbons, newly ironed.
She would be bright and resolute. She had been very foolish—Fred had assured her that she had. She would be good now, and cheerful, as of old.
Fred Stanier had hoped to secure a place for himself near Miss Kabury; but Mrs. Clarke, with a joke that made his ears tingle, pointed to a vacant chair next to Jenny. He sat

down with a smile, and handed tea and cake with such terrible politeness. Not a word, not a glance, that everybody present might not hear and see. The loving brown eyes beside him, glancing up timidly now and then to his face with a wistful, beseeching
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look, saw nothing there to give any hope or gladness, any ground for that cheerfulness that had been decided upon.
Just opposite was a tall, dark man, with a powerful face and head. Not long ago this man had had what people called a disappointment, and they said that he had grown cold and stern in his manner to men, cold and satirical in his manner to women. But the merest glimpse of one woman had power to soothe and soften him; it was but to be in her presence for awhile that he had come to Stonebrig Heights. There was a look on his face now, calm, benign, loving, suffering—suffering that had its root in the pain that he was reading on another face. If by the sacrifice of years of his life Anthony Rede could have bought back for Jenny that happiness that she was yearning for, I believe the sacrifice would have been made.
Tea is over at last; the party breaks up into little groups. Miss Kabury stands on the hearth-rug, with her back to the fire, her small, glittering brown eyes flashing fiery meanings and inquiries everywhere—not friendly eyes, not unsuspecting; but watchful, defiant, ready for warfare. She has a certain kind of wit, too—not often brilliant, not always quite her own.
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'Sorry to hear you had such a cold,' Fred says. Fred is one of the group attracted by Miss Kabury.
'Cold—yes. Three days in bed. Bored to extinction. It has weighed down my youth, and impaired my beauty not a little.'
'Beauty is only skin deep, you know, my dear,' Mrs. Clarke says, who has taken the remark very literally, and is much given to proverbs.
'Quite deep enough, too, aunt, till people begin going into society without their skins.'
The reply is not original, but it raises a laugh, and Miss Kabury seems surprised, and looks round with a little frown. But she has a good deal of the same kind of shallow cleverness at hand; and there is more laughing, and caustic little remarks are made among the other groups—made with such pleasant smiling eyes and faces.
'What do you think of her?' Emmy Wright asks in a whisper of Miss Stanier; but Miss Stanier is too well-bred to give a direct opinion of that kind in her own words. She looks up into Emmy's face with a smile, and says gracefully: 'Well, dear,

' "Her manners have not that repose
Which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere,"'

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And Emmy smiles, and thinks how clever and ready Miss Stanier always is.
Music is asked for presently. Rachel Rede plays a dreamy air of Mendelssohn's—one of the '*Lieder' Ohne Worte.'*
'A good deal of musical feeling there,' Miss Kabury says, watching with critical eyes, listening with critical ears. 'What is her name? I forget,' she says, turning to Maria Stanier.
And Maria replies:
'St. Rachel of Cleveden.'
'I respect St. Rachel,' Miss Kabury says honestly, thinking aloud.

'What is it she is playing?' Fred asks, merely for the sake of saying something.
' "*Rule, Britannia,*" replies Miss Kabury.
Jenny looks on a little sadly when Miss Kabury sits down to the piano. Fred had almost exhausted his vocabulary of praise in speaking of her playing; and he takes his place by her side to turn the leaves as if he had an acknowledged right to be there.
There is an instant silence. A crash—a wonderful sweeping of chords and scales—bravura variations, feats of execution that hold her listeners spell-bound with astonishment.
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Fred looks flushed, delighted; Jenny sits cold, pale with pain; and Maria, glancing over to the piano, says to her neighbour:

' "When Orpheus played he touched the rocks and trees,
But you, my lady, only touch the keys.' "

This is hardly said when it becomes untrue as applied to Miss Kabury. She drops the dazzling spasmodic style. A low wailing plaintful strain is heard—people look at each other as if a cry of human pain had reached them. Every note, the softest, is distinctly articulated, difficult passages played with the greatest ease, yet no one thinks of the music; they sit entranced.
Almost immediately after Miss Kabury rises from the piano Mrs. Clarke asks Jenny to sing; and other people join her in asking; but Jenny is reluctant. She would sing gladly if she were sure of herself. She has great faith in the power of music, there is no music like that of the human voice, and that Fred's heart may be reached through his ears she knows from experience. Yet she hesitates, and at last Maria Stanier leads her to the piano almost against her will.
'Jenny dear, there's no compulsion, only you *must,'* she says.
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And Charlotte Kabury, handing Jenny a pile of songs, says with a grand air:
'Never say "No" when the world says "Yes," Miss Kirke.'
But a new difficulty arises. The songs are for the most part French and German. There are only about half a dozen English ones, and of these only two that Jenny has seen before. One of them is Claribel's ' *Take back the Heart that Thou Gavest* '; the other *'I Dreamt that I dwelt in Marble Halls.'*
Jenny would give a great deal rather than sing either of these at the present moment. But there is no time to think. With nervous haste she decides upon the latter song; and Miss Kabury offers to play the accompaniment.
Tremulously, huskily, Jenny begins, hardly a note reaching to the other end of the room. And there is such a terrible silence, such a burning consciousness of curious eyes and ears.
A hot crimson flush rises over her neck and face, tears come into her eyes, her heart beats fast, there is nothing but failure. Yet she goes on singing, almost mechanically for a few moments; but by degrees a touch of pathos steals into her voice—pathos that thrills to the very soul of one who
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listens. It is not Fred. But when Jenny comes to the words:

' "Yet of all that I dreamed, what charmed me most

Was that you loved me still the same,"

her eyes seek Fred's instinctively. He too is listening; but there is no thrill, no response there.

The words have to be repeated, but Jenny's voice falters, her whole frames heaves with emotion, and the music and the words disappear together in a mist.

'She is fainting,' someone says; but Jenny does not faint, she breaks down ignominiously in a burst of tears.

Fred, who hates a scene beyond everything, especially any scene in which he could possibly be supposed to have the remotest concern, is conscious of nothing but intense irritation.

He is quite aware that everybody will put a certain meaning upon what has happened; and he is further aware that this meaning will not be far from the true one; and he groans—almost aloud—over the folly that has led him into such a dilemma.

Maria, who understands the position, but dares not venture upon open sympathy at present, ventures instead upon another epigram:

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' "Swans sing before they die; 'twere no bad thing
Should certain persons die before they sing." '

This she says in a whisper to Fred and Horatia, while Miss Kabury and Rachel Rede administer wholesome severity and sal volatile to Jenny in the back parlour.

Jenny does not go back to the 'best room'; she prefers going home at once. She begs hard to be allowed to go alone; the distance is not short, but it is moonlight, and she knows the way thoroughly. Yet Rachel will not listen to the idea for a moment. They will go together, steal away at once without taking leave of anyone but Miss Kabury.

Outside it is a brilliant autumn night. Widespread valleys lie between the moors; peaceful-looking villages nestle among trees, still and weird in the moonlight; uplands, purple and gray and black, tower against the sky. Everywhere there is a quiet, solemn grandeur.

'It is like being in a cathedral,' Rachel says. And the two girls stand for awhile on the brow of the highland called Stonebrig Moor.

Jenny makes no response. If she were alone she would crowd down among the heather and let her sorrow have its own wild way; but instead she stands quietly struggling for self-control. She has

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shame to contend with, as well as sorrow, the shame of a woman born and reared among a race of people not given to visible emotion, given rather to think such emotion cause enough for a life's disgrace.

Jenny's struggle is not successful. The contention is too strong. Instead of calmness tumult comes, and a feeling of recklessness—feeling that becomes audible in the form of wild, blind questioning when they reach the old Hall.

'What have I done, Rachel? Have I offended him? What is it? Why is he so changed?... Rachel! Rachel! If this is to go on I can't live… Oh, if I only knew what I had done!'

Rachel has no question to ask, no comfort of any acceptable kind to offer. She has understood with intuitive perception how things have been tending, and perceives not dimly how they tend now. So she only replies gently:

'I should say you have not done anything, dear. There is a kind of love that fails merely because it has spent itself, worn itself out by its own vehemence. There may have been no fault on your part, perhaps none on his.'
'None on his! Why do you say that? What do you mean?'
'I mean simply that perhaps he has not sufficient
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self-knowledge. I cannot tell. If he has loved before, and his love has failed, he ought to have known, to have suspected himself, restrained himself till he was quite sure that such was not likely to be the case again.'
'How *could* he know? how *could* he suspect himself when his love was so great? Rachel, if I could make you understand but in the least degree what his love was, you wouldn't talk like that. It came upon me as a dazzling light might have come blinding, bewildering. The most passionate love I had ever dreamed of in my whole life was coldness compared to it. And then, and not till then, I too learnt to love, and never knew that I had learnt till a shadow came between the light and me… What had I done, what could I have done, when I loved him with a love so strong that it was almost bitterness, nay, bitterness it has come to be in the end?'
'No, Jenny; not bitterness yet; and you mustn't let it grow to that,' Rachel said soothingly. 'If once you let yourself begin to think hardly of a person you have loved, you begin to increase your own misery tenfold. The worst disappointment is aggravated by unkindly thought:
'But I have never thought of him with unkindness;
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and I have borne more than you even dream of… Oh, Rachel, Rachel! Think me weak if you like, despise me if you like, but I can bear it no longer. If I might speak I wouldn't care; but he condemns me to a silence that is unbearable, forbids me so much as to ask a question that he thinks has the tone of complaint or reproach in it. Sometimes I feel as if my heart would break with the longing to speak; and if I utter a word he turns upon me with an impatience that frightens me, silences me at once. I must bear all, put up with whatever mood he happens to be in, take thankfully a little kindness, if it pleases him to bestow it; if it does not please him so to do, bear patiently with coldness or neglect; but there must be no remonstrance, not so much as by a look. Oh! it is hard to be hungry, and not dare to ask for food, to long for crumbs of affection, and to have a stone of oppression like this laid upon one.'
'It is hard, dear, and it is perplexing,' Rachel says, looking thoughtful and perplexed herself. 'I often think it is strange that one human being should have this terrible power to pain and wound another; stranger still, that anyone should have the will. St. Paul says, "Great is the mystery of godliness," but the mystery of wrong and sin seems
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greater far to me. There must be deep meaning in it. Man wills it, or yields to it, but God permits it. Why, I cannot tell; but I know that He knows why; and I wait. There will be a day when the eyes of them that see shall be dim no longer.'
Jenny's reply was not responsive. Her spiritual perceptions, never of the clearest, were overshadowed by a weight of pain now. Abstract ideas of suffering, let them be ever so true, were altogether unattractive and incomprehensible.
She was crushed, weakened, knew that she was weak, and had but a dim notion where to turn for strength.

Yet here at this gate of sorrow was to be entrance into life; no triumphant entrance, but one of strife, agony, shame, repeated failure.

Without the gate had been a life of comparative blamelessness, but also a life of comparative blindness, of thoughtless ease, of shallow content, a life to paralyze a soul if long continued.

But a time had been set for its continuance. The danger of paralysis was over; other dangers threatened.

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CHAPTER III.

HARD TO UNDERSTAND.

'To sorrow
I bade good-morrow,
And thought to leave her far away behind;
But cheerly, cheerly,
She loves me dearly;
She is so constant to me, and so kind:
I would deceive her,
And so leave her,
But ah! she is so constant, and so kind.'

KEATS: *Endymion.*

IT was some days before Fred Stanier went to the old Hall again, and these were sad days with Jenny.

A woman singing plaintively in the village street, a lingering gleam of sunset on a hilltop, a tender dream, a pathetic accent in a voice, the waving of boughs in the autumn breeze, anything that had power to touch her soul brought tears to her eyes, though the little woman was far from *larmoyante* by nature.

And they were days of fear too, and heart-sinking. Perhaps Fred might never come again; and if he did, what kind of coming would it be? There would be no reproof—this she said to herself

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sadly; no chidings, tender or untender. He would be polite, and impassive, and unapproachable.

And they were sad days, too, for other reasons. Abel Kirke's little store of ready money was decreasing last, and the misfortune that had come to him had not come singly.

He was a poor man now, and his poverty was a terrible thing in his eyes—a thing to pray over with strong prayers. 'Yet,' he said, 'my stroke is heavier than my groaning, for God hath overthrown me, and compassed me with His net.'

So Jenny had to wait and to endure, and when Fred came at last the poor little lace was pale and wan with endurance. Was he touched a little? Did the sudden flush of pleasure, the brightening eye, the lip that smiled while it quivered, bring back for a moment some memory that quickened the old emotion within him? Perhaps it did.

He was not at all in the mood that Jenny had prepared herself for. He made no allusion to that scene at Stonebrig Heights, "but chatted pleasantly of other things, and once or twice came near to being tender. And when Jenny put out little feelers for sympathy, if he did not respond to them, he did not trample them underfoot as he had so often done of late.

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Had he marked out so me pathway for himself? If so, he was a man quite capable of

keeping to it, though he might seem to swerve—though he might actually swerve for the moment, if temptation was strong. Still, he would keep the pathway in view.
It seems to him that temptation is very strong this evening. Jenny, stirred by the touch of gentleness in Fred, a touch more potent now than the fullest expression of love in the old days, is as winning and fascinating as Fred ever remembers to have seen her.
'Curious little creature she is,' he says to himself, 'tortured to agony, or roused to the height of felicity by a single word or a look.'
Jenny is sitting near the fire, her work-table beside her; Fred on the hearth-rug, with his back against the mantel-shelf, towering above her. Now and then he puts out a condescending hand, and strokes her hair, the beautiful soft brown hair that he has always admired so much; and now and then he prefaces a sentence with some tender word or phrase coined specially for her in days gone by, and remembered by her with passionate regret on many a day of hopelessness and pain. Little wonder that, hearing them again, Jenny's happiness is something that she cannot hide.
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'Where is your father, dear?' Fred asks presently.
'He's down at Port St. Hilda,' Jenny says, adding, 'Did you know he was going over to Branthwaite in the morning?'
'No. That is, I knew he was going, but I didn't know he was going so soon. I wanted him to take a small parcel for me. I wish I'd known he was going to-morrow!'
'It isn't too late. You can send it up when you go home.'
'So I can… But on second thoughts I'll just run down for it. I can be back in a quarter of an hour.'
The quarter of an hour seems long, but Fred comes back at last, bringing a tiny paper packet in his hand.
'It is five pounds I am going to lend to that sad ne'er-do-weel, Nathan Boulby, my mother's half-brother, you know,' Fred says. 'I don't suppose I shall ever see a penny of it again, but I couldn't refuse him. He says he's on the very verge of starvation.'
Jenny remembers all about Nathan Boulby, a broken-down farmer, with six or eight children, and a dressy, untidy, sickly-looking wife, the talk
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of the whole neighbourhood of Branthwaite for thriftlessness and extravagance.
And Jenny quite agrees with Fred that he might as well make Nathan a present of the money at once.
Suddenly there is a strange and peculiar silence. Jenny, looking up, sees that Fred's face is suffused with a feverish colour, and that there is an expression of intense disquiet and perturbation upon it, and also something that she interprets as surprise. Only a moment or two passes.
'Is anything the matter?' she asks, with something of effort.
Fred does not reply, but he is making a quick forward movement, when Abel Kirke's step is heard striding along the passage. Fred draws back, darting a nervous, almost appealing, glance at Jenny, such an odd glance that the idea crosses her mind that he looks like some timid animal driven to bay. Almost at the same moment Abel enters the room; his long silver hair droops on his dark coat with a picturesque curve; the lines on his face are deeper; his features are blanched and withered; but his eyes are still keen and piercing, and in the expression of his face there is still the same curious blending of lofty thought and petty care.

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His recognition of Fred Stanier's presence is slight, and his consent to deliver the packet to Nathan Boulby by no means cordial.
But he deposits it safely in his desk under lock and key; and then, with a brief good-night to Fred, he retires for awhile.
From time to time faint echoes of the old man's voice reach the sitting-room, and it is the voice of one in the very agony of prayer.
Is Fred listening? He seems absorbed; or is that strange and incomprehensible mood upon him still?
Jenny cannot tell, but she feels the change, and makes various efforts to bring him back to the happier manner of the previous hour.
Not successful efforts. She cannot reach him or touch him in any way, until at last, quite incidentally, she mentions Charlotte Kabury's name.
Then Fred turns sharply, irritably, and says in a snappish way:
'Why are you always harping on that string? What jealous, small-minded beings women are!'
And Jenny looks up, genuinely astonished:
'I don't know that I ever mentioned Miss Kabury's name to you before,' she says with surprise. 'Indeed, I cannot have done so. I
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haven't seen you since—since that evening, and I didn't know her before… Do be good again, Fred,' the poor little woman says, looking up wistfully, trying to put away the old fearfulness that is coming over her. 'Do be good again.' And then she adds half playfully, 'If you are not, I don't think I shall speak to you for a whole week.'
'I know who would feel *that* most,' Fred says coolly.
And then there is a little silence, broken by Miliy's entrance with the supper-tray; and when Milly disappears again, Jenny looks up, and her eyes are tearless, but there is a very sad look in them—a look of pain, and hunger, and disappointment.
She utters no word, and her eyes droop again, and she goes on quietly with her sewing; but the expression that had been in her eyes remains on her face, and about the drooping corners of her mouth.
It is more than Fred can bear. He knows that he is doing a foolish thing, but the impulse to do it is stronger than the resolve to act wisely; and with a passionate movement he clasps her in his arms, covers her head and face with kisses:
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'Forgive me, forgive me, Jenny, will you?' he murmurs.
And Jenny, with a sob of happiness, says only:
'You do love me yet?'
It is for her a moment almost solemn with its weight of joy. Fred assures her of his love—again and again he assures her; and there is something of penitence in his manner, a certain unconfessed sorrow, and he excuses himself, though no accusations are brought against him… Then there is a time of rapt eloquent silence before Abel's footstep is heard on the stair.
When Abel enters the room there is only Jenny there—a glowing, eager, happy little creature once more in love with all the world. Her father's fretfulness, his deep sighs, his heavy groans, fall upon her ear as the ticking of the old clock falls—they have no power to break in upon the new joy. But great as her joy is, there is a tremulousness in it; and

when she goes to her own room she offers up a thanksgiving and a prayer. Then she sits awhile, and thinks over all that has happened, and discovers that she has not been without blame.
'I ought to have been more careful at first,' she says to herself. 'I let him see too plainly that I loved him.' And then she ponders over
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her love—the love that had gone too deep to be understood either by herself or others. And she wonders in what manner she can best restrain it without seeming restrained herself; and how she can best stimulate herself to be sunny and genial when it shall seem to her that there is small reason for being in such happy temper. Here has been her greatest fault, this she perceives clearly. Now that she knows Fred better, she wonders much how she could ever be so silly as to indulge in that attitude of sad silent reproachfulness, still more how she could ever try him by any word of complaint.
The great drawback of the lessons of experience is that they are learnt too late. The life wherein they would have been of use is lived out whilst we are learning them. We mar our little day of happiness by folly, weaken a friendship, lose a love, throw away a fortune— then we turn from the sunlight and grow cynical, or write a book, or give way to sentiment, and quote 'Sorrow's crown of sorrow' till we have quoted all the beauty out of it.
Jenny goes to sleep in the glad belief that her happier things have come back to her, and that in order to keep them she has nothing to do but
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to walk mindfully. Whatever may come in the future, she must not forget the mistakes of the past.

It was something of a trial to Jenny's new resolution that Fred, knowing that she must be alone during those two days that her father was at Branthwaite—did not once make his appearance at the old Hall, and it was a further trial when she learnt from Maria that he had spent both evenings at Captain Clarke's.
When Maria had gone Jenny sat down by the window, and sat there a long time, trying to force the wrong thoughts back, trying harder still to arrive at right ones.
'I can understand it,' she said to herself a little sadly; 'anyone could understand it. I would rather be there myself than here.'
And she looked round upon the wide desolate-looking room, the bare gray walls, the uncarpeted floor, the dingy uncomfortable horse-hair furniture.
Then she thought of the handsome room at Stonebrig Heights, the bright fire that would be burning there, and the brilliant lights, and the comfortable chairs; and she listened to Miss Kabury's music, listened with Fred's ears, and
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recalled Miss Kabury's clever sayings—very clever they seemed to Jenny.
Was she at all envious? she asked herself; but it did not seem to her that she need answer Yes. And she thought she could have liked Charlotte Kabury very much indeed, if there had been no fear that Fred liked her more.
Charlotte had been quite kind—almost tender—that evening when Jenny had behaved so foolishly, and Jenny never forget nor was ungrateful for kindness.
No; she was not envious, nor uncharitable; but things were a little hard, and Fred was, after all, a little difficult to understand.

CHAPTER IV.

NATHAN BOULBY'S ERRAND.

'O, what men dare do! what men may do!
What men daily do, not knowing what they do.'
SHAKESPEARE: *Much Ado About Nothing.*

WINTER weather set in on the second day after Abel Kirke's departure for Branthwaite. Snow and sleet swept over the fields, dull leaden skies hung low upon the moorlands. It was twilight all day
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and night came suddenly down in the middle of the afternoon.

A bitter night it was. The cold was intense, the snow was blinding, the darkness visible only where feeble lights gleamed in the villages.

And the wind was high too, tossing the tops of the leafless trees to and fro, drifting the snow against the hillsides, whirling it into the faces of two black silent figures that were struggling along. Over the gloomy moor where no shelter was, no landmark save here and there a heap of stones, many a mile over the dark wild moor.

Then down through a hillside village, through a wide gusty valley, by the river-side, by three tall poplar-trees, by a house where a narrow streak of light gleamed from between warm crimson curtains.

'Are ya sure this is t' hoose?' the shorter and slighter figure inquires of the stalwart one with a shiver. An affirmative grunt is given, and a loud knock resounds through the house.

'Tell Frederick Stanier 'at Nathan Boulby wants to see him.'

The accent is broad, the voice rough, but not unpleasant; the tone determined and important. The housemaid hesitates, looks suspicious, and finally shuts the door. She returns quickly, however, and
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Nathan Boulby and his poor wearied sickly wife are shown into the bright sitting-room where Fred Stanier and his sisters are at tea.

There is visible surprise and confusion. Nathan unlooses the red cotton handkerchief that has been tied over his old white felt hat, and deposits hat and handkerchief, with his stick and ragged greatcoat, upon the carpet.

'Sit tha doon, Janey,' he says to the pale, silent figure at his side. And Horatia begs pardon and draws a chair forward, glancing not unkindly at the poor woman's thin, dripping clothes.

'You must have had a terrible journey, I'm afraid,' she says, pouring out a cup of tea.

'Ay: it's coöarsish soört o' weather,' Nathan replies, lifting large, straightforward, dark eyes to Miss Stanier's face.

Then he turns toward Fred, and looks at him with a long, scrutinizing look that is very difficult to comprehend.

Fred returns the look, steadily, inquiringly.

'You must have had business of some consequence, I should say,' Maria observes, with a smile and a barely perceptible sneer.

'Ay, consequence anuff,' Nathan replies, and a rather melancholy look comes over the brown,
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almost handsome face. 'Ah suddn't ha com'd ower t' moor sike a daäy as this for nowt.'
Then there is a pause. Horatia attends bountifully to the wants of the worn-out hungry woman. Nathan refuses food for the present.
'Ah mun ha' my mahnd set at rest first,' he replies. Then he turns toward Fred again: 'Ah sall want to see ya a bit,' he says slowly; adding, 'Mebbe Ah'd better see ya by yersel'.'
'I think there will be no need for that,' Fred answers, in his usual courteous and musical voice. 'I keep nothing secret from my sisters: they are fully acquainted with the little transaction that has taken place between us this week.'
Nathan's only reply is another look, even more intensely scrutinizing than the last.
'Perhaps,' Fred resumed, with a slight shade of annoyance on his face; 'perhaps I had better just state beforehand, that if your errand is of the same nature as your letter—in other words, if you have come toask for a further loan—I shall not be able to grant it. Not, I assure you, from unwillingness, but from sheer inability. I have done all that it is in my power to do—all that any reasonable man would have expected.'
Nathan listened very patiently—very quietly.
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Jane, his wife, looked up from her teacup, with a curious little flush on her face.
Horatia leaned back in her chair, graceful, elegant, in an old black silk dress with cherrycoloured ribbons. There was a puzzled look behind her kindly smile, and more than a shade of constraint in her polite manner.
Maria busied herself with her lace work. She had a small table near the fire, and a lamp to herself. But, though apparently absorbed, she was very watchful.
Nathan listened quietly till Fred had done speaking. Then, drawing from his pocket a sman brown-paper parcel, and holding it out in a somewhat guarded manner, he said:
'You sent this parcel to me, by Abel Kirke's hands?'
'Yes,' Fred answered, with surprise.
'What did ya put insahde this parcel?'
'The five pounds you had written to ask me for,' Fred replied, with a steady look and in a firm tone.
'What soört o' coin?'
'Five sovereigns.'
'You're riddy to swear?'
'Certainly. Both ready and willing.'
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Nathan rose to his feet, and advanced slowly to the table:
'Cum here, Janey,' he said; 'an' you, Miss Stanier, an' you an' all, Miss Maria.'
There was a rustle of movement, glances of wonder and curiosity, smiles of amusement; five pairs of eyes fixed upon Nathan Boulby's big brown hands—hands that trembled visibly as he opened the parcel. His mouth quivered, too, and his face turned paler.
'There!' he said, carefully smoothing out the four corners of the paper, leaving the five coins in a little heap in the middle. 'There!... I swear before Heaven—an' my wife is witness that I speak the truth—those are the coins that were in the parcel when I opened it, two minutes efter Abel Kirke had left my door. Five shillings.'
For a full minute no one spoke, no one looked away from the contents of the piece of brown paper. At last Maria broke the silence.
'I can't say that I'm astonished,' she said, with her peculiar smile.
Fred looked at her rebukingly.

'I can feel nothing but astonishment,' he said, in a voice that sounded fun of pain. Then he
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turned away from the table, pale, and amazed and bewildered.
No one present had doubted Nathan Boulby for a single second; and, by that peculiar intuitiveness by which we know when we are understood and believed in, he felt that no one doubted him.
Jane Boulby felt it too, and the poor, weak woman burst into tears as she sat down again.
The disappointment about the money—money that had been needed to stay an impending distress warrant—had been a terrible one; and the dread that suspicion would point to them rather than to Abel Kirke had grown to a certainty during the long wild walk over the snow-covered moor. Tears were a relief, and also an expression of relief, but they were not so understood.
'Don't make a trouble of it, Jane,' Horatia said kindly. 'We may not be able to lend you the same sum, but we will do something—we will do what we can.'
Fred turned. He had been standing near the fire, absorbed in very painful thought.
'Yes; the loss must not fall entirely upon you,' he said, in a quiet, altered voice… 'But,' he added, in more resolute tones, 'what I do I shall do only upon this condition—that no word of what
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has happened shall ever pass your lips… You cannot have mentioned it to anyone already?'
'Te neabody but te Abel Kirke hissel',' Nathan replied, relapsing into his native Doric.
'You have seen him—seen him since he gave you this?' Fred asked, with a good deal of surprise and some agitation. 'What *did* he say for himself?'
'He said little or nowt,' Nathan replied curtly. 'When and where did you see the wretched old man?' Maria asked, with an amusing assumption of virtuous dignity.
'Ah seed him ower at Balmforth's—he's stoppin' there. Ah went ower last neet, mebbe twenty minutes efther he'd left oor hoose.'
'Were any of the Balmforths present when you accused him?' Fred asked.
'Noä. Ah gat him oot te t' deärstan.* There was a bit o' leet fra' t' kitchen winda, an' I open'd t' parcel, an' meade him leauk for hissel'. He tonn'd a bit white, but he niver yance denied it.'
'He said nothing?' Fred asked.
'Nowt te t' point. He put his han's tigether, an' präayed a minute or tweä, an' then he gabbled ower a lot o' scriptur'. Ah could mak nowt on him!'

*Door-stone or step.

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Maria smiled a little, and Miss Stanier arranged her red satin ribbons with a sigh, observing with originality:
'That only makes it all the sadder, you know.' No more mention was made of Abel Kirke's name; even Maria, seeing Fred's distress, grew a little careful in her speech.
A substantial supper was prepared for Nathan, a consultation was held among the Staniers whilst he was engaged therewith, and afterward the sum of four pounds was

handed to him by Fred.

'You are to consider this as a gift,' said Fred.

'A pound from each of my sisters, and two from myself. But I shall require both you and your wife to promise faithfully that you will keep this matter secret. I cannot explain to you why I am so urgent about this. It must be sufficient for you that my reasons are of the strongest.'

The promise was given most willingly; neither Nathan Boulby nor his wife had felt much resentment toward Abel Kirke. Their first sensation had been one of utter bewilderment, and it is not wide of the truth to say that Nathan had been as ready to suspect Fred Stanier of mockery as to suspect Abel Kirke of dishonesty.

But his visit to Balmforth's farm had pointed

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his suspicions more clearly toward Abel, and his interview with Fred had put an end to any remnant of doubt he might have had. Thinking of Abel, of his reputation, of his life-long profession of religion, Nathan felt more and more amazed; but his amazement was not unmixed with pity.

They parted for the night soon afterward. Miss Stanier had had a comfortable room prepared for the tired-out travellers. They were to start on their homeward journey next morning before daylight.

'Let me beg you again never to forget the promise you have made,' Fred said, in a pleading tone as Nathan left the room.

'You can trust me,' Nathan replied laconically. Then, as he went upstairs, he looked once more at the money that was in his hand. Four pounds. And he was owing one way and another nearly three hundred!

About two hours after Nathan Boulby's arrival at the Poplars, another figure might have been seen toiling wearily up the village street.

Through the driving snow and the darkness, by the church, by the inn, up to where the old Hall loomed, a blacker spot in the blackness.

It was Abel Kirke who was struggling with the

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winter's night. Jenny was not expecting him; she had waited expectantly for another footstep, but in vain. It had been a sad waiting.

She had re-arranged her ferns and plants on a small table by the piano, making a green, bright oasis in the gray dreariness; bits of colour were lying in and about her open workbasket.

She had dresssed her hair in the stylish manner adopted by Miss Kabury, weaving gay pink ribbons into the thick brown plaits, placing a pretty pink bow coquettishly at the side of her head; and her old-gray silk dress had been turned and ironed, and made open at the throat and wrists for the display of white frilling.

She was conscious of looking more than pretty at the beginning of the evening; but as the hours went slowly on she began to feel pale, and cold, and wretched. Then she sat down to the worn-out piano—that was so wretched, too; and the feeble notes were wailing through the room when Abel opened the door.

At no time was music a pleasant sound in the ears of Abel Kirke. Some peculiarity in his constitution caused him to feel irritable at the sound of the softest and sweetest musical instrument, and

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he had been known to stop his ears when passing a band in the streets of Port St. Hilda. Consequently, although Jenny rose to shut the piano as her father opened the door, she was not surprised to see him sit down in his chair, and bury his face in his hands, and this without removing his snow-covered hat and coat, or his wet gray gaiters.
'I didn't know you were coming to-night, father,' she said, in a deprecating tone, trying to unfasten the heavy great-coat that seemed almost frozen to the old man's gaunt figure. But he made no answer. For some time not even a groan escaped him.
Then he rose, and began to pace slowly up and down the room, with hanging, listless hands, and a strange droop in his attitude. And his face was drawn and withered, and it seemed to Jenny that even his hair had a new whiteness, and that the lines on his forehead were deeper than before.
But an observer would have seen that every line was clear and horizontal—not one confused nor oblique line there.
'Are you ill, father?' Jenny asked at last, going up to him with tender tone and manner.
The old man stopped, and laid one hand gently
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on her shoulder, and looked into her face with eyes that had a world of untold sorrow and sadness in them.
'My whole head is sick, my whole heart faint,' he said, with trembling ashen lips. 'I am become as an oak whose leaf fadeth, as a garden that hath no water.'
Then he resumed his heavy pacing to and fro, pouring out in strong Scriptural language a torrent of indignation and wrath.
In the words of the Psalmist he spoke of enemies gathering themselves together against the souls of the righteous, of evil-doers condemning innocent blood.
And after the wrath came complaint and lamentation:
'Behold I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment.
'Mine eyes fail with looking upward; my cry goeth up in vain. O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me!
'Himself hath done it. I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul.
'Yet have I done evil in His sight; therefore let Him not spare. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him.'
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CHAPTER V.

WHAT THE WHISPERING MEANT.

'We are puppets, Man in his pride, and Beauty fair in her flower.
Do we move ourselves, or are moved by an unseen hand at a game
That pushes us off from the board, and others ever succeed ?
Ah, yet we cannot be kind to each other here for an hour;
We whisper, and hint, and chuckle, and grin at a brother's shame;
However we brave it out, we men are a little breed.'
TENNYSON: *Maud.*

THAT moment of repentance, self-extenuation, and reassurance wherewith Fred Stanier had gladdened the heart of Jenny Kirke had been a moment not without its influence on the days that followed. But this influence was wearing out now. Jenny was relapsing

into habits of unhappiness and doubt, enlivened from time to time by hours of day-dreaming and wilful self-delusion.
A whole week had passed since Abel Kirke's return from Branthwaite. The old man was silent and stricken; Jenny was silent and disappointed; the days were wild and gloomy and dark. No footstep crossed the wide gray hall; no crumb of
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food came to satisfy the hungry little soul that craved so wildly and yet so patiently. She fed on visions of food, and the visions grew larger and brighter with every day, and the hunger-pains grew sharper in proportion.
There is no need for people to go into the fens to find Moated Granges. They are everywhere—in village streets, in crowded towns, in dingy back parlours, in dainty drawing-rooms—and weary life-sick Marianas look out from many an unsuspected lattice.
This poor little Mariana's heart leaped on one of these wintry afternoons. There was a knock, a footstep, but the step was light and strange, and Jenny made sure of disappointment even before Emmy Wright entered the room. Jenny had been alone, and lonely—two very different things, and she was glad to see Emmy, notwithstanding the disappointment.
'I called to ask what you were going to wear?' Emmy said, with a rather odd look in her round light-blue eyes.
'To wear!—when?' asked Jenny with astonishment. And Emmy pretended to be astonished too.
'Why, on Wednesday, at the Poplars,' she said, with the same odd look and a smile. 'But of
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course you know all about it, more than I do, I dare say… Will Rachel Rede be there?'
'Rachel is at York, and I know nothing at all,' Jenny said quietly, and with a sudden pain. 'I suppose from what you say there's going to be a party, but I haven't heard of it till now.'
'How curious!' Emmy said, looking vaguely out of the window. Then she turned to Jenny again. 'Perhaps they want to make a surprise of it, and don't intend inviting you till the last moment. But that won't be fair—it won't give you time to prepare anything; and I suppose, like me, you will have a whole host of preparations. Do tell me what you would wear if you were me. I am so sick of sky-blue, and people say that nothing else suits me.'
For more than an hour Emmy Wright sat there, pretty, well-dressed, comfortable; free from all care save the care of pleasure. But from time to time there was something in her manner that puzzled Jenny strangely, questions apparently pointless, and wide of the mark; a tendency to be obtrusive and inquisitive that Jenny had never observed in her before. Then she grew sympathetic and a little patronizing, and Jenny was glad and relieved when she went away. What an odd visit
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it had been! Jenny felt as if Emmy Wright had left at least a dozen sharp little penknives behind her.
For a time, Jenny by some curious mental process with which we are most of us acquainted, but which few of us can define, suspended all thought of the coming Wednesday. It was there in her mind, the dominant subject, but she kept a thin mist of

other ideas floating before it perpetually.
All the evening Jenny did this; but with pathetic inconsistency she busied her deft little fingers with the ironing of lace, the trimming of sleeves, the remaking of a half-worn crimson sash. Every detail of her toilette was arranged, every shade of effect calculated with as much accuracy as possible.
The following morning was a brighter one. There was sunshine on the snow-covered fields, the ivy sprays glittered as if frosted with diamonds, and diamonds dropped from the cottage eaves all the way down the street. It was like another life out of doors, Jenny thought, as she went down to the station. Various little household needs compelled her to go over to Port St. Hilda for an hour or two. She was coming back by the noon train.
The distance from the old Hall to the road leading down to the station was not long, but it
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was long enough for the reception of a good deal of unpleasant impressions. Cottage doors were opened quickly as Jenny passed; loud whispers of bewildering nature reached her ear; a group of gossips turned to stare before she had fairly passed them; little laughs followed her, strange looks met her. What was wrong? Was there anything odd in her appearance? she wondered, with a good deal of nervous fright.
At the station another half-dozen pair of curious eyes seemed to pierce her through and through; and two or three people whom she knew turned away with a glance of surprise, or contempt, or something equally incomprehensible. What had she done? Was it anything about Fred? she wondered, taking refuge in the waiting-room. But her refuge was no hiding-place. People dropped in, stared, turned away with a smile. There was whispering outside, whispering that grew louder, and was intermingled with suppressed, unpleasant laughter. Then run impertinent gossip in a green gown, and with flame-coloured roses in her bonnet, a woman to whom Jenny had never spoken before, came by with twinkling eyes and smile, and said:
'Hoo's yer fayther, miss?'
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'He is quite well, thank you,' Jenny replied, with more dignity than truth.
'Glad to hear't,' the woman said, still standing with impertinent air and scrutinizing glance.
Jenny brushed past her impetuously, and walked with short, quick steps up and down the platform till the train came. Her face was burning, her eyes flashing fire, her heart was full of dread and bitterness.
'What was the meaning of all this mystery that was in the atmosphere?' she wondered, as the train wound slowly down by the river-side. And the same wonder came back many times that day.
At Port St. Hilda—in the streets, in the shops, at the station, wherever she was known—there was the same element of curiosity, the same intolerable consciousness of whispering and allusion.
Poor little Mariana! She was glad to get back to the Moated Grange and the crusted flower-pots.
No note had been left, no message. The day wore on into evening, and the evening into morning—Wednesday morning; and still no word came, nor sign nor token of any kind.
Of course, hope was dying, but it was dying hardly. At one moment it seemed impossible that this thing could be, that she who had been so loved,

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so honoured, so tenderly cared for, should be slighted, neglected thus, in the eyes of that terrible little world that was all around. The knowledge would be everywhere in a day, if it were not everywhere already.

'Did they know—Fred, and Horatia, and Maria—what she would feel, what she was feeling now? Surely not. No human beings could be so cruel knowingly. They had no idea what a monotonous, desolate thing her life had been lately; therefore, they could have no idea of the unspeakable value of any gleam of hope or happiness breaking over the desolation.'

It was not only that the disappointment was hard to bear in itself; it was the meaning that was in the disappointment. They had been drifting apart a long time now—she and Fred—but this would be a turning-point in their drifting. The separate currents that bore them along would be more than ever divergent after this.

And then a storm of wild, mad longing came down upon the little creature.

Was separation worse when people were separated by seas or continents? Was the separation of death itself worse? Could anything be worse than this separation between people who lived in

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the same village, who met at the same houses? It was not only Fred that her heart cried out after, but Fred's friends. They had loved her, she told herself, and esteemed her, but they had known nothing of the world of love that she had poured freely and silently at their feet. Whatever she had received from them she had exaggerated, placed a tenfold value upon it. Their common courtesies had been special graces, their affectionate manners the outcome of a deathless, devoted love. Of change in them she had never dreamt, and the poor little woman's heart was sore with a soreness not to be described, now that evidence of change was forced upon her in this cruel and ruthless fashion.

It was a bright day without, a tempting day; and after dinner Jenny decided to go for a walk. She felt that she must do something,

'A little to disedge
The sharpness of that pain about her heart,'

and a walk was the only thing possible.

She avoided the village street instinctively. The paddock behind the old Hall led to a narrow stone-flagged pathway that was the road through the fields to Port St. Hilda, and along this pathway Jenny went. The snow was still sparkling in the

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fields, on the sloping hillsides. The bare brown hedgerows marked the irregular boundaries of the corn and pasture lands, white pearly clouds were rolling up from the west, the blue ether overhead was reflected in the little pool that was bordered with drooping russet-coloured weeds and grasses. There was colour and glitter everywhere. It was impossible for Jenny to feel so utterly sad and hopeless as she had felt indoors. She felt her step grow lighter as she went along; and the fresh keen air brought a little colour to her cheek; and the lines of weariness and pain that had been visible on her face began to disappear rapidly.

At the end of one of the fields there are stone steps leading up through a hillside copse to the fields above. The trees arch overhead, the steps wind away out of sight; at the bottom a little runlet trickles under the pathway, gurgling down under bracken and briar

till it reaches the river.
There is a quaint, tempting air about the place always; shade and coolness on a hot summer's day; sadness and sympathy when the autumn leaves come rustling down; and a *soupçon* of mystery and tradition to heighten the charm after nightfall.
Jenny lingered a little, leaning over the railing, listening to the water murmuring among the grasses,
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watching a redbreast hopping among the snow almost at her feet. Then the sound of footsteps broke the silence, and she turned to go homeward; but a laugh came ringing down under the trees, and two figures came in sight. Horatia Stanier, dark and graceful in black silk; Charlotte Kabury, startling and watchful in a dress of bright blue, with a large pink satin sash tied at the side, and some yards of scarlet velvet streaming in loops from her hair. They looked at each other, and there was half a minute's silence; but Miss Stanier's behaviour was very edifying.
'Miss Kirke! Well, really!' she exclaimed, in a tone of polite surprise, as they neared the bottom of the steps. Then she held out her hand, and said with her own elegant smile, 'How *do* you do, dear? I haven't seen you for an age.'
But her efforts to be diplomatic in nowise obscured her perceptive powers. Every sign was seen and understood—the pathos that was in the brown eyes that questioned hers in such a dumb, helpless manner, the sudden emotion that seemed to draw the full curved lips into a thin white line, the huskiness that was in the voice that said calmly:
'I'm quite well, thank you.'
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Nothing was lost, but nothing was pitied. She, Horatia Stanier, had lived all of life that was worth living in one summer, eighteen years ago; but she had managed to keep up a very respectable semblance of living since. It was hard for Jenny, doubtless; but all lives had their romantic little episodes. She would soon get over it. In the meantime, was she going down to Port St. Hilda? It was a lovely day, but very cold; she must take care not to get a chill—this very affectionately, and then an affectionate leave-taking.
'Good-bye, dear. You look *so* nice in your new hat… *Good*-bye.'
Then Charlotte Kabury, who had hardly spoken at all, held out her hand, and said, 'Good-bye,' too, glancing out with a sharp, searching glance, and speaking in a coarse, shrill voice that came back from the hillside some seconds after. She was like the passing of an east wind; but Horatia Stanier's passing was as the passing of a storm at sea, leaving a dreary waste of waters behind, and wreck-strewn shores, and hopelessness.
Utter hopelessness and blankness and silence. Jenny stood by the wooden railing. The two figures disappeared, chatting confidentially as they went gliding through the fields; the shadows
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lengthened, solitary wayfarers passed up and down the steps, the sun sank behind the hilltop, and then Jenny went home, walking listlessly through the snow, staring aimlessly into the gray gloom that was creeping down the valley.
Was it all a dream—a nightmare from which she might awake if she struggled with sufficient energy? It could hardly be that she was living her natural life. She had no power to think. She had power to see visions, to find herself in a brilliantly-lighted room, with gay toilettes all round, and flowers, and haunting music, and familiar

friends, and love-visions powerful enough to intoxicate, to suspend for the moment every mental faculty she possessed. But going back to the old Hall, through the dim, ghostly passages," to her own wide, bare room, the visions faded; all her powers seemed merged in the power to feel. The wild, rebellious longings that had beset her so grievously in the morning came back with tenfold keenness and intensity now. Why had this intolerable weight of pain come down upon her? In what had she erred? If only she might know! If only she might cry out—make complaint to anyone—ask for justice anywhere!... But she might not cry out at all. If she did,
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there would be for answer an echo from the old gray walls; for comfort, rain on the roof, and the sighing of a hollow winter wind.
'Poor little thing!' Horatia Stanier said, gliding through the fields with Charlotte Kabury, 'poor little creature! I feel *so* sorry for her.'
'Yes, you must, I'm sure,' was the reply.
But Charlotte Kabury smiled a little. Grief expressed in such pleasant liquid tones was very suggestive of the highest refined London grief alluded to by Sydney Smith.
'I wonder if she knows yet?' Charlotte said, after a pause.
'Oh yes,' Horatia replied, 'she must know by this time! It's all over the place now; though how it came to be known at all is a perfect mystery to us. I assure you we actually bribed those people to keep the matter secret. Fred says he would rather have given twenty pounds than have had it noised abroad in this way.'
Certainly it would have been to Fred Stanier's advantage that this thing of which they spoke should not have been noised abroad; the inhabitants of Cleveden were as the inhabitants of other small towns and villages, inquisitive, gossiping, criticising to a degree not conceivable except by
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experience. And the Staniers were people who, for some non-apparent reason, had always been favoured with an unusual amount of attention in the way of remark and criticism. They knew that it was so, and, so long as the remarks were of an agreeable and appreciative nature, they enjoyed the knowledge. But, unknown to them, during the last few days there had been a partial change. The people of Cleveden were not all of one opinion about this grave matter, the details of which had spread through the length and breadth of the place in an hour. A few of them were conscious of a little failure of sympathy when Fred Stanier passed on his way to the station. His handsome face and well-kept curls, his stylish air and dress, seemed to call less successfully for admiration. Hints were whispered, motives conjectured. It was a strange world, and strange things were done in it every day.
This feeling grew, and with it grew another feeling—pity for the old man whose hair was becoming visibly whiter, and whose step became feebler day by day. Even if it were possible that he should have done this thing that was laid to his charge, they would still feel nothing save pity. But to them it seemed not possible. A man who had
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lived his threescore years and ten blamelessly, was not a man to stain his last decade with a clumsy, pitiful crime like this; but, as it has been said, the people who felt thus were the minority.
The more generally-received opinion had certainly tangible ground for its existence. Abel's avarice—concerning which a thousand and one new stories came suddenly to

light—seemed of itself sufficient to account for the fact that he had fallen in a moment of temptation. But in addition to this there was his poverty—a fact that he had, in a foolish and ineffectual way, tried for a time to conceal. He had never possessed more than a quarter of the wealth he had been reputed to possess; but he had enjoyed rather than disclaimed the vague reputation of being a wealthy man, and he had suffered with morbid intensity when he knew that this reputation must fall to the ground. These facts, with others less well founded, were being dragged into the daylight now, and they did not tell in his favour. No doubt he had been more hardly pressed than anybody was aware of; and a man will do things under pressure of poverty against which his whole life before and after cries out in protest. As to his religion, he might be hypocritical, or he might not. If he were, his only
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regret would be that the thing he had done had been so openly and decidedly attributed to him; if he were not, there might be as little reason to doubt his repentance as there was to doubt his sin. And there was very slight reason for doubt on this latter point—so said the majority, and the majority is always right.
A few there were who wavered, others who charitably suspended their judgment for awhile, and one or two who were stunned and bewildered. Anthony Rede was of the latter. He dared not trust himself to judge. His sympathy was all on one side, his antipathy all on the other; but he was too honest a man not to suspect his conclusions for this very reason. He avoided speaking of the subject, as far as he could; but hardly for an hour could he avoid thinking of it; and his thoughts grew to be of a more painful nature every day. It was not possible to shut out the growing crying scandal altogether. The names of Abel Kirke and his daughter were on every tongue; and the very sound of Jenny's name swept through him with a thrill of pain. A careless comment concerning her, an unsympathetic conjecture as to the duration of her engagement to Fred Stanier, roused the ire in his veins till it was almost beyond
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his control. It was incomprehensible to him that people should *dare* to say these things, that they should dare to whisper an irreverent word of one who seemed to him worthy of all reverence. This feeling of profound respect was at the very root of his passionate tenacious love. Even before he had been aware that he loved, he had been aware of a vague unreasonable wish that she could be in some way screened from the gaze of common humanity altogether. It seemed to him now that his desires had all been reversed; and this in a way that was very hard to bear with equanimity.
Of all this—this undistinguishable throng of pity and suspicion, of defence and accusation, of honour and dishonour—Jenny as yet knew nothing. It seemed to her that she was enduring all that she had strength to endure. She had passed through the first stage of suspense—the stage of tension and fever and persistent hope that trembles on the verge of anger. She was only conscious now of the dull torturing pain that precedes dark certainty.
Sometimes she told herself that she was certain; that life had nothing more for her; that the worst had come that could come to any human being. But it often happens that when things seem at the worst, and people think they have borne all they
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can bear, they find they have to begin bearing afresh.
The second day after the party at the Poplars was a mild June day that had crept into the

middle of December—a rare day it was, one to be remembered simply for itself. Jenny, pale and listless, moved noiselessly about the house, wandering in and out through the empty rooms—gray and empty as life itself. Then she sauntered aimlessly across the wide hall, gliding like a ghost through the dim dusty air. As she entered the kitchen a ray of sunlight fell upon her, lighting up her soft brown hair, lingering tenderly upon the wan little face, and for a moment half-blinding the sad brown eyes over which the white lids drooped heavily. Then, peering into a gloomy comer by the window, she saw Milly crouching in an old arm-chair; and Milly's eyes were half blinded too, but not with sunshine. A suppressed sob broke out as Jenny laid her hand on the girl's shoulder:

'Milly, Milly—what is it?' she said gently. But Milly only sobbed a little louder than before, sobbing 'No' to each of Jenny's questions. 'Was she ill?' 'No.' 'Was she in trouble?' 'No.' 'Then why do you cry?' Jenny asked, perhaps a shade less tenderly.

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In answer to this Milly's tears came faster than ever, but a few incoherent words came too, and Jenny gathered enough to enable her to wait patiently for the end. Milly's trouble, briefly told, was this.

She had been over at Mrs. Purvis's with some mangling to be done, and being just one o'clock, Mrs. Purvis was sitting down to her after-dinner cup of tea. 'Sit down an' have a cup, Matilda,' the chatty little woman had said, much to Milly's surprise, and Milly, nothing loath, had accepted the invitation. But she had done so to her sorrow. Mrs. Purvis had introduced Miss Kirke as a topic of conversation, feeling her way gradually from skilful admiration to yet more skilful interrogation. 'Did Milly know why Miss Kirke had not been at the Poplars on Wednesday? Was there any truth in the report that it was "all over" between her and Mr. Fred Stanier? Did he come to the Hall as often as he used to do? Did he ever come at all now? When had he been there last?' These and other questions the child had answered without suspicion; and then, with many injunctions as to secrecy, Mrs. Purvis had rewarded her by acquainting her with every detail—true and untrue—of the all-engrossing scandal. 'I'm surprised 'at you've

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never heard of it,' the busy-tongued woman went on, 'but keep yer own counsel an' you'll hear more of it afore long, if I'm not mista'en. They say 'at the chapel-folks over at Port St. Hilda's takin' it up warm; an' if it's true, Abel Kirke'll be disgraced as never man was disgraced i' this neighbourhood. But as I said before, keep yer own counsel. There's no saying what'll happen. Most likely as you'll be wantin' a place, Matilda. If you do, you know where to find a friend.'

Perhaps this idea of 'wanting a place' had as much to do with Milly's distress as any other part of Mrs. Purvis's information. Be this as it may, her distress was very real, and Jenny saw that it was, and tried to alleviate it a little before she turned away to sit face to face with herself for awhile.

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BOOK FOURTH: THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

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CHAPTER I.

BY THE RIVER-SIDE.

'Or has the shock, so harshly given,
Confused me like the unhappy bark
That strikes by night a craggy shelf,
And staggers blindly ere she sink?
And stunned me from my power to think,
And all my knowledge of myself.'

TENNYSON : *In Memoriam.*

THE first effect of the blow was utter stupefaction. Jenny recalled the words she had heard, remembered the day when she went down to Port St. Hilda, went over all with a dull, benumbed consciousness of incapacity to feel—an incapacity that was something of a satisfaction to her for a time. She sat silent, stirless, not daring to change her position, lest thought and sensation should change too.

But a human soul cannot be encouraged to remain in an attitude like this. To a mind not totally unhinged words must bring meaning. Life

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returns all too rapidly—power to be, to do, to suffer; and the latter power is greatest of the three.

Yet Jenny remained strangely calm, as people will do when a new and weighty sorrow falls upon sorrowful days. This new grief was bewildering—perplexing alike to heart and brain. Milly had told her of the divided opinions that were in existence, and for a brief time her own opinion was divided too. This was the bitterest time of all. One of the sharpest pangs that humanity can suffer comes with the suspicion that the being who professed to hold you dearest, upon whom you had showered your heart's best and most passionate love, is unworthy of any love at all—unworthy even of respect.

She was aware that if Fred was not innocent his guilt would be guiltless of the greed of gain, that he could only have had one motive for a deed so strangely pitiful, so strangely cruel. And what a motive! Could it possibly have seemed to him adequate? Had it been possible for him even to dwell upon it consciously? Could a human heart become cold, estranged, implacable, where it had been tender, loving, passionate? Nay, these things were not possible. Emotion rushed backward for

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the moment, ignoring the days and weeks of pain and slowly-dying faith. Doubt of Fred's honour became sin—a thing that was scorn to herself! *He* do a deed so mean, so small? Never! And then, in spite of all, came pity for him, that his name should have been stained for an hour; and then gratitude that he should have forborne to take the steps he might have taken to remove the stain.

Yet, still the sorrow was keen and bewildering. If Fred was innocent, there was an alternative not to be faced without agony. It was not possible to face it. But, after all, there might have been mistake, misrepresentation. She would go down to Mrs. Rede's. Perhaps Rachel might have come back. Some gleam of truth might be attainable in some way.

She walked down the village street very calmly and firmly, the impressionable, over-sensitive nature within her half paralyzed by the weight of pain. What did it matter what people thought? Why should she care to know how opinion leaned? Why should she care to learn even the truth? There was no sustaining rush of emotion now. Memory opened her disillusionizing pages; Experience gave her naked opinion unbidden. The

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truth—whatever the nature of it—would be the death-blow of the hope that had been so long in dying.
Beyond the village, beyond the mill, the water rushes down from above the mill-dam to the pebbly bed of the river—the sound varying as the seasons vary, harmonizing with the scene in a subtle, indescribable way that cannot be appreciated till after long acquaintance. The scene itself has charm, even in winter, and on this mild December day there was special charm. The blue ether overhead was like the blue of April; soft, sunwhite clouds swept the horizon; olive-coloured fields and dun-brown woods were etherealized by a dreamy, purple-gray haze that hung over them. The river broadened and deepened above to a still, placid lake; patches of colour gleamed from either side of it, glimpses of low-lying emerald pasture, sprays of curving thorny briar, wild weeds graceful in form and line, stray leaves russet and yellow, the purple, prickly stem of the bramble straggled quite down to the edge of the water—everywhere there was colour and quiet beauty.
Jenny was lingering insensibly. She had left the mill behind now, and the sound of the water in the distance seemed to lull her troubled senses into
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a tranquillity as grateful as it was unreal. She was startled presently. There was a rushing sound among the dry vegetation behind her, and a large brown retriever dashed out from the briars at her feet. 'Down, Nero,' she said, with a kind of gasp, feeling as if her heart had suddenly stood still. Then she turned and stood still herself, face to face with Fred Stanier.
Fred's vexation did not betray itself. He raised his hat and held out his hand without any apparent hesitation. He would have spoken—he tried to speak; but only a broken murmur was audible.
For a moment Jenny was silent too. She was conscious of no active self-repression. Her whole strength was centred in the effort to read the expression that was on Fred Stanier's face, to define the change that seemed to have come over his whole being. He was suffering, unquestionably the man was suffering; he looked worn and wan, and older by half a dozen years. He did not shrink from this silent questioning. He fancied there was a shade of sternness in it; but his only response was a look of quiet sadness and compassion.
'I am glad we have met,' Jenny said at last, in a cold, hard voice. There was no smile on the
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white firm lips, the intense searching gaze was not modified in any way.
'Yes, yes…Perhaps it is better,' Fred said, with some confusion. He was beginning to be conscious of astonishment, perhaps of some feeling less welcome than astonishment. This Jenny Kirke was not the person he had known before.
'It is certainly better,' Jenny said, still speaking quietly, but with a perceptible increase of nervous intensity in her tone and manner. The suffering of the past days was yielding its full measure of strength. Hope being dead, she had nothing to fear. Life lay before her, a dreary silent desert, with no landmarks save endurance, and pangs of shame, and hopeless unwitnessed strife. The remembrance of the silence that had been imposed upon her in the past, the anticipation of the silence that must inevitably be kept in the future, came upon her with a strength that was half maddening, turning the tenderness that was in her to bitterness. She would speak now—speak so much of the truth as she

could put into words boldly.

'Yes—certainly it was better they had met,' she said. Then she paused awhile, and added, with desperate deliberation:

'I know all that has happened.'

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For a moment Fred seemed to quail: a slight nervous movement was perceptible in him.

'I was afraid you would get to know,' he said, after a pause, speaking in a gentle, commiserative way. 'I did all I could to prevent its being known.'

'*What* did you do?'

'There is no need for us to enter into details now.'

'There is every need. I have a right to demand the smallest particulars,' Jenny said, with a certain sharpness. She was beginning to feel exasperated, without, as yet, exactly knowing why.

'It is a painful matter—too painful altogether. We had better avoid it,' Fred replied, looking vaguely beyond Jenny into the purple haze that was over the hills.

Jenny began to perceive the cause of her exasperation. Fred was taking refuge in that irritating elusiveness that had so often roused her before. What *could* she do?

'To be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain.'

If she had been a man she would have struck him, she told herself. Being a woman, she could only bite her lip, and clasp her hands rigidly

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together, and stand quietly whilst her passionate, indivisible love and anger consumed her very soul. But she would not be silenced yet.

'It *is* painful,' she said, repressing her irritation, and still speaking out of that over-mastering intensity of mood that seemed so strange to Fred.

'It *is* painful, but I am used to pain now. A little more or less won't matter. I want to know what you did to prevent this thing being known, and *why* you wanted to keep it unknown… You are not obliged to tell me,' she added, with a flash of new meaning in her glance. 'I can get the truth from Nathan Boulby.'

'Then I think I would rather you did get it from him,' Fred replied, with a certain quiet dignity that had more effect than he was aware of, and his answer was as convincing as it was unexpected.

Beyond all doubt convincing. Fred would not have been so willing that this matter should be investigated if there had been any chance of such investigation proving injurious to himself. Perhaps he desired it, and only refrained from expressing his desire from motives of highest and truest charity. Doubtless, he knew the truth, and was content that others should not know—content to bear whispering and suspicion himself, that another

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might be saved from disgrace and humiliation. Jenny would have honoured him for this had that other been the merest stranger; as the matter stood, how was it possible that she should not do more than honour him? How was it possible to withstand the love and gratitude and pain that swept through her with such a sudden force?

The older, and, as it seemed to her now, the deeper pain, came back, with all its small yet hard and cruel details. The hundreds of miserable little disappointments that had

gone to the making up of the bitter whole, the wild longings that had had to be crushed and trodden underfoot; the ceaseless crying out of her loving, passionate nature against the calculated impassiveness of a nature that had yet a strange and strong fascination for her. How was it possible to withstand? Her strength seemed to depart from her, and with it her pride. There was nothing left but pallor, and trembling lips, and feeblest, most ineffectual utterance.

'I was wishing to see you before,' she said, turning a little, so that her face was slightly averted, and laying her hand upon the wooden railing—' before I knew anything of this—this later trouble.'

Then she stopped. No other words would come.

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And Fred could not help her. It was not for him to understand the hungry look; the sad, drooping attitude; the aching misery that was in every line and feature of her face.

Still silence—hard, unbearable silence, and that peculiar, indefinable vagueness on his face that was worse to bear than an intelligible blow.

But Jenny had no strength left for further irritation. A few scalding tears came to her eyes; they did not fall, but the consciousness that her weakness was becoming visible increased that weakness. She tried to speak, but a sob burst forth, and her first words were like a low, quivering cry.

'Fred, Fred! What have I done? Why are you so strange?' She was looking full into his face now, and her eyes had in them a very agony of supplication and entreaty. 'Why are you so strange? Why will you not say one single word that can either explain the past, or throw even a gleam of light upon the future? You know what I have endured—what I am enduring still—you cannot help knowing. If you cared for me in the least, you couldn't bear the knowledge. But you cannot care for me. You have never cared. I have never been more to you than a toy is to a

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child—a thing to be played with, and broken, and thrown away.'

'Jenny, you are mistaken,' Fred replied, with heightened colour and a certain vibration in his voice. 'Let me tell you, once for all, that you wrong me there. I have loved you; I love you still. And if the separation that circumstance has made inevitable is painful to you, it does not follow that for me it will be painless.'

It was Jenny's turn to be silent now, to become still paler than before, to look at Fred with uncomprehending eyes.

Fred resumed, still speaking with emotion, and with something of tenderness and compassion in his tone:

'I cannot speak plainly—I should be a brute if I could; but I think if you will try to understand my position you will understand what plain speaking would come to. It is no light matter to me, I assure you. I cannot teach myself to forget so easily as you may think. But there is no alternative—you must see that there is no alternative.'

Still no audible answer. The muscles of Jenny's face tightened a little, the tears forgot to fall. Fred went on again:

'I think with you that it was fortunate we met

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to-day—that it was better for us both to have a final understanding.' Then he paused awhile… 'It is a hard moment too,' he said, as if speaking to himself; and there was a quiver in his voice, and an ashy paleness on his lips, and his eyes were heavy with a

misery altogether unfeigned. 'I wish we had never seen each other!' he exclaimed, with a passionate movement.
'Yes; it would have been better if we had never met,' Jenny echoed quietly, hardly knowing that she spoke. A touch of pity was beginning to mingle with her thoughts.
Her first impression had been that Fred was suffering, and the impression was acquiring new force. She had done what he had told her to do—she had tried to understand his position, and it seemed quite probable to her that it might be a very painful one. Clearly he was doing the one thing possible for him to do; and she told herself in one rapid thought that if he had been willing to do the thing that was impossible, if he had been willing to make her his wife, to be to her as if all this shame and disgrace had never been, she would not have taken advantage of such willingness. Perhaps for one brief instant she wished that he had shown himself capable of the sacrifice;
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but the wish was crowded out by other wishes. For the moment her strong, blind, tenacious love had the effect it had had in so many other moments. The long dreary past was ignored; and when it thrust itself imperiously forward, it was only that it might be excused. The old fear was resolved into a certainty. She had wearied Fred—showered her overweighted love upon him too freely. A colder or more reticent woman would have kept him at her feet, well content to be there. But his weariness might not have been in any way determinative. Change in her—the change she had already decided upon—might have wrought change in him. The clouds might have passed away. The radiance of an old love with new life in it might have been hers. And in all this wide 'might have been' there seemed no improbability. How should there be, when Fred was standing there before her, the love in him yet alive? Doubtless it was as he had said. 'I love you still. This love must die, though it die painfully. There is no alternative.'
And she had seen for herself that there was no alternative. She could hardly comprehend anything beyond the mere fact as yet; but she could acquiesce quietly and quickly, and by so doing perhaps make matters easier for him. She wished
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she had seen things in this light before. Instead of paining him, she might have lessened the pain he had been feeling previously. She would try to make up for it now. If nothing else was to be won at this last moment, she would try to win gratitude.
'Certainly it would have been better for us both if we had never met,' she said, speaking with some difficulty. Her heart was palpitating, and her breathing was of a hysterical kind very hard to control. 'It would have been better far; but that can be no comfort to either of us now. It seems we have to part—let us part without bitterness. Forgive me for anything you may have suffered through me… for anything you may have to suffer… through me—or mine; and—'
'Don't, Jenny—don't!' Fred broke in, impatient of the emotion that was clutching him in its strong grasp. 'I have nothing to forgive—I can never forget.' Then, yielding to an electric impulse, and hardly knowing that he yielded, he drew Jenny to him; and with one passionate kiss, that was half prevented by a sob, he was gone.
Jenny did not try to think as she went back along the road. The stray leaves had begun to shiver sadly, the blue ether was deepening to a
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cold gray, the rush of the water had a sullen sound.

'Ah, Love, but a day,
And the world has changed,
The sun's away,
And the bird's estranged;
The wind has dropped,
And the sky's deranged.'

She remembered the expression of sympathy afterward—remembered, wondering at her own passiveness. But she was not merely passive. In spite of all the weight of sorrow that was upon her, there was a sense of relief—the reaction natural after long-continued strain. Her life for months past had been a life of fever and tension; her nerves had been overtasked by the ceaseless fret and jar of pain and disappointment. There could be no more disappointment. There could be nothing in the future. She had lived her life.

Yet there was a strange aching in her tranquillity . The drear old home was drearier than before; and her father's step was slower and heavier, and his withered face was grayer and thinner. A tear or two trembled in Jenny's eyes as she made his tea and set it before him, and her movements had the quiet pathos of one moving by a sick-bed. She

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kissed him before he left the room, and stroked his long white hair tenderly. No word was said, but the old man's quivering lips showed that the mute sympathy was fully understood.

An hour or two later Rachel Bede went up to the old Hall. She had only come home during the day; but she had heard the story of Abel Kirke's disgrace, and Jenny saw that she had heard. They were silent for the first few moments, and nervously awkward both of them. Then they sat down by the fire, and Jenny felt comforted without knowing why; and by degrees strength came back, and the history of that long sad day was put into words. Broken, unintelligible words for the most part, but Rachel was quick to understand, quicker still to sympathize—to give what help might be given at such a moment. At first she listened only, keenly alive to the fact that a trouble lying heavily upon the heart is lightened by every word concerning it that the tongue can utter. Then, with wondrous touch, she drew forth tones and echoes of tones that had lain dormant, roused a certain depth of resolution, awoke a feeble sense of the duty and value of patient endurance. There was no attempt to ignore the weight of sorrow and shame, the broken life, the intolerable pain of a hopeless love.

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Jenny herself was satisfied with the fulness of Rachel's recognition of these things, and wondered for the moment how it was possible for her to enter so completely into feelings of which she had had no experience.

Then Rachel went away—lingering tenderly over the parting, though it was only for the night.

'I shall come and see you again to-morrow,' she said, stroking the weary face with gentle fingers; 'and shall I give you something to think of till I come?'

'Yes—if it's something easy. I can't think much.'

'It is very easy—it is called the ninth beatitude, and was written or spoken by St. Francis de Sales:

' "Blessed are the hearts that bend, for they shall never break." '

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CHAPTER II.

WINTER-TIME.

'At peace! ay, the peace of the desert—
The silence, the deep desolation,
That comes when the blast has swept o'er us,
And buries our hopes.

* * * * *

At peace! ay, the peace of the ocean,
When past is the storm where we foundered,
And eager aud breathless the morning,
Looks over the waste.'

W.W.S.

YET still the gray clouds hung low and heavy, and the wind sighed drearily; and the rain was on the roof all night, and went on dripping among the rank grass and the tangled weeds all day.

The rain came down ceaselessly, quivering from the bare boughs to the deserted paths. At nightfall the wind moaned over the fields and round the house with a moan that seemed almost human; and a pale, shrouded moon crept over the trees, throwing a weird light upon the grim old Hall, upon the desolate garden. The arched jawbone of the whale gleamed over the gate, white and ghostly; eerie sounds came sobbing and wailing through the

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valley; and from beyond the hills came the hollow surging of the sea.

All round and above the stone-mullioned windows the dripping ivy shivered piteously; the diamond panes creaked in the rain-laden wind; the damp stains on the old gray walls within spread higher and wider, and the echoes seemed to grow more hollow and feeble. There were few sounds to awake any echo. The old clock ticked with oppressive monotony; Abel Kirke walked slowly and heavily over the carpetless floor, up the oaken stair. The whistle of the five o'clock train came over the fields; Jenny sobbed a low, distressing sob. The sound of the five o'clock train had been a sound of joy not so long ago, new and thrilling every day.

No tears fell. The poor little face was

'White and calm as frost
On days too cold for raining any more.'

But this calmness was not yet a permanent mood. Virtue does not spring up in the heart as Jonah's gourd sprang up on the east of Nineveh. She had tried to be good,' but not successfully—this, perhaps, as much because her standard of goodness was vague and indefinite as because it was high.

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She tried to pray, but that was hard—almost impossible, seeing that there was nothing but an unknown blackness and silence all round. Besides, prayer did not seem suitable for a trouble like hers. A broken heart was not an acceptable thing in itself; there was the manner of breaking to be considered.

It was one of those dark hours known to most—hours wherein life seems one vast oppressive burden, and the threescore-years-and-ten years of endless labour and sorrow. Endless and profitless. Where is the fruit of it all? What shall we reap of this bitter

sowing?... These, and other questions; but no answer anywhere. Dark, faithless, heathenish questions! What is truth? asked Pilate; and Truth was silent before him. What is sorrow? ask we; and the Man of Sorrows answers never a word.
Dark hours, made darker many a time by unchecked bitterness of thought and fits of half wilful perversity. Jenny's moods were various as a sick man's dreams. One hour grief had its own wild way, and memory was as a strong stimulant. There were times when her heart seemed to turn backward merely to seek fresh agony for itself—nay, even to invent circumstances of agony that
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had never been. As the patients in a hospital find a certain pleasurable relief to the monotony of their lives in the application of blisters and leeches, so did Jenny Kirke find relief in recalling and inventing details of extremest misery in heightening and colouring the things that had been, in creating and dreaming of things that might have been.
Then came

'The drowsy calm that steals on worn-out anguish.'

Sensation seemed to die within her. The broken affection was not only broken, it was destroyed. She could think of Stanier without a thrill, without a pang. She could blame him or praise him as her thought of him required. She could do anything but forget him. Her mind presented him as at a great distance, wan and vague as the distance of years or miles—still, it presented him.
And still the rain came down—sadly on the roof all night, and sadly from the bare boughs to the untrodden paths all day. The wind came wuthering round the house incessantly, the diamond panes creaked in the gust, the old clock ticked slowly, and Abel Kirke walked heavily to and fro over the sanded floor.
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'Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard; I cry aloud, but there is no judgment.'
So he groaned, walking with bowed white head, and crossed hands, and drooping figure.
All round in the villages, and beyond in the town, men talked of him, and the din grew louder—rose at last among the brethren at Bethel Chapel to a clamour for investigation, for stronger measures if need were.
'If there be an Achan in the camp let him be brought forth, stoned with stones till he die.'
After much waste of words it was decided that there should be a meeting—not a public meeting; the office-bearing members of 'The Church' alone were invited to attend. It was to be held in the body of the chapel.
'It's the saddest affair that's ever 'appened in our connection,' Brother Hall said.
The time was evening; the place Brother Hall's back-parlour.
'It's more than sad,' replied Brother Page; 'an' it seems to me as if nothing but sadness could come out of it. If he's innocent, why hasn't he said so—why has he never offered no explanation o' no kind whatsoever?'
Mr. Verdon rose from his chair, and assumed an
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oratorical tone and attitude. The minister was a stout pink-faced man, with mild blue eyes and curly hair, and an odd expression produced by the blending of natural good

spirits with an air of consciouslyacquired solemnity.
'Brother Page,' said the minister, bending forward, and placing his fat pink hand on the table, 'Brother Page, "Judge not!" You can finish the text for yourself: I only remind you of it, "Judge not." Brother Kirke is aware that appearances are strong against him—overwhelmingly strong; he is an aged man, very aged; and in addition to the feebleness and despondency natural to such age, he is cast down by much sorrow, by poverty nay, I fear by actual dread of want. It may be that, feeling himself utterly powerless to make such effort as would be needed to prove his innocence, he prefers to make no effort whatever; it may be that he has not even strength within himself to prefer one course to another at all, but is simply bowing his head as the trees of the forest bow before the wind. Let us deal gently with the old man, and encouragingly; let us give him this chance of vindicating himself, not in the spirit of judges and censors, but in the spirit of fellow-sinners, of men who can support and sympathize if he has been
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unjustly accused; who can sympathize and pity if there has been no injustice.'
Brother Page said 'Hear, hear!' as Mr. Verdon sat down, and Brother Hall thumped the table; and then some notes of invitation were penned. One was longer than the rest; more time was given to it, more consultation held over it. Finally it was copied, folded, and addressed to Abel Kirke.
It was received by Abel on the following evening as he was sitting down to tea; but the tea was left untasted. The old man's hands trembled as he read, his lips quivered, and his eyes were dilated. These were the words that were before him:

'DEARLY BELOVED BROTHER,

'It is our painful duty to ask your attendance at a meeting to be held in Bethel Chapel, at seven o'clock in the evening of the fifteenth day of January. The object of this meeting may probably occur to you, as you are doubtless aware of the scandal that is being circulated concerning you, a scandal that is causing very sad offence to the Church.
'We the undersigned, with many others, are unwilling to accept it as true, and are of opinion that it is our duty to offer you an opportunity of
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declaring its untruth. Trusting that you will be ready and willing to profit by this opportunity, we remain,

'Hopefully and truly yours,
'LUKE E. VERDON.
'THOMAS PAGE.
'WILLIAM HALL.'

The old man read this note twice; then he locked it in his desk, and went slowly and silently out of the room, tottering up the echoing stair.
There was yet more than three weeks to the day of the meeting. Christmas, with its train of sad memories, of sadder realities, had to come and go. Abel Kirke and his daughter were quite alone in the old Hall now. Milly had gone. Not only her wages but her food had become matter of consideration. Poverty was beginning to press heavily. Christmas, the traditional time of mirth, intensifies most kinds of misery. Jenny was growing used

to misery. She had ceased to rebel, even in thought; but the sights and sounds from which there was no escape lent new pangs to many an old heartache. There was sadness in the quavering voice of the old man who sang the Christmas Carol; the carts laden with holly loomed against the sky darkly and
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drearily as they went up the hill; the chime of the church bells floating through the valley on Christmas morning found a discordant echo in the uplands beyond Cleveden.
Jenny remained indoors as much as possible till after New Year's Day. Then she felt a little sense of relief; a little longing to breathe freer air, to escape from the oppressive blankness and silence that was her life. She stood a minute at the gate. Which way should she turn? She wanted to be alone, and the loneliest road was up the hill, but she did not go that way.
She remembered the chilly dismal day afterward; the children playing in the mud as she went through the village, the pools of brown water in the road that led to Stonebrig. She felt weak and confused. Was she going to be ill? she wondered, as she sauntered listlessly by the bare hedgerows. Then she turned to the left and crossed a bridge that led to a road with many turns in it, and hills and valleys, and brown overhanging trees. She would not go far, she said to herself, only to where the road branched off to Hainton-on-the-Hill.
She never knew how it all happened. The hedges were high where the three roads met;
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there was a sound of footsteps, of a low musical voice; then two absorbed figures gliding under the trees; Fred Stanier's hand laid lightly within Miss Kabury's arm.
Nothing more than this. They did not start nor modify in any way the confiding attitude, betraying more perhaps by this *insouciance* than by the attitude itself. They bowed, passed on, smiled to each other in passing, leaving Jenny standing quite still in the middle of the road, not knowing that she stood. She had turned very pale, she was twining her small brown hands tightly one over the other, trying to persuade herself that she had been the dupe of her own imagination, that what she had seen had no meaning, that signs were not significant.
Then, creeping to the side of the road, she sank down by the bare gnarled roots of an old oak. Two gaunt boughs were stretched out above her, the dead weeds quivered in the hedgerow, the leaden clouds swept slowly over the hilltop.
Crouching down, burying her face in her hands, sobbing aloud with a tearless sob; and none to see, none to hear, none to answer.
'Fred, Fred! is it possible!' she cried, with a quiet, complaining cry. 'Is it possible? If you
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only knew how I loved you—how I love you still in spite of all, how I love you still! If you knew that I have nothing to forgive, nothing to forget, nothing in me sitting here now but love! If only you knew, if only you could believe, if only you could understand!'
The chill wind blew more chilly, whirling the dead leaves down the hill, tossing the gaunt brown arms to and fro against the sky, whispering sadly over the fields and among the leafless trees.
Then she crept wearily down the road again; shivering piteously, cold all through, save over her eyes. There were no tears to fall. Now and then a sob broke from her, a wild cry, a plea for pity, for compassion. If there might be no love, then a little compassion.

If he would only not be so hard, so cruel—if he would only vouchsafe a kindly glance, a sympathetic word, a drop of comfort by the way. It was the horrible hardness that was in him, that was in all things, that was pressing her down, crushing the life out of her.
She began to walk more rapidly, and her words came more wildly: it was as if some fever thrill was hurrying through her veins. There is no need to write those wild words here—mad words
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they would seem, but Jenny was not mad. She could by an act of will have controlled herself at any moment; but she was in that strange state of mind, known to many a stricken being before her, when it is a relief to act as if no such faculty as will had ever been given. To let blind impulse lead where it may. To cease from thought, or purpose, or restraint. To sit down and die, or to die talking, or walking about—anything but to keep up the strain of conscious living.
But Jenny was obliged to keep up the strain; to go back through the village street, through the moss-grown courtyard, through the dolesome rooms; to act and speak as she had acted and spoken before. She was more absorbed, her movements were more mechanical, her eyes were heavier, her lips more compressed; but there was none to perceive, none to regret. As the days went on she ceased to feel regret herself, consciously; fell back again into the dull stupor of the previous days. But it was a deeper stupor than before, and more dangerous. Brooding for ever on one thought, dreaming for ever the same dreams, till her heart was sick and her brain wearied to confusion, the danger increased apace. One dark day brought a moment to be shuddered over for years. Life was
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of no value now, save for her father's sake. But for his sake?... She was obliged to go on living.
Rachel coming and going meanwhile was touched to new distress daily. Jenny's mood was beyond her now, something she could not understand, nor touch nor reach with any word of comfort or support. There was no complaint now, no outpouring of sorrow. Sympathy awakened no response; when sympathy was withheld no reproach followed.
And still the murmur of gossip went on. Jenny had not heard of the coming meeting, but everyone else had heard. Abel Kirke's disgrace was consummated beforehand. The machinery of the law might not be set in motion, the brethren of Bethel Chapel might find it expedient to bring in a verdict of 'not proven,' but nothing could avert an open disgrace. There were still the few who pitied him, the few who lamented his too-evident poverty, but these few were powerless to do anything more than pity. Anthony Bede walked about his counting-house half maddened by the sense of powerlessness. He devised plans, only to find that they were impracticable; he wrote letters, only to tear them into a dozen pieces. He blamed himself for his helplessness, though it was inevitable;
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he blamed the world for its hardness, though it was natural. Jenny he blamed, and then hated himself far so doing; a stronger feeling came in when he thought of Fred Stanier, and he ground his teeth.
A calmer and deeper state of feeling succeeded this. It now wanted only three days to the much-talked-of fifteenth of January. If he decided to do what his whole being seemed to impel him to do, he must do it at once. Near two hours he sat by his desk in

quiet thought. His impulse had been to act without thinking for a moment; and his impulse was noble and generous, as the impulse of true affection cannot fail to be; but he had not obeyed it. His love had been rejected, and rejected love is very humiliating. He shrank from putting himself in the way of fresh pain, of receiving fresh proof that his love was burdensome and unwelcome. But this was thinking only of himself; and such thought must be put away altogether. He must take the risk. If he failed? Well, he had failed before. It would be nothing new, though there might be new pain in it.
So he thought, walking through the courtyard of the old Hall, raising the heavy painted knocker. It was strange how nonchalant he looked and moved. The door opened slowly, a timid, shrinking
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figure stood in the shade, a white face changing to deepest crimson. Anthony stood there, dark and large, smiling pleasantly, holding out his hand carelessly, though his heart was beating till he could almost hear it. Jenny's pulse was bounding too, but it soon began to flag, and the crimson flush died out as quickly as it came. Nothing escaped Anthony; the thinness of the hand that lay for a moment in his, the changing colour, the lifeless expression. Everything was noted, from the frayed linen collar that Jenny wore, to the half-dead ashes that smouldered in the grate.
Jenny had been quite alone. Anthony seated himself with the large easy way he had in Abel's armchair, placing first another chair for Jenny close by him. Jenny was roused to a little wonder—wondering first why he came, then at his strong calm, unembarrassed manner; not exactly a studied manner, but partly the result of effort, partly of absence of hope. Yet, for all his ease, there was a new respect and deference in him; and his face had the watchfulness, the guarded susceptivity, of repressed love; his voice the soft, indefinable intonation of sympathy.
A moment or two he spoke of indifferent things; then he sat silent, looking with fixed, intent look
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through the diamond panes. A few flakes of snow were fluttering down; beyond was a gray-white world, and nothing clear.
Then he turned, and said, a little abruptly, yet gently:
'Jenny, you will be wondering why I am here.—I think I am going to find it difficult to tell you.'
'Are you afraid of me?' she asked, with a smile.
'I am afraid of paining you—I wouldn't pain you for the world. But I want to be of use to you—I must do something. I can't go on enduring what I have been enduring lately.'
Jenny looked up with a moment's surprise; then her eyes drooped again, a look of distress passed over her face; and she made a little nervous movement, as if she would have been glad to escape. Anthony saw all this, and the sight was bitter.
'If you had had brothers, or friends who had been to you as brothers, I wouldn't have come to trouble you now,' he went on again, speaking a little less eagerly, a little more carefully than before. 'I had no right to come, and only one excuse for coming, and this excuse perhaps not a very acceptable one… '
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'You do not need any excuse,' Jenny said, looking into his face with the old straightforward look. 'I think I know what you want to say. You want to be my friend… I am glad,' she said simply, holding out her hand and placing it in Anthony's for a

moment. And for that moment she looked glad, and a little relieved; but Anthony spoke again.
'Yes; I want to be your friend,' he said, speaking with a new vehemence. 'I have always wanted that, but I need not tell you, not that only… You must let me speak out, Jenny,' he said, preventing an interruption. 'I know you will think this is no time for such speaking. In one sense you are right, but there is another sense… I cannot speak very plainly. There are things I cannot remind you of, but I want to take you away from them, so that you will never be reminded of them again. Jenny, you can't refuse me—for your father's sake you can't refuse me. I will give my whole thought, my whole life, to make your happiness and his.'
He was bending down toward her now, his dark, intense eyes looking pleadingly into hers, his whole being earnest, eager, resistless in its eagerness. It was hardly possible to think; but Jenny did not think; she was only conscious of distress, and pain,
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and oppression. Why could not Anthony see that his love was a mistake, that his kindness was a burden? she wondered fretfully, and that her heart was still sore with disappointment is the only excuse that can be offered for such fretfulness. She hardly knew that she was silent, but Anthony knew, and the silence pleased him.
'If you will think of it, dear,' he said, laying one of his big brown hands upon her shoulder with a kind of fatherly instinct—'if you will think of it, you will see why I have come at this inopportune moment. It might have been better for me to have waited awhile, but I couldn't wait. We are not strangers to each other. If you cannot love me just now, I feel certain that you will love me—; no, don't interrupt me; I hope I say it without presumption, but I feel as if it were impossible that such love as mine should live and grow and never awaken any response in you—never be anything to you at all; never be anything to me but a life-long hunger and aching of heart.'
Jenny had been thinking, and had hardly heard the last words. Perhaps, after all, there was something generous in Anthony's coming at such a time, on such an errand. How blind she had been! How good he was!
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'Anthony,' she said, looking up sadly, speaking with a quiet, pathetic voice, 'I know you have not forgotten, though you forbear to remind me. Some time ago I told you that I did love you. I thought I did, but I did not know what love was. I know now. This that you ask can never be. There is no one in the world like you. I care more for you than you think. But I can never love you—and even if I did… '
'Jenny, Jenny, think again before you say that!' Anthony exclaimed, with changing face and voice. Past suffering had lent a power to Jenny's tone and word and manner that was undermining his hope rapidly. It is difficult to plead with a sinking heart, but Anthony did plead.
'Think again, Jenny,' he said, controlling his distress with an effort. 'It is not only for my own sake I plead, but for yours and your father's. Think how much better it would be if we were to go away from Cleveden at once for awhile, and to take him with us… I could make you happy, Jenny, I know I could. And think of my mother and Rachel—what a pleasure it would be to them!... If you cannot—if it is impossible for you to say the word I want you to say just now, take a little time to think of it—give me a little hope.'
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'That would be wrong,' she said, with the old shadow of trouble coming into her eyes. She could say no more just then; her voice sounded full of sobs and tears. Rising from her chair, she walked toward the window, and bent over her plants for a minute or two. Then she came back again.

'Anthony,' she said, in a calm voice, and with wistful, beseeching eyes— 'Anthony, don't ask me any more. You know all that has been. There is no hope for me. There can never be any hope. I should like to lie down and die… Please don't ask me any more!'

Anthony had told himself that he had very little hope, yet he was strangely unprepared for disappointment. He was crushed, powerless to move or speak. He could not but do as she wished. It would have been cruelty to deny a thing asked with such wistful earnestness. She was asking it still, he thought, as his eyes met hers again; there was a timid helplessness about her that appealed to the most unselfish side of his love. No, he would not trouble her again… Then a great silence fell upon him; there was nothing with him save the remembrance of past pain, the foretaste of pain to come.

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Jenny was silent too. Had she pained him more than she need have done? She feared to ask him, to give any sign that might look like change of feeling. But when Anthony spoke again there was a little change in her manner, though she was not aware of it.

He only spoke to beg that she would look upon him as a friend, but he spoke as one sadly aware how little any real friendship between them would be possible now.

Jenny was grateful, and she looked and spoke as if she were, but he did not seem in any way touched by her gratitude. Was he going to be hard, impassive, as other people were? she wondered as he rose to go. But he took her hand very tenderly, looked into her face very sadly, and as he looked a mist came over his eyes, shutting out for a moment the sight that so pained him. It was hard to leave her there alone with her sorrow, hard to turn hopelessly and helplessly away.

Jenny stood at the door, watching him as he walked slowly through the courtyard. The snow was falling fast now; lying softly on the ivy, on the grasses and mosses that crept among the stones. Anthony did not turn to look at her again. Was she hoping that he would? She hardly

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knew. A chill came over her as she closed the heavy door. It seemed dark indoors, and colder there than out in the snow.

CHAPTER III.

ABREPTUS.

'He fixed thee 'mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou forsooth wouldst fain arrest;
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth sufficiently impressed.

R. BROWNING: *Rabbi Ben Ezra.*

AN old man singing the songs of his youth in a high, quavering, tuneless voice, checking himself with a muttered prayer, and changing from song to psalm. A young girl, whose singing was hushed, out of whose life all harmony had departed.

Or seemingly departed. Are there two harmonies in human life? A lower harmony, that can be heard of all *men.* Fortune smiling graciously; a courteous Fate bringing kind friends; circumstances neatly fitting; fair winds, cloudless skies, a sunny voyage all

through.
A higher harmony, that, like the wind of heaven,
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stealeth where it listeth, none knowing whence it cometh nor whither it goeth. A harmony born of pain and discord, of petty daily strife and ceaseless aching negation. The days pass slowly on, grinding us down lower and lower with heavy events, choking our souls with the dust they make. Music! It would be something to get food and raiment peacefully. A kindly word or two would make the world a paradise. We have little thought of any other paradise.
There may be rest, and perhaps light, somewhere on the other side of darkness, but we have little energy for speculation of this kind. Mere endurance uses up what we have of vitality over and above what is required for the act of living. But we go on living, and much depends upon the manner of this living.
Patience is all but impossible, but at least we strive against impatience; we may have nothing to hope for, but we fight manfully against despair; we maintain an attitude—not exactly of waiting, we have nothing to wait for, but an attitude of toleration that may possibly be appreciated somewhere if we only knew it. Not a very reverent state of mind, perhaps, but in no way defiant, and not very exalted; but is it uncommon?
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Enduring, struggling, and now and then listening. Listening when Nature touches us with her tender hand: by the sound of her waters, by the rustling of leaves in her lonely places, by her stars shining holily down from midnight skies. Listening when human voices reach us—friendly lips offering us sympathy, kindliness, encouragement; putting away from us

'That hardening of the heart that brings
Irreverence for the dreams of youth.'

Poet lips singing noble songs, raising us a moment at a time from things hard and narrow. And lips that teach truths beyond poetry; pleading with us for ever, offering us of the best without money and without price, crying all day long, 'Why will ye die?'
And listening yet again, when One higher still puts out a hand to touch us—His own hand, touching us, perhaps, by pain; perhaps, we know not how. There is a silence—an unconscious reception of quickening influence, a lifting up of the soul from the sordid, paltry atmosphere around it. And then comes the strain that is to us what the sound of the harp was to the prophet Elisha—a sound to calm the troubled spirit, to awaken it to new perceptions, to develop in it new powers.
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Fitfully and faintly this higher harmony comes to the best. How, then, should it come to us, who are so very far from the best; to such as the poor struggling woman of whom I write—people in whom is no good thing at all.
Did she hear it as she knelt there alone, her face buried in her hands, her one bitter cry echoing to the very roof of the wide old Hall—perhaps beyond the roof?
All day the old man had quavered feebly from song to hymn, stopping to mutter his prayer, to express his grief or his faith, in the language of prophet or psalmist. As the day wore on into evening, the grief seemed to lose itself in the faith. The careworn expression that had marred his features disappeared. Jenny watched him sadly as he paced to and fro, with clasped hands and raised eyes and uplifted head; the long silvery

curls drooping upon his blue coat, his mouth tremulous with fervour, the whole expression of his face and attitude that of intense, rapt devotion. If they could only see him now, the people who had cast the first stone; if they could only hear the words he uttered!
'He shall deliver thee in six troubles; yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee.
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'The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.
'In His favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'
Would there ever be any morning? Jenny wondered. Was it possible that the clouds could roll away, that there could be sunshine again, and flowers, and singing of birds?
It was a pleasant dream, but it was only a dream, and the hard, waking life seemed harder when it was gone. The ordeal that her father was about to pass through came back upon her with new force. He was on his way to the town now. It seemed to Jenny that she had not actually realized his position before. What a terrible position it was! And there was no one to help him, no one to stand by him!... It was altogether too hard.
Jenny sank down by her chair, and that one bitter, echoing cry broke from her with a passionate bitterness.
But by-and-by it was consolation to kneel there—to make no prayer, to expect no answer; only to kneel there with all her marred broken life, her sins, her ignorance, her hopelessness, her helplessness, all there for God Himself to see.
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He might pity if He would, or' if He would He might strike again. She could ask nothing. Yet still it was consolation to kneel there incapable of asking.
Alone in the wide old house, kneeling, listening to the eternal silences, yielding to the eternal influences; and not knowing that she listened or yielded, conscious only of a growing quiet, of a dawning perception, of a little strengthening and a little upraising.
There was no sudden, shining light, such as is sometimes given for a blessing—no rush of clear conviction. A soul had lain dormant; a Master Hand passing by swept a few gentle chords, and the soul was touched into life, but not into any consciousness of its own existence.

* * * * *

The old man went onward through the fields, through the clear blue starlight; praying aloud as he went, comforting himself with promises. All through the town he prayed, passing along the lamp-lit streets, by the bridge where lights twinkled in the river.
The brethren at Bethel Chapel sat waiting for him, twelve or fourteen of them, round the square green-baize-covered table that stood below the
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pulpit. Two gaslights burned dimly overhead, throwing ghostly shadows all round among the empty pews; the wide galleries were in darkness; the clock ticked loudly, the hands moved onward, there was silence, expressive glances, movements of impatience.
'Perhaps the clock is a little fast,' Mr. Verdon suggested, as the hands pointed to half-past seven. Whereupon, with more or less of physical effort, twelve watches were drawn forth, and the dock belonging to Bethel Chapel cleared from imputation.
Yet still it was a clock that had no pity. There was aggressive self-complacency in its loud monotonous tick. Five minutes more, another five, another. It wanted now a quarter to eight. Did anybody there still suppose that Abel Kirke would come? The question was not asked in so many words, but one man asked it by his curling lip, and

another by his unbent attitude. There would be nothing to call for any attention that evening.
When the inexorable dock struck eight, Mr. Verdon rose from his chair at the head of the table. He would make no comment—he begged that no comment might be made by anyone, but a prayer instead. Mr. Verdon was interrupted:
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'Do you mean as we're to separate without comin' to any conclusion or decision of any kind?'
'I fear we must,' Mr. Verdon said, a little timidly. 'We can decide nothing without evidence, you know, Brother Hall.'
'Evidence! Who needs any evidence now? If we can decide nothin' else, we can decide that Abel Kirke be no longer considered a member of this connection.—I beg leave to move that—'
'Pardon me, Brother Hall,' Mr. Verdon begged mildly, but with evident distress—'pardon me, but I should take it as a personal favour if you would refrain from moving in this matter to-night. I ask the same favour from the brethren here present generally. Another meeting can be arranged. I will make effort myself to get accurate evidence or information. I beg once more that nothing be done to-night.'.
With various degrees of reluctance Mr. Verdon's request was granted. The meeting was closed with a prayer. The brethren looked at each other, some sadly, some triumphantly; great-coats and mufflers were resumed; the gaslights were turned out; by twos and threes the brethren left the chapel.
There was a long flight of steps that led down through a dark narrow passage into the street. A
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brother stumbled in descending, and one stepped forward to help him. There was a railing at the side, and something lying by the railing.
Something that had lain there on the dark damp steps for an hour or more. There were houses on either side down below; and men and women passing about. The shrill cry of the milkmaid had sounded through the yard, the clatter of her cans, the laugh that followed her threadbare jest. Still there had been no movement on the steps.
From above the light of a solitary gas-lamp streamed; a few silvery hairs glittered where the dark stirless figure lay. The noise from the streets below came loud and rude; the few dim stars were very far above the tops of the quaintly-built chimneys.
A brother had stumbled, and one had stepped forward to help him. There had been none by to lend a helping hand when Abel Kirke stumbled and fell.
They raised him tenderly, the men who had been sitting with stones in their hands. They laid him tenderly on a bed at the nearest inn.
They had been loud in speech some of them, and hard in thought, and ready in harsh suggestion.
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There was no speech at all now, suggestive or other; and the thoughts were such as need hardly be put into words here.
Yet the silence seemed only for a moment. The doctor came, gave a momentary glance, asked a question or two, and went away. There would have to be inquiry on the morrow. But there was something that must be done that night, one scared-looking man said to another, as they went out into the busy street. Someone must go over to Cleveden. The

old man had a daughter, who was doubtless even then expecting him.
So it came to Jenny—the knowledge that she was fatherless; sudden, unexpected as the vivid lightning flash. Rachel was with her—she had been there since about an hour after Abel's departure; but no support was required at her hands in that first terrible moment, save the mere support of her presence. Mr. Verdon spoke long, and kindly, and wearyingly; Brother Page echoed a word now and again. Jenny stood by the table, clutching the edge of it with one nervous hand, trying to listen, trying to realize, wishing only that they would go away. Then, without perceiving it, she ceased from wishing or trying. The lamp went out, the fire
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dwindled to a speck, the wearying voice sank to an inaudible murmur.
She was alone with Rachel when consciousness came back. There was a moment of blindness and effort and confusion; then full sight and knowledge. She was lying there on the little hard sofa that was all studded with brass nails; Rachel was holding her hand and looking at her sorrowfully… And there was no one else but Rachel now—in all the wide world none save this chance—met friend.
Till a late hour in the night she lay there. Anthony came up for Rachel, received the sad news at the door, and went away alone. Rachel stood for a moment watching him as he went through the yard, listening to his footstep as he went down the street. The bare boughs of the laburnum-tree waved a little sadly over the wall; the silence of the starlit sky seemed to have an ache in it.
Then she drew the heavy bolts and bars and went back to the sofa. Jenny gave a smile of thankfulness. She was taking her sorrow very quietly, but Rachel knew what such quietness meant. She, Rachel Rede, had known and seen sorrow in many phases; there had been times for
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her when every morsel of bread broken and eaten had been a sacrament of sorrow. They were past, but they had left more than memories behind them. She had attained by them to a tremulous apprehension of the sufferings of others. Even suffering that she could not touch nor reach nor alleviate in any way had power to reach and touch herself.
But this new grief of Jenny's was not of this kind. It was one of Rachel's older griefs, but she had not forgotten it. She could never forget. Talking with Jenny, living through these hours with her, made her own double loss seem but yesterday. And her words came from a heart attuned to no lower philosophy, stoical or other. It never occurred to her that it would be better to go at once to the root of the matter, she simply went. There was no thought of teaching. If she might comfort a little, strengthen a little—that was all her aim.
It was an easier matter than she had thought. She imagined that it was the sudden and overwhelming blow that had awakened Jenny to a new receptiveness; but the awakening had been begun before. There had been preparation for the terrible stroke, so that it might fall less heavily. Only
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two or three hours had passed, but to Jenny the effect was like the passing of years. All behind was wan, and distant, and unimportant. A new atmosphere had gathered round her life.
'I feel as if the blow had blinded me,' she said to Rachel, 'or as if someone had struck me in the dark, and I wanted to know who it was, and why they had done it? You will

say it was God Himself who did it, and that He did it for my good. I believe it, but I cannot feel it.'
'No; I can understand that,' Rachel said… "Whom God loveth He chasteneth." And—if one may use such human words—He does not take pains to chasten everybody alike. Certain natures He cultivates to the utmost. They have to be stung, thwarted, humiliated, defeated. By death, by change of affection, by turn of circumstance, they are made to stand alone. They find themselves thrust into positions from which they shrink, knowing themselves to be unequal and unworthy. They have to be burdened, wearied, pained, made acquainted in some degree with the whole range of human woe requiring human sympathy. Think of St. Paul's list of suffering. He must have needed it all. The finer minds of all ages have needed the same culture; and they have
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had it for the most part. From Homer, who begged his bread, to Chatterton, who died because he was ashamed to beg, there has been no really gifted mind that has been set at a disadvantage by too much pampering. You will say there are few minds of this class—true; but there is a gradation of classes, and these for different uses. We don't even know where we come in, but God knows—knows how to fit us into His own design, and how best to fit us. It may be that our life shall seem to us, and to others, as an utter failure. But we—you and I—are God's work; and His work cannot fail. Think of these words of Browning's:

' "All I could never be,
All men ignored in me,
This I was worth to God, Whose wheel the pitcher
shaped." '

The night passed, and sad days passed, yet not unquiet nor unhallowed days.
Abel Kirke was borne slowly through the winding lanes, back to the old Hall, and on the last day of the week they laid him in his grave.
There were mourners there, distant relations from the dales and moors, gaunt brown men and women, to whom a funeral was but another name for a feast.
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But there was no feasting at the burial of Abel Kirke. A few came back from the churchyard. Mrs. Rede superintended the making of tea; Rachel and Jenny sat alone upstairs.
But by-and-by came a message.
The mourning cousins were thinking of going home; they could not go till they had seen Abel Kirke's daughter. They had been discussing her prospects over the cups of strong green tea, and it had seemed to them that the said prospects were such as to warrant a little kindly interference.
As kindly as they could make it; but Jenny, standing there in her plain black dress, with hardly enough of crape fold to make it decent in the eyes of the cousins, felt a little shrinking from the open questions, the homely comments, the crude plans.
Yet they were well intentioned, these people; this she knew, and she answered the intention.
'You are very kind,' she said gently, speaking more directly to old Joseph Balmforth, who had offered her a home at Branthwaite. 'You are very kind, but I have been talking over the future with a friend, and I think I have decided what I shall do. I shall leave this

neighbourhood, take a
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situation of some kind. I should like to nurse an invalid.'
There was little to object to in this. They knew nothing of the extremity of her poverty, of the fact that the sale of the furniture would hardly cover the expenses of the funeral. Neither did they know anything of the struggle that her resolve had cost, of her deep shrinking from the idea of an unknown home among unknown people. It seemed natural to them that she should wish to be independent. They approved with animation.
'An' ya can allus remember 'at ya hev' a heame ower i' t' deales if ya happen to want yan,' old Joseph said, hoisting on his great-coat, swathing his throat in a many-coloured worsted comforter. 'We've had a goodish bit o' thradin' tegither, yer faather an' me. Te saay nowt o' wer bein' relations.'
Then they went away, making up for want of insight by warmth in shaking hands. Jenny was turning away, too, when a little noise, almost a squeak, came from a dim corner at the further end of the room. A fire was burning; the lamp threw a fitful glare; a tiny brown-black woman came trembling up to the table.
'It's me, Miss Jane,' the little creature said,
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with another squeak. 'I thought I'd wait till they'd all gone.'
Jenny could only stare. There was a large black bonnet with bits of black glass and crape flowers standing out wildly on stiff wire stalks. A tiny brown wrinkled face, two sparkling bead-like eyes, the tiniest of brown 'fronts,' two bands of narrowest black velvet across the forehead, with little wisps of gray hair sticking out uncompromisingly below.
Besides these was an immense black shawl trying to hide a scant brown merino gown. It seemed to Jenny that she had seen it all before. But when? And where?
'You don't remember me?' the small person inquired, with elevated brows. 'Miss Sage, Miriam Sage! Why, I've nursed you many a time when you were a baby. And once, when you were a little girl, you—'
'I know,' interrupted Jenny, holding out her hand, trying to check the too-ready tears. 'My mother's cousin. I came to stay with you once when I was about five years old. You lived at Topcliff. I remember it all now. And your sister—'
'My sister Margaret keeps a school. We live at
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Netherton now. Margaret wanted to come to-day, instead of me; but I couldn't think of it. She's younger, you know—hasn't had so much experience. I thought I'd better come myself; then I could say what I wanted to say… You're going back with me, Miss Jane. I'll stay here till Monday morning, if you'll let me; and we can go back together. You have friends here, I see: they'll attend to the sale and things better than you could.'
'But I've decided—'
'Yes; I know. I heard what you said. Very proper. But you can decide again. You can't stay in this house by yourself, not even till you get a situation; and you may be months getting a suitable one. You can stay as long as you like at Netherton-le-Moors.'
Jenny shook her head, but a moment's thought showed her that Miss Sage's offer was not one to be treated in that way. There was real sense in it as well as real kindness, how much kindness she did not perceive till the tiny person spoke again.
'We're poor people, Miss Jane. We have always had our own bread to work for; but if

you're thinking we can't afford to ask you to stay with us, I beg leave to say we're not as poor as that comes
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to. I couldn't rest without coming. We'd heard how things were; and we considered what we'd best do… It'll be disappointin' if you don't come, now we've made up our minds that we'd like to have you… It's a big house; and we're lonesome of a night, Margaret and me.'
Miss Sage had been fidgeting with her black cotton glove, trying to hide a chance hole in the finger; and peeping out now and then from under the black crape dahlias like a bird peeping from its nest in the hedge. Jenny was not watching her; she was looking thoughtfully into the fire, wondering what she had better do.
' 'You'd better come, Miss Jane,' Miriam broke in opportunely, and there was a change in her voice that was more persuasive than any argument.
And then the small person took off her glove, and laid a withered hand caressingly on Jenny's shoulder. 'Say you'll come, dear,' she pleaded. 'It'll be better than going among strangers.'
Jenny took the caressing hand in hers. She was grateful, but her gratitude was not audible just then. Tears were rising again; she turned away to hide them a little; and then she untied Miss Sage's bonnet, and unpinned the big black shawl.
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'And you'll be ready on Monday morning, my dear?' the shrill voice inquired in a satisfied tone.
'We must go on Monday, because of the school, you know.'

It was all very sudden. There was the day of rest between, a silent time of looking backward and forward. Then all was hurry and movement, with hardly time for any pain.
'It is better so,' Rachel said at the station, hiding away the pain she was feeling herself, talking with a smile of future meetings. Mrs. Rede was there too, smiling and crying; and Anthony was looking after the luggage, doing his best to deserve the apologetic gratitude of Miss Sage, who persisted in whisking about under his feet until he was afraid of falling over her. The train came up at last, and he had the relief of seeing the small brown person perched safely on the seat beside Jenny… Then the train went on again; Mrs. Rede and Rachel went back to the cottage; Anthony went back to the mill… Before him all day was a face, 'wan as primroses gathered at midnight,' and a mouth that quivered while it smiled; and two brown eyes that had tears in them, but not tears only.
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So Jenny Kirke left Cleveden. She had been there less than two years, but into these years had been crowded the brightest and the darkest hours of her whole life. In after-days she did not regret the darkness. There had been increase of stature during the time that had seemed so full of fret and jar, increase of humanity and insight.
She had grown to have patience with the mistakes of others, sympathy with them under the sad consequence of mistake. There had been a germ of good in her, as there is in the most lost and contemptible human being that cumbers the ground, yet a germ that might never have changed to flower or fruit, but for the fiery culture of suffering—fire as purifying as that living fire from off the Altar wherewith the Seraphim, touching the lips

of Isaiah, purged his sin.

END OF BOOK IV.

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BOOK FIFTH: AFTERMATH.

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CHAPTER I.

IMPULSES.

'Then crouch no more on suppliant knee,
But scorn with scorn outbrave;
A Briton, even in love, should be
A subject, not a slave!'

WORDSWORTH.

LIFE at Cleveden was rather a triste affair during the spring that followed Abel Kirke's death and his daughter's departure. The crocuses bloomed in the little front gardens, the orchards grew white, the woods and the fields grew greener; and the water rushed down by the mill with a fuller sound after the heavy April showers.

If you cared for such things as these the little place was pleasant; but there were some for whom these were not enough. A nine day's wonder served for twenty-seven days at Cleveden, unless it was superseded by a new one. And this was rare.

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Topics died out of themselves after passing through any and every phase they might admit of. Impressions were weakened. Facts were forgotten. The village mind was depressed from mere lack of new emotion.

In the absence of incident in the present, people were driven to the conjecture of incident in the future; and, truth to say, for certain of these conjectures there was sufficient ground. The friendship between Miss Kabury and the Miss Staniers appeared to be of the warmest. It was whispered that Charlotte Kabury took tea at the Poplars at least three times a week. And Fred Stanier bore with wonderful good-nature Captain Clarke's badinage about his frequent visits to Stonebrig Heights; though the said badinage was not of a very refined nature, and was indulged in mainly in a public billiard-room at Port St. Hilda.

'There is nothing to prevent people from putting two and two together, you know,' was the remark of one sagacious observer.

At last an event occurred—trivial, and not new, yet still an event. Anthony Rede was seen one April morning at the station; subsequently, it became known that he had taken a ticket for Netherton-le-Moors. True, it was acknowledged that

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Netherton was the nearest station to Bent Brow, the farm owned by Mrs. Rede, and it was also acknowledged that business had taken him in the same direction before. Still he had gone to Netherton; and Jenny Kirke was there. Once more there was two and two to put together.

But if anyone had been inclined to make this latter two and two into four they would have acted prematurely. Anthony went direct to Bent Brow, and had an interview with Ralph Langtoft, the tenant, for which purpose he had gone there.

Dinner followed, Mrs. Langtoft doing her utmost to keep up her reputation for hospitality, her large bright-faced daughter Susan adding to a reputation of another kind.

In all the dale district there was no such daring, laughing coquette as Susan Langtoft.
The time passed pleasantly. Anthony was amused in spite of himself, and Susan had desired nothing more than his amusement. She wanted to coax from him a promise that he would try to persuade Rachel to pay them a visit at Bent Brow. The moor breezes would be good for Miss Rede, and Miss Rede's coming would be good for that silent little body over at Sage's. The promise was given unhesitatingly; and Anthony left Bent Brow
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for the station two hours before he need have done.
Neither was there any need for him to go round by the village, the station known as Netherton lying nearly a mile nearer to the farm. But the distance seemed less than it seemed before. Anthony was in an absent mood.
Flowery hedgerows, budding trees, chirping linnets, were but as a pleasant background to his thoughts. Yet he recognised that the village was not, after all, such an ugly one as it was said to be. And there was a wonderful freshness about it. Breezy airs from the blue moorland, a cool rocky beck rippling right through it, a mill-pond with ducks diving and sailing about.
A road winding out of the village led to the old gray house where the Miss Sages lived. Anthony knew the house. He was about to turn down the road, when a small figure dressed in deep mourning came out from the grocer's shop only a few yards further down the street. His heart palpitated. He saw distinctly—there was no mistake—the figure, the face that was all the world to him.
But it was only for a moment. He caught a surprised, frightened glance, saw a timid irresolute movement on the top of the three steps; then the
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figure fluttered back into the shop… Anthony stood at the turn of the road, wounded, disappointed more than he could realize just then.
His first impulse was to walk straight to the station, looking neither to the right nor to the left; but it was an impulse he could not obey. He sauntered beyond the shop, glancing in at the door as he passed, again as he returned, but there was no one there, save a red-faced, gray-haired man.
I am sorry to be obliged to tell the truth, but Anthony was too angry to go in and ask a simple question, as he might have done. Instead of this, he turned with impatient strides towards the old gray house down the lane.
It had been a parsonage once upon a time. There was variegated ivy all along the front; a row of smooth flagstones; a railing that had been white; windows that were still quaint and uncommon. From a window that was open came the noise of many voices, the shuffling of many feet, a complication of indescribable sounds that said little for any discipline to be found within.
Anthony's loud knock produced an effect that was like the sudden stopping of a railway train. Presently the door was opened; Miss Margaret Sage stood before him with a curtsy, smoothing
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her broad apron with one hand, trying to hide the cane that was in the other.
'Miss Kirke is not at home, I think?' Anthony demanded, in high autocratic tones.
'Wha did *you* saäy, sir?' inquired the schoolmistress, with evident fright and confusion. Anthony's tall figure, his startling brown eyes, the fierce expression of his face and

voice, had produced a not unusual effect upon her.
She had arrived at an age when years are difficult to guess; but she was, as Miriam had said, not a person of experience. The smallest event out of the ordinary routine seemed to scatter what intellect she might at other times possess.
Anthony repeated his inquiry.
'Noä, sir; she's nut at hoäme,' replied Miss Margaret, with widening eyes and unmeaning smile. Then she dropped another curtsy. 'What might ya be pleased te want, sir?'
'I don't know that I want anything in particular,' Anthony said, his irritation increasing under this reception. 'When do you expect Miss Kirke?' he asked, after a moment's pause.
'I'm sure, sir, I can't saäy, sir,' was the reply, accompanied with various small imbecilities of manner and expression.
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'And Miss Sage—your sister, I presume—is she not at home?'
'Meriam? Noä, sir. Meriam isn't in, neither. She's gone oot te tea, hes Meriam.'
'Thank you. Good-day,' Anthony said, striking down the road again. He would not go back through the village. There was a field-path to the station, along which he went at a more rapid pace than he was aware of.
There were other things of which he was not aware. Jenny Kirke's eyes following him from the window of the parlour at the back of the grocer's shop-eyes that might not have been so hot and dry had she been there alone.
But Mrs. Ford was sitting at work, and little Miss Sage was smoothing away the wisps of gray hair that refused to be hidden under the brown front.
It was all through little Miss Sage.
She had gone out to tea, forgetting her knitting, and Jenny had followed with it, and was going back home, when her heart stood still, and a strange, tremulous feeling came over her, and a sudden impulse upon which she acted without a moment's thought. The first thought of all was regret—vehement, passionate regret. How could
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she be so childish, so silly? There would have been a sting in her self-reproach had Anthony been no more to her than the merest Bede acquaintance.
As the matter stood, there were a thousand stings.
And he would never know. He would go back to Cleveden, pained and annoyed himself, and having a lower opinion than ever before of her.
If she could only have lived that blind, confused moment over again! If only Anthony might know how it had happened—how quiet her life had been of late, how different she herself was from the self he had first known, and how strangely startled and bewildered she had been by his unexpected appearance!
It was an unquiet day for her, but, happily, she had not the baneful gift of ready self-analysis. It was only when she set herself deliberately to the task that any self-knowledge was to be acquired in this way.
She did not ask herself *why* it was that in that first, uncertain moment she had fled from what would have been an excess of pleasure; *why* it was that the mere thought of having grieved Anthony Rede by so doing was such an intolerable pain?
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He had been in her thoughts, but not in all her thoughts.
There were other things behind, not yet forgotten, not yet healed, though more in the

way of healing than Jenny herself knew.
She was happy in being away from Cleveden—from the gossip there. There was no one to mention Fred Stanier's name at Netherton, and Rachel in her letters ignored his existence. There was nothing to keep up any fret or strain. She had been surprised herself of late to find how much less frequently the memory of him troubled her—how little weight or reality such trouble had.
But she had been conscious of no more definite change than this… She was wakeful now, and fevered; fearful of looking behind or before.
And Anthony! Every fibre of his nature seemed to jar against itself. He had loved so long, so well, so patiently.
Had there been some mistake in it all? He wondered, as he went back home.
Had he been loving some ideal creature of his own brain—some being to whom coldness and cruel indifference would have been impossible?
He would never think of Jenny Kirke again.
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He would no more embitter his life with hopeless hoping.
There were women in the world who would have been touched to yielding by the mere force and tenacity of such love as his. But Jenny Kirke was not one of these.
Her liking was of another order. It demanded yellow curls, and scent, and shallow elegance… He was sadly pained, this big, self-sufficient-looking man; and his pain was visible.
His anxious mother fretted him with her many questions. Rachel went out to saunter in the garden. The daylight was departing. Beyond the top of the hill was a peaceful-looking sky of pale gold, with long gray bars across the west.
The bleating of a solitary lamb came over the hedge at the top of the garden; a ploughman was whistling along the road below; the water was sweeping down by the mill softly.
All else was silence, and gray shadow, and breath of sleeping flowers.
Up and down the stone steps Rachel sauntered—to and fro on the gravel paths.
White blossom fluttered down as she passed under a pear-tree, summer snow lying white on a dark dress, on dark, shining hair.
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She stopped by the little red-brick summerhouse. The blue-green door was open, and some flower-pots were standing outside upon the step. She would put them in, and shut the door.
'Let me do that,' said a sudden voice in the twilight.
There was a whiff of a discarded cigar—an undistinguishable mingling of disturbance and other things.
Then the heavy flower-pots were taken from her hand, arranged on a shelf, and the door of the summer-house shut.
'Don't go in just yet, Rachel,' Anthony said. There were strange tones in his voice. Rachel could have fancied that he was longing to cry out.
She had turned away, but she came back readily, and stood by his side, full of all manner of comforting, womanly instincts. Something had happened to him she knew. His dark face was paler in the fading light. She could almost feel herself growing paler, almost hear her heart beating in the silence.
A strong sudden thought had come to the brain of Anthony Bede as he sat at his tea.

Sudden in its development. How long it had been lying in
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him unrevealed he did not ask himself; neither did he ask how nor why it had revealed itself just then. It had not been born of any new circumstance. The cosy parlour had been the scene of no inspiring event. His mother had sat in her easy-chair, knitting, asking fussy questions. Rachel had ministered to his wants, deftly, noiselessly, smiling silently as usual. He did not know how it was that he had found himself watching her; noting the drooping lines of her figure, the grace of her movements—how he came to realize, almost for the first time, how soothing and satisfying her mere presence was. There was nothing to irritate a man there, to drive him half wild with vacillations and perversities. He was looking at her intently in this new light; and Rachel, glancing up, saw the look, and her eyes drooped suddenly, and her colour came, and she shrank away out of sight.

Then Anthony had gone away from the fireside too, had stood by the porch with his cigar thinking rapidly—if encouraging an impulse could be called thinking. There was no reason why he should not encourage it, he told himself. He had loved Jenny Kirke passionately—with his whole heart; twice he had poured out as much of this passionate love as
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could be put into words; and if he had been treated with commonest civility he might have been fool enough to pour it out a third time before long. He knew now with what result!

The events of the day had been very enlightening. It was irritating to go over them. He felt restless, unstrung, sorely in need of some human sympathy. His feelings had been strongly aroused and were on the recoil; and sympathy was there waiting for him, sauntering by the pear-tree, packing away flower-pots.

If a man or woman has been stung or roused in any way, and the emotion can find no adequate outlet in words, a tenfold intensity struggles through the tone and manner.

Rachel felt something that was almost fear of Anthony as he crushed her frail little hand between his two powerful ones, and, bending down to her, said, in a breathless, agitated way:

'Rachel!—Don't you know why I called you back?— What I want to ask you?—Can't you guess?... I want you to love me a little. Can you learn to care for me, do you think?—Not in the way you have cared—in another way… I want you to be my wife. We shall be very happy, Rachel; I know we shall—you are so
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good, so true… Tell me you can learn to love me!'

Poor Rachel! Learn to love him! The grand struggle of her life had been to unlearn this very love!

And now for one brief moment came a vision too big and bright—a vision that flashed too suddenly across a gray unilluminated life. Could it be true? Anthony was there, overpowering in his strong individual nature. His big warm hands seemed to quiver slightly; his breath came nervously, hurriedly. Was it possible that it was love that was doing this—pervading his whole being to his very finger-tips? And love for her?

She might well ask! Already the tremor of a new-born fear was stirring in Anthony Bede—already a warning voice whispering. He might not obey, he might not even listen; still, it was there. He spoke again, more vehemently than before, but his

vehemence had not the moving power it was it meant to have.
Some finer instinct in Rachel told her that his tones were not true. Anthony might not know it himself, still this love of which he spoke was not true. His expression of it was eager, but there were subtle undertones—echoes of another love that was
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not dead, nor dying; but was simply writhing under an unexpected blow, throwing itself hither and thither in search of sympathy.
Rachel understood it all. The feeling of being overpowered, helpless, under a weight of new happiness, went away as suddenly as it had come. She must be true to others as well as to herself. This happiness was not hers. She must put it away resolutely, with no forethought of the cost of such resolution.
'No, Anthony; it cannot be,' she said, speaking in a quiet yet decided tone. 'We might, as you say, make each other happy…But the future—that you speak of—might not bring the kind of happiness you mean.' Then she paused awhile, and looked up with a smile, adding, in gentler tones than before, 'We will forget this, and you will go on being my brother.'
Anthony heard only the words, quiet, sensible, emotionless. There were no undertones for him. He had been mistaken—deluded by vanity or egotism, and it was a relief to him that there had been delusion. He was altogether relieved—more than he cared to acknowledge to himself just then. Yet he was not more satisfied with himself, nor with the things that were. Had he no power
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to win any human love? Was he for ever to go on coming hopefully near to it, only to find himself forbidden to stretch out his hand and take it?
'You are quite sure, Rachel?' he said, a little sadly and less pleadingly. 'You are quite sure that it would be no use trying to care for me?'
'Not with any caring that could satisfy you.'
'Am I so hard to satisfy?'
'In this? Yes, I think you would be. But, Anthony—let me speak plainly, as a sister may—if you will wait patiently come.'
'You are thinking of her?'
'Of Jenny—yes.'
'Then let me tell you that you know nothing at all of her,' Anthony said, in the strong, dogmatic, half-bitter way he had sometimes. 'I knew nothing of her myself until this afternoon.'
It all followed. An unrestrained torrent of words, angry, emphatic, exaggerated. He had gone there for no selfish ends, thinking a friendly face, a few friendly words, would have been welcome things dropping into the middle of an isolated life like that. And there had been no mistake. She had seen him as distinctly as he had seen her; she had *turned back deliberately;* and, to the best of
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his belief, must have asked the shopman to allow her to hide herself somewhere.
Rachel could not help smiling. Anthony could not see her face—there were many things he could not see. How blind he had been!
'Oh, Anthony! Couldn't you understand?' Rachel asked, with slow, emphatic surprise.
'Yes; I understood quite well. She wished to avoid me.'
'And you couldn't feel why?... You don't deserve to be told… Anthony, you are rather

stupid. I never discovered it before.'
'And you are rather credulous, and the best "excuser-general" that ever lived,' Anthony replied. His spirits were rising.
Was it possible that there could be anything in this hint of Rachel's? What strange creatures women were!
He stood silent some time, Rachel there by his side, struck into a sadder and deeper silence by the deed he had done. He did not suspect, he would never know, and there was comfort here. And she would be even more careful than she had been. She would study German, try to write or translate something; fill her brain in some way or other till there was no room in it for any wrong thing. She
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went in presently, leaving Anthony to finish his cigar.
Mrs. Rede was dozing by the fire, the lamp was already lit, Anthony's chair ready by the table. There was nothing to be done; she might go upstairs to her own room. It was a pretty comfortable room, with pictures and books and little refinements of all kinds lying about. On a table near the window there was a well-worn book, with pages turned down, and marked passages, and a trick of opening of itself at the right place. Bishop Taylor's 'Holy Living' it was, and this evening it opened at these words:
'Lay fetters and restraints upon the imaginative and phantastic part… Persons of fancy, such as are women and children, have always the most violent loves: but, therefore, if we be careful with what representments we fill our fancy, we may the sooner rectify our lives.'
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CHAPTER II.

AT NETHERTON-LE-MOORS.

'How could I know I should love thee to-day,
Whom that day I held not dear?
How could I know I should love thee away
When I did not love thee anear?'
JEAN INGELOW.

RACHEL had reasons of her own for accepting Mrs. Langtoft's invitation, and also for doing so as soon as possible—reasons that involved a little innocent diplomacy. It was yet early in May when she went over to Bent Brow. Jenny was at the station—moving impatiently forward as the train drew up, regardless of the distress of Miriam Sage, who had come there in her big black bonnet and tiny brown gown for the sole purpose of keeping Jenny back from the edge of the platform.
Susan Langtoft was there too, big, and bright, and noisy; but Susan had some errands to do in the village. If Jenny and Rachel would be walking up the moor a little way she would soon overtake them.
It was a lovely spring day; shining cloud swept across the masses of white low-toned ether;
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miles and miles of brown ling stretched in long ridges as far as the eye could see; here and there were the big gray boulders lying embedded in the earth, or standing tip-toe on one corner, ready, as it seemed, to topple over at the slightest touch. There was silence everywhere, the sweetest, most touching silence, such as heightens any pain or pleasure tenfold.
A little distance from the stony upland path there was a sheep-hut, a patch of bright

colour in the brown landscape.
Old red bricks peered out from green ivy; the roof was of red duted tiles, weather-stained, moss grown, and all round the hut tempting stones were lying. Jenny and Rachel sat down on one of the stones, and waited there till Susan came striding up the hill, nearly an hour later.
Nothing was said for a time, there was too much to enjoy; but Rachel began to note things presently, changes in Jenny that were pleasant to see.
It was hardly possible to believe that her features were exactly what they had always been—they were softer, clearer, and of a higher type. The worn, clouded, hopeless look was gone altogether. Suffering had left its trace, a strange sweet shadow that came and went, yielding place to every smile;
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and there was something new and touching in her gentler ways; but there was no abiding visible sadness.
Rachel talked of indifferent things for a while, perceiving with delight how much of Jenny's old elasticity of mind had come back, how ready she was to receive any little sunbeam. And Rachel had more than one irradiating gleam to disclose.
Jenny had half expected them; yet they were not the less new and thrilling.
'You will give me a word—just one word to take back to him,' Rachel said, after Jenny had confessed how foolish she had been on that day when Anthony had gone to Netherton. 'You don't know how much he felt it. You don't know how true he is, nor what an aching there is somewhere in his life. He doesn't speak of it, I have wished sometimes that he would—but I can see it all. I can see it in his very gait as he walks along the road, in his manner of throwing himself into a chair. He. seems tired of all things, and listless and indifferent.'… Then Rachel paused awhile; Jenny was turning a shade paler, and her mouth was quivering a little.
When Rachel spoke again it was in a more soothing manner.
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'You won't trifle with him any more, dear?' she asked, stroking the small hand she held caressingly.
'Do you think I have trifled with him?' Jenny said. She had asked herself the same question many a time lately; but she had never answered it. And Rachel found it difficult to answer, thinking over the past.
'It has all been so strange,' Jenny said, looking out over the blue hills. 'I don't want to excuse myself; I have had all the time a general sense of wrong-doing, but I can't say that I see yet how I could have been true to myself and others and yet have avoided the mistakes at the time. I could avoid them now. I remember once, Rachel, you said that no one could love and doubt, not know certainly whether the love was true; and I think I doubted all the while. I had qualms and apprehensions that I refused to own even to myself. I preferred being blind.'
Then Jenny was silent awhile. The past yet had its shadow—but it was more a shadow of regret than of pain.
If she could only have lived it all over again, knowing the true from the false. False! no, that was not the right word… 'Do you know, Rachel, I think everyone is capable of two kinds
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of love,' Jenny went on again; 'a lower love and a higher. The lower suffices while

people are credulous and ignorant. One is content simply to have one's vanity satisfied… If the feeling grows, it is like ivy growing on a stone wall; there is hardly soil enough for it to take root in; it must throw out suckers in a hundred directions before it can flourish… It is different after. One wants a deeper kind of sympathy, a stronger and readier helpfulness, a more understanding companionship… I am ashamed of the past!'

'Then try to forget it, Jenny,' Rachel said. She had been listening in no inert way; but words had thrust themselves in between Jenny's words—voices beseeching a little, complaining a little, refusing to be silenced altogether. 'Forget the past, dear. You will know the future when it comes. You will not put the higher love away from you now.'

A brief silence followed. Of what was Jenny thinking? Rachel wondered. The expression of her face had changed a little. It was not so calm. Yet she spoke very quietly without embarrassment.

'Have you seen Fred Stanier lately?' she asked.

Rachel's heart gave a leap.

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'No, not quite lately,' she said, 'not since they came back.'

'They—who? Has he been away?'

'Yes, he and Mrs. Stanier,' Rachel said, looking resolutely down the moor. 'They went away on the day of the wedding, and came back to Stonebrig Heights on Monday. They are to live at the Heights, I understand.'

This, then, was the end of it all. Jenny did not blame him even in thought. It only seemed as if an idea that had been haunting her all along had been put into words, the idea that she had been mistaken from the beginning in this man, who had but acted according to the fitful wavering light that was in him.

Not one cry arose in her heart, not even a cry of indignation. She could look back over the time of dark intense agony that she had lived through with full comprehension.

She could realize still the passionate, fevered, half-unreal love—a love that she told herself could not under any circumstances have become a thing of enduring value. And more than all, she could put the two together, the love and the pain, and see in them one teacher teaching the same great lesson.

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Yet she could not help wondering a little at her own quietness, at the strange feeling that was almost indifference. Was it real? She pictured Fred Stanier happy, devoted to his wife, and there was no pain in dwelling on the picture. If there was anything it was relief, a sense of satisfaction in the completed separation.

He could never again come between her and the light. There had been wrong and sorrow and forgiveness: now there remained only forgetfulness… Rachel, looking up at the little face, was fully satisfied.

* * * * *

'I had no idea Netherton was such a pleasant place,' Rachel was saying a few days later. She was standing in the porch at Esk Cottage. The white lilacs were out, the bees were humming to the hyacinths, the Gloire de Dijon was opening to the sun.

'Yes; it's pleasant enough,' Anthony replied. He was putting the geraniums into the borders. Perhaps he was too much absorbed to enter into conversation just then. Rachel

would wait.

But Anthony had not calculated upon this. 'I should say it's a healthy place too,' he resumed

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presently, without pausing in his work. 'I think you are looking better for your visit, Rachel.'

'Yes; it has done me good… And I think it would be good for you too, if you were to go over for a day or two.'

'It is not so long since I was there.'

'No; but you didn't stay long enough.'… Anthony glanced up. There was a good deal in Rachel's look just then.

'So you think I should go again?' he asked, smiling to himself in a satisfied way.

'I should either go or write if I were you.'

'Write! I should never write myself into anybody's good graces—hot if I were to write for a dozen years… Why, you ought to have known better, Rachel. There never were such wooden letters as mine.'

'They *are* rather dry,' Rachel said, smiling and making an odd expressive face as she disappeared.

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CHAPTER III.

THE SOUNDS IN THE SHELL.

'O morning star that smilest in the blue,
O star, my morning dream hath proven true:
Smile sweetly thou! my love hath smiled on me.'
TENNYSON: *Gareth and Lynette.*

A SWEET dream it was, but vague and unfinished; yet the impression lasted all through the day.

She had been wandering in darkness somewhere; alone and friendless. There was no pathway; the rain made sad music in the trees; her heart had plained wildly for shelter and protection. Then through the darkness a strong hand had been stretched out to guide her. The scene had changed. There had been warmth and light, and a strange and beautiful kindness. There was no recognition of any place or person; only of the wondrous kindness. She moved about when she awoke as one who had dreamt a poem. The straitened life at the old house in the lane had suddenly widened. There was no visible change. There was the same spotless cleanliness, the same barely tolerable tidiness. The polished dresser was guiltless of dust, the brass pans underneath glittered in the morning

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sun, the patched, threadbare carpet was free from speck or stain. And there was no change in the monotonous routine.

Peggy came down to breakfast a little late—as was usual; Miriam scolded, and then they quarrelled, and that was usual too. All these things were as they had been; yet nothing was the same. There was a new felicity, nameless and wordless—a subdued, tender, expectant feeling that cast a glamour over all.

After breakfast Miriam washed the teacups. This she did herself always. Jenny might put away the sugar-tongs, and the three worn silver tea-spoons, but she was rarely entrusted with anything of a friable nature. Then Miriam disappeared. 'Away you go,

Madame Prim,' Miss Peggy said, in a whisper, closing her eyes and throwing her head back a little.
And Madame Prim went. She was in the habit of absenting herself from the kitchen for long periods, and it was only lately that Jenny had found out how these intervals were spent. Going upstairs on an errand for Miss Peggy she had discovered the tiny creature perched on the window-sill in her own room, surrounded with tools and materials for stay-making. She had learnt this
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trade in her youth, and had followed it for a time; but it was hard work, and they could live without it, so it had been given up gladly. She had returned to it soon after Jenny came to Netherton. Madame Prim had been angry with Jenny for not knocking at the door, angrier still when she begged, at a later date, to be allowed to carry out her original intention of earning her own bread.
'And what may you be going to do this morning, Miss Tippety-witchett?' Peggy asked of Jenny. She had quite a talent for bestowing names.
'I think I shall dust the parlour,' Jenny said, turning away with a pleasant dreamy smile.
This was soon done. There was only the old oaken bureau with its shining brass handles, the ponderous carved chairs, the old-fashioned table that stood in the middle of the room.
Jenny swept about with her duster, the sun glinted through the little octagonal panes, throwing quaint lines of shadow upon the faded birds and flowers that papered the wall. There were some curious little china figures upon the mantel-shelf, a vase with a hanging garland of green leaves, and two large pink-lipped shells.
Jenny had been forbidden to touch the vase or the figures, but she put one of the shells to her ear
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in very sympathy. It was like another phase of her dream. There was the murmuring sea, picturesque ships, white waves, sunshine, footsteps on the sands. So she stood, smiling and holding the shell to her ear; looking out through the window. The footsteps came nearer… Suddenly there was a dark figure in the lane.
This tall dark man walked on with a smile. The hawthorn hedge opposite the house was in full bloom, the air was heavy with the scent of it, the hedgerow was gay with marguerites and ragged-robins. Along the edge of the pathway the low white railing stretched, shutting out the green common and the sleepy ducks; the windows were all lighted up with sunshine. At the door a brown-eyed girl stood smiling, waiting there with a quiet, glad expectancy, a soft-yielding grace of attitude, revealing all her soul without one thought of reservation.
He came up, a little leisurely the last step or two. It was a moment to linger over without knowing it. The waiting eyes brightened a little as he came nearer, looked up with a deeper, more intense expression. Yet Anthony said never a word of greeting. Two pink cheeks were crushed lovingly together between two brown hands; a kiss was
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stolen from a small curved mouth; a voice said in low, earnest tones:
'You dear little child!'

* * * * *

There had never been such sunshine as the sunshine that poured over the dales that day;

and such hawthorn-trees had never bloomed as those in front of the old parsonage. The smell of the may-bloom is instinct with emotion for Anthony Rede even yet; and Jenny fills her vases with marguerites all through the summer.
Yet it was a very quiet day; the beauty of it was altogether unutterable. The dream had proved true. There was the deep, wondrous kindness, the warmth and light, the protection, the understanding fellowship that her heart had cried out for all through the darkness. Could Anthony ever know what a world-wide space his mere presence filled? How it was rest and hope and exaltation only to stand by him? How there was nothing left to desire?... And what could she be to him? Was it possible that she could satisfy him, make his whole happiness, complete his life?
She knew at a later date, but on this day she learnt little except by intuition. Anthony had not much to say. His tenderness was full of deference;
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he watched her as she went about the old house with a new admiration; he felt as if she were inspiring him with some new feeling every hour. He had not seen her, except as people see fairies, since she left Cleveden. There was change, and evidence of growth that he had not been prepared for. He saw, as Rachel had seen, that she had in some strange and indefinable way become beautiful, but this was not all that he saw. Gentle and confiding as she was, he could discern increase of power in her. She had a wider range of vision, too, a quicker grasp of thought.
He remembered trying once to decide what change it was that was needed in her character; the change had come, it was even more than he had desired. Still, he failed to decide as to its nature. He could only say to himself that he had never known her before, that he had never loved her till now, that she had never been so good, so graceful, so winning, so dear in every way as she was on this bright June day at Netherton.
It was a dream, a poem, a picture, all in one for Anthony. There were the little Miss Sages in the background; Peggy shouting at the rough-headed children in the schoolroom; Miriam trotting in and out of the little parlour, sorely puzzled
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between her liking for the big polite man and her dread of seeming to countenance the impropriety of his being there. Yet the tiny pursed-up mouth would relax in spite of all her efforts, especially when he consented so readily to stay to dinner, and didn't object to cold mutton, nor to sitting with his back quite close to the kitchen fire.
Peggy smiled, uttered her little imbecilities. 'You Peggy!' Miriam would say, shaking her head and holding up her fork rebukingly after some inexpedient remark. Her rebukes were taken in good part, company being present; and when the tiny elder sister disappeared in the pantry for a moment, Peggy whispered to Anthony:
'You see, she's soä clever, oor Miriam is; she isn't like me.'
And this day was like other days that followed. All through that long, happy summer the gossips of Cleveden were speculating upon Anthony Bede's frequent journeyings to and from Netherton.
It was odd, to be sure. He might have done so much better. At least he might have married into a family upon whose name no stain had ever rested.
It was true, some acknowledged—men and elderly women more especially—that Jenny herself
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was a fascinating little creature enough. Her voice, when she sang, had a way of holding

you breathless; and, so far as they knew, no stain had ever rested upon her save the stain of poverty.
But there was sufficient offence here. If one sins against his neighbours in nothing save in being poor, it does not follow that he must be counted sinless.
But nothing of this reached Anthony Rede's ears. If it had it could not have disturbed him. Things that had irritated and oppressed him in days gone by were ignored or forgotten now.
When he was not at Netherton his spare time was fully occupied. He had plants to raise to help to fill a new conservatory, he had presents to choose for the little Miss Sages that should be worth accepting without seeming ostentatious, and he had letters to write that astonished himself quite as much as they gratified the person to whom they were addressed.
It was strange how the thoughts came, clothing themselves in fitting words as they dropped from his pen. He wrote page after page; the difficulty was how to come to an end. Certainly this new gift was not to be accounted for.
The year went on—Anthony going and coming,
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Rachel visiting at Bent Brow; love and friendship growing, finding out all manner of new and intimate relationships.
The course of things was smooth at last. Qualms, doubts, misapprehensions, could never again come into any life of theirs.
Varying circumstance could only tend the same way—to happiness, to confidence, to satisfaction of the desire that each had to be more worthy of the other.

CHAPTER IV.

MORNING SUNSHINE.

'The trees stand stiff and still at time of frost,
If no wind tears them; but, let summer come,
When trees are happy—and a breath avails
To set them trembling through a million leaves
In luxury of emotion. Something less
It takes to move a woman.'
MISS. BROWNING : *Aurora Leigh.*

SWALLOWFIELDS had always been considered a pretty place; it stood almost on the top of a hill, about a mile from Cleveden; and, perhaps, half a mile above the low-lying village of Stonebrig.
It was a picturesque little house, though not very
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old. There were tiny windows in the pointed gables; there was a green veranda, with trelliswork at the sides—creepers, with tender shoots and yellowing branches waving about in the spring breeze. The little lawn in front was newly mown, the borders were gay with flowers, the trees were in that stage that

'Goes before the leaf,
When all the woods stand in a mist of green,
And nothing perfect.'

And there were trees everywhere—trees that seemed to have grouped themselves afresh, to have taken newer and more graceful form.

Mrs. Anthony Rede, standing at the bottom of the garden, was quite puzzled by the newness of the landscape. It was so strange, so wondrously beautiful, seen from the top of the hill. Was it possible that she had lived somewhere down in that far-away valley all filled with golden haze, with the sparkling thread-like river flowing through it? Had she really walked through those ethereal woods, where greens, and grays, and yellows, and purples were intermingling so softly?

There were other things beside the landscape that had to be looked at from a new point of view, other things that faded into mist and beauty and

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harmony. The threads of life seemed to have gathered themselves together in one silken string. At last

'Good, right, and law were all summed up
In what was possible.'

She was waiting there in the garden. This had been the first day that she had been alone all day; yet it had not been a long day.

How could any day be long when you had a pretty drawing-room to arrange and rearrange; and books and flowers and music; piles of new music, and a piano that brought tears to your eyes if you only swept a chord?

There were little rosy clouds floating about in the ether now. Anthony would be coming soon. Was Eliza getting tea ready? she wondered, tripping up the garden-path, gathering her pretty pale-blue dress together in the old dainty manner. Then she reappeared, standing suddenly still in a frame of hanging creepers. There were footsteps in the lane. A gray figure was swinging with strong easy gait up the garden-path—a dear old face that was growing a little rugged. Then two big hands were laid tenderly on her shoulders:

'And what have you been doing, little woman?'

'Enjoying myself.'

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'Without me?'

'Without you.'

How he did love those glimpses of the old coquetry coming back to the sunny face! She had made his happiness, and it was a pleasant thought; but it was as nothing to him compared with the thought that he had made hers. And she had such wonderful capacity for happiness and brightness. The brown eyes never drooped, the pretty mouth gave never a sign of sadness or weariness.

She was always ready: in lighter moments with a smile, an apt phrase, some new prettiness of tone or gesture; in more thoughtful moods she sympathized, understood, or waited patiently till understanding came. She had much to learn, but the learning was pleasanter than all the other things put together.

'For what delights can equal those
That stir the spirit's inner deeps
When one that loves but knows not reaps

'And you really like Swallowfields, dear?' Miss Stanier said, sinking gracefully into Anthony's arm-chair on the following day, her rich gray silk dress sighing itself slowly into elegant folds.
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'You'll find it frightfully bleak in the winter, though,' said Maria in emphatic tones. Maria had grown prettier than ever. Her new spring toilette was fresh and dainty. The wind had blown her soft feathery hair into picturesque confusion; there was a tint of rose-colour in her cheek, and her eyes sparkled to every word she uttered.
There was hardly time for Jenny to speak; and, truth to tell, she was a little overpowered. She had been quite alone, and these were almost her first visitors. And she was so anxious—for Anthony's sake—to behave well.
'You have got the place into beautiful order, I see,' Miss Stanier observed condescendingly. 'But I think I should hardly have built the greenhouse in that corner. You will not have half enough sun there. That is a great mistake.'
Nobody else could have said the same thing so elegantly, so pleasantly. The most sensitive person could hardly have taken offence.
'Your drawing-room is very pretty,' Horatia resumed, glancing round patronizingly. 'Those ornaments are quite lovely… Is that Wedgewood?'
'No.'
'What a capital imitation! And your pictures,
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too, are well chosen. That engraving of "Suspense"—Sir Edwin Landseer's, as I dare say you know—has always been a favourite of mine. So touching, isn't it? And these exquisite little water-colours—whose choice were they—Mr. Bede's?'
'No; they were Rachel's present. Aren't they pretty?' Jenny said, glad to have an opportunity of making an unimportant remark.
'More than pretty; the tone is so good throughout. That sketch of the Abbey—is it a little out of drawing?... Only a very little. I like it better than this, though; this is just a trifle chalky. Don't you think so, Maria?'
And then Maria took up the strain, assenting, flattering, criticising. Were these part of the congratulations? Jenny wondered. What a relief it was when they rose to go! 'Good-bye, dear,' Horatia said with effusion. 'It is *so* nice to have you in the neighbourhood again. Our little parties have been quite tame. Good-bye.'
Smiles, eisel, elegance,' perfumery—what an atmosphere they left behind them! Were there any more visits like these to dread? Would everybody when they went away leave her with burning cheeks, and eyes that felt full of hot tears, and an insupportable sense of having said wrong things,
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displayed a thousand little *gaucheries,* of having done herself injustice in every possible way?
She longed to sit down and cry; but being a married woman, and having a husband who had a trick of dropping in at unexpected moments, perhaps it would be better to sit down and try a new sonata.
How she did play! False notes, chords and discords, new and striking variations, original modes of fingering!... *That* a difficult sonata! How could people say so? Bang!

Crash!—*p p?*—nothing of the kind: *f f f* would be much better. Crash! Bang!—It was a most effective piece of music.
She began to feel a little better. The next piece was played with much less spirit; the third in a manner not deserving of mention. Perhaps she had been a little silly. It might be wiser to forget, not to say anything to Anthony about her silliness. She would tell him they had called, and resolve to behave better next time.
What a pretty piece this was of Comettant's! Why was it called 'Raphael'? she wondered. And it was so soothing too—a little sad, perhaps, if one was in a sad mood, but very sweet, very peaceful… After all, life was pleasant, and people had
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kind hearts, and the world—as seen from Swallowfields—was a sunny place to live in.
Another day it was Mrs. Rede who came, Jenny's new mother! She would bring her knitting, perhaps, and stay to tea; and if she was a person of one idea, it was an idea that never wearied. Jenny could never learn too much of Anthony. No story was more thrilling than the story of his uneventful life. Childish accidents, boyish escapes, youthful braveries, grown-up perfections—twenty years ago, ten, five—they were all alike, new, important, adding to the fulness of her knowledge and her love.
Rachel was a little unsatisfactory just now. She came so seldom, stayed so short a time. But it was pleasant when she did come. In the dark days no one had understood as Rachel had done; and now that the morning had dawned, and all was light and sunshine, Rachel's sympathy was still, with one exception, dearer than any other. Her very manner had been tender and subdued when Jenny was sad; now it was tender and playful—even gay on occasion. Jenny wondered a little sometimes, and said to herself that if reflected happiness was so much, it was not surprising that happiness at first hand should be almost too much for people.
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And it was a happiness that was always new. Anthony was never weary of making little efforts to heighten it or deepen it, though no such efforts were needed. On one of these early days he declared himself tired after dinner. He would not go back to the mill—he was in need of a little dissipation—what should it be?
'Let us go for a long walk,' Jenny said, standing by his chair, smiling gently, happily.
'Can you think of nothing better than that?'
'No; I don't want anything better.'
'Then you wouldn't like a drive?—I've been dreaming of it all the morning. A walk first, into the town; then a drive on the sands. Fancy being down by the edge of the waves to-day? Or would you like a sail better? It would be delightful out by the rock buoy.'
He never knew what Jenny would have preferred. A flush of pleasure was stealing slowly over her face, her lips were parted, her hand was laid gently on his shoulder. Just then the door-bell rang; Jenny darted off to her own chair; Eliza announced Mr. and Mrs. Stanier.
There was a moment of half-incredulous hesitation, then Jenny rose, pallid, trembling, holding out her hand to each; but it was impossible for her to
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speak. Every faculty of her brain seemed confused. But, fortunately for her, no one else showed any embarrassment. Anthony was watching her with distress, but his distress in no way affected his presence of mind. His manner was perhaps a trifle cooler than usual, his tongue perhaps a little more eloquent, but there was no other change.

Jenny began to recover herself. Mrs. Stanier chatted naturally, almost pleasantly. She was looking her best, and she knew it, and the knowledge had the effect upon her that it has upon most women. Her pale cloudy green dress and cherry-coloured ribbons were very becoming to her, if a little startling; but Mrs. Stanier was nothing if not startling. Her eyes, her manner, her speech—all tended to the same effect.
Yet there was a little alteration in her somewhere. Jenny could feel it, though she could not define it. Was there a certain softness under her outer hardness? Were her bright eyes somewhat less defiant in their watchfulness?
Fred sat a little apart, talking mainly with Anthony, or rather, perhaps, listening; and there was change in him, too—change that Jenny, perturbed as she was, could not help perceiving. Physically there was deterioration. His tall figure
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had developed, but the impression was that of gauntness rather than roundness; and his square shoulders drooped, and his long arms were moved or thrown listlessly about in a way that was almost painful to see.
But the greatest change was in his face and in his manner. He was, as he always had been, winningly polite; but his politeness was of a more subdued nature; and now and then a look that was almost sad came over his face—this especially when his eyes met Jenny's. Anthony saw the look, and all unconsciously added an interpretation. There were other things to interpret as the minutes went on.
The two men were discussing a small matter of local legislation, taking different sides, when suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, Fred stopped—became slightly embarrassed. Then he turned listeningly toward his wife, who was speaking, and his colour began to come and go rapidly.
'I wonder you have not heard of it,' Charlotte Stanier was saying, in her abrupt tones. 'Of course it's not my doing, nor done with my consent. Uncle Clark was half wild when Fred first talked about it. He is not reconciled yet, and never will be.'
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There was a sudden silence when she had done speaking. Fred looked at Anthony, then at Jenny, with a helpless, fevered, appealing look that neither could understand.
'What is it, Mrs. Stanier?—may I ask?' Anthony said, with a little polite surprise.
'Only Fred's whim of going to Liverpool. I wish his uncle would leave him alone, and not keep offering him situations in this way. This is the second time he has done it, I understand… Last time Fred refused. I wish I knew for what reason—then perhaps I could persuade him to refuse again.'
It was rather an awkward moment both for Anthony and Jenny. Neither was able to express a civil amount of regret. Fred felt the awkwardness—though it might be that he was feeling something else more strongly just then.
His manner grew more and more embarrassed and self-conscious.
'I am afraid you will have to let me have my own way in this matter, Charlotte,' he said, as they rose to go.
Why need he have said such simple words with so much agitation ? Anthony wondered—an agitation that seemed to be communicating itself to
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them all. It was impossible not to feel a longing to get at the meaning of it. There *was* a meaning—this even Charlotte felt suddenly. She demanded it of her husband as they walked under the trees by the river-side. Anthony Rede, standing by his silent,

perturbed little wife in the drawing-room at Swallowfields, would have scorned himself for making any such demand. But of two evils a little self-scorn would perhaps have been the least.
Did he doubt her in any way? Not for a moment. Charlotte Stanier had said to herself, going out at the leafy porch:

'If love's dead there it has left a ghost.'

But Anthony had no thought of this kind. He told himself that he could understand quite well why Fred Stanier's mere presence should still have power to disturb Jenny—he had been disturbed himself. Yet his feeling toward his wife was not altogether what it had been till half an hour ago. There was a strange, subtle element in it that seemed to grow in the silence—nay, of that very silence it was born.
An element so insignificant that if Jenny had but spoken, had but commented on the colour of
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Mrs. Stanier's bonnet-string, it might have been neutralized; the very sound of her voice have absorbed it.
But for some minutes she said not a word. Her thoughts had travelled backward, and they were full of pain; but they were not thoughts of herself, nor altogether of Fred Stanier.
Of the depth and intensity of her love for the white-haired old man who had died in poverty and contempt, not even her husband knew. This love, with the weight of sorrow and pain that was part of it, had been re-awakened to-day. There had been nothing in the manner of anyone else in the neighbourhood to remind her of that terrible time, but Fred Stanier seemed to have brought the very atmosphere of it with him, to have left it behind him. She was living through it again—trying again to find the truth. Could Anthony help her? Would it be wise to ask him to help her?... Perhaps it would be better to try once more to forget. It would be easier when the Staniers had left the neighbourhood. And she had enough of happiness to fill her life. It was fitting that the roses should have one thorn.
Such were her thoughts during the few moments that she stood by the window. Then she turned
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with a smile to Anthony; but to her surprise the smile was not returned. He only looked at her intently—surely not sternly? She was growing fanciful! What would she be fancying next? she wondered, laying her hand gently on his arm, looking up into his eyes with her own loving, untroubled look.
Anthony's face suddenly grew clear as if no cloud had ever rested there for a second; and he put his arm round her and drew her to him:
'Forgive me, little one,' he said; 'I've been thinking wrong things.'

CHAPTER V.

THE ENVIOUS LITTLE CLOUD.

'Imaginary evils soon become real ones by indulging our reflections on them, as he who in a melancholy fancy sees something like a face on the wall or the wainscot, can, by two or three touches with a lead pencil, make it look visible

and agreeing with what he fancied.'

DEAN SWIFT: *Thoughts and Aphorisms.*

THEY had walked on in silence for a little while; then Mrs. Stanier had demanded of her husband the meaning of his disquiet.

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He made no answer, but his face, which had been pale, suddenly flushed with a flush of pain.

Charlotte was watching him keenly, and he knew something of her keenness now, perhaps dreaded it a little. It was quite useless trying to hide anything from her that she set herself to find out. She hated hidden things. Honesty was her virtue of virtues; openness her first impulse, let the event be what it might.

It was not always a pleasant openness. She was as ready to utter a disagreeable truth as an agreeable one; and of this also it may be that her husband had a little dread. The colour that had risen to his face with her question died out as rapidly as it had come; but the pain remained and the burden—for burden there was.

Perhaps had he known his wife better, he would have dreaded her less, and perhaps have trusted her more than he had yet learnt to do. In spite of her glitter and loudness and hardness, she was a true woman, womanly enough to have married for love this man who was so much weaker than herself; womanly enough to pity him when his weakness was of a nature to admit of pity. She was bewildered a little at present; and bewilderment was not congenial to her.

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They had reached the bridge that spans the river near the station at Stonebrig. Tall trees, elm and ash, oak and sycamore, were swaying and rustling on the right, arching over the river beyond where the water was surging and foaming over the stonework of a ruined mill.

The sun poured down the valley; there was a haze of purple hills beyond; a mid-distance of cornfield and pasture-land; on the left a few hawthorn and apple trees, a bank of spreading coltsfoot, and an angler knee-deep in bracken.

They stood awhile in the middle of the bridge, looking over the parapet. The clear brown water murmured over the stones, catching the sunlight hem and there; bees hummed by; there was silence in the little hamlet behind. Something seemed to hold them there, to touch them, perhaps to raise them a little.

It was Charlotte who broke the silence:

'If you would rather not tell me why you have behaved so strangely at the Redes', would you mind telling me why you were so anxious to go there?' she asked, and her voice was softer and quieter than usual.

Fred hesitated a minute, then he replied:

'I can't tell you anything just at present.

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Certainly I can't tell you that. I don't know myself.'

This was by no means satisfactory, and again Charlotte turned upon him a keen, scrutinizing look. There was nothing to learn, except, perhaps, confirmation of the fact that she had been suspecting. Beyond doubt he was contending with some mental suffering or emotion of which she had no knowledge at present. She indulged in two trains of conjecture. If there was ground for either of them, it would be easy to understand why he was so anxious to leave the neighbourhood of Cleveden.

Still they stood by the stone parapet, Fred leaning his head wearily on his hand,

watching the pebbles at the bottom of the water. Presently he looked up: there was a strange look in his beautiful gray eyes, wistful, entreating, sorrowful; and his voice when he spoke was tremulous and agitated, though still sweet—it never failed in sweetness.
'Charlotte,' he said, 'if you had done a wrong thing—say, for instance, told an untruth, and that untruth had done a person harm—tenfold, nay, a hundred-fold more harm than you ever intended or thought possible; and then supposing that person had left the country, or—or died, and you
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could make no reparation, and no good could come of confession; and still you couldn't forget it, nor be at peace about it—what would you do?... I am only putting a suppositional case, remember; but what would you do?'
Charlotte Stanier had gradually grown paler while her husband was speaking-paler and colder; and, without perceiving it, she had moved just a little from his side. It was doubtless rather startling to find that her husband's hypothesis was only one of her own conjectures put into words.
'You ask me what I should do,' she said, after a pause, making an effort to manage the uncontrollable hardness that was natural to her voice. 'I think you know what I should do. I should tell the truth to everybody I knew, and to everybody who had known the person I had wronged.'
They stood a little longer, but neither spoke; and then they sauntered slowly and silently up the lane to Stonebrig Heights, Fred walking with averted face, and eyes that drooped even more sadly than before.
He knew a little of what was passing in his wife's mind, but he did not know all; he did not even suspect how large a measure of love and pity was there contending with pain and other things.
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It would have been better if he had known. He would have been comforted simply to find how well she understood; how tolerant a view of what she termed human frailty she had, how firm a belief in human power to rise above old frailties.
She could not yet offer him any consolation. He had not confided in her. It was possible that he might never confide in her fully.
The hours that followed were strange hours. He blamed himself for his morbidness, he laughed at himself for his weakness, he groaned within himself over something that stung him, and tortured him, and defied his every effort to obtain rest.
It was no new thing. He had suffered so long that the time when he had been at peace with himself seemed so far back that he could hardly remember it. And the suffering had increased of late. It was part of his nature—of its weakness, that he had neither power to obey his conscience nor to silence it.
Silence it! Would it ever be silenced again? He told himself that it never would, unless he should do the thing that his wife had counselled him to do; and there were moments when death itself seemed to him preferable to that. At other
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times—times when he was worn and wearied with the strife—the thing seemed easy. He could go in no defiant way, in no craven way. He could go as one who had simply blighted his life, and knew that he must live and bear the blight.
He was coming fast to this state now. His blood and his brain were fevered with

contention. There would be reaction after the fever. Conscience and his wife might do with him what they would.
There was little outward sign of any such reaction as he went down the lane toward Stonebrig on the following afternoon. An acute observer might have seen shadowy circles about his eyes, a slight, nervous quivering at the corners of his mouth; but Anthony Rede, who was on the platform at the station, was not particularly acute in such matters.
He did notice, however, that when he said carelessly, and without the faintest notion of underthought, 'I am going up to Netherton,' he did notice then that Fred Stanier's face flushed with a sudden crimson—a fact he remembered afterward.
The train came up almost at once, and Fred went direct to Swallowfields.
Jenny was at the piano; the windows of her pretty room were open, the lace curtains were
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fluttering in the breeze, the creepers were straggling about. She was singing, and her song was a little plaintive, as was natural, being so happy. Something about 'Shadows on the Lawn' she sang; and just then a shadow fell on the carpet.
Fred Stanier stood there, pale, confused, and with no trace of a smile on his face.
What was the matter? Why had he come alone? she wondered. She almost forgot to be confused herself, seeing him so strangely disturbed and agitated.
A moment or two they sat in silence—Fred on a chair near the table, leaning his head on his hand; Jenny watching him from the sofa, with a little pity, and a good deal of fear.
'Are you ill?' she asked at last, feeling that the silence was becoming awkward.
'No… that is—I don't know—I—I can't say,' Fred replied, speaking like one in a dream.
Then again came the awkward silence; and again it was broken by Jenny.
'My husband has gone to Netherton this afternoon,' she said, speaking with an indifference that required effort.
'Yes; I saw him go,' Fred replied, lifting his
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eyes wistfully to Jenny's face. Then he seemed to rouse himself, and something that was almost a spasm of pain crossed his face, contracting his forehead, tightening the muscles about his mouth, causing his colour to come and go in a way that was painful to see. Suddenly he rose to his feet, and held out his hand.
'Forgive me, Mrs. Rede, will you?' he said tremulously. 'I think it is as you said—I am not well… I will call again… I am certainly not well to-day.'
Then he was gone; and Jenny was left standing there as much bewildered as she had ever been in her whole life. He had not been in the house ten minutes, but it was hours before she could forget his visit, or cease from wondering why he had come. One of two reasons he must have had; and the mere thought of either was sufficiently disturbing. He had said that he would call again; it would be better that he should not do this, unless his wife was with him, or Anthony was at home, or unless she knew beforehand the nature of what he wanted to say… What a pity it was that Anthony was not at home! What would he think when she told him? It was hardly likely that he would be pleased.
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Jenny dwelt on this latter thought more than was wise; and recalling the visit of yesterday, Anthony's subsequent silence, his half-stern look, his confession, 'I've been thinking wrong things,' she found that the unpleasant feeling of dread was growing upon

her. Later in the evening, when Anthony returned, it had grown to be something very definite indeed.
Anthony saw at a glance that some infelicitous emotion was at work within her; and remembering the change on Fred Stanier's face at the station, he was quick to guess of what nature it was. He expected disclosure every moment; and every moment of silence concerning it was an added cause of dissatisfaction.
Jenny was watching the moments for an opportunity, watching with a nervous apprehension that was as painful as it was new.
Could it really be that there was any change in Anthony? that his eyes had a little fierceness in them, that there was something rigid about his mouth, that the tones of his voice were a little hard and untender? Fred had said that he had seen Anthony at the station—had Anthony seen him? suspected that he was coming to Swallowfields? Why did he not say so? At any rate,
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why did he not say something to help her a little, make her task easier?
And thus it happened that nothing was said that night; and in the morning, when Jenny detained Anthony after breakfast to tell him all there was to tell, the explanation did not clear the atmosphere as she had expected it to do.
He listened with a frigid, restrained air that was the reverse of encouraging, and there was no sign that he accepted her views of the case. But he was only half aware of his manner. His thoughts were chiefly occupied with wondering why she had held back this apparently unimportant piece of information, why it cost her so much effort and emotion to give it now.
'Was it not strange?' she said, when she had concluded, taking his hand, smiling a little timidly.
'Very strange,' Anthony said coldly, turning away from the smile.
'If he comes when I am alone I shall not see him.'
'In that, of course, you can do as you choose,' was the indifferent reply.
Jenny hesitated a moment, then she said softly, drawing a little nearer to him:
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'I should like to do as you choose.'
'Thank you,' Anthony replied, politely bowing, removing his wife's hand gently from his arm and turning away.
Had he really gone, gone without parting kiss or word or look. It seemed impossible. Yet, though she stood there pale and faint and motionless for an hour or more, there was no returning footstep.
In what had she erred?... She had been weak, foolish, and shortsighted—so much was patent at the first glance. It would have been better a thousand times to have told Anthony at once, to have refused to perceive any want of encouragement, any tone of untenderness in him. It was but a little seed of misunderstanding that had been sown, but she had had sufficient experience to know how such little seeds take root and flourish.
She blamed herself unsparingly, but—the thought would come—was she alone to blame? Had not her error been visited somewhat hardly? Did Anthony know how hardly? Could he ever know fully the aching misery and doubt and dread that began to creep over her as she stood there?
Doubt and dread that was not altogether groundless. Anthony Rede was a man of strong

judgment,
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but woe be to a man if his imagination be but a little stronger. What becomes of his reasoning power if circumstance gives this terrible faculty but a moment's predominance! More especially will the question urge itself if the circumstance involves his emotional nature, and Anthony's nature might have been made up of emotion on the morning of this fatal day.
He could do no work, see no fact, realize nothing but the cloud that was gathering itself together before the face of his morning sun. It was merely a cloud: this he acknowledged. Not a thing to be put into words, hardly into thoughts; but it was a thing to cast shadows, to darken the past, and perhaps the future also.
He felt none of that irritation that would have beset a man of slighter nature in a similar case, neither did he feel any resentment. Toward Stanier it could hardly be said that he felt anything at all save that contempt that he had felt for him from the beginning.
He had never understood him, never for a moment tried to understand him: he was too far down in the scale of humanity to be worth wasting thought over. He was certainly acting in a manner to draw attention now, and it was a very
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bewildering manner; yet still contempt and a desire to ignore him seemed stronger than bewilderment. It was not possible to ignore the mischief he had done, but he would have been powerless to work any mischief of himself.
It was the fact that it had been done through another, and the inexplicable way in which that other had been disturbed, and moved to act in non-accordance with her own straightforward and outspoken nature, that troubled him. He told himself, and truly, that so slight a trouble coming to him through anyone else could hardly have made such demands upon his fortitude, and the demands grew heavier as the time he spent in brooding grew longer.
He went home to dinner because it was dinnertime, but he was still brooding, and the little thrill that swept through him when he caught sight of his wife standing at the window was stifled with an aphorism. 'When those who smite are those we love, then do the scourges become scorpions.' This he said to himself, swinging with listless, indifferent gait and cold, reserved countenance up the garden path.
Anthony held theories about explanations. They were worse than useless; they were unwise, dangerous.
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No man nor woman ever demanded explanation without widening the breach that had before been made. No explanation was ever given without feeling of soreness and loss of self-respect. 'It is intolerable,' said one, 'after condescending to a laborious vindication, to remain where we were,' but Anthony did not believe that it was possible so to remain. It was part of his belief that, if even reconciliation were effected, it would only be the surface of things that would be reconciled, that underneath there would be misgivings and tacit feelings of non-conviction more deeply rooted than before.
If things were to come right they would right themselves without indulgence in the expensive 'luxury of explanation.' So he said to himself, assuming an attitude of courteous half-sad patience towards his wife that was altogether incomprehensible.
An attitude that had nothing in it of which she could complain. His attentions at dinner were, if anything, a little more numerous and *prévenant* than usual; but there was

something wanting that had never been wanting before. He was not frigid nor silent, but there was some feeling behind which she could not pass. If her eyes met his there was
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no response to the mute appeal she was conscious of making; no quiet reassuring smile playing for ever about his mouth.
Anthony went into the garden after dinner. Ever since their marriage they had been in the habit of sauntering up and down together for half an hour or so before Anthony went back to the mill.
Such a thing as an invitation had never been thought of. Jenny had donned her white cotton bonnet-hat and stepped out through the window, knowing, without thinking, that she was welcome as the sun itself. To-day she hesitated—would Anthony ask her to go? But Anthony had never asked her before—why should he now?... And he went out alone, and his loneliness turned to hunger, and his hunger to pain.
Was it unnatural that when Anthony came home in the evening there should be change in Jenny herself—that the half-beseeching wonder in her eyes should have died out, leaving there a certain look of resolute indifference? And her manner was changed too: she was cold, and irritatingly submissive.
When Anthony—perhaps relenting a little—asked her to play, she rose instantly, and walked
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to the piano with an air of prompt obedience that was almost aggravating. And her playing did not improve matters. She went carefully and mechanically through a long, tedious sonata; and was about to begin another, when Anthony said, dryly enough, 'Thank you, dear, that will do.' And no music was asked for the next evening, nor the next, though Jenny waited with almost tearful tremulousness for the faintest desire. And all day she practised the wistful airs, the plaintive little songs, that were to touch him to tenderness when the evening came.
It would hardly be possible to say which of these two people was suffering the most; and to both of them, before three days were over, the original cause of their suffering seemed so small, so far away, that it was hardly remembered. If either of them could have lived this brief time over again, half a dozen kind words said kindly would have dispelled the cloud at once. But there could be no going back—there could only be resolve for the future.
But meantime the present was growing darker hour by hour. Had Anthony deceived himself? Was it true that 'souls never touch their objects'? Was it only in fancy that he had been so completely
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one with this human being who had been all his joy, and was fast becoming all his sorrow?
He told himself that he dared not think; but from morning till night he did nothing else but think. Could it be possible that their life was arranging itself on these terms permanently—that the barriers would continue to rise of themselves, until by no effort could they ever be put down?
Anthony shivered at the thought… He must do something. He had doubtless been to blame himself in some way or other, though that way was not quite clear to him. An explanation might be a thing to be dreaded; but perhaps, after all, there were other things to be dreaded more.

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CHAPTER VI.

'AS YOU ARE GREAT BE PITIFULLY GOOD.'

> "There are cases of wrecked lives, lost fame, guilt which has been followed by a very tempest and whirlwind of shame; yet in which, so far as we can see, there has been no precursor in the shape of sins that would naturally lead to ruin. The sky was bright, the horizon clear, and without warning the cloud gathered and the storm broke. So we say, so we think in our ignorance. So we shall not say when the secrets of all bearts are revealed.'
>
> *Notes for the Age.*

'JENNY, I'm going to York,' Anthony said, coming in suddenly. It was about the middle of the afternoon.

Jenny was sitting with folded hands in a low chair near the window, her face a little screened by the curtain. Outside there was sunshine, flowers, shadows, tranquillities.

'Are you?' she said, in odd, listless tones. She had been dreaming sadly. She was hardly awake yet.

'Yes, I am,' Anthony replied, watching her a little strangely. Was she pretending to this indifference, or was it real?

There was a moment's silence. Jenny did not

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move nor look up. Anthony stood grasping the back of an unfortunate chair that stood in his way, biting his lip, his eyes and the upper part of his face calm with the calm that goes before a storm.

His intentions had been tolerably good only two minutes ago, when he entered the room; they were good still; but he had not calculated upon encountering any difficulty—least of all these nameless, impalpable difficulties that he found himself as yet so little able to deal with or understand.

'When do you go?' Jenny asked presently, speaking in the same absent manner.

'This evening.'

'And return to-morrow?'

'Perhaps—I can't tell.'

There was another pause. Anthony struggled hard with the impetuosity that was rising within him, impelling him either to utter some rash, bitter word, or to leave the house without uttering any word at all. He half regretted that he had adopted this plan of leading up to a reconciliation. The journey to York had been talked of some time; and it had been arranged that Jenny was to accompany him. It had occurred to him suddenly that this little break in the ordinary routine of their daily life might be made to advantage now.

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Of course Jenny knew that he had intended her to go. She had anticipated the journey with delight; and it was the remembrance of this that made her present seeming indifference so much harder for Anthony to bear… If he had only known a little more than he did know! If he could only have felt the aching that was crushing all vitality out of her heart! If he could only have believed that one tender, loving word would have made her ready to fall at his feet for very joy!

And yet I am not sure how much of all this he knew or did not know. Is there some

luxury in misunderstanding the people we care for most? Is there some yet unexplained part of a man's nature that finds actual pleasure in the mingling of love and pain?
No man argues the question for himself at the moment when such argument would be of service. Anthony Rede was hardly conscious that any such question might be raised. At present he tried to think only of what would be wisest, best. It was unfortunate that at that moment latent impulse was working another way.
Jenny's sad dreaminess had passed away now. Her eyes were still cast down, but there was colour on her cheek, and her heart was beating quickly.
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She was beginning to feel a little resentment. Anthony was hard—too hard. She had been to blame, but she had not deserved such punishment as this. If he should go away, and leave her there alone, she thought she could neither forget nor forgive.
She broke the insupportable silence at last.
'Are you going to York on business?' she asked, and there was a sharp and strangely unnatural ring in the intonation of her voice.
'I *have* business there,' was the guarded reply. Then Anthony made a great and evident effort.
'I thought, perhaps, you would like to go with me—you spoke of doing so?' he said, and if his tone was a little restrained, as of one speaking with difficulty, it was not harsh, nor quite emotionless.
Was there sufficient emotion to be disturbing? A hot, crimson flush that might have been of pain, or might have been of pleasure, surged up over Jenny's face and forehead. Her lips quivered a little, but no words would come. Love, anger, forgiveness, yearning were struggling within her; and the strife was too great for instant expression. She could not trust herself to speak. If only Anthony would have seen!
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But Anthony did not see. Her silence, her unresponsiveness to the effort that had cost so much, smote him like a blow, blinding him for the moment to any higher sense of right or duty. His impulse was latent no longer, though his outward man was still calm, still strong and self-restrained.
'Don't force yourself into compliance,' he said in cool, deliberate tones. 'It was only a whim of mine. I shall pack my bag at once, and go back to work till train-time. I may as well say good-bye now.'
He held out his hand, he stooped and kissed her forehead, lightly and coldly; and then with firm, decisive step he turned away.
'He was pale and sick at heart as he went back along the road by the river-side. His first thought had been wisest. It would have been better, infinitely better, to have waited patiently. Now he would have to begin it all over again, and to begin lower down than before.
It was terribly painful to him to think over the past few days. It seemed to him that there could never again be that harmony between himself and his wife that there would have been if this jarring note had never been struck. He was going away
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from her now, and his heart softened toward her at every step; yet he never thought of going back. What would be the use? There was a greater distance between them than any distance of miles.
Yet more and more he found that attitude of firmness and decision difficult to maintain.

He opened his books, he worked for awhile desperately, but the double strain of working hard at one thing, thinking intensely of another, was too much, even for him. His dark, sallow face began to look fevered; his eyes were flashing restlessly, a crimson spot began to burn just beneath them. Yet he worked. Then he looked up at the clock—it was a quarter to six. The train would be due in fifteen minutes. Suddenly his head fell forward on his hands, he cried out softly to himself, 'Jenny, Jenny, my little one, I cannot go.'

The train came up, Anthony could hear it quite distinctly. There was a shriek, a rumbling sound as it went over the bridge; then all was quiet again. The mill had stopped for the day; the waggons were housed; the men were going homeward, only one remained, waiting till Anthony had done his work.

Anthony was conscious of none of these things.

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He stood there still, with his head bowed on his hands, thinking, regretting, suffering. He looked up at last, and saw with surprise that it was already twilight. There was a great silence over the world when he went out. Dark shadows hung low upon the river, upon the pasture-lands on the other side. The folds and curves of the tall hills were softened into newer and more picturesque beauty; groups of trees were looming up weirdly against the sky, purple black clouds were sweeping along the edge of the upland. It was an hour and a scene to give to thought a depth beyond thought—one of those moments when 'space widens in the soul,' through no effort of ours; high moments that bring out in painful relief any lowness, or narrowness, or ugliness that mars the life we are living.

Sometimes we see the naked truth with a weak little sigh of regret, or a passing thought of the force of circumstance, or it may be that we attain to the forming of a resolution.

At another time a higher chord is struck, a whole set of dormant sympathies are quickened into life, sympathies betokening the diviner element in man. It seems impossible to us that we should ever go back into that narrow groove of thought and life

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again. We make no plans nor rules now, we are beyond the need of them. The new influence is so deep, pervades us so thoroughly, that we make no provision for the loss of it. It will doubtless be sufficient for us. It will enter into the outer life as it has entered into the inner. We look back upon the errors and blindnesses and perversities of the past as if they had been the characteristics of some other life.

'We touch on our dead selves, nor shun to do it,
Being other.'

The little scene that had been so painful in the afternoon came to Anthony's mind—yet very dimly—as he neared the gate that led up to his own house; it seemed strangely far off and unimportant. He was conscious of a sting somewhere. He had been narrow and hard; he had acted according to the instincts of some lower and hardly comprehensible nature within him, he had been blamable in every way. Yet it was no weak, fretful blame that he cast upon himself; and he entered into no details, past or future. There was a light in the drawing-room window on the top of the hill. His wife was there. Was she beginning to hate him for his cruel love? He smiled a little at the

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thought. A man who can fully trust himself, his own intentions, seldom distresses

himself much as to the intentions of others. Perhaps this very confidence ensures his being met half-way.
He was about to turn. Looking up the valley, he could see the lights at Stonebrig Station. There was a dark mist of foliage between, lines of black hedgerows, a figure coming along the road at a rapid pace; a voice in the darkness saying, 'I knew it was your footstep.'
It was the voice of Charlotte Stanier, but not her natural voice. It was even harder than usual, but less quick and shrill, more firm and deliberate.
'Mrs. Stanier!' Anthony said with not very pleasant surprise as he opened the gate. Then he added more courteously, 'You are coming up to Swallowfields?'
'I was intending it,' she said firmly as they turned up under the trees.
Anthony made some remark about the fineness of the weather, Mrs. Stanier made a brief reply; then they walked in silence to the edge of the lawn.
'Where does that road lead to?' Charlotte asked suddenly, pointing to a path that went up by the end of the house.
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'Into the orchard,' Anthony replied.
'Would you mind walking there with me a few minutes?' she said, in a peculiar resolute manner that betrayed some strong motive for the request.
'Certainly not,' was the reply; 'but had we not better go indoors'?'
'No—I can say what I have to say better in the darkness.'
The orchard-gate was open; the white bloom had gone from the apple-trees; there were two or three stars twinkling in the blue ether; in the distance, over where the quaint old town lay, there was a young, bright, sickle-shaped moon.
There was an opening between the trees, disclosing the wide valley, and the undulating landscape that lay on the other side. Charlotte stood there—in silence for a moment or two. Anthony was thinking to himself what an odd person she was, and wishing much that she had chosen some other evening for her mysterious visit.
'Do you know that my husband is ill?' she asked abruptly after a time.
'No; I had not heard of it. I hope it is nothing serious,' Anthony said, with a proper amount of interest.
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'It may be, or it may not… He was delirious last night.'
'Indeed! I'm sorry to hear that.'
There was a little pause. Anthony was still wondering.
'Can I help you in any way?' he asked at last.
'Yes; I think you can.'
Charlotte's tone was growing more intense, and betrayed that, in some way or other, she was exerting her fullest strength.
'Then tell me what I can do at once,' Anthony said, speaking kindly enough now.
Charlotte's face seemed to grow paler as she raised it a little; her features seemed sharper; her eyes flashed, though there was so little light for them to reflect.
'In the first place, you can listen to me,' she said.
Her breath came heavily, rapidly. She was evidently unable to say more just then.
Presently she spoke again, with terrible effort:
'I have come here with my husband's knowledge; I hardly know whether lean add with his consent. He asked me to come, prayed me to come; then he begged me not to do so.'

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'But if he is delirious?'

'He was delirious last night—it was the delirium of hysteria, brought on by an overwrought mind. He has been quite himself to-day….Weak perhaps—weak in body and mind.'

Another brief silence came between; then she began afresh—her voice, her whole manner, betraying that her nature was still strained to the utmost tension:

'You offered to help me. Can you not see the sort of help I am needing?' she asked, witha kind of fretfulness—perhaps assumed to conceal distress. 'You know the past, that terrible scandal. Had you no suspicion? Did the thought never cross your mind that Abel Kirke died innocent and injured?'

It was Anthony's turn to be struck into silence now, a long silence, wherein he scarcely seemed to breathe.

For a time the indignation within him was roused till it was almost beyond his control. But he remembered that it was a woman who stood before him—the wife of the man who had, doubtless, done the wrong that had been laid to Abel Kirke's charge; he remembered, too, that she had come there of her own will… When he spoke again,

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it was in the gentlest, most pitying tone he could command.

'Mrs. Stanier, don't say another word of this tonight. I think I can understand; I shall try to understand. It is—'

Charlotte interrupted him.

'I have a good many words to say, Mr. Rede, and you must please listen to me.'

She was speaking more gently now; perhaps a touch of her deep humiliation was stealing into her voice.

'I had arranged all I wanted to say,' she continued—' all, down to the very words I wanted to use. But I might as well have done nothing. It has all gone from me… You must take the truth as you can get it.'

'But I know the truth now,' Anthony urged. 'I don't want any details, not at present.'

'You would prefer having them from my husband? It is natural. But if I ask you—for my sake—to hear me speak, instead of him, you will do so, will you not? He is not equal, physically nor mentally, to a scene like this. It would kill him, or destroy his reason… He came here the other day to tell your wife himself, and could not utter a single word… You don't know what we have

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suffered, even during the past twenty-four hours. I only learnt the truth last night—learnt it first from words uttered in a state of half-consciousness… I have learnt more since; he has kept nothing back… I am not going to offer an excuse for him—not one. He has hardly excused himself, though he has tried to explain. Nor am I going to ask mercy at your hands. You must do what seems good to you. Let the truth be known when you like, and as widely as you like; and take what other steps you think proper. He would bear a trial scene in a court far better than he would bear a personal interview with you… We shall remain in the neighbourhood till you decide what to do. Let us know when you have decided, will you? The strain, the suspense, will be agony to him.'

Anthony's first impulse was to declare that there need be no more strain, no more suffering, of any kind that he could help, because of this long-past sin. It had been confessed, and it was not for him to inquire whether it had been repented of.

But, thinking of the past, of the old man who had gone to his grave with the stain of an uncommitted sin resting upon his name—a name that even his child could hardly dare to breathe in any hearing but her own—thinking of these things, it
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seemed to Anthony not wise to trust this impulse towards instant forgiveness.
It would be better to accept the course Mrs. Stanier had implied. It would be a pain to him to send her away without comfort of any kind; but he could hardly avoid the pain.
'I fear I must do as you say, Mrs. Stanier,' he said gently. 'We must think it over, my wife and I… Will you go in now? Or—'
'No; I cannot. I must go back home at once. Can you not imagine what we must be enduring?... You will let us know at once what you mean to do?'
'You shall know to-night,' Anthony said. And Charlotte, hurrying back to Stonebrig Heights, knew that he would keep his word. He would have accompanied her, but she refused to allow him to do so.
He remained standing just where she had left him. It was impossible for him fully to comprehend the thing that he had heard. He could believe in Fred Stanier's weakness, his guilt, but he was altogether at a loss when he endeavoured to discover the motive that could have led to such guilt. This motive occurred to him, but he put the idea away contemptuously. It was inadequate
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—miserably inadequate. But he was judging from the point of view natural to himself—it was impossible for him to stoop—even for the moment—to the line of vision natural to Fred Stanier.

CHAPTER VII.

A TARDY CONFESSION.

'Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned,"
Youth shows but half: Trust God: see all, nor be afraid.'

A LINE of vision so narrow in its range that the smallest object in the foreground of Stanier's own life threw all other objects into some misty background that he found himself unable to make out. The magnitude of any event was measured by its power to affect *him.*
The subtlest social undercurrent was understood, and made available if it could bear him, but ever so little, in the way he would go; or grieved and fretted over if it seemed likely to bear him but ever so little out of it. What people would say of *him,* think of *him,* was beyond all doubt the ruling
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motive of his life. His love—if it could be so called—for Jenny Kirke, had for once elevated him above his motive, perhaps above himself. He had never been able to comprehend the influences by which he had been so strangely swayed at that time. He had been carried beyond his depth; and though it had been pleasant to be so carried, it was more natural to find himself once more under his own guidance.
A secondary motive—who could doubt it; some may say, who would blame it?—was a strong appreciation of the good things that this world has to offer; and to a man whose

means were sadly insufficient to gratify such appreciation, it was but natural that his choice of a wife should not be made with an eye altogether single. He had told himself, and perhaps with truth, that the fact that Jenny was not likely to be portionless had ceased to influence him as he had learnt to lave her for herself; and that she had—by her own mistaken attitude toward him—begun to weary his lave before he knew that she would be penniless.
He had hardly acknowledged to himself that this latter fact had given any impetus to his desire far freedom, or that he had received any second impetus on the appearance of Charlotte Kabury.
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He only remembered now a time of irresolution and weakness and misery—a time of sleepless nights and fretful days, and a consequent result of fever and blindness. His consciousness of Jenny's intense love for him, his knowledge of other people's consciousness of the same fact, his inexplicable sensitiveness as to the thoughts and words and looks of these same 'other people,' had wrought upon his brain by constant brooding, until it is no exaggeration whatever to say that he was the subject of mania.
All this he had confessed to his wife, confessing at the same time his inability to understand the state of mind he had been in at the time when the terrible temptation came to him so suddenly.
Charlotte Stanier, repeating his confession to Anthony Rede, had not said all that she might have said in exculpation of her husband's crime. It might be that she had been too much distressed and unnerved to feel the full value of the extenuating circumstances. She knew that the wrong had not been a premeditated one—that his intention had been pure up to the moment when he discovered at the old Hall that he had in his haste seized upon a wrong rouleau of coin.
He was not, like Abel Kirke, in the habit of
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keeping his money tied in paper parcels; but that day, having received his quarter's salary, he had, by the merest chance, tied up two: the one to be sent to Nathan Boulby; the other, and less valuable one, to be sent in similar manner to a person to whom he was so far indebted. He had, purposely to prevent mistake, wrapped them in different kinds of paper; but owing to his hurry, and to the dim light from the landing thrown across his room, he had snatched the wrong one—a mistake he perceived in a moment when he saw the packet in the fuller light of the lamp at the old Hall'.
Simultaneously, as it seemed to him, there came a whole train of suggestion, startling, forceful, overpowering, but satanically clear and plausible.
Thinking over it afterward, he saw that his weakened or diseased imagination had been so completely occupied with the novelty and subserviency of the ideas suggested, that he had been altogether unable to perceive the wrong and danger of entertaining them, even for a moment. But the whole affair was momentary, the suggestion, the temptation, the entering into the temptation. The latter might be said to be instantaneous. He had, so to speak, been startled into it by Abel Kirke's unexpected return. His experience for
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some hours afterward must have been as that of the man who has murdered his friend by a blow given in a moment of irritation.
There was this difference—within a reasonable time Fred Stanier might, without humiliation, have confessed his mistake: it was one that any man might have fallen into.

When he left the old Hall there was in his brain something that was almost an intention of returning, either within the hour or so that yet remained before Abel's bedtime, or early in the morning before he should have started on his journey.

But he passed the hour otherwise. He thought afterward that he had passed part of it in fighting with temptation—he should rather have said with the better angel who fought with him to the last.

There was no more fighting when once he had entered his home. Maria was persuaded to join in a game or two of *écarté,* Horatia sat down to the piano, and Fred soothed his brain with the fumes of a choice cigar—an indulgence not often permitted in Miss Stanier's pretty drawing-room.

It was a comfortable kind of evening. Fred enjoyed it, and began to feel as if he had a right to this sort of natural sympathy and consolation,

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after the wearying mental torture he had gone through.

When he again found himself alone he had an easier time of it. Supposing the worst, that the thing he had done should be brought home to him, there was still the actual fact of mistake to fall back upon. No one need know that he had found out the mistake for himself.

But if events should follow each other in natural sequence, there was no likelihood of any such untoward thing. He did not bring out these natural sequences in detailed form.

He surmised vaguely how discovery would take place; how suspicion would follow—the merest whispered suspicion, but enough to justify him in breaking off the engagement that existed between himself and the daughter of the suspected man.

That better influence had ceased altogether to trouble him now. It was a matter of expediency, and the force of expediency was large to him.

Now, as ever, he saw nothing but himself. Himself had tied this Gordian knot; himself would act the part of Alexander, as well as that of Gordius.

Of what followed—of how he bore himself

'In the toils
Of those twin serpents, Sin and Suffering,'

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I need not write fully. Sometimes suffering consequent upon sin is of a kind to excite not only sympathy, not only pity: it demands respect, almost admiration.

But Stanier's suffering had not been of this kind. He had been cautious in setting the whisper abroad, trusting to no one's tact in this matter but his own; yet neither tact nor caution had availed to hinder the whisper from rising louder and louder. He had listened with uneasiness as well as surprise, but his uneasiness had not been of the conscience.

It had yielded no fruit, save a little idle fretting, a little idle blaming of the world, and of the events which had led him into such evil case.

He had never realized, or, at any rate, had never believed, that suspicion attached in any significant degree to his own name; but, as he came to perceive the terrible consequences that followed the suspicion attached to another, his idle fretting had given place to something very like remorse, and the last sad consequence of all had unhinged him in a manner that he could hardly be said to have recovered from even yet.

It was Dr. Johnson who said that 'sickness makes a villain of a man,' but it requires a man of

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some physical power to reap the aftermath of villainy with success.
Fred Stanier had not nearly sufficient stamina to make a thoroughly bad man. His nerves had given way under the first severe strain.
The very possession of a secret so terrible had involved a tension of mind to which he was not equal; it was a secret that made him wretched either to keep or to disclose. This wretchedness had pursued him, overmastered him. It was his Nemesis, though he knew it not.
He was pacing up and down his room now, awaiting another and more terrible avenger.
As I write, a sweet story comes to me, with many words of wisdom and understanding mingled with the sweetness—these among others:
'The crimes that people commit are not all done in a minute; they seem to come into existence little by little, one by one, small selfish considerations, jars, vanities, indolences; they do not even come to a climax always. It is not a consoling reflection that the sum of the evil done by a respectable easy-going life may be greater in the end, perhaps, than that of many a disastrous career.'
Something like this passed through Anthony
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Rede's brain as he stood on the orchard slope. This thing had, perhaps, been done suddenly at the last, but the doer's whole life had tended to that one hour.
Anthony did not think harshly of that life now. All vice was pitiable to him, a thing to call up grief and sorrow rather than harsh judgment.
He could forgive a sin, though he often found it hard to forgive a folly. He recalled to himself Fred's early youth, his surroundings; he remembered him a beautiful child, fatherless and motherless, flattered and petted at home, flattered and petted abroad; trained, elevated, nowhere.
Could he ever have had even a glimpse of human nature at its best? Could he know how mean meanness was, how base was baseness?
Was it not natural that he should be one of those in whom any feelings save the most selfish have 'a perpetual struggle for existence'?
So Anthony was thinking as he went indoors. The room was dim and a little chilly. There was an untasted cup of tea on the table. Jenny was standing by the mantel-shelf; she had been leaning her head on it sadly, and there had been tears on her face not so long ago.
She had been very pale, too, but Anthony saw a
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crimson colour flushing up to her forehead. Soft wistful eyes were raised under heavy white lids, and two repentant hands were held out beseechingly… Nothing was said. There was a little sob of joy, a loving, forgiving caress, then a long time of silence.
Anthony could have stood there silently for hours. He knew that misunderstanding had passed away—that love and faith, and tenderness and trust, had come back. And even then he felt a little gleam of satisfaction that there had been no explanation, that the soul of each had gravitated toward the other of necessity.
It seemed to him that they were nearer than ever now, so near that they could understand each other without words—at any rate, without fatal words of accusation and defence.
It was Jenny who broke the silence. She looked up, smiling a little sadly.

'I knew you wouldn't go,' she said, but not confidently.
'Did you?' Anthony replied, drawing her closer to him. 'Then you knew me better than I knew myself.'
'You meant to go?'
'I'm afraid I did, at first.'
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'Only at first?'
'Only at first.'
'That was what I meant… I knew you couldn't go after three or four hours.'
'So you made yourself quite comfortable,' Anthony said; 'only you forgot your tea, and let the fire go out, and didn't open the piano, and spoilt your eyes.'
'And what did you do?'
'I? Oh, I made out some invoices.'
'They will be full of mistakes!'
But there were graver matters than these to be talked over. Anthony was very cautious in his manner of disclosing the truths he had learnt. Jenny's emotional nature had been over-wrought already, and he would not have put it to the test of a second strain so soon, but for his promise to Mrs. Stanier. But Jenny listened very calmly. Her quick, deep-drawn manner of breathing alone showed how much she was stirred by the strange tidings.
Strange, and yet not strange. After the first moment or two, she felt that she had known it all before; that she had never been successful in her endeavours to put away suspicion of Fred; she had never in her own heart believed
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the thing that she imagined everyone else had believed.
Yet the certainty was overwhelming in its weight of joy. She buried her face on her husband's shoulder, and sobbed distressingly; and for awhile he made no effort to restrain her.
Then he told her more—told her how the wretched secret had preyed upon Fred's mind until his health had given way, and how he had betrayed himself in a moment of delirium. And how they were suffering—not only the man who had sinned, but his wife, who hated the sin, and who, in the honesty of her nature, had doubtless insisted upon the confession which she had forced herself to make with her own lips.
Jenny heard and understood, but she did not quite understand the tone her husband was taking. She had no instant impulse toward forgiveness, certainly not toward any forgiveness that implied concealment of this tardy confession. She wished for no revenge—for nothing but justice, justice to the memory of the dead.
'I pity his wife more than him,' Jenny said.
'I pity them both,' Anthony replied, 'and I can understand why you are finding it hard to do so just at first. But I know you will come to think
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as I do presently. You must remember, dear, that except so far as the Staniers and ourselves are concerned, this matter is forgotten everywhere; and, even at the time, opinion was by no means so unanimous as you appear to think. "He that dies pays all debts." You knew nothing of the reaction that followed after—after you left Cleveden; though you might have inferred it from the kindness of everybody now—their goodwill expressed when you came back to the neighbourhood… I think—taking the lowest

motive—it would do us no good, dear, were we to insist upon the truth being known; and we cannot calculate upon the more or less of harm that it might do to the Staniers.'

Jenny was yielding to conviction—or perhaps to something more feminine than conviction. She had known sorrow and suffering herself; and—

'The woman could not be of nature's making,
Whom, being kind, her misery made not kinder.'

'You must do what you think best,' she said. 'I know it will be as you say—I shall come to think as you think by-and-by. It is very hard at present, because I have never forgotten. Till quite lately I used to dream day and night of some disclosure

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that would take away all shame. You don't know what it has been to me.'

'But it can never be the same again?'

'No; never.'

They stood talking a little longer—Anthony pleading, Jenny softening to his pleading—and then Anthony went out to fulfil his promise. The manner of its fulfilment had been suggested by Jenny herself. She had written a note, to which Anthony's signature as well as hers had been appended. It was a very brief note, and human, but sufficiently forgiving.

Half an hour later it was left, without any message, at Stonebrig Heights.

THE END.

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