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RIBSTONE

PIPPINS

A Country Tale

By MAXWELL GRAY

Author of "The Silence

Of Dean Maitland"

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The Salamanca Corpus: *Ribstone Pippins* (1898)

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*"Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
How jocund did they drive their team afield,
How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!"*

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RIBSTONE PIPPINS

CHAPTER I

"My heart is like an apple-tree
Whose boughs are hung with thick-set fruit."

The sun was gone, but the glory lingered. The broad and ruddy disc of a hunter's moon was just showing above the level rim of a sea stained and transfused with lilac, gold, and soft rose-reflections from the west, where a large, liquid star shone in a lake of the exquisite clear green of sunset. It was the lovely moment when the afterglow

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broadens and brightens to that extent, spreading purple and violet waves even beyond the zenith, that it seems as if a second and more glorious day were rising in the west, in spite of the mysterious shadows deepening and darkening on the dim earth, an afterglow of ethereal splendour, like the idealised memory of a loved life in a bereaved heart.

A vague mass against the bright sky was a cottage; a latticed window and a half-opened door were ruddy with hearth-light, which was reflected from shining myrtle

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leaves; scents of mignonnette, ripe fruit, and late roses filled the garden, mingled with pungency of burning furze. The dark outline of a thatched cottage, prolonged by the line of a low stone -wall, broken here and

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there by trees, was traced on this glowing sky; in the gap made by the wicket showed the head and shoulders of a man, with arms folded on the gate and one foot crossed behind the other. He was looking across the road, that gleamed white in the dusk, and across the green hill-slopes, that met in a wide V, to a sea and sky that were purpling as if with wine in the sunset, save where, far along the confused levels merged in the offing, they were burning with ruddy gold. So still the figure was, it might have been carved; so vague in the dusk, it seemed a shadow or dream of a labouring-man, resting from toil in evening peace.

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breakers on the reef, the momentary twitter of a wakened bird, tinkle of sheep-bells, sound of slow footsteps on the road when a labourer passed with a drowsy good -night, rustle of small creatures through dry bents and twigs, stamp and clink of stalled horses in the farm-stables below, the click of a gate-latch in the distance, and faint twanging of a concertina at a cottage door; but always, through every other sound or silence, the perpetual muffled roll of the slumberous sea.

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the mysterious glamour, and the figure leaning on the gate turned to look eastward, where the broad and burning disc of the moon rose above the darkening sea, making that tremulous gold pathway over the waves that has such a weird, irresistible attraction, and more than anything rouses dormant feelings of the innate poetry and charm of things. Jacob Hardinge was so roused and touched by the sight of this path of magical gold dancing over the live and breathing sea to that calm and dream-like orb; the blood — the young, clean, healthy blood of a temperate, clean-living labourer — leaped in his strong pulses; he sighed; his large hazel eyes shone with spiritual light; his bronzed face became earnest and pensive.

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"Jacob," called a woman's voice from the cottage — "Jacob, bain't ee never comen' in? What be ee at?"

"Tes ter'ble pleasant out-doors," he replied, dreamily. "What do ee want?"

"Vuzz and fire-'ood," was the concise answer, falling on ears filled with the charmed murmur of sea-waves and breaking surf.

The heart beneath the coarse white smock throbbed to the calm soft rhythm of the quiet sea and thrilled to the dance of golden moonbeams; dewy scents of fresh earth and crushed thymy down-turf, salt, live sea-breath, rich fruit - and flower - odours passed into the unlettered peasant's soul; the immensity of moonlit sky arching above, immensity of starry space all round, the noble sweep of downs, and

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mystery of deepening earth-shadows, absorbed him. He was merged in, and made part of, the all; the all was happy, holy, calm, and beautiful. But a motionless shadow, vaguely outlined against the bright sky, as a labouring man resting, grieving, or praying, was all he seemed to be; all he could say of the passion and poesy within him, "Tes ter'ble pleasant outdoors."

"Jacob," repeated the strained female voice from within, "be ee gwine to bide out-doors all night long? Where's that ar vuzzen o' mine, laäzy Larrence of ee?"

"Ay, ay, Grammer," he replied, turning slowly and striding along the beaten earth-path beneath the leaf-shadows, the full deep content within

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him finding expression at last in a low, mellow whistle.

The furze faggot was pronged out of the lean-to, its bonds hacked apart, and its branches sundered, all to the tune of "My love's like the red, red rose," and a goodly heap of fuel came into the cottage to the same tune.

" 'Oh, my love's like the melody

That's sweetly played in tune,' "

he sang as he fed the hearth-fire.

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"And what naäme do she answer to, Jake?" asked the grandmother. "Do she be called Alisbeth?"

"You be a wise ooman, Grammer," was the evasive answer. "Can ee tell fortunes and caäst births?"

"I can chearm wearts, I 'low. And I've a zin a young chap make a vool of

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hisself avore thee was barn or thought on. Zure enough, Jake, thee'st come to coorten-time, and 'tain't only hright to make a vool o' theeself. Thee vather done it avore ee, and his vather, poor man, avore en. Thee 'mences like thee grandvather, poor buoy."

"Can I hae they apples, Grammer?" was the apparently irrelevant rejoinder.

"I dunnow but ee med so well hae 'em, Jake. Thee be bound to hae summat to goo a coorten with. Thee grand-fer, he bringed me inions. Doan't ee goo and pick up no trash, my dear. Grammer can do vor ee, and thee can taäke thee time and pick the best stick out of vaggot."

"What do ee think of Alisbeth?" Jacob asked, his face averted, as he stooped to pile the furze in a corner.

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"I 'lowed 'twas Alisbeth all along. Well there! Thee wun't bide a bachelor, at thee time o' life. If 'twarn't she 'twould be another."

"Thee hasn't nothen to zay agen her?" he asked, looking a little anxiously into the plump old face set in its smooth bands of gray hair and surrounding white cap-frill.

It was a wholesome, kind old face, the browned cheeks streaked with red, like a ripe russet apple, with shrewd, dark -brown eyes, aquiline nose, firm chin, and mouth not yet fallen in. The thin lips tightened a little, a frown drew the brows together, as Grammer Hardinge paused in her occupation of turning pork in a frying-pan set over a trevet on the hearth, the fork suspended in her hand, and the

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flames dancing over her bent, strong figure and white-capped head. The moment was fateful, heavy with important issues. The tall, shining clock in the corner whirred its

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warning, struck its seven strokes, and subsided into its steady tick-tock again, while the grandmother paused and the grandson waited, his eyes gleaming dark and anxious under the shadow of his soft felt hat, and his heart thumping heavily against his chest, the vision of a fresh young face, with wavy chestnut hair and laughing gray eyes, coming between, him and the shrewd old face in the firelight.

"Tick-tock — tick-tock," said the steady old clock that had ticked all Jacob's moments away till these, the most momentous of them; the furze-fire

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crackled, the fat frizzled; but Grammer, like a cottage Lachesis or home-spun Sibyl, still paused, her fateful fork suspended in air, though the potatoes and pork sadly wanted turning, and Jacob knew it.

"Maids," was the well-weighed sibyl-line utterance that came at last, "is maids. And matterimony is a ter'ble long laäne, Jacob. I've a-buried two husbands, and med a-buried dree, onny the laäst tumbled over cliff and was drowned the night avore the wedden. Thee's took wi' the lust o' the eyes, poor buoy. Why hadn't thee a-looked to the heart?"

"Thee casn't zaäy aught agen her, can ee now?" pleaded Jacob. "Thee's knowed her, a little titty thing no bigger than zix-penneth o' hapence."

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"I hain't never yeard nothen agen her, as I knows on," was the slow and rather dubious reply, "without 'twas she's so mis'able good-looking. Thee 's ter'ble zet upon good looks, whether 'tes a cow or a ooman, Jacob. The hreddest apple, and the brightest hackled hen vor ee. I'm ter'ble afeard thee onny looks outzide athout consideren' of the innards. 'Vaävour is desateful,' is hwrote in the Bible, do ee mind? A ooman that veareth the Lard is what ee wants. The prettiest cat ain't always the best mouser, and the vinest cow doan't yield the moast milk."

"But the brightest hackled hen lays the moast eggs, Grammer," retorted Jacob, hitting the weak spot in her armour; "and I'll war'nt you never knowed a better apple than a Ribstone,

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or a better smellen vlower than a hroase. Why, they Glory die Johns blows pretty nigh all the year hround!"

"Oh, g'long wi' thee Glory die Johns! Anybody med downarg anybody wi' the taäties hreaddied to a turn, an' the pork a spilen in the pan," said Grammer, sharply. "Vetch me the dish, wull ee, avore I tumbles down about house. Poor wold Grammer's noase is out a jint. Muck her off to Church Lytten, poor wold heart of her; hred-chaked maäids is all we thinks upon nowadays. Wold boäns is best underground, I 'lows."

"Goo an with ee, Grammer? Thee hasn't no call to maäke a zet out about nothen. Set down and ate thee vittles, wull ee ? Whatever be ee maäken such a chearm about?"

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They were now seated at table, both doing ample justice to Grammer's cookery and both wearing countenances of perfect content.

"'Tain't onny natural to goo a-coorten," observed Grammer, tranquilly. "Now ee be cairter, thee med hae a cottage, ef ee'd a mind to. But I 'lows ee'd so soon bide long wi' wold Grammer, Jake."

"'Lows I'd zooner."

"How wold be ee? Vour an' twenty year old, come Christmas, bain't ee? Do she vaävour ee, Jake? When did ee vust caäst eyes on the maid?"

"Lard love ee, Giammer! One ooman cain't know everythink. You be purely plimmed out wi' knowledge already. She gied me a laylock vlower Whitsuntide. She've a ben long wi'

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these here Suttons, two year, an' she've a-putt money in bank. She'd a ben in her vust plaäce now, onny she was fo'ced to come hoam and bide dree months when her mother was down in the faver. 'Tes a praper good maäid, Grammer."

"Ah, they be all prapper good maäids when the young chaps comes along. A turnen down o' their eyes, and a maäken o' niminy-piminy mouths, and a-looken like dyen ducks in a thunder-starm. I hreckon I knows the goens on o' maäids, Jake."

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"Ay, Grammer, thee's ben a maäid theeself in thee time, I 'lows, an' thee's rared up two bilens o' maäids. Thee'd ought to know 'em prett' nigh droo and droo. Did they all bide two and dree years in their plaäces?

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and tend vathers and mothers in faver?"

"I've a-rared up some ter'ble zaäcy buoys, I 'lows, whatever I done by maids," retorted Grammer. "Thee's to hae these here sticks o' vurniture, mind. Doan't ee goo zellen o' Grammer's zettle and things, wull ee? That there carner cupboard ben in our vamily this hunderd year. I minds en and I minds wold clack ever zence I wer the tittiest little maäid, avore ever I could chipper no zense. Whenever ee zees that ar clack and that ar carner cupboard, thee'll mind poor wold Grammer. Vurry like thee'll tell the young uns about the wold gal. I minds my vather whenever I years en strike. Ay, Jake, whenever ee looks at he or hears en strike, he'll mind ee of Grammer."

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"There's no call to mind ee now, Grammer, while there ee be, a-chammen of vried taäties and pork. And there med ee be this twenty year to come, plaze the Lard!"

"There, taäke and goo long to bed with ee, do, zaft zaäderen of poor wold Grannie, the girt lusteren buoy! Doan't ee vorget the tay, Jake, nit the boughten caäke, vrom Opert, wull ee?" was the pleased rejoinder. "Not that I ever known two oomen bide quiet under one hroof itt athout one was a bed-lyer and t'other one dumb," she added, thoughtfully.

"You med live and learn, Grammer, wold as ee be," was his parting shot, as he climbed the cupboard-stair.

The labouring man's sleep is sweet: Jacob Hardinge's curly head scarcely

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touched the coarse pillow, on which the moon traced a diamonded lattice, before he was caught down in deep, still gulfs of dreamless sleep, whence Grammer had some difficulty in rousing him at cock-crow, before the darkness began to thin or the east to lose its solemn pallor.

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The grass was so thickly beaded with dew it was hard to say whether it was really dew or hoar-frost in the gray of early dawn, when the carters unlatched the stables, and set to combing and brushing and dressing the horses, especially the picked team that was to draw the huge waggon standing in the yard, ready laden with sacks of wool. The harness was already cleaned and polished to its utmost brightness; through the misty dawn flickered moving

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lanterns, and sounded the hiss that seems necessary to bring out the satin shine of horses' coats, the gruff "Whups!" and "Ways!" and "Stand-stills!" of the stablemen, the snort and stamp, the shake and whinny of the horses, and the clank of halter and harness. But when the day had broken behind clouds of red and golden mist, the Titanic antics of the watering were ended, and the shining steeds began to break their fast, their appearance, with plaited manes and tails decked with coloured ribbons, amply repaid the labour of their grooms and was not distasteful to the horses themselves. Then the carters' own toilets and breakfasts had to be gone through, parcels to be collected, and messages and commissions stored in memories.

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Hardinge's time was very unevenly divided between his dressing and breakfast; the latter being, to Grammer's secret amusement, greatly stunted for the sake of unusually serious ablutions, a clean white smock, a bright-blue neckerchief, and a carefully cocked felt hat, with a bunch of budded myrtle and red carnation in the band. The last thing was to give one more polish to the beautiful apples streaked with red and gold, each as large as a breakfast-cup, and tie them in a blue-checked handkerchief. There were eleven. Eleven is a bad number, associated with treachery. Dared he snatch a twelfth from the tree as he passed? No; Grammer's eye was upon him, and Grammer's voice was calling her commissions and messages after him.

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Now the team is put to the waggon, the bells are fitted to the collars — five under each scarlet-bossed canopy, shaking music over each proud and happy-horse; the

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fanner is giving orders, and the farmer's wife and daughters looking over the garden-wall; the last pails of milk are being carried across the yard, and the soft-eyed cows, stepping daintily over the straw among clucking hens and strutting cocks, the boy serving pigs, the girl scattering grain for the ducks, the ploughmen going afield with their teams, the man with the milk-pails, and the maid dipping water from the well-pail, are all looking at the splendid team in bell-harness. The yard-gate is opened, the leader passing through at a sign of the whip, when suddenly the mistfolds, wrapping everything

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in dim glamour and moving like smoke from the bodies of horses and cows, turn bright gold, are stricken asunder as by an unseen magician's wand, rise and roll away in clouds of rose and silver, disclosing bright hues of yellow and red barn-roof, red of cows, yellow of straw, golden -green of sere lime leaves, glitter of brass and glow of red fringes and bosses, and the horses, nodding their heads to the bell-music, wind through the gate into the lane with the heavy waggon creaking ponderously behind them.

Away and away rolled the rosy mist, brighter and brighter shone the mellow autumn sun on turf and hedge-row, stubble-field and red berries, the blue of the zenith grew soft and pale. The hearts of the carters waxed glad as

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they stepped briskly by their team up the hill-side in the still, sea-sweet morning air, and yellow-bearded Moses Snow broke into his favorite song:

"Oh, the waggoner's life is a jolly life,

Yo ho, Igh oh!

He cares not a straä for the world and his wife,

Yo ho, Igh oh!

He's up and away at the break of day

Athirt the downs to the roaren towns,

Yo ho!

He's up and away at the break o' day,

And from marnen till night it es his delight

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To go, yo ho!

To go wi' the dancen bells.

So Igh oh! On we go!

With a crick and a crack and a louser O!

To the zound o' the dancen bells!

"So Igh oh! On we go!"

chorused Hardinge and Ben Brunt, Hardinge holding on to the body horse, the splendid stallion, Thunder, which

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almost pulled the sedate thriller, Charlie, off his sturdy legs in his exuberant strength and joy.

"Tes praper wearm, harses hrokes aheady," Moses said, when they stopped to breathe the horses on the brow of the hill, whence a broad blue stretch of sea burst upon their sight. Hardinge's cottage peeped above a fold of green down; the morning sun was full upon it, steeping the gold-brown thatch in yellow light, and throwing up the rich colour of thick-set apple-trees, and of climbing fuchsia and myrtle. That speck of white was Grammer's cap; she was watching the waggon climb the hill and wishing her "zaäcy buoy" good luck to his wooing. He had deduced full acquiescence and approval from her communications of the previous night,

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especially from her remark upon the impossibility of two women living together in amity, and, even had he had any doubt upon the subject, her last parting speech that morning would have laid it to rest:

"Grammer's prett' nigh weared out, Jake," she said, "but the wold gal ain't nooways done for itt. Young uns must hae their turn, I hreckon; and wold uns can bide by the vire and hrest their boans."

Grammer had not heard all about the courting. About that Sunday after-noon, for instance, when the pair walked home from church together, and stopped just here, and Jacob took courage to point out the cottage and say it was his grandmother's house, and her furniture, and that she was always to live with

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him, and that he feared that might be a hindrance to his marriage. Did Elizabeth suppose that any girl would care to keep house in that way? The gray eyes had softened and a warmer colour flushed the cheeks with the reply that such a thing was possible, if people made up their minds to it. The apples then in bloom were now ripe fruit. When she saw them she would remember the pink blossom of Whitsuntide, and his promise to bring her the finest of the fruit.

"Hreckon 'twull be dark night avore we goos over Culveredge Down," Moses said. "Moon's vull. Bide still, Churree! Wold Churree's mis'able idle to-day. Eddn't one o' Oodford's gals at sarvice out Estridge way, Jake?"

Moses Snow was sitting on the thill, dangling his legs; Hardinge was leaning

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against Thunder; Ben Brunt, lounging on the grassy bank facing them, took the word from Jake's mouth.

"Zure enough," he replied; "that young vaggot, Bess."

"Vaggot!" cried Jacob — " who be ee a-vaggoten of now, Ben?"

"I be a-vaggoten of young Bess Oodford," returned Ben, tranquilly." A randy bit o' traäde as ever I yeared of."

Jacob, still leaning against Thunder, with one arm on the horse's great neck, looked at the lad across floating films of sunny gossamer for some seconds in silence.

"Ef ever you zays that there agen, Ben Brunt," he observed, slowly, when at last he spoke, "I'll knack ee down."

"Goo 'long with ee, ye girt zotes," growled Moses, who was a bearded man

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of thirty; "we shain't maäke no vail wi' this yere job ef ee vails out ahready. Putt on the shoe, Ben."

Ben contented himself with a derisive laugh as he picked himself off the bank arid rolled slowly to the back of the waggon; Moses let himself down from the thill, and Jacob, still looking "pretty sure" at Ben, straightened himself, turned, and let off a

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couple of cracks like pistol-shots with his heavy cart-whip, and the great waggon began to roll down-hill, Ben, whether from that discretion which is deemed the better part of valour, or to arrest the too rapid descent of the waggon, sitting on the tail-board and going backwards.

"So Igh oh! On we go!

With a crick and a crack and a louser O!

To the zound o' the dancen bells!"

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roared Moses and Ben, but Jacob could not bring himself to join in, and spoke no unnecessary word for three miles.

The sea spread away to the south before them far below, calm, sunny, and slightly veiled by the soft autumnal haze filling every dimple, dell, and hill-fold with blue bloom; the cumulus cloud-masses piled on the horizon were touched with opal, golden peace was over gray downs, shining stubble-fields, corn-ricks, red-roofed farms, and mellowing woods. Purple dogwood, blackberries, and honeysuckle, with pink flower and crimson fruit on the same spray, brightened sere hedges; harebells hove red from invisible stems over flowers of thyme, marjoram, and myriad others that embroider the turf of chalky slopes in autumn; here and there rose great

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spikes of yellow-flowered mullein among purple thistle and knapweed, yellow ragwort and hawkweed; here and there the rarer chicory showed azure wheels by the roadside. Here a little lonely hamlet nestled in a fold of the downs, and here a village of gray stone and brown thatch, gorgeous with autumn flowers and fruit, straggled about an ivied tower sheltered by yellowing, sea-blown elms.

Men turned in fields and women came to cottage doors at the sound of the waggon bells; here was a greeting, there a message, and there a parcel. Now the team had to be breathed on a steep hill, then the iron shoe must be thrown before the wheel in a sharp descent, now the wool-sacks were dangerously brushed by overhanging boughs,

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now a ruddy lane threw the load to one side and now to the other, and now that "idle" horse, Cherry, indulged in some ponderous antic, then the fiery Thunder had to be curbed and soothed, and sometimes the iron hoofs slipped up till the horses slid on their haunches, and the men threw their own weight against the wheels till they recovered.

Up hill and down dale, over open road, between steep, wooded banks, through clear streams, that ran laughing across the road, by farm, village, and mansion, the waggon creaked and groaned to its pleasant accompaniment of bells; and now they turned their backs on the sea and went inland through a long valley between downs, smiling and sunny. But there was no more singing; the spring was gone from

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the men's steps and they were glad to drink from the puncheons they had brought, and munch the apples filling their pockets.

It was within a mile or two of Oldport that the nearest approach to a catastrophe occurred. In winding up a steep incline, a wheel got on the bank, and the load, already jolted to a perilous extent, shifted so seriously that the wagon only just righted itself, nearly lifting the thill-horse off his legs.

"Prett' nigh capsized then, maätes," said Moses, wiping his beaded brow and looking at the panting, reeking horses. "'Twas Thunder kep' us hright zide uppermost. Onhatch Churree, Ben, wold harse is blowed. They be all a-drillen with wet."

"Wold cairt's all to one side. 'Lows

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she's a-gwine to cocksettle," observed Ben, slowly contemplating the leaning load, with his hands in his pockets.

"Then whatever do ee stand a-gaäken an' a-gloaten there vor?" cried Jacob. "Taäke and lend a hand, will ee. This yer rooap's gied out, and the whole load 'll be down 'bout house ef ee doan't look shearp and trig en up. Come on, Moses. Thunder's hatched on to geate and t'others is hatched on to he. They'll bide. We shain't hreach Estridge avore the devil's dancen hours. Come on, maätes, wull ee?"

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Chapter II

"I can make no marriage present,
Little can I give my wife,
Love will make our cottage pleasant,
And I love thee more than life."

The load having been shifted back into position, a spare rope produced in place of the parted one, and the horses again put to, all at the expense of heavy groans from Ben, growls from Moses, reproaches from Jacob, much exertion from all three, with half an hour's delay, the waggon rolled on its way through the last village, not without halting at a wayside inn, and Oldport church tower came in sight.

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Then Jacob's heart leaped up, and he began to sing:

"Oh, the pretty maids of Opert in their vine new frawcks,
Do laäugh to scarn the laäbourers in their clane white smawcks;
But the laäbourer is true,
He will tile all day vor you,
Ef hes dewbit and hes brefkass and hes nammet you will taäke
To the vields, where he's a laäbouren all day long vor your saäke,
And wull cheer en up o' evenens when hes boans do aäche,
And a cometh hoam to you
Droo sun and vrost and dew."

And Moses and Ben bore the chorus:

"And a cometh hoam to you
Droo sun and vrost and dew."

"Tes a mis'able vine song, Jake," Moses observed, "and here be Opert; but where be the pretty maids?"

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"I likes a song wiv a good core-house," Ben averred:

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"So, Igh oh! On we go!"

There could be no more singing so near the town. Thunder whickered and whinnied with such excitement that Jacob's hand was seldom off his neck. The lash-horse, Cherry, demoralized by Thunder's example and the sight and sound of so many of his kind, shook his bells with inconvenient energy; but Diamond, the next to fore, was fortunately of a temperament so well balanced, and conduct so discreet, as to keep both Cherry and the mercurial fore-horse, young Farmer, comparatively tranquil. Cries of "Thun-derr-rah!" "Churr-ree-ah!" "V-armerr-rah!" were constantly heard; but Diamond,

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and Charlie the thill-horse, like well-conducted members of Parliament, were never named during the eventful progress through the town to the quay, a progress marked only by a brush with a four-horse coach, the driver of which made what the French call "injurious" remarks to the gallant three, who took care to pay him in kind, to the joy and delight of the populace.

At the quay the team was "onhatched," rubbed down, and supplied with a nose-bag and bucket of water apiece, while the men applied themselves to the victual-bag and puncheon each had brought. But Hardinge contented himself with a long draught of cold tea that Grammer had put in his little wooden barrel, and a hunch of bread-and-cheese in his pocket, that he broke and ate as

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he walked through the sunny streets, instead of resting during the dinner-hour on the quay.

"Whatever's come to wold Jake?" asked Ben, as he sat in the Three Tuns by the water-side, with his elbows on the table and a mug of ale before him. "Traipsen about as though a'd a-come in to fair. A must be purely twickered out wiv het and doust and drouth and all."

"Hreckon wold chap's come to hes zenses," replied Moses from the opposite side of the table over another mug; "a's putt on hes coorten cap."

"How do ee know?" asked inexperienced Ben, who was only eighteen.

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"A zets mumchance by the hour. A doesn't show to his vittles no zense. A quiddles over hes cloase, and a

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shaäves worky days," was the profound reply.

"And a goos jackassen 'bout town when a med bide still and hrest," added Ben, thoughtfully. "Lard, what a zote this here Keewpid do maäke of a honest wold chap!"

"G'long wi' thee Keewpids, thee girt zote," retorted Moses, "'tes Vanus, thee manes."

"I never yeard tell of he, as I knows on," said Ben. "I mane the little chap wi' nar a mossel o' cloase, onny a pair o' goose-wings, and a bowanarrows in valentine pictures. They caas en Keewpid, and a shoots vokes' hearts droo and droo."

"Oh, g'long! 'tes Vanus, I tell ee. I wish a'd shoot thee jaäs droo and droo."

Jacob, in the meanwhile, totally unconscious

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the disputation to which his emotions gave rise, strode heavily through the principal street with a light heart and a bewildered brain, examining window after window with great perplexity and total oblivion of Grammer's tea and boughten cake. He stood long before the confectioner's tempting window, his hat pushed to one side, and his curly hair mercilessly twisted and pulled. "What was inside the picture-boxes? Did Bessie like cakes or jam-tarts best? But, after all, there was a lack of delicacy in two presents of eatables. Then came the book-shop. Story-books were too difficult and hazardous, prayer-and hymn-books too serious. Then the jeweller's. That was indeed tempting but inadmissible, even if not too dear. A silver watch-chain

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was seductive. It was almost impossible to pass that watch-chain; it had to be returned to again and again. It was to be remembered as suitable for a more advanced stage of proceedings — that is, supposing she had a watch. The fancy-shop was enough to turn any honest man's brain, so glittering and so incomprehensible were the things displayed there. A penknife might do; but no, there is ill-luck in a given knife; scissors are as bad.

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Finally, he brought up before a draper's window filled with gay ribbons and laces and all sorts of feminine fal-lals, and, looking at the town-clock, on the dial of which the hands seemed to be turning with intolerable quickness, hardened his heart, set his teeth, and doggedly plunged in.

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It was one of the very best, most West-End-like shops in Oldport, and the appearance of a fine, brown-faced young carter in it was as unusual as it was incongruous. Deeply conscious of his own inappropriateness, Jacob stood in the middle of the large entrance and glanced dubiously round at the numerous departments, through avenues of many-coloured drapery, laces, ribbons, and flowers; then, after a little hesitation, he clumped heavily up to a counter bestrewn with fascinating inutilities, and presided over by a still more fascinating damsel in black, whose smiling countenance invited his confidence.

"What may I have the pleasure of showing you?" asked this elegant young person, scarcely subduing a titter as her

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bright eyes ran over his comely face and strong frame. Then she recognized something above ridicule in the hazel eyes and manly carriage, and acknowledged that prey, not to be despised in the absence of larger game, was before her.

"I want zomething," he said, slowly, as if trying to bring his speech down to the level of townsfolk's understanding — "I want zomething to gie zomebody."

"Quite so," she replied, in dulcet tones. "Now, do you know," she added, with a smiling and confidential air, "I felt sure that you were wanting a present the moment I saw you come in?"

"However did ye know that, miss?" he returned, with astonishment and increasing confidence, to the delight of some men at other counters, whom Jacob

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had avoided, partly from an instinct that assured him of more sympathy in a feminine than a masculine breast, and partly from a countryman's aversion to finicking towners immersed in ribbons and ignorant of field lore.

"Well, you see," continued the bright-eyed damsel, leaning over the counter upon her elbows, and looking up into Jacob's face with a pleasant smile, "I noticed your eyes, and they — told a tale."

The eyes fell; he blushed through all his sun-burn right up under his curls. "I understand men's ways," the siren continued, with a meek voice and demure air. "I have a brother of my own," she added, shooting a glance at a man behind a side-counter, who instantly buried his face in his handkerchief, while innocent

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Jacob remarked on the singular coincidence that he had a sister, upon which the man with the handkerchief, having nothing particular to do at the slack hour between the forenoon and the afternoon, beckoned to another, equally disengaged, and the two stole nearer to Jacob's counter and listened behind a pillar formed of stuff for gowns.

"How very singular," laughed the shop-girl; "quite — ha, ha! — a bond of sympathy — hish, hish! — between us — hi, hi!"

"Ho, ho!" laughed Jacob, he had not a notion why, beyond a vague instinct of civility. Then the girl went off in a little storm of titters to fetch merchandise to tempt him with, while the honest carter congratulated himself on finding

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such a knowledgable young lady, and so easy to get on with.

"These are some of our latest novelties," she said, returning with boxes of ribbons and handkerchiefs. "Now this — is a very sweet thing. But, of course, it depends upon the young lady."

"Et es not vor a laädy," he explained, "tes vor a respectable young ooman, daughter of a laäbouren man. She es in sarvice wi' gentry out Estridge way. She eddn't one o' they as likes to go garbed up vine."

"You have scarcely — ah — got as far as the wedding-gown, I suppose?" she inquired, with a sort of tender respect for his feelings that went to his heart.

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"That's just where 'tes," he explained; "I 'ain't got no vurrer than picken of a vlower vor er itt. I bent one to be near

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nit scrimpy, but I be feared to buy zummat to maäke her think to herself, 'Od! darn his impidence!'"

"A very beautiful feeling! "What a fortunate girl to have such a thoughtful sweetheart!"

"And a dunno what maäids like. You med hae some young chap after you, miss, I allow. Now what would ee like yesself from a chap — from a gentleman, as you'd a gien a vlower to athout getten vurrer on?" he asked, fixing a deep, solemn gaze upon her, and priding himself upon the artfulness of his question.

"Well! — he, he — really! — ha, ha! — a most embarrassing question — ha, ha! I may say that I have had — hi, hi! — several nice presents from gentlemen — ah — one can't accept them *all*, you see."

A curious gurgle and splutter from

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behind the pillar of new autumn gowns caused Jacob to look round for a moment, and called a passing frown to the lady's agreeable visage.

"Oye! That's just where 'tes," he added, "you cain't hae 'em all. But athout he gied ee a goold hring, or a silk gown, you wouldn't zay, 'Od! darn the chap's impidence!' would ee now?"

"Ah — really! how very droll you agriculturists are! Shish, hish! No. I should never say that — hi, hi!"

"Nor ee wuddent think it nother?" he asked, earnestly. "Well, there! this yer is mis' able pretty, to be sure," he added, cautiously passing his big brown hand under a dainty silk neckerchief. "Do ee think, now, it med be too vine vor the likes o' she? — a stiddy young ooman in service?"

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The serious, direct gaze of the clear brown eyes was almost too much for the coquettish little bundle of affectations; she blushed, dropped her eyelids, tossed her head, and played off a whole arsenal of little tricks and attractions upon the single-hearted carter, who was as insensible to them as a haystack. "To confess the truth, Mr. — "

"My naäme's Jacob Hardinge, and I be never caäed Mr. — I be cairter to Vearmer Barton out "Westway," he explained.

"Dear me! Then those beautiful bell-horses are yours. I heard them go by just now."

"Iss. They be ourn. We come in 's marnen wi' a load o' 'ool, an' we be gwine over Estridge wi' a load o' ile-caäke this afternoon. 'Tese a smartish

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team. Two on 'em got prizes at Show laäst zummer."

"How very interesting! I shall look out for your bells — ah — Jacob, when you return. Ah! how somebody's heart must go pit-a-pat at the sound of those bells! Now, how would you like one of these little shawls? See! they are really elegant," throwing one over her shoulders with a conquering air, and turning her back to him. "Is she tall?" she asked, turning her head gracefully over her shoulder to speak.

"Not vurry tall. But ter'ble slim and weath. That there's too vine vur she, miss, I allow."

"Well, how about the handkerchief — ha, ha! — Jacob? Shall it be the red or the blue?" gracefully discarding the shawl and turning round again.

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"Darned ef I knows which colour the maäid likes best!" he ejaculated, with knitted brows. "Maäids is ter'ble quiddlen over colours."

"Naturally. You see, we poor girls like to make the best of ourselves — hi, hi! — our faces are our fortunes, and gentlemen are so particular. Now, is she fair or dark? What complexion? Anything — hish, hish! — like mine?"

"Her vaäce," replied Jacob, slowly and solemnly, "be the zaäme colour as a apple-tree when he es vully blowed all over en. Her mouth be the zaäme colour as a

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apple-tree when the hred knaps is all over en avore the vlower openeth. The maäid hath shinen gray eyes, and her hair be the zaäme colour as a bay harse, zaäme as wold Cherrlie, our thill-harse."

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"Indeed! Mr. — I mean Jacob. How *very* beautiful your sweetheart must be!"

"She eddn't not vurry beautiful," he corrected, gravely, "but 'tes a comely maäid and well-spoke."

"I think the pale blue would be the most becoming. I'll put it up for you," she said, decisively, and with a sudden dryness. "Three and six. Thank you."

"I be main bounden to ee, miss," he said, taking his parcel and wondering at the sudden chill in her manner as she turned abruptly from him to a lady just alighted from a carriage waiting at the door, who looked with some astonishment at the smock-frocked customer walking out of the smart shop.

How wonderful and delightful it was! To think that he should actually have

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gone into that bewilderingly fine shop, and brought away a beautiful present for Bessie Woodford! And what good luck to have found, instead of some clumsy male, that kind and friendly young lady, and to have availed himself of her sympathy and knowledge of her sex. Having a brother, too, made her enter so pleasantly into his feelings. He had always supposed smart young ladies in shops to be proud and stand-offish. We should never judge others, especially before we know them.

But the town-clock had not been considerate enough to wait while the purchase was effected; on the contrary, it had ticked on with such ruthless speed that the dinner-hour was past, and it was necessary, after the briefest survey of the sheeny, pale-blue neckerchief in

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the sunshine, to set off at a long swinging trot for the quay, at which he arrived breathless and "all of a swim," as the French have it, to find Moses and Ben hard at work unloading the wool, and inclined to be grumpy at being left in the lurch.

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"Tes what we've a got to putt up wiv," Ben said, sorrowfully. "We maäkes allowances vor ee, Jake. 'Tain't onny natural at thee time o' life."

"Whatever's come to the buoy?" asked Jacob, in astonishment, in a brief pause between unloading and reloading the waggon, during which Ben sat on a rail by the water's edge, dangling his legs. "What lurry a talks!"

"Coorten ain't come to en itt," Moses explained. "Hreckon one at a time es enough."

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"Ded ee vind her oomen on like, Jake?" inquired Ben, with tender interest, "ded the maäid hearken to thee zighs? I zims mis' able zaf t mezelf, purely vor thinken ont."

"I 'lows you'll zoon veel zafter, Ben Brunt, and hae zummat to zigh vor, athout you stops yer jaä," returned Jacob. "Come on, maätes, be ye gwine to bide footeren about here till Christmas time? 'Tes prett' nigh time to hatch on."

"Zure enough," retorted Ben, "that's what this yere coorten leads to, hatchen on. 'Tain't zo easy to hatch off agen, Jake. When do ee hreckon to goo to church long wi' her?"

"Doan't ee be too hash, Jake," added Moses, solemnly. "'Lows thee eddn't to be sneezed at. Thee's a smartish

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looken chap a Zundays. Hae a look at 'em all hround vust."

"Ef you hev a mind to zet yollupen there like a passel o' wold oomen, maätes, there ee med zet and yollup," Jacob returned, tranquilly. "I be gwine to load up."

As he spoke he strode slowly past Ben, who looked, sitting hunched up on the rail, his hands in his pockets, his good-tempered, beardless face framed in straight, lint-white hair, and his eyes blinking in the sun beneath their white eyelashes, like an enormous toad. As Jacob passed, he suddenly put out one hand, caught Ben by the throat off his guard, and pushed him backwards heels over head above the water, where he held him, amid roars of laughter from the men loading

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and unloading vessels at the quayside.

"Beest gwine to work, or beest gwine to act?" he asked of the helpless Ben, who durst not give so much as a wriggle under pain of dropping into the dark water below.

"Or beest gwine to cocksettle into hriver?" added Moses, hugely delighted.

"Doan't ee do vor me, Jake?" implored Ben. "Think o' the wife and vamly I med hae to leave widders ef I be spared. Aow! aow!" he cried, just in time to be pulled back, "I be gwine to work zo zoon as I be hright-zide upper-moast." Which he did, after receiving a couple of flat-handed bangs in the rear that sent him rolling into the waggon, shaking with laughter and merry as a grig.

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They had reached Oldport at noon; by the time they had reloaded the waggon with oil-cake from a vessel at the quay-side, the clocks were striking three. The sun was shining hotter than ever through the stirless autumn air, as with "Hoot!" and "Whup!" and "Hitherr!" and naming of "Thunderr-rah!" "Churree-ah!" and "Vearmerr-rah!" the five, having been hatched on to the comparatively light waggon, started off beneath their canopies more sedately than in the morning, spilling merry little clashes of music as they went.

The dangers and excitement of the streets passed, there were still the perils of comparatively crowded roads to claim all the attention and care of the three waggons; just as they were creaking

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under the railway bridge, a train must needs come thundering over it, to the great amazement and distraction of the team. Farmer and Thunder bolted in their terror, but, luckily, they both bolted in the same direction, which was up a very steep hill; the virtuous Diamond and Cherry, with Farmer darting ahead and Thunder pressing them behind, had no option but to do likewise; while poor Charlie, the wheeler, found himself literally carried up the hill, waggon and all. Jacob, who never left Thunder's leading-rein in the town, simply hung on to him, while Ben, who was behind, with Moses running at

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the fore, had much ado to overtake them, and averred that no mortal team had ever gone up a hill at such a rate; all agreed that such a bolt down-hill, or

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even on a level, would have ended in a "nation girt smash."

The road ascended with more or less steepness, broken by a few slight descents, for miles, and many a halt was necessary. They had entered Oldport from the west and left it towards the east; thus the afternoon sunbeams smote full upon their backs all the way, and were also reflected from the hill upon them, and they began to feel *dépaysés* from the singular circumstance that they no longer knew the names of the fields they were passing, and were even ignorant of the names of some of the farms. There was no more singing; their heavy boots struck the dusty road with dragging steps.

Sunset was near, and "nammet-"

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time past when the ascent ended on an open down over which a high breeze came, welcome and exhilarating, borne from the level band of sea in the east, across a fertile plain lying between two chalk ridge; and here, by the roadside at the edge of the down, lonely and wind-blown, they found "The Travellers Rest," to the inmate of which the waggon-bells made welcome music. Here, of course, they stopped to refresh themselves, refilled their puncheons, mended a little matter that had been wrenched in that marvellous bolt up-hill, and were made welcome by, and exchanged news with, the innkeeper and a few customers, after which they went on their way rejoicing.

There was now nothing but the long white road on the ridge of the downs all

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the way to Estridge; not a house of any description, except where the downs broke a little, two miles from the sea, and a sleepy old village was niched into the break. It was pleasant travelling; sometimes level, sometimes up and down, always with the fine plain spread out to sea and hills on their right, and either a wind-shorn thorn-hedge, with peeps of wooded country and glimpses of sea, on the left, or green down-slope and the same country open ; over all was a delicate blue haze.

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Larks were singing and sheep-bells tinkling in the golden peace of the closing afternoon; a great wave of joy rose and rushed into Jacob's heart, and he began to sing to the bell-music for pure gladness and fulness of heart:

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"Oh, the pretty maids of Opert in their vine new frawcks
Should not laäugh to scarn the laäb'ren lads in clane white smawcks;
Vor the laäb'ren lad es true,
He wull tile all day vor you,
Ef you wull mind the childern and the wold yokes vor hes saäke,
And wash hes cloase and clane hes hearth, and pies vor he wull baäke,
And a good girt vire of evenens a blaftzen bright wull maäke,
When a cometh hoam to you,
Droo the vrost wiv vingers blue."

And Moses and Ben chorused :

"When a cometh hoam to you,
Droo the vrost wiv vingers blue."

"Oh, ye pretty maids of Opert in your vine new frawcks,
Do not laäugh to scarn the laäb'ren lads in clane white smawcks;
Vor the laäbourer es true,
He would tile and ceare vor you,
A Zatterdays hes waäges hoam to you wull vaithful taäke
And wull not bide out-doors o' nights, a drinken vor your saäke,

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But wull herten up and cheer ee when your hert and boans do aäche,
And a cometh hoam to you,
Droo sun and hrain and dew."

"And a cometh hoam to you,
Droo sun and hrain and dew,"

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chorused the three.

The bells clashed in mellow harmony; straight before them, through the pink and lilac mist on the eastern horizon, the broad, red-gold edge of the moon rose above the sea-rim, and, looking back, they saw the western hills purple-black against the lucid after-glow over the sunken sun.

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III

"Oh, who will o'er the downs with me,

Oh, who will with me ride ?

Oh, who will up and follow me

To win a lovely bride ?"

Slipping behind the waggon in the thyme-scented dusk, Jacob took one last affectionate glance at the blue-silk neckerchief, bluer and brighter than ever in the magic light of after sunset. She would surely like it; she would fasten it round her soft young throat and love to think that her sweetheart had chosen and given it her. Her sweet-heart? Oh, yes! he was growing very bold and confident under the intoxication

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of cooling moonlit air and glamour of mixing lights. She little knew he was coming over the downs with singing and music, and a heart laden with love, to fulfil the promise of Whitsunday and bring the ripened fruit of those sweet apple-blossoms. "Was she thinking of him, while she sat sewing or went about her housework? Every stroke of the iron hooves on the white road, and every little clash of horse-bells, brought them nearer to each other; when that broad red moon had paled and climbed the starry blue steep above the hills, the waggon would reach Estridge. And then?

"Gie I a yapple?" coaxed a familiar voice in his ear.

Jacob started, and laid the silk kerchief upon the apples in the check

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wrapper, whereby it acquired a powerful fruity perfume. "I'll gie thee a towse in the chaps, thee girt larrapen Larrance!" was his disobliging response. "Goo an, and bide 'longside o' Thunder, wullee?"

"Wouldn't she hae thee yapples, Jake?" continued the unabashed Ben. "Then I'll war'nt she wun't hae thee, nother,

"This pretty maid o' Opert in her vine new frawck!"

Suppose she would not have him? Well, she was a woman; therefore, as King Richard argued in like case, to be wooed, consequently, to be won; corn is not ripened for harvest, much less cut and carried, in a day.

But what was Grammer doing all this

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time at home? He had forgotten her commissions; his heart smote him for the neglect, though there would be ample time on the return journey. She had no "girt zaäcy buoy," to cook for and scold to-night; she was sitting down to her cup of tea all alone. Dear old Grammer! She had lavished two generations of child-love upon him. His father had gone for a soldier and died in India, and when the news of his death came home, his mother, perilously near her groaning-time, gave birth to her father-less boy and died of the anguish. So Grandmother took the girl and the baby-boy, and reared them, gaining their bread and her own in the sweat of her brow.

Grammer, too, had had her young days. How strange that seemed! A

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labouring lad had made love to her, his heavy step had set her heart beating long, so long ago. It was time for her to rest and be cared for in her turn. Bessie would help make her old age happy; it would be a cheerful home. The two women would be company for each other, and, when the little folk came, Grammer could sit in the chimney-corner and mind them till they were old enough to mind her, and it was time for her to go to her long home. There were the garden and the pig already; perhaps they might get a bit of pasture near their cottage, and buy a cow or two. Or find a little "bargan" of a few acres close by, and then, with fowls and pigs and garden-stuff, an acre

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of hay, and a cart-shed knocked up by himself at odd moments, why not pick up a horse cheap

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at market and set up as carrier to Oldport, carrying their own stuff as well as that of the neighbours round? Another carrier on that road would do no harm; the Westway folk had to go a couple of miles to find a carrier. Horse-tending was his proper work; he loved horses. It was rumoured that Thunder had killed a man; there were times when not a man on the place would face him except Hardinge; he could always subdue or manage the fiery creature. He loved the magnificent horse like an own child; he led him to shows and fairs, showed off his paces and his points, and rejoiced in his value and docility.

And now the western hills, the sea, and the undulating plain dotted with farms, villages, and church-towers, with here a copse, here a plantation,

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and there a cluster of ricks, were all spread out in the magical, dreamy light of the moon; the haze cleared off, stars sparkled, the horse-bells clashed a clearer music on the still night air.

There was a weird, unearthly charm in this melody moving along the crest of the lonely downs in shimmering moonlight. No other sound but that of bells, waggon-wheels, and steps of men and horses broke the charmed stillness, except when the light scurry of a flock of frightened sheep, and the tinkle of their bells, were heard, or a distant rumble grew and died away, as a flying curl of white smoke rolling above the sinuous black line of a train flashed swiftly across the lowland and was gone. It was a beautiful and wonderful thing to be moving thus on the lonely height,

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with the world lying below on either hand in the silvered shadows, a calming, dreamlike joy.

They halted on the brows of hills to breathe the team, and halted on downward slopes to put on drags, else they seemed to go on and on forever with the clashing bell-

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music lulling them in a pleasant, drowsy dream, beneath the stars and moon, above the silent silver-steeped earth. They passed no house and met no soul, the horses almost slumbered as they went, the men grew more and more silent, Ben's pranks and Moses's singing had ceased, Farmer took his own way, which glimmered white and plain before him; it seemed like the phantom of a waggon drawn by phantom horses, followed by phantom waggoners, lulled by fairy music.

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Passion and hope, etherealized to religious fervour, grew in Jacob's heart as he moved along, with wide eyes and uplifted soul, seeing, yet not seeing, the beauty of the night, the play of shadow and shine in moon-thrilled copses, the singular steady brightness of a white-spired tower full-lighted by the moon, thrown up by masses of foliage, and then lost by a bend of the road; the sport of hares on sheltered uplands, the glimmer of distant sea, and here and there a warm glow pierced by spires on the horizon showing a sea-coast town. Moses thought of the brother who died young, happy, and full of simple faith, and of the little child who came and went, leaving a great ache and yearning behind. Ben — thoughtless, careless Ben — thought of heaven, full of

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shining streets and fields of light, and tried to make up his mind about the approaching Confirmation. He also perceived and loved the possibility of falling in love. The horses probably thought of hay, buckets of water, and nice straw-littered stables.

So that when a silly sheep, feeding on the top of a shadowed bank on one side of the road, suddenly bethought himself of the propriety of joining the flock nibbling the turf-slope on the other side, there was a simultaneous yell of waggoners, shying of horses, and jangling of bells, as that foolish white animal tumbled ghost-like through the shades and across the bright moonlight exactly in front of Farmer's nose.

Thunder made a caracole so gigantic that the steady and long-suffering

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Charlie was almost thrown over the off-thill — a stout bit of timber that creaked ominously but did not split in the shock; the great waggon was jolted and jerked from

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side to side, Thunder was over the turfed edge of the road, and, but for the lucky circumstance that Farmer's terrors impelled him, with Diamond and Cherry at his heels, to the opposite embanked side, and thus partly neutralized the strain of Thunder on Charlie and the waggon, team and waggon and all must have gone tumbling down the green slope with disquieting results. As it was, the off fore-wheel went on the low turf edge, and stuck at an angle that would have upset a higher load. But the oil-cake lay level with the over-rods and the tilted waggon stood.

Then there were Whups and Roits

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and Hoots and Thunderr-rahs and Vearmerr-rahs and Churree-ahs, with a general shamefaced feeling that the men had shied worse than the team, and, after a stiff struggle between Hardinge and Thunder, a skirmish between Snow and Farmer, and much verbal remonstrance and patting and soothing from the three, the team fell into proper line, the wheel was got off the bank, the bell-chimes resumed their even rhythm, and the waggon rolled ponderously on, at a somewhat quickened pace.

"I never year'd ee maäke sich a louser avore, Moses," observed Ben, who had jumped higher and screamed louder than anybody, though unseen by the others, being the hindmost. "Ded ee low wold Bogie was aater ee?"

"No veer," returned Moses; "a

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wouldn't come anighst me, wi' Ben Brunt behind for en, let alone Jake."

"Wold cairt she swochelted as though she was drunk," continued Ben; "she prett' nigh lumpered over bank this time, I hreckon."

"Mis'able good job thee was long wi' we, Ben," replied Moses, "else I hreckon wold cairt and the whole bwilen would a ben down 'bout house. But ee be that cliver and knowledgable, nobody cain't get upzides with ee, not wold Bogie hisself."

"Ben, he's that valiant, nothen gies he a steart," added Jacob.

"I 'lows thee's no call to jaä, Jake," replied Ben. "Whatever maäde ee rare and scraich as though 'twas pig-killen day? Did ee 'low the wold moon had tumbled out o' sky?"

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"'Twasn't that, Ben. What gied I sich a steart was hearen you blaren behind me. I 'lowed ee was gone queer."

"Goo an' wi' ye! I never blared. 'Twas wold Thunder a whickeren."

"Ef Thunder couldn't whicker tunabler than you blared, ee'd bust hisself wi' tryen, that a would !" retorted Jacob.

"So Igh oh! On we go!"

Moses trolled out:

"With a crick and a crack and a luster O!

To the zound o' the dancen bells!

Oh, the waggoner-boy hath a life of joy,

Yo ho, Igh oh!

His team is his wife, 'tes the pride of his life,

Yo ho, Igh oh!

He loveth to stride by the fore harse's side,

With a crack o' the whip doth he steer the gurt ship,

Yo ho!

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And the harses rejoice at the sound of his voice,

For by day and by night it es their delight

To go, yo ho!

To go with the zwingen bells!

So Igh oh! On we go!

Wiv a crick and a crack and a luster O!

To the tune o' the zwingen bells."

sang the waggoners so blithely and so lustily that cottagers in the valley below heard and wondered, hares and rabbits skittered away into the furze, and birds stirred in the copses.

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Now they wound along beneath a high bank topped by a wind-bent, leafless thorn-hedge, and embossed with many late flowers; here and there in the bright moonlight a tall mullein reared its spire of yellow blossom, crimson-centred, above pale broad leaves, and now the level band of sea, so long

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their horizon, widened and shone in the moonshine, with audible waves, on their right. Now they were immediately above it, now they turned and left it behind, rolling on with muffled music through a narrow lane, overshadowed by stunted ash and maple, yet sufficiently splashed by moonlight to make lanterns unnecessary, and there, straight before them, showed the broad, dark roof of a pine-tree on a background of dark-blue sea. Leaving this behind, they turned to the right, and came out once more on the open down, with sea beyond woods and fields on either hand. The sea crept closer on each side as they travelled on, dipping into a fold that held Barling village and mounting again beyond it on an artificially scarped and fortified slope, and

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saw the few scattered lights of another village just under Culveredge down, that ended in chalk cliffs rising sheer from the sea.

They turned aside, before reaching Estridge, to enter a farm-yard shadowed by elms. No sooner had the yard gate clicked than lanterns were seen approaching and surrounding them. The bell-music died into faint, irregular droppings; Thunder whinnied with joy because he snuffed stables, whence he was answered in tones of equine welcome; Charlie put down his tired head and closed his great meek eyes in blissful anticipation of fodder and a stationary position for some hours to come; and Farmer deliberately turned to face his fellow-labourers in the certainty of being unhooked from them.

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The lanterns, accompanied by gruff monosyllables as their holders examined the team, circled slowly round the travellers; a fan of light from the open farm-house door fell across the garden and yard; female forms bearing mugs fluttered through the

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shadow and shine of the moon-barred court; the three waggoners' heads bent silently over these mugs, straightened, and bent back, with the mugs uppermost; there was a pause of refreshing silence, followed by inquiries for acquaintances, and the delivery of messages and small parcels.

One of the mug-bearers had blue eyes, fair hair, and plump carnation cheeks; she looked so pleasant and pleased when Ben Brunt gave her back the mug he had just emptied, as she

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stood in a streak of moonlight, that he sighed and thought it a pity she lived so far off, and wondered if she walked with anybody on Sundays.

"Hain't I zin ee avore?" he asked, to give himself an excuse to look at her again. "'Tes Emily Dore, eddn't it?"

"Oh no; quite a mistake," with a smile and a bashful air.

"Then 'tes a picture of ee I've a zeen. You walks out with a young chap by the naäme o' Smith, doan't ee?"

"Certainly not. Smith indeed!" with a toss of the head.

"Then whatever do he be called?"

"It's like your impudence to talk about my young man, a boy like you!"

"Well, there! 'tes liker my impudence than anybody else's, I 'lows, Miss Zaäcy. Churree-ah! Bide still, wull ee?"

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Thunder had to be stabled in the village, whither Hardinge led him without delay, leaving the steed to his corn and his reflections, while he washed his hands and face in a bucket, combed his hair, cocked his hat, and, taking the bundle of apples in his hand, made off at a long, swinging trot through the village street, paved, but grass-grown, just as the belfry-clock was chiming the three-quarters before nine. Though gentlefolk sit up late, and would probably still be afoot, it was reassuring, at that dissipated hour, to catch the ruddy gleam of lighted windows through the trees that surrounded the old-fashioned house set back from the street in a walled garden.

The kitchen window was open and uncurtained; bright light streamed upon

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the laurels and bays outside, and partially lit the arch of walnut boughs under which he passed, with a heart throbbing in blissful anticipation and a head so whirling with excitement that he was constrained to draw into the heavy shadow by the back door to compose himself and consider what words were fit to be produced at first sight of the sweet face.

At last the words and the self-command were there. He rang the bell, and waited, throbbing and flushed but self-contained and full of happy anticipation of the wonder and joy that would light her face when she saw him. The door opened quickly, so quickly that, in a calmer moment, it might have been assumed that some one was on the other side waiting for the bell

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to ring. The light fell full on Jacob's radiant face, it glittered in his clear, shining eyes, but threw the face of her who opened into shadow. Yet he knew, even before his glance fell on the neat figure in its white cap and apron, lighted from above and behind by a pendent lamp, that it was not Bessie, and this knowledge was at once cooling and embarrassing.

"Good-evenen," he said, touching his hat, and the girl, in a voice unknown to him, replied, "Good-evening."

"Plaze to excuse comen so laäte," he continued; "we come long with a waggon from Westway."

"Don't mention it. Westway's a long ride."

"I be come to zee a young ooman

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liven here, Alisbeth Oodford by naäme."

"Then I'm sorry for you," the girl replied. "Might you be her brother? She lived out your way."

"No; no relation, zo to zay. An old friend by the naäme of Hardinge, wull ee plaze to tell her."

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The girl looked him curiously in the face, with a somewhat acid smile on her full, high-coloured visage, while a secret, unspeakable hatred of her gathered in his heart and mingled with an agony as of dread.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Hardinge," she replied, slowly, and with evident relish, "you'll have to step a goodish bit further if you want to see your sweetheart to-night."

"What do ee mane?" he asked, sullenly.

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"Who's talken of sweethearts? I want to see Alisbeth Oodford? Edden't she at hoam?"

The girl's smile broadened and her eyes glittered; such satisfaction as degraded the faces of Roman women, when thumbs were turned down, and the wounded, naked swordsmen, quivering on the arena before them, vainly and dumbly implored their lives with agonized glances, shed a lurid gleam upon her features.

"What! haven't you heard?" she drawled, unwilling to bring this spectacle of a man's bleeding heart and dying hope to an end. "Dear, dear! Well, anybody can but feel for you, though you mayn't have thought of anything more than passing the time. We all know what young men are. Law now! Hasn't

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anybody heard out Westway? To think of that, now, to be sure!"

The man's comely, healthy face went ghastly white in patches under the sunburned bronze; his lips tightened, his teeth set, and his eyes sank as the awful, awful fear grew and drank the life from his heart; his very youth withered and went under the searching anguish.

"Young ooman," he said, at last, in a deep, sullen voice, "what do ee mane? Spake out, and ha' done, wull ee? Where do Alisbeth Oodford bide now, as lived housemaid here somewhile avore hearvest?"

"Well, reelly!" with a self-conscious simper and down-cast eyes, "'t isn't hardly right for honest girls to speak of; but — since you seems anxious about it — I expect she's trapesing along

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Portsmouth Hard this time of night — they mostly do — when a girl goes off long with a soldier."

"You darned, lyen Jezebel!"

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! I'll call master, that I will!" she whimpered, shrinking back as the tortured man strode heavily towards her. "It ain't my fault Lisbeth's gone to the bad. She was always after sojers, and that's why Missus gave her the sack — a nasty, fast young faggot. Boo-ooh-ooh! I'm sure 'twas bad enough to be in service long with such a character, without being pitched into as though anybody had lost their own good name."

Hardinge staggered heavily back, shamed by his own sudden violence, and ground his teeth for some moments in silence.

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"Spake out," he growled at last. "If you be a-riggen of me out, spake the truth, and I wun't do ee no harm. But ef what you ben a-zaying is Gospel true, zay it out shart, and zay no more. When did she goo? And who did she goo along with?"

"You do frighten anybody, to be sure," the girl returned, drying her eyes. "She went off yesterday four weeks, long with a gunner from the fort."

"Where to?"

"Well, to be sure, she didn't leave her address behind her, she only left her good name."

"Name of this here gunner?" he continued, with a threatening flame in his eyes.

"Hopkins. A tall, fine man, with reddish hair —"

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"That'll do. Good-evenen to ee," he interrupted, and the girl had scarcely closed her loose red mouth, before he had turned and was swallowed up in the blackness bordering upon the gravel drive, where the trees were thick within the boundary wall. But she could hear the dull thud of his heavy steps, first on the moist path and then out on the high-road, and the click of the gate as it swung to behind him and latched itself. Then she heard the belfry clock, striking the last of nine strokes. She stood, as if spellbound, the unfinished sentence forming itself on her closed lips, and

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listened till the slow, even footsteps died away in the distance, and then, with a loud, defiant laugh, she went in and shut the door with a bang.

Jacob plodded back to the village

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inn where he was to sleep that night, with head bent down and teeth set, slowly and steadily, like a man striding over a ridged wet field in the face of driving tempest. The blue bundle of apples swung unnoticed from his hand, his curly hair dripped with sweat of anguish, his eyes were wild. But he did not forget to rack Thunder up comfortably for the night.

When he reached the stable, he passed a few words with the ostler, shortening the latter's chat with a premature Good-night.

"We come a long way to-day, maäte," he explained, "and I be properly twickered out."

When the ostler had left him, after showing the loft above the ladder where he was to lie that night, and

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hanging a lantern on a nail in the wall, Thunder curved his noble head round and whickered affectionately to him. Then it seemed to the poor lad as if something melted and broke in his heavy heart, and he fell, with a thick, stifled sob, on the horse's shoulder, hiding his face in his neck. Presently he ' pulled himself up, stroked the great horse, and became aware of the blue handkerchief of apples resting on a step of the ladder in the light of the dim lantern. He took one of the finest, all gold and crimson and fragrance, and gave it to the horse, who munched and crunched it with eager pleasure.

"You and me ben maätes this two year, Thunder," he said, smoothing the creature's satiny shoulder. "You vurry nigh done vor me, wold chap, time and

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agen. You med zo well ha' vinished the job while ee was about it, I hreckon." At this Thunder curved his great neck and rubbed his soft nose on Jacob's shoulder, making the

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halter-ring rattle, and the latter added, "The zooner thee doos vor Jake Hardinge the better, I 'lows, zo long as ee makes a clane job of it."

Meanwhile Thunder's great soft eyes were directed to the blue bundle on the ladder-step; but, failing to arouse Jacob's attention to it, he gave a snort of displeasure, and trod heavily on the foot of his friend, who knew very well that he was not a horse to be trifled with, and promptly fetched him a second apple. "A craäfty wold beggar!" he muttered, reflecting, as is not unusual under similar circumstances, that the

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process of being done for, however desirable, could very well be deferred to a more convenient moment. Then, climbing wearily up the ladder and flinging himself face downwards on the fresh hay spread for him, he fell sound asleep, "blissfully havened till the morrow day."

After all, sleep is sleep; the hours when one would fain lie awake for pure happiness are few and fleeting, even in the most blissful lives. And if the happy find sleep a sweet thing, in misery it is indeed a hiding-place, a shelter, and a balm. Poets have lavished honeyed praises upon sleep, but never too honeyed, called it soft names, but never too soft; the very sound of it falls hushingly on the senses; he is never quite bankrupt of solace who has

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not lost his sleep — murdered it, like Macbeth, slain it by sin and folly, or had it stolen by pain. Beloved and gentle, it is man's first and last and life-long friend. It stills his earliest cry at sight of this sorrowful world, cradles his infancy in kindest arms, and curtains the travail of life away from him till he have strength to face it; with velvet footfall it follows his labour and nightly carries his spirit far into realms of glamour and marvel; it is his tenderest nurse, his best medicine in sickness, always his truest friend, counsellor, and benefactor. Finally, it pillows his age, and with noiseless touch draws the curtain a second time between him and the troubled world. It is a holy thing, mystic and marvellous in its nature and beneficence. Death itself is no

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greater leveller than sleep, that makes all men equal — high and low, rich and poor, joyful and sorrowful. But the waking! that is indeed with a difference.

Cocks crowed, horses stamped in their stalls, cows lowed, and cracking of whips was heard in the dim dawn, but Jacob, flung at random on his heap of hay, slept on, as devoid of life, to all intents and purposes, as those whose dust is being transmuted into the turf above them. But the blessed truce with pain had to be broken, and the ostler's rough shaking and shouting, and the starting awake in an unfamiliar place, brought the agony back with the shock that seems a daily repetition of grief.

"I hreckon thee had a stiffish glass laäst night," the ostler grumbled.

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"I hreckon I'd just zo much as I'd a mind to," Jacob replied, getting up and shaking the hay off.

"I 'lows thee'd a biggish mind, then."

"Prett' nigh zo big as thee jaä."

It was just such a scene in the misty morning as on the day before, only an immense black gulf yawned between to-day and yesterday. There was grooming and feeding and watering of horses; but not the Titanic gambols of the preceding day when the team was fresh. The journey had taken the nonsense out of the horses, Moses averred, when the waggon had been loaded with hurdles wattled from hazel-copses fringing the downs, the team "hatched on," and the waggon creaked out into the lane in the sunshine to the music of its bells, followed

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by the eyes of the farm-folk, indoors and out.

"So Igh oh! On we go!"

Moses began, when they were clear of the farm, and the hills and vales lay fresh and fair before them in soft glamour of morning sunshine, fragrant with the wholesome earth-scent made by drying dews and pungent smell of burning weeds, the blue fume of which rolled slowly up from hill-side and hollow like altar smoke.

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But nobody chorused the song. Ben Brunt plodded heavily along in unwonted taciturnity, doing as he was bid without a murmur or an antic, his boy's heart like a lump of lead within him. It was not only that the blue-eyed girl was left behind and would

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probably be seen no more; it was something that changed the colour of everything and made the sunshine paler. He had madly desired and asked a kiss; the sting was, he had had it; the maiden had been too kind. A good sound box on the ear was what, his better nature whispered to him, would-have been good for them both. There was no harm, only a kiss; it was the cheapness of it that poisoned things, touched a lower chord, kindled the baser nature, and stirred the lad with confused, unnamed trouble. He did not reason upon it, he only felt a dreary irritation, the cheap kiss burned on his mouth with mingled rapture and repulsion, and would not be forgotten for miles, till the pure down-air and morning sweetness, the bell-chimes and the natural

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joy of living and moving, brought him back to the frolic, good-tempered boyhood that lingers so long in rustic youth. Then he forgot his fatal discovery, that womankind was made of poorer stuff than he had been led to believe.

"Whatever maäde ee hike off athout ar a zupper laäst night, Jake?" he asked.

"I 'lows 'twas the zaäme raison as maäde ee bide, Ben."

"G'long wi' ee! What was 't then?"

"I'd a mind to 't."

"'Twas a mis'able bad mind made ee shab off vrom that ar zupper, Jake, a ter'ble vine zupper. There was coald hroast griskin stuffed wi' inions — I 'lows I'd a goodish dollop of that; there was coald haäm and apple-stucklen and

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viggy pudden, and hroast taäties, and hrid cheese — dedn't I tuck in! To tole it all down, zo much small beer as ee'd a mind to, and ee med hae haäf a pint o' strong beer. Ef that wasn't the head goo! that ar haäf pint maäde anybody's noase hum. 'Twas hearvest ale. Wold Moses, he glutched it down middlen shearp. Heartened th' wold chap up mis'ble,

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darned ef a dedn't zet up and zing em a zong. Vearmer Jones he laäughed, and he was vor zingen of a zong too. I 'lows we was middlen peart laäst night, the whole bilen of us."

"Zure enough," Moses corroborated, as they breathed the team across a hill. "Ben's a middlen trencher-man. There eddn't a many can come anighst e'n when the scran bag's out. I 'lows a maäde Vearmer Jones's vittles vly, laäst

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night. Missus she looked pretty zure at en. She 'lowed she'd zooner veed en once a day than twice."

"Goo an wi' ye! She never 'lowed nothen o' the zart. 'Mis'ble nice buoy, that ar Ben, I yeard her zaäy. 'He've a got such a vine open countenance.'"

"Ay, Ben, thee countenance is open enough when there's vittles avore it, whatever it med be when vokes is a zaäyen o' their prayers."

"Oh! G'long!" chuckled Ben. "I was voced to hae zupper vor two, Jake and mezelf, along o' Jake michen. Whatever's come to wold Jake?" he added, in an undertone, when they had reached the brow of the hill and paused again. "A's entirely mumchanced, and so downhearted as a ooman buryen of her baby."

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"That's come to he as comes to many a zon o' Adam," responded Moses, solemnly. "A's vound out what oomen volks es maäde of."

"What be they maäde of athout 'tes flesh and blood saäme as we? How ded he vind out?"

"Thee've a vine open countenance, Ben, but thee never zeen Jake was aäter Lisbeth Oodford."

"The deuce a was!" cried Ben. "Then that's what maäde en so mis'ble thirt-over. "We all got our troubles, Mose, but darned ef this yer eddn't the head goo!"

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Chapter IV

"Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow,

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Thou shalt not escape calumny."

The day was as fair as on yestermorn, lark and red -breast sang as cheerily, the blue calm sea was as sweet to eye and fancy, but the sunlight cast their shadows before instead of behind them. On these breezy heights, scented with thyme and salt sea-breath, where the glamour and stillness of last night's moon had lain with such ethereal potency, the golden sun seemed cold, strange, and far-off, the places they had passed at night were unrecognizable by

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day. The bell-music, usually so gay and cheery, seemed laden with inexpressible heartbreak; the tones were not the same, the very rhythm had changed under some spirit of anguish imprisoned in the metal throats.

Across the soft blue sky and opalescent cloud-piles on the horizon, across shining plain, yellowing woods, and breezy sea, a veil as of crape had been drawn. Not that Hardinge saw the sweet vision of autumn fields spread out before him; his mental gaze was filled with far different things. No country-morning freshness, but night scenes in a great seaport town, scenes of mingled brightness and squalor, of sinister pleasure and ignoble delight, rose before him — scenes touched, nevertheless, by the grandeur of national consciousness,

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mingled with the taste of sea-air, the stateliness of great war-ships, of beautiful, victorious timber-bastions of the past, and vague impressive outlines of the armoured vessels of to-day. The boom of guns, cry of lonely bugles, sound of plashing oars and lapping water, were blended with the shriek of steam-whistles, roar of trains, clatter of cabs, oaths and laughter of seamen and soldiers, yelling of newspaper urchins, and raucous voices of miserable beings who once were women. Over all streamed brilliance of electric light and ruddy glow of gas, on which a pure pale moon and shining stars, sailing aloof, looked down as if ashamed.

It was Portsmouth Hard, between eight and nine at night. He had been there once to fetch Thunder, and

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remembered it very well; the curious intoxication of novel scenes, the taste of an unfamiliar atmosphere — composed of tar and sea, fish and oranges, liquor and tobacco, all potently blended with mud and frowsiness, but all out-savoured by tar and sea-salt. The wonder of jewelry blazing in shop-windows, the wonder of dancing lights on the harbour waters, the bustle and hurry, the uniforms and small-arms, the pleasure of the strange pageant mingled with the pain of feeling lost, incongruous, and out of place there.

But those women — some tipsy, some on the arms of tipsy sailors — bold, gaudy, over-dressed — some powdered and painted, some battered, bruised, and barefaced!

Some women, indeed, were modest

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and neatly dressed; these were chiefly careworn, with children and soldier-husbands; a few were in cabs and carriages, with flowers and jewels and shining raiment, to match the uniforms and gold lace by their side. Among the motley crowd surging to and fro on the pavement of the Hard appeared the sweet face he loved and honoured, the bloom faded, the eyes wistful and weary, but never with flaunting carriage, bold look, and hard laugh. Nay, she seemed even to shrink from the fine tail gunner with reddish hair at her side; she did not hang on his arm or look up in his face; she could not love him; she shrank from all in the surging crowd with a lost and lonely air — his flower could not bloom in that tainted atmosphere.

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It was when he was lingering on the bustling Hard — a lonely, displaced rustic, with the scent of fields upon him, and the cleanness and health of out-door life in his glance — that the mystery and marvel of the sea had fallen upon him and the strange glamour of war and fascination of peril had taken him. Then the memory that he was a soldier's son strongly stirred in him; then the longing for distant lands, chance, change,

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and peril became urgent; he was dazzled by the glory of the wide, unknown world; he considered how he might leave his quiet life and prove his manhood by bearing arms for old England. But not the thought of poor old Grammer alone had given him power to conquer this desire and subdue the fever of longing for the sea and peril. No; though that incident

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occurred two years ago, before the lilac blossom had been given or anything asked or promised, it was the thought of that same sweet flower-face, now withering in the garish lights of the Hard, that had restrained him and given him power to curb desires so seemly and natural to English youth.

The foreign words carved on the soldiers' monument on the Common had been explained to him.

"Sweet and seemly it is to die for our native land." Long and long they rang in his ears with a strong, deep fascination, like Bible words. Often, even now, they drew his heart with siren charm; often, even now, he was divided within himself and half-bewildered by them; but the lilac given last spring was a counter-charm, potent

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to exorcise the spell. Sweet and seemly to die for our native land? Yes; but that was long ago, before the fatal journey to Estridge; now nothing, not even patriotism and heroic death, could ever be as sweet and seemly as before. Reverence was slain, trust in the purity of woman lost. For what face was showing in the hard lights on Portsmouth Hard?

Soon after mid-day the waggon reached Oldport, in the bustle and hurry of a market-day; all the busy faces in the streets had something repellent for Jacob; all seemed conscious of some agony and shame newly born into the world; some were oppressed by it, some gloating over it, some grieving, all intolerable in the strong light of noon-day.

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But there was little time for brooding, the streets being so thronged; the horses were excited by the stir, all ears pricked and turned, all necks arched — all except those of the long-suffering Charlie, who was conscious only of being between the thills, with that provokingly active Thunder prancing in front of him, and the waggon lumbering behind, and the strong desire for dinner that stirred his equine frame.

"Thee'st a cup too low, Jake," said the good Moses, when the team were unhooked and feeding in the Plough yard. "Hae a pint o' strong beer long wi' me fur the good o' the house. Cheer up, maäte. Ef there wasn't no downs there wouldn't never be no ups, I 'lows. Oi, that's how this yer world do wag,

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zure enough! Here's looken towards ee, Jake!"

"Thankee kindly, and the zaäme to theezelf, Moses," replied Jacob with a great relieved sigh, as he swallowed the humming October not unwillingly.

"Yew! how suant and zweet this yer traäde do vlow down anybody's keck-horn!" observed Moses, pensively contemplating his half-emptied mug, and smacking his lips." The Lard hev zent a zight o' trouble into this yer world vur the zins o' the likes o' we; but he've a zent zome mis'able good ale long wi' 't, I hreckon. Glutch et down, Jake, noo heel-taps! Here's to ee agen! May ee never want a vriend nit dibs to stand en a drink!"

"The zaäme to theezelf and many of

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'em," replied Jacob, with pardonable preoccupation.

"That ar maid o' ourn's a craäfty young vaggot," Moses continued. "Vust thing when I goos hoam 'twull be, 'Dad, did ee mind my missums?' — kmishuns, she manes — ' Where's my change, Dad?' zaäme as her mother. I be voced to gie her a ha'penny change and zommat boughten, too. That's what comes o' been' a vamily man."

Grammer's commissions were carefully executed this time and a little surprise procured for her as well. The shop-windows had lost all their fascination to-day; there was no temptation to loiter. The young lady who sold the kerchief had looked out at the sound of the waggon-bells. "There goes my handsome carter!" she exclaimed, laughing

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and pretending to blow a kiss through the ribbons and laces in the window. Jacob, looked up, saw her and touched his hat as he passed, stolid looking and ashamed.

The commissions took time; just at the last, with the team put to and chiming through the town, there was a long wait for a delayed order, so that the after-noon was far advanced when they cleared the town, rolling on in the track of the westering sun, that was all glorious in storm-cloud edged with fire and interspaced by lakes and inlets of molten gold. The dust whirled in gusts, the wind sprinkled the bell melody fitfully, sere leaves showered down from shuddering branches and danced to and fro, singly and in squadrons; flocks of starlings were tossed hither and thither in

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the blast, the woods groaned, even while their gold and crimson flamed up in the stormy sun-gleams; late roses bent, scattering their last petals on the wind-gusts; there was in nature that chill menace which is a challenge, evoking defiance and bracing to action, or a tyranny crushing, and beating down hope, according to mood and temperament. It stirred up the team to step out briskly and bravely; the bracing chill, and the knowledge that their heads were now turned homewards, made Farmer and Thunder over-cheerful, what their friends called idle, so that even the excellent Diamond threw his mighty heels about, to the joy and amusement of Cherry and scandal of the much-burdened Charlie, whose sole aim in life was to escape from the shafts

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with the least possible expenditure of energy. There was naming of horses, and "Bide-stills" and "Ways" and "Whoas" and "Hitherrs," ending in a mighty scrimmage, turmoil, and clatter, as Farmer danced ponderously downhill, with the rest thundering pell-mell behind, the waggon swaying and bumping along upon them, and the much-enduring Charlie sitting on his own heels and tobogganing unwillingly at the tail of Thunder, whose exasperating energy sometimes drove the poor thill-horse to the verge of distraction. Fortunately the road was clear, with a rise in front, so that "wold cairt" soon

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righted herself, and was borne up-hill with more speed than was quite convenient to the horses, a dispensation the unoffending Charlie felt to

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be particularly hard upon his virtuous bones.

"Ef you goos downalong smearer than we've a mind to, I 'lows you'll hae to goo upalong smearer than you've a mind to," Moses slowly observed to the five, as the whole eight, biped and quadruped, breathed on the brow of the hill; and a simultaneous droop of five maned heads and sweep of five bell-peals seemed to give unanimous assent to the proposition.

This last adventure was not without scathe; a shoe had become loose and some iron-work in the waggon broken in the violent jerking, so that, as evening was closing in with a scud of driving rain, they were glad to see the glimmer of firelight from the windows of a lonely inn hard by a forge on the wayside.

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There was a good half-hour's work, very cheery with the stithy fire aglow and the sound of bellows and hammer-clink. News had to be exchanged, and strong, weather-browned faces, lit up by red flame leaping in the shadows, shone with other light, while tale and jest went round and pewter mugs were tipped up, before the waggon was on its way again in the darkness of driving mist scarcely thinned by a clouded moon.

As they fared musically on through the mirk, striking sparks from the road and singing from time to time, a sound struck through the bell-melody, filling Hardinge with such agitation that he came nigh to trembling.

"What's what?" returned Ben, in answer to his question, when the waggon

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was stopped to take the drag off the wheel. "Bells and wind, that's all I hears. Whup! Whup! Hitherr!

"So Igh oh! On we go!
Wi' a crick and a crack — "

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The song died down the wind; they issued from a deep cutting in the chalk and rolled along an embankment, from the sloping sides of which fields and woods spread away to the sea, when the sound rose again, filling Jacob with unthinkable dread. It was surely a human cry, feeble and strained, yet the word "Help!" seemed to come in it. He was about to call for a halt when Thunder started and lurched across the road with a jerk that took even the impassive Charlie with infectious excitement, and for some moments there was nothing

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but confusion of jangled bells, clattering hoofs, creaking timbers, and shouting voices.

But when calm had been restored, Hardinge insisted on stopping. He had caught sight of a dark object just on the grassy border of the embanked road in a dim light that was only just not darkness, and knew it for the cause of Thunder's start.

"Goo an wi' ye!" retorted Ben, "'tes onny wold Bogie."

"I tell ee 'tes a man or a ooman," Jacob asserted. "Bide long with Thunder, wull ee? I be gwine to zee."

"Bide where ee be, Jake," shouted Moses; "'t'eden't nothen onny a bit of scrole!"

So he said, very valorously; but secretly he inclined to the supernatural

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view advanced by Ben. Thick wood rising up the embankments overshadowed the road on each side, beginning above the clear grassy space where the dark object lay. This bit of road was dark and lonesome to a ghostly degree; boughs creaked in the wind, sere leaves rustled and shivered as if in pain or fear. Moses was most desirous of leaving it behind and reaching the friendly lights of the next village. Hardinge hastened with long strides to the spot, untroubled by supernatural fears that might have overcome him in any mood but that of this blank desolation, which annihilated all feeling but susceptibility to others' suffering, and stooped down in the obscurity by the long, dark, motionless object, whence issued a faint and feeble moan.

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"Who be ye and what's the matter?" he asked; but there was no response. Feeling gently along the prostrate form, he perceived the draperies of a woman's garments.

"Cheer up," he said, gently, "'tes vriends. Where be ee hurt?" The utter silence that followed filled him with horror and dread; it was evident that the poor forlorn creature, roused to hope by the sound of the bells, had sent forth all her strength in cries for help, and was now either swooning or dead. He pulled off the thick pilot coat, worn over his smock-frock in the damp night-chill, and covered her with it; then, hastening back, overtook the waggon, calling out that it was a woman fallen senseless by the roadside. The others were incredulous, oppressed by

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the loneliness and heavy shadows of overarching tree-tops, and still inclined to the supernatural view. Vague, inherited dread of witches and of spectres simulating suffering and luring honest men to destruction flitted through the brains of Moses and Ben.

"'Tes nothen to we. A traipsen vaggot of a wench in liquor, or a good-vur-nothen lurdan dree sheets in the wind," Moses growled, when Hardinge urged taking the woman into the waggon. Ben shivered, remembering a spectre said to haunt the lower copse, and averred that the horses and waggon were more than enough to manage, and that, as Thunder had shied at the mere presence by the road, the whole team would probably bolt with the burden in the waggon.

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"Goo ahn, ye girt cowards!" cried Jacob. "A ooman, I tell ee, whatever else she med be. Nigh her groanen time vor all we knows. Her boans med be broke, yew!" While he spoke, he was making a clear space for a couch in the waggon with spare sacks and bundles, and lighting another lantern.

"What be ee gwine at?" grumbled Moses, seeing him loosen one of the hurdles.

"Gwine to carr her on hurdle and hyste her in waggon," he replied. "Come ahn, Ben; thee med bide long wi' team, Moses, ef ee be afeard."

The Salamanca Corpus: Ribstone Pippins (1898)

The taunt fetched Moses; he tied up the team to the rails fencing the embankment. This he did with a rapidity quickened by a firm determination not to be left alone in a place so obviously

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uncanny, a determination that he Englished to himself as a noble desire to share to the utmost the peril to which the folly of his mates was conducting them. Then with reckless valour he seized the lantern — the best protection, as is universally acknowledged, against ghosts and other powers of darkness — while Jacob took the hurdle, his own puncheon, and some empty sacks, and strode swiftly back on his charitable errand — as swiftly, that is to say, as his encumbrances permitted. Moses and Ben clumped after him with great alacrity, Ben provided with a stout cart-whip, that he carried butt end upwards, ready for action.

They reached the spot in time to stumble over the hurdle and find Hardinge on his knees by the body, which

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they dimly discerned to be that of a woman, with a bundle beside her and Jacob's coat over her; the face was turned away in the helpless droop of the swooning head. Moses, making the sign of the cross, which Ben did likewise, firmly grasping his whip at the same time, turned the light of the lantern on the face, that Jacob might see to put the puncheon, or little keg, he had uncorked, to the lips.

The three carters bent over her, their rough, masculine faces lit up by the lantern, the light of which revealed to them nothing more terrible than the white, thin face and closed, long-fringed eyelids of a woman, young, comely, and suffering. At sight of her the tense, affrighted features of Moses and Ben relaxed and those of Jacob quivered

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with horror and pain; he started violently back like a stricken animal, spilling some drops from the puncheon in his clenched hand. Moses and Ben turned their eyes, with half-ashamed curiosity, from the motionless form of the woman to Hardinge, whose

The Salamanca Corpus: Ribstone Pippins (1898)

head was held quiveringly back, with the singular, painful shudder of a horse struck in the face and expecting another blow. For a moment — only for a moment — scarcely long enough for the other two to mutter to themselves the name *Elizabeth Woodford*.

Then he bent forward over the prostrate girl, his face ghastly with the pallor under its brown, and once more put the little barrel to the closed lips. Moses, telling Ben to hold the lantern, then raised the limp head gently in one

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hand and parted the lips with the other, while Hardinge poured a little water between them, and Ben, like a statue, held the light and looked on with an awed gaze.

"I 'lows this here's a bad job," Moses observed, after a while. Jacob poured a little more water between the lips, and then the delicate young face in Moses' hand lost its absolute whiteness, the transparent eyelids unclosed, two frightened, pained gray eyes gazed up in the three carters' solemn faces, and a faint moan was heard.

"Doan't ee be afeard," said Moses; "we be gwine to putt ee in cairt and carr ee long."

"Home, home!" she moaned, feebly, and then, looking up in Hardinge's face, a flush went over hers, her eyes closed

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again with a contented sigh, and her head turned, like a child's, on the pillow of Moses' rough-coated arm.

With marvellous care and gentleness they lifted the slight, light figure on to the hurdle, and Moses and Jacob carried it between them, accompanied by Ben with the lantern and whip, and welcomed by a long whicker from Thunder, and confused pealing of bells from the five horses, growing fidgety with waiting unattended in the darkness, and laid it in the waggon.

Hardinge touched the slender form without emotion, scarcely remembering that twenty-four hours ago the mere thought of seeing her had stirred his pulses with an agitation beyond control. A rose blooming on its stem touches the senses deliciously, moving

The Salamanca Corpus: Ribstone Pippins (1898)

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the soul within; but the same flower, dropped and trampled in the mire, has no more charm than the mire itself. He touched her gently from fear of hurting her, just as Moses did. Yet it was strange to him that he could so calmly touch what had been Elizabeth.

As they laid her there, one of the beautiful apples, escaped from the bundle, rolled out on the road, and the huge, broad felloe of the hind wheel passing over it, crushed and ground it into the flinty dust.

Hardinge plodded on at Thunder's side through the dark, with the bells clashing out their pleasant, irregular cadence, thinking that she might even now be dead, and thinking that it would be best so. If she had died innocent,

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if he were following her now to an honoured grave, what heartbreak, what desolation, but how infinitely better than this! The bells, usually so gay and heartsome, were jangled knells; the burden in the waggon was sadder and more solemn than any coffin; they were bearing it to the burial of her youth and bloom, peace and innocence; whether that he had so carefully placed on the rough couch still breathed the breath of life or not was of little moment, since the soul within it was slain, and the Elizabeth he loved was no more.

Misty rain drove in their faces as the three carters trudged on in silence; Ben's spirits sank lower and lower, until he sought relief in dolorously chanting:

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" Zo vair art thou, my only lovv,
Zo deep in lovv am I,
And I wull lovv thee still, my dear,
Till all the zeas hrun dry-igh-igh-igh.
O my lovv's like the hred, hred hroase."

Jacob's love was gone, and yet the seas were not run dry.

The Salamanca Corpus: Ribstone Pippins (1898)

They stopped at Malbourne, at the Sun, where Moses was for leaving the young woman. "How do ee know her vather 'll taäke her in?" he objected.

"A cain't taäke her in athout she's there," Jacob argued.

"Found the young ooman fainted on the road, Snow? Dear heart alive!" said the landlady, examining the patient, who appeared to be dozing. "I shouldn't wonder now if some nice hot soup and a taste of spirits med bring her round. Best take her home. Look here! She's

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cut her head falling on a stone. She'll be all right to-morrow, poor thing!"

The wound was quickly washed, and bound up, some warm soup administered, and the patient in due time taken to her home. Hardinge staid by the horses the whole time, and left the other two to lift her out and carry her in to her parents, who were surprised and distressed beyond measure at her plight, not having heard that she had left her situation.

Next day the doctor's gig was seen outside Woodford's cottage, and the next and the next, but Hardinge was never seen there, though Moses and Ben brought tidings that the maid was terrible bad, at death's door.

Three days later Jacob received a letter written thus:

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"ESTRIDGE, Oct 20.

"Mr. Harding:

"Sir, — I rite this hoping It finds you Well has it Leaves me i have the onner to inform you kindly hall you was tolled fryDay nite was lyes. Throo jellusy she wood Not do know such thing been. Stiddy bewty is vane hand Makes sum mad witch the Kitchen winder Hopen i cooed year All was that jelluss Hand Spitfull off her she Aint much two boste off Hand fond of millitry pardon, the Libberty hand Remane with luv Too hall Kind fiends ewer obedient Humble well Wisher has Object. To lice

"no Name she wood Bee that mad Hand doo Lather a pore fallow sirvant offal sow Nott lett out i rote."

The Salamanca Corpus: Ribstone Pippins (1898)

This missive, the result of much unusual labour, embellished by many smudges, blots, and erasures, was not easy to decipher by a stable-lantern's light, and, even when slowly spelled out and pronounced in an undertone, required some cogitation before the full purport of it penetrated to the brain of

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the recipient. But when, after the third spelling and puzzling, the thing became clear, Hardinge trembled exceedingly, and cold drops fell over his face. All lies! All! What then was the truth? Elizabeth was certainly dying; she had as certainly been picked up senseless by the roadside. How had she come to that pass? The poor lad groaned aloud in his agony. "Oh, Lord!" he cried, with joined hands, "forgive me! What hev I done? Oh, Lord! what shall I do?"

He stumbled home through the rainy, windy night, and, plunging into the cosey cottage, where his grandmother sat by the fire with supper spread on the table near, burst out with:

"Grammer, what do ee know about Alisbeth Oodford?" the first allusion he had made to her since the journey.

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"Lard love the buoy! There ain't nothen to know. The pore maid's goen vaäst, everybody med know that much. She's gied over. She've a got information in the chest, and two dacters, I've a yeard em zaäy."

"Thee've a yeard nothen bad of her, hev ee now, Grammer?"

"I 'lows two dacters and information in the chest is vurry nigh bad enough vur one maid," Grammer returned, with dignity.

Jacob looked hard at her, so hard that she was offended.

"Whatever be ee a gaäpen at, thee girt larrapen gaäk?" she asked, with indignation.

"Lies!" returned Jacob, sorrowfully. "All lies! All lies!"

"I'll gie thee a clout in the chaps,

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The Salamanca Corpus: Ribstone Pippins (1898)

thee girt good-vur-nothen, a zaäcen of thee Grammer, and a callen of her a liar!" cried the old lady, looking round for an instrument of chastisement, while Jacob vanished up the cupboard stair, soon returning with something that he put in his pocket.

"Thee hasn't no call to be cagged," he said, emerging from the staircase. "I be mis'ble hearled up wi' lies vokes tells. I wasn't thinken of ee nooways. Dooan't ee be miffy, Grammer. There isn't no call."

He was soon out in the wet night, striding along in the face of the wind, head bent down and teeth set. Along the lane, across a ridged fallow, over two hedges, into the village, with the agonizing dread of being too late.

The Woodfords' cottage lay dark beneath

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two lindens that were groaning with writhen branches and swaying trunks in the wild wind above it. A red glow showed like a reproachful glance in the window by the door, another, beneath the thatched eaves above, was like a gleam of hope; its feeble radiance quivered on the thin sere leaves and wet boughs of the storm-shaken trees, vaguely comforting him.

He stepped quickly up the wet garden path and knocked on the door with his knuckles, sick with fear. Elizabeth's father was sitting over the fire, stirring something in a saucepan; he was visible through the rain-blurred window; he turned his head at the sound of the plashing steps, rather than the knock, and bid Hardinge come in. He stepped in, accordingly, carefully shutting the

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door behind him, and stood dripping wet on the flagged floor.

"She's a gooen vaäst," the haggard father said to the new-comer, and wiped his eyes by drawing his shirt-sleeved arm across his face. At the same moment a woman's quick step was heard overhead, and a smothered "Who's there?" was asked from the top of the stairs.

"Jacob Hardinge," Jacob replied from the foot of the stairs, and was bidden to come up, which he did, after shaking some of the wet from his garments, trembling, and trying to step softly.

The Salamanca Corpus: Ribstone Pippins (1898)

"Moast too laäte," whispered the mother, as the fresh, brown-eyed face, shining with wet and cold, appeared in the dim room, and two or three women neighbours and a young man, Elizabeth's

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brother, moved back from the bed. "Wherever hev ee ben all this while, Jake Hardinge, and my poor maid a callen of ee night and day? She's all lost-like now."

"She's a-gwine off easy, poor thing," said one of the women. The clergyman standing at the bed's head bent to murmur something in the ear of the sick girl, who lay back, propped up high on pillows, with half-closed eyes, flushed face, and short, quick breath.

"Elizabeth," Jacob said, in a clear, deep voice, stepping softly towards the bed. She made no reply; her fixed eyes showed no knowledge of anything around her. For a few minutes there was silence, broken only by the sound of rain and wind in the moaning trees and pelted window-panes and the painful

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breath of the ebbing life; then the agony clutching at the young man's heart overbore everything, and with a loud and bitter cry he fell forwards heavily across the bed, which shook beneath him.

Of course Elizabeth ought to have died then and there, under such a severe shock; but, partly owing to the inbred perversity of her sex, and partly to the inherited curiosity that proved so fatal in the case of Mother Eve, she opened her half-shut eyes, from which the world was fast receding and fading, and with an effort shook off the deadly apathy weighing upon her weak and fevered brain, to inquire into the cause of this sudden tumult; and lo! prostrate and weeping at her feet, there was her own true-love, at sight of whom a smile passed

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over her wasted features, a soft light came into her fever-brilliant eyes, her fluttering pulse calmed, and her breath came more easily.

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"Jacob," she said, in a faint, gasping voice, which roused him to look up, "are — the apples — ripe?"

He took that he had brought from his pocket and put it into her hand; she gave a sigh of comparative ease, smiled, and slept.

Later on the mother told him how Elizabeth had been taken ill while at service and had been sent home. How she had grown so much worse during the journey when the disease had declared itself that she had been taken to the infirmary. There, unwilling to cause her friends anxiety, she had remained without communicating with any one

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until she became convalescent and was discharged. Whereupon, ignorant of her natural weakness after long illness and confinement, she had started in the morning, intending to walk the seven or eight miles home. How she had been surprised after a few minutes to find her limbs giving way, how she had fainted and recovered, rested, struggled on, fainted and recovered and toiled on again, all day, until, in the early dusk, she fell and struck her head, were by degrees related. For those calumnies reaching all across the country to Westway, her singular beauty and charm and the jealousy of an evil fellow-servant were sufficient foundation.

So when the time of singing birds came round again, when young leaves fluttered in tenderest green upon linden

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boughs, oak-trees came out in gold and ruddy-brown bravery, and thrift on cliff-edges showed pink against seas of azure bloom, a bride and bridegroom walked down the "Woodfords' garden path, under lilacs in full blow, and then through Grammer Hardinge's garden, under the Ribstone Pippin apple-blossoms. And at the wedding-supper the three carters sang their waggon-song, and Jacob his "Pretty Maids of Oldport."

"And a cometh hoam to you,
Droo sun and vrost and dew."

THE END