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UP HILL AND DOWN DALE

A Tale Of Country Life

BY

EDITH L. CHAMBERLAIN

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL I.

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1884

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Part First

The Miller's Daughter

[1]

UP HILL AND DOWN DALE

CHAPTER I

THE MILL AND THE MILLER

THE first exclamation of visitors to Braybridge was always, 'How pretty!' and the second was, as invariably, 'What a funny little town!'

The first remark was fully warranted by the situation of the place, in a well-watered valley, sheltered on the north by wooded hills, and also by the picturesque appearance of the many old-fashioned houses; while the irregular style in which all the buildings were erected and grouped, gave rise to the second.

The principal street was, indeed, straight and broad, being part of a fine old coach road. By

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this road you might cross the stone bridge over the river, and enter Braybridge by what was known as 'The Top of the Town.' This consisted of a kind of triangle, on different sides of which stood the post-office; the police-station; the chief inn of the town; a chemist's shop; a builder's yard, full of great stones and piles of timber; and the ruins of a pound. In the central space, the market was held in the open street— room being barely left for the passage of carts and gigs between the pavement and the moveable stalls, big baskets, piles of hampers, and other belongings of the hucksters and market folks.

If, by good fortune, you passed these in safety, you might drive down the street without fear of further obstruction, for it was almost deserted, even on market day. The interest and business of the occasion all began and ended at 'The Top of the Town.'

There was plenty of variety, however, so far as architecture went, for no two houses were alike. Here you might perceive a large, square, brick house, standing back within a walled garden, while close outside the wall huddles a wretched-looking public house.

Beyond that is a timbered cottage, with projecting upper storey, the walls of which bulge over the pavement in an unpleasantly

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suggestive way.

Next comes a grocers shop, with newly inserted front and plate-glass windows, the admiration of the youth of Braybridge. Farther on lies the church, and below that the tall red houses disappear; small public houses, smaller shops, and the smallest of cottages, line the sides of the road. Presently the line becomes broken —fields and gardens intervene—then the pavement comes to an abrupt end, and you are once more in the open country.

Do not imagine that this one street constitutes Braybridge, you have still to see the more characteristic part, which calls forth the admiration and wonder of visitors. This consists of a network of houses, great and small, old and middle-aged, ugly and pretty, built up and down in the strangest confusion, and connected by steep and narrow lanes, which all, by routes more or less circuitous, merge into the High Street. Now, you come across five or six dwellings crowded together, as though every foot of ground were valuable; then you will find a single cottage, standing in a garden so large that the owner does not cultivate more than half of it. Beyond this, perhaps, will be a space of waste ground, browsed over, occasionally, by a stray donkey, and used as a playground by children.

Below

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lies a long, low, white 'cottage of gentility,' with a verandah and a lawn surrounded with shrubs; this is on so different a level from the top houses, that their inhabitants might almost look down its chimneys; while they can, and do most completely overlook the lawn, which, from outside the drive-gate, appears to be a perfectly secluded spot.

All these lanes have a family likeness, and so having surveyed one of them, we will return to the lower end of the High Street. Passing on beyond the limits of the uneven pavement, and farther yet, beyond the last lamp-post, we must still walk on about half-a-mile before we come in sight of Rippidge Mill. Here a curve in the course of the river brings it in a line with the road, wide grass-meadows lying between. It runs smoothly and quietly along; but soon we catch the sound of livelier waters, and see before us a

low, grey bridge, under which the Wripple hurries and frisks onward to empty itself into the Bray. Over the side of the bridge, you look down on the great black wheel, and up at the dark red wall of the old mill. The first is bright with drops of water, and the last adorned here and there with patches of yellow lichen and tufts of hart's-tongue fern.

Beyond, in an old-fashioned garden, raised three

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steps above the road, stands the house, long, low, and white. This was the abode of Daniel Bourne, of Rippidge Mill, and had belonged to his family for two centuries or more. The name, therefore, of Rippidge Mill—a contraction of Wripple-Bridge— was inseparably connected with that of Bourne in the mind of all the neighbourhood.

The present owner had not been brought up as a miller; he had been the second son, and, being a quick and studious youth, was bound as a pupil teacher in the Parish School. He afterwards obtained a scholarship at a Training College, and, in due time, held the mastership of a large school in a distant town. There he married, and, there, Lettice, his only child, was born. When she was about ten years old, George Bourne, the delicate elder brother, died; and his death was such a grief to the old father that he never held up his head afterwards, and before a year had passed, he was buried beside his son. Thus, the mill, house, and the land appertaining to it, fell to Daniel, who at once decided to give up his teaching, and go to live at the old place. It seemed to him impossible, that Rippidge Mill could go without a Bourne to see to the turning of it; or that he, the only remaining Bourne, should live anywhere but at the mill.

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He resigned his school, and though he had, in many respects, been a successful master, yet no one regretted his departure. He was a hard man, and without grace of manner to hide his hardness; nay, he was positively uncouth, both in ways and appearance.

He came to the mill, knowing nothing of his business, but with his mind made up to learn it; and all the more determined to do this because people told him that he was past the age to learn. He knew that all his fathers workmen thought so, even though he was younger than many of them, who remembered him as a lad. He would not submit to be questioned, or set to rights by any of them. He paid a large sum to a man from a distance, to come and teach him his trade: and, by the utmost application, he contrived

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to master all the details of working the mill, in a time that seemed marvellously short to the slow country-folks. The presence of this outsider was a great offence to the workmen, as were also the quick, suspicious glances of Daniel himself, who feared the men would take advantage of his ignorance. And, though the stranger went away, and the time soon came when the miller knew exactly what work should be done by every man, yet no confidence ever grew up between him and them;

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their masters sharp tones, and searching looks made them fancy he suspected them, even when he did not.

Mrs Bourne was a quiet, timid, long-suffering little woman, whose one aim in the latter years of her life, was 'not to vex the master.' She kept the house clean, mended the clothes, and cooked the frugal fare which was all he permitted. That she wanted further occupation never occurred to her husband; that she sometimes even sighed for a little pleasure was still further from his thoughts. There was but one pleasure that he was capable of—the getting of money, for which he worked day and night. He succeeded; yet life was bitter to him, because he had no son to inherit the mill and money. For Lettice he cared not a straw, and the thought that he was the last Bourne of Rippidge was a continual trouble to him.

But Lettice was the light of her mother's eyes; the one pleasure the poor woman craved was to have her daughter near her, and this was denied. Her father had brought the girl up to teaching, his former occupation; he had coached her himself, at one time, for her examinations, working her so hard, early and late, that he had brought her to the verge of brain-fever. After the warning he received from the doctor on this occasion, he took

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less interest in his daughter than before, showing very little pleasure when she did well, but complaining long and loudly if she failed. When she got her provisional certificate she went as assistant mistress to a large London school, and then the poor mother felt more than ever separated from her daughter.

Her only solace was gardening, and she kept the narrow borders, and the round beds in the strip of turf before the house, bright with flowers all the year through. Her husband made no objection to this; there had been flower-beds and borders there, as long as he

remembered, and therefore, it did not occur to him that this was a waste of ground. As long as his wife did not want him to find money for seeds or plants, she might do as she liked in the front garden; and she did very well, for people were ready enough to give roots or cuttings to the sweet-voiced, gentle, little woman, whom everyone pitied without quite knowing why.

At last, in the second autumn after Lettice went to London, Mrs Bourne pined away and died. Lettice came just in time to see her, and of course, stayed at home till the funeral was over. She wondered a little whether her father would now keep her with him, but he sent her

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back as a matter of course, and engaged a housekeeper for himself.

The girl missed her mother's letters sorely; they had been so loving always, though crookedly-written and often ill spelt. She did not care about going home at Christmas, and accepted an invitation which she received to pass her holiday with a friend. When she wrote to tell her father, he seemed nowise displeased that she should eat another's bread instead of his, and inferred as much in his answer—a curt epistle, in which he warned her not to spend her money on travelling second-class, or any such nonsense.

Meanwhile, all the dead remains of last summer's flowers were rotting on the beds at Rippidge Mill, and when the spring came the garden presented so forlorn an aspect, that one of the old workmen was stirred to ask his master 'If he might ha' a daay ta set the poor missis's garden ta rights a bit.' He was refused, but the request took effect, and the man who attended to the big kitchen-garden, and sold the fruit and vegetables at Kingston-on-Bray, was seen on the following day at work in the front of the house.

When Lettice came home in the summer, she found that the honeysuckle which used to grow over the porch had been cut down, the roses at

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the side of the house hung loose from the wall— there were carrots in the south border under the windows, the grass was unmown, and cabbages grew in the round beds before the door.

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THE MILLER GETS A LETTER

THE September sun shone brightly on the mill, and lighted up the beautiful autumn tints on the leaves of a pear tree, which grew on the side of the house nearest to the mill. A path ran along the garden here, leading to a small doorway, by means of which the reigning Bourne passed to and fro between his dwelling and the scenes of his labours.

At half-past eight on this, as on every other morning, the door opened, and Daniel Bourne came out of the mill to go to his breakfast, stooping his head to pass through the low doorway. He was tall, and broad-shouldered, and yet, these the only good points in his outward man, were lost in

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consequence of a stoop. He had a pale face, scanty moustache and whiskers, and a thin fringe of dull brown hair round his head, which was large in front, and sloped away suddenly behind. His right leg was bent inwards at the knee, and his gait was shuffling and peculiar, as were, indeed, all his movements. His eyes were small, dark, round, and deep set—'pig's eyes,' they had once been called by the irate mother of some child whom he had caned too severely. He was short-sighted, and poked his head forward with an air of anxious suspicion that was not conciliatory. His voice was harsh, and his utterance very abrupt and rapid; it sounded snappish at the best of times, and when he intended to be disagreeable—an occurrence by no means uncommon—then the snap became a snarl.

Such was the miller, who now came along the narrow path with a quick, ungainly walk so characteristic of the man. He nearly trampled to death a brood of young chickens that were taking their morning walk across the garden; he crushed beneath his feet a lovely spray of crimson leaves that was straggling, all uncared for, from the wall of the house. At the doorstep he trod on the tail of the old dog, who was sunning himself there; then, without noticing the animal, who slunk away from him, Daniel pushed the door roughly back,

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entered the bare, stone passage, and passed, without removing his hat, into the front kitchen, the only sitting-room of which he now made any use.

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Poor Mrs Bourne, had, in her time, made it as bright as she could, with the aid of pictures, a few ornaments, and plants in pots; but now, under the rule of Miss Betsy Wall, the housekeeper, it was as bare and colourless as the ward of a workhouse. The walls were covered with a cheap paper in pale drab shades, without a speck or line of warmer tint to relieve it. In the window hung very ancient curtains of drab moreen, which the housekeeper had discovered somewhere upstairs and put up in place of the white ones in which poor Mrs Bourne used to take delight. 'It saved the washing,' Betsy said.

The brick floor was uncovered, except just in front of the fireplace, where a small square of old carpet was laid down, from which all colour had long since departed.

A long deal table stood in the middle of the room, a smaller square one against one wall, and near the hearth was a third, a little round table of dark oak, on which was a very practical looking work-basket, and a heap of stockings and shirts in the course of being mended. Two wooden armchairs, and a few smaller ones completed the furniture. By way of

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wall-decoration was a flaring tradesman's almanack —quite a relief to the eyes, in that sea of drab. Last, but not least, at the far end of the room, were several rows of books, Daniel's old school collection, and by no means a bad one, for, in younger days, the one indulgence he allowed himself was the purchase of books. The case in which these former favourites stood was of rough deal, roughly put together; indeed it was made by Daniel himself out of the packing cases in which the books were brought to Rippidge. They now supplied him with occupation at night, when he sat in the hard arm-chair, and read them through and through by turns. He never bought new books now; he could not even spare the money to take in a newspaper, but kept himself up in the history of the times, by reading a weekly paper, borrowed from one of his own workmen.

He now held last week's copy of that paper in his hand, and was in haste to read it, as public affairs were just then of special interest.

The room was empty, and its atmosphere at once chilly and close, for there was no fire, and the window had not been opened. The miller, however, was accustomed to that. He merely screwed up his eyes, glanced round, and then called out, 'Breakfast ready?'

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'Look on the table,' was the answer made in shrill tones from the small inner kitchen, where Miss Wall was apparently very busy, making a considerable clatter, and a peculiarly unpleasant smell. Daniel took no notice of the abrupt reply, the noise, or the smell; he was used to all three. He knew well enough what the housekeeper was doing—she was boiling food for the poultry. She was invaluable to him, as a frugal manager, and for her success with the poultry.

The way in which miller Bourne's fowls were made to pay, was the wonder and envy of the neighbours, but he would never let out what he made by them, and it was a disputed point among the curious whether the 'millud' or Miss Wall herself reaped the pecuniary results of her efforts in that direction.

Looking at the long table, Daniel now perceived at the further end a cloth on which his breakfast was spread forth. This consisted of weak tea, watery milk, a small piece of bread, and some treacle in a cracked jar. He poured out the tea, spread himself a slice of bread and treacle, and proceeded to eat his breakfast with much apparent relish, wearing his hat all the while, and refreshing his mind by the perusal of the county paper, propped, for convenience, against the milk jug.

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He devoured two slices and a crust; but, from the absorbing interest of the news, did not observe the nature of the last morsel. Having finished it, he stretched forth his hand for more, his fingers passed over the plate and closed upon each other; this roused him, and peering round the corner of the paper he perceived that the bread was gone.

'What's this?' he said, then, raising his voice, he shouted, 'Miss Wall!'

'Coming,' replied the shrill tone from a greater distance than before; the housekeeper having just carried out her big black pot into the yard. The miller turned slowly round in his chair to face the door through which she would enter, and he had no sooner settled himself in this new position than Miss Wall appeared.

She was a short, thin woman, with high cheek bones, a rough, red complexion, wide mouth, and *retroussé* nose. Her eyes were light grey, and one of them had a very decided cast in it. Her red hair was screwed up very tightly into a rusty black net, and her costume, now as always, was peculiar, not to say scanty. She wore old-fashioned

shoes of thick leather, they were low, and rendered her blue worsted stockings very conspicuous. Her skirt was short, and consisted of a striped grey linsey petticoat. It is to be supposed that she wore

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some kind of underskirt, but appearances were decidedly against the assumption; her whole costume apparently comprising the said petticoat, and a loosely made jacket of washed-out print, secured round her waist by the strings of an apron of the coarsest hurden.

'Give me more bread,' said Daniel.

'There isn't any,' she answered.

'Isn't any? How's that?'

'Bread was rose a penny a loaf last week.'

'I know it, what of that?'

'You gave me no more money, so I took one loaf less.'

He said nothing to this; it was difficult to answer.

'You knowed it was rose; who *should* know, if not the millers?' continued Miss Wall, raising her voice a little, and squinting rather worse than before.

'I didn't think of it,' Daniel answered. 'You should have spoken about it; you know we never have had more bread than was really wanted. One must have enough to eat, if one is to work, though the food is as plain as possible.'

The latter part of the sentence was spoken faster, and with a snarl that made it unintelligible to Miss Wall: in fact, it was addressed more to himself than to her.

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'What d' ye say?' she asked, sharply.

'Have you no more bread, now?'

'No, you've eat the last.'

'When will the baker come?'

'This evenin'.'

'H'm,' growled Daniel, turning back to the table, which movement the housekeeper took as a dismissal, and vanished again into the back region with a grim smile on her countenance. Had her master seen that smile he would have known what it meant. To a

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millar, of all people in the world, it would answer best to bake at home. And this had always been done at Rippidge, until Miss Wall's advent, when her efforts in the bread-making line had proved so unsuccessful that Daniel, who was fastidious on that one point, had persisted in going to a baker. This was an insult and a piece of extravagance which the housekeeper could not get over, and she never lost an opportunity to make some difficulty about the 'boughten bread,' as she called it—'unwholesome, wasteful stuff as never was.'

This morning, therefore, she was in high glee, and her master had to console himself as best he might with the remaining contents of the tea-pot and the newspaper. These finished he pushed back his chair to go out; making a

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scraping sound on the floor which attracted Miss Wall's attention.

'Got your letters?' she called out.

'What letters?'

'There's two in the window,' she screamed, and, looking on the broad ledge where his wife used to keep her 'trees,' the miller found two envelopes; one, a business letter, in an ill-directed yellow cover; the other, white, addressed in fair and even handwriting.

He seized the yellow one first, devoutly hoping it might contain something to his advantage, but he must have been disappointed, for, crushing it roughly in his hand he tore the other open, muttering as he did so, 'Wonder what the girl wants?' This letter was as follows.

'ST LUKE'S SCHOOL,

'MILBOROUGH, E.,

'MY DEAR FATHER,

'I am sorry to have to tell you that since I came back here after the holidays I have been very unwell. I went on as long as I could before applying to a doctor, but, one day I fainted in school, and then Miss Jones made me go to Dr

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Dickson, but still I got worse in spite of the medicine he gave me. He says that the hot weather, the close school, and working for the examination have been too much for me,

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and I must rest for a time. So I am writing to tell you that I shall be at home next week, if you can have me. I am obliged to resign my situation here, since these schools are too large for Miss Jones to wait for me, even if it were only for a few weeks. I hope I shall soon be well enough to take another; the doctor says I ought to go into a country school. Please let me know if you can send for my box, to the Station on Thursday week.

'Your dutiful daughter,

'Lettice Bourne.'

The miller put the letter down with a gesture of impatience and disgust. He looked out of the window for a minute or two, and then muttered, 'Oh, why couldn't she have been a boy?' Then he picked up the letter, read it through again, and finally pocketed it and returned to the mill.

At one o'clock he came in to dinner, of which meal he and his housekeeper partook in common,

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and which was accompanied with occasional interchange of short remarks on the all-important subjects of weather, business, poultry, vegetables, and prices.

To-day, Miss Wall had several interesting pieces of news to communicate as to the welfare of her feathered charges, but the miller would pay no heed. He seemed lost in thought, and Betsy, unable to attract his attention, began to feel herself an aggrieved woman. This view was confirmed by his after-dinner proceedings. As she took away the plates and dishes and washed them up in the back kitchen, she watched her master askance.

He sat quiet for a time, still thinking over some matter which evidently perplexed him, then he pulled out a letter and read it, after which he unlocked his desk, took out paper, envelopes, pen, and stamps; and, instead of writing at the big table as he was wont to do when he had letters to answer, he carried off all the materials into the mill.

'What's the meaning o' that, now?' she asked herself. 'He's got summat in 'is 'ed 'e dunna want me ta know. I'll pay thee off for it, miller Bourne— see if I don't—for that, and for speaking so short about the bread.'

With this in her mind, Betsy went about her afternoon work with greater determination than

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usual, pursing up her lips and casting glances full of meaning in two directions at once. Presently she went upstairs to her bare and cheerless bedroom, and commenced the operation which she called 'cleaning me.'

This consisted of giving a tighter screw to the red hair, replacing the net by a hideous black cap, and exchanging the washed-out print jacket for a very unbecoming garment of green merino.

Her toilet completed, she returned to the kitchen and made herself a cup of tea and a slice of toast. Then she sat herself down to work, and was fully occupied for some time in contriving a lining for a dilapidated waistcoat of the miller's, out of the best parts of an ancient red table cloth, long ago discarded by some deceased Mrs Bourne, but which had been dragged forth from its hiding place by the thrifty Betsy, who had now found opportunity to turn it to good account.

The business proved so absorbing, that she was quite five minutes late in going out to see after the pigs and poultry, and she had to hurry through this lest she should be behind time with supper, for they kept primitive hours at the mill.

Her master came in punctually, but sat down without a word, not even remarking on the fact that he was kept waiting.

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"Tis ready now," said Betsy shortly, as she placed on the table a cracked jug of sour cider, and then drew in her own chair. She eyed the miller furtively, as he helped himself to the hard cheese known in that neighbourhood as 'Skimdick,' and poured out a glass of the cider. She was determined not to speak till he had done so, but, then, *then* she flattered herself, 'she would wake him up a bit.'

But, alas for Betsy, the subject of his conversation, when he at length opened his lips was so opposite to anything she had expected, that the 'bit of her mind' she had been treasuring up for him was never delivered.

'I'd a letter from my daughter, this morning,' he began abruptly.

'Had you?' returned the housekeeper, with polite indifference.

'Yes, she's been ill, ordered home by the doctor— says she mustn't do any more teaching at present— wants country air, and so on.'

He paused, and cut himself some more cheese. Miss Wall's cheeks grew a shade redder than usual. She fixed one eye on her master, while the other looked out of the window.

'Are we to have the pleasure of her company at home, then?' she asked, sarcastically.

'She must come home, of course,' was the answer.

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'I can't afford to be sending her to the sea, or anything of that sort. She must come home, and when she's here she must work.'

'Nothing so bad for girls as idleness,' interrupted Miss Wall, with an approving nod of the head. 'I'll see that Lettice—'

'Stay a bit,' said the miller, 'I was going to say that of course, as you know, I can't afford to keep a daughter in idleness, nor two women to do the work of one. If Lettice comes, she must do the work of the place.'

'What do you mean, Mr Bourne?' asked Miss Wall, with an unpleasant crescendo in her voice.

Daniel did not look up; he hacked away with his stumpy worn-out knife at a crust that lay in his plate. Was it possible that he was afraid of his housekeeper?

'I mean,' he said, snapping off the ends of his words more than usual, 'I mean, that if Lettice comes home, she must be housekeeper.'

'Am I to understand that you give me notice, then?'

'Yes,' he answered, speaking more freely, relieved that she had taken his meaning. 'Yes; a month's notice from to-day.'

There was silence for a minute, a silence that made the miller look up, and when his eyes me

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the gaze of the one that was levelled at him, Miss Wall rose from her chair.

'Daniel Bourne,' she said, 'is this the way you treat Betsy Wall? I've not forgot, if you have, that my grandfather was Wall of Wall End, and though, by no fault of their own, our fam'ly has come down in the world, yet there was a time when the Walls was far, far above the Bournes of Rippidge Mill, and not so long ago, neither. But, when I

demeaned myself to come and be your housekeeper, I little thought this was to be the ungrateful end of it. If it hadn't been as you come of an old family, I 'ould never ha' come anigh you, and so I've told you many's the time, And I've give you the benefit of all my experience, which you'll not find another 'ooman in all the county as understands poultry like me, and I've slaved for you so as never was, and now you've give me a month's notice, as if I'd been a common servant—a slut of a gurl to come when you please and go when you choose. You'll not catch me a doin' it, miller Bourne. No Wall was ever treated so yet, and *I'll* not be the first to be so put upon. I've plenty of friends, still, thank goodness, that's better off than you will ever be for all your pinchin' and savin'. There's lots of places I can go to, and welcome, where I can sit still and be waited on and

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go out drivin' if I've a mind, instead of toilin' and slavin' as I've done here. I hope your daughter's comin' soon, Mr Bourne, and that she'll prove a good 'ousekeeper and a good hand with the poultry. *I'll* take my leave on this day week, if you please.'

She paused at last, and stood with her hands folded waiting for an answer, while Daniel shifted uneasily in his chair, and said as mildly as he might,

'I'm very sorry you should put yourself about so, Miss Wall. This day week will suit me very well.'

'And is that all you have to say?' gasped the irate Betsy.

'Yes,' said the miller. Whereupon she flung away from the table and left the room, banging the door after her.

Daniel sat in his place for some time, overcome with surprise at this outburst from the quiet and demure housekeeper.

'Surely she'll come and put away the supper, and lock up,' he said to himself. But as she did not re-appear, he went round and 'locked up,' then, leaving the remains of the supper on the table, he lit a lamp and sat down to read one of the books from his shelves.

There was a certain number of

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these which he always studied at night, taking them in regular order over and over again. The volume he now held was known almost by heart, yet this evening he could find no meaning in the familiar lines.

It was so long since he had been rated by a woman, that he felt quite overwhelmed by the event of this evening.

In his schoolkeeping days sometimes it happened that an angry mother would come up and make a scene because she thought her child had been unjustly, or overmuch punished.

Since then, he had heard no female fury directed against himself. His wife's little fretful wishes or complaints he had always ignored, though they had seemed to him an exasperating instance of woman's folly.

He had been wont to respect, nay, almost to admire Miss Wall's Spartan contempt of small discomforts. Now, to think she should fly out like this!

He could not read, so, at last, to save the oil, he put out the lamp and went to bed by moonlight, saying to himself as he went—

'Lettice may not be such a good housekeeper, perhaps, but anyhow, she has not a tongue like that. It wasn't in her mother, and it isn't in her,

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thank goodness! and, on the whole, it's lucky Miss Wall has chosen to go on the very day the girl comes. I shan't have three mouths to fill.'

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CHAPTER III

THE MILLER'S DAUGHTER

'AAY saay, missus,' bawled old Joe Porter to his wife, 'aay saay, missus, what d'ya think?'

'Aay dunno,' she answered, without raising her eyes from their anxious watch on the pot, wherein something was bubbling and steaming in preparation for Joe's supper.

'Wuoy,' said Joe, as he entered the kitchen and sat down ponderously in his old, black oak chair, 'Wuoy, that thar Betsy Wahl's a goin' ta leave.'

'Well!' exclaimed Mrs Porter, dropping the spoon she had been using, 'well, aay never did! How's that, an' who tow'd 'ee?'

"Er, 'er own sen,' replied Joe with a chuckle.

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"Er tow'd ma 'er wuz a goin' awaay a Thursday, an' er axed ma 'ould aay git a cart somewhere, and drive she an' 'er box ta Braaybridge i' tha evenin' like.'

'Well, aay never did! A've 'er an' tha maaster fell out?'

'Not as aay 'nows on. 'Er 'nows on which side 'er bread's buttered on too well fur that, I reckon. But Miss Bourne's a comin' 'ome, Joe, ses she, an' aay be a goin' ta leave.'

'Lettice comin' 'ome! What's that fur, aay wonder? Poor wench, 'er'll find it mighty dull at the mill.'

'That 'er 'ool. Thee may well saay 'poor wench.' 'Owsumdever, 'er's comin', though what's the reason on't, aay dunnow. Anyway, that Betsy don't like goin', aay cun tell 'ee.'

'Not likely! Aay wonder what 'er'll do now.'

'Aay be ta tak' 'er a Thursday evenin' ta the King's Head, that's ahl 'er tow'd ma. 'Er'll be fur goin' ta some a tha 'friends' uz 'er tanks sa mighty fine about.'

'A pack o' rubbidge!' sneered Mrs Porter, as she poured out the boiling contents of the pot into a dish. 'Aay don't believe a word about them "friends" o' 'ers. Who be thaay aay shud like to know?'

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'Aay'll tell 'ee who some on um be. Them Bridgeses of Long Farm, near Kingsfud.'

'Wuoy, Joe, thaay be reg'lar well-ta-do folks.'

'Ay, so tha' be, but thaay be some kin o' 'er mother's, an' they've 'elped 'er now and agin, that's what it is.'

'But 'er'll not go ta their 'ouse, Joe, surelye?'

'No, no daaynger! Thaay knows better than ave a owd hobject like Betsy Wahl at their 'ouse. But if 'er gets a bit 'ard up, 'er'll come down on um, an' thaay'll 'elp 'er, like thaay've done afore.'

'Trust 'er fur bein' 'ard up! 'Er's a sly 'un, 'er is, and mighty proud, too. Ta see 'er mincin' along, with that best 'at an' fall uv 'er's on, you'd think she'd a thousand a year.'

'Aye, so ya 'ould,' said Joe, 'but come, now let's 'ave our suppers.'

And neither then, nor afterwards, did the Porters, nor any of the work-people discover more about the cause of Miss Wall's departure, though it continued for some time to be

a subject of wonder to them; much wonder but no regret, since the housekeeper had not made herself a favourite.

On the day she had named, she went away in a cart driven by Joe Porter. The miller's proposal that she should go by the cart which was to meet Lettice had been declined with an air which implied

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that such an offer was only insult added to injury. She desired Joe to drive her to the King's-Head, a small, old-fashioned public-house in a bye-street at Braybridge.

Here she alighted, and when Joe asked if he should not call some one to carry in her box, she replied, 'No' very shortly, and requested him to put it down on the pavement. His curiosity as to her destination was not to be gratified, for, as he drove slowly away, balancing with much disgust in one hand the very small coin with which his trouble had been rewarded, he turned his head at the end of the street and looked back, and beheld Miss Wall still standing on the same spot, looking up and down with a sprightly air, and her box on the ground beside her. In any other town a crowd would have collected to stare at her oddly dressed figure, but in Braybridge the costume of at least half the inhabitants seemed ruled by chance circumstances, rather than by any effort of taste, or rule of fashion; and most of them looked like Betsy did then, as if their respective garments had been picked out hap-hazard, from the stock of a pawnbroker in a small way of business.

Joe Porter possessed that kindly disposition which takes a very lively interest in the affairs of his neighbours, and now, being fairly baulked with

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regard to Miss Wall's intentions, he turned his thoughts to the coming housekeeper, and wondered if he might see her on his homeward way. In this he was not disappointed, for, as he was jogging slowly along, and had just come in sight of the mill, a light cart passed him, driven by one of his fellow workmen, at whose side sat Lettice Bourne, while behind was her big black box.

"Er's a likely-looking wench enow," he said to himself, "but, eh dear, the mill's but a dull place fur 'er ta come to."

The light cart had deposited its fare, and driven round to the yard, before Joe's heavy steed came lumbering by; the new-comer had entered the house, the door was shut, and all looked as dull as ever. From the outside only, for the kitchen was adorned by the presence of one of the fairest faces in the whole of Brookshire. Whence Lettice Bourne got her beauty was a puzzle to all who knew the family, but there it was, undoubtedly.

She was slightly above middle height, and had a slim, graceful figure. Her hands and feet were well formed, and carefully kept; her face was one that Sir Joshua Reynolds might have painted—oval and delicately tinted, with small straight mouth and nose, a high, smooth, white forehead, from which was turned back most becomingly, a quantity of

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silky, light brown hair. Her round eyes were blue-grey, and out of them she gazed calmly and steadily, though, perhaps, with lack of expression.

Lettice was not one of those who combine, in their own persons, every variety of charm. It must be confessed that there was a still quietness about her beauty that almost amounted to monotony. And this outward sameness was the faithful reflex of her mind. Lettice was a woman of few ideas, and the light in which she first viewed any person or thing, continued to be the only one of which her mental vision was capable. She was not stupid, by any means; had she been so, she could never have learnt as she did, nor have imparted knowledge to her pupils; but she lacked that keen sympathy and quick insight which enable some women to put themselves into the place of others, and see from its several points of view any circumstance which may come under their consideration.

She had no sense of the ridiculous; you might sometimes see her smile because she was pleased, seldom or never because she was amused. She was a good girl—a very good girl, but was mentally incapable of perceiving any merits beyond or outside the limits of her own goodness. A truly matter-of-fact nature had Lettice, and this stood her in good stead now that the mill was to be her

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home. The dreary look of the house, the dull monotony of the life led there, with the continual pinching and saving, would have been untold misery to a girl of keen sensibilities; but she took it all as 'father's way,' and was in nowise alarmed at the

prospect before her, except that now and then a fear crossed her mind that she might make mistakes over the unaccustomed household work, or spend more than her father would like.

Had she known the amount of pity expended on her by the neighbours, she would have been puzzled as to its cause, and have opened her pretty round eyes a little wider than usual, with a look of wondering innocence charming to behold.

She was always picturesque, and her appearance as she sat at breakfast with her father, on the morning after her arrival, would have given pleasure to any man, but one so absorbed in thoughts of money-getting as was the miller.

The gleam of sunshine that lighted up his daughter's fair hair was lost on him; he had no eyes for the trimness of her figure, nor for the becoming tint of her plain dress of dark blue, set off by a snowy apron. He only felt a vague uneasiness, a fear that all could not go right, if Lettice sat down with him, instead of eating her own meal as Miss Wall had done, in snatches

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standing up, and occasionally shouting to him through the open door of the kitchen. However, for this morning, he suffered the innovation to pass unnoticed, since it gave him an opportunity to repeat and enlarge upon all the injunctions and warnings he had given her last night.

'Above all,' he concluded, 'mind what you're about with the poultry. Of course it's strange to you, but anything you don't know, go and ask old Mother Porter. Know the house? That little grey 'un, up the lane yonder, first turn to the right. The poultry was a great expense to me, they've only just begun to pay, and want well looking after to do it. 'Well, now, I must be off,' getting up with a crust in his hand. 'Dinner at half-past twelve, sharp, mind—bacon and cabbage. Joe Porter will come and show you where to cut the cabbage from.'

Left to herself, Lettice proceeded leisurely to work, to wash up the breakfast things, make the beds, and put the rooms straight. She was of an orderly nature and enjoyed these tasks. She congratulated herself on being in the fresh, country air, and on having no hot, noisy school in prospect. That the rooms in the mill-house should be so unadorned and colourless seemed natural to her, and her fingers did not itch to

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brighten and beautify them, as many another girl's would have done. She felt content with her home, and hummed to herself a school song as she moved about at her work.

Presently, she was startled by a series of loud bangs, proceeding from the kitchen, and hastened, not without alarm, to discover their origin. By the table stood a ruddy-faced old man, with a good-natured expression, bright dark eyes, and silver hair. He wore no coat, but his brown waistcoat and the old wide-awake hat which he held in one hand were well dusted with flour. His other hand rested on the table, and with it he had been thumping vigorously, to attract the attention of the 'young missus.'

'Marnin', miss,' he said, raising his right hand and ducking his head till forehead and forefinger met. 'Marnin', miss, aay be Joe Parter, an' the maaster said as 'ow aay were ta come and shownd 'ee whar tha cabbages be, leastways, which on 'em we be a usin' of.'

'Thank you; will you come through this way?' and Lettice passed on before him into the garden from the back kitchen door.

'Thae jews is very 'eavy uv a marnin', now,' remarked Joe, as he saw Lettice holding her skirts

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out of the way of the dripping hedge on one side, and the wet cabbage-leaves on the other.

'Thaey hardly dries ahl daay, though the sun do shine purty wahrm fur the time o' year. Wuoy!'

This sudden exclamation was caused by Joe's catching sight of some three or four hens, busily 'pecketting,' as he called it, over a freshly dug piece of ground at the bottom of the garden, only lifting their heads occasionally to give vent to a contented 'Cluck! Cluck!'

'What's the matter?' asked Lettice, turning round, but she got no answer, and watched Joe with wonder as he raised himself with the help of a stake that projected from the hedge, and having looked over into the orchard stood flat upon his feet again, with his head on one side as if listening to something. Then he looked in her face, with an expression half shocked, half amused, and again exclaimed,

'Wuoy!'

'What's the matter?' she asked, impatiently.

'Aay be afraid, Miss Bourne, you've forgot to feed the poultry. Listen! Thar be the ducks quackenin' like mad in the yard, for their fittle, poor things; an' 'eres the fowls i' the garden, an' the' archert, an' ahl over the plaayce uz you m'y saay.'

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Lettice blushed scarlet, 'No,' she said, 'I've not fed them—I—I forgot—at least, I didn't know when they ought to be fed.'

'Never mind, miss,' said Joe, consolingly, sorry for the girl's confusion. 'That owd Betsy—ugh—ugh—Miss Wahl—'er wuz use to feed 'um d'reckly 'erd 'ad 'er own breakfuss. But never mind, aay'll come along wi' you now an' feed um. D'ya know whar tha cullen is?'

'No, I don't,' said Lettice, who did not even know what cullen was.

'I nows whar 'er kep it. Thar, them be the cabbages you mun take; right down a' the fur end, d'ye see?' explained Joe, pointing with a stick he had picked up. 'Come, now, let's give them ducks summat to stop their noise.'

He led the way now, and paused at the door of an outhouse close to the back kitchen. On the floor lay an empty sack. Joe stood staring at it, while Lettice looked over his shoulder and thought, 'Is that a cullen?'

The old man stooped and picked it up, opened the neck, put his arm in, and finally his head, before he was satisfied that there were no contents. He shook his head as he threw it down again, and muttered to himself, 'That wur filled a Monday, but 'er allus *was* a sharper.'

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Lettice wondered what he meant, but before she could ask he said, 'I'll fetch some cullen out uv the mill in a minute, my dear, an' bring it 'ee i' the yard.'

'Thank you, you are very kind,' said the girl earnestly, beginning to feel a little oppressed and bewildered by her new duties, and glad of this friendly guide. She went slowly into the yard, where the clamorous ducks came towards her, head foremost, and only ceased their loud quacking when Joe re-appeared with a basket on his arm, which he gave to Lettice, out of which she threw handfuls of the food they had so long been deprived of.

'I canna staay now,' said Joe, breathlessly. 'Thee cun get the cabbage thysen, I suppose, an' do 'ee know uz thee mun kill some fowls fur ta-morrer's market?'

'No; I didn't know it,' gasped Lettice, piteously.

'Can 'ee dress um?' enquired Joe, hurriedly.

'No; I can't, I know nothing about it.'

'Well, well. Aay'll tell my missus, an' 'er'll come up i' the afternoon an' 'elp 'ee. Don't put thysen about, 'tull be ahl right. Aay'll tell 'er at dinner time; thee kill um, an' 'ave um ready, an' 'er'll dress um for 'ee; aay mun go now.'

And Joe hurried off, knowing he would be enquired for if absent any longer.

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His promise to 'the young missus' was not forgotten. In the afternoon, just as Lettice began to fear that no help was forthcoming, she was relieved by the appearance of an elderly woman short, and plain featured, but with a kindly, almost sweet expression on her wrinkled face, and chiefly remarkable for her exquisite cleanliness.

'You are Mrs Porter?' asked Lettice. 'I hope you are well. I am so glad to see you. Father says that Mrs Jones will call for the poultry to-night, and I was so afraid they would not be ready.'

'Oh, us'll soon get em done,' said Mrs Porter, pleasantly, as she took out of her basket a large coarse apron, and tied it on, as she asked,

'How many are you going to send? and have you some water ready?'

'I didn't know how many I ought to send,' answered the girl, a perplexed look coming over her fair face. 'I thought perhaps four would do,'

'Four couple?'

'No, four fowls. I've killed them, but they don't look right, somehow,' and Lettice sighed as she opened the back kitchen door, and showed the bodies of the victims in a row on the table.

'No—no—no sure,' said Mrs Porter, with a funny little cough, and turning rather red.

'You

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shouldn't have cut their heads off, my dear! These can never go to market.'

She stood and turned over the limp and headless birds, choking down her amusement with an effort worthy of any well-bred lady, and refraining from looking at Lettice who she knew instinctively to be on the verge of crying.

The tears came a minute later, when Mrs Porter made another discovery, and could not help exclaiming,

'And—oh! my dear, there's three of 'em pullets, and only one a cockerel!'

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CHAPTER IV

A DIFFICULTY

THE bodies of those unfortunate fowls furnished forth the table at the mill for many a day, and not a bone of them but was picked with groans from the miller, and sighs and shame by his daughter.

The care of the poultry, altogether, grew to be a burden on the girls mind; it seemed to her that the more she tried to learn all things pertaining to it, the more remained to be learnt. There was no end to the mistakes she made; so both she and her father thought. She carried in nest-eggs, and sent them to market for fresh; she took the best white wheat from the mill to feed

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her charges with; she forgot to set open the door by which the ducks entered their resting place at night, so that they strayed away, and several fell a prey to the foxes.

She laughed to see an old duck come up to be fed with her beak wide open, and push her way to the front, uttering short quacks. She laughed still more at the way it shovelled up all the corn it could get into its beak, and then waddled off alone, and, apparently in great haste.

She told Mrs Porter how funny the old duck was, and the old woman cried out, Why, my dear, she's stole her nest!'

'Stolen her nest! What's that?'

'She's got a nest somewhere off i' the meadow, an' you must follow her and find it.'

And Lettice did follow the duck the next morning, and brought home all the eggs that had been sat upon. This was when she had been at home about a month, and her father grew despairing, and determined already that her housekeeping was a failure, which was

hardly fair, as in other respects she did not do badly. She was of a house-wifely nature, and had watched and helped her mother during her holidays in the old days, before Mrs Bourne's death, and she had taken an interest in the *ménage*

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of the schoolhouse, though that was the care of the senior mistress with whom she had lived.

Lettice also inherited, in a certain degree, her father's love of saving, and so in the housekeeping department he had no cause for complaint against her. Yet he felt distrustful. Miss Wall's idea of saving had comprised economy of time and trouble as well as of expense. That is, she counted it wasteful to use two plates or knives at one meal, or to risk the ware and tear caused by carrying any article from the cupboard to the table, unless you were absolutely certain it would be used.

Lettice, on the other hand, had always a bountiful supply of forks, and spoons, and dishes; and this, with other small changes gave to her father a sense of luxury, which led to the conclusion that his daughter was extravagant. All this grew out of the disappointment about the poultry. Miss Wall had talked so much and so loudly of the profit they were, and of the still greater profit they would be in the future, that her master had quite pinned his faith to them, and now that Lettice had not succeeded in this direction, he felt sure she must be mismanaging everything.

He was sorely perplexed, and meditated over his difficulty so constantly, that he appeared more morose than ever, and persuaded himself that he

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was in actual danger of being ruined. What should he do? Far in the distance he seemed to see a vision—a golden much-to-be-desired vision— of Miss Wall installed in her old place, and Lettice—gone.

But how many dark difficulties lay between the present state of things, and the accomplishment of that other desirable one. First, he did not know where Miss Wall could be found; nor, when he remembered her angry departure, did he venture to think he could get her back, even if he discovered her whereabouts. He felt instinctively that his workpeople had disliked the late housekeeper, and yet that they had a curiosity about her, which would lead them to enquire after, and probably to find out her present abode.

But Daniel Bourne was so proud that he could never have brought himself to seek for intelligence through such a channel, and so he saw no solution of that difficulty.

Secondly, he could think of no way in which to dispose of his daughter. He never thought of disputing the doctor's verdict, that she was not strong enough to teach: he had, moreover, a strong impression that she was too stupid to teach.

He had previously reconciled himself to the thought that her former profession was no longer

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open to her; but he puzzled himself with thinking what should he do. Were he to place her in a shop, a premium would be required to teach her the business. Heaven knew he could not afford that! Service? Bah! No Bourne had ever been in service. Besides, the wages were so small. Oh! to think of the money he had spent on this girl, and now she was bringing him nothing. Why hadn't she been a boy?

To talk over the matter with Lettice herself, never occurred to him. It was an article of his creed that the fate of women should always be decided by their male relations, without any reference to their own wishes; and so, he pondered, morning, noon, and night—how he might get rid of his daughter, and no conclusion would present itself to his mind. He felt constrained to take counsel with some one.

This feeling grew into a fixed resolve on an October afternoon, when the miller was walking across the fields, through which runs a footpath leading to Braybridge.

His destination was a farm that lies half way between Rippidge and the town, but, having at last made up his mind to consult a friend about Lettice's future, he began to think he had better extend his walk, and go on to see the only man in

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the world to whom he ever talked with any freedom. He was walking as usual, with his head down, and, therefore, did not perceive, till he arrived at a stile, which obliged him to look up, that the very man he wanted was advancing on the other side. This was Mr Cox, master of the National School at Braybridge, a little, bustling, self-important fellow, smartly dressed, talkative, and in every way a complete contrast to the miller.

'Do, Cox. How are you?'

'Why, Bourne, is it you? How curious, to be sure! I was on the way to the mill to look you up. I have not seen you for ever so long.'

'No—was going to see you.'

'Were you? Well, that is odd, now. To-day of all days! It so happens that we've got a holiday, and I thought I would'—

'Holiday! How's that?'

'In honour of a wedding,' said Mr Cox with great gusto. 'One of the young ladies from the vicarage was married this morning. We've had grand doings in Braybridge. Didn't you hear the bells? She is a very agreeable young lady, upon my word, and we are sorry to lose her; but of course it's a capital thing for Mr Vernon to get one of his daughters off his hands. It's a poor living, you know, Bourne, a poor living, and he has five girls.

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But I am keeping you. Shall we go on?' asked Mr Cox, turning towards the mill.

'Am going to the farm, yonder. Sha'n't be long. Can you wait?'

'Oh, certainly; all right,' returned the little schoolmaster, jumping back again over the stile. 'It's all the same to me. I've all the afternoon before me. I thought I would come over to Rippidge while the weather is so fine; these fields will be impassable soon.'

'For fellows with boots like those.'

'Ah!' said Mr Cox, complacently regarding his small and smartly shod feet. 'You see, a man in my position must pay some attention to appearances. Besides'—

Here he paused, glancing askance at the heavy ill-shapen boots, all guiltless of gloss, which were worn by his friend. Mr Cox did not finish his sentence; he could not imagine his own feet similarly covered, and his feelings were too deep for words.

'I sha'n't be long at the farm,' snarled Daniel, 'just got to speak to old Mother Higgins about some sacks. Come back with you then. Stay to supper?'

'N-no, thanks. I'm afraid I've an engagement for this evening,' answered Mr Cox, adding to

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himself, 'I can't stand that squinting housekeeper of his, and the supper she gave me last time I was at the mill wasn't fit for a dog.'

'Sorry for that, wanted to talk to you,' replied the miller, almost civilly.

'Oh, we shall have plenty of time to talk. I needn't go back just yet,' said Mr Cox. 'It's pleasant to get a little change and fresh country air,' he continued in a pathetic voice, 'after the wear and tear of school life. Our inspection takes place next month, and we are working very hard. I hardly feel as if we ought to have taken this holiday, only Miss Vernon asked for it herself, and of course, I couldn't refuse a lady. I wonder you didn't hear of this wedding, Bourne—it has been very much talked about in the county. We took a great deal of trouble about the arrangements, and it went off uncommonly well; though I say it that shouldn't. The school children marshalled by me'—

In this style Mr Cox continued to talk during the walk to the mill, very much to his own satisfaction, but very little to the edification of his companion, whose thoughts had gone off on another track.

Marriage! Here was a way of getting rid of one's daughter which had not occurred to him before. He would set about finding a husband for Lettice immediately. He had but a poor opinion of

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her himself, but looks go a long way with some men, the fools! She was good-looking, he knew; he had overheard the men saying she was 'a real 'andsome wench.'

By this time, they had arrived at Rippidge. Daniel opened the wicket for his friend, led the way up the steps, and then paused, with his hand on the latch, and turned round to blurt out the words, 'Got my daughter at home.'

'Your daughter!—Oh, indeed!' said Mr Cox, so taken by surprise, that he hardly knew what to say. 'Has—has she got a holiday?'

'No. Been ill, Doctor says she's not strong enough to teach. Had to leave. Come in. Lettice! —Oh, there you are. This is Mr Cox.'

Sitting in the window, her bright hair lighted up by the autumn sun, was a slight fair girl, in a pretty grey dress, bending over a pile of the miller's much-worn socks. Startled by this blunt introduction to a stranger, a faint colour came into her cheeks, as she rose, and said softly—

'How do you do, sir?'

While Mr Cox, struck dumb with admiration, made his best bow, and smilingly declared,

'Delighted, I'm sure, to make your acquaintance, Miss Bourne. This is an unexpected pleasure, and'—

'Must go to the mill, for a minute,' said Daniel,

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cutting short this polite speech. 'Shall be back directly—mind waiting, Cox?'

Mr Cox was charmed to wait. He took a chair close to the window, and said to himself that he wished he had accepted the invitation to supper, and he hoped that old scarecrow, Miss Wall, would keep out of the way. He began to converse with his hostess, and tried valiantly to make himself agreeable, though he met with but small encouragement. He talked of the beautiful autumn weather; of the quiet country ways at Rippidge; of the change it must be to Miss Bourne, after town life; of the pleasant freedom she must experience at having escaped from teaching; of the cruel injustice done by the world to teachers generally.

Lettice listened attentively, looking now and then at the speaker, out of her pretty eyes, and occasionally when a pause in the flow of Mr Cox's eloquence, seemed to demand that she should say something, she opened her rosy lips and remarked, 'I don't know,' or 'Do you think so?'

This was certainly not very encouraging, and so, when the miller returned, Mr Cox, having got warmed up to his favourite subject, plunged at once into a discussion on some of the grievances of teachers, concerning which he had written a letter to the *Schoolmaster*.

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He drew a copy of the paper from his pocket and showed it to his friend, to do which had indeed been his original object in coming to the mill that day. Daniel read, criticised, agreed on some points, and disputed others. The interests of school-teachers was one of the few subjects, outside the all-important one of gain, in which he took any interest.

Mr Cox talked away, and now and then cast an admiring glance at Lettice, who sat darning in the window, very diligently. He began to think that his bug-bear, the

housekeeper, must have vanished from the mill, and he hoped that, at any rate, they would ask him to stay tea He did not feel in any hurry to go now.

But this hope was vain.

Truly, the miller had asked his friend to supper, but that was in a moment of weakness, begot of surprise at meeting, so unexpectedly, the very man he wanted; and of the desire to obtain some advice. But now that the required hint had been given unconsciously, why should it be paid for by cups of tea and slices of bread? Little Cox was a tremendous eater. No—he might go home to tea.

Still the schoolmaster stayed on, till at last Lettice put down her work and said, half shyly, 'Shall I get tea, father?'

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'No, child; we've not done talking yet. Wait a bit.'

So, very unwillingly, Mr Cox at last rose to take leave. The miller accompanied him to the gate.

'Well, Bourne, I must congratulate you,' said his visitor, with effusion. 'What about?'

'Why, on your daughter! She's lovely—quite lovely! You must look after her, Bourne, or you'll have all the young fellows round her, like wasps after honey.'

'I'll take care of her,' replied the father, with a grim chuckle. 'Bye, Cox. Will call soon. Should like to see the answers to your letter there.'

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CHAPTER V

AN ACCIDENT

THE days following Mr Cox's visit were spent by Daniel Bourne in anxious thought. Even the unobservant Lettice perceived and wondered at his pre-occupation, while the men were full of conjectures as to what their master could have on his mind. He came into the mill late in the morning, and left earlier than usual; he mooned about, without seeming to pay much attention to the work, and various shortcomings on their part were unheeded, instead of being sharply and quickly rebuked, as was ordinarily the case. One step he took, which seemed to them to throw some light on this unwonted conduct.

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The Salamanca Corpus: Up Hill and Down Dale. Vol I (1884)

This was to call Joe Porter aside, and with an unsuccessful effort at carelessness, to ask if he knew where Miss Wall was living now.

'Noa, aay dunno,' was the reply, 'but 'ers somewheres about in Braaybridge. My missus seed un thar' a Friday. Not ta speak to, ya knows, but 'er cotched sight on 'er like, in the street.'

When Joe told of this question, the men and their wives immediately decided that the miller must mean to find and marry the late housekeeper.

But they were on a false scent, their master was reflecting on the possibility of getting his daughter married. It had seemed so easy when the idea first struck him, but now he realised the fact that he must first procure a husband for her. How and where was he to find this necessary article? Where could he light upon a young man sufficiently steady, thrifty, and well-educated? He did not desire these qualifications so much on Lettice's behalf, as that he felt he could not endure, as a son-in-law, a drunkard, a prodigal, or an ignorant lout.

With these thoughts in his mind, he prepared one Friday to go to Braybridge market, in a light cart, drawn by a broken-kneed horse, and driven by young Porter, who always acted coachman on these occasions, the miller, who was not a brave man, being afraid to touch the reins. Indeed,

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he never seated himself in the cart without sad misgivings, and a strong sense of the danger incurred, lest the last Bourne of Rippidge should not come home alive.

To-day the town was safely reached, and Daniel got speedily through his business, and was about to return, when he remembered he had a word or two to say to a farmer who would probably be found at the White Hart. This was the Inn or Hotel, as the landlord called it, at the 'Top of the Town.'

Daniel enquired for Mr Walker, of the Fern Farm, was told that he was in the bar, and went in to see him.

Meanwhile, Dick Porter sat in the cart, and was well amused by watching the market going on in the triangular space before him. Business there was in full swing, and Dick watched and listened with all his eyes and ears. The miller always drove in early on

market days, and often returned within the hour, so that the boy had seldom a chance to see much of the fun and bustle which seemed to him so lively and inspiring.

He hoped his master would be a long time talking to Mr Walker. And yet, when the miller re-appeared, after a very short absence, Dick did not seem displeased.

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His dark eyes shone and his mouth stretched from ear to ear, as he watched the master climb into the cart and establish himself in his seat.

'I seed Betsey—Miss Wahl—jus' now, sir,' he said significantly, raising the whip as he spoke to stir up his steed.

The miller seized Dick's arm.

'Stop!' he shouted, 'where did you see her?'

"Er wuz walkin' along th' other side, thar; an 'er went up River Lane along wi' another 'ooman.'

'You just run up the Lane and see where she goes, if you can,' said the miller, excitedly.

'I'll hold Diamond.'

Nothing loath, Dick jumped out. 'Shall I come back here?' he said, 'or 'ull ya drive down High Street and me run down by the New Lane to meet ya?'

'Yes, that will do; it will be the quickest way,' was the answer made, without thought, and immediately repented of; for, no sooner was Dick off than his master realised the unwelcome fact, that to do as he had decided he must turn the horse round. This he accomplished, with many unnecessary jerks and tugs, which must have caused old Diamond,

'Who never in this sort

Had handled been before.'

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to wonder 'What thing behind him he had got.' But, knowing pretty well what was expected of him, the steady old fellow behaved as discreetly as circumstances would permit.

The base of the triangle was thus traversed in safety; but now, a sharp corner must be turned into the side which being prolonged beyond the 'Top of the Town,' formed the High Street. A violent tug at the rein brought one wheel of the cart within an inch of

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some geese, which, with their legs tied together, were lying on the ground. Their owner, a weather-beaten old woman, with a handkerchief tied over her bonnet, rose from the overturned hamper on which she had been sitting, and shook her brown fist, screaming loudly,

'You orkerd crayter! You shall pay for ahl a them geese, if you 'urts one on 'um.'

Seriously alarmed by this threat, the miller jerked the other rein, and immediately felt a shock throughout his system, as the wheel stuck fast against the wall of the old pound, from the top of which a few loose bricks came rolling down.

This succession of unwonted occurrences was enough to make even Diamond slightly fidgetty, and it was with some little trouble that his master got horse and cart once more fairly in the middle of the road, where he paused for a minute to

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recover himself, eyeing ruefully the while the narrow crowded way before him.

'Hi! you sir! Let me pass if you please.' These words, spoken in stentorian tones, made Daniel jump in his seat, and turning nervously to see whence they came, he felt warm breath on his cheek, and perceived the head of an immense grey horse nearly touching his shoulder. Behind this animal was a high dog-cart, containing three gentlemen.

The affrighted miller now pulled at both reins with all his might, 'clicked' with his tongue, and used every effort he was capable of to make Diamond proceed, but the old horse obstinately refused to stir.

The driver of the dog-cart grew impatient; he stood up, and reaching forward gave the millers horse a sharp cut with his long whip.

Up went Diamond's head, and off he started as fast as he could go. Daniel dropped the reins, threw himself down at the bottom of the cart, and cried in piteous tones—

'Stop him!—Stop him! I shall be killed.'

Roars of laughter arose on all sides, and none of the by-standers made an effort to catch the miller's runaway steed, but before he had gone many yards down the High Street, a young man coming out of

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a shop, seeing a horse going very fast, with the reins hanging lose, strode into the middle of the road, seized Diamond's head, and brought him to a stand-still.

Here, sit up, can't you?' he said, as he picked up the reins, and held them out for the driver to take, for, seeing the prostrate figure in the cart, the young farmer naturally supposed that he had rescued some one who had been indulging too freely at the King's Head or some other tavern.

The miller raised himself slowly; and showed his white scared face over the front of the cart.

'Oh, thank you,' he said abjectly, 'thank you, my good man. Do you—do you think he has quieted down now?'

'He's all right enough,' answered the stranger, wondering what ailed the big, unwieldy man, who had now scrambled up, and seated himself, without attempting to take the proffered reins.

'Would you please to hold him till my boy comes? He'll be here directly,' said the miller, and then sat staring at his preserver, who silently complied with this request.

The young fellow was tall, broad-shouldered, and well built; his face was a pleasant one, though plain; he had dark hair and moustache, and good, honest eyes of bright brown. He wore a suit of

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grey tweed, and black leggings; and though he was no dandy, yet there was an air of trim smartness about him which is not usual in the ordinary Brookshire farmer.

'Wonder who he is,' thought Daniel, 'but, dear me! I've never thanked him;' so he began abruptly, —' Am much obliged to you, sir, I'm sure. Don't know what would have happened, but for you. Those people in the market would have seen me killed before they—ah! Dick—there you are. Be quick, lad. What have you been about?'

'Wuoy!' exclaimed Dick in an injured tone. 'Wuoy! Didn't ya send me yer own sen to run ater 'er, an' wasna ya to meet me at the end o' New Laayne?'

'Take the reins from this gentleman, and let us get off home,' said the miller, leaving Dick's defence unanswered.

The young farmer let go of Diamond's head, and stepped back to the pavement, where he stood watching the cart as Dick drove away.

'I seed 'er,' said the boy, triumphantly, gazing up in his master's face.

'Who?'

'Wuoy, 'er! Miss Wahl sure enow! 'Er went into that little shop o' Davies' a-top o' New Laayne.'

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'Did she!' returned the miller absently, and, to the intense mortification of his groom, he did not speak another word the whole way home.

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CHAPTER VI

KINGSFORD-ON-BRAY

ONCE a month Daniel Bourne was accustomed to 'keep' (as it was locally called) the market at Kingsford-on-Bray, the county town. His day for doing this fell on the Thursday following his misadventure at Braybridge, when his nerves had by no means recovered from the shock received there, and he felt so strong a distrust of Diamond that he walked three miles to the station, and went on by train to the town, rather than drive as usual.

He arrived somewhat late, and the narrow old-fashioned streets were filled with a bustling throng of country people.

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There were market-women, in their well-worn cloaks, relentlessly thrusting their large sharp-cornered baskets into the ribs of unwary passers by; farmers in their long many-pocketed coats, and their wives as smartly attired as circumstances would permit, and in the latest fashion with which they were acquainted.

Most of these good people were sociably inclined, and stopped at every yard or so to greet a friend. What pleasure was there in coming to market, if you didn't have a chat with your neighbours?

But miller Bourne never 'neighbour'd' with anybody, and pushed his sullen way through the crowd, with his head down, and his eyes on the ground. On the steps of the Corn Market he passed the gay and popular young Squire of Long Upton, who stood there with his hands in his pockets, and addressed by name most of those who went in and out of the dingy-looking building behind him.

'Good morning, miller! Beautiful autumn weather, isn't it?'

'Mornin',' was the only answer, with a sideways nod of the head from the miller.

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'What a surly old fellow that is!' said Mr Temple, laughingly, to the little group of farmers who stood round him, admiring secretly his lithe

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figure and the faultless cut of his clothes. They all rode pretty regularly with the hounds which he hunted, and thus considered themselves entitled to a certain degree of friendship with him, a privilege which they never endangered by contradicting him.

'Thar a'n't such another crabbed owd fella as Bourne in all Brookshire,' said one of them, and the rest murmured assent.

Meanwhile, the miller had made his way into the grim, dreary room in which the grain of Brookshire was bought and sold. It was dimly lighted from above by a skylight, the panes of which were encrusted with dirt, and the framework festooned with cobwebs, as was every beam of the ceiling, and every corner of the walls.

The atmosphere was at once chilly and close, but it did not appear to incommode the traders who congregated there, they were used to it, and, probably, had the place been cleaned and aired, they would have thought something must be wrong, and business in danger.

The farmers were tall, good-looking men, for the most part, but slow in their movements, and not generally very quick-witted either. They stood in groups, shaking each other by the hand and talking together. Occasionally, they showed

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samples of their corn, but the chief subject of conversation was the last run with the hounds.

In and out among them moved a little sharp-faced dealer from Braymouth, pressing his Indian corn on their notice, vaunting it above any home produce, and ready at the slightest sign of yielding on the part of any listener to seize the opportunity of booking an order.

Other dealers sat at desks arranged in rows, and conspicuous among them was a Quaker, in his broad brimmed hat; he was reverend of aspect, and seemed to be regarded as an oracle by farmers and dealers alike, all of whom came to him for advice when any difference of opinion arose.

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Near the door stood a well dressed, jaunty-looking man, beset on all sides by a cluster of farmers who had gathered round him. This was the land agent, on the estate of Lord Harbury, a nobleman, who, though he owned half the county, yet was always in difficulties, and lived abroad.

The tenants always crowded round the agent with requests as to repairs, &c., whenever they could catch him, and the present occasion was no exception to the rule; the unfortunate man made promises all round, but with an uneasy air, as

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though he knew that such promises would be difficult, if not impossible, to fulfil.

The whole scene was a familiar one to Bourne, only one element was missing, and of this he became aware as soon as he had reached his own stand, where he displayed small quantities of ground meals. The absentee was a woman, the solitary woman who adorned the Corn Market by her presence. Our miller had some business to transact with her, and looked round in vain for the familiar black garments, pale face, and straight-down figure of Mrs Dawes.

Unable to see her from his present post he set forth on a tour of the hall, thinking to find the object of his search hidden behind a group of men, poking her widow's bonnet in among them, and lending an attentive ear to all their transactions, as her manner was.

'Good morning, Mr Bourne,' said a voice at his side, and the miller very unwillingly submitted to a tremendous shake of the hand, from a burly farmer, who, after a few preliminary remarks as to weather and turnips—made in a leisurely matter-of-course way, but received with snorts of impatience by Bourne—pulled out a small bag of wheat, poured some grain from it on his broad

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palm, and sinking his loud voice a little, said confidentially, as he turned the sample over,

'Here's some remarkable fine wheat now, miller. I've kep' it a purpose to shownd ya.'

'Very good, I daresay,' interrupted Daniel, scarcely glancing at the wheat, 'but you see, Mr Cooper, I have the best foreign sorts offered me, so good and cheap, that it's not worth my while to buy any English corn now.'

'Dash them furrin sorts,' said the farmer, warmly, but miller, you did na' wait to 'ear what I axes for this 'ere, 'taint at all dear, an' I'll tell you one thing, and tak' my oath on it, too; you'll not find better wheat in all Brookshire, an' as to furrin—why, it can't come no ways *near* mine.'

'If foreign wheat is good enough for my customers, it is good enough for me,' replied the miller, 'and cheapness is what a man looks for in these hard times.'

After much haggling, he succeeded in beating down the red-faced Cooper, to about two shillings a bag less than the price first asked for the wheat.

'Seen Mrs Dawes this morning?' he asked, before parting with the farmer.

'No, 'er's not 'ere to-day, but 'er son's somewhere about, I b'lieve.

'Son! Didn't know she had one!'

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'Yes, 'e's bin with a uncle in the North, they say, but he's come home to stop now.'

'Oh—thank'ee. Morning. Don't forget the wheat on Monday,' and the miller moved on to look for young Dawes.

Standing near him, at a corn dealer's stall, he caught sight of a tall figure, and a pleasant intelligent face, which he recognised as those of his rescuer at Braybridge.

Daniel stood, for a minute or so, screwing up his eyes, and staring at the stranger, then he seized the elbow of a passing farmer, and pointing at the young man, asked—

'Bowen, who's that?'

'Young Dawes of the Hill Farm.'

'*That* young Dawes? How extraordinary!' exclaimed the miller, dropping his friend's arm as suddenly as he had seized it, and staring harder than ever at the young fellow.

Then—a thought seemed to strike him—he turned hastily back to Mr Bowen, and asked, abruptly—

'There isn't another son?'

'Where?—what do you mean, miller?'

'Mother Dawes hasn't another son?'

'No, Armell there is her only lad. She has but him and Marjory.'

'Ah!' said Bourne, then, without another word,

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he left Mr Bowen, who was surprised at his questions, but felt completely puzzled on seeing the miller approach young Dawes, beaming amiably through his spectacles, and introduce himself with an air of clumsy politeness, quite foreign to his blunt nature.

'Here's a go!' thought Bowen. 'Dan'el Bourne trying to be civil-behaved. What can he be after? Surely he isn't going to make up to Mother Dawes? He'll find 'er one too many for 'im, I reckon.'

Meanwhile, the miller was making a speech.

'Morning,' he began. 'Believe you are the son of Mrs Dawes, of Hill Farm. Didn't know it when I saw you the other day. Have wanted since to see you, and thank you for your noble conduct in stopping my horse. Felt the shock too much to be able to do it then. Have hardly got over it now. Am most grateful to you, I'm sure.'

'Pray don't mention it,' returned the tall young man, looking down, half in amusement, half in wonder at the miller, who shuffled from one foot to the other, and peered up through his glasses under the brim of his hat, in a manner quite peculiar to himself.

'Had some business with your mother—she is not here to-day, eh?'

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'No, but she sent a message by me for you, if you are Mr Bourne, of Rippidge. I was asking this gentleman if he had seen you,' said Armell Dawes, indicating the corn dealer's salesman, a smart young man of such obtrusive activity, that Mrs Dawes was wont to compare him to a 'pea in a frying-pan.'

'Yes,' said this individual, 'and I had not seen you, Mr Bourne, though I had been on the look-out for you myself. And now you are here allow me to call your attention to these Canadian oats. There is a great demand for oatmeal just now—you know, Mr Bourne, the doctors are recommending oat bread and cakes on all sides. You'll find it so, I'm sure, and cannot do better than take all we have left of this lot. We have a tremendous sale for it, but I wanted to give you a chance before all was gone. Look at it.—Splendid! I'll undertake to say you won't get a better article in any market, nor half so good a bargain. You shall have the whole lot at—let me see—Bob! How much have we left of this Canadian.'—

'Don't trouble,' grunted the miller. 'Don't want any of it. Can get English oats far better and much cheaper.'

With this he turned his back on the smart young man, and found that Armell Dawes had been

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greeted by a friend, who was asking if he meant to go hunting on Saturday.

'I should like it. Where is the meet?'

'At Rippidge Cross, just below the mill—Oh! here is Mr Bourne.'

'Morning,' said Daniel. 'Meet at Rippidge, on Saturday, did you say?'

'Yes. Close to you, Mr Bourne. I'm going to Higgins' to breakfast. Can you come, Armell? They'd be glad to see you, I know.'

'I can't promise,' said Dawes. 'If I am able to go, I'll join you there.'

'All right. I must be off now. Good bye, Mr Bourne.'

The miller made no answer. Once more an idea had struck him, and he grasped Armell by the arm.

'Come to breakfast with me on Saturday,' he said. It will be handy for the meet, and you can talk over that message of your mother.'

'Oh, thank you; you are very kind. I should like to come, but——'

'Oh, but you can come, I'm sure,' continued Bourne. Ours is an old place; people come to sketch it. You ought to see it—and—and—my daughter will be glad to see you.'

'Oh, thank you,' repeated Armell, 'but——'

'No buts. You will come. Half-past eight'

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'we'll say, on Saturday morning; tell your mother I'll send her word about the sacks then.'

The two then parted, and went their ways; the young man thinking what a curious old fellow the miller was, 'but very hospitable,' he added, mentally. Yet he wished he could have got out of the invitation, it would be very stupid. He wondered what Miss Bourne was like—middle-aged, bony, and prim he decided; and he should be afraid of her.

At the same time, Daniel sat in the third-class carriage on his journey home, repenting of what he had done. 'Asked a man to breakfast! Why, he would expect bacon and eggs, at least! And Mrs Dawes might get her price for the wheat! And suppose nothing came of it! It was a risk—a great risk—but it couldn't be helped now; he must make the best

of it. Mother Dawes was a saving old woman, anyhow, would have something to leave her son he should think. Yes, it might be worth while to give young Dawes a good breakfast, and Lettice should put on her best frock!

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CHAPTER VII

AT THE HILL FARM

'GOOD evening, Mr Temple. Have you seen my son on your way home? He's bin hunting, and I thought he'd a been back by now.'

The speaker was Mrs Dawes, of the Hill Farm, at Long Upton, a village two or three miles from Kingsford, on the road between that town and Braybridge.

Mrs Dawes was standing in the dusk of a November evening, at her farm-yard gate, and she was addressing the young squire, as he rode slowly by, splashed with red clay from head to foot, after a long run over a heavy country.

He started violently when she spoke, for her

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white face and cap, and fluttering black garments, had a ghostly effect in the twilight. There was no mistaking her voice, however, so he instantly recovered from his fright, drew up his horse, and replied,

'Yes, Mrs Dawes, I saw him; and I think I heard him say he was going to call at Rippidge Mill, on his way home.'

'The mill! Goodness me!' exclaimed Mrs Dawes, 'didn't he come to terms with that old Bourne this morning, I wonder? I hope Armell won't let himself be got the better of by *him*. That miller, Mr Temple, is the graspingest man as ever breathed.'

'He is very closefisted, I believe,' returned the young man, 'I should think, though, that Armell will be sharp enough for him. By the way, I want to see Armell about—about some draining we have talked of. Perhaps I might look in after church, to-morrow afternoon. Would he be at home?'

'Oh, yes, certainly,' said Mrs Dawes, in tones rather less rasping than usual. 'We shall be most 'appy to see you, Mr Temple.'

'I'll come, then,' said he, adding, as he moved on, 'I hope Miss Dawes is well.'

'She's pretty well, thank you, sir. She's not very

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strong, you know. I spares her all I can, but many's the time I says to her, "Margaret," I says, "you ought not to have been a farmer's daughter." I says. She's bin 'aving her moosic lesson this afternoon. She seems to take more kind to that than anything we have to amuse her here—'tis but a dull place for a young girl, you know, sir—though I must say Mr Leddington do give her a lot to learn.'

'Oh! then she still goes on having music lessons, does she?' asked Mr Temple, who had again reined in his tired horse. 'Mr Leddington is the organist at St Jude's, isn't he?'

'Yes, sir, and oh, I should be pleased if you would come to-morrow, Mr Temple. I should like for you to see Marj—— Margaret's new pie-anna.'

'Have you got her a new one, then, Mrs Dawes?'

'Why, yes, sir. You know very well, Mr Temple, that she never had one before but that old one of your aunt Farrer's as poor Dawes bought years ago, when the sale was at Rose Cottage; which it was very small and old-fashioned, you know, sir, and now, Mr Leddington, he do give her such long pieces to learn, that she's forced to have a bigger pie-anna to play 'em on.'

'Oh, really!' was the squire's vague reply, and, apparently seized with a sudden fit of coughing, he

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bade Mrs Dawes "Good Night" in a choked voice, and rode away.

Mrs Dawes gathered up her full skirts in a large bunch on either side, and crossed the farmyard by a series of small jumps from one well-worn stepping stone to another. They led to a wicket gate in the old brick wall, opening into a small paved yard. The dairy and wash-house were on one side, and opposite them the back kitchen door. Mrs Dawes entered here, and after scrubbing her shoes energetically on an old mat inside, she went on towards the kitchen.

There a substantial meal was laid out upon the long black oak table, the kettle slung above the open grate was 'on the boil;' an unlighted lamp stood on the table, while, by the firelight, could be dimly seen two figures, standing in shadow, one on either side the hearth.

'Why, Margaret, have you finished your lesson?'

'Yes, mother. I thought I heard Armell, and came out to make the tea.'

'Armell a'n't come yet. I can't think what makes him so late. That horse you heard was Mr Temple's. I hope Margaret has give you satisfaction, Mr Leddington?'

'Miss Dawes is a very good pupil,' answered

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the organist, in the phrase he used nearly every Saturday evening, in answer to a similar enquiry.

'That's right,' said Mrs Dawes. 'Mr Temple is coming to-morrow afternoon, Margaret, to see Armell, and he wants to see your pie-anna, my dear.'

Was it only the flickering firelight, or did the organist, watching Marjory's shadow on the opposite wall, see the girl make a slight impatient movement, as her mother spoke? It must have been fancy, for her voice was quite untroubled, as she asked—

'But where can Armell be?'

'Oh! Mr Temple saw him go to miller Bourne's.'

'But that would be in the morning.'

'No; he was to go there again on his way back, Mr Temple says. You'll stop and have a bit of supper with us before you sets off, Mr Leddington? It's tea and supper together to-night, 'cause of Armell. being out all day. Margaret, give me the matches that I may light the lamp. Mr Temple says'—

Marjory dropped the box of matches; the organist watched her pick them up, and saw her face in the glow of the fire; was it that which made her cheeks burn?

'I'll not stay to-night, thank you, Mrs Dawes' said he. 'It's a dark night, and I'd better be off' Marjory broke in, with a little laugh, 'what

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a funny idea for Armell to have gone to the miller's this evening. He is such a cross, unsociable old fellow, and never asks any one inside his door they say. What, are you going, Mr Leddington? Good night.'

'Hadn't you better have a lantern?' asked Mrs Dawes, anxious to speed the parting guest, whom she considered an' unaccountable strange chap in his ways.'

She offered him her hospitality every Saturday night, and was always relieved when, as was usually the case, he declined it. He had a stiff, nervous manner, which puzzled Mrs

Dawes; she did not like his silence either, though, when he did speak, matters became worse, for she could never understand what he meant.

She lighted him to the door, and when barring it after him, she once more heard horse's feet in the lane, and hastened to the back of the house to meet her son, and question him as to the day's doings. She always liked to know everything, and settle everything immediately, and so, almost before Armell could dismount, she began asking him about his bargain with the miller—the direction the fox had taken, the reason of his return to the mill—and telling him how she had heard of it.

Her son laughed, good humouredly, and told her

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she would catch cold if she stood out in the mist; he would be in directly, and tell her all she wanted to know. She protested there was no danger of *her* catching cold, but complied with his request that she would go back into the house.

She always thought and spoke of Armell as a mere boy, and had a secret contempt for his simple kindly ways. Yet, neither mother nor son realised how often she yielded to this same good-humoured simplicity, which, since Armell had returned to live at home, had obtained more power over her than any amount of argument or self-assertion could have done. Parents, teachers, rector, husband, landlords, farm-bailiffs innumerable, had vainly tried to lead or direct the firm self-sufficiency of Pamela Dawes; and now, at the age of fifty-five, it was a question how long and how far she would be guided by this grown up child, her son.

In a few minutes he followed her into the kitchen, but only to pass through on his way upstairs to change his splashed clothes and wash his hands and face before coming to supper. His mother commented rather severely on this 'bit o' pride,' as she called it, and wondered that he couldn't be content with kicking off his dirty boots, and sticking his feet into a big pair of slippers, as his father used to do.

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When he came down again he told his mother of all the business he had done, and some of the day's events in the hunting-field.

'Did the old miller give you a good breakfast V asked Marjory. 'They say he is a miser, so I was afraid you would be starved.'

'Oh, yes; we had a very good breakfast; eggs and bacon, I think, or something of that sort.'

'Has he got that scrat of a housekeeper still, I wonder,' said Mrs Dawes. 'A red-haired woman with a cast in her eye.'

'I didn't see her. There didn't seem to be any one but Miss Bourne and her father.'

'Miss Bourne?' exclaimed Marjory and her mother at once, and the latter added, 'His daughter, I suppose. I wonder when she came home. A reg'lar old maid, I'll be bound.'

'No, she is not; she is quite young.'

'Dear me! what can he have brought her home for, I wonder. P'raps he had found out some of Miss Wall's tricks, she'd plenty of 'em as I knows well. She kept house for old Wilson, you know, Margaret, at the Dale Farm.'

'Miss Bourne has not been home long. She was a schoolmistress before. She has not lived at home since her father came to Rippidge. She

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does not seem to know any one. It must be very dull for her.'

Marjory looked up at her brother.

'I daresay she is very nice,' she said. 'I should like to know her.' 'What is her name?'

'Lettice.'

'If you would like to go and see her, Marjory, there's no reason why you shouldn't drive over there some day, Armell might take you, p'raps,' said Mrs Dawes.

She had tried, all her daughter's life, to spoil the girl, who having a spice of her mother's own obstinacy, refused to be spoilt.

'Perhaps, we might,' she said, carelessly. 'What's that book you put down on the dresser, Armell?'

'Oh! it's the one the miller lent me. He's got a capital lot of books. He wants this back soon, though, and I must take it. You might come if you liked, Marjory.'

'Yes, that would be a good chance to go. Shall I clear away, mother?'

No, child. Let 'Melia and me do it. What need is there for you to tire yourself?'

'I'm tired of sitting still, and I'd rather run about a bit.'

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And Marjory rose up from the table, took up a dish of cold meat, and walked off with it to the pantry.

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CHAPTER VIII

BROTHER AND SISTER

THE Dawes family had for several generations been tenants of the Hill Farm, under the Temples of Long Upton. There had always been a certain degree of friendship between the families, for the tenants had a refined intelligence, devoid of pretension, which made it possible for the landlords to be intimate with them, without fear of undue familiarity; and though the Daweses never gave themselves airs, yet it was generally admitted that they were superior to others of their own class.

When the late Edmund Dawes, Armell's father, had brought home as his wife, Pamela Rowlands,

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a wheelwright's daughter, from Marleigh, on the other side of the county, there was an unanimous feeling in Long Upton and its neighbourhood that he had married beneath him. Pamela had been left an orphan, and was taken out of pity for her friendless condition, as kitchen-maid at Marleigh Castle; being a clever girl she soon became head cook, and finally, at an early age, was promoted to be housekeeper, which position she left to become Mrs Dawes.

No former Mrs Dawes had possessed half the energy of this wheelwright's daughter, or held her own so triumphantly against all comers. His friends and neighbours were of opinion that poor Edmund Dawes was hurried or worried into an early grave, by the overpowering energy and unreasonable aspirations of his wife.

It was curious that her sojourn in the service of a great family should not have given her a truer estimate of social position; but while she had the most unbounded respect for the Marleights of Marleigh, she believed herself to be the equal of every squire's wife in Brookshire. She was, in fact, a very clever, but coarse-minded woman, entirely without perception of the fitness of things, and thus capable of inflicting torture on a man of keen sensibilities as her husband had been. He died when Armell was but six years old,

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'Marjory Dawe,' as he loved to call his little girl, had only just learnt to speak plainly.

The widow managed very well for a year or two, but then came bad seasons, and she could hardly make both ends meet, far less give the children the education she wished for them. Not that she valued education for its own sake, but that she deemed it indispensable for ladies and gentlemen; and lady and gentleman her girl and boy must be.

Just then came an offer from a well-to-do, but childless great uncle of her husband's, to take Armell, and send him to a good grammar school in the northern town near which he lived. This offer was accepted at once, not without an eye to the savings of the great uncle, which were reported to be considerable.

The boy's visits to Long Upton had been few and far between, until a few months before the date at which this story opens, when his mother, having had a bad illness, he came home to take from her— as far as she should permit—the management of her now flourishing farm.

Mrs Dawes at first opposed his return, but when she was told at last by her doctor that it was necessary, she gave way, and even began to look forward with pleasure to the sensation which would be felt

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in the parish, if not in the county, by the appearance of Armell Dawes, Esquire.

Marjory was disappointing in some ways; she never would fall in with her mother's views as to what a lady might or might not do. But Armell, with his classical education, the favourite of his great uncle, brought up, she supposed 'in style,' must surely be a real, fine gentleman.

Here, again, she was doomed to disappointment; her son was quiet, good humoured, unselfish, helpful, easily pleased. Was this what came of a classical education? Why, it seemed to Mrs Dawes, that young Baker, a draper's assistant from Kingsford, who came to the farm sometimes, curled, and ringed, and languishing, to cast sheep's eyes at Marjory, was more of a gentleman than Armell, even though Baker had only been to a National School, and his father was a gardener.

She flung out of the room, sometimes, provoked beyond measure, at Armell's unassuming ways, and would mutter to herself that she didn't know what young men

were made of now-a-days. She recalled the habits and manners of certain young village beaux, who were wont, years ago, to frequent the wheelwright's shop at Marleigh and laugh at the sharp saucy speeches of Pamela Rowlands. Of course, she felt that they were

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far below Armell, yet, in her heart of hearts, she preferred their way to his. If he would have seasoned his conversation with oaths, made vulgar jokes, ordered his mother and sister about—instead of so quietly trying to save them trouble—in fact, if he had been blustering, and self-assertive, she would not have felt for him the contempt she now did. It was Mrs Dawes' invariable custom to remain at home on Sunday morning, to cook the dinner, which was on that day quite an elaborate meal. All that she needed was put ready beforehand, and cleared away afterwards by 'the gurl,' so that Mrs Dawes was free, when her dishes were once concocted, to think over any business that was uppermost in her mind, and, while keeping careful watch over the roasting of meat, the boiling of various saucepans, or the heat of the oven, she generally contrived to come to a satisfactory decision on some matter or other which, had been stored up in the week for this morning's consideration.

One Sunday morning, just before Christmas, and some five weeks after Armell's visit to the mill, Mrs Dawes was sitting very upright in a wooden chair by the kitchen fire. Her cap strings were fastened back behind her head, her black dress

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folded on her lap, showing its white lining and her short striped woollen petticoat. She pulled down her sleeves and buttoned them at the wrist, and sat slowly wiping her hands on a clean, coarse cloth, her eyes fixed on a goose which hung before the fire, and her face full of perplexity and care.

'Surely,' she said to herself, 'no woman ever had two such contrary children as mine! 'Tisn't that they are bad, or does anything wrong, but they seem as if they can't see the rights of things. Here's Armell, now, took up with that girl at Rippidge, it's very clear. Being as he was brought up like a gentleman, he ought to ha' knowed better and looked higher. I blame old uncle Edmund for not having taught him different. I didn't think the old gentleman had been that sort, but he must be as simple as Armell himself, or poor

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Dawes, not to have put a bit more pride in the lad. My patience! How stupid men are! Fancy that great gowk of an Armell marrying a miller's daughter! Margate seems taken with the girl, too. I'm sorry in my heart I told 'em they might have her here at Christmas. Yet it's better I should see her. I shall know then how to put Armell out of conceit with her. She's pretty, they say,—a poor silly thing, I make no doubt. It wouldn't do for me to go and see her, 'twould look

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as if Armell *was* going to do it then, or folks 'ud think, maybe, I was after the miller! Ha! ha! ha! a pretty notion! Old Bourne's scraped a good bit of money together, but that a'n't enough for Armell; he's fit to marry any lady, and a lady he must have, for his sister's sake, if not for his own. No doubt if he hadn't me to look after him, he'd marry this Lettice Bourne, and be happy enough with her—a young fool—but look what a pull-back it would be for Margate.

'As for her, she's so masterful in some ways that I often don't know what to do for the best. Such a girl to stand in her own light, I never saw. With the little pains she'll take to be agreeable, it don't want her brother to be doing anything unpleasing to Mr Temple. She's got that way about her, too, that all the men are in love with her. 'Tisn't only the young squire—but there are those Wilson lads at the Dale, and Mr Baker, from Kingsford, as mad after her as possible. Sometimes, I declare, I think that even that old image, Leddington, is sweet upon her. But I don't believe she cares a pin for any one of the lot.

'The young squire'd have her directly, if she'd only be a bit civil to him. What could be more proper? Their families being old friends, and they learning both from Mr Metcalfe when they

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were little ones! But Marg'ate's that whimsical, I daren't say anything to her, or 'twill make her worse. I wonder if she really don't like him, or if she's only holding off as girls do.

'P'raps when she sees him at the ball, at Christmas, she'll think better of it—in his own house and all! I should think he'll say something to her then, it 'ull be a good chance; and p'raps Armell might see some lady there that will make him forget this girl at

Rippidge. I'll wait and see about Marg'ate till after then; and I'll not take any notice to Armell about Miss Bourne till she's been here, and—there's that goose done to a turn now!

Mrs Dawes rose from her seat to take up the goose, and ended her reflections for that day. She would have pursued them with greater distraction if she could have seen and heard her son and daughter on their way home from morning service.

Outside the porch they were joined by the young squire, who shook hands with both, remarking that the frost was seasonable, and he hoped it might last over Christmas, even though it did put a stop to hunting. Did Armell think the ice would bear to-morrow? — No? It surely would do so by Tuesday, then, and he must bring Miss Dawes to the great pool. How was Mrs Dawes?

Marjory thanked him—her mother was well, but
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she would be waiting dinner for them, so they must hasten home. Mr Metcalfe's sermon had been longer than usual, hadn't it? She wished Mr Temple good morning. A slight cloud came over the young man's face, as he lifted his hat, and turned away towards the Rectory, where he generally lunched on Sundays.

At the corner of the tower, he stopped for an instant to look back at the brother and sister, who were just then passing through a small gate at the south-eastern corner of the churchyard, that led to the footpath across some wide grass meadows lying between the farm and the church. This path was only available in very dry or frosty weather. At other times it was necessary to go round a mile or more by the high road.

Armell and Marjory were a goodly pair and worth looking at, so well did his tall, powerful frame contrast with her small, plump, compact figure.

Few people would pass Marjory without looking at her twice; hers was a beautiful face, refined, yet piquante—a style that is not usual in any class, but most uncommon in that to which she belonged. Though, in certain points, she resembled both her parents, she was, on the whole, so unlike them

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that family friends were always wondering 'who she took after.'

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Her forehead was low and broad, her eyebrows dark, straight, and delicately marked. Her nose small, and ever so slightly 'tip-tilted;' her mouth rather wide, but firm and well cut, as was also the little soft chin. A dimple nestled in each cheek, and her dark bright eyes were veiled by long, thick lashes. But the wonderful thing about her was her complexion, it was of a clear, creamy tint, very rarely relieved by any tinge of colour—yet no one ever accused her of looking sickly or delicate; she was, in reality, a perfectly healthy girl. Her mother's oft-repeated words, 'Marjory is never very strong,' were but a concession to her own belief that delicacy of health was genteel and interesting.

The curly rings of hair that made a dark background to the picturesque face, were a real trouble to Mrs Dawes, 'You never could get Marjory's hair smooth, brush it how you would,' she said, and the girl herself was secretly ashamed of her brown locks—for frizziness had not then come into fashion.

The dark winter dress, fur trimmed jacket, and hat with a little crimson feather, were most becoming to Marjory, and Armell could not help thinking so, as he gave his hand to his sister, when she crossed the slippery plank which served for a bridge over

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the little brook that ran outside the churchyard wall. He gazed thoughtfully at her, till she gave a little slip and dropped her prayer book. He picked it up, and as he returned it to her he fancied that she blushed. They walked on in silence for a few yards, then Armell spoke.

'Marjory,' he said, very gravely, 'I have something to say to you.'

'Please to say it, then,' she answered quietly, with a ring of determination in her voice.

'We have been so little together (more's the pity) and are such strangers to each other, Marjory, that perhaps you will think I have no right to interfere in your affairs, or to give any opinion about them. But I have to take poor father's place as well as I can, and I must speak to you— about—about Mr Temple.'

'Well, what about Mr Temple?' asked Marjory, with her head up and a light coming in her dark eyes.

'The way you treat him, Marjory.'

'How would you have me treat him?' Am I not respectful enough? You know I went to school with him—at least we both used to have lessons from Mr Metcalfe—and I know how naughty he used to be, and'—

'It is a great pity,' said Armell, emphatically.

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'But that is not what I mean. Why is it, I wish to know, that he is always making excuses to come to the Farm.'

'To look after his property, I suppose,' said Marjory, very demurely.

'Does that include you?'

'Armell! What do you mean?'

'You know very well what I mean, Marjory. It is plain enough he comes for your sake. What his intentions are I don't know, but it appears to me that you have a very clever way of drawing him on, without seeming to do so.'

Marjory stood still, and faced her brother, stamping her foot and clenching her hands.

'How dare you say such things?' she said, panting with anger.

'Because they must be said,' he answered, sadly. 'Things can't go on as they are. Tell me honestly, is there anything between Mr Temple and you?'

'No,' said Marjory, curtly, letting fall her raised hand, and breathing more easily.

'That is well, at any rate,' said Armell, with a sigh of relief. 'Come on, Marj'y, you mustn't stand here in the cold. You mustn't be angry with me for asking you this. If you knew how much I have thought of you, and loved you all these years, even when I hardly knew you, you would

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forgive me, I think. And when I came home, and got to know you, I felt so proud of you. No man could have a nicer little sister I thought, and hoped you would learn to love me, as I did you. But when I saw how Mr Temple came, I felt disappointed in you, for you know, dear—There, now, I've made you cry—I didn't mean to be unkind!'

Marjory grasped her brother's arm tightly.

'It isn't that,' she sobbed. 'It's because I'm so glad—so glad.'

'So glad of what?' asked Armell, wonderingly, as he stooped to kiss his sister, by way of re-assuring her.

'So glad you don't want me to like Mr Temple.'

'Do you mean to say you dislike him?'

'I don't care one bit for him. I shall get to hate him soon. I can't bear to see him.'

'Then why don't you stop his coming?'

'I'm sure I do all I can. I keep out of the way, and scarcely speak when I see him, and always contradict what he says.'

'That's true enough—it was that made me think. —But how stupid I've been, I beg your pardon for what I've thought of you.'

'I forgive you,' she said, putting her arm through his, 'because I was mistaken about you, too. I

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thought you were on mother's side, and now I'm so glad to find you are on mine, and will take my part.'

'Mother! Does she think of such a thing?'

'Yes,' said Marjory, sadly, 'she makes him think I like him, and yet she never gives me an opportunity of telling her I don't.'

'He has said nothing to you, himself, then?'

'No, never. Sometimes, I wish he would, that I may get rid of him, and then, again, I'm afraid. Mother will be so angry when I send him away; and you don't know what she is like when she is angry.'

The two walked on a little way in silence, then Armell said,— 'We must think about this, dear, and see what it will be best to do. I must speak to mother, and don't you be afraid, I'll share the blame, though I'm afraid I can't take it all on myself.'

'I don't mind at all, now,' said Marjory, squeezing his arm. 'It's so nice to have a kind, big brother to help one.'

There was another pause, then Marjory spoke again.

'You have heard all about my affairs, now, Armell; are you going to tell me about your own?'

'I have none to tell—yet,' he answered, with a smile.

'But you will have soon?'

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'I hope so.'

'Oh, so do I! I think she is very nice and so pretty. I shall love her very much, and I hope mother will like her.'

'She can't help it,' said Armell, very earnestly 'Everyone must like Lettice. I mean to marry her as soon as ever I can. It isn't fit for a girl like her to live in that lonely place. And she is worked like a slave.'

'The house is just like a prison—inside,' said Marjory. 'It's pretty enough outside, but all those drab walls and bare rooms. Oh, they are dreadful. Even mother's beloved parlour is better than that! Oh, dear; there she is at the garden gate looking for us. We must make haste, Armell, or the dinner will be spoilt, and she will fret over it for the whole of the week.'

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CHAPTER IX

LETTICE IS INTRODUCED AT LONG UPTON

MRS DAWES having further considered the proposed visit of Lettice, came to the conclusion that it would be no harm to make her welcome, since there was little doubt that the miller had 'put by a tidy bit of money,' and one should always be civil to such people. She put on, accordingly, her second best cap, but decided that her ordinary afternoon gown would be sufficient for the occasion; and she met Lettice at the door, with that curious compromise between a bow and curtsy, which always served her for ceremonious greetings. She clasped the girl's hand with the bony grip, peculiar to her,

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which gave to sensitive persons a feeling best described as 'creeping down the back.'

'How d'ye do, Miss Bourne? I am glad to see you at Hill Farm. I 'opes Mr Bourne is pretty well.'

'Father is very well, thank you,' answered Lettice, in her soft, serious voice, wondering vaguely why she felt uneasy, under the searching gaze of Mrs Dawes' small dark eyes.

'Will you come into the parlour, Miss Bourne, and have a glass of wine after your drive? You're tired, no doubt, and it's a good half-hour till dinner time.'

Lettice meekly followed her hostess along the passage, declining the offer of wine on the score that she never drank it.

'Oh, nonsense; you must have some,' said Mrs Dawes, peremptorily, pulling out of her pocket a key, with which she proceeded to unlock the cupboard door of an article of furniture, concerning which, strangers were often puzzled as to whether it were a sideboard or a chiffonnier. The lock was faulty; Mrs Dawes fumbled over it, paying no attention to Lettice's entreaties that she would not trouble about it; then Marjory ran in.

'Oh! Lettice, I am so sorry I was not down when you came. I meant to have met you at [102]

the bottom of the lane. Mother—you are not going to give her wine! She does not want it, I know.'

'Don't be ridic'lous, Marg'ate, she must have some of course, after her drive.'

But Marjory got her way as usual; the refractory lock was left unturned, and Mrs Dawes went off to see after the 'gurl' and the dinner to the very evident relief of poor Lettice, who gladly accepted Marjory's proposal that they should go to her room till dinner time. This little apartment was shown with great pride, it was pretty and cozy, and, to Lettice's eyes it seemed quite luxurious with its comfortable chairs, bright fresh chintz covers and curtains; the book shelf, flower glasses, and other small treasures. When these had been duly admired, something more interesting still was displayed,—a fragment of the material from which a dress was being made at Kingsford, for the occasion of Mr Temple's Christmas ball.

Neither of them believed that the half-hour was gone when the 'gurl' (a stout, red-haired damsel called 'Melia) came clattering upstairs, in her thick boots, to announce that dinner was ready.

'I persuaded mother to have dinner in the kitchen, as usual,' said Marjory, as they went [103]

down. 'She wanted to have it in the parlour, in honour of you; but I told her I was sure you wouldn't mind. The kitchen is much the nicest. I am rather proud of it, but I hate the parlour.'

'Hate it! Oh, why?' asked Lettice. 'It's a beautiful room, I think.'

'Do you?' replied Marjory, with a keen look at her companion. 'I think it is stiff, and ugly, and unnatural.'

'The kitchen is very nice, I daresay,' said Lettice, thinking she had offended her new friend. 'I have not seen it yet, you know. But it would be a great pity to mess the parlour.— Very well, thank you, Mr Dawes.'

Armell was waiting at the foot of the black oak staircase, and received his guest with unconcealed satisfaction. He led her into the kitchen with such marked attention, as made the colour deepen in her fair cheeks, and produced a broad grin on the countenance of the sturdy 'Melia, who was in the act of placing a dish on the table.

Mrs Dawes saw the grin, and smarted under it.

'There,' she said, 'you stupid gaby, that a'n't the way to put a dish on. See how you've spilt the gravy! now, go and get on with cleaning those tins, and mind you don't make yourself more like a pig than you can help.'

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'Will you sit here, Miss Bourne?' asked Armell, who had been unable to find anything to say during this episode, while Lettice looked down on the floor, in renewed embarrassment, and Marjory drew a heavy chair across the floor, as if hoping to drown her mother's voice by its scraping.

Mrs Dawes stood up to carve, setting about it in a business-like, and rather ferocious manner. She managed at the same time, to keep an eye on Armell's performance, and did not hesitate to interrupt the conversation she had begun with Lettice, to scream to her son that he was raining the leg of pork.

'Of course, you've made your plum-pudding and mince-pies, Miss Bourne—a month or more back, I daresay. I wonder now how you make your puddings?'

'I haven't made any,' said Lettice

'Not made 'em yet? You're a young housekeeper, my dear, so p'raps you'll excuse me tellin' you that you ought to ha' made 'em long before now.'

'We never have any.'

'Never have any Christmas puddings or mince pies,' gasped Mrs Dawes, pausing, with her fork half way to her mouth. 'Aren't they good enough for you? We always had 'em at Marleigh. Pray, what do you have?'

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'I hardly know,' said Lettice, timidly. 'I wasn't at home last Christmas. I should think father would have a piece of meat.'

'Meat!' ejaculated Mrs Dawes.

'I think I remember one year when we had a leg of mutton and a rice pudding,' continued Lettice, thinking she was expected to supply some details, and having no idea of the shock she administered to her hostess.

'Tch—tch—tch,' clicked Mrs Dawes, with her tongue against the roof of her mouth. Had she gone to church on Christmas day and heard Mr Metcalfe read the Communion Service, she would have been less surprised.

'I can't bear plum-pudding,' asserted Armell, boldly, while he gave a sly glance at Lettice, who, however, took the matter quite seriously.

'Can't you? I like it very much; I think I could make one, and I should like to try; but father says he can't afford things of that kind.'

'My patience!' cried Mrs Dawes, 'well, I always heard that miller Bourne was very close, but I never thought he was so gripple* as that comes to.'

Lettice looked up, only half understanding the drift of this speech.

* Miserly

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'Father isn't at all well off,' she said. 'Why you don't mean to tell me you believe—' 'Isn't there some one at the back door?' asked Marjory innocently. 'I fancy I hear 'Melia talking to somebody.'

Mrs Dawes was up and out of the room in a minute. 'Melia's propensity for exchanging remarks with any waggoner or cowman who might be in the yard, was a perpetual grievance to her. She soon returned, saying she couldn't see any one, but she *knew* it was that lad Peter, and he had heard her coming, and hidden somewhere. *She'd* keep an eye on them.

Marjory rejoiced that her ruse to break off the conversation had been successful, without any suffering to poor 'Melia, and then, contrary to her usual custom, she encouraged her mother to hold forth on the girl's failings, so that those of the miller might be forgotten, and Armell could talk to Lettice in peace.

Both brother and sister feared lest the appearance of the pudding should revive the awkward subject, but by some lucky chance, their mother made no further allusion to it, and the rest of the dinner passed off pleasantly enough. When the cheese was done with, it was announced that they were to eat walnuts and apples in the parlour,

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and the two girls were sent in to roast some chestnuts at the fire, while Armell had to go out to see after his men before joining them, and Mrs Dawes remained behind to preside over the dinner of 'Melia, and the unfortunate Peter, who lived in the house.

'Now, Lettice, what do you think of the kitchen? Isn't it much prettier than this?' asked Marjory, as she opened the parlour door.

'The kitchen is very nice, but of course, this is the prettiest. Think of the curtains, and carpets, and ornaments, and all,' said Lettice, who could not believe that Marjory was serious.

'Well, I am glad you like it, dear. Sit down in the arm-chair, while I get the plates out of the chiffonnier. They are very pretty plates, and very old; now, I *do* like *them*.'

'Why don't you like the room?'

'If you don't see what's the matter with it, I don't know how to tell you. It's all too bright and too stiff; now the kitchen is just right somehow, not gaudy, nor yet dull nor bare,' said Marjory, her thoughts turning involuntarily to the kitchen at Rippidge.

'What would you do to this, then?' asked Lettice.

'I'd alter everything if I could,' answered

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Marjory energetically. I should like it to look like Mr Metcalfe's rooms.'

'Who is he?'

'The rector.'

'Oh, but Marjory? you couldn't expect to have rooms like his.'

'Perhaps not,' returned Marjory with a sigh, and a smile, as she finished her task of putting out the dessert plates and dishes, and sat down on an armchair, opposite to Lettice.

The two girls made a pretty picture as they sat by the fire, but an artist wishing to paint them would have been of Marjory's opinion, and have preferred the kitchen as the scene of his labours. It was true that the parlour walls were panelled to the ceiling, but the panelling was hidden by a yellow-brown tinted paper, relieved by impossible garlands of roses. The two windows were long and narrow, latticed, and with deep seats in each, but on either side of them hung curtains of scarlet moreen. There were large roses again, on the green carpet. The walls were adorned by bad engravings, in showy frames; the furniture was mahogany; and the chimney-piece, tables, and chiffonnier, were loaded with ornaments, lamps, vases, shells, mats, of no value, but great

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pretensions. Marjory's piano alone escaped; it stood in one corner, with a pile of music beside it.

The girl was puzzled to explain why she disliked the room; it would have been far more puzzling to her to say why she was satisfied with the kitchen. She knew nothing of art, as art; and had never read a word of Mr Ruskin; yet the glare and vulgarity of the parlour grated on her feelings, while she could appreciate the harmonious colouring of the kitchen, where the walls were tinted a warm cream, the oak tables and dresser were black with age, the latter had rows of dark blue plates upon it; bright dishcovers shone on the walls, and a deeper glow came from curious old vessels of brass and copper, which were raised on the high, black mantle-shelf.

To look at Lettice, sitting in a hideous red armchair, no one could have thought she could fail to see what was amiss in Mrs Dawes' parlour; her face and manner were refined, and her dress tasteful and becoming, though it had, as usual, a certain primness about it. It was of a dark green colour, and a warm, soft material, relieved only by a snowy collar, fastened with a small gold brooch, the parting gift of the head mistress of the Millborough School.

Her shining hair, blue eyes, and the delicate rose

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of her cheeks, supplied all the colour that was necessary.

Marjory's dress was a deep purple, coquettishly trimmed and finished with bows of ribbon, while she wore also a tiny coral brooch, and earrings to match. She lounged in her chair, or jumped up occasionally to attend to the chestnuts, or look out of the window, and was as restless as a child, while Lettice sat upright, and never moved her clasped hands as they lay on her lap.

Both girls were better taught than most of their class, yet the education of each had been very different, and had produced very different results. Lettice had, of course, been obliged to acquire a certain amount of knowledge, and to master it thoroughly; yet, no encouragement had been held out to her to extend this limit, and her own inclination did not lead her to do so.

The routine of school, the perpetual teaching of the same subjects; then, when a certain point was reached, the perpetual turning back and beginning again, had narrowed a mind, which, above all things, needed a wider, softer influence.

In this, as in all other respects, she was a great contrast to Marjory, whose teaching had been desultory, but of a kind to make her love learning for its own sake; the result being an amount of

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general knowledge, and a refinement of mind and manners, which seemed almost to justify her mother's oft-repeated words, 'she ought never to ha' been a farmer's daughter.' When she was a very little girl her mother had talked of sending her to a boarding school at Kingsford, thinking that there she would learn all that was 'genteel' and desirable, for £20 per annum.

Mr Metcalfe, who had liked Edmund Dawes, loved his bright little daughter, and knew the wretched travesty of an education which was obtained at such a school as that proposed for Marjory by her mother, had tried, in vain, to impress this on Mrs Dawes.

When she proved unable to see it, Mr Metcalfe, in desperation, offered to teach the child himself.

Mrs Dawes jumped at this, not because she could appreciate the rector's scholarship and loving patience, but because little Hugh Temple, whose widowed mother could not resolve to send him to school, was already a pupil of Mr Metcalfe; and to have it said

that Marjory learnt her lessons along with the young squire, was a distinction, in favour of which the glories of the Kingsford boarding school were resigned without a sigh.

When, soon after this, Hugh's guardian sent him to Eton, Marjory still trotted to the rectory every

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day, and it was in the study there that she literally picked up all she knew, except music. Sometimes she studied with Mr Metcalfe, sometimes by herself; if he had friends to see him, he never sent her away, she might listen to the conversation or read, whichever she liked, and, from listening to the talk of thoughtful, cultivated people, she probably profited more than from any other advantage she enjoyed at the rectory.

'What are your favourite books?' she asked Lettice, as they sat together.

'I hardly know. I'm not very fond of reading.' 'Not fond of reading!'

'No,' said Lettice, calmly. 'I like any sort of work better than reading.'

'Any sort of work!' repeated a deep voice at the door, and the girls turned and saw Armell entering there. 'Any sort of work. You don't look much like it, Marjory. You look the picture of idleness.'

'What if I do? It is well to be idle, sometimes.'

'When is Marjory Daw anything else?'

She shall have a penny a day,

Because '—

Marjory leapt up and boxed her brother's ears, at which Lettice flushed and looked unfeignedly surprised.

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'You are quite shocked, Miss Bourne,' said Armell 'You did not know how badly my sister can behave.'

'I—I suppose she did not mean it,' stammered Lettice.

'You are disagreeable, both of you,' said Marjory, pouting. 'I shall go away and leave you; and be busy or idle, just as I choose, by myself.'

'Oh! can't I help you?' cried Lettice, starting from her chair.

'No,' said Marjory, taking her by the shoulders, and pressing her down again. 'Mother will be here directly, and we are all going to eat chestnuts. Armell, just see that these don't get burnt to a cinder.'

With that she left the room, and Armell knelt down on the rug, apparently much interested in the chestnuts.

'I hope you like my sister, Let—Miss Bourne?' he said.

'Oh, yes; she is so pretty and so kind to me.'

'Mother is kind too,' said he, 'you must not be afraid of her. Do you like the house?'

'Oh, yes; I think it is a beautiful house.'

'I wish you could have seen Uncle Edmund's house; that is pretty, if you like it. I used to live there with him, you know, till about six months ago.'

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'Weren't you sorry to leave?'

'Well, I was—and I wasn't. I was fond of him, and didn't like parting from him and my friends there—still, I always felt that I ought to be with my mother and sister. I didn't care much about this part of the country when I first came home, but now I like it very much, and I'm *very* glad I came,' said Armell, still on his knees, but looking at Lettice instead of the chestnuts.'

'I am glad you like it,' she said, looking down into her lap.

'I've liked it ever since that day I went hunting, and had breakfast at the mill,' he continued, trying to see into her eyes; but her head bent lower, and he could only see the colour rise in her cheeks, and mount even to her forehead.

'That was when I began to like it,' he repeated.

A sound of steps was heard in the stone passage, and a rattle of the door handle, made Armell turn to the fire, and begin to collect some blackened chestnuts from among the ashes, while Lettice drew herself up.

'Here's Mr Temple, my dear,' said Mrs Dawes, in her most amiable company manner. Then she stopped short.

'Why, where's Marjory?'

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'She's upstairs,' said Armell, rising. 'I think she went to fetch something. I'll go and call her.'

'Aye, do. Mr Temple this is Miss Bourne, the miller's daughter, from Rippidge. Now where will you sit, sir? We was going to 'ave some chestnuts —do you like 'em?—Why these are all burnt. What 'ave Marg'ate and Armell been about? How came she to go and leave 'em, Miss Bourne?'

'I—I don't know'—began Lettice in confusion— when the young squire came to the rescue. The chestnuts smelt delicious, but if he might, he'd rather have an apple, they looked so good. Then he asked,

'Do you often come to the Hill Farm, Miss Bourne?'

'This is my first visit, sir.'

'But you know Long Upton, of course? We are rather proud of our village. Don't you think it pretty?'

'I have never seen it, sir.'

'And yet you only live at Rippidge?'

'I have only lately come home to live.'

'Oh! I see; I know your father well, and thought it seemed odd I should not have heard of his daughter,' said Mr Temple, really thinking it strange that the name and fame of so pretty a girl should not have been known in the neighbourhood.

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'May I ask in what part of the country you have lived?'

'I was a schoolmistress, sir, in London,' said Lettice, simply.

The young squire looked at her, and said to himself that Armell had by no means bad taste, when Mrs Dawes returned, followed by her son and daughter.

They all drew round the fire, some chestnuts were roasted and eaten, but the conversation was carried on entirely by Mrs Dawes and the squire. Marjory's laughter and teasing ways seemed to have flown; Lettice vaguely wondered what had changed her friend so much, while she herself had a feeling that the afternoon was being spoilt.

Armell sat gloomily silent, and only his mother was pleased. She rejoiced because Mr Temple had come, and was gratified that he seemed to approve of Miss Bourne. For his

part, he liked being one of the family party, as it were; and felt no doubt that Marjory's smile would come back sooner or later.

'I don't know if you have heard of my dance?' he asked Lettice presently.

'No,' she answered, but then, recollecting, added, 'Yes, Marjory showed me—told me about it.'

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'Are you too far off at the mill, for me to hope you will honour us by coming over to it?' he asked, very politely.

'Oh!' she gasped. 'I don't think father would like it, and I never went to a dance in my life.'

'Then it's high time she began, isn't it, Armell? Now, Mrs Dawes, help me to persuade her to come.'

'Surely your Pa'd let you come,' said the lady thus urged.

'Oh, no, he would not like it,' faltered Lettice.

'Oh, you must come, Letty,' said Marjory.

'*I hope you will come,*' said Armell's eyes, so plainly that even Lettice could read the words there.

'I should like it,' she said, 'but it's no use to think of it.'

'I will ride over and ask,' said Mr Temple.

'And I will speak to him at market, next week,' observed Mrs Dawes, with an air that implied 'he will listen to me.'

They all seemed so sure that the miller would be won over, that, at last, Lettice began to think it possible; and the prospect of such gaiety, with the knowledge that Armell would be there, and wished for her presence, made her feel quite excited. Her cheeks flushed, and her eyes shone so that she looked prettier, and more animated than she had ever done

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in her life. When Joe Porter came to drive her home, she left with the understanding that she was to stay at the Hill Farm for the dance. It was only a fortnight hence, and fancy the delight of it!

'Did a see Squire Temple at the Farm?' enquired Joe.

'Yes; he was there in the afternoon.' 'Ah!' said Joe.

Why do you say Ah! in that way, Joe?' laughed Lettice, who felt as if she must laugh at everything. 'Thaay do saay,' answered Joe, slowly, 'that he's allus thar.—Looking attar the young missis, ye know.'

Lettice wondered why people should think that Marjory wanted looking after, but thought it was no business of Joe's if she did; so she took no notice of this speech, but told him of her invitation to the ball.

'Waal,' said Joe, 'I 'opes maaster 'll let 'ee goa; 'tis mighty dull for a young wench to be cooped up at the mill. Wat sart of a chap be the young squire?'

Lettice replied that he was very nice indeed.

'We was used ta live at Long Upton w'en I were a lad. I mind th' owd squire—this 'un's grandfather, ye knows. 'E were a mon! 'E never opened his mouth but 'e said summat.'

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Lettice thought a minute.

'Didn't he open it to eat, Joe? He couldn't always talk when he was eating.'

'Haw, haw, haw!' laughed Joe. 'Wuoy bless yer 'eart, miss, I didna mean that. You see 'e were such a one for cussin' and swearin'. 'E were a reg'lar owd sart, ye dunnot see none like 'un now-a-days. Waall, miss, I shall be drivin' 'ee this road again soon, then? I'll warn'd ye gets plenty to dance with; and dunna ye leave owt behind 'ee, when ye comes awaay.'

'What do you mean, Joe? I am not likely to lose anything.'

'Folks do leave their 'earts be'ind 'em, upon times,' said Joe, with a chuckle at this very original remark. 'Waal, 'ere we be at the mill, good night to 'ee, miss. Mind 'ow 'ee gits down.'

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CHAPTER X

THE BALL

HOW many hearts were fluttering with hopes and fears, rising from, and centring in Mr Temple's ball to his tenants?

First and foremost, that of Lady Charlotte Bentley, the young man's aunt, who came down from town with her two unmarried daughters, and her son, Captain Bentley, to act

hostess on the occasion. The young officer's loudly expressed intention to 'go it' with the farmers' daughters, gave his mother no little uneasiness, but her chief anxiety was the eccentricity of her nephew.

'What can make Hugh want to give a ball of

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this kind, when he will not go into society among his equals?' she said to her eldest daughter. 'He won't come up to town, nor stay with any of his relations, but pokes by himself in this dreary, empty house. He seems to associate with no one but the Rector—very bad for him. Not that there is anything against poor, dear Mr Metcalfe; he is well connected, a great scholar, I believe, and certainly, a most gentlemanly man—but your cousin ought to have younger friends, and visit among his neighbours in the county. Hugh is not a shy man.'

'No, he is not shy, certainly,' asserted Victoria.

'Then why does he go on like this?'

'I'm sure I don't know,' replied Victoria, finding that her mother waited for an answer. She, herself, felt little interest in the matter, beyond being slightly aggrieved that Hugh had chosen to give his ball just then, since, in order to come to it, the whole Bentley family had refused an invitation which she particularly wanted to accept.

'There must be some reason for Hugh's liking this kind of life,' continued Lady Charlotte, energetically. 'I'm determined to find it out. He ought to get married, and we must rout him out of these ways. If there seems no one suitable hereabouts, I shall *make* him come up to us in the

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spring, and see what we can do. I should like to see poor dear Emily's son well married,' she concluded with a sigh.

'There are lots of daughters at Marleigh, are not there? Hugh goes there sometimes.'

'So he does; and some of them are coming to-morrow. I must watch, and if he betrays any preference, act accordingly.'

Then there was young Baker, the draper's assistant, from Kingsford, who came home for Christmas and could scarcely take his proper part in the family merry-making, for wondering how many times Marjory Dawes would dance with him, and thinking how

well she would look in the dress he had sold to her, one happy Saturday, three weeks ago.

Armell and Lettice looked forward to meeting each other, with a quiet, yet deep satisfaction, which would have angered Mrs Dawes had she known it, but her head was so full of the coming triumph of her daughter, that she overlooked many things which at other times would have raised a storm. She even omitted to scold 'Melia, and allowed Peter to 'answer her back,' without a rebuke.

She felt convinced that the ball was given in Marjory's honour, and fully believed that, before

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the evening was over, all the guests would be aware of the fact. She half expected that Mr Temple would lead her daughter forth, and inform the assembly that this was the lady of his choice, and the future mistress of his house.

'Of course, them Coopers and Wilsons will be sneerin',' she said to herself, 'but who cares for a low lot like them?'

It never occurred to her that objections might be raised from quite different quarters—by the young squire's relations, for instance.

She quite patronised Lady Charlotte when she was introduced to her. "Oped 'er ladyship found everything comfortable at the "All"—and almost apologised for the bachelor establishment, and bare unused rooms.

Lady Charlotte was too much surprised by this address to do more than murmur an indistinct reply. She shook hands with Armell, Marjory, and Lettice, without seeing them, and followed Mrs Dawes with her eyeglass, as that lady led her party down the long room. At the first opportunity, she asked her nephew,

'Who was that extraordinary woman, in the straight-down black satin dress, and the scarlet shawl?'

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Hugh recognised the unflattering description, and winced.

'Oh, that is Mrs Dawes, aunt Charlotte. She is my principal tenant, and you must be very civil to her, please.'

The Salamanca Corpus: Up Hill and Down Dale. Vol I (1884)

Lady Charlotte made no answer, but mentally decided to keep clear of this person, whose familiarity she resented extremely. But though her hostess was not inclined to make much of Mrs Dawes, that lady received ample attention from other quarters. The young squire himself found her a comfortable seat, secure from draughts, whence she might get a good view of the dancers. Her neighbours came and held little talks with her, for they all feared her sharp tongue, and treated her with respect, in spite of their dislike of her arrogance.

The young men came about her too, for had she not brought to the ball, the two prettiest girls in the room?

Marjory looked charming in a dress of the colour we should now describe as 'deep cream,' but which she then called 'a light buff,' it had little touches of dark red about it, and suited her perfectly. Lettice had, with her neat and clever fingers contrived to re-make a white dress, which

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her mother had given her, when once there had been a concert at the school where she was pupil teacher.

Her father had, after much persuasion, allowed her to go to Long Upton, on condition that the visit involved no expense; so she had, rather sadly, ironed out her limp and faded ribbons for the occasion. On her arrival at the farm, Marjory had ruthlessly unpicked these, and sewn on fresh bows of forget-me-not tint, bought by Armell himself at Kingsford, though nominally presented by his sister.

Then nothing marred the dainty freshness of her toilette, and serene content gleamed in her blue eyes, when she came down from her chamber into the kitchen, to meet the approving glance of Armell, the critical one of his mother, 'Melia's unfeigned admiration, and a distant grin from Peter in the back-ground. Arrived at the Hall, she felt positively excited, and her eyes shone and her colour rose, so that she looked beautiful, and her hand was soon as much in request as that of Marjory.

'Who is that very pretty girl you were dancing with?' asked Lady Charlotte of her son, who came up to her, after a long and lively galop which he had danced with Lettice.

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'Her name is Bourne, and she lives at a mill somewhere "on the banks of Allan Water," I should think, for she is a lovely little thing, but she has precious little to say for herself—the other one is much the best to talk to.'

'Who is the other one? Has the miller two lovely-daughters?'

'No. I suppose they are cousins. There is the other one with Hugh, in a sort of yellowish frock.'

'Why, Arthur, that girl is positively beautiful! She would make a sensation anywhere; she looks so —so well bred! who is she?'

'She has the oddest name in the world,' said Captain Bentley. 'She is called Marjory Dawes.'

'Dawes—Dawes,' repeated Lady Charlotte, 'Hugh introduced me to some one of that name—but I can't recollect who it was; I am bewildered with them all.—Oh, there are the Marleights at last. Come, and be introduced, Arthur, you must ask one of the girls to dance. But first call Hugh, he doesn't seem to know they are here.'

'No wonder; he's with Marjory Dawes,' said the Captain, rather to his mother's vexation. She hastened away, to do her duty to the most important guests of the evening, and her son sauntered across the room, to the spot where Hugh and

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Marjory stood together—he looking at her, she gazing up at the gallery occupied by the band.

'You seem to take a great interest in the band, Miss Dawes,' he was saying, in a rather piqued tone of voice, 'would you like to have a fiddle down, and try to play it?'

'No thank you,' she answered, absently; then a sudden smile came to her lips, and she gave a very friendly nod to someone who looked over the gallery and caught her eye.

'Do you know any of those fellows up there?' enquired her companion, with some disgust.

'Yes, one of them; he is my music-master.'

'Why, I thought you learnt from the organist at St. Jude's.'

'So I do; there he is—Oh, he has turned away now.'

'It is a very extraordinary thing he should play in a band like this. I thought he was a good musician, and held a decent position.'

'He does hold a decent position. Is there anything to be ashamed of in playing at your ball, Mr Temple? He is——'

'Sorry to interrupt you, Miss Dawes,' drawled Captain Bentley at this moment. 'My cousin is wanted. Hugh, the Marleighs have come. Shall I take Miss Dawes to her seat?'

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'Confound it!' was Hugh's mental ejaculation as he hurried away to greet his newly arrived guests. He received them with not the best grace in the world, and was not thought a very agreeable partner by the various young ladies with whom he had to dance before he could return to Marjory. His waltz with her came at last, and he meant to enjoy it thoroughly, having forgotten the irritation he had felt at her interest in 'the fiddler.' He was disappointed that before it was half over, she declared she was tired, and would like to sit down.

'I danced that last polka with Mr Baker, and he works so hard at it! He has nearly pulled my arm off, and taken away all my breath,' she said.

'Come into the conservatory, it is lighted up, and there are lots of seats there,' said the master of the house. 'You haven't seen it yet, I think?'

'Oh, yes—I have indeed. Captain Bentley took me there, long ago.'

'I am sorry,' said Hugh, with genuine vexation. 'I wanted to take you there first, myself. But never mind, my cousin couldn't show you such a cosy seat as I will find for you. Just the place to rest in. I arranged it myself. This way—By George!'

Another couple had discovered the squire's cunningly hidden nook, and there, in a recess,

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sheltered by venerable camellias and myrtles in huge green tubs, were seated Armell and Lettice. One of his arms was round her waist, the other hand held both of hers. They looked radiantly happy, and quite oblivious of what was going on around them.

Marjory looked, smiled, and turned softly away. Her companion followed.

'I am glad of that,' said he.

'So am I,' she answered, still smiling.

'Will you sit here?' he said, finding another seat. Then, as he seated himself beside her, he continued, 'I am glad Lettice is as kind to Armell as he deserves.' Then, leaning

forward and looking in her face—'And, oh! Marjory, why shouldn't you be as kind to me?'

She had felt it was coming, and, though she dreaded the task, and still more dreaded the consequences at home, yet she nerved herself to an effort which should free her once and for ever from this atmosphere of suppressed love-making, as it were, with which Mr Temple's infatuation and her mother's ambition had surrounded her so long.

'Kind?' she repeated. '*I* kind to *you*? Surely you have many friends, Mr Temple, and need not

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look for kindness to the daughter of one of your tenants.'

'Oh, Marjory! Marjory! why should you speak like that? You must know that I love you—that I have loved you a long time! And there is no difference between us; none that can matter at all! Didn't we both learn of the same tutor—and didn't he always say you were his best pupil? Why, Marjory, I loved you then—when you were a little girl in pinafores, and came across the fields to your lessons every day. I went to Eton, and Oxford, and afterwards, on the Continent, and didn't come home for several years; you were the only person here whom I felt any wish to see during all that time—well, you and Mr Metcalfe. And when I came back, and saw how pretty and sweet you had grown, I felt I could never love any one like you. I thought there was no lady in the county to compare with you, and I think so still. Can't you love me a little, Marjory?'

Tears stood in Marjory's eyes but she shook her head.

'Not for old sake's sake, when we went to school at the Rectory together?' 'No,' said she very faintly.

'But why, Marjory, why?' he continued, as he thought he saw signs of relenting in her bowed

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head, and the tears that hung on her lashes. 'I think I could make you very happy my darling. There is not anything in me that you dislike, is there?' 'No,' she said again.

'Then why not try and love me? It would please your mother—she says—'

Marjory's head was raised at once, the rare colour rose in her cheeks, and all signs of tears vanished at once.

'No, Mr Temple,' she said, clearly and decidedly. 'There are some things in which a girl must please herself, and not her mother; or she does wrong. Marriage is one of these things. I cannot love you. I could never marry you, and you must please think no more about—'

'That is impossible,' he broke in, trying to take her hand. She drew it away, and continued—

'I am not ungrateful, Mr Temple. I know you have done me great honour, but it is of no use— no use at all. It is better I should tell you so at once; you will be glad some day that I did so. If I could go anywhere now, that you could not see me for a long time, I would do so; but I can't—I have nowhere to go. You must come no more to the Hill, Mr Temple.'

She had risen from the seat, where Hugh still

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sat with his arm on the back, and his head bowed upon it. He was very young for his age, and inexperienced, and had been roughly awaked from a pleasant dream; it must be forgiven him that tears were in his eyes, and that a sob broke his voice, as he uttered the vain and piteous words, 'But—Marjory—I did think you cared for me a little. Your mother said—'

'My mother has misled you, and I can only say I am very, very sorry for it. Will you take me to her now? Here is your cousin coming to look for you.'

'Mrs Matthews is beginning to fidget about the supper, Hugh; will you go and speak to her?' said Captain Bentley, looking perfectly unconscious of there being anything peculiar in Hugh's attitude.

'All right,' said the latter, drearily, rising as he spoke, and offering Marjory his arm without another word.

'Poor boy!' said the captain to himself. 'I hope the young woman isn't playing with him. I'll keep an eye on her.'

He followed the pair into the ballroom, where Mrs Dawes could not be found, and Marjory had to be left with Mrs Baker.

"Ave you bin enj'yin yerself, my dear?" asked the good woman. "That there conservatory is

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lovely, though I say it as shouldn't, seein' it is all Baker's work, so to speak. But the squire took a dill o' paayns about it, his own self—my dear, are you cold?'

'No thank you, Mrs Baker; I wonder where mother is,' said Marjory, looking vainly round the room for the scarlet shawl.

'I see her go out of the room, just after that last waltz; you was a dancin' with the squire, I think, an' Lady Charlotte and Lady Marleigh, they went out a'most directly after. P'raps they're seein' after the supper my dear.'

'But they wouldn't want mother to help them, Mrs Baker. She isn't in the tea-room, and I can't think where she can be.'

'Well never mind, my dear; here's William waitin' to dance with you.'

Marjory had to accept young Baker's proffered arm, and try to put her mind into the quadrille for which he had engaged her, but she watched anxiously for her mother's return, hoping that on some pretence or other, they might get away home, leaving Armell and Lettice to follow.

They had re-appeared, and were now looking on at the quadrille, which seemed to Marjory interminable, while her mother was still absent.

The truth was that Mrs Dawes had watched her

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daughter throughout the evening, with pride and gratification. She saw the waltz broken off, and observed the retreat to the conservatory. She felt instinctively that a crisis had come, and had no misgivings as to the result.

'Marg'ate *is* stubborn,' she said to herself, 'but not so stubborn as to turn her back on such a chance as this—with the house and conservatories and all? It 'ud all be the better for having a mistress over it, that's plain enough. The place ant kept as it ought to be, and the servants is that idle and wasteful as no one would credit it! Margate 'ud soon let 'em know!'

And she began turning over in her mind the reforms Marjory must make, and presently rose and left the room to perfect some of her plans.

Meanwhile, Lady Charlotte having a little respite from her duties as hostess, held a confidential talk with Lady Marleigh, telling her misgivings as to Hugh's retired mode

of life, and finally hinting very plainly at her cherished hope of a union between one of the daughters of Marleigh, and the master of Long Upton.

Lady Marleigh had been the intimate friend of Hugh's mother, during her short married life, and ten years of widowhood. She had been ready to receive her friend's son, with almost motherly

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kindness, when he came home after some years' absence. But Hugh had repelled her advances, as he had repelled those of others, and had gained for himself the reputation of being an eccentric youth, on which grounds Lady Marleigh did not regard him as a desirable son-in-law.

'He is very unlike his mother,' she said, by way of turning the conversation.

'Oh, I don't agree with you there,' returned Lady Charlotte. 'He has a strong look of her sometimes. More than once this evening, it has struck me, how like he is to her picture upstairs.'

'Ah, that picture in the boudoir? I have not seen it for years. It hangs in the same place, I suppose?'

'Yes; would you like to see it?'

'I should like it very much. May I go up presently? I can find my way. Don't let me take you away.'

'I shall like to come with you,' said Lady Charlotte, rising, 'I am not wanted here, just now; every one is dancing and there are yet four dances before supper.'

In the hall she paused to look for a candle.

'Where can the candle be?' she said. These servants have grown sadly rusty. If you ring, no one comes, and the old housekeeper is as bad as any

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of them. But come upstairs, there are lights there, I think.'

They mounted the fine old staircase, and passed down the corridor leading to the room that had been Lady Emily's boudoir. The door was ajar, and a faint light was reflected on the opposite wall.

'They have kept the fire up, at any rate,' said Lady Charlotte, with her hand on the door.

'What is that?' she added, hastily, as a noise was heard within—a prolonged shrill

scream; she pushed open the door, and both ladies started at the unexpected sight that met their eyes.

With one hand holding a lighted candle, and the other on the back of a heavy sofa, to which her knee was applied below, as she rolled it towards the fireside, was a short, square, figure—a pale-faced woman, in a straight black dress, and an unbecoming scarlet shawl. Mrs Dawes herself!

'Madam!' gasped Lady Charlotte.

The disused castors uttered dismal squeals, replying with difficulty to Mrs Dawes' efforts; she was so intent on her sofa that she had not been aware of the entry of the two ladies; the voice startled her and she turned so suddenly that a shower of grease was sent upon the carpet.

'Oh, my goodness!' she exclaimed. To think o' me doin' such a thing! But it'll come out easy in

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the mornin' with a hot iron, an' a bit o' brown paper. P'raps your Ladyship 'ull tell the 'ousemaid. I 'adn't 'eard you comin' in, and it gave me such a turn, when you spoke. An' Lady Marleigh, too, to be sure. I 'ope I see your Ladyship well?'

Mrs Dawes made a stiff inclination of her body towards Lady Marleigh, and waited so pointedly for an answer that, as Lady Charlotte did not speak, Lady Marleigh returned haughtily, 'You are very kind, but I have not the pleasure of knowing you.'

'Ah, said Mrs Dawes, 'it's just like me. When I goes to market, one says, "Good mornin', Mrs Dawes," and another, "'Ow are you, Mrs Dawes?" and me not knowing 'em from Adam! There's more folks knows Tom Fool, thinks I, than Tom Fool knows.'

Lady Marleigh made no reply to this sally; she merely looked Mrs Dawes up and down. She had not married till after Pamela Rowlands left Marliegh Castle, and though she had often heard of the thrifty, but tyrannous rule of the ex-housekeeper, yet she had forgotten the woman's after-history, and did not connect her with this presumptuous person, who did not seem one whit abashed by the indignant gaze of her ladyship's aristocratic eye.

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But now, Lady Charlotte having taken breath, rushed to the front.

'Mr Temple introduced you to me when you arrived, but, unfortunately, I had forgotten your name. Now that you have reminded me of it, Mrs Dawes, may I ask what brought you in this room, which is not intended for the use of any but Mr Temple's own family?'

'I come up in this room,' returned Mrs Dawes, stoutly, 'because, many's the time I've bin here in poor Lady Hemily's time, and I thought I should like to see it again, and it goes to one's 'eart to see it all look so dejected, which, I ask you, Lady Charlotte, *is* that the way a brass fender ought to be kep'? Look at it—as dull as dull! Now, a little drop of oil and some rottenstone——'

'The condition of my nephew's furniture can be of no interest to you, Mrs Dawes; you may not intend to be impertinent, but——'

'But you *are most* impertinent,' added Lady Marleigh.

'Oh, indeed! you think so, do you?' said Mrs Dawes, contemptuously. 'I can tell you, my fine madams, that Mr Temple knows who his friends are, and you'll know too, before long. Not his aunt, who, though she is his mother's own sister, never comes anigh him, and 'ud let the house go

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to rack and ruin, an' the dust lie that thick about this very room, as you may write your name in it, as I've seen it myself. Nor he don't call my Lady Marleigh 'is friend, though she asks an' asks 'im to the castle, and brings all 'er daughters over 'ere tonight, for 'im to take 'is pick of. But there's a change a-coming soon, that 'ull make some folks open their eyes.'

'I don't know what you're talking about,' said Lady Charlotte, very nervously. 'I don't think you know yourself what you are saying. If you don't leave this room, immediately, I shall ring for assistance, and have you taken home.'

'Ha! ha! well, I never!' laughed Mrs Dawes. 'I've frightened you now, have I? The idea of talkin' of turning *me* out of *this* 'ouse! It's you as don't know what you're talkin' of my lady. But I won't intrude my company on you ladies, I'm sure; I must go down and see after my daughter. I'll leave you the light as you don't seem to have brought one; and I knows my way well enough without it.'

The candle was placed on the centre table, the door was slammed to, and the two ladies stood, looking at each other, in speechless amazement, listening to the heavy tread of Mrs Dawes, audible all the length of the corridor.

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As the footsteps died away, Lady Charlotte spoke.

'What a dreadful woman! Is she mad, do you think, or intoxicated?'

'No, oh no—I fear not,' answered her friend sadly. 'I had hoped it was but country gossip, but I fear it is too true, that your nephew has long been paying attention to one of his tenants' daughters.'

'Oh, Lady Marleigh!—

'The young woman's name is Dawes, I remember. This must be the mother.'

Lady Charlotte sank on the sofa, placed so invitingly near the fire by Mrs Dawes, and burst into tears.

'Oh! how dreadful! Wretched boy! It would have broken his mother's heart! Dear Lady Marleigh—tell me all you know about it.'

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CHAPTER XI

AFTER THE BALL

MRS DAWES had happily, a very sincere belief in Marjory's delicacy, and she suspected nothing wrong when, immediately after supper, Armell told her that his sister was tired and unwell, and he thought they had better go home.

Had any inkling of the real state of the case occurred to Mrs Dawes' mind, she would unhesitatingly have demanded a public explanation on the spot. As it was, she felt personally glad to leave early; the unmistakable fact that she was neither so young nor so strong as she had been, was making itself felt. To sit up in one's best clothes, and with one's company manners on, some

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four or five hours after one's usual bedtime, is no slight exertion to those unaccustomed to it; and therefore, though nothing seemed to have taken place between the squire and

Marjory, she contentedly turned her back on the Hall, feeling sure that its master would be at the Hill to-morrow.

'And no one 'ull care *that* for old Lady Charlotte,' she said to herself, snapping her fingers beneath her shawl, in so violent a manner, as to startle Armell on whose arm she was leaning, out of his own reflections, to ask,

'What was that, mother?'

'Oh, nothing!' she answered, 'Miss Bourne, that white petticoat of yours 'ull be finely dagged if you don't hold it up a bit more. Marg'ate, you keep that big shawl well lapped round you.'

Thus she issued her orders to her companions, who, as they trudged silently through the dirt and darkness, were all more or less disturbed in mind. Since the moment when Marjory, in a hasty whisper had told Armell what had happened, and begged him to get her away, his feelings for her had been so keen as to make him, for the time being, forget his own affairs. Lettice, on her part, felt injured that Marjory should choose to get overtired, and cut short such enjoyment as she, at least, had never known in her life.

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She felt still more injured that, for the last hour, Armell had paid her little or no attention. Like other persons of her temperament Lettice was rather exacting, not to say jealous. Though she had read few romances, yet she remembered those few; and from them, and the love affairs of a fellow student, she had formed unconsciously an ideal of the conduct of lovers.

Now, Armell had already fallen short of this standard, and Lettice was vexed and puzzled, feeling half persuaded that, at the first opportunity, she ought to tell him that she had mistaken her sentiments.

There were persons and things, she had found, to whom a certain degree of license must be allowed, since you could not say with precision, what they would do under given circumstances. She had accepted this fact, with regard to her father, all her life—then had recognised it of government inspectors and school managers—and latterly at the mill, she had experienced it in the rearing of young chickens. But that her lover should not behave exactly as she expected of him, was quite incomprehensible.

The Hill Farm was reached before she came to any conclusion on the matter. The door was unlocked with a huge key taken from the hiding-place

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behind a shutter where 'Melia had been instructed to leave it.

As she crossed her own threshold, Mrs Dawes laid aside her reflective mood, and proceeded to action; she stirred up the fire, and decreed that they must all have 'something hot,' the girls especially, to prevent them taking cold after dancing, and to make them sleep.

'You look as tired as tired, Marg'ate; you go right off to bed, and I'll bring you a glass of elder wine, when it's ready.'

Marjory was not sorry to be thus dismissed. She had that to tell her mother to-morrow, which would give deep, if not lasting offence; and she needed some thought before the trial should come. She bade Lettice good night; then turned to Armell, and contrived to whisper to him, under cover of the noise made by her mother's preparations, 'Meet me down here, when mother is gone to bed.'

Mrs Dawes was a person who took some time to go off to bed, particularly after an evening's absence from home. She deemed it necessary to ascertain that 'Melia had put away everything neatly; each bolt, each bar, and lock must be examined, and lastly, a progress made through all the rooms in the house; Armell began to think his mother meant to stay up all night; he offered to

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assist in some of these operations, but was only permitted to carry the candle.

She was satisfied at last, and retired to her own room the door of which had a trick of catching in the carpet; and would only open with a struggle, and shut with a bang, audible throughout the house. When this familiar sound was heard, the brother and sister knew they were safe, and stealing downstairs in their 'stocking feet,' held their consultation by the dying embers of the kitchen fire. Marjory had been obliged to make some show of undressing, before her mother's visit to her room, and now she came down in her white petticoats, with a thick shawl over her shoulders. Armell stirred the coal, to make a little light—and when, a tiny flame sprang up, it shone on her snowy skirts,

caught the red shawl, and brought out in strong relief the round white arm that held the shawl in place, and the cloud of dark curly hair that hung about her head.

She made a pretty picture, yet, Armell, looking at her, thought the little figure so forlorn and sad, so different from its usual, trim brightness, that he put his arm round her, and, raising the drooping head, said tenderly,

'Why, Marjory! You look almost as if you wished you hadn't said 'No' to the squire after all.'

She laid her head on his shoulder as she replied,

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'No. I'm thankful that is said, once for all; but, Armell, you don't know what mother is when she is crossed in any of her schemes, and she has set her heart on this so long.'

'Don't fret about that, little sister; I'll take your part; and if she makes it very bad for you, why, we'll see what can be done. You might go and stay with Uncle Edmund a bit; he'd be glad enough to have you, I know.'

'Oh, no; I don't think I can do that. I must bear it. But how and when shall I tell her? Lettice will be here in the morning. Oh, it is a shame of me to take up your time and vex you with my affairs, when you ought to be so happy about your own!'

'Don't think of that, dear; perhaps it is well both affairs happened together. I can take off mother's attention by telling her my tale directly you've told yours. Then she can let off some of her anger on me.'

'Oh no, Armell—she won't be angry with you! She must like Lettice, and be pleased that you are happy.'

'She can't dislike my Lettice,' said the lover, 'but,' he added sadly, 'I know very well that she won't like my marrying her.'

Marjory tried to make some bright and hopeful

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answer, but the words stuck in her throat. She knew—who better?—that this very natural, but common-place attachment between Armell and the miller's daughter would never be congenial to the mother who had been so ambitious for her daughter. Was Armell beginning to find out, she wondered that he, gentle and sensitive, was not a son

after his mother's heart? She turned the conversation. 'What shall you do about Mr Bourne?' 'I shall go over and see him to-morrow afternoon.'

'Lettice is to go home after breakfast,' said Marjory. 'We won't have anything unpleasant while she is here. I'll tell mother directly she is gone.'

'And then, before she has time to be very angry with you, I'll come and tell her what I've said to Lettice, and what I'm going to say to the miller. Come, Marjory, now we've settled this, you must go to bed.'

'Yes, let us go; thank you, Armell, you've helped me very much.'

The two stole softly upstairs, and then Marjory drew Armell gently to the door of Lettice's room.

'You couldn't wish each other good-night properly, before,' she said. 'Wait there, and I'll bring her to you.'

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Inside the room sat Lettice, half undressed; her hands were clasped in her lap. She did not lean her head on her arms, nor crouch in a corner, like most love-lorn maidens, but she sat very upright, and was gazing straight before her, pondering over the event of the evening, and asking herself whether she had done right to listen to Armell's pleadings.

She started when Marjory came in, and feeling terribly ashamed, began to murmur some excuse for not being in bed. What would her friend think of her sitting idly there, and wasting the candle? To her surprise Marjory paid no attention to her excuse, but put her arms round her neck, and kissed her, saying,

'Lettice, dear, I'm so glad you're to be my sister, and I must beg your pardon for having spoilt your pleasure this evening. I've been in trouble, and had to get Armell to help me. Don't look so shocked, it's nothing wrong. And now he's waiting outside to say good night to you. Go, dear, and give him a kiss.'

'Oh! Marjory,' cried Lettice, her face brightening, though a crimson glow flushed over her cheeks and forehead, and even her throat. 'Oh, Marjory—to go to him, now, as I am!'

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Marjory took off her shawl and put it round Lettice, then gently pushed her out of the door.

Armell, leaning against the opposite side, with a candle in his hand, saw his love come forth and shyly lift her sweet eyes to his. He set down the candle on the floor and took her in his arms, while she lifted up her mouth, and gave him, rather primly, her first kiss.

'I have so much to say to you, Lettie,' said Armell, 'but I will not keep you up now, my dearest. If I can't tell you in the morning you must just wait, dear, till the afternoon, when I shall be over at the mill to talk to your father; to ask him, you know, if he will give you to me.'

Lettice blushed again. 'I do not know what father will say.'

'He won't want to lose you, of course,' said Armell, 'but he thinks I saved his life that day at Braybridge, and so he will consider he owes me something.'

'That was why he asked you to the mill.'

'Yes. And would you believe it, Lettie, I didn't want to go, and was as nearly staying away as possible. I hardly know now how it was that I went. How well I remember coming in and seeing you putting the kettle on the fire. Wouldn't you like to know what I thought of you—eh, Lettie?'

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he asked, holding her out at arm's length, and gazing into the quiet depths of her blue eyes.

'What did you think?' she asked, in a tone of slight surprise.

He drew her closer to him, and laughed.

'There isn't much vanity about you, at any rate,' he said.

'I'm sorry to disturb you,' said Marjory, from Lettice's door, 'but Armell, you must let her go to bed now.'

A long good-night was said, and, at last they all separated; the house was silent, but for one, at least of the household, there was little rest that night. Marjory knelt long at her prayers, and though few words were formed upon her lips, her whole heart went up in a cry for help to bear her mother's anger. It was not till the morning that she fell into a troubled sleep.

Mrs Dawes was the first astir, and said to herself that 'Marjory must lie abed like a lady, so as to be freshened up by the time the squire came.'

She went downstairs before dressing to ascertain that 'Melia was up and about her work; then, having made her toilet, she went to Marjory's door, and turning the handle very cautiously, succeeded in making a prolonged and dismal squeak, which

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woke her daughter, who started up in a fright, exclaiming 'What is that?'

'There, now!' exclaimed Mrs Dawes, 'to think as you've woke up, and I came in as quiet as quiet could be. I only wanted to see how you was this morning. You must go to sleep again, my dear, there's no call for you to get up for ever so long yet. Why, what is coming at this time o' day, I wonder?'

Attracted by the sound of wheels, she went to the window, and looking out, continued, 'why I declare if it isn't the cart from the mill! to think o' that owd miller sending so early for Lettice! He grudges the girl every minute that she isn't looking after his poultry and things, I'll be bound. Why she isn't up yet, let alone having her breakfast. I must go and tell the man he'll have to stop till she's ready. You go to sleep again, Marg'ate, and I'll come to you presently.'

Marjory was not very likely to sleep, after being thus disturbed, and she lay awake thinking, till the door opened, and in came Lettice, dressed for her drive homewards.

'Why, Lettice, are you going already? I'm ashamed not to be up to see you off.'

'But you are not well,' said Lettice, simply, 'of course you ought not to get up.'

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'I shall hear of you from Armell to-night,' said Marjory, 'and I hope you'll be back again very soon, or I shall come to the mill and see you.'

'Father doesn't like visitors,' said Lettice, 'but, Marjory I mustn't stay—the horse will have to go to Braybridge, after I get back, and Dick says we must be quick.'

She kissed Marjory, and ran down stairs, and the cart drove away immediately afterwards. Marjory heard the wheels grating over the stones in the lane, and then, her mother's voice giving orders to Peter, and a rebuke to 'Melia, then the slow, heavy steps mounted the stairs, and for each step Marjory's heart throbbed.

Mrs Dawes entered, and sat down on the side of the bed.

'Now, what 'ull you like for your breakfast, Margate? I'd a bin up before only that owd miller sent word that Lettice wasn't to keep the man waiting, and we had to give 'em some breakfast, and bustle her off, ever so. It's a shame her father won't let her have a bit o' pleasure in peace, as you may say.'

'It is, indeed,' assented Marjory, finding that her mother paused for an answer.

'And how do you feel this morning, my dear? Tired, I'll be bound!'

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'No, thank you, mother. I'm rested now. I'd rather get up and come down to breakfast, please.'

'No, no—you stop abed a bit longer. You looks as white as ever was a wall. It's a lucky thing Lettice Bourne isn't as delicate as you—her father 'ud never let her lie abed, I knows—yet, she must be tired, too, for I'm sure there was no ladies at the 'All last night as got so many partners as you two, and you did look nice, though I say it, as shouldn't. The squire 'ud be finely vexed at you coming away so soon.'

'Oh no, mother, he wouldn't!' said Marjory, very earnestly, sitting up in bed as she spoke.

Mrs Dawes was pleased at this unusual effect of the mention of Mr Temple, and she laughed as she answered,

'Oh, he knowed about it, p'raps, did he? Well, anyway, he's sure to be here before long, to see how you are, this morning, I shouldn't wonder— Why, what are you doing, child?'

Marjory was getting out of bed, and now knelt at her mother's side. 'Oh, no; he won't come,' she said, very gravely, 'he'll not come again. I told him last night that he must not.'

A faint colour rose in Mrs Dawes' sallow cheeks, she paused an instant, fixing her small keen, dark eyes on her daughter's face.

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'What do you mean, miss?' she asked, at last 'You told him not to come?'

'Yes, he has been always coming lately—you brought him, mother—you have both been mistaken—you and he.'

Marjory had rested one arm on her mother's knee, the better to plead her cause; Mrs Dawes now swept off the arm, and rose so suddenly that Marjory would have fallen, had she not caught at the bedpost. She raised herself, and still holding to this support, stood to confront her mother's anger.

'Do—you—mean—to—tell—me that Mr Temple asked you to marry him and you refused?' asked Mrs Dawes, in a voice half stifled with rage.

'I did.'

'Wicked, bad, ungrateful girl!'

'I am not wicked, mother; I am not ungrateful; I do not love him: I could never marry him. I am sorry to have to vex you, but——'

'Vex me, indeed! This is a nice return for all I denied myself to educate you like a lady, letting you go day after day, for years, to that silly old rector for your lessons, Nicely he's taught you to honour your mother!'

'He taught me to know my own position,' said

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Marjory, indignant for her kind old master. 'And to know my own mind,' she added, *sotto voce*.

'You little fool!' hissed the mother, who had caught the words, 'Mind! You've got no mind to know. There's not another girl in Brookshire but would give her eyes for the chance you've throwed away. Why, the squire was head over ears in love with you, and there's plenty that knows it, too! *You* must ha' knowed it, you wicked girl, and you must ha' knowed what I wished.'

'I knew you thought of it, mother; but I hoped that both you and he would give it up. You have no right to call me wicked. I should be wicked if I married him, because he is the squire, without caring for him at all. You cannot say that I ever gave him any encouragement.'

'Why, no; but then I thought——,' hesitated

Mrs Dawes, as she gradually awoke to the fact she had obstinately and blindly urged on the match, without regard to Marjory's inclinations or Mr Temple's feelings. She could

not but own herself beaten, yet would not admit this for an instant, and so began afresh to heap on her daughter those reproaches which came so easily to her tongue.

'You're a bad, ungrateful girl,' she repeated. 'And where you get all your pride and
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pigheadedness from, I can't think! What do you suppose is to become of you, I should like to know? I can't afford to keep you idling like I have done, and if you think your mother's going to wait of you all your days, you're very much mistaken. I daresay you think a 'usband 'ull drop down from the clouds, or you expects the Prince o' Wales 'ull come down to Long Upton and marry you—it 'ud be just like your ridiculousness. But the end of it 'ull be that you'll take up with some low fellow, that hasn't a penny to bless himself with, and your children'll be beggars!'

Marjory was leaning listlessly against the bedpost, her head resting on her arms. She had literally bowed before the storm of her mother's words; she now gave a slight shiver, and stretched out her hand as if to speak, but Mrs Dawes cut her short.

'There, now, you'll be catching cold. I can't afford to have you ill, I'm sure. Please to put your things on at once, and have summat to eat.'

'I don't want any breakfast,' said Marjory, faintly.

'Nonsense, Miss—you'll have to eat. Come, I'm going down now, to tell your brother about this piece of work. You please to stop 'ere till I come back—and think over your evil ways and

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repent of 'em'—concluded Mrs Dawes, as she extracted the key of Marjory's door, and going out of the room, locked it on the outside, feeling, as she did so, that such imprisonment was almost too good for a girl who had so disgraced herself.

Armell had waited in the house after Lettice's departure, thinking that Marjory would come down and he could help her out with her confession. As his mother was so long upstairs he thought that she must be hearing of the frustration of her hopes.

'Poor little Marjory!' he thought. 'I fear she'll have a bad time of it.'

Then he was summoned to look at an invalid cow whose case proved to be beyond home-treatment, and so a messenger had to be dispatched for old Josh Tandy, whose profession would have been described by his clients as that of a 'beast leech.'

When Armell returned to the kitchen he saw at once that the storm had burst. His mother, a shade paler than usual, with gloom on her face, compressed lips, and angry eyes, was standing with a tray in her hand, on which was a glass of water and a very neatly cut slice of dry bread.

'What is that for, mother?' he asked quietly.

She turned, and, seeing her son, put down the tray on the table.

'It's your sister's breakfast, and a far better one

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than she deserves. She's a bad, ungrateful girl—born to break her mother's heart. Mr Temple asked her to marry him last night, and she refused him.'

'She has done quite right,' said Armell, steadily.

'Oho!' said Mrs Dawes, bringing down her hand on the table with such force that the water splashed over right and left. 'Now, I see who has backed her up in this wilfulness. A nice son and brother, to set a sister agen her own mother! It's a bad job as ever you came home to set her against her duty. You're no children o' mine—you're Daweses, the pair of you. Never know when you're well off—always stand in your own light. I might ha knowed how it 'ud be when I let you go up to Yorkshire, to be along of that poor, soft Edmund Dawes.'

'Hush, mother,' said Armell, who had closed the door, leading into the back kitchen, where 'Melia was at work.

'Hush! you don't want all the parish to hear that you've quarrelled with your own children. You know very well that if this story got about it is you who would be blamed, not Marjory. Now sit down,' he said, placing a chair for her, 'and listen to me. You have set your heart on this so long that you have never stopped to think that

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Marjory never cared one bit for the squire, and that she would have done wrong to marry him for that reason, if for no other; but there are a hundred others.'

'What others, pray? And what do you suppose I care for the Long Upton folks? A pack o' fools! And wasn't Marjory taught along o' Hugh Temple at the Rectory? And don't she know how to behave herself as well as any lady in Brookshire? And did you never hear before of a gentleman marrying his tenant's daughter?' asked Mrs Dawes,

breathless with anger and surprise at being taken to task by Armell, and at having, for the first time, to find reasons in defence of her cause.

'Yes,' her son replied, 'I knew just such a case in Yorkshire, and very badly and miserably it turned out. Marjory has done right—quite right—and you'll own it, mother, when you've had time to consider. Meantime, parents in England have no right to make their daughters marry against their will, and still less right to punish them for refusing to do so. Marjory is not a little girl that you should feed her on bread and water. I shall order her a proper breakfast.'

So saying, he went out and told 'Melia to get tea and bread-and-butter ready for his sister.

'Perhaps you'll order the dinner and see to the
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churning while you are about it,' said his mother. 'It seems I am to be nobody in my own house.'

Armell took no notice of this, but waited till 'Melia brought the tea, and then said, 'I am going up to Marjory now, mother, and I shall be glad if you'll wait here till I come down. I have something to say to you.'

When he was out of hearing Mrs Dawes laughed, as she shook her pocket in which the key lay. 'You'll have your journey for nothing, my fine gentleman,' she said aloud, then she rose and occupied herself by putting away a few stray articles that lay about the room.

'Mother!' said an indignant voice behind her. 'Give me the key of Marjory's door directly. How could you lock her in?'

'The keys of this house is mine. I can lock what doors I like.'

'Do you wish me to break open the door?' he asked, stretching out his strong arm, as if to show how easily he could do it.

'If you like to break the house to pieces, you can.'

'Now, mother, you know you don't mean that. Give me the key.'

His tone was so firm, and his look so steady that, involuntarily, she took the key from her

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pocket and laid it in his hand. When he was gone she stood by the fire, dumbfounded. 'Was this her son, Armell, whom she had deemed "so soft?" And had she actually given way to him?'

She would have liked to go away, in despite of his request, but somehow she felt bound by it. Presently 'Melia entered with a letter held in her apron, between her thumb and finger.

'Jem from the 'All, 'as brought this 'ere note, she said.

Mrs Dawes opened the envelope and read, as if in a dream, the simple words Mr Temple had written. He told her that he found Marjory did not care for him; he and her mother had been mistaken as to her feelings. She had asked him not to come to the farm any more, and he thought she was right. It would be most painful to him to do so. Still, he could not go away without letting such old friends know that he was leaving on Saturday, with his relations, the Bentleys, and should not be back for some time. He should be glad if Armell could go and see him next morning, and he desired to be remembered to Miss Dawes, and hoped she might be very happy always.

It was a very short, simple note, but when Mrs Dawes put it into Armell's hand to read, he guessed to some extent, how much the writing of it had

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cost Mr Temple. It brought his own love affair to his mind, and he hastened to inform his mother of that

'Poor fellow!' he said, softly, laying the note on the table.

'Poor fellow! I think he is a poor fellow, to go right off to London at once, and never come anear! Why don't he ask her again? That wasn't the way your father courted me. But it's all of a piece. Marjory's done for herself, now; he'll not look at her again, and serve her right, too! You'll go up and see him in the morning?'

'Yes. I'm glad he's asked me to go then. I've something else to do this afternoon; and that's what I want to tell you about, mother.'

'Oh, indeed!'

'I am going over to the mill this afternoon.'

'You're not going to let that owd miller have any more wheat?'

'No; it isn't wheat I'm going about. Don't you know what it is, mother? It is to ask Mr Bourne to give me his daughter—I asked Lettice last night if she'd have me, and she said "Yes."'

Mrs Dawes sank back in her chair, her face turned ashen grey, with a bluer tint about her lips; she pressed her hand on her left side.

'Oh, my heart!' she said.

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Armell ran to the bottom of the stairs.

'Marjory! Marjory! Come down quick. Mother is ill!'

The rest of that day Mrs Dawes had to lie in bed and submit to be waited on by her daughter, whose attentions she received with a very ill grace indeed.

It was curious that, while she felt the strongest possible contempt for Marjory's 'folly,' in bringing her schemes to naught, she was inspired with a perfectly new respect for Armell, begotten of his successful opposition to her will.

Towards evening, as she grew better, her busy brain set to work again. Marjory's future she set aside, as a question she was yet unfit to cope with; but Armell's prospects were pretty well arranged for him by his mother, before her eyes closed that night.

She tacitly acknowledged that if he was going to be so masterful, he and she should never do under one roof—therefore, he had better get married, and if he liked Lettice Bourne—a poor, silly, pink-faced thing) why, let him have her. Only they must have a home of their own. Ah! that would be the very thing—the Dale Farm!

Old Wilson had confided to her, at the Hall, last night, that he was going 'to live retired' with his sister at Kingsford—and the boys were going out to

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Canada. Armell could take the Dale: Lettice hadn't been brought up to any wasteful extravagance, that was one good thing; and the young couple must make the best shift they could for themselves.

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CHAPTER XII

MR COX IS CONSULTED AGAIN

'Master in?'

'No, 'e ain't.'

'Where is he?'

'Don't know.'

'Expect him back soon?'

'In 'alf-an-nour.'

'H'm!—Call again.'

Daniel Bourne turned away from Mr Cox's door which was slammed behind him by the neat little maid-servant who had responded to his ring.

The miller was no favourite of her's; she often wondered secretly, that master 'who was quite the

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gentleman,' should care for the company 'of that great unked man.'

'Who was that?' asked old Mrs Cox, who sat knitting in the comfortable little kitchen.

'Bourne, o' Rippidge,' returned Jane, who whenever she came in contact with the miller always relapsed into her native roughness, and suffered a temporary loss of the demure respectful manner, so carefully implanted by Mrs Cox.

'That is not the way to speak, Jane, as you very well know. Is Mr Bourne going to call again?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'Then show him into the parlour when he comes,' said the old lady, who had long ago given up trying to make herself agreeable to the miller, and in her secret heart shared Jane's opinion of him.

When he returned as appointed, Daniel Bourne was therefore ushered into the neat little parlour, which, with its harmonium, music books, framed maps and photographs, carved bookcase, and many tasteful ornaments, he regarded with a lofty contempt.

'Jimcracks,' he muttered, curling his lips as he looked round.

Luckily a newspaper lay on the table, one of a better class than the *Braybridge Saturday*

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Advertiser, which he borrowed every Monday from Joe Porter.

He seized it, and was greedily devouring the contents when Mr Cox entered the room.

'How do you do, Bourne? I am very sorry to have kept you waiting. Am generally home before this hour, as you know; but one's time is not always one's own. One of my pupil teachers goes up for examination next week, and I have had some extra work to do with him. I feel doubtful now how he will stand in arithmetic. He's a well meaning lad, very, poor fellow; but slow, slow. These Brookshire brains are all alike. But you wanted to see me, Bourne. What can I do for you? You will stay to tea; my mother says it will be ready directly, and then we can talk afterwards.'

The miller paused and pondered—to have tea with Cox, would save his supper, when he went home, but—there was Mrs Cox! no, he could not stand Mrs Cox. Her cosy spotless kitchen, her smart cap, her politeness, her mincing mode of speech, were all too much for him, and made him feel like a bull in a china shop.

'No thank 'ee Cox, not to-day, must get home; had a word to say to you though. Put your hat on, and walk part of the way with me?'

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'Well, I might do so, certainly,' said Mr Cox, reflectively. 'It is a perfect spring evening, and the air is refreshing, after the confinement of school. Ill just speak to my mother, Bourne, and then join you.'

He knew by experience that the miller found a great difficulty in speaking of anything that might be on his mind, while shut up in that little parlour. Bourne must want his advice about something, he felt sure; and it was chiefly the flattering knowledge that he was the only man living whom the miller ever consulted, which linked the schoolmaster to one so opposed to himself in tastes and habits.

What could be the matter now, he wondered. Instead of beginning at once to state the object of his visit, Bourne hesitated and seemed quite confused; and it was not until they had walked halfway across the first field that he blurted out,

'Remember my daughter, Cox?'

'Remember her? Miss Bourne?'

'Yes. She is going to be married.'

'Going—to be *married*? repeated Mr Cox, faintly.

'Yes; young Dawes of the Hill farm at Long Upton. Why, what is the matter with you, Cox?'

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The schoolmaster had stopped short, and laid one hand on his companion's arm. The miller looked down at him, wonderingly, as a mastiff might at a terrier.

'Oh, Bourne!' breathed Mr Cox, emotionally.

'D'ye know anything against him?' asked the miller, anxiously.

'No, oh no,' returned the schoolmaster, in a plaintive voice, letting his hands drop and making a long pause, then pulling himself together, as it were, he moved slowly forward, continuing, 'No; I never heard of him. Who, and what is he?'

'Son of old Mother Dawes; one of the best farmers and managers in the county. You must have heard of her, Cox. This is the only son—'

'Oh! usual style of Brookshire farmer I suppose? Big, good looking, stupid as a sheep, and heavy as his own plough lands.'

'Nothing of the sort,' snarled the miller, 'I am a Brookshire man myself remember, they're not such fools as they look perhaps. Young Dawes is a fine fellow—brought up by an old uncle in Yorkshire—'

'Oh come, that's better; he'll have had his mind more enlarged in the north.'

'Bother about minds!' rejoined the miller, 'he has good prospects, and will make a good home for my

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daughter. I'm satisfied and that's enough. What I wanted to ask you about, is the wedding. They're to be married at Easter, from the mill Mother Dawes wants to manage the wedding, but I'll not have that. She'll be for having a regular feast, and expect me to pay for it. I'll see to it myself, but there's one or two things I want to ask you, Cox.— Why what's the matter now?'

Mr Cox had stopped again, and now stood with one hand upon his breast, gently shaking his head.

'No, Bourne, it is too much,—too cruel.'

'Why man—what ails you? What is too much?' shouted the miller impatiently.

'Don't you know, don't you guess, what a shock this is to me.'

'Shock! Bless the man!' exclaimed Daniel, beginning to fear his friend's wits were wandering. He was afraid of sick people, but his fear of the mentally disordered amounted to terror.

If Cox's next remark were not more reasonable, he would run and place the barrier of a stile between himself and the lunatic as soon as might be.

'Yes,' resumed the schoolmaster with a sigh. 'You may not have guessed it, Bourne, but I greatly admired Miss Lettice myself.'

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'Ho, ho, ho,' roared the miller, greatly relieved. 'Is that all?'

'All! Really, Bourne, this is not the treatment that one friend expects at the hands of another to whom he has laid bare the tenderest feelings of his bosom.'

And Mr Cox drew himself up with great dignity, as he uttered these solemn words in a tone at least a third lower than that in which he ordinarily spoke.

'Beg pardon,' gasped the miller, trying to choke down all signs of the amusement which had succeeded to his first feeling of relief. 'Apologise—a—a sure—Lettice—a—myself—a—a honoured,' he stammered, trying vainly to evolve a polite speech which should appease his friend's deeply wounded feelings. The schoolmaster had a kindly, generous nature, in spite of his weaknesses, and he accepted this very tame apology with a better grace than it deserved, ignorant of Daniel Bourne's mental decision that little Cox was a greater fool than he had taken him for, but he must not quarrel with him just now when he might be useful.

'Well now, Bourne, what is it you want me to do for you? If it lies in my power I will do it, but there *are* limits,' here he stopped short, as if bounds were set even to his usually ready flow of speech.

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'Want you to come to the wedding,' began the miller, abruptly, hoping to get into his subject without further delay.

'You are very kind, but no, oh no! I could not assume that festive aspect which the occasion would demand. You will do better without me, Bourne.'

'But you must come,' urged Daniel, in desperation; adding with more honesty than politeness, 'must have some one to talk to Mother Dawes— there's that girl, too!'

'Girl? What girl?' enquired Mr Cox with languid interest.

'Miss Dawes—a ladyfied little thing.'

'Ladylike, is she? That's well; she will be one of the bridesmaids, I suppose.'

'Don't know, I'm sure—bridesmaids! Will there have to be a bridesmaid?'

'Certainly,' said Mr Cox, authoritatively, 'one at least, if not several.'

'I'll not have more than one, anyhow. Shan't have to give her anything, shall I?'

'No, no, my good fellow. But surely you don't grudge a little extra expense when your daughter—your only daughter—is going to be married?'

'That's the worst of it! Very well for her to get married, but I have to feed 'em all!'

'How many do you suppose there will be?' asked

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Mr Cox, whose love of management was getting the better of his disappointment.

'Twenty or thirty, perhaps?'

'Twenty—twenty or thirty!' ejaculated the miller. 'What are you thinking of!'

'The bridegroom will surely have some friends who will expect to be asked, and Miss Bourne, also, then you ought to invite Mr and Mrs Mitchell, the Cartwrights, and Miss Rogers—oh you could soon make up a charming little party.'

It was now the miller's turn to draw up, confront his companion, and glare down upon him through his spectacles.

'Upon my soul, Cox—a pretty notion! If you or anyone else thinks I'm going to feast the country side in my kitchen, you're very much mistaken. There'll be Lettice and Armell, his mother and sister, and you and me, that's all—and enough too.'

'Oh, I see; a family party only—quite a private affair. Well I believe it is not uncommon in the highest circles. But then there's the breakfast. Of course you'll like to have everything very nice. I'll consult my mother, I think she knows of a woman who would do it thoroughly well for you—a professed cook in fact.'

The miller applied a strong expression to this professed cook, and informed Mr Cox that

'Mother

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Porter should cook 'em a piece of beef, and make a pie or two, and that's all he'd give 'em.'

'As you please, Bourne,' returned Mr Cox in an injured tone, 'though why you should ask my advice, when you've already made up your mind, I am at a loss to conceive. All that I have to say is that I beg my name may not be mentioned in connection with the affair. I have had some little experience in these matters, and know how things should be done; I have also the reputation of being a not unskilful master of the ceremonies on such occasions, and I should seriously object to its being supposed that I had any hand in the arrangement of a wedding party on so small, not to say *shabby*, a scale as you propose. If you can reconcile yourself to having it said that the last Miss Bourne of Rippidge was married in that *hole-and-corner* style, as I may call it, of course I can make no objection. Let us change the subject—a painful one to me under any circumstance. We are now in sight of the mill. I will go with you as far as that last stile, and then must return to Braybridge.'

'All right,' assented the miller, 'but Cox what you said just now about the last Bourne, you know—that's just it.'

'I fail to understand you.'

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'She's a girl!' cried Daniel, with a burst of passion that made Mr Cox start. 'If I'd had a son no one should have had a finer wedding; but a girl! She's the only child of the last Bourne of Rippidge, and gets married, and cares neither for the name, nor the place. What's the good of a girl?'

'The good! a thing of beauty and a joy for ever,' replied Mr Cox lightly, for he did not in the least degree comprehend the depth and bitterness of the miller's feelings on this point. So deep were they that he did not even notice this remark by his usual impatient 'Pshaw!'

'But let us change the subject,' repeated Mr Cox 'Since you will be alone now, you will want another housekeeper, shan't you?'

'Shan't have one!' was the curt reply. 'Mother Porter 'll look after the poultry and do what I want in the house.'

'I can understand your not caring to have anyone in Miss Lettice's place. By the way, where is she to live? Is this old Mrs Dawes going to retire and let the young couple have the farm?'

Daniel gave a grim chuckle.

'Catch Mother Dawes retiring! She knows better. Armell has taken the Dale, just vacant.

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The squire there has gone abroad, and left him to manage the estate; so hell do right enough.'

'I'm glad you're satisfied. Here's the stile, good evening, Bourne.'

'You'll be at the wedding?' asked the miller sharply.

'I don't know. I'll consider of it, Bourne, and let you know. Which day is it to be?—you haven't told me. I've a good many engagements about Easter; there's the Volunteer Review, and a concert in the schoolroom, and I'm going to a meeting at Kingsford one day, I think.'

'I'll let you know on Saturday,' shouted the miller. 'You *must* come, Cox.'

With this they parted. Mr Cox strolling back across the fields hugging a pleasing melancholy; and the miller shuffling up the bit of road between the stile and the mill, looking with loving eyes upon his heritage.

The evening sun shone softly on the tall old mill and long low house beside it, bathing them in rosy light. The orchard trees were covered with great swelling buds, which only needed a few warm days and nights to transform them into a sheet of pink and white blossom. From the yard were heard the last remonstrances of a few restless hens, quarrelling over their perches before settling down for

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the night; in the fields the ewes were bleating after their stray lambs, now grown lusty and strong upon their legs, and apt to make voyages of discovery beyond the maternal ken.

Some of those fields had not been inherited by Daniel with the mill; he had bought them one by one, paying for them by instalments in sums taken hesitatingly from time to time out of his store, which was kept no one knew where.

'Cox!' he muttered. 'Cox marry Lettice! a likely notion indeed. Knows no more about land, and the value of property than any counter-jumper. A little fool! Pity if I could not find some one better than that to have my mill.'

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CHAPTER XIII

A SELF-POSSESSED BRIDE

'WHAT'S this Mrs Porter?' asked the miller, peering anxiously through his spectacles at the table on which his daughter's wedding feast was spread forth. 'What's this?'

'Pies, sir,' was the short reply, made boldly, though not without some inward qualms.

'See, that for myself! One, two, three pies! What's in 'em?'

'Pigeons in the one, and fruit the t'other.'

'Pigeons! fruit! three pies! Who ordered 'em? I say, who ordered 'em?'

'No 'un ordered um,' returned Mrs Porter, who stood unflinchingly, but betrayed her agitation by rolling and unrolling her apron between her fingers.

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'Who made 'em, then?'

'I made um, if it comes to that.'

'What did you do it for? Where did you get the things to make 'em of. Didn't I tell you what I meant to have? What business had you to get anything more!'

The miller was very angry. His voice rose with each successive question; and he was in no way appeased by the calm contempt with which Mrs Porter now surveyed him.

When he paused, she let her apron fall, and smoothing it down with an air which said plainly, 'Now I'm going to tell you what I think of you,' made answer:

'What did I make them there pies for? Why, for love of Lettice an' 'er poor mother that's gone, who'd 'a bin proud to see this daay if she'd lived, poor soul; an' 'oodn't 'a borne to see 'er dahter a bride wi' no better fittles to offer 'er friends than Sam the carter's Sally 'ad when she were married a Christmas. I'd be right down shamed, if I were you, Mr Bourne, to think as I owned the best mill and the best business anywheres about,— you needna throw up yer 'ands an' shake yer 'ead at me—an' you've worked yer only dahter like a slave, so you 'ave, for the last six months, an' now you gives 'er no better weddin' than a sarvin' wench.'

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Thar's nobody but what cries shame on you for it, no that thar ain't. An' if so be you grudges the cost o' them pies, me and Joe ull paay for 'em our-sens—that us 'ool. So thar!'

Mrs Porter folded her arms and accompanied the conclusion of her speech by a defiant nod of her head towards the miller, who was about to make reply, when the door at the foot of the stairs was opened by Lettice in her bridal dress; her blue eyes were wide open, and her cheeks slightly flushed.

'What is the matter?' she asked. 'I thought I heard a noise?'

'Matter?' snarled her father, 'matter enough! This confounded impudent old woman—but perhaps you were at the bottom of it?'

'No, no, it was all me,' interposed Mrs Porter hurriedly. 'Don't werrit the poor wench this mornin,' on all days of the year! The pigeons were yourn sure enow, but I'll paay far urn sooner than 'ave a row over it. The fruit is damsons out o' our garden, which everyone knows it is the best in the parish for plums an' such. I allus bottles some on 'um agen the Christmas; the boys is that fond on 'em thaay'd sooner 'ave 'urn than anything a'most: and by good luck I'd a few left this year, an' I thought as ou thaay'd make a bit av a chaaynge ya knows. There's scarce any damsons at Long Upton.'

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She concluded half apologetically, half coaxingly. and the miller seemed appeased. But there was a distressed look on Lettice's fair face, and she began reproachfully,

'Oh, Mrs Porter, I told you'—— when the old woman cut her short.

'Look 'ere, my dear, there's summat wrong wo yer gownd behind; come up along o me this minute, an' I'll put him to rights far ye. The fly 'll be 'ere d'rectly, an' you ain't near ready yet.'

She bustled the girl upstairs, unheeding the miller's growls of—

'Look sharp! What a time women take to dress.'

Lettice's bedroom was spotlessly clean, though very bare and plainly furnished. Still the bright spring sunshine lit up the white-washed walls, and made a golden background to her pretty figure, and soft white dress.

Nor was Mrs Porter out of harmony with the picture, even in the character of waiting-maid. The snowy frills of her cap set off her dark hair, curly still and only slightly tinged with grey, her cheeks were rosy, and her brown eyes as bright as any girl's, while her dark blue dress and little red neckerchief were decidedly picturesque.

She made believe to re-arrange something at the

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back of the wedding dress, while Lettice, who was not the person to let a disagreeable subject drop, began over again.

'Oh, Mrs Porter, I told you father would be vexed!'

'Never you mind, my dear,' replied the old woman soothingly, 'you've no call to fret about anything to-day. It's my affair about them pies, an' if the gaffer 'as anything more to saay, 'im an' me' ull settle it to-morra!'

But still Lettice suffered pricks of conscience, that she had not made a stronger protest against Mrs Porter's addition to the bill of fare; for in truth her resistance had been but feeble, as she could not help remembering how plentiful a table she had always seen at the Hill Farm, and she felt instinctively that Mrs Dawes would notice, and remark on the small provision which her father had made for his guests.

She had gradually become aware that this lady did not consider the miller was all that he might be; and on the other hand she had heard her father speak with a sneer of 'old mother Dawes;' and she wondered now, for the hundredth time, why there should be any difference between two such undoubtedly excellent people.

In the meanwhile Mrs Porter proudly surveyed

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her young mistress, bestowing fond little touches here and there on her dress and bonnet; then holding her out at arm's length, exclaimed,

'No one in the world, not the queen 'erself on 'er weddin' daay, could look nicer nor you do, my pretty!'

'Oh, Mrs Porter!' said Lettice, half shocked; though at the same time she cast a blushing, but complaisant side glance at her own reflection in the tiny glass on the table.

The old woman's eyes followed the glance, and then suddenly filled with tears. She threw her kind old arms round the motherless girl, hugged her tightly, and showered kisses, blessings, and good wishes upon her, with a sob between each.

Lettice bore this quietly for a few seconds, then disengaged herself from Mrs Porter's embrace, thanked her for all her kindness in a stiff little speech, and concluded calmly, 'You've quite crushed my strings I declare.'

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Mrs Porter drew back, feeling herself repulsed, but she made no answer, for if she was more sensitive than Lettice she was also more sensible, and she reasoned with herself that 'It was no wonder the girl was so cold in her waays—she'd bin brought up without any affection, so to saay. Not but what 'er poor mother 'ad loved the ground

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she trod on, but 'er was that timid and feared o' the master that 'er never dahred make much o' the child, as 'er naturally 'ood 'a liked to do.'

Lettice flattered herself that she had put an end to the scene: she disliked scenes: ebullitions of temper were to be expected in dealing with a school full of children, among whom there would, of course, be some naughty ones; but for grown up people to suffer their emotions to overcome them was really wrong, she thought. However, Mrs Porter had been very kind to her, and perhaps knew no better, so to re-assure her old friend, who might fancy she was angry with her, Lettice now remarked aloud,

'Now I've only to put my gloves on, then I shall be quite ready.'

The trivial remark and even tones provoked Mrs Porter, and roused her to give expression to her feelings, which were wrought up to an extent that would have horrified Lettice, could she have fathomed them.

The old woman drew nearer and said in a voice that trembled with earnestness,

'It's little matter your bein' so stand off with me, my dear; but I 'opes you'll be different to yer 'usband. Nay, you needna bridle yer neck, an' colour up so. I'm but a poor scholard, an' you're a

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good un, but I'm an owd 'ooman, an' knows the way o' the menkind. Mr Dawes thinks a deal on ya, my dear; an' no more noo you deserve I'ool saay. He's a lovin' 'eart, an' 'e'll like to shownd as 'e loves—'e's that sart o' man I can see—but if ya turns from 'im, and allus answers 'im shart, like ya did me jus' now—why thar'll mischief come on it'

Lettice buttoned her second glove with a very decided air, then taking up a shawl that lay on the bed, said loftily,

'I don't think I shall need any advice how to behave to Armell, thank you, Mrs Porter; I daresay you mean very well, but you are mistaken in what you say. Do not speak to me again in that manner. Now please put my shawl on.'

She held out the shawl, and stood with her back towards the old woman, waiting to have it deposited on her shoulders, but as her attendant did not stir, Lettice turned and discovered her with her apron at her eyes.

'Don't cry,' she exclaimed, with some irritation in her voice; 'I can't think what is the matter with you this morning, Mrs Porter.'

With a final sob and snuffle the old woman dried her eyes, and dropping the apron, took the shawl and proceeded to put it on, saying in a huff—

'Well, it wur all far yer good I spoke; but I'll

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not interfere never no more. If you are so cool and contented thar's no need for *me* to put *myself* about, that's certain.'

Lettice gazed at her in wonder; cast a last glance at herself in the glass, and turned to go downstairs, when her steps were hastened by her father's voice shouting,

'Look sharp! The fly's come.'

Rippidge Mill and the cluster of houses near it were in the parish of Braybridge, and nearly two miles from the church; so the fly had been ordered to convey the miller and his daughter to the wedding. This was done, not out of any consideration for the bride, her feelings, or her dress, but because Diamond might possibly run away again had they taken him in their own cart; and to go on foot through Braybridge, in his best clothes, and be stared at as the bride's father, was more than Daniel could endure even to contemplate.

Old John Harvey and his fly were the only alternatives.

The vehicle, in truth, belonged to the landlord of the White Hart, and Harvey was presumably in the pay, undoubtedly in the service of the same worthy; yet if any name more distinctive than 'the fly' was deemed necessary, it was spoken of as 'Harvey's fly.'

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He, the fly, and the horse, all seemed to have grown old, slow, and shabby together. But all were not contemporaries; though Harvey was a patriarch—'one of the old standards,' as they say in Brookshire—yet it was certain that even he could not remember the time when that battered fly was whole, new, and smart.

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Again, Roland, the horse, a big brown beast must have been a mere colt, when his years were compared with those of his driver; but he was so gaunt lean, and stiff, so disfigured by projecting bones, lumps, and a great scar on one shoulder, as to be quite consistent with the turnout. Harvey himself was a tall, spare man, with high cheek bones, red face, shaggy eyebrows and hair. He wore a tall, very tall hat, brown with age, greasy from wear, and bent in the brim, as well it might be, for he was never seen without it, and it was commonly supposed in Braybridge that John Harvey slept in his hat. His costume was completed by a long, rust-coloured coat, and a big blue neckcloth wound round and round his throat, and forming a great bunch under his chin. His cloth gloves were many sizes too large, and every finger stuck out of a hole that seemed almost to have been made on purpose.

I said he was presumably in the pay of the landlord of the White Hart. I speak thus doubtfully

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because he never set down a passenger and received the fare agreed upon without raising one finger, in its ragged casing, to his hat, and leaning forward to ask, in confidential undertones, that he would 'remember the driver.'

When it was replied, as was usually the case, that the sum already paid was nearly double that charged elsewhere for the same distance, he would shake his head sadly, and answer with a sigh, 'You mun spik to the gaffer about that. Ahl I knaows is that I gits nowt but what's give me by the customers.'

Sometimes the landlord was appealed to, and assured the applicant that Harvey was paid 'a sight too well, and had no buisness to ask for anything extra;' but, nevertheless, on the next occasion, Harvey asked again, and generally got what he asked for. He was so thin, so ragged, and looked so anxious as he made his request, moreover he was so respectful and so ingratiating in manner, that there was no denying him. The subject was one of frequent discussion in Braybridge, but nobody ever found out the rights of it. If to be merciful to his beast be the measure of a man's tenderness, then old Harvey was the soul of mercy. He never took Roland off a walk, he got down from his seat to walk himself at the merest

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semblance of a hill, and drew up to rest his steed on every conceivable pretence.

He had great faith in the merits of his fly. 'It was so handy,' he observed, when the weather was fine, you might have it open; should the wind blow in your face, the front could be reared up to protect you; did the sun shine too strongly for your comfort, the hood was raised; did it rain, he had only to wrestle with both divisions for ten minutes or so, and tie them together with string, and there you were quite secure. There was no fear Roland would run away while the transformation was in process.

Harvey's chief customers were old ladies, of whom many inhabited the small houses scattered up and down those lanes of which I told you that they were a distinguishing feature of Braybridge. In fine weather they took little drives in the country, or they paid calls on distant friends. On rare occasions he would drive some of them over to Kingsford. They often talked him over, and frequently decided that he could have no possible right to ask them for that 'something for the driver.'

'He must be well paid, my dear,' said one to another, 'for his cottage is the most comfortable in the town, and his wife wears a velvet jacket on Sundays; and there was such a good smell of cooking yesterday morning when I went in to order
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the fly—for I always leave word with Mrs Harvey when I want it. Some people don't mind going to hotels by themselves, but I never could think it right for a lady.'

'I always send a note when I want the fly,' returned the second old lady. 'But, my dear, don't you think that it is all Mrs Harvey's doing that they are so well to do? She is such a good manager, and so hard working; she washes for the Greens, the Joneses, and the Robinsons, besides keeping her library you know.'

But the old ladies never settled the point to their satisfaction, and the mystery remains unsolved to this day.

The road between the mill and the town was as level as might be, yet Harvey drove along it at funeral pace; and while her father fumed and fidgetted, even Lettice began to feel some alarm lest they should be late at the church. The dirty cushions disgusted her, and the close, musty smell of the closed fly made her feel faint. She was glad when her father opened first one window, then the other, putting his head out each time, and sharply bade Harvey 'get on quicker, can't you?' A flourish of the whip was the only

response. But Roland paid no attention at all; the only result of the remonstrance was that the miller trod on his

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daughter's toe, and wiped off on the skirt of her dress some of the blacking too liberally bestowed on his boots by Dick Porter, who wished to do honour to the occasion in every way that lay in his power.

At last the church was reached. They looked up at the clock—yes, they were late, a full quarter of an hour later than the appointed time.

"Ere thaay be!" shouted an expectant crowd at the churchyard gate. Mr Cox was there anxiously looking up and down; he rushed forward to open the door of the fly for Lettice. At the entrance of the porch was the parish clerk, and peeping over his shoulder appeared the white face of Mrs Dawes.

'Bless us all,' she said, 'what makes you so late? I thought you'd never be in time, and there's Armell in such a way as never was!'

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