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EIGHTEENTH CENTURY \*\*\*



THE MUNIMENT ROOM, S. MARY REDCLIFFE.

## **Bristol Bells**

***A STORY OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY***

**BY**

# EMMA MARSHALL

AUTHOR OF 'BRISTOL DIAMONDS,' 'THE TOWER ON THE CLIFF,'  
'HER SEASON IN BATH,' ETC.

The budding floweret blushes at the light,  
The meads are dappled with the yellow hue,  
In daisied mantle is the mountain dight,  
The tender cowslip bendeth with the dew.  
CHATTERTON.

LONDON  
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## *PREFACE*

The incidents in the life of Thomas Chatterton which are introduced into this story are gathered chiefly from Mr Masson's exhaustive essay and a biography of the poet by Mr Chatterton Dix.

In these books full details may be found of the pathetic life, misdirected genius, and tragic death of the boy poet.

Several citizens of Bristol, who are connected with his sad history, appear in the following tale; the other characters are wholly imaginary.

WOODSIDE  
LEIGH WOODS, CLIFTON,  
*February 1892.*

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# Bristol Bells

## CHAPTER I

### LONGING FOR FLIGHT.

'Grandfather! I want to speak to you; please listen.'

'Well, who said I would not listen? But speak up, Biddy.'

The old man put his hand to his ear, and his granddaughter leaned over the back of his chair.

'Don't call me Biddy, grandfather. I am Bryda.'

'Bryda! Phew! Your poor mother was called Biddy, and you ain't better than she was that I know of.'

'Well, never mind; but this is what I want to say, and Betty is quite of my mind. Do let me go to Bristol. Jack Henderson heard old Mrs Lambert say she would like a bright, sharp girl to help her in the house, and I am bright and sharp, grandfather!'

'I daresay, and make you a drudge!'

'No; I shouldn't be a drudge. I should be treated well, and you know Mrs Lambert is a relation.'

'Relation! that's very pretty, when she has taken no heed of you for years. No, no; stay at home, Biddy, and put such silly stuff out of your head. Goody Lambert may find somebody else—not my granddaughter. Come! it's about supper-time. Where's Bet? She doesn't want to gad about; she knows when she is well off.'

Bryda pouted, and darted out of the large parlour of Bishop's Farm into the orchard, where the pink-and-white blossoms of the trees were all smiling in the westering sunshine of the fair May evening.

The level rays threw gleams of gold between the thickly-serried ranks of the old trees—many of them with gnarled, crooked branches, covered with white lichen—some, more recently planted, spreading out straight boughs—the old and young alike all covered with the annual miracle of the spring's unfailing gift of lovely blossoms, which promised a full guerdon of fruit in after days.

In and out amongst the trees Bryda threaded her way, sometimes brushing against one of the lower boughs, which shed its pink-and-white petals on her fair head as she passed.

'Betty!' she called. 'Bet, are you here? Bet!'

Bryda had come to a wicket-gate opening on a space of rugged down, golden with gorse, and from which could be seen an extensive view of Bristol in one direction, and of the village of Langholm and the woods of Leigh on the other.

Bishop's Farm was on the high ground of the Mendips, not a mile distant from the church of Dundry, whose tower is a landmark of this district, and is seen as a beacon to the country-side for many miles.

'Yes, here I am. Bryda, what is the matter?'

Betty was seated on a bit of rock, anxiously looking down on a lamb which the shepherd had brought from the fold, as it seemed, to die.

'It's just dying, that's what it. It's no use making a to-do Miss Betty. Lor'! the master can afford to lose one lamb, and it's no fault of mine.'

'It should have been brought in last evening, Silas. I'll carry it in myself, poor dear little thing.'

'Better not, better not; let it die in peace, miss. No mortal power can save it now. The mother is

all but dying, too, and if I save her it's as much as I can do. There, I told you so. It's gone, poor dumb thing.'

For the lamb give one little feeble moan rather than a bleat, drew its thick legs together convulsively, and then lay still.

'Dead! Oh, take it away, Silas,' Bryda exclaimed; 'I cannot bear to see anything dead. Come away, Betty,' she entreated.

'There, there, Miss Biddy, don't take on. I'll carry it off, and don't trouble your heads no more about it. We've all got to die, and the lamb is no worse off than we. Can't say but I am sorry though,' Silas said, in a softer tone, as he picked up the dead lamb. 'I'd sooner see it frisking about in the meadow yonder than lying so cold and quiet.'

And then Silas, in his smock frock and wide hat, strode away over gorse and heather, and left the sisters alone.

Of these sisters Betty was the younger of the two by one year, but older in many ways—older in her careful thought for others, in her unselfish life, in her patience and tender forbearance with her somewhat irascible old grandfather.

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Bryda and Betty had lived with their grandfather at Bishop's Farm ever since they could remember anything.

Their aunt, their father's sister by the farmer's first marriage, a widow, took the charge of the house after her husband's death, when she had come to her old home at her father's bidding rather than at his invitation.

He had been angry with her for marrying a sailor, had prophesied from the first that no good could come of it, and he was more triumphant than sorry that his prophecy had proved true.

There are some people who feel a keen satisfaction when they are able to say with Peter Palmer of the Bishop's Farm, 'I told you so, and I knew how it would be.' Peter certainly repeated this often in the ears of his daughter, a stolid, heavy woman, whom it was difficult to rouse to any keen emotion, either of joy or sorrow.

Mrs Burrow was one of those slow people to whom stagnation is life. She could scarcely read, and her writing was so much like hieroglyphics that on the rare occasions when she had to sign her name she used to get one of her nieces to write, 'Dorothy Burrow, her mark,' and then she would add the cross.

She did not neglect the homely duties which devolved on her as head of her father's house. She managed the dairy and the poultry, and kept the farm servants up to the mark.

Her world was a wholly different world from that of her young nieces, and the imaginative and enthusiastic Bryda especially had nothing in common with her.

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Biddy, who undertook the plain cooking and baking of the establishment, and had a light hand for pastry and cakes, and who mended the linen with unexampled neatness, was Mrs Burrow's favourite. She was useful, and had no new-fangled ways like Biddy, and would make a good wife when her turn came, but as to that flighty Biddy, the man who married her would repent it to his last hour.

'Do ask grandfather, Bet, to let me go to Mrs Lambert's.'

'I wonder you are in such a hurry to leave me,' was the reply.

'It's not *you*, it's this humdrum life. Here we live, with no books and no fun, day after day, month after month, year after year. Why, I shall be twenty at midsummer, and I have only been to Bristol twice, and to Wells once by the coach. Oh, Bet, I might as well be a turnip or—'

A laugh from someone near made the girls spring up.

'So Bryda is like a turnip. That's good, I must say.'

'Jack, how you frightened me,' Betty said. 'I thought you was gone back to Bristol.'

'No, I have got another week's holiday. Uncle Antony sent word by the carrier that he would as lieve have my room as my company.'

'Oh, Jack, have you quarrelled with Mr Henderson?'

'Not exactly; but I am no favourite of his. Well, aren't you going to ask me to supper, Betty? I am hungry enough, I can tell you.'

'I must go and find out if there is enough supper for you,' Betty said, laughing. 'You and Bryda can follow when you like, but, Jack, don't fill her head with nonsense about going to Bristol. She will only be miserable if she goes to old Madam Lambert.'

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And then Betty let the wicket-gate click behind her, and went singing through the orchard.

Jack Henderson was a giant in stature, with large ungainly hands and a somewhat slouching gait.

If ever a man was cut out for a country life it was Jack Henderson. But his mother was a little of the fine lady, and when her husband's brother offered to take Jack as an apprentice in his jeweller's shop in Corn Street, Bristol, she eagerly accepted the proposal, or rather, I should say, Mr Henderson at last gave a somewhat reluctant consent to receive Jack and polish him up as he polished his old silver and chased gold in his Bristol shop.

'You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear,' had been Mr Henderson's remark when the bargain was finally struck, 'so don't expect it, Molly,' he said to his sister-in-law. 'But as you are a widow, and I promised poor Jim to do something for his children, I'll hold to the bargain.'

The bargain was this. Mrs Henderson was to supply vegetables, cream and butter, and cider from her farm in return for her son's board, lodging, and learning the trade in her brother-in-law's shop in Corn Street.

Jack Henderson threw his huge form on the ground at Bryda's feet, and said,—

'What are you doleful about, Bryda—eh?'

'Don't ask me,' Bryda said. 'I might as well cry for the moon as ask grandfather to let me go to Mrs Lambert. He won't give me leave.'

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'Go without,' was the prompt reply. 'I'll manage it.'

Bryda shook her head.

'It would vex poor Bet if I did.'

'Well, it will vex me if you stay here. I'd give something to see you once a week, and if you stay here I sha'n't see you till next Whitsun'—p'r'aps not then.'

Bryda made no answer to this. She was leaning forward, and looking past Jack to the lovely landscape stretched before her, listening intently, her eyes full of wistful longing, her small hands clasped round her knees, and a pair of little feet, which the thick, clumsy shoes of the village shoemaker could not altogether disguise, crossed one over the other close to Jack Henderson's large hand.

'Hush.' she said, 'there are the bells, Bristol bells calling—they always seem to call me—but it's no use.'

Then, rallying, Bryda said,—

'Tell me about that boy—you know who I mean.'

'Oh! the mad fellow at Lambert's, he is as mad as ever, writing and scribbling verses. But, all the same, he is not a bad sort of chap. Old Lambert hates him, but masters always hate their apprentices, just as Uncle Tom hates me.'

'Have you brought me any more poems, Jack?'

'No. You must come for 'em. I'll lay a wager Chatterton will give you a lot of stuff like the "Friar's Bridge" when he sees you.'

'You might send me *Felix Farley's Journal* when you go back to business.'

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'Look here, Bryda, you must come for it. I shall be off in the cart next Monday morning. I'll wait at the turn by the church till you come. Only old Tim will know, and he is as blind as a mole and deaf as a post. Now, come, there's a good girl.'

'But Mrs Lambert may not want me.'

'You are quick with your pen, write to the old lady and tell her you will come to be a grandchild to her, or what you like. Come, Bryda, say yes.'

But Bryda still hesitated.

The flight to Bristol was to the country-bred village maiden of a hundred and twenty years ago a serious matter. Just as she had seen the young swallows stretching their wings on the nests under the eaves, and fluttering and trembling before they followed their twittering parents, so did Bryda pause, before she could make up her mind to take this earnestly desired flight into the heart of the city from the heart of the hills.

Bryda had few books, for books, of which there were not many in those days, did not find their way to the Mendip villages. But the girl lived in her own world of romance, and peopled it with airy phantoms, as many a maiden has done before her. Her prosaic aunt and the two or three cronies who paid visits to Bishop's Farm were much more unreal to her than the creations of her own brain.

She loved Betty with the love that is born of dependence, for Betty exercised a half maternal care over the sister of whose beauty she was so proud, and who seemed to her simple soul so far superior to herself and to any of her neighbours.

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That Bryda should have the best of everything was a recognised fact with Betty—the best clothes, the brightest ribbons, the choicest food.

Many a time had Betty stood as a shield between their Aunt Dorothy and the spoiled child, her sister, and skilfully covered any of Bryda's delinquencies by the garment which loving hands know so well how to throw over those who are dearest to them.

Betty was very pretty, but she had no acknowledged admirers, while there was not a young man in the district who did not show signs of adoration for Bryda—mute signs, perhaps, but not the less sincere—a flower presented as she passed under the porch of the village church, or a fairing brought from Bristol, left with no words on the stone seat under the porch.

But none had dared to make a formal declaration of love, except Jack Henderson, perhaps, who, on his not frequent visits to his old home at the Mendips, found Bryda more and more irresistible, and gave her reason to know, as at this time, that the sight of her was indispensable to his

happiness. Poor Jack, he was to find out that the very temptation he put in Bryda's way—to take flight to the busy, toiling city, now lying at the distance of some miles below them, wrapt in the gathering blue haze of the May evening—was to widen and not lessen the distance between them.

'Well,' he said, drawing his huge ungainly form from the soft cushion of moss, where the daisies and golden cistus flowers had shut their eyes for the night, 'well, take my word for it, you'll find a lot of things you care for in Bristol, and I tell you, if I were you, I should write to Madam Lambert at once. You can send it by the carrier, tied up in brown paper. He baits his horse in Corn Street, close to Lambert's office, and he'll take it direct to Dowry Square. You'll get heaps of things you want. Books—why, bless you, Bristol is a mighty learned place. The folks there do nothing else than write histories, and read till they are blind. You'll get a lot of things there, and so you'll say when you are once there.'

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'Bryda, Bryda,' it was Betty's voice calling in the orchard, 'Bryda, pray come; Aunt Dorothy is as cross as two sticks.'

'Is that anything new?' Bryda said, with a little laugh, as she sprang to her feet, waved her hand to Jack Henderson, and disappeared under the blossoming apple trees. He longed to follow her, but as she did not ask him to do so, he turned towards his home two miles away.

That night, when Betty was quietly sleeping in the white-curtained tent-bed which the sisters shared, Bryda went to the lattice and opened it gently, and looked out into the calm of the summer night. The old-fashioned garden below sent up from its bushes of lavender and rosemary, and sweet-scented thyme and wallflower, a dewy fragrance. A honeysuckle just coming into full flower clasped the mullion of the old stone framework by the lattice with clinging tendrils. Above, the stars looked down, giving the sense of the infinite and eternal, which will strike at times the dullest heart with awe and reverence. The sounds were subtle and scarcely defined. The rustle of a bird in the nest, where she was guarding her newly-fledged young ones, a whisper of the breeze faintly stirring the leaves of a silver birch, whose white trunk shone out in the dim twilight, for the days were nearing midsummer and May was just melting into June.

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'Yes,' Bryda said, 'I might gain much, but should I not lose more? And yet there is life, life in the city, and here it is sameness, and life, real life, is scarce felt. I wonder how it will be.'

Bryda was about to close the lattice when her ear caught sounds more audible than the faint whisper of the breeze and the rustle of the leaves. Voices low and angry came from the kitchen, which was below her window.

The voices grew louder, then a door was sharply shut, and Flick, the big watch-dog, gave a low growl and the gate of the farmyard clicked again and again as it swung violently backwards and forwards before it finally closed.

The dwellers in farmhouses a hundred and twenty years ago on the height of the Mendips were early to bed and early to rise. It was therefore unusual to hear anyone coming or going between nine and ten o'clock.

'I wonder who it was?' Bryda thought. 'And there is grandfather coming up to bed. How slowly he comes, and—what can be the matter?'

For, as the heavy footsteps reached the landing by the girl's bedroom, there was a pause, and then a prolonged sigh, which was more like a groan.

Bryda stood transfixed, her hand on the latch of the door, which she had not courage to lift.

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Another heavy sigh, and then the slow footsteps were heard getting fainter and fainter as the old man passed along the passage to his room.

Then all was quiet, and Bryda, still haunted with the fear of something unusual and strange, lay down by Betty's side and was soon asleep.

How often some cherished wish when fulfilled comes to us, not as the phantom of delight, as we pictured it, but with a grave and sober mien which makes us scarcely recognise that the desire which is granted is 'the tree of life,' for the fruit too often has a bitter taste, or ere we can grasp it is turned to dust and ashes. Bryda's longings were to be satisfied, but not as she had imagined. The way was to be made plain for her departure from Bishop's Farm; the home of her childhood and early girlhood was to be hers no longer.

Her grandfather went up to his bed that night a ruined man.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE SQUIRE.

The next morning the poor old farmer came down to the plentiful breakfast prepared by Dorothy Burrow looking ten years older than when he had left the kitchen the night before. He refused all food, and sat in the settle by the fire, holding his thin hands over the smouldering embers, and shuddering every now and then and moaning to himself.

'You ain't cold now, father?' Dorothy bawled in his ear. 'It is hot enow in the fields, even now, I can tell you. Do you want a bigger fire—eh?'

The old man shook his head.

'What *do* you want then? Don't sit there as if you was crazy—sighing and muttering.'

'Here, grandfather,' Betty said, approaching the settle and sitting down by her grandfather's side, 'here. I've put a drop of rum in the new milk, now take a draught of it, do, and you will feel quite spry and lively. Come!'

Betty always took a common sense view of things, and she added,—

'You can't feel well if you don't break your fast.'

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She succeeded in making the old man swallow half the contents of the thick-lipped mug. Then she put another faggot on the fire, not heeding Dorothy's remark that they should all be smothered with heat, and sat down on the bench at the table, by Bryda's side, to discuss her own breakfast with a keen appetite.

Bryda, who was thinking over the loud, angry voices she had heard on the previous night, connected her grandfather's appearance with some mysterious visitor, who had evidently left the house in anger. So she did not do justice to the particular griddle cake, done to a turn, which Betty had put on her plate.

'Something is wrong,' she whispered to Betty. 'I know there is. I wish we knew what it is.'

They were not left long in doubt. As soon as the scraping of the heavy boots of the farm servants was heard on the brick floor of the back kitchen, where they took their meals, and the benches pushed back by the general servant of the farm, Mr Palmer spoke, jerking his thumb in the direction of the open door.

'Shut yonder door,' he said, 'and come here all of you.'

The girls obeyed, Bryda and Betty seating themselves on either side of their grandfather, while Dorothy Burrow stood before him, her stout red arms uncovered, her elbows stuck on either side of her thick waist, and the frills of her big calico cap blown back from her stolid face.

'Well,' she said, 'what's up, father?'

The old man shook his head, and thumped his fist irritably.

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'Didn't I say I was going to tell you summat?' he said. 'Hold your tongue till I've done it. Years ago,' he began, 'I had a son—your father, Biddy and Bet. You don't remember him—how should you. He and your poor silly mother died when you were babes.'

'I remember him well enow,' Dorothy began; 'I had cause for he disgraced the family.'

'Hold you tongue, Doll.'

'Yes, Aunt Dorothy, do be quiet,' Bryda said in a trembling voice.

'Well, he went wrong, very wrong, and I wanted to get him out of the country, to escape the justices. It was a big sum, and I borrowed it of Squire Bayfield up Binegar way. I put my name to a paper that I'd be surety it should be paid on demand. The old Squire was a kind-hearted chap, and he never pressed me. I spoke to him last fall, when he was out with the beagles, as stout and as strong as ever, I thought. I told him times were bad, and the crops scarce, and I had lost a lot of sheep in the hard winter. And says he, "All right, I'll not come down on you." So I was easy in my mind, and if he had lived it would have been all right; but he dropped down dead last Candlemas, and his son, who has come back from foreign parts, says he will have the cash or sell me up.'

'How much is it?' Betty asked, with white trembling lips.

'Three hundred pounds. I paid interest, I did, but this chap, curse him, says he will have the lump sum or he'll put the bailiffs in.'

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'Are you bound to pay him the sum?' Bryda asked. 'I expect not.'

'Yes, the paper says, or heirs of his body.'

'Ask a lawyer about it. Ask Mr Lambert,' Betty said.

'It ain't no good. The young fellow was here blustering last night. He says he is in want of cash, and he must have it. That's the long and the short of it. No, there's no hope. So the stock must go, and the bits of furniture that have stood here since I was no higher than the table.'

'Lor!' the old man said, wandering back into the past, 'I can see my mother now a-polishing and rubbing yonder bureau till I could see my face in it. Well, well, it's not for myself I grieve, it's for you children.'

Bryda had risen, and stood with one hand on her grandfather's shoulder and the other grasping the carved elbow of the old oak settle. Her lips were firmly shut, and her whole bearing determined, almost defiant. Presently she said,—

'I never knew before it was as bad as this. I never knew my father was what Aunt Dorothy says—a disgrace. But did *you* know it, Betty?'

'I guessed something, not much; but, Bryda, it is all over now.'

'All over,' the girl said, with flashing eyes, 'all over! Such a stain can never be wiped away.' Then, with a sudden impulse of pity and tenderness, Bryda stooped, and kissing the furrowed brow of the old man, she said,—

'Ah, poor grandfather!'

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'He was such a fine, handsome boy, was our Phil. There was not one to match him—straight as a dart, and that strong, he could get the better of the strongest in the wrestling matches. Oh, he was a fine fellow was Phil! To see him on horseback was a treat.'

'What did he do? I wish to know now, grandfather.'

But the old father shook his head.

'It is so long ago, now—near nineteen years. Yes, nineteen years. Betty was born just after, and her mother died of a broken heart, they said. Hearts don't break.'

'Do you know, Aunt Dorothy, what my father did?'

'Well, if you must know—he forged a cheque. If he hadn't been got off to America he would have been—hung. Father scraped up a hundred pounds, and sent him packing, and borrowed the three hundred to pay the man Phil had robbed. That's the long and short of it. I wasn't here, but that's what father told me, and I suppose it's gospel truth. It's over and done with now, and no one need have been the wiser if that fool, young Bayfield, had not come and stormed at father. Shameful, I call it.' Then Dorothy threw her apron over her face, and leaving the kitchen, called Betty to come and look after the butter. 'It is churning day,' she said, 'and to spoil pounds of good butter won't mend matters.'

Betty obeyed, and Bryda was left with her grandfather.

'Is my father dead?' she asked, putting her mouth close to the old man's ear.

'Dead? Yes. I never heard a word of him since the ship sailed from Bristol one dark night. I put him aboard. No one knew. When I got back there was Bet wailing. She was born—and your poor silly mother died. Poor thing! poor thing! She said, "I am glad to die, take care of my babes." And I said I would, and so I did—eh, Biddy?'

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'Yes, yes, grandfather; and now we will take care of you. I'll go and earn my keep at any rate; but first I shall go and see Mr Bayfield.'

'No, no; it's like a lamb running into the jaws of a lion. He will only storm at you. There's nought to be done but sell up, and pay the cash down. But I'll do it myself. He sha'n't send his fellows here to knock about the things. The stock must go. The sheep will fetch summat—and there's two fine young heifers, beside the milch cows.'

Three hundred pounds looked an enormous sum in the eyes of the Somersetshire maiden, but she was determined to make an appeal to the hard-hearted young Squire.

Binegar was some miles from the hamlet of Upton, where Bishop's Farm stood; but Bryda was well used to long rambles over hill and dale, and she ran up to her room full of her scheme.

'I will tell no one—no, not even Bet,' she thought. 'They shall see for once I can be of use. And then I will go to Bristol and see Mr Lambert, and tell him I will come and be the useful girl about the place his mother wants.'

Bryda took some pains with her appearance, as she stood before a little glass, which gave but a distorted reflection of the fair face which gazed into it.

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Bryda exchanged her blue homespun skirt for a red camlet, a material then much used for women's dress. It was made with short elbow sleeves, and the bodice cut low. Over this Bryda pinned a white kerchief, confining the ends at the waist with a silver buckle which had belonged to her mother. Then she tied back her bright hair, which was the colour of a cornfield rippling in the sunshine, with a blue ribbon, and perched on the top of her pretty head a bonnet of Dunstable straw which would have disguised most faces so ugly was its shape. But Bryda's face could not lend itself to any disguise. Her luminous eyes seemed to shine the brighter under the shadow of the peak. Her clear rose-and-white complexion was set off by the clumsy knot of faded ribbon strings which passed under the high crown of the bonnet was tied under Bryda's dimpled chin, and defined its beautiful outline.

Thus equipped, Bryda stepped quietly downstairs, and went out at the back door of the farm.

In the yard, on a barrel turned up for a seat, sat Silas the shepherd.

He was cutting huge slices of coarse bread with a clasp knife, and crowding them into his mouth, with morsels of Cheddar cheese.

'I want to take one of the dogs for a walk, Silas. Which can you spare?'

'Neither,' was the short response.

'Oh, let me have one, Silas. Let me have Flick. Here, Flick, will you come?'

'Where be thee going?'

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'For a long walk, that's all.'



'You'll find it nearly broiling 'cross the hill. The old ewe died early this morning. There's another loss for the master. But, lor', he's dazed like. If I told him the whole flock was dead he wouldn't care. Master is queerish this morning.'

'He is not well,' Bryda said. 'Don't trouble him, Silas, if you can help, and let me have Flick.'

Flick was only waiting the word of command from his master, with anxious upturned nose and eyes scanning Silas's rugged face.

'Get along with you,' was the not very gracious dismissal.

And the old dog leaped for joy, gave his low, deep-mouthed bay, scuttled round the yard twice, sending two sedate cats clambering up the old wall, with its high lichen-covered coping, where they turned at bay, with swelled tails and arched backs, to spit at their enemy.

So bright was the sky, and so full of life was everything around her, that as Bryda tripped lightly on her way she had almost forgotten what was her errand.

The church clock of Dundry struck ten as she passed. The village was quiet, almost deserted.

The people were out at their daily toil on the hills, and only a few white-headed children were making dust pies by the churchyard gate, two or three women, with babies in their arms, gossiping at their cottage doors.

'Where's she off to, I wonder? That's Peter Palmer's girl, she is mighty proud, and never passes good-morning or the time of day, not she.'

'Pride must have a fall,' said another. 'Look at her in her fine red gown as if 'twere a Fair day.'

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And then the women hushed their squalling babies with somewhat rough vehemence and turned to other subjects.

Bryda was a little doubtful of the nearest road to Rock House when she came to the place where four roads met.

The old sign-post had lost one of its arms, and the lettering on another was defaced. Bryda knew Rock House was several miles nearer Dundry than the town of Binegar, but she could not feel sure which of the four roads that looked so much alike was the right one.

As she stood hesitating, a young man, with a gun under his arm, leaped over the hedge into the road.

Flick growled as he approached, and Bryda, putting her hand through his collar, said,—

'Down, Flick.'

Then, addressing the young man, she said,—

'Please, sir, can you tell me the way to Rock House, Squire Bayfield's?' Then she added demurely, 'I have business with him.'

'Well,' was the reply, 'the Squire is a lucky man, that's all I have to say.'

Bryda's colour rose, for this young man's gaze was a little too openly admiring.

She curtsied, with a grace which was very different from the low bob of the country maiden generally, and said,—

'I beg you, sir, to be so good as to tell me which road I am to take, right or left.'

'It's right ahead,' was the reply; 'I am going the same way. Your dog is not a very pleasant companion; he looks as if he would fly at my throat if he could.'

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'He knows his manners, sir,' Bryda said, 'and he will not fly at anyone without reason. Down!' she said, 'quiet, Flick.'

This, with a pat on his shaggy head, was taken as a sign that Bryda's companion was not the foe Flick had at first imagined, and he walked gravely by her side, as if unconscious of a third person's presence.

Bryda volunteered no conversation, and for some minutes there was silence. Presently the man asked,—

'Have you any acquaintance with Squire Bayfield?'

'No, sir; not with the young Squire. He has been in foreign parts for years.'

'Yes, that's true; he came home a week ago to find his father dead and buried, and the old place a ruin for him to build up, and money short to do it.'

Again there was silence, till a pair of large gates came in sight and a long avenue of firs leading up to a house, of which the low front was seen at the end of the drive.

'Is this Squire Bayfield's house, sir?'

'Yes, and I have business there also, so we will walk up to the door together.'

Bryda hesitated, and then said,—

'I have business with the Squire, sir; but it is of a private nature, and I must see him alone.'

'That I'll warrant you shall do, madam,' and insensibly the man's manner became more respectful.

This was no country maiden to whom he might offer any familiarity, praise her beauty, or rally

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her on her charms. Bryda had always about her that innate purity and refinement, which acts as a shield against the shafts of impertinent admiration which men of a certain type in the eighteenth century were apt to offer to win favour with the belles of town or country.

A short flight of stone steps led to the front entrance of the house, and here the young man paused. After a moment's hesitation he opened the door, and a parcel of dogs of all shapes and sizes came rushing out, whining and capering with delight.

Immediately Flick stood at bay, and a scrimmage seemed imminent, when the young man took a short whip from a peg in the hall, and thrashing right and left, with a great many oaths and curses, exclaimed, 'The brutes—the underbred brutes,' as the dogs went whining and yelping back to the place whence they came.

'Now, madam,' the young man said, after apologising for this uproar, 'let me show you into the only habitable room in the place where you can have your desired interview with the Squire.'

He pushed open a door as he spoke, and holding it for Bryda to pass, closed it again, and left her alone.

Bryda was in the old library, which was full of deed boxes and papers. Books lined the walls, and a big chair at the farther end by the bay window was the magistrate's seat, where Mr Bayfield had, after the custom of the time, tried prisoners for poaching, petty larceny, and other offences.

Bryda felt frightened, and yet gathered up all her courage to meet Mr Bayfield when he appeared. [Pg 24]

The summer sunshine, lying on the wide expanse of open country, did not touch this gloomy room, which looked full north, and only caught a gleam of brightness later in the day for a short space.

Bryda walked to the window and looked out. Flick was lying on the terrace, his nose on his big ungainly paws, his ears pricked up—on guard, and watching for a return of the yapping crew which the young man's whip had so summarily dismissed.

The aspect of everything was dreary and cheerless. The dark firs, the decayed urns, which flanked either side of the stone steps, the rough terrace of loose stones, the long grass of the pleasance below, where a few flowers were bravely struggling to show themselves under difficulties.

'What a dreary place!' Bryda exclaimed. 'But, oh, I wish the Squire would come. I wish Betty was here; but I must make the best of it now I have come here. No gentleman would be cruel to an old man like grandfather, and—'

She stopped, for the door opened and the same man whom she had met on the road came in. He made a low bow, and advancing, said,—

'The Squire, otherwise David Bayfield, is at your service, madam. I pray you be seated, and let me ask you to take such refreshment as this miserable house can afford. I have ordered it to be brought.'

But Bryda stood like a fawn at bay, and said with all the calmness she could command,—

'I do not understand, sir. I am at a loss to know whether—'

'I am the Squire? Yes, fair lady, I have the misfortune to bear that ill-starred title, and I beg you to be seated and open out your business.' [Pg 25]

But Bryda, though trembling from head to foot, repressed all outward sign of fear, and still stood, her hand on the back of the old carved oak chair, which, when she had turned from the window, she had grasped at the entrance of the young Squire.

'My business, sir, will not detain you long,' she said. 'My poor grandfather, Mr Palmer, to save a son, *my father*'—this was said with infinite sadness—'yes, my father, from disgrace, borrowed a sum of money, a very large sum, from the old Squire. He never pressed him for payment, and indeed it is doubtful that he ever expected it. I came to ask you, sir, to be pitiful, and give my grandfather time, at least. He has had years of poor crops, and many losses of stock. He is already behind hand. If you press him, as I heard you did last night, you will ruin him, you will kill him,' she added with vehemence—'yes, you will kill an old man, who is over seventy, and,' clasping her hands, 'make us all wretched and miserable.'

'Madam,' David Bayfield began, coming nearer, while Bryda, with the shield of the old magistrate's chair before her, felt secure, 'madam, I feel like a poacher on trial, you the judge. Listen to a prisoner pleading; I pray you, be merciful. You speak of ruin—the money I claim by right of your respected grandfather it is absolutely necessary I should have. I hold the note of hand. I showed it to the old man last night. It sets forth that the money is payable on demand to my father, or heirs of his body. *I must have* the money.'

Bryda looked straight into the face before her, and with flashing eyes, drawing her small figure up to its full height, she said,— [Pg 26]

'Very good, sir; I need detain you no longer, but return whence I came from my bootless errand. I do not envy you, sir; it is always better to be the injured than the injurer. Permit me to pass, sir, as I must lose no time.'

The door opened at this moment, and an old man-servant came shuffling in, a tray in his hand, loaded with a silver goblet of spiced wine and a few wheaten cakes. He eyed Bryda curiously, and

placing the tray on a small table covered with dust, he put a chair before it, and was retiring, when Bryda seized the moment for escape. She came swiftly round from the chair, and before the servant could close the door she had gone out into the hall.

'Nay, madam, I pray you, do not leave my house thus. It will put me in the position of an inhospitable brute. I beseech you take some refreshment ere you depart.'

'I did not come here for refreshment, sir,' Bryda said. 'I came in the hope of finding a merciful gentleman, who would not hasten an old man to his grave by cruelty and hard usage. This hope is at an end. There is nothing left for me but to repent I ever came hither.'

'But, my dear madam, hearken. I would fain win your favour. I am not one to make fair speeches, but I am not cruel. Right is right, and—'

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'Mercy is mercy,' Bryda said. 'Good-day to you, sir. Flick, Flick!'

The dog was at her side in an instant. He gave an ominous growl as the Squire tried to follow, and then Mr Bayfield stood like a statue on the top step of the cracked flight and watched Bryda's light figure as it passed under the sombre firs, Flick striding at her side as she walked swiftly, at a pace which was nearly running, towards the white gates, and then vanished out of sight.

The Squire clenched his teeth and muttered a string of oaths, turned into the house, swallowed the contents of the silver mug at one draught, and then sat down before the table, with its many pigeon-holes and secret drawers, to curse his stupidity in allowing Bryda to depart without another attempt to detain her.

She was so entirely different from any woman he had met. There was a mingling of dignity and sweetness which he was not slow to recognise. Her beauty was not her only attraction. He read in her clear eyes purity, and strength of purpose in her round, determined chin, with its slightly upward curve. David Bayfield felt ashamed of himself as he had never felt before, and unable to settle to any business matters, he went to the stable, saddled one of the horses, which had been eating off their heads there since his father's death, and galloped at a furious pace to Wells to consult his man of business there as to what steps should be taken.

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## CHAPTER III

### AN ELEGY.

Bryda had just reached the cross roads where she had met the Squire when a heavy lumbering cart came slowly in sight, which she recognised as Mrs Henderson's. If Jack was driving it, she would at once tell him what had happened; but Jack was not likely to be driving at that snail pace.

It was Jack, however, indulging in a slumber as the old horse, who knew his way in the district as well or better than his master, plodded soberly along to his destination.

'Oh! it is Jack!' Bryda exclaimed. 'Jack, Jack, do stop!'

Jack Henderson opened his sleepy eyes and called 'Wo, wo!' to the horse.

'Oh, Jack, will you take me up, I am so tired and so—'

Jack brought his huge frame down into the dirty road with a mighty thud, and said,—

'Why, Bryda, what's up? What are you doing here? Lor! don't take on like this,' for poor Bryda's self-possession suddenly forsook her, and she began to cry helplessly, like a tired and frightened child.

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'There, get up,' Jack said, 'and I'll take you home, but for mercy's sake don't cry.'

Bryda climbed up the steps of the waggon, and Flick, looking highly satisfied with the arrangement, rubbed his nose against Jack's leg, and whined as if to say, 'I know she will be safe now,' waited with his red tongue lolling out of his big mouth, panting hard after the manner of dogs on a hot day, till Jack gathered the slack reins in his hand and mounted to the seat by Bryda's side.

'Well,' he said, 'I was amazed to see you. Why, you are six miles from Dundry. Come along home with me, and—'

'No, no; I must get back. If you will wait I will tell you everything—and, Jack, I want to go to Bristol, to Madam Lambert's. That will be a help. I am no use at the farm, Aunt Dolly is always telling me so; and now, now they will have a hard fight to get through at all. Grandfather has got to sell up all the stock to pay a debt.'

'Nonsense, get along, I don't believe it,' Jack said. 'What do you mean?'

'What I say.'

And then Bryda poured the whole story into Jack's sympathetic ears, which he received with sundry ejaculations, which were anything but complimentary to Squire Bayfield.

But Jack, however sympathetic, had only one thing to advise.

'Don't pay the money to the young scoundrel, don't you do it, and go to Bristol and get out of all the bother.'

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'It is not that I want to get out of the bother, Jack,' Bryda said. 'How can you think so? I want to help by going away. Why, yesterday, I wanted to go for my own pleasure, now I *must* go to try and help. Perhaps Madam Lambert will give me wages in time, then I can be a real help, and send Bet some money, and get comforts for poor grandfather.'

'You must get comforts for yourself first,' Jack said.

He was so pleased that his favourite scheme of getting Bryda to Bristol was to be carried out that he forgot everything else.

'I am going back Monday,' he said, 'and you can come along with me.'

'No,' Bryda said decidedly, as Jack drew a little nearer to her. 'No, Jack, I shall go before Monday. I shall try to make Madam Lambert take me. She is a sort of relation, you know; and if she won't, well, I must try to get into a haberdasher's shop—or be a servant—or—'

'You stop that,' Jack said. 'I'll never see you a servant while I'm alive. You are too good and too beautiful to be a servant.'

Jack laid emphasis on the last word, with a sharp slap of the whip on the drowsy old horse's fat back. Not that Jack Henderson wished to hasten on his way, he would have been content to jog along thus with Bryda at his side for days. To this simple-hearted young man whom Nature had designed for a farmer, but whose ambitious mother had willed that he should be a silversmith and jeweller, in the fond hope that he might succeed his childless uncle in his Bristol business, Bryda was an idol at whose shrine he worshipped, and whose smile sent him on his way rejoicing, while her frown, or a sharp word from her, made him miserable, and conscious that he was too dull and stupid and clumsy ever to win her as his wife.

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Jack's education had been of the scantiest. It had been begun at a village dame school, and finished at the Wells Grammar School. It is to be doubted if any school could have raised Jack Henderson above the ordinary type of the Somersetshire farmer's son. He had shut his Latin primer and his English grammar when he left Wells, and had never opened a book since, except his prayer book on Sundays, and then he could scarcely spell out the verse of the psalms, and shouted Tate and Brady to the accompaniment of scraping fiddle and trombone in the gallery of the church, with a refreshing disregard of words, though he supplied deficiencies by mystic utterances which filled in doubtful passages and could be interpreted according to the wishes of the hearer.

Such was Jack Henderson, with his true Somersetshire dialect, where 'Z was, and is still preferred before 'S, making the speech of the good people on the Mendips somewhat difficult to understand.

But beneath Jack Henderson's rough exterior beat a true and honest heart. He was upright in word and deed. Shams were hateful to him, and he would not try to seem other than he was for all the gold and silver in his uncle's shop in Corn Street.

He set Bryda down close by the entrance to Bishop's Farm, and said,—

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'Look ye here, Bryda, I'll jog off to Bristol to-morrow, and take your letter myself to Madam Lambert. You put it under the loose stone in yon wall, and I'll be here at daybreak and trudge off. I'll bring an answer back in the evening. Come, will this suit you—eh?'

Bryda had already jumped down into the road, and Jack was standing, with the reins in his hand, anxiously peering into her face.

'Eh, Bryda, will that suit you?'

'Thank you, Jack. Yes, I will have the letter ready. But will your mother be angry?'

'Lor!' why should she? But if she is, it's no odds to me. I say, Bryda, give me—'

But before Jack could finish his sentence Bryda was gone.

She found things at the farm going on much as usual.

The butter was made, the noonday dinner cleared away, Dorothy 'cleaned up' for the afternoon, and seated at the table cutting up some bits of old printed calico for a patchwork quilt.

When she caught sight of Bryda at the open door she called out,—

'Where have you been to? Dinner is done an hour ago. P'r'aps you have had yours at Mistress Henderson's?' This with a sniff of contempt. 'You are mighty partial to these Hendersons, I know I can't abide them.'

Instead of taking any notice of these remarks, Bryda asked,—

'Where's grandfather?'

'At his business, of course. Another lamb is dead, and another ewe past hope. Everything is

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gone crooked. The last brood of chicks are dying fast as they can. It's all along with Goody Fenton's evil eye. I said so when she sat in the porch Lady-day. I told you you was feeding a bad old woman, and I was right.'

Bryda gave a little incredulous laugh.

'I should feed her again,' she said, 'if she came this way, poor miserable old creature!'

'Wicked old wretch, she'll end in the ducking stool, and serve her right. I'd like to be by and see it, that's all.'

Bryda's imaginative nature had a vein of superstition in it. She was not altogether sure that witchcraft had died out of the land, and she rather liked to hear the stories of elves and fairies, good spirits which made those dark rings on the turf by their dances, when all the rest of the world were asleep.

There was a fascination for her in the notion of a world of little mysterious fairies, who cradled themselves in the deep blue bells of the campanules, and lay in the heart of the tall white lilies, powdering their airy garments with gold, and flying through the air of the still summer nights on the backs of the shy, spotted moths which blundered over the moor, when none were there to see, in chase of a will-of-the-wisp, whose lantern, darting hither and thither, lured them on. She stood thinking for a moment over all the run of ill luck to which Dorothy referred, and then her thoughts went back to the cause of all this trouble, a crime of which she had never known before—her father's sin.

'The sins of the fathers are visited on the children.' Was it to be so in her case and Betty's—Betty, whose wailing cry struck her grandfather's ear when he returned from his sad errand at Bristol, and had parted from his only son for ever? [Pg 34]

Then there came over Bryda that strange regret for the ignorance of yesterday, as bliss when compared with the bitter knowledge of to-day. But with the knowledge came tender regret, the longing to remedy the evil and efface the stain of disgrace from the name she bore.

She said no more to Dorothy, whose huge scissors clipped the square of gay stuff lying before her as if to make the gaudy quilt was the one object of her life, but she ran upstairs to the bedroom she shared with Betty, and found her there, as she expected, exchanging her working gown, with its large apron, for what was called an afternoon frock, with a dainty kerchief and white apron.

'I have seen him,' Bryda exclaimed.

'Seen who?' Bet asked.

'The Squire. He is as hard as nails. He will have the money.'

'Why, Bryda, how did you get to the house?'

'I'll tell you, Bet; but,' she said, 'do get me a bit of something to eat and drink. I am so famished.'

'I wondered what had become of you, but I kept you a currant dumpling in the oven, and a bit of hash. I'll go and fetch it.'

'Yes, I would rather have it here.'

However distressed the young are, and however perplexed, they do not lose their appetite.

Bryda ate everything Betty brought her with keen relish, and drank a cup of cider. Then she said,—'I feel fit for anything now, and now I will tell you the whole story, and what I have resolved to do.' [Pg 35]

Betty was a sympathetic listener, but she did not quite see why Bryda should go to Bristol.

'No one wants me here.'

'I want you,' Betty said, 'and if trouble is coming, and the stock sold, and that dreadful young Squire comes here, I shall be frightened without you.'

'He won't come here any more, Bet; he has made up his mind, and he will stick to it, and I want to hear what Mr Lambert says about it all. I suppose it is lawful, if the paper was signed by grandfather, but I should like to tell the whole story to a man who knows about such things. Now, I am going to write my letter to Madam Lambert, and I shall be off to Bristol before the end of the week.'

There was in Bryda's determination a dash of romance as well as of keen desire to do something to help her grandfather in his sore strait.

Of course it may be questioned whether Betty, pursuing the even tenor of her way, and letting nothing interfere with her household work, was not more in the line of duty than her beautiful sister. But the two sisters were, as often happens, so entirely different in character that one cannot be judged by the same rules as the other. The impulsive enthusiast and the matter-of-fact, practical labourer in the field see things from a different standpoint.

In this case there was no division of heart between the two.

Betty believed in Bryda, and had for the whole of her short life looked on her as superior to herself, and to any of the few acquaintances of their own age whom the sisters knew, and she was quite content to take the subordinate place and sit at the feet of her beautiful sister. [Pg 36]

Betty fetched an inkhorn and two quills from a cupboard by their bed, and placed them on a

somewhat rickety table, where Bryda's few books lay—books well worn and studied, books which fed her romance—two volumes of the *Rambler* and *Spectator*, Pope's verses, and last, but not least, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

On the style of these English classics Bryda had formed hers, and thus her expressions were somewhat quaint, and yet she was free from the stilted and flowery mannerism of the women of her time who had received a superficial education.

Bryda might be said to be self-educated. Her schooling had been of the narrow type afforded by a 'decayed gentlewoman' in a neighbouring large village, who had undertaken to instruct her pupils in reading, writing, and arithmetic, with fine needlework and the rudiments of French.

These rudiments seldom advanced beyond the auxiliary verbs and the pronouns, but Miss Darcy still kept school at Pensford, and spoke with pride of her late talented pupil Miss Palmer.

Bryda wrote her letter on a sheet of blue Bath post, and folding it, sealed it with a pink wafer, and addressed it to 'Mrs Lambert, Dowry Square, Bristol,' and wrote in the corner, 'By the hand of Mr J. Henderson.'

In the evening, when everyone was going or gone to bed, Bryda stepped out and placed the letter under the loose coping-stone of the wall, and then with a sense of relief went through the dewy orchard and out on the moor, where the purple hues of evening had gathered, and indulged in those castles in the air which were so dear to her.

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'Perhaps I shall find ways in Bristol to make myself known. If that strange boy gets his verses printed in *Felix Farley's Journal* I may as well try to get mine there. Then people will ask who is Beta—for I shall call myself Beta. I know that is the Greek for B—and it sounds pretty. I have many verses in my old school book. Miss Darcy said they were elegant—at least the one I called "Farewell to Miss Darcy."

'I am sure I could write some verses about the dead lamb. Let me try, so many words which are appropriate would rhyme.

'Dear little lambkin lying on the grass  
So stiff and cold while strangers careless pass,  
Never again to frisk amongst the flowers,  
Never again to skip in vernal bowers.  
Oh, little lambkin, death is hard for thee,  
Though many a weary wight would gladly flee  
From all the trouble of this mortal life,  
And bid Farewell to grief, and pain, and strife.

'Yet what is Death? We get no sure reply  
As cold and stiff like thee our dear ones lie.  
Say, whither does the spirit seek its home  
When all the battle's o'er, the victory won?  
Ah! whither are they flown?'

Bryda came to a full stop.

A soft breeze wandering through the orchard gently caressed her hair, making its own soft music as it whispered to the flowers and buds that the day was done and that all things must end.

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'I must go in now,' the girl said, starting up. 'I will write those lines to-morrow, and take them with me to Bristol. I hope Jack will not forget to come for the letter. But I know he won't. Poor old Jack, he is kind and good, if he is stupid. But everyone can't be clever. The young Squire looked as if he knew a good deal; and he was very handsome. Though I hate him, I can't help seeing he is handsome, but cruel and hard—yes, hard as nails, as poor grandfather said. I might as well try to soften that big bit of rock.'

Then Bryda let the gate of the orchard close behind her, and went towards the house.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE LETTER DELIVERED.

Jack Henderson was up before the sun the next morning. He had thought it better not to take a horse and cart from his mother's stable, but trust to his own powers of locomotion.

He made his way across the meadows, where the cowslips hung their graceful heads, yet heavy with the dew of the short summer night. As the light strengthened in the east, and lines of pink

and gold announced the approach of the sun, the birds began to sing in full chorus. A lark soared high above Jack's head, and lost itself in the blue ether in an ecstasy of rejoicing.

The sleepy cows raised their clumsy forms and began to chew the grass. A company of rooks, in a black line, winged their way, cawing as they went, to seek a breakfast for their young ones, yet in their nests in the mass of elms which stood dark against the sky in the direction of Binegar.

From afar came the gentle coo of the wood-pigeon, and the bleating of the lambs in a fold, awaiting the shepherd's voice to go forth with their mothers to try their newly acquired strength on the soft turf of the uplands.

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Jack's honest heart was filled with an emotion he could not have put into words. He only knew that Bryda reigned there supreme. All these sights and sounds of beauty, and the youth of the day and of the year, were in harmony with his love for her, though he was only conscious that it was a fine morning and he was glad to be astir early to serve her.

When Jack Henderson reached the Bishop's Farm no one seemed to be stirring. He approached the wall which skirted the farmyard very cautiously, and lifting the loose stone of the coping, found the letter. He placed it carefully in the large pocket of his long buff waistcoat, which reached far below the waist of his blue coat, and hid the upper part of the short corduroys, which were met at the knee by coarse stockings, and fastened by large metal buttons.

For a moment Jack paused. He looked up at the old farm, and at the open casement of the room where he knew Bryda and Betty slept.

His heart beat with mingled feelings of hope and fear.

'If any harm should come to her from going to Bristol I shall have had a hand in it. Yet it's what she wants, and I have done it for her sake. Oh, bless her!' he continued, taking off his hat and gazing at the window. 'I say, God bless her, and keep her safe!'

And Bryda, all unconscious of this benediction, murmured in her sleep the last lines of the stanza of her elegy on the lamb which she had composed the night before, and which was interrupted by the vain hunt for a rhyme to 'won.'

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'When all the battle's o'er, the victory won,  
Ah! whither are they flown?'

Bryda awoke with the question on her lips to which she could find no rhyme and no answer.

Jack Henderson knew his way about Bristol, and found himself in Dowry Square just as the deep-toned cathedral clock struck seven from afar.

The townspeople were not so early in their rising as those in the country and Dowry Square was wrapt in repose when Jack Henderson entered it. The blinds in the upper windows, and the shutters, with their heart-shaped holes, were still closed.

A door in one of the houses opened quickly, and a woman came out in a large frilled nightcap and a big apron. She had a broom in her hand, and began to raise a great dust by sweeping out the entrance and the dirty steps. She watched Jack curiously as he knocked at the door of one of the opposite houses twice and three times with no apparent effect.

'You may knock there till you are tired. Nobody is stirring there yet, I'll lay a wager. Folks who keep no women servants always lie late.'

Jack only nodded in reply to this, and knocking once more, leaned against the side of the door and resigned himself to waiting and patience.

Presently footsteps were heard and the bolts withdrawn and the key turned in the lock.

The face that appeared as the door was partially opened was a remarkable one. The eyes that met Jack's were literally blazing with anger, and the mass of hair tossed back from the wide white brow gave the appearance of a young lion at bay.

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'Curse you, Jack Henderson, for knocking like that at this time of the day.'

'Keep a civil tongue in your head, Tom. Time of day, indeed! You ought to be up and half-way to the office by this time. I know Bristol folks are lie-a-beds, but I didn't think past seven o'clock was thought early even by them.'

'Well, what do you want? Out with it. Dogs are loth to quit their kennels when they can dream of the game they never catch when awake. Come, Henderson, I sha'n't parley any longer. I suppose you are come to beg, like a poltroon, to be taken back to that precious office in Corn Street. Get Lambert to intercede for you—eh?'

'I'm not dismissed that I know of. It's nothing of the sort, so hold your tongue; but I have got a letter here for Madam Lambert, and I want to see it in safe custody before I leave it.'

'Well, hand it over.'

'You swear to give it to madam, and say I'll call back for an answer in the afternoon.'

'Who is it from?'

'Ah, that's another matter. I sha'n't tell you; but I say, Tom, if ever you set eyes on the writer, remember what I tell you. If ever an angel—'

And now the young men's conversation was abruptly ended. A loud, strident voice was heard from the head of the wide oak staircase, which was at some distance from the narrow lobby.

'Chatterton, what do you mean, gossiping like any old woman at the street door? Where's Sam?'

'Asleep,' was the short reply.

'Wake him, then. Bid him attend to the door. It's not your business that I know of.'

'I should have thought it was, as I share his bed in the cellar. I should have thought it was share and share alike.'

This was said with infinite scorn, betrayed in the tone of the musical voice as well as by the contemptuous tossing back of the thick hair and shrug of the shoulders, which were seen in sharp outline under a threadbare coat hastily thrown on.

'Hold your tongue or I'll find means to make you. Who is it at the door?'

'Come down and see for yourself, sir,' was the final reply, as Thomas Chatterton departed whence he came and disappeared in the lower regions of the house.

The door was still open, and Jack Henderson still stood there. He ventured to advance to the foot of the stairs, and looking up he could dimly discern the figure of a gentleman in a long nightgown, his head surmounted by a huge nightcap, with a tassel dangling from its crown.

Mr Lambert held to the banister of the second flight of wide stairs, and peered down at Jack, who looked up at him.

'I have brought a letter, sir, from a young lady to Madam Lambert. She is a relative of yours, and wants to find a place in Bristol.'

'Relative, relative—tut, tut. Ah! I see you are Henderson's nephew. Well, judging from his experience, relatives are like to be more plague than profit.'

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'Miss Palmer's mother was first cousin of Madam Lambert's, sir.'

'Oh! Well, I know nothing about it, but hand up the letter, and I will see my mother has it, though I don't promise you she will think anything of it.'

'I will call back for an answer, sir, about one o'clock.'

'Very well, very well. Here comes Mrs Symes, and I suppose we shall now have a chance of breakfast.'

The open door now admitted a large and portly personage, who came every morning to perform the duties of the household, assisted by the footboy Sam, who wore a suit of livery and answered the door to clients who might prefer to see lawyer Lambert at his private house rather than in the somewhat cramped office in Corn Street.

Mr Lambert disappeared upstairs as the woman began to throw open shutters and draw up blinds and let the light of the morning into the house.

Jack Henderson was not invited to breakfast, and after his early walk he was very hungry. He was just turning out of the square, towards the river, when he heard footsteps behind him.

Presently a hand was laid on his arm, and a voice said,—

'I was vastly uncivil half an hour ago, Henderson, but when one is treated like a cur one is apt to snarl like one. Where are you going to break your fast? At your uncle's—eh?'

'No,' Jack said, 'I leave well alone there. I am not in high favour, and don't go near him till next Monday, when I hope to bring Miss Palmer along with me.'

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'Your sweetheart—eh?'

Jack blushed to the roots of his hair.

'I can't joke about *her*,' he said.

'I crave pardon,' was the answer. 'Don't be sulky, Jack. I snatch a roll and a draught of water somewhere at a shop near by. Come with me and share the frugal repast.'

Then the two young men turned into the road by the river, where the early frequenters of the Spa were returning from drinking the waters in sedan chairs or wrapped up in fur. A band was playing before the door of the pump-room, and the whole scene was at once festive and melancholy.

The bun shop was not a dozen yards from the pump-room, and when Jack and his companion turned in to satisfy their hunger several gaily dressed beaux and young gentlewomen, probably relatives of the sick people who were drinking the waters, were laughing and chatting as if there was no such thing as death or sickness or sorrow in the world.

The group formed a sharp contrast indeed to the patients leaning on the arms of their attendants, who came forth in melancholy procession from the baths, coughing continuously, and with faces where consumption had too plainly left its mark. On some the bright hectic burned, on others the pallor of the last stages of that fell disease was seen.

Thomas Chatterton seemed wholly unconscious of what was passing before him. He threw down his penny for a roll, and drank a glass of water, and then stalked out of the shop, while Jack demolished a pork pie and two rolls, asking for a mug of cider to complete his breakfast. Having settled his account with the smart young woman behind the counter, he hastened to rejoin Chatterton.

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He had walked away in the direction of St Vincent's Rocks, and Jack, with his long strides, soon



overtook him.

'I am ready now,' he said; 'shall I walk back with you as far as Corn Street?'

But Chatterton did not answer. He stood like one in a dream, staring with his wonderful eyes at the giant rocks ahead of him, and seemed unconscious of any presence.

Something in Chatterton already struck Jack Henderson with a strange awe.

Now, as he stood on the bank of the river, where the tide had just turned its dun-coloured waters, rushing swiftly towards the sea, his head bare, his hair tossed back from his capacious brow, his hands clasped and his lips moving, though no sound escaped them, he looked as if he belonged to a different race from the big stalwart youth beside him, whose honest face was all aglow with health and vigour, and who towered a head and shoulders above the slight boyish form at his side.

Presently Chatterton spoke, but not to Jack.

'Rushing on to the sea—rush on—and bear the tidings of wrong and injustice and hate to the great ocean. I see them as they go—the evil spirits which make Bristol a hell on earth—drown them in the flood—free the city from their presence—and then—'

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'Are you not going to the office, Chatterton?' Jack ventured to say at last. 'You will not be there at eight, I say,' and Jack touched the boy's arm.

The human touch seemed to break the spell, and Chatterton laughed a strange unnatural laugh.

'Oh, is it you, old Jack? Late, do you say? Yes, I am late for everything—too late—always too late. Farewell. I must away with all speed. Tell your angel she is coming to a place where she will find no good company.' And then, before Jack could say another word, Chatterton's slight boyish form was speeding along the road with incredible swiftness, and had disappeared at a turn leading from the Hot Wells to Bristol.

'I believe they are right,' Jack thought; 'he is mad. I must warn Bryda to be careful. All the queer stories about him are true, I daresay; but, after all, he is only a boy—sixteen at the most—and I am twenty. Hang that jeweller's shop! I think I will cut it, and go off in one of these big ships—make a fortune in America—and then—then—'

Ah! Jack Henderson, what then? Your simple soul has its dreams as you stand by that mighty rushing river, under the giant rocks, and your dreams are sweet, sweeter than those of the marvellous boy who has just left you to return to the hated drudgery of Mr Lambert's office in Corn Street.

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## CHAPTER V

### THE ORCHARD GATE.

Jack Henderson found the morning very long, and finally stretched himself on one of the benches of the pump-room and slept away the time, rousing himself at intervals as a group of laughing girls passed him with their attendant beaux, for Clifton Hot Springs was now becoming a very fashionable resort, and the houses lying under the shadow of the huge rocks were in great demand.

Now but little is left to tell of the glory of the past. The pump-room has long since been pulled down, and instead of gaily dressed bevvies of fashionable folk disporting themselves under a row of trees in the May sunshine, heavy trams, drawn by patient horses at an even jog-trot, pass along at stated intervals, at all times and seasons, connecting the traffic of the busy, populous city with Avonmouth which is just beyond the graceful Suspension Bridge which spans the gorge between the Gloucestershire and Somersetshire banks of the Avon.

But the grand old rocks do not change. The black-winged daws fly in and out of their nests in the crevices, where the yellow wallflower and large golden-eyed daisies still grow in profusion where no hand can reach them, and flourishing with the scant nourishment that the crevices in the rocks afford them, fill the air with their fragrance. Generations of men come and go, and the face of Nature remains as it was when the boy poet first gazed in a rapt vision at the grey bastions of St Vincent's Rocks, and down at the river at his feet rushing out to the sea.

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Jack Henderson fortified himself with another meal at the confectioner's, and then pursued his way back to Dowry Square.

The aspect of things was changed there since the early morning. The brass handle of the door was polished and bright, the steps clean, and Jack's pull at the bell and rap at the door was

answered by Sam, in neat livery, who conducted him immediately to a pleasant parlour where Mrs Lambert was sitting; an old lady of a past time, her grey curls fastened back from her forehead by two combs, surmounted by a large cap something between a turban and a mob. Her black paduasoy gown, full at the waist and only touching her ankles, was covered with a spotless white apron with deep pockets.

Over the low bodice of her dress Mrs Lambert wore a thick white kerchief, fastened close to the throat by a gold pin. On her arms she wore thick mittens, which reached the elbow of her short sleeves, and on her thin but shapely fingers she wore two or three handsome rings.

Jack made his best bow, and advanced to Mrs Lambert's chair, unhappily treading as he did so on the paw of a tabby cat, who resisted the indignity by a very prolonged yell and an angry spit at her enemy.

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'Poor puss,' said her mistress. 'I expect, sir, your foot is no light weight. I believe you brought me this letter,' laying her hand on the precious document, which was placed on a little table by her side.

Jack murmured an assent.

'I have been much troubled by the loss of servants of late. One made a foolish match, the other died—both old servants. I have made efforts to replace them, and have failed. Is this young woman known to you, sir?'

'Well known, madam, but—' Jack paused. 'She isn't a servant. I believe she is a relative of yours.'

Mrs Lambert gave a little incredulous laugh.

'I see she subscribes herself as my cousin, but this is a *very* distant connection. However, it is a pretty note, take it altogether, and she speaks of trouble at home—her father in money difficulty. I showed my son the letter, and from all he can make out the sum borrowed will have to be repaid. He will speak more of that hereafter, but I will send my answer to Miss Palmer's request. Writing is difficult to me, for my fingers are a little stiff with rheumatism, therefore I am glad to spare them. First, are you the accepted lover of Miss Palmer?'

Again poor Jack felt the hot blushes rise to his face, again he shrank from the rough touch of the secret in his heart which he held sacred.

'Because,' Mrs Lambert continued, 'I do not permit sweethearts in the house. It is on this ground that I have dismissed several young serving-maids and depend on the services of Mrs Symes. I don't quite know what your views may be about Miss Palmer, but as I hear you are apprenticed in Bristol to a respectable goldsmith I should wish to make it plain that I can have no gallivanting or—'

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'Madam,' Jack said, interrupting this long speech, 'I have known Miss Bryda Palmer all my life. I am anxious to serve her, but I am not her accepted suitor.' Then, rising to his full height, Jack asked, 'What are your commands, madam? What answer am I to take to Miss Palmer?'

'I will take her on trial, and give a wage, say ten pounds per annum. This is only an arrangement, as I say, on trial, to be broken by either party at a month's not a quarter's notice.'

'Miss Palmer will come next Monday,' Jack said. Then, his voice faltering, he went on with some hesitation. 'She has been much cared for and—and loved. I hope you will be good to her, and remember she has never been used to hard words.'

'She has been very fortunate, then; but I think, sir, you forget yourself when you remind me of my duty. Good-day.'

Jack bowed, or rather ducked his head, which nearly reached the thick oak beam across the ceiling of the parlour, and as he was leaving the room, Mrs Lambert said,—

'Will you take a cup of cider before you leave, sir?'

'No, I am obliged to you. I have dined, and must hasten homewards.'

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And then Jack, inwardly conscious that he had been but a poor ambassador, departed on his way to scale those heights which rise above Bristol in a straight unbroken line, where the tower of Dundry stands out against the sky.

Jack plodded on. His stalwart frame knew little of fatigue, and he was not nearly as tired, when at last Bishop's Farm came in sight, as he often felt when sitting with his long legs tucked under him on the high stool in his uncle's workshop in Corn Street. When he reached the gate of the farmyard he paused and determined to go round by the lane, and then pass through the orchard to the house if he did not, as he hoped, find Bryda on her favourite seat on the rough bit of limestone which cropped out of the turf.

The sound of his steps brought Flick to inspect him. Flick was satisfied, for he gave a low whine of welcome and rubbed his nose against Jack's hand.

At the gate of the orchard Jack saw two figures—Bryda's and a man's; the man, with a liver-and-white pointer at his feet, leaning against the gate in an easy attitude; Bryda, on the other side, with her face flushed, and a look in her eyes like a frightened fawn.

Jack strode up to the gate, and said in a rough tone,—

'Let me pass, sir. I have business with Miss Bryda.'

'So have I, sir, and I will despatch it, by your leave, without your interference.'

Jack put his hand on the gate and pushed it towards Bryda, but a hand, apparently as strong as his, pulled it back, with an oath.

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'Wait one minute, Jack, wait till this gentleman is gone. He is speaking to me about—about—'

Poor Bryda's voice broke down, and she hid her face in her hands.

'If *you* wish it I *will* wait,' Jack said. 'Do you wish me to wait?'

A faint 'Yes' was the reply.

'Then I'll wait,' Jack said, but, glancing at the Squire, he added, 'If it were not for this wish of Miss Palmer's, sir, I would *not* wait your pleasure; but her word is law to me. If it weren't,' he muttered, 'I'd knock you down.'

An ironical laugh, with the words, 'Come, sir, be off!' was the only rejoinder, and then Jack strode away out of sight.

'Will that big sulky fellow eavesdrop?' he heard as he was departing, and the question was not likely to allay his wrath.

The conversation lasted for more minutes than Jack's patience held out, and he fumed and chafed at the indignity passed on him.

'To be warned off by a brute like that!' he murmured. 'What right has he to do it?'

Presently Betty's face appeared above the low wall which skirted the farmyard.

'Oh! Jack,' she exclaimed, 'Bryda has been talking to the young Squire ever so long. She sent me away. I do so wish she would come. It is all about that money and grandfather; but I don't like her to be alone with that man; he has a bad face. She has got Flick, but still I wish she would come.'

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'Hang it all!' Jack said, 'I won't stand this another minute,' and he retraced his steps up the lane, reaching the down just as the Squire, with a pointer at his heels, was bowing low and waving his hand in farewell to Bryda.

Jack was at her side in an instant.

'What does that fellow want?'

Bryda had recovered her self-possession.

'He has promised to stay proceedings against grandfather for a month,' and the swift colour came to her face, and then vanishing, left it pale as death.

'What has he been saying to you?' Jack demanded, almost fiercely. 'Has he been frightening you to death—it looks like it.'

'Don't be angry, Jack; you should be glad. I have got a month's respite. I am tired, that is all. Come in to supper; Betty is sure to have something good to-night to try and tempt grandfather.'

Jack was wondering when Bryda would ask what had been the result of his journey to Bristol. He had walked some twenty miles in her service, and yet she asked no questions about the letter.

'I have been to Bristol,' he began, 'and delivered your letter. Don't you want to know what Madam Lambert said?'

'Oh, my letter! Yes—will she have me?' But Bryda did not seem eager for an answer.

'Yes, you can ride with me on Monday in the cart, and I will put you down at number six Dowry Square. Madam will give you ten pounds a year, and you will get a lot of books—I saw shelves full in the parlour—and you will see all the fine folks at the pump-room, and hear the band play. Won't you like that—eh, Bryda?'

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'Oh, yes, of course I shall. I thank you, Jack, for taking all this trouble for me.'

But the thanks were not so warm as Jack expected, and he could not understand what made Bryda seem so different from the eager, restless girl of the previous day, whose whole heart seemed then set on going to Bristol.

The supper was silent, and old Mr Palmer could not be persuaded to taste the little meat pie made expressly for him. He pushed the plate away, saying,—

'What business have I to be eating dainties like that, when I may not have a crust to gnaw before the year's out. Take it away, take it away—I don't want it.'

Jack took leave as soon as supper was over, and made his way with a heavy heart to his own home.

Then he found his mother in a very captious mood, upbraiding him for his long absence, and asking what he had been about all day.

'That's my concern, I suppose, in my holidays,' he replied.

'I shall be glad when your holidays are over, vastly glad. Your brother Jim is worth six of you after all. You don't know how to take advantage of the place in uncle's shop, which many would give their ears for.'

'Let Jim go to be a silversmith,' Jack said, 'and I'll come on the farm.'

'No. I know what's what, and the eldest shall have the first chance. For the sake of your

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widowed mother and six innocent little sisters you ought to be willing to do anything to raise you in the world.'

'Raise me! Pshaw! it's the other way,' Jack said. 'It's fine "raising," indeed, to be cooped up in a little workshop, peering into the works of old watches, with a glass in my eye and my back ready to break. However, I'm off again on Monday,' he said, altering his tone, for he remembered that if Bryda was in Dowry Square, within reach, even the little workshop and the pain in his back would be tolerable.

Mrs Henderson was seated by the wide lattice window, with her feet on a stool, dressed much more smartly than the farmers' wives in the neighbourhood. She was sprigging fine muslin for a cap, and she wore large rings on the finger of her left hand, as well as her wedding ring on the other.

The rings were of doubtful quality, like Falstaff's of old, but they were family heirlooms, and had been worn by her mother before her.

Mrs Henderson prided herself on her ancestry, her mother being the daughter of a draper and haberdasher in Bath. She was generally supposed to be a cut above her neighbours, and she left the farm to the serving-man she dignified with the name of bailiff, and her six little girls to tumble up as best they could. It was thought by Dorothy Burrow and others, ridiculous to try to make Jack into a Bristol tradesman and Jim the farmer. But Jim was no favourite with his mother. She set great store on appearances, and Jim had a squint and a wide mouth, a freckled face, with carrotty hair, while Jack was in his mother's eyes, and in the eyes of other people also, a fine handsome fellow, with eyes of a deep blue, and chestnut hair curling lightly on his shapely head.

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Mrs Henderson trusted to Jack to set the family up by becoming a partner at last in Mr Henderson's business, he being a bachelor, and with no son to succeed him.

'There's a great talk about these poor Palmers, Jack,' his mother said, dropping her work as the light failed. 'The old man is ruined. Money he borrowed of old Squire Bayfield has to be paid back. And it all came from that worthless son of his years ago having to leave the country to escape the gallows. Farmer Short was here to-day and was telling me all about it. A nice come down for these two girls, especially the eldest, who thinks herself a wit and a beauty. She'll have to go to service, if anybody will take such a useless piece of goods!'

'Good-night, mother,' was Jack's only reply. 'I'm tired, and off to roost—good-night.'

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE SYMPATHY OF POVERTY.

It was one evening early in June, when the days were almost at their longest, that Mrs Chatterton sprang to the door of her modest little dwelling in Redcliffe Street to greet her son.

'Welcome, my dear boy, welcome! And the embrace between mother and son was as fervent as if they had been parted for a month instead of only four days. 'Where was you the last evening, Tom?' his mother asked.

'I was walking to and fro in the streets,' was the reply, 'too restless to come hither to trouble you and sister. By-the-bye, where is Sis?'

'Gone to take a bit of supper with Mrs Edkins, sure, but she will be returning ere long. You will bear me company till she returns. Have you had a letter from the grand gentleman in London, Tom?' his mother asked.

Instantly the sunshine on Chatterton's face, which the loving greeting of his mother had kindled there, was gone; his whole bearing changed. His eyes flashed, and he exclaimed,—

'Don't weary me with questions, mother. When the great or little man deigns to reply to me I'll tell you.' Then muttered imprecations followed, and the boy paced the little room, with his hands at his back, his head bent, not uttering another word for ten minutes. Presently he shook off his ill mood, and laughing, said, 'There has been an arrival at the mansion in Dowry Square. I came to tell you of it, only you put it out of my head.'

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'An arrival? A new serving-maid?'

'Yes; but that word does not suit her. I am taking her out on Sunday, and I shall bring her here, poor soul! I pity her as I pity anyone who has to deal with the family of Lambert. You know that big fellow Henderson—I brought him here once.'

'Yes, sure, I remember him, and his pleasant face.'

'His stupid face, rather. Well, to proceed—a cart lumbered up to Lambert's house Monday at noon, and with a mighty thump the said Henderson descended. Then he put a bundle on the pavement, next a box, next a big bunch of gillyflowers and roses, and next he helped out a young woman. What do I say?—a young lady, beautiful as an angel—just such an one as I have seen in dreams.'

'Like Miss Rumsey, Tom.'

'Pshaw! Miss Rumsey is of the earth earthy, but this one is of another race. In she came just as I was returning from a message sent by Mr Lambert, and I stood aside to let her pass. She smiled, and yet there were tears in her eyes as she turned to Henderson, and says she, "Good-bye, Jack. Come and see me soon, and—" Then came a voice from the parlour, "Sam, take the young woman's box to her chamber, and walk in here, Miss Palmer." Then the vision passed, and I was in the street bidding Jack Henderson good day as he clambered up to his seat to drive round to Corn Street and put up the horse for the night at the White Hart. I'll bring her here on Sunday, and you'll judge for yourself and sister also. She will admire her as much as I do, if she don't look at her through the green eyes of jealousy.'

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'Whatever has brought her to Mr Lambert's?'

'She is a cousin of the old lady's, in poor plight from some loss of money. Poor! How pretty that word sounds from Madam Lambert's lips. Well, the poverty will make a bond between this young lady and me; and when I asked her if she would like to see my mother she said she would fain see anyone who would be kind to her, so expect us on Sunday.'

'In the forenoon, Tom?'

'I think not. She will have her slaving to get through first.'

Then Chatterton went to a door leading up a flight of narrow stairs to the upper storey of his mother's house.

'You are not going up there for long, Tom?' his mother asked, with a sigh.

But there was no reply as Chatterton's light steps were heard ascending to the garret where he kept all his old parchments, his charcoal, his books, and various possessions, all as necessary to him, or indeed more necessary than his daily bread.

It was in this year of 1769 that Chatterton's hopes had risen on rainbow coloured wings, when his 'The Ryse of Peyncteyne in England, written by T. Rowlie, in 1469, for Master Canynge,' had been favourably received by no less a personage than Horace Walpole. The spring of that year had been the springtime of Chatterton's fairest hopes. In April a letter from Mr Walpole fired the boy with the desire to do more than ever with his strange conceits and imitations of old documents.

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If Mr Walpole could be deceived, who might not follow his example?

But that courteous, nay deferential, letter on the receipt of 'The Ryse of Peyncteyne' was the first of its kind and the last. For now June had come, and other specimens of Rowley's extraordinary gifts were not even acknowledged, nor could his repeated requests for the return of the manuscripts avail, and his heart was full of bitterness and indignation against everyone.

It is hard to realise that the author of 'Ælla' and all the other fictions was scarcely more than a child; that the boy of one of our public schools, in the sixth form, is the age of this poor lawyer's apprentice, whose short life was filled with the dreams and aspirations of a man while as yet he had scarcely emerged from childhood, and was but a boy in years.

Bryda Palmer's arrival at Mrs Lambert's house in Dowry Square was exactly as Chatterton had described it to his mother.

A great wave of desolation had swept over her as she heard the cart rumble off, and took up her posy of gillyflowers and her small basket as she obeyed Mrs Lambert's summons to the parlour.

Mrs Lambert looked her down from head to foot, and was apparently satisfied.

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'Take care not to drop the flowers about, if you please,' she said. 'You can put them in a pot by the grate, but I like no litters made by flowers or anything else. You may sit down while I talk to you,' Mrs Lambert added. 'You look very delicate; I hope you are not in a decline.'

'I am very well, madam. It is only that I have felt the pain of leaving home a little. I shall soon get used to it; and I am much obliged to you for taking me in, I will try to please you.'

'I want a maid-servant who can attend to me—crimp my lace borders, clear starch, iron aprons, make bows, and do needlework, also help below stairs when fine cooking is needed. My son brings in a friend to supper sometimes, for cribbage, and he is very particular about the pastry being light, and the Welsh rabbit done to a turn. Have you ever made a Welsh rabbit—toasted cheese, you know, wetted with a little ale?'

'I daresay I can do it,' Bryda said.

'Well, added to this, you must dust the chayney. I have very fine chayney. And you'll have to rub the oak bureaus and clean the brass. If you serve my purpose I shall get no more sluts as maids, but keep going with Mrs Symes, who comes every morning, and Sam the footboy. Then I expect you to be pretty, trim, and neat in the afternoon, and sit here and read to me, darn stockings—my son's and mine—and mend fine lace, and—well—a hundred other jobs which I need not count up now. There is no one in the house but yourself and an apprentice, who is bound to my son—worse

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luck—an idle good-for-nothing, with whom you may just civilly pass the time of day, but no more. He is not a companion fit for any young woman—a wild scapegrace. Mr Lambert would be glad to be quit of him. Now, if your box is taken to your chamber, you may go and lay aside your hood. I suppose you have more gowns than that you stand up in?’

‘Yes, I have changes of gowns and aprons.’

‘Very well, I think you will suit me. Mr Lambert comes into his dinner at half after one o’clock; it is near that now. You can take your meals with us, and see my friends when they visit me. There, now, I think you are a very lucky young person—be off to your chamber—first door on the second flight.’

Bryda hastened to obey, and was thankful to get a few minutes to herself.

Mrs Lambert seemed satisfied, but it was Mr Lambert whom she wanted to see, and she dare not address him before his mother.

On the second day after her arrival Mrs Lambert said there would be friends to sup, and Bryda must make a cake and some apple pies, and Mrs Symes had her orders to put things ready for her in the kitchen.

Up to this time the glimpse Bryda had of the apprentice at the door was all she had seen of him.

But when she went down into the kitchen at twelve o’clock she found him seated at a very untempting meal, with Sam the footboy and Mrs Symes.

But whether the repast was tempting or not made but little difference to Chatterton. He had a book open before him, and only now and then swallowed a bit of the unsavoury morsels provided, and preserved a haughty silence when Mrs Symes questioned him as to any of the gossip current in Bristol.

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Presently she pushed back her chair, and before departing to the back kitchen with Sam she placed, with rather a bad grace, a rolling pin and flour and butter on a board at a side-table, some apples and a jar of raisins and spice and coarse sugar, saying,—

‘Will that suit your fine cookery, miss? Lor’ bless me, I could die of laughing to think a pair of hands like yours could make better paste than mine! You’d best be careful or you’ll catch it. If ever there was a fidget about his food it’s Master Lambert. Come, now, Tom, I am going to clear away, so you must budge. Why, you’ve left half your victuals on the platter. I’ll feed the cat with them.’

Chatterton now looked up from his book, and said,—

‘You’re welcome, or rather the cat is welcome.’

He had an hour allowed for his dinner, and was not due at the office again till one o’clock, when Mr Lambert left it to return to Dowry Square for his midday repast at half-past one.

Chatterton rose as he spoke, and sat down on a stool by the fire, his book still in his hand.

But he was not reading now, he was watching the lithe, graceful figure at the side-table.

Bryda had rolled up her short sleeves above the elbow, and her pretty rounded arms were seen to advantage as she mixed the flour and kneaded it, and then passed the rolling pin lightly over it.

She was conscious of Chatterton’s presence, but her back was turned to him.

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Presently she turned her head, and saw a pair of extraordinary eyes fixed on her. It was not an impertinent gaze like that of Squire Bayfield’s, it was simply one of almost wistful earnestness.

‘I am wondering, miss,’ he began, ‘what made you come to this hole?’

‘I came because I am poor, and wish to help them at home.’

Chatterton’s eyes flashed.

‘*Poor!* Aye, to be poor is a curse.’

‘No,’ Bryda said, ‘it need not be a curse.’

Then she went on with her rolling and kneading. Presently she said again,—

‘Are you a lawyer, sir?’

‘A lawyer’s apprentice, worse luck.’

‘I have a question about law to ask Mr Lambert and I am afraid to approach him.’

‘I don’t wonder. Well, what is the question?’

‘If a person promised to pay back a debt, and put his hand to a bond, and the man to whom he owed the money died before it was paid, would the son of that man have a right to it?’

‘If it had been so set down in the bond that the heirs of his body should have it, yes, he’d have to pay it.’

‘Then there is no hope,’ Bryda said, with a sigh, and Chatterton saw her wipe a tear away with the corner of her apron.

‘Hark, miss,’ he said, ‘I am poor, and treated here like a dog because I am poor. I have a good mother, and if you would like to see her she would be proud to see you. I can escort you there on

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Sunday, and show you a thing or two.'

'If I may, I will come,' Bryda said.

'May? Sunday is everyone's holiday. I should feel it an honour to guide you to St Mary's grand church. It is there my father found all these fine poems, you know, up in the muniment room.'

'I knew you were very learned. I have the story of the "Fryars passing over the old Bridge" in my pocket-book. I cut it out of the newspaper.'

'But I can read you better things than that, if you care to hear them. I have a splendid poem called the "Tragedy of Ælla." The minstrel's song would be to your taste, perhaps. But I must away now. Count me as your friend in this miserable hole should you need one.'

'I do need a friend,' poor Bryda said; 'I am friendless in Bristol except for one,' she added. 'You know him—Mr Jack Henderson.'

'Yes, I know him, a big country lout and bumpkin, whom his uncle is trying to polish as he polishes his silver goods, poor fool for his pains.'

But Bryda rose on the defensive for Jack.

'Mr Henderson is a good and true friend, sir, nor can I hear him ill-spoken of.'

'Nay, I meant no harm,' Chatterton said, and the next minute Bryda was left to her pastry making and cake mixing.

'If Jack should ask me to go out on Sunday he will be angered against me for promising to go with that strange boy, but what fire there is in his eyes, what a noble mien he has when he answers Mrs Symes.'

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Here Bryda's soliloquy was abruptly broken in on by Mrs Symes' voice.

'Seasoning your pastry with gossip, I hear. Have a care of yon fellow. I think an evil spirit is in him, and so do many beside me, let me tell you, miss.'

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## CHAPTER VII

### CONSULTATION.

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Bryda watched her opportunity, and finding Mr Lambert alone in the parlour, on the first Sunday morning of her residence in Dowry Square, she laid before him her grandfather's troubles. Mr Lambert's advice was soon given.

'Let him sell goods to the value of three hundred pounds, and pay down the money, or he may be clapped into the debtors' prison.'

'Oh! sir, anything would be better than that. I have got a month's delay, and I have some hope of the Squire's relenting.'

'I have none,' said Mr Lambert. 'You ask my advice, and I give it. Let your grandfather employ some trustworthy auctioneer to value stock, to the amount of the debt, then employ him to effect a sale, and the matter is settled. A debt like that is a chain round a man's neck, and he had better live on a loaf a day than go down to his grave burdened by the thought of making a legacy of it to his descendants.'

Bryda could only murmur her thanks. She was wondering if Mr Lambert knew the whole story of her father's disgrace, and she shrank from alluding to it. Presently Mrs Lambert came in with some papers in her hand.

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'Look here!' she said, 'I picked up this rubbish in the backyard. It is some of that mad apprentice's stuff. *That* is how he wastes his time, and robs you of what he is bound to give you. The sooner you are rid of him the better,' and Mrs Lambert held out some fragments of parchment to her son, covered with black hieroglyphics and stained with charcoal.

'I think the fellow is in league with the devil,' Mrs Lambert said. 'What can all this mean?'

'Give the papers to me, mother; I will show them to Barrett and Catcott. They look like trumpery not worth a thought.'

'Now, miss,' Madam Lambert said sharply, 'I am ready to go to church. You must accompany me and carry my books; make haste.'

When Bryda had left the room Mr Lambert said,—

'A pretty girl this new maid of yours, mother. Look sharp after her or you will have the fellows

at her heels.'

'She is as quiet as a mouse,' was the reply. 'A bit too quiet, but she is none the worse for that; and I will say she makes the best pastry I ever tasted.'

'Well, have a care,' Mr Lambert said. 'Henderson says that his bright nephew Jack is one of her beaux, and I daresay there will be a dozen more before long.'

A few minutes later Bryda was sedately walking by Mrs Lambert's side, carrying her large prayer book and Bible, while Mrs Lambert had a gold-headed cane in one of her hands, on which she leaned as it tapped on the pavement, and in the other a black silk reticule, which contained her handkerchief, a fan, and a scent-bottle of somewhat gigantic proportions.

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She wore her best Sunday black paduasoy, and a hood over the frills of her lace cap, which was tied with whimples under her chin, fastened by a small diamond brooch.

Mrs Lambert was looked upon as 'quality,' and as she passed into the cathedral she curtsied with a patronising air to several of her acquaintances.

It was a long walk for Mrs Lambert from Dowry Square, but she liked to worship where, as she expressed it, the clergy and congregation were composed of 'gentry,' and where the visitors at the Hot Wells were to be seen in a variety of smart costumes.

There was scant reverence for the house of God in these days—days when the Church was asleep, and the fervour of religious zeal was just beginning to burn outside her pale, kindled by the teaching of the Wesleys and Whitfields.

There was a buzz of talk as the congregation reached the choir, and engagements were made and civilities exchanged with almost as much freedom as at the door of the pump-room under St Vincent's Rocks.

Bryda had never been inside a large church before, and she was struck with wonder as she looked up into the vaulted roof and watched the morning sunshine illuminating the pillars with transient radiance.

Bristol Cathedral is not remarkable for stately proportions, and in the eye of many is but an insignificant building, which cannot bear comparison with the noble church of St Mary Redcliffe.

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But to Bryda that morning in the cathedral seemed to begin a new era in her life. The Past, with its stories, the stories that Mr Lambert's apprentice told her had been found in the muniment room at St Mary's, seemed to live before her.

The men that had raised those walls and carved the devices on the pillars, who were they?

Was there no record left, no voice to tell of the labour, and the toil, and the spirit which had moved them to do their work well?

Bryda's small figure was hidden in the deep pews which then disfigured the choir, and it was only when she stood up, and was raised above the ledge of the seat by a green baize hassock, that she could see the congregation or could be seen by them.

Mrs Lambert sat through the service, fanning herself at intervals and smelling her salts, though she whispered the prayers after the clergyman and made the responses in an audible voice.

Bryda was in a dream, and thinking alternately of her grandfather, Betty, and the young Squire. Poor child, she had never been taught that the burden of all troubles and anxieties and sorrows can be laid at the feet of the Father who pities His children. He was a God very far off to Bryda Palmer, as to the great majority of girls in her position of life, and, indeed, in any position of life, in the last decades of the eighteenth century.

The sermon was a dry dissertation to which no one listened, to judge by the number of sleepers in the pews, who woke with a start when the organ pealed forth the welcome tidings that the service was over.

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At the door of the cathedral Bryda saw, to her great discomforture, Mr Bayfield.

He smiled and made a low bow, which Bryda returned by a curtsey, and then was passing on laden with her heavy books, when the Squire said, 'Permit me,' putting his hand on the heavy Bible.

'No; I thank you, sir,' Bryda said, and Mrs Lambert turned sharply round.

'Miss Palmer, you will oblige me by attending to your duties.'

'Indeed, madam,' Mr Bayfield said, 'I think Miss Palmer is scarce fitted to bear these heavy books. I venture to take them from her, by your leave.'

'Sir,' Mrs Lambert said, bridling, 'I have not the honour of your acquaintance.'

'This is Mr Bayfield,' poor Bryda said, a blush suffusing her fair face and a look of almost terror in her eyes.

'Is he a friend of yours, Miss Palmer?'

'Oh, no,' Bryda said fervently; 'no.'

'Nay. That is cruel, too cruel, Miss Palmer.' Then in a lower voice he said, 'The month expires on this day three weeks. I shall expect, nay demand my reply at that date.'

Then, with another bow, his three-cornered hat in his hand, Mr Bayfield turned away.



But Bryda had not seen the last of him. The midday dinner was not over when the large brass knocker on Mr Lambert's door thundered against it, and took Sam to open it in hot haste. He returned quickly to say,—

'A gentleman wishes to see you, sir, on business.'

'Then tell him I don't see clients on Sunday, but at my office in Corn Street on week days. What does he mean by bringing the house down like that?'

Sam disappeared, but returned again to say,—

'The gentleman desires to see you, sir, on a private matter.'

'Tell him to walk into the study and wait my convenience. I am eating my dinner, if he must know.'

Bryda felt certain the visitor was Mr Bayfield, who must have followed her and Mrs Lambert home from the cathedral, and so discovered where she lived.

She was determined to escape another interview with the Squire, and as soon as she had helped Sam to clear away the glass and china, she gave Mrs Lambert her footstool as she retired to an easy-chair, with a glass of port wine, on a little table at her side, and a volume of Blair's sermons, which were both agreeable sedatives, and conducive to a prolonged sleep. Bryda then went hastily upstairs, and tying on her high poke bonnet, slipped out at the front door, and found, as she expected, Jack awaiting her at the corner of the square. The sight of his friendly, honest face had never been so welcome before, and she showed her pleasure by the warmth of her greeting.

'Oh, Jack,' she said, 'will you take me to see that poor boy's mother?'

'What poor boy?' Jack asked.

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'Tom Chatterton, of course, the poet. I *do* pity him so much. He is miserable and unhappy, and you know, Jack, so am I, and therefore I understand how he feels. Besides, I want to get far away from Mr Lambert this afternoon, for the cruel Squire has followed me, and is now talking to Mr Lambert. I know what he is saying. I dread him, I am afraid of him.'

'Afraid of him? How can you be afraid of him? I will soon show him what I can do if he dares to molest you. Let him try, that's all.'

'Oh, don't quarrel with him, Jack, that would only make matters worse. Don't talk of him. I want to forget him, and see the poor boy's grand church he says is so beautiful, and his mother and his sister.'

'They are quite poor folks,' Jack said, 'but come along. I would take you to the end of the world if you wanted. But will Madam Lambert be angry at you for coming out?'

'She said I was to have time to myself on Sundays, and I have been to church with her this morning. She gave me her books to carry. Such big heavy books.'

'The poor boy,' as Bryda called him, had been pacing up and down on the wide open space before St Mary's Redcliffe for some time.

He had been unwilling to go too near Dowry Square to meet Bryda, for fear of a reprimand if he chanced to be seen by his master or Mrs Lambert.

At the same time he was doubtful as to Bryda finding her way alone, and he had asked Jack Henderson to go to Dowry Square and bring her to his mother's house.

The apprentice in his workaday dress presented a very different appearance from the apprentice in his holiday attire.

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Chatterton always liked to do his best to cut a respectable figure amongst his associates.

His coat of mulberry cloth had, it is true, been bought second-hand with some difficulty, but it set off his slight, boyish figure to advantage. His knee-breeches and waistcoat, with embroidered flowers, were the handiwork of his mother and sister, and so was the white neckerchief, with lace at the ends, which was tied in a careless bow at his neck.

His massive curls were brushed and combed back from his wide brow, and there was about him that indescribable 'something' which separated him from the throng of youths who collected in Bristol streets on Sundays, some on the College Green and many in Redcliffe Meadows, talking and laughing with the girls who were, like themselves, occupied in the week in shops and warehouses or in domestic service.

The contributions to *Felix Farley's Journal* had by this time attracted attention to Chatterton, but he was entirely believed in by respectable people when he said he had discovered the works of one Rowley, a priest of St John, in the time of Canynge,<sup>[A]</sup> and had reproduced them for the wonder and benefit of all lovers of ancient lore, especially when the author of these works had been an inhabitant of the City of the West, which had been famous in the history of the country from very early times.

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When at last Jack Henderson and Bryda came in sight Chatterton did not hasten to meet them.

He chose to be offended that Bryda was so much later than he had expected, and for the first few minutes he was moody and gloomy.

The three took the accustomed turn in Redcliffe Meadows, where presently Chatterton's sister joined them, and Bryda was introduced in due form.

'My mother bids me say, Miss Palmer, she will be vastly glad if you will take a dish of tea with us, and you also, Mr Henderson.'

Jack could only express his gratitude for the invitation, and walk by Miss Chatterton's side, while her brother and Bryda were left together.

'That church is fine, is it not, miss?' Chatterton began. 'I consider it a marvel of the builder's art, and a casket which contains precious treasure. In yonder muniment room above the porch lay concealed for centuries the works of a man, as wonderful in their way as yonder pinnacles and buttresses. Will you take a turn in the meadows—there are not so many fools prancing about here to-day as sometimes. The river begins to attract them at this season.'

#### FOOTNOTES:

- [A] William Canynge was five times Mayor of Bristol. He generously contributed to the work of rebuilding and ornamenting the Church of St Mary Redcliffe, and built and endowed an almshouse and hospital in the parish. He took holy orders on the death of his wife to avoid a second marriage pressed on him by King Henry VI., who speaks of him as 'his beloved, eminent merchant of Bristol.' William Canynge was made Dean of the College of Westbury, which he rebuilt with his usual munificence. He died in 1474.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SONGS OF ROWLEY THE PRIEST.

And now Bryda listened to the song of Rowley, the priest of St John, as Chatterton poured it in her ear with almost fiery eloquence. She could scarcely believe the apprentice taking his meals with the footboy in the dingy kitchen at Dowry Square could be one with the young man who walked by her side in his holiday attire.

All the latent romance in Bryda's nature was stirred by the history which her companion told her of the old parchments, used forsooth as covers of books, or cut up into thread papers, and yet of priceless value—a value which he alone had discovered.

'Listen,' he said, stopping short, 'and I will recite to you an elegy or minstrel's song from the "Tragedy of Ælla," then tell me whether Rowley the priest was not a king amongst men. A poor priest—aye, and a poor apprentice, brought up on the charity of Colston's School, has brought him to light, and in due time we shall see his memory receive the laurel crown, denied him perhaps in his life. It is only these dull trading Bristol folk who are blind as bats and deaf as adders. Curse them! I hate Bristol and its people for Rowley's sake, and for my own. Yet I will rise above them, and they shall find they cannot trample on me with impunity.'

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Bryda began to feel frightened at the increased vehemence of her companion, and looking back, saw they had left Jack Henderson and Miss Chatterton far behind.

But suddenly his manner changed, and he said,—

'No. I will not sing to you of death, you who are so full of life and beauty. The minstrel sang in a sad refrain,—

My love is dead,  
Gone to his deathbed  
All under the willow tree.

Your love shall have a happier fate. Hark!' he said, 'you shall have a song of springtime, not of the grave—the dark grave, where I wish myself a dozen times a day.'

'Do not say so. Life is so sweet and beautiful,' Bryda exclaimed. 'Though I have many cares at this time, yet I love life, and even in Dowry Square I think it is good to be alive.'

'Aye, to you, doubtless,' was the reply. 'But now for the verse from the "History of Painting."

When spring came dancing on a flowery bed,  
Clothed in green raiment of a changing kind,  
The leaves of hawthorn budding o'er his head,  
And with fair primroses waving in the wind,  
Then did the shepherd his white garment spread  
Upon the green bank, and danced all around,  
Whilst the sweet flowerets nodded on his head,  
And his fair lambs were scattered on the ground;  
Beneath his foot the brooklet ran along,

Which strolleth round the vale to hear his joyous song.

'There, Miss Palmer, you have a song of spring, wrote hundreds of years ago. I tell it to you in the language of to-day, but it is ten times sweeter in the beauteous rhythm of the olden time.'

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'It would not be sweeter to me,' Bryda said; 'for though I found the "History of the Opening of the Bristol Bridge" full of beauty, yet it teased me to scan the words though I made out their meaning at last. How could you find them out—who helped you?'

Chatterton laughed.

'My dear young lady I helped myself to the Saxon language as to most other things. If I trusted to other help I should be worse off than I am. When first it dawned on me that the friend and confessor of Canynge had wrote all these poems for the edifying of his patron, I toiled night and day till I was able to interpret them for this perverse generation. But I had my friends. Mr Catcott is one, Mr Barrett, a surgeon, another, and now let me count as a friend one fairer than they, your sweet self.'

'As we live under the same roof, we may well be friends, but if, as you say, you are yet but sixteen years old, you are so much younger than I am.'

'Nay, older by a score of years,' Chatterton interrupted. 'For age is not counted by years, but by the strife and the struggle and the misery through which the soul passes. In this I am your senior.'

'Nay,' Bryda said gently, 'we cannot enter into each other's secret heart. We all know our own troubles. I have mine, and I am now parted from a sister I love, and I am, after a week's absence, hungering for her tender care.'

And now Bryda became conscious that they were observed by a party of girls who were returning through the meadows from a Sunday ramble with their lovers.

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Several of the girls nodded and laughed at Chatterton. One stopped and said,—

'A new flame, Tom? Oh, fie for shame! Do you know, miss, whoever you may be, that Master Tom is a terrible one to shoot from Cupid's bow. He seldom misses his aim.'

'Come on,' said a gruff voice, 'and don't talk such foolery, Sally. Leave the boy to look after his own business.'

'Or rather the girl after hers,' was the saucy reply, as the pair moved away.

Jack Henderson began to think that Miss Chatterton purposely avoided joining company with her brother and Bryda.

He now said,—

'Miss Palmer has a long walk to Dowry Square. I think, by your leave, I will join her, and advise her to take advantage of Mrs Chatterton's offer to rest a while at her house.'

'Certainly, sir, if you desire it; but my brother would fain take her into the church, I fancy, before it is closed.'

Chatterton at once became moody and distrait when his *tête-à-tête* with Bryda was at an end. He had been annoyed, too, by the remarks of the free-spoken young lady, who had rallied him on his 'new conquest,' and when they entered the church the evil spirit was again dominant.

But Bryda forgot him, forgot Rowley the priest, and the wonderful story of his poems, in the feeling of awe with which the noble church inspired her.

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There was in her, as I have said, a quick response to all sights and sounds of beauty. Then, as the organ rolled its waves of melody above her head, as the last Amen of the choir rose to the vaulted roof, her whole soul was wrapt in that feeling which has no other name but devotion. The unseen Presence of what was holy and pure seemed to encompass her, and as she leaned against one of the pillars, close to the monument of the great Canynge, her fair face wore on it an expression those who saw it were not likely to forget.

And, as if in sharp contrast, a little in the background was seen the grand outline of Chatterton's head, thrown back with a strangely defiant air, his lips curled with contempt, his hands clasped at his back, and his whole bearing that of one full of resentment and hatred against what might or might not be imaginary foes.

There is nothing more sorrowful than the story of Chatterton's genius, misdirected, and, as it were, preparing its own doom. The lawyer's apprentice, who had this rare gift of poetry, was to know only broken hopes and unfulfilled desires, and soon to fall beyond the reach of help, of human love, or Christian charity.

There he stood, on that bright summer afternoon, as the procession of clergy passed out and the organ pealed forth its melodious strains, there he stood in the church, where his father had stood before him, chafing against his lot, and conscious, who shall say how bitterly conscious, that like the baseless fabric of a dream the poems of the priest of St John would vanish, and he, Thomas Chatterton, the true poet, stand exposed as an unskilful forger. Sixteen summers had barely passed over his head, and yet in moments like these he looked as if the storms of twice sixteen years had left their mark upon him.

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Mrs Chatterton received Bryda with kindly warmth, rather overdoing her apologies for her humble fare and poor cottage. It was evident that Chatterton chafed at this, and he scarcely spoke a word during tea. Jack Henderson and Chatterton's mother made an attempt at

conversation, but honest Jack was not skilled in finding subjects for small talk, and he was, moreover, so engrossed with Bryda that he had little room for any other thought.

When tea was over Bryda said she must return to Mr Lambert's, as Sam the footboy was to have his turn for a holiday after six o'clock. Jack was only too glad to get Bryda off, and as they walked away together he said,—

'Don't have too much to say to Tom Chatterton, Bryda.'

She looked up at him and laughed.

'It was he who had so much to say to me,' she said.

'Well, he is not the man for you to make a friend of, mind that.'

'Man!' she said. 'Jack, he is only a boy—just sixteen. You did not call yourself a man then when you were at the Grammar School at Wells. But, Jack—' she said more seriously.

'I don't want to talk any more about the apprentice, though I pity him just as I should pity a young eagle shut up in a close cage, and feeling all his strength to rise to the sun of no use. Oh, yes, I do pity him, and so ought you.'

'I shall pity myself more if you give him all your company another Sunday and shut me out.'

'Don't be silly, Jack; I am not one to cast off old friends for new. But, Jack, I am so frightened when I think the Squire is in Bristol. What did he come for?'

'What was he saying to you by the orchard gate that evening I came upon you?'

'Oh, that I could not tell you; it was all meant to flatter me, and I hate him.'

'Why did he say he would give your grandfather a month before he sold off?'

Bryda hesitated.

'He said something about he would have me instead of the money.'

Jack Henderson's honest face flushed with indignation.

'The villain—the cursed villain! I see what he is driving at, but I will be quits with him.'

Bryda grew calm as Jack waxed more and more vehement, and his loud voice attracted the passers-by.

'Hush, Jack, people are staring at you! Do you suppose I would be bought like that? No! What would Bet say? I would sooner die than strike a bargain like that!'

'I'd sooner see you dead,' Jack replied.

Bryda was afraid to say more that would rouse Jack's wrath, so she asked him to be sure to let her hear any news of home.

'I sha'n't hear any news. No one ever writes to me. When the farm produce comes in once a month on market days the old carter asks if I am in good health—with the missus' love—that's about all.'

'I am writing to Bet, little bits every day. I have got an ink-pot and a quill pen up in the garret, and Mr Chatterton gave me some paper from the office, but I don't think that is quite honest, so please buy me a little. I can give you a shilling,' she said, putting her hand in the large pocket which was fastened to her waist under the short skirt.

Jack pushed her hand away.

'I don't want your shilling,' he said.

'Oh, Jack, why are you so cross-grained,' Bryda said, 'it is not like you.'

'I don't feel like myself neither,' poor Jack said, 'but I'll be in a better temper when I see you next Sunday, and don't have that mad boy at your heels. Take care what you do in Bristol; it is full of people, and some of them are bad enough. So take care, for you know you are—well, you have only to look in a glass to see. Good-bye, Bryda, I won't come up to the door.'

Bryda found Mrs Lambert only half awake in her easy-chair, with the best china teacups and a small teapot before her. Blair's sermons and the port wine together had caused a prolonged slumber, and Sam had brought in the tray all unobserved at five o'clock. Mr Lambert generally spent his Sunday afternoons with a friend at Long Ashton, and sometimes one of Mrs Lambert's cronies looked in on her for a dish of tea and a gossip. But no one had arrived on this afternoon, and the good lady had thus slept on undisturbed.

'What is the time, Miss Palmer? It must be time for tea.'

'Oh, yes, madam; it is six o'clock. I will go and boil the kettle, and make the tea; please give me the keys of the caddy.'

Bryda took the large tortoiseshell caddy from the shelf in the glass cupboard, and Mrs Lambert solemnly unlocked it. Tea was precious in those days, and Mrs Lambert took a teaspoon and carefully measured the precise quantity, saying,—

'One for each person, and one for the pot.'

'I have had my tea, madam,' Bryda said.

'Oh! Well you can take another cup, I daresay,' Mrs Lambert said graciously. 'I am getting a little faint,' she added, yawning, 'so I shall be obliged to you to hasten to brew the tea.'

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Bryda lost no time, and descending to the lower regions, set Sam at liberty till nine o'clock, and very soon had tea and crisp toast ready for her mistress.

All her handy ways were rapidly winning her favour, and Mrs Lambert called her 'a very notable young person, not at all like one brought up in a farmhouse!'

When the tea was over Bryda cleared it away, and carefully washing the handleless cups, replaced them in the corner cupboard. Then she took a seat by the window, at Mrs Lambert's request, and read to her—a dry sermon first, and then Mrs Lambert told her she might go to the bookcase and choose a book for her own reading.

Bryda's eyes kindled with delight, and she joyfully accepted the offer.

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'May I choose any book, madam?'

'Any book that is not a novel. There are some there not for Sunday reading, or indeed for workaday reading for a young person.'

'Milton's *Paradise Lost*,' Bryda said, 'may I take that?'

'Yes, but be careful not to finger the binding, and remember no book leaves this room. I found the apprentice had dared to abstract a volume of an old poet—which I am sure he could not read—by name Chaucer, for the poems are wrote in old English. He had a deserved reprimand, and a box on the ears for his pains.'

'Old English,' thought Bryda, 'old English, Tom Chatterton can read old English, for I suppose Rowley the priest's poems are in old English.'

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## CHAPTER IX

### THE POET'S FRIENDS.

When Chatterton left his mother's house soon after Bryda and Jack Henderson had gone away together he was in one of his most depressed moods.

What did anyone care for him or his disappointments and continually deferred hope that Mr Walpole would at least return the manuscripts, at first so graciously received, and now it would seem thrown aside as worthless?

Everything seemed against him, and the gay throng of pleasure seekers on the fair summer evening was an offence to him.

As he passed over Bristol Bridge he looked down into the river with a strange longing that he could find rest there, and be free from the torments of disappointed life and fruitless aims.

As he leaned over the parapet, gazing down into the dun-coloured waters, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a cheery voice said,—

'Eh, Tom, my lad, what are you dreaming about? Come with me to sup at Mr Barrett's and meet my brother Alexander, the parson. I'll warrant you have got some more bits of history for him to put into his big book. Come, come, don't look so glum, and we'll take a glass at the tavern in Wine Street on the way.'

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'No,' was the reply; 'you are very good sir, but I am in no mood for taverns to-night.'

'Well, a little bird whispered in my ear that you were seen in Redcliffe Meadows walking with a mighty pretty young lady, with a figure like a sylph and a face like an angel. Now then, Tom, don't be shy, but out with it, and tell the truth.'

'There's nothing to tell, sir. Miss Palmer is so unfortunate as to be under the same roof with me in Dowry Square, and misfortunes make us akin. She has great literary taste, and—'

'Ah, can see the beauties of Rowley's poems! Well, I am glad to hear it. They are wonders—wonders, and, Tom, you are a wonder for bringing them to light.' 'Then you are a poet, you know, a real poet, and Bristol will be proud of you some day. Why, there is not a lad of your age who can boast of his verses being taken by a London magazine and printed and admired. Come, Tom, don't be downcast; you should hear what my brother the reverend Alexander says of you, and he is a judge. A man who can write a book about the Deluge must be a judge—eh?'

Mr Catcott was a pewterer by trade, and a simple-hearted, kindly man, a staunch friend of Chatterton from first to last, never wavering in his allegiance nor in his faith in Rowley the priest; no, not even when not long after the great Dr Johnson asserted that the poems were a forgery, though at the same time he acknowledged that it was wonderful how the *whelp* had written such things. The honest pewterer now put his arm through Chatterton's, and soon his sympathy and

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perfect faith dispelled the cloud, and by the time they reached Mr Barrett's house Chatterton was his most winning self again.

Mr Barrett was a surgeon in good practice, and a man of culture, who found time to pursue his historical studies without neglecting his professional duties. In this he was very different from the ordinary general country practitioners of his times, who were for the most part men of scant education. Mr Barrett's introduction to Thomas Chatterton was brought about by the boy assuring Mr Burgum, Mr Catcott's partner in the pewtering business, that he came of a noble race, and that he had discovered a full account of the family of the De Bergheims, and at once presented Mr Burgum with a manuscript copy of the original document on parchment.

Mr Burgum had been so pleased that he gave the boy, then scarcely fourteen years old, in Colston's School, five shillings.

This success was followed by further particulars of the family, and a poet was found amongst the pewterer's ancestors, one John de Bergheim, a Cistercian monk, and a poem called the *Romaunt of the Cnyghte* was inserted in the second document to give the good pewterer a specimen of his skill.

To make the poem more intelligible to the puzzled pewterer a modern English version was appended, and very soon the boy at Colston's School attracted attention and became celebrated amongst a small circle of the more educated and literary Bristol people.

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Mr Barrett received Chatterton on this particular Sunday evening with much cordiality, and the conversation over the supper-table was easy and pleasant.

'Any news of the manuscripts?' Mr Barrett asked.

'No, sir, nor ever will be. I fear now they are lost beyond recall.'

'Nonsense; that cannot be allowed. Mr Walpole shall be forced to return them—if he is forced to do nothing else.'

'Sir,' Chatterton said, 'you know full well that Mr Walpole's whole manner changed when he discovered I was the son of a poor widow, and was small, and of no repute.'

'The very information which should have secured his heart and made your literary zeal of more value in his eyes. But means shall not be wanting to come to the bottom of this conduct of Mr Walpole's. Your friends will rally round you,' exclaimed Mr Catcott vehemently.

'Gently, gently, George,' exclaimed his more wary brother Alexander: 'We must first know that Mr Walpole has any dishonest intentions, which in a person of quality like him is scarce reasonable to suppose,' and then the author of *The History of the Deluge* pulled from his capacious waistcoat pocket a bit of fossil, which he handed round for inspection in support of one of his theories.

When the clock chimed the quarter to ten o'clock Chatterton hastily rose, saying,—

'I am late as it is, sir. Permit me to bid you good evening.'

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Mr Barrett followed Chatterton to the door, and laying his hand kindly on his arm, he slipped into his hand half-a-guinea.

'This is a small acknowledgment for the last curious bit of information you handed me on Bristol antiquities. Be of good courage, my boy; your time will come, and your industry in adding to the history of past ages will meet its reward.'

Chatterton pressed Mr Barrett's hand fervently.

'I thank you, sir,' he said; 'you are my good friend, and were there others like you I might be delivered from the chains which gall me.' Then Chatterton took a flying leap down the steps before Mr Barrett's house and sped on his way to Dowry Square.

'Poor boy!' the kindly surgeon said, 'poor boy! he is not made to bear the frowns of the rich and great, nor the buffets which all must meet in life. Poor boy! I would fain be of some use to him, but it is a hard matter to help such as he.'

In his better moments Chatterton had a longing to throw aside all shams, and be true.

As he stood at the door of the house in Dowry Square, waiting the first stroke of ten before he gave the single knock which should announce his arrival, he, looking up at the starlit sky, felt there was something greater and nobler to strive after than mere fame and recognition of his powers by those around him.

The silent majesty of the heavens has often brought a message, as to the psalmist of old, 'When I consider Thy heaven the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast created, what is man that Thou art mindful of Him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him.' That this poor boy had moments when he felt after God as the supreme good is shown by his poem which he calls 'The Resignation.'

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O God, whose thunder shakes the sky,  
Whose eye this atom globe surveys,  
To Thee, my only Rock, I fly,  
Thy mercy in Thy justice praise.

The mystic mazes of Thy will,  
The shadows of celestial light

Are past the power of human skill,  
But what the Eternal does is right.

Then why, my soul, dost thou complain,  
Why drooping, seek the dark recess?  
Shake off the melancholy chain,  
For God created all to bless.

We, who read these verses after the lapse of a hundred and twenty years, may well feel as sorrowful as if it were but a story of yesterday, that for Chatterton the last verse of this fine poem was, as far as our poor human judgment can go, never fulfilled, when he says,—

The gloomy mantle of the night  
Which on my sinking spirit steals,  
Will vanish at the morning light  
Which God, my East, my Sun, reveals.

The next day Mr Lambert, standing at the door of his study with his hands full of papers, called Bryda as she passed.

'Step in a moment, Miss Palmer,' the lawyer said, surveying her with his keen eyes, which gleamed under bushy eyebrows.

As Bryda obeyed and followed Mr Lambert into the room he shut the door.

'Mr Bayfield was here yesterday, as you may be aware.'

'I knew he was in Bristol, sir,' Bryda said, her voice faltering.

'Well, he has consented to await your decision before proceeding to recover the debt which your grandfather is unable to pay.'

'My decision, sir,' Bryda said, with some dignity, 'is made, and can never be altered.'

'Well, well, Bayfield is not the only man who has been taken at first sight with a pretty face. He says, if you will marry him, he will let your grandfather go scot-free. He has told you as much, I believe.'

Bryda's crimson cheeks was sufficient answer, but she said firmly,—

'I told the Squire my decision was made. I will not marry him.'

'That is your own affair, but it seems to me, you'll excuse me for saying so, you are throwing away a good chance. Young Bayfield seems to have got a great deal of practical knowledge in America, and I do not doubt will soon retrieve his fortunes. But he wants ready money, and this three hundred pounds is of importance to him. Still, he will waive his claim, it seems, if you consent to his proposal, and put in the scale with the gold you appear to weigh a good deal more. That is all I have to say. I felt bound to tell you what passed yesterday between me and Mr Bayfield. And, Miss Palmer, pardon me, but do not encourage that apprentice of mine to talk to you. You may find him troublesome. He is half mad, I think, and he does the most preposterous things, aiming the shafts of his so-called wit at those above him in station—his old master at Colston's School for one, and I thrashed him for his pains. I am seriously thinking I must break the indentures and be quit of him, with his rubbish and nonsense about old parchments, wasting his time when he ought to be learning his business. My mother seems very well satisfied with *you*, Miss Palmer, and I hope you will remain with us, unless you give the Squire the preference!' This was said with a laugh which made Bryda's heart swell with indignation as the lawyer bustled off to his office, where Chatterton had been an hour and more before him.

Bryda clasped her hands, and exclaimed,—

'He would not dare to speak to me like this if I were not poor. The apprentice is right, poverty is a curse, though Betty will not have it so; and how shameful of the Squire to speak of private affairs to Mr Lambert—about *me*. No, not even to save poor old grandfather will I have any more to do with him. After all, if the stock is sold, there will be the garden and the poultry and the dairy. I forget, though, if there are no cows there will be no milk—still there will be a roof over grandfather's head, and Silas will stand by him.'

Bryda continued to win favour with Mrs Lambert, and she snatched many an odd half-hour to read, taking a book from the cedar-lined bookcase and reading while Mrs Lambert dosed in her chair, or was engaged with some crony who looked in for a gossip, when Bryda had only eyes for her book, not ears for what was being said by the furthest window of the little parlour.

*The Vicar of Wakefield* fed Bryda's romance, and Milton fired her enthusiasm by his lofty strain. With the book on her knee, and some fine lace of Mrs Lambert's in her hand, which she was supposed to be darning, Bryda committed to heart 'Lycidas,' and 'L'Allegro,' while the faithful Abdiel in the larger poem became a living personage to her.

Writing to Bet was more difficult to achieve, but she used to kneel at the window seat in her little attic and set down the thoughts of every day as they occurred to her. As the month passed she felt some uneasiness for fear Mr Bayfield should make any further sign.

To take a stroll at a slow and measured pace with Mrs Lambert was one of her duties. Sometimes the old lady would go to the pump-room and drink a glass of the water, and Bryda was quietly amused to watch the gay crowd flitting here and there in the sunshine of the beautiful summer weather.

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Sometimes a short cough struck upon her ear, and her heart would go out in sympathy with some hectic invalids who, with the invariable desire of consumptive patients to appear better than they are, would sink exhausted on one of the benches, and then start up again to walk with a gaily dressed beau to the strains of the band playing under the row of trees before the houses.

'She will die before July is out,' Bryda heard someone near her say of a girl who had just recovered from a violent fit of coughing, and was placed in a sedan chair by her mother, resisting it and saying,—

'I had much rather walk. Don't make a fuss, pray.'

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'Death so near, and life so sweet,' thought Bryda, and then she recalled the elegy on the dead lamb, and the same shrinking from the unknown and the inevitable oppressed her.

One morning, when the dreaded month had nearly expired, Bryda was dispatched on a message to a shop celebrated for Bath buns, to buy a shilling's worth for the 'tea company' Mrs Lambert expected that afternoon. And she was also to call in at the grocer's and buy some allspice and orange peel for a tasty pudding which Mr Lambert wanted for a supper he was to give to some friends. Bryda looked as fresh as a rose just gathered as she set out on her errand, Mrs Lambert's large leather purse in her hand, and the directions as to her purchases in her mind, which had been repeated at least a dozen times.

'Mind you insist on having the buns puffy at the top. Don't let them press on you those with a sink in the middle where the comfits lie. They are sure to be heavy; and take care you get the narrow blue ribbon from a roll that is not faded outside at the haberdasher's in the College Green.'

'Mrs Lambert ought to think twice before she sends out that girl a-shopping,' Mrs Symes said to Sam the footboy. 'She is a vast deal too dainty to walk Bristol streets alone. I've seen the fellows turn and stare at her as she crosses the square, and as to Chatterton, he has eyes for nothing when she is by. I declare if ever eyes were like evil eyes they are that mad boy's.'

Then Mrs Symes wiped her face with her apron, and said the kitchen was enough to stifle her, proceeded to pursue her scrubbing and cleaning with great vehemence.

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Meanwhile Bryda went gaily on her way. She was very susceptible of the circumstances of the moment, and the summer air playing amongst the sails of the ships, as she got to the quay, and the water rippling at their sides, where the sunbeams danced and sparkled, gave her a sense of life and gladness which for the moment made her forget how near she was standing to the day when the Squire would again put before her the alternative of seeing her grandfather's stock sold, and so ruining him for the future as a farmer—or marrying him.

The idea seemed preposterous to her, and she shrank from it with the shrinking of a pure, high-minded girl.

She had finished her purchases, and carefully counted the change in the large leather purse, when the cathedral bells, chiming as she passed, made her think she would go in for the service.

There were not more than half-a-dozen straggling worshippers, and the prayers were made as short as possible by the irreverent fashion in which they were hurried over. But Bryda's ear caught the words of the anthem, which, by the care of the organist, was really the only devotional part of the service.

It was but a fragment from Handel's *Messiah*, but it was well sung, and the words struck home to Bryda's heart.

*As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. For as by man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead.*

Death, on which she had so often meditated—death, which had for her so much of darkness and fear—death could be changed by Him who had conquered death—'*All be made alive.*'

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The beauty of the music and the words acted like a spell on her, and she forgot the passing of time, till, as the half-dozen old men and women tottered away to their homes, she raised her head to see the verger beckoning to her.

'Service over, we clear the church,' he said, and Bryda rose hastily, and with heightened colour went out again into the summer noontide.

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## CHAPTER X

### A LONG RESPITE.



Bryda had nearly reached the entrance to Dowry Square, fearing she might be reprimanded for delay, when her heart beat fast as she recognised the Squire, Mr Bayfield, crossing over it to meet her.

His manner had changed, and he was gentle and even deferential as he bowed low and addressed Bryda.

'Good-day to you, Miss Palmer. I have come, by your leave, to hear your decision.'

'My decision was made, sir, when I last saw you. I have no more to say.'

'Hearken, fair lady, I am not one to be beaten in the race. See here, I had determined, as you know, to get that money, my lawful due. When I saw you standing at the cross roads like an incarnation of spring's loveliness my courage forsook me. In our future interviews it grew fainter and ever fainter. I love you, madam, and if you will promise to be my wife I swear I will never press that old man again for the money. I will work honestly to redeem the neglect of the past, at my poor home, and I swear further I will see you its fair mistress ere another year is out.'

'Nay, sir,' Bryda said, gathering up all her strength, 'nay, sir, do not swear what is impossible to perform. Not even to save those I love from penury will I accept your proposal.'

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'Another suitor is more favoured, I presume. Who is he?'

'Nay, sir,' Bryda said, with heightened colour and flashing eyes, 'there is a limit to such questions. I decline to answer them.'

'Now, see here,' Mr Bayfield went on, 'I give you a proof of my ardent affection. Name a time for the further consideration of this matter, and as I ride back to-day I will give them warning at Bishop's Farm that I extend the time for claiming my dues. Name the time, and I grant it, for your sweet sake, and for yours alone. Speak, and I obey—command me as your slave.'

Bryda hastily went over in her mind the probability that after all this was but a subterfuge, and that Mr Bayfield would not be true to his word. Then she thought of what the joy and relief at the farm would be when a long delay was granted—much might happen in six months—the winter might be hard, and there would be a terrible pinch, perhaps, for the necessaries of life at Bishop's Farm.

But could she trust Mr Bayfield?

She felt a strange recoil from him, and yet something like admiration, for he was a distinctly handsome man, and had an air and bearing far above good Jack Henderson, or any of her old admirers in her native village. After a moment's pause, while she nervously pinched the corners of the paper bag containing the Bath buns, she looked up with her clear guileless eyes into the Squire's face.

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'Will you grant a delay of a year, sir?' she asked.

'A year—*no!* I am not made of the stuff of patient Job,' he replied, with a little laugh. 'No, madam, I will *not* wait a year.'

'Till Eastertide next year, then?'

'Well, you are a little witch. I think you have cast a spell over me. I will wait till then. Come, thank me—give me a sign of gratitude.'

Bryda put out her little hand, and the Squire took it, bowed over it, raised it to his lips, and then said,—

'If I keep this hand your grandfather shall keep the money.'

'But I do not promise, sir—mind, I do not promise. I only crave for delay—understand me, sir.'

'I do understand,' was the reply, and then there were steps along the pavement of the square, as the apprentice hurried home for his midday meal in the kitchen.

Bryda reached the door at the same moment, but Chatterton made no remark.

He was in one of his unquiet moods. No news from Horace Walpole—no reply to his repeated demands for his manuscripts—nothing but complaints of him at the office—nothing but indignities in the house where he lived as a servant. What was it to him that Bryda's sweet face was clouded by distress—that tears stood on her long curled lashes—and that Mrs Lambert's voice was heard from the parlour door, raised in no pleasant tones?

'Miss Palmer, you are late in returning. Unpunctuality I cannot tolerate. Remember, miss, you are bound to follow my instructions, and—'

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Then the door closed, and Chatterton heard no more.

But that afternoon he went into Mr Antony Henderson's office in Corn Street, where poor Jack Henderson sat on his low stool, with his long legs bent up under the watchmaker's counter, pulling to pieces a large watch in a pinchbeck case, and thinking more of Bryda than the wheels of that cumbrous bit of mechanism.

Chatterton bent over him, and whispered in his ear,—

'Look about you, Henderson. Your fair lady has another suitor. He was with her in the square to-day at noon. A fine fellow, too, I swear he was.'

Jack started so that the pinchbeck watch had a narrow escape of falling from the counter, and the man who had the care of the apprentices at Mr Henderson's exclaimed,—

'Take care, you clumsy lout. You spoil more things than you mend. You'll never be fit for the trade. You might as well put one of your mother's heifers in here to learn the business.'

Jack paid little heed to this taunt, and bent his head lower over the watch.

Chatterton laughed a low laugh.

'Well,' he said, 'I advise you to look out or your fair one will slip through your fingers.'

And then he was gone.

Jack had to wait till the following Sunday before he could see Bryda. Everything was against him, for a heavy rain was falling, and there was no chance of Bryda coming out for a Sunday walk. But he went boldly up the steps before Mr Lambert's house and gave a heavy thud on the door with the knocker.

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The footboy opened it, and Jack said,—

'Can I see Miss Palmer?'

'I don't know. She is reading to the missis. But,' said the boy, with a knowing wink, 'the missis takes a nap after dinner, and if she is gone off Miss Palmer may get out on the sly. I'll peep in and see. You are Miss P.'s beau, ain't you?'

'Hold your tongue,' Jack said wrathfully, 'you impudent young villain.'

'Oh, that's it, is it? Then I sha'n't do no more for you. You may stand there till the "crack of doom" the 'prentice is always talking about.'

The voices in the little lobby attracted Bryda's attention. Mrs Lambert was comfortably asleep, and Bryda opened the door softly, and saw Jack standing near it, arrayed in his Sunday best—blue coat, bright buttons, and large buff waistcoat.

Bryda closed the door behind her and said,—

'I cannot come out to-day, Jack, it is raining so hard.'

'I know that. Can't I speak to you here a minute?'

'Mr Lambert is gone out for the day. Yes, you may come into his study. Is anything wrong, Jack?' she asked, looking anxiously into his face.

'What have you got to do with that brute of a Squire Bayfield? I know it was he you were talking to t'other day. Don't have aught to do with him or you'll rue it, I tell you. You will—'

'I don't know why you should be so cross, Jack,' Bryda said, assuming a jesting air. 'I shall sing you the old rhyme,—'

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Crosspatch, draw the latch,  
Sit by the fire and spin.'

'Don't be silly, Bryda. It is no laughing matter.'

'No, perhaps it isn't,' Bryda replied, 'but I have had a letter from my dear Bet, which the carrier brought, which will please you, or *ought* to please you.'

Bryda plunged her little hand into her deep pocket and drew out Betty's letter. Betty had not the gift of either penmanship or composition, and this letter had cost her much trouble.

'Here, read what Bet says,' Bryda exclaimed, holding out the letter to Jack.

'No, thank you. I don't want to read it.'

'Then I shall read it for you,' Bryda exclaimed, 'you stupid old Jack.'

How pretty she looked as she stood before Jack with the open letter, her face flushed with the most delicate crimson, her eyes sparkling as she began,—

'DEAR BRYDA,—This leaves me well, as I hope it finds you at present. Dear Bryda, the young Squire, Mr Bayfield, came over here last evening. He was as kind as he could be. Grandfather is not to trouble about the money for another few months. The Squire says he won't press it, and so we can go on as we are till next Easter. Dear Bryda, I think the Squire was tender-hearted when he saw grandfather so old and broken. I don't wonder. He looks ten years older since it came out about the money and our poor father. That's what cuts him to the heart—'

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Bryda sighed as she read these words, and Jack was touched. He had been cross-grained, he knew, but nevertheless he would gladly have got the Squire at that moment in his hands and thrashed him without mercy.

'That's all in the letter,' Bryda said. 'There's only love and kisses, and a few words written below to say grandfather had eaten a good supper and was more like himself for this good news.'

'It's all very well,' Jack said, 'but it seems to me if the Squire gets the money at Easter he might as well have it now. What's the odds?'

'Oh, Jack, they will have the winter to look about them. It does make a difference.'

'Well,' Jack said, 'I would not trust that man. He has got some reason for this, depend on it.'

But poor Jack dare not trust himself to ask what that reason might be. His was a mind slow to reach any conclusion. He was filled with a subtle uneasiness as to what might be the relations between Bryda and the Squire, and yet he dared not come to the point and ask the plain

question. Bryda would resent it, and he might lose what was so precious to him—the Sunday walks and the sight of her who was the light of his eyes. He only repeated,—

'He has got some reason, I'll warrant.'

'Kindness to an old man of seventy-six years is not that a reason enough to please you,' Bryda said, and then she added, 'I must go back to the parlour now. Mrs Lambert will awake and be angry if I am not at hand. Good-bye, Jack, good-bye. I hope it will be fair weather next Sunday, and then we'll go to the Redcliffe Meadows again. Good-bye.'

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Jack turned away sorrowful and uneasy, determined to watch the movements of the Squire and question Chatterton about him. 'And yet I should not like to act spy to *her*,' he sighed, as he went out into the relentless rain, which pattered on his best Sunday coat and dimmed the glory of the large gilt buttons with moisture.

In a city like Bristol, then as now, many stories of love and hatred, of vain aspirations and blighted hopes, are told out, of which the passer-by in the busy streets knows nothing.

To-day, as yesterday, our hermit spirits dwell apart, and even those with whom we live in daily intercourse but dimly guess what reason we have to smile or sigh.

Perhaps there never has been anyone, dwelling apart in the dreams of romance, and the world of the past peopled by his own fervid imagination, whose short, sad story can be compared with that of Mr Lambert's apprentice.

At this time of which I write—when Bryda Palmer was full of her own troubles, and with many misgivings tried to persuade herself she had given Mr Bayfield no promise, yet dreading lest he should interpret her acquiescence in the delay as a promise—Chatterton was brooding over his wrongs, and in August was in a frenzy of indignation when he received his cherished manuscripts back from Mr Walpole in a blank cover. This was the unkindest cut of all, for we all know that the wound to pride is, to a sensitive nature, the sorest and the slowest to heal.

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But Bristol took but little heed of the slender figure of Mr Lambert's apprentice as he paced the street, with hands clenched and brows knit, nursing his wrath against the great man who had once raised his hopes, and by his moody and fitful temper turning even his friends against him, or at any rate tending to make them indifferent to his woes. For Bristol citizens had many more important subjects claiming their attention at this particular time than the angry disappointment of a self-conscious and irritable boy.

Mr Wilkes was with some the hero of the hour, and the rebellious feeling in America, of which Bristol had perhaps the earliest intelligence, excited the popular feeling, and roused the sympathy of many for those who resisted the enforcement of the Stamp Act, and the indignation of others who were of the old Tory faction and thought that submission was the duty of their brethren on the further side of the great dividing ocean.

Chatterton was too much occupied with his own grievances to be keenly interested in what he heard discussed at Mr Barrett's supper-table or Mr Catcott's tavern. This good, simple-hearted man was faithful in his allegiance to the boy, and never doubted but the great work Chatterton had done in unearthing the poems of Rowley the priest would in time meet its reward.

'A fig for Mr Walpole!' he said. 'Never you fear, my lad, you'll find your level, and it will be a good deal above the level of Mr Walpole, with all his grand relations and riches. Go on, go on, and write for the *Town and Country Magazine*. Why, what a feather that is in your cap. There's not another fellow in Bristol to match you. Bless you, my brother Alexander's history of the Deluge is mighty dry reading though a watery subject,' and Mr Catcott sipped the large tankard before him, and setting it down with a loud thud on the tavern table, he laughed at his own wit. 'And then there's Barrett, his history is learned and all the rest of it, but I'd sooner read one of your own poems, my lad, let alone hear you recite from Rowley's 'Tragedy of Ælla,' than I would read twenty pages of history. It suits my tastes,' the worthy man said, 'and I have some taste and discernment, though my brother won't allow it. If I had none I should never have valued you as I do, my boy,' and then Mr Catcott flung down his money for his pot of beer, and clapping Chatterton on the back, went out with him into the streets of the city again, his arm linked in his, and his portly figure contrasting with the slight boyish form at his side.

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## CHAPTER XI

### CHRISTMAS AT THE FARM.

Mrs Lambert became more and more dependent on Bryda. She was an utterly selfish old lady, and selfish people have a strange power of getting all they want out of those who minister to

their particular weaknesses and foster their self-love and self-indulgence. Bryda was allowed to go home for two days at Christmas, having first made the puddings, and pastry for the mince pies, and cut the citron and orange peel into the prescribed portions for the rum punch which would be brewed for the Christmas supper.

Bryda was driven home in the cart which brought in some turnips and potatoes to Mr Henderson and produce for the Christmas market. Jack, to his great satisfaction, was allowed to return for Christmas, and include boxing day, not then as now the recognised holiday, but still a day of feasting and general jollification amongst the people.

Bryda's spirits rose when she reached the farm once more. She had been very quiet during the ride, and Jack was not a person of many words, but when Bet came out to clasp her in her arms, and her friend Flick went nearly mad with joy, she felt a thrill of satisfaction that by her means those she loved were still left in peaceful enjoyment of the old home.

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Her grandfather was more like himself, and when she arrived had just returned from an inspection of the stock with Silas, with a colour on his cheek like that of russet apple, and leaning less heavily on his staff.

'Well, my lass,' he said, 'town air has taken some of your colour from your cheeks, but you look like a wild rose all the same. Well—' and then the old man sank down on the settle and surveyed his grandchild with some admiring glances.

'Quite the town miss!' Dorothy Burrow said. 'I hope you ain't putting all your earnings on your back, Biddy?'

'No, aunt, not I. Madam Lambert gave me this sacque which makes me so smart, and some lace ruffles, beside my half-year's wages. Oh, I am quite rich, I can tell you.'

Bryda had time to hear all Bet's news in their own room before the evening meal.

'The Squire comes here sometimes,' Bet said; 'he is wonderfully kind. I can't help thinking he will never take the money, and leave grandfather in peace for the rest of his days.'

Bryda, who was opening her box to bring out her presents for Bet—a large crimson neckerchief with a border, a bow of ribbon to match for her cap, and a pair of long mittens—did not reply.

'What do you think, Bryda? Shall we have all the trouble back again at Easter?'

'Oh, no; let's hope not,' Bryda said carelessly. 'See, do you like these things? They are all for you.'

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'Oh! they *are* beautiful! But, dear, you must have spent too much money on me.'

'Not I. Why, child, I had five pounds wages, and I have got a lot left, and I am going to give Aunt Doll this warm shawl, and the dear old daddy a pipe, and yet I have three pounds left to last me till midsummer.'

'Ah, midsummer!' Betty said. 'We shall know by then.'

'Know what?' Bryda said sharply.

'Know whether we are sold up or not.'

'Well, let us have peace now, and forget everything but how we love each other; and oh! Bet, I have so much to tell you. I have read so many books while madam is asleep. The *Vicar of Wakefield*, and *Paradise Lost*, and Mr Pope's poetry, and history—and then there is poor Tom Chatterton, his verses are lovely!'

'Chatterton!' Betty said, 'who is he? Oh, yes, I remember—the apprentice who lives in the kitchen, and you went to see his mother.'

'Of course he is very strange and queer sometimes,' Bryda went on, 'but he is what is called a genius.'

'Is he in love with you?' Betty asked.

'Not that I know of. He is too full of Rowley the priest, and Mr Walpole's horrible rudeness to him, to be much in love. Of course he talks about my eyes, and my grace, and all such rubbish, but that is not *love*, little Bet.'

'Jack Henderson's is love,' Bet ventured to say. 'He has time to think of nothing but you, anyhow.'

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'Poor fellow!' Bryda said. 'I am afraid I have a great many other things to think of besides him. Let us go down. There's Aunt Doll screeching for you as usual.'

It was a pleasant Christmas in the old homestead. There seemed to be a tacit understanding in the family not to forecast the changes that Easter might bring. Everything went smoothly till the last evening of Bryda's holiday, when Jack Henderson came to supper, the board spread with the remains of the fine turkey cooked on Christmas day, and the large mince pie, pricked out with holly, which stood in the middle of the table.

The log fire sparkled merrily up the wide chimney, and Bryda, seated next her grandfather, felt a sense of happiness which had no cloud over it. Betty and Jack were happy in the joy of looking at her, for it would be difficult to say whether sister or lover was the most devoted worshipper at her shrine.

The dish of snap-dragon, just placed on the table, was waiting to be set alight, when a tap at the door made Flick start, rise warily on his forelegs, and growl ominously.

Betty, who was nearest the door, opened it, and with difficulty kept Flick back, who seemed determined to fly at the intruder.

'Down, Flick; be quiet,' the farmer thundered. 'Friend or foe, it ain't the thing to fly at folk's throats.'

'Friend or foe?' said a voice Bryda knew too well, and Mr Bayfield, his long riding-coat peppered with snow, which had touched his thick hair with a fringe of white, came in. 'Mr Palmer, I hope you will tell your hound I am a friend—eh, Miss Bryda?'

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'Sit down, sir, sit ye down,' said the farmer. 'And, Doll there, take the gentleman's coat and shake it.'

'I came to wish you a merry Christmas,' the Squire said, 'a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. I have brought some trifles for the ladies, if they will honour me by accepting them.'

All this time Jack Henderson had not spoken. His honest heart was filled with jealous hatred of the visitor, who seemed to be unconscious of his presence and took no notice of him.

Apparently Flick and Jack had some sympathy with each other, for the dog retreated from the hearth and went to Jack's side, crouching at his feet, with his nose on his paws and his watchful eyes fixed on the guest, with no very amiable expression in them.

'Light the snap-dragon dish,' Mr Bayfield exclaimed, 'and let me have a dip for a raisin. It is many a long year since I burnt my fingers in such a quest. The old customs have a charm,' he added. 'Do you not say so, Miss Bryda?'

Betty now carried away the two tallow candles, which stood in large pewter candlesticks on the high mantel-shelf, and the spirit was set on fire by Jack Henderson.

Then the hands were dipped in and the usual amount of exclamations followed.

Jack, who had looked forward to this episode of the Christmas supper, supplied Bryda with more plums than she could eat. The ladies of the party, on these occasions, were supposed to give their spoil, snatched from the burning mass amidst much screaming and laughing, to the most favoured gentlemen of the company.

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Bryda studiously avoided bestowing a single raisin on Mr Bayfield, and fed her grandfather with the hot morsels, and tossed one now and then to Jack Henderson.

Then there came the final scene, when most of the plums were secured, and Dorothy sprinkled the dish with salt. The ghastly light that flickered on the hot faces round the table was a part of the amusement.

The last flicker had died out, and the wide kitchen was nearly in darkness, for the fire had burnt low, when Bryda felt her hand seized and pressed to Mr Bayfield's lips.

'Remember Easter,' he said.

His words smote her with sudden fear. She snatched her hand away, and exclaimed,—

'Bring back the candles, Betty, and we will mix the punch.'

Again the low voice said, in tones which were almost a whisper,—

'Unless your promise is kept, this will be the last Christmas here for yonder old man.'

'I made no promise, sir,' was the reply; 'the promise was yours.'

'Come, sir, come,' the old farmer said, 'draw closer to the hearth, and let us drink to your health. Yon old punch bowl,' he said, with a sigh, 'belonged to my father, and his father before him. I would not care to part with it, nor of nothing they called their own.'

'Part!' Mr Bayfield exclaimed; 'no, by George! why should you. We won't talk of parting to-night, though you know, sir, the most precious things you possess will have to be parted with sooner or later.'

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'Ah, that's true; we can't carry aught out of the world with us, and we brought nothing into it. But let's fill the mugs to the brim and drink to the Squire's health, for I don't forget you have treated me handsomely, sir, in giving me breathing time. So here's to your health and happiness.'

Dorothy Burrows had thrown on more logs, and the genial blaze shone on the dark leaves of the evergreens and the scarlet holly berries, and brought out the dull white beads of the great mistletoe bough which hung suspended from the thick oaken beam of the kitchen.

The firelight made a bright light round Bryda's fair head, on which the masses of her hair were gathered and surmounted by a dainty top-knot of blue ribbon. Jack's eyes fed on her with a hungry longing to possess her. He saw visions of future Christmastides, when he should be a prosperous silversmith and live in one of the houses in the College Green, as his uncle did, with Bryda its mistress, with all she liked best about her—plenty of books, and music, and everything she asked for. Lost in the contemplation of that halcyon time, Jack forgot the present, and was only awoken to it by the old man's exclamation of wonder as Mr Bayfield laid the gifts of which he spoke on the table.

'Lor', to be sure, what a pretty necklace! Shells do you say, sir? I never saw such shells in my born days—green and white; and what a grand silver comb—that will please Bidy and no mistake—and a brooch for my daughter—well, to be sure! But I favour the shells most,' and the old man fingered the necklace made of the pearly shells, shot with green, which are to be found on the shores of the South Pacific ocean. 'And both of 'em for Bidy—and Bet a brooch like aunt's

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and a pin for her cap. Well,' said the old man, in whose veins the punch was circulating, and giving a comfortable sense of warmth and contentment, 'you are turning out a good friend, sir, after all, Mr Bayfield, sir. I thought you must have something of your good father in you, though at first you seemed a bit rough—you'll excuse me for saying so.'

Meanwhile, there lay the gifts on the table. Dorothy took up her brooch, and making a bob-courtesy, said,—

'I'm greatly obleeged to you, sir, I am sure.'

Betty, uncertain whether to speak before Bryda did, looked questioningly at her sister.

Bryda stood motionless, feeling the Squire's eyes were on her.

Presently he took up the necklace and said,—

'Permit me to clasp it on a neck which is fair as—'

But Bryda put up her hand to prevent it, and started back. Suddenly the necklace became like a fetter which would bind her to the man who gave it. But Mr Bayfield was not to be baffled. As Bryda retreated he advanced, the necklace in his hand, till Bryda stood under the mistletoe bough.

Then he caught her hand, and saying, 'I take my privilege here,' he put his arm round her and kissed her on the lips as he clasped the necklace round her slender throat.

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Like a lion from his lair Jack Henderson sprang on the Squire, and shouted,—

'You villain! how dare you?'

Instead of an angry retort the Squire only laughed ironically,—

'My good fellow, you may have your turn now. All is fair under the mistletoe bough at Christmas.'

Then, with a bow and a 'Good-night to you all,' the Squire departed, whistled to his groom, who had been holding his horse under cover in one of the farm sheds, and was gone.

Bryda, with burning cheeks, unfastened the hateful necklace, flung it down, and rushed out of the kitchen, regardless of her grandfather's repeated exclamations,—

'What are you about, you saucy baggage? And you, you lout, Jack, go and wait on the Squire, and see to his horse. What ails you—eh? It is not often a gentleman like that crosses our threshold and behaves so affable like and friendly.'

'Curse him!' was all that Jack could reply. 'If you think he is a gentleman, I say he is a villain. Good-night,' and then poor Jack, fuming and helpless, went out into the snowy night.

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## CHAPTER XII

### THE FINAL BLOW.

Betty found that to question Bryda as to the cause of her wrath against Mr Bayfield was useless.

To Betty's simple soul a kiss under the mistletoe bough was of no further significance. She had been kissed by Jack, and even her Aunt Dorothy had received a kiss from a neighbouring farmer who had visited them on Christmas day.

Betty pleaded that if the Squire was disposed to be kind and friendly to the old grandfather it was a risk to anger him. If they could keep the farm during his life times might improve, and there might be saving instead of loss, and the debt paid back.

Both girls felt that the debt itself had a peculiar interest for them. It had been originally incurred to save their father from death, for death by hanging was then the punishment awarded to forgery. Bryda, however, preserved silence as to the Squire, and when she had returned to Bristol Betty found the necklace and the silver comb hidden away in a deep drawer in a bureau.

Betty was suddenly struck with an idea.

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'Perhaps the Squire is really in love with her, and if he is, why should she be so angry? It would be a fine thing for Bryda, who sets such store by pretty things, and is so much more of the lady than I am. Dear Bryda, I should love to see her happy—but oh, poor Jack! what would he say?' And as she recalled his fierce looks as he sprang upon Mr Bayfield she added, 'And what might he not *do*?'

It is always difficult to realise how swiftly a certain period which we fix for any great decision in our lives, or any event which is to seriously affect us, will come. We look forward, especially in youth, to six or nine months and think there is time yet, we need not determine *yet* on any particular course of action, or make any definite plan yet. And then, even while we are thinking that there is yet delay, the days and weeks and months, perhaps years, have passed, and we find ourselves changing 'not yet' changed into the inexorable *now*.

It was thus with Bryda when she had pleaded for delay from Mr Bayfield. The hour for decision looked far away, and she had tried to put off thinking about it, and, trust with the hopefulness of youth, that all would be well.

Her life at Mrs Lambert's was not uncongenial to her, and she rose daily in the old lady's favour. Her hunger for books was in a measure satisfied, and she found good pasturage in the standard works of those times, with which Mr Lambert's library was well furnished.

Though the lace mending and lace cleaning for Mrs Lambert's caps and whimples and neckerchiefs and aprons went on, and though the preparation of dainty dishes to please the lawyer's appetite when he came home after hours spent in his office gave more and more satisfaction, Bryda found, and made time for her favourite pursuit. She was now allowed to take the books from the shelves and study them at leisure, and an old edition of Shakespeare's plays filled her with a strange thrill of delight. They were to Bryda, as to many another novice, like an introduction into a new world.

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For all her aspirations and longings, and for all her secret misgivings and fears for the future, for all her dreams of beauty and love of the good and true, she found the right expression and the right word.

'How wonderful,' she thought, 'that he should know everything I feel.'

The master's hand was recognised, and the recognition quickened her sympathy for poor Chatterton, who at this time—this Eastertide of 1770—was so greatly in need of it.

The storm that had long been in the air now broke over the head of Mr Lambert's apprentice.

Bryda heard angry voices in Mr Lambert's study before he went to his office one morning, and presently Madam Lambert came out bridling with rage, and declaring she would not sleep another night under the same roof with 'the young rascal.'

'No, no, I will not run the risk. What are you standing there for, Miss Palmer?' she said as, trembling with suppressed indignation, she put out her hand to Bryda to support her into her own parlour.

'Take care of my mother, Miss Palmer,' the lawyer said. 'Give her a glass of wine. She is too old to work herself into a frenzy like this.'

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Bryda, frightened at the old lady's pale face and trembling lips, hastened to get something to revive her, and placing her in her chair in the parlour, held a glass of port wine to her mouth, and fanned her with a large green fan lying on her little table.

'What has he done? What has Mr Chatterton done?'

'Tried to kill himself. Why, we might have had the house streaming with blood, and the crowner's inquest held here.'

'He threatened to kill himself, in a letter which Mr Barrett put into my hands,' Mr Lambert said, as he stood at the parlour door looking anxiously at his mother. 'Come, come, mother, no harm is done. The boy is mad, and a lot of people here have turned his head by flattering him till he is puffed up, and, like the frog in the fable, is all but bursting with conceit. I'll soon settle matters. He must take away what belongs to him; there's not much, I'll warrant, except his manuscripts in their outlandish trashy language. Now, keep her quiet, Miss Palmer, and don't let her fume and fret.'

Madam Lambert took her son's advice, and Bryda, seeing her inclined to take a nap, quietly left the room, and went downstairs to pursue her usual domestic duties. Mrs Symes was gone to market, and the footboy had been sent with her to carry the basket of purchases, so that Bryda was alone in the kitchen regions.

Presently a quick step was heard coming down the stairs, and Chatterton appeared.

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'I am free,' he said, 'Miss Palmer, I am free, and Bristol chains will hold me no longer. Do they think I am sorry? Not I! And yet!—the boy paused—'there is my mother. Poor soul, it will vex her sorely—and poor sister also. Well, I shall be off to London, and then—why, Miss Palmer, *then* you may live to hear of me as famous.'

Bryda raised her eyes to the boy's glowing face as he repeated the word *famous*, and said gently,—

'You would not, sure, think of taking your own life? Oh, it is very dreadful—it is a sin!'

'A sin!' he repeated. 'Well, I have not done it yet. I feel vastly full of life to-day. Old Lambert's rating at me put some spirit into me, and I shall not die yet.'

'Death is so solemn,' Bryda said, 'even when God calls us to die—the leaving of the sun and all the beauty of the world for the dark grave. I always shudder to see even a little bird dead, to think its songs are silent for ever, and its happy flights into the blue sky, and its sleep in its warm nest—'

'Ah!' Chatterton said, 'you have a breath of poetry in you. You can understand!'

'But what will you do in London? It is such a big place. And how will you live?'

'I shall *try* to live, and if I can't—well, I will do what I meant to do to-morrow—*die*. But,' he went on, throwing back his head with the proud gesture peculiar to him, 'I can turn a penny to more purpose in London than here. I have been paid for my contributions to the *Town and Country Magazine*, and the *Middlesex Journal* will take what I write and be glad. Then I have all my "Ælla"—"*Ælla*," he repeated, 'I set great store by "*Ælla*"—money will be sure to come for that and "The Tournament." But come and see my mother, Miss Palmer, next week, and we will have a parting visit together to the grand old church, and I will tell you more. Oh, I am not crushed yet—not I! I have heaps of literary stuff which may turn into gold, and I can say,—

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Hope, holy sister, sweeping through the sky,  
In crown of gold and robe of lily white,  
Which far abroad in gentle air doth fly,  
Meeting from distance the enjoyous sight,  
Albeit oft thou takest thy high flight  
Shrouded in mist and with thy blinded eyne.

'Yes, holy sister,' he repeated, 'I clasp thee to my heart, and away and away to London.'

'These are beautiful words,' Bryda said; 'are they yours?'

'Mine? yes, they are mine. Despair came to me in black guise when I went to old Burgum, and he vowed he had not sixpence to give me. And as to lend money—who would lend to a beggar? Not Burgum; he is a thrifty soul though he comes of the grand race of De Bergheim, of which he is mighty proud, poor fool!' And Chatterton indulged in a fit of laughter, probably remembering how easily the honest pewterer had been gulled by the story of his noble ancestry, for which he had given him a crown piece.

The laugh was strange, and not a melodious sound, and almost at the same moment Mrs Symes and the footboy came into the kitchen.

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'Laughing, are you?' she said. 'You will have to laugh on the wrong side of your mouth, young man. Why, the folks are all talking of you and your wickedness. Come, I hear you have notice to quit—be off. And as to you, Miss Palmer, I would take care what you have to do with this *limb*, for he is a limb and no mistake—a real limb of the Evil One.'

Chatterton did not seem much affected by Mrs Symes' tirade. He made a graceful bow as he left the kitchen for the last time, and with 'We shall meet again, Miss Palmer, so whispers the holy maid we spoke of just now,' he was gone.

But although Chatterton could be indifferent to the gibes of Mrs Symes he was by no means indifferent to the censure of his best friend Mr Barrett. The good surgeon sent for him to his house, and then said that, after a consultation with all his friends, there seemed no alternative but to agree to Mr Lambert's giving up the indentures, and getting rid of him.

Mr Barrett had ever a kindly feeling for the wild, undisciplined boy, whose genius he recognised although he had not measured the extent of his powers. Perhaps he knew how to awake in the boy poet his best and higher nature, for instead of receiving his reproofs and advice in a defiant manner he melted into tears, confessed that pride, his unconquerable pride, was his worst enemy, and that he would try to learn humility. The mention of his mother's distress affected him more than anything, and Mr Barrett, saw him depart with a sad heart.

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Of all his other friends, perhaps the kindly good-natured George Catcott was the most sorely troubled. But this Easter week in Bristol was one of great excitement, and the worthy citizens were all much occupied with their views of the great event of the time.

On Tuesday, the 17th of April, Mr Wilkes was released from prison, and all the advanced Liberals of the ancient city were to make themselves merry at the Crown Inn in honour of their hero's triumphant release.

Bristol has always been foremost in hero-worship, though too often the Dagon at whose feet it has lain has, like Mr Wilkes, been a poor creature after all, and has fallen from his pedestal and broken himself to pieces.

As Chatterton was pacing the familiar streets, and with alternate fits of hope and the most cruel despair thinking out his future, he passed the Crown Inn, in the passage from Bond Street to Gower Lane.

Sounds of revelry and merry voices struck his ear, and he paused to listen.

There were several other hangers-on in the precincts of the inn, and they were discussing Wilkes and liberty, and the freedom of the subject, with all the keen zest of those within.

A woman jostled against Chatterton, and raised herself on tiptoe, hoping to see something through the crack in the red curtain which hung over the window of the large room where the revellers were gathered. She was poor and ragged, and the goodly smell of the viands made her exclaim,—

'What a dinner they be having, while hundreds are starving. Ah! starving is hard work!'

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Chatterton heard the words and said,—

'Aye, my good woman, you are right,' and then he put his hand in his pocket and pulled out one of the very few copper coins which were left there and gave it to the woman.



'Lord bless you, my dear,' she said, 'you've a kind heart, and you look as thin as a rod yourself. I hear,' she said confidentially, 'they've got forty-five pounds of meat in there, and puddin' and punch and baccy. Ah! it's a queer world, that it is!' and then she passed on, the smell of the viands becoming more tantalising every minute.

There is something very pathetic in the position of the Bristol poet on that spring evening—alone, and as he thought deserted, and driven to despair by what he believed to be the ill-treatment of the people of Bristol.

After the lapse of a hundred and twenty years the memory of that boyish figure still haunts the streets of Bristol, and there comes a vain and helpless longing that at that critical moment of Chatterton's life some hand of blessed charity had been stretched out to him, some word of loving counsel and sympathy offered him.

It was the young eagle chafing against the bars of his cage, wounding his wings in every vain attempt to soar above his prison house; it was the prisoner held captive by chains, of his own forging, it may be, but not the less galling. The gift bestowed by the hand of God was soiled by its contact with earthly desires, and the Giver altogether unrecognised, and His divinity unfelt.

Chatterton, on this evening, was drifting on a sea of doubt and perplexity, nursing within angry passions of hate and revenge, and yet through all was to be seen the better self trying to assist itself, as when he gave his poor mite to the starving woman, and going to his home made his mother's heart sing for joy as he cast off his gloom, praised the frugal supper she set before him, and told her the day was soon coming when she should feast with him in London, whither he was bent on going as soon as possible. The very next day this scheme was rendered comparatively easy of accomplishment.

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Mr Barrett, probably when discussing Chatterton's story over the punch bowl at the Crown, got up a little subscription for him, and sent for him to communicate the intelligence on the next morning.

And now indeed Hope, holy sister, swept through the poet's sky in crown of gold and robe of lily white. Dire despondency was changed into raptures of joy, and his mother, though with a pain at her heart, busied herself to enter into all the little preparations for her son's start to London—London, which meant for him a new bright world, the world of Goldsmith and Garrick, of Johnson and Burke, and who could tell if, when with the laurel crown of success on his brow, he might not meet Horace Walpole as an equal and repay his coldness with disdain. Who could tell? Alas that this exultant happiness in promised good should be doomed to end in the wail of sadness which was to know no note of triumph henceforth.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### AN UNSUCCESSFUL SUIT.

Never once in all the months that Bryda had spent under Mr Lambert's roof had Jack Henderson failed to appear at the door of the house in Dowry Square on Sunday afternoons to inquire if Miss Palmer was disposed for a walk. But he had often to turn away dejected and sorrowful. Sometimes Bryda could not leave Mrs Lambert, sometimes she had promised to take a dish of tea with one or other of the friends of the old lady who frequented her parlour, and praised the girl, who was, as they said, so notable and obliging, and who was really quite the young gentlewoman though country bred and born in a farmhouse.

But Jack had worse misgivings than could be caused by Mrs Lambert's disappointing him of his Sunday treat—looked forward to with hungry eagerness from Monday morning to Saturday night—he heard from Chatterton that the suitor whom he had seen in Dowry Square in the autumn was frequently known to be hanging about the place, that he visited Mr Lambert's office, that he had been invited more than once to the midday dinner, and that he had on these occasions made himself generally agreeable.

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Jack attempted once or twice to question Bryda about the Squire, but she always resented it, and the pleasure of his walk was consequently spoiled.

Mrs Lambert, though she never asked Jack Henderson to cross the threshold, was abundantly gracious to Mr Bayfield, and he, taking his cue, flattered the good lady to the top of her bent, sympathised about the crazy apprentice, and declared hanging was too good for him. After the meal was over, Bryda would sit silently by with her work, and the Squire left her alone. But on this memorable Saturday, when the apprentice had finally been dismissed, and his iniquities fully discussed, he leaned over Bryda as he took leave and said,—

'The morrow is Easter day. Did we not agree for Easter or Whitsuntide?'

'For neither, sir,' was the reply, in a low voice, 'for *neither*,' she repeated.

'Then I may put in an execution on the farm next week. Is it so?'

And Bryda answered,—

'If you are minded to be so cruel, sir.'

And so Mr Bayfield left her.

'Miss Palmer,' Mrs Lambert said, 'if that gentleman is paying his addresses to you, it is my duty to express a hope that they are honourable.'

Bryda's eyes flashed, and she answered,—

'The Squire has a matter of business connected with my grandfather, beyond this I have no dealings with him, madam.'

'I am happy to hear it, for although, Miss Palmer, I consider you as a friend rather than a serving-maid, and allow my particular friends to show you kindness, I must remind you that you are not in the class of life from which a country squire would choose a *wife*.'

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Mr Lambert had left the parlour with the Squire, and Bryda felt that he, at least, knew the real position of affairs.

Mrs Lambert's words made her heart beat fast with mingled fear and indignation, and she determined to lose no time in writing to Bet, and telling her the sale must at once be thought of, for Mr Bayfield was inexorable, and he must have the money.

The next morning was fair and bright.

The bells of the Bristol churches were ringing a joyous peal, telling out the glad tidings that the Lord was risen, and Mrs Lambert, arrayed in her best gown, leaning on her gold-headed walking-stick, with Bryda at her side carrying her big books, went to the service at the cathedral.

The anthem had again a message for Bryda, as on that first Sunday long ago. *Even so in Christ shall all be made alive*, sounded the triumphal strain, and then there came into her young heart the question, had she any part or lot in the risen Christ? Bryda had never been confirmed. Confirmations in those days were of rare occurrence, and the remote country districts were reached by the Bishop of the diocese at long intervals. But Mrs Lambert, being a rigid observer of times and seasons, went up to the altar, at the conclusion of the morning prayer and short dry sermon, to receive the Holy Communion, as it is set forth in the prayer book that such is the duty of all members of the Church three times a year at least, of which Easter is one.

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Mrs Lambert put out her hand to Bryda as she left the pew, as if she needed her support, but poor Bryda shook her head and whispered,—

'I cannot come, madam.'

Mrs Lambert gave her a reproving glance, and one of her friends, seeing her dilemma, came forward and gave the old lady an arm to the altar.

Bryda sank down on her knees, and all unbidden tears forced their way through her fingers. She felt outside, poor child, and uncared for, and so sorely in need of some help in what was likely to be a crisis in her life.

If the Squire persisted, what should she do? Then, with a great longing of prayer, she asked for wisdom to do what was best and right—and to marry the Squire could never be best and right. Better let everything at the farm be sold. Better let her grandfather suffer than consent to what would be a sin. Then the remembrance of Mrs Lambert's words the day before made her cheeks burn, and she rose up at last determined to let Betty know that immediate steps must be taken and the large sum raised to pay off the debt.

That afternoon Jack Henderson was not disappointed of his walk. He appeared dressed in his best, with a large bunch of primroses, bought in the market the day before in his hand, and two or three in his buttonhole.

The bunch he presented to Bryda, who returned with them, for a minute, to the parlour, and filling a vase with water, placed them on the little table where the volume of sermons lay.

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'Mr Henderson brought them for me, madam,' she said. 'It is too large a posy to carry, so I will beg you to accept them.'

Mrs Lambert was pleased to sniff the flowers and say,—

'I am much obliged to you, my dear. Mr Lambert considers Mr Henderson's nephew a very respectable young man. I have no objections to your keeping his company—he is, of course, in your own class of life,' she said significantly.

'What have you done with the posy, Bryda,' Jack asked.

'It was far too big to carry with me, so I put the poor flowers in water. Now let us go up on the Downs. I am in the mood for a long stroll. Don't be cross about the posy, Jack.'

'I am not cross that I know of,' was the reply.

Then there was a long climb to the heights above the Hot Wells, and at last, on the vantage ground where the old snuff-mill stood, now the well-known observatory, the two sat down on a boulder of limestone to rest. There were no houses near, thus nothing interrupted the view in any

direction. The budding woods on the other side of the great gorge, now spanned by the famous Suspension Bridge, were just wearing their first delicate veil of emerald. Away, far away, the blue mountains of the Welsh coast stood out against the clear sky, and the sloping sides of the Mendips, where Dundry Tower stands like a sentinel on guard over the city, were bathed in the soft radiance of the April day, while now and again the chime of bells was borne on the breeze.

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For some minutes both were silent, Jack toying with the small pebbles at his feet, Bryda gazing out at the hills where her home lay hid, and forgetting poor Jack's presence in her own meditation. Jack was the first to break the silence. There had sprung up between him and Bryda, since Christmas, a certain reserve which seemed to raise a barrier between him and his fondest hopes.

'I say, Bryda,' he began, 'I am very unhappy. Can't you give me a kind word?'

'Why, Jack, what is the matter?' she said carelessly. 'I thought I was unhappy this morning, but now I think no one ought to be sad to-day. So the bells tell me. Hearken!'

'I am sad, though,' poor Jack rejoined. 'I love you, Bryda. You must know it. I have loved you all my life—I shall love you till I die. I am tied to this silversmith's business—but my uncle has no children, he takes more kindly to me than he did, and the last year I have pleased him better. When he dies I shall come into the business, and then—'

Bryda turned and looked straight into Jack's frank, honest face. She tried to speak lightly.

'So after all, Jack, your mother was right, and you will be a Bristol alderman some day, or perhaps mayor.'

Jack's foot gave an impatient kick against the pebbles beneath it.

'What has that to do with the question?' he said. 'Bryda, can you care for me? Can you love me? That's the real question.'

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'Jack, I have always cared for you, you know that. Now let us talk of something else.'

'No,' Jack said, 'I am not to be put off like this. Give me a plain answer. When I can give you all you ought to have, you know, will you be my wife? I love you so that if you can't promise to be my wife I don't care what becomes of me. I shall be off in one of the ships from the quay, and get drowned—drown myself, I daresay.'

'Nonsense, Jack; be sensible. I do not feel as if I could promise to marry anybody. There is trouble at home, and I am thinking more of that just now than anything else,' and in spite of herself her colour deepened on her cheeks and the tears dimmed her eyes.

'Look here, Bryda, has that villain Bayfield anything to do with this? Do you care for *him*? I hear he has been gallivanting after you, curse him.'

'Hush, Jack. On this beautiful day—Easter day—don't have wicked feelings. If you went to church this morning—'

'I didn't. I was too miserable,' Jack interrupted.

'Well, I am sorry for that,' she said very gently, 'because if you had gone you would have heard the words which tell us to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness, Jack. I have thought so much more of religion since I came to Bristol, I don't quite know why, but I have thought how, if we really love God, He will keep us safe—safe from evil passions such as we have seen possess poor Tom Chatterton. I could cry when I think that when he was only a little boy of eleven he could write those beautiful verses on "Christmas Day," and not long ago the lines on "Faith," and yet get so mastered by his passion that he could actually write a will to be read when he had sinned against God by killing himself to-day. And he is now cast out on the world, which will break his poor mother's heart.'

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But Jack Henderson did not care to hear about the mad apprentice just then. He rose from his seat with a gesture of impatience.

'I don't want to hear about Tom Chatterton,' he said. 'I asked you a plain question, and I want a plain answer.'

'Well, then, dear Jack, we shall always be friends, I hope. But I could not—no, I could not promise more.'

'Very well,' he said moodily. 'But look here, Bryda, if I thought that scoundrel Bayfield had anything to do with this I'd break every bone in his body—I swear I would!'

'You have no right to speak to me like this,' Bryda replied. 'You have no right to suppose that the Squire has anything to do with what I say to you.'

'Haven't I, then? What did he mean by sneaking in last Christmas with presents, and daring to —' Jack stopped, and then in a choked voice he said, 'Don't be angry with me, Bryda; that would be worse than all.'

'No, I won't be angry if you are good,' she said, in a tone she would have used to soothe a child, 'and now let us go round by the village and down by Bristol to the Hot Wells.'

Yes, Clifton was then only a village, and Chatterton had already sung its charms in lines which ought to be known and prized by those who live in the Clifton of these days. It is true Clifton is no longer 'the sweet village' which the boy poet describes, though it may still be

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The loved retreat of all the rich and gay,

it is not the Clifton of a century and more ago. Now it is rather a city of mansions and stately crescents, of colleges and schools, than a village. Full of the busy workers in literature and art, of philanthropists and philosophers, of churches and chapels, looking down from the elevation of her rocky fastnesses over the yellow Avon creeping below, 'its sullen billows rolling a muddy tide.'

The poet who sang its praises, and with his wonderful eagle glance over the page of Bristol history seized the salient points to introduce into his ode, is at once one of the most famous and the saddest memories lingering round this City of the West, from which her younger sister of to-day has sprung, and to which she owes her origin and her wealth.

Jack and Bryda parted at the entrance of Dowry Square, and with a long and wistful gaze at the face he loved so well he turned sadly away.

'I am a rough suitor,' he said to himself, 'I shall never win her. She is too far above me, too good, too clever, but'—and poor Jack tore the primroses from his coat and threw them away—'oh, Heaven! how I love her!'

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## CHAPTER XIV

### ON THE HILLSIDE.

The next week was spent by Chatterton in bidding his friends good-bye, presenting some young ladies of his acquaintance with gingerbread, the boyish side of his nature coming to the front, and with it a loving tenderness to his mother and sister.

Full of hope since the money had been collected for him, and glad to be turning his back on Bristol, Chatterton was in one of his most winning moods.

The soft spring weather had changed, cold winds blew, and instead of soft April showers hail fell, blown in little heaps along Dowry Square by the breath of the keen north-west wind.

Bryda was standing by the parlour window, looking out into the square, just before dinner was served on Sunday.

It was somewhat of a relief to her to think Jack would not come to-day, or, if he came, she could make the excuse of cold and a headache and decline to take a Sunday stroll.

The remembrance of poor Jack's sad face as they parted haunted her, and she said to herself she wished she had been kinder to him, and she wished, oh! how she wished he had loved Betty instead of her. Bryda had written to Betty as she had determined, and sent the letter by the carrier, folded in thick paper and fastened by a string. The post in the rural districts was very irregular in those days, and the carrier's charge for delivering a parcel was even less than the postage of a letter. Bryda wondered she had received no answer yet from Betty. She had told her to reply on the return of the carrier on Saturday, and she knew that if the letter was left at the office in Corn Street she would be sure to get it on Saturday evening.

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But no reply had come. Bryda had spoken to Mr Lambert that morning about the affairs at Bishop's Farm, and he had advised that before the Squire could take any decided steps an appraiser, in the old man's interests, should be dispatched to the farm to value the stock and the furniture, and find out how far it would cover the debt and the expenses.

'I must wait till I hear from my sister,' Bryda had said. 'I dare not take them by surprise; it would frighten poor grandfather, and upset him again. I hope Betty will soon answer my letter.'

'Well,' Mr Lambert had replied, 'young ladies must please themselves, as they take care to do; but if I might presume to advise, I should say accept the Squire's proposal. I should have thought he was a likely fellow to gain a fair maiden's favour.'

Bryda had no reply to make to this, and now, as she stood looking out on the square, she saw a boy crossing it and looking at the houses, as if uncertain at which to stop. Presently he came up to the door and rang the bell, giving also a great thud with the knocker. The footboy hastened up to open the door, and Bryda, going into the passage, heard her name.

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'Does Miss Palmer live here?'

Bryda advanced and said,—

'Yes; I am Miss Palmer.'

'This is for you, miss,' the boy said. 'I was to say it was *urgent*.'

Bryda took from the boy's hand a crumpled bit of paper, on which was written,—

'Come at once to the old thorn tree half-way up the hill—great distress, I must see you. I will be there at three o'clock.

BETTY.'

The paper was so crumpled that it was hard to decipher the writing, but it was Betty's, of that Bryda felt sure. She went hastily to the parlour.

'Madam Lambert,' she said, 'I am come to ask leave to start at once to meet my sister. She is in great trouble—give me leave—'

'To meet her—where? You agitate me, Miss Palmer.'

'Oh! I pray you let me go,' and Bryda, scarcely waiting for an answer, ran upstairs, threw on her cloak and covered her head with its hood, and then was out of the house and on her way towards Rownham Ferry.

'The shortest way, oh! which is the shortest way. Shall I be able to get to the thorn tree by three o'clock. I know the tree, and the road when I am once out of Bristol.'

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At this moment she met Chatterton, whom she stopped, waking him from one of his dreams.

'Oh, Miss Palmer, I was on my way towards the square, hoping I might be so happy as to meet you and your true knight. But what ails you?'

'I have had a summons to meet Bet, my sister. She is in great trouble, something has happened. Put me in the way to get to the road to Dundry.'

'I will show you the way, and glad to do so,' Chatterton said. 'I am sorry for your distress, Miss Palmer, but let us hope things are not so bad as you fear. I am in good heart to-day,' he said, his fine face shining with hope and boyish gladness, 'let me give you some of my "Holy sister's" influence.'

Then he walked with Bryda to the ferry. When once on the other side of the river she could find her way to the foot of the winding road which led up to Dundry.

Bryda held the crumpled piece of paper in her hand and scanned it again.

'Bet has written it so ill I can scarce read it,' she said. 'That word is *distress*, is it not, Mr Chatterton?'

Chatterton took the paper and examined it closely.

'It is the hand of one who can write well if she choose—and do you know your sister's handwriting?'

'Yes, I know she takes a long time to write, but I expect she was hurried and distressed, and these are tears which have blotted the paper. What can it be? Oh, what can the trouble be? Good-bye, and thank you. I must go, as it is full three miles to the old thorn tree.'

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'I know it,' Chatterton said, 'I know it. It is where a by-road turns off towards Bath. I wish you good luck, Miss Palmer.'

Then Chatterton turned, and went back with his swift pace the way he came.

He met, as he expected, Jack Henderson, who had been to Dowry Square and heard that Miss Palmer had been called away on some business, but where the footboy did not know.

When Chatterton met Jack, he was walking with a downcast air, and Chatterton had slapped him on the back before he was aware of his presence.

'Whither away, Master Jacques the melancholy?'

'I am in no mood for jests. Tom, let me go.'

'Yes, but let me tell you something first. A certain fair damsel you know, has crossed the ferry, and is wandering unprotected up the road to Dundry. Be a good knight and follow her, for it strikes me she may need your presence.'

'What do you mean?' Jack said.

'What I say. Your fair lady is in trouble, summoned to the old thorn tree half-way up the hill by her sister, who is in dire need. I have my suspicions that the paper she showed me is not wrote by her by whom it is pretended. Speed away, honest Jack, and see what you will see.'

But Jack stood still; he was always slow of perception, and never took up any idea hastily. 'She may not want me,' he thought; 'she may be angry, as she was last Sunday, but—' As Chatterton gave him another sharp slap on his back, as a parting encouragement to set off, he said aloud,—

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'Well, I may as well walk that way as any other; it's no odds to me.'

Chatterton then left him. He was on his way to his good friend Mr Clayfield's, and was to meet there several of the friends who had been kind to him and stood by him in the distress of Easter eve.

Jack Henderson pulled himself together and began his walk, crossed the ferry, and went on in the direction which Chatterton had pointed out, greatly wondering what Betty could possibly have to say to Bryda which she could not have put down on paper.

'Perhaps that brute has put an execution in the farm, turning out the old man into the road, like enough. Well, I may as well follow, for it's a lonely road for her, and there's lots of ill-looking fellows lurking about birds nesting and ratting on Sundays.' Then Jack heaved a deep sigh as he

said, 'P'r'aps she won't mind my taking care of her for once, though a week ago she just treated me as if I was naught to her.' And as Jack recalled the scene on the summit of St Vincent's Rocks he felt a pain at his heart, which, as he thought, time would never cure.

Meantime Bryda pressed bravely on, though the storms of hail often beat on her face, and then the cloud breaking, great fields of deepest blue sky appeared in the rifts, and now and again the sun shone out brightly on the young leaves and primrose banks, as if to reassure them that the present cold was but an afterthought of winter, and that spring and May would soon reign again.

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Bryda's way led along a lonely road. There were no villages, only here and there a shepherd's hut, and not a house to be seen. A few ragged boys foraging in the hedges for birds' nests, or paddling in a little wayside stream for tadpoles, were the only people she saw. The ascent was long and steep, but Bryda stepped quickly on, and at last the thorn tree, with its rugged, gnarled trunk, came in sight.

Here the road branched off in two directions; that to the left led across the side of the hill towards Bath, the other down to the village of Bower Ashton, and following straight on led to Dundry, beyond which was Bishop's Farm.

When Bryda reached the old crooked thorn, which was but scantily covered with blossoms in its old age, she looked in vain for Betty.

The Bristol bells were ringing for evensong as she was climbing the hill, and she had quickened her step fearing she might be late.

Bryda sat down to rest on an old milestone which stood close by and waited, but still no Betty appeared. Presently she was conscious of footsteps approaching, and turning her head, sprang to her feet to meet, not Betty, but Mr Bayfield.

'What is the matter, sir, at the farm? Betty sent for me—she is in great distress—can you tell me?'

'I am come instead of your sister,' Mr Bayfield said, and pitying Bryda's face of alarm, he said, 'Nothing is wrong. I am only come here to claim your promise. Easter has come and is nearly gone. I am prepared to bury the very remembrance of the debt. I am prepared to leave your grandfather a free man for the rest of his life, and give him a written pledge of this, if you will consent to be mine.'

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Bryda started back. The helplessness of her position came over her. Alone on that lonely hillside—alone, and with no hope of escape.

'Hearken, fairest and dearest,' Mr Bayfield began, 'I am not one to be turned from anything I have set my heart on. I *mean* to have you, and so,' he said with emphasis, 'you had best come to me graciously.'

'I did *not* promise,' Bryda said firmly. 'It is cowardly in you, sir, to try to put me thus in the wrong.'

'Now, now, fair lady, that is going too far. I made certain conditions, you accepted them. I have been true to my part of the agreement—you must, nay shall, reward me. I have a horse and gig a little further up yonder by-road. I shall drive you to Bath, and then I will marry you to-morrow morning. Come. You shall reign like a queen in my old home, and I will do all you desire. Come.'

And Mr Bayfield laid a firm hand on Bryda's arm, looking down into her terror-struck face with eyes in which his determination and his passion shone almost fiercely.

Bryda did not scream or cry, or even struggle. The spirit that was in her rose above her fears, and looking steadily at Mr Bayfield she said,—

'I will not be forced to marry you, sir. Let me go. Every penny of your claim shall be paid, but I will not marry you.'

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A laugh greeted these words, and yet when Bryda said, after a momentary pause, 'I trust in God, and He will deliver me,' the laugh was changed into a tone of entreaty. Something in this girl there was which, in spite of himself, commanded respect. So small, so fragile as she looked in his power, in his hands, lured thither by his treachery, as a bird is lured to the snare, he yet quailed as Bryda repeated, 'He will deliver me.'

'Nay, Bryda,' he began in a gentler tone, 'I love you. I offer you all I have. I make you honourable proposals, when some men might—'

A loud voice was now heard.

'What are you doing here—eh?' And in another moment Jack Henderson strode up, and putting his arm round Bryda, said defiantly, 'Touch her again if you dare.'

'Touch her!' Mr Bayfield said, with cool irony, 'touch her! I am to marry her to-morrow morning at Bath, so, my good fellow, I advise you to go back the way you came, and remember the old adage and mind your own business.'

'Is this true, Bryda?' Jack said, still holding her with his strong arm, 'is this true?'

'No, Jack, no, it is not true—it is false.'

Then Jack sprang upon the Squire and struck him across the face.

'Leave her!' he shouted, 'leave go this instant, you scoundrel!'

'Yes, to give you your deserts, you young rascal.'

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The two men closed in a deadly struggle, and Jack, the lion roused within him, got the mastery, though his adversary fought in a more scientific way, as one who had been well accustomed to such conflicts.

Bryda stood by the old thorn tree too terrified to move, only entreating Jack to stop for her sake, only crying aloud in her despair to Mr Bayfield to stop.

But the fight grew ever fiercer and fiercer, and at last, with one mighty blow of his huge arm, Jack had his adversary at his feet, his knee on his chest, his hand at his throat.

So tremendous was the force with which the young giant had felled the Squire that his fall made a heavy thud on the hard road.

Just at this moment a storm-cloud came sweeping over the hillside, and hail fell in a thick, sharp shower.

'Swear you will leave her, swear you will not touch her again,' Jack gasped out, for he was breathless with rage and exertion.

But there was no answer. Suddenly Jack relaxed his hold, and rising, stood staring down at the inanimate form before him, on which the hail beat with blinding fury.

Bryda drew near, and clasping her hands, said,—

'You have killed him, Jack Henderson, you have killed him! Oh, God have mercy on you and on me!'

Jack stood motionless as one in a dream. Blood was streaming down his cheeks from a cut in the temple, and his face was almost as wan and livid as that which was turned up to the darkened sky, on which the pitiless hailstones danced and leaped, unheeded and unfelt.

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Thus they stood, when steps were heard plodding down the hill, and old Silas, the shepherd from Bishop's Farm, came up.

'What's to do?' he said. 'Miss Bidy, my dear, what's to do?'

'Get a doctor,' she gasped. 'They have had a fight, and—he is—hurt.'

'Dead,' Silas said, looking down at Mr Bayfield as he had looked down on the lamb a year ago, 'dead. His skull is cracked, I'll warrant.'

'Oh, go for a doctor, Jack. Run quick to Bristol and send a doctor. Oh, Jack! Jack!'

Her voice seemed to wake Jack from his stupor.

'Yes,' he said, 'I'll send a doctor. Yes. Good-bye, Bryda, good-bye, and—' Jack covered his face with his hands, and sobs shook his large frame. 'He angered me past bearing, Bryda. I did it for your sake,' he sobbed. 'Say one word to me before I go.'

'Oh, Jack! Jack! What can I say except God forgive you?' She laid her little hand tenderly on Jack's fingers, through which the tears were trickling, and repeated, 'Yes, God forgive you and help *me*.'

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It fell out that Jack Henderson, running headlong down the hill, met a village doctor, in his high gig, returning from a long and weary round of country visits.

Jack hailed him, and the doctor drew up his tired nag.

'There's a man lying on the hill half a mile up the road. Go to him quick—it's life or death.'

'Why, you are covered with blood, young man,' the doctor said, as Jack flew past on his downward way to Bristol. 'I say,' he shouted, 'come back. I may want help.'

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But Jack took no heed, and the doctor, whipping up his old mare, soon reached the place where Mr Bayfield lay.

The storm-cloud had passed, and again there was a gleam of sunshine flooding the country side with fitful radiance.

When the doctor leaped down from his gig he found Bryda alone, kneeling by the motionless form. Silas had gone, at her bidding, down the by-road which branched off the highway, where she remembered she had heard Mr Bayfield say a horse and gig were waiting.

'Is he dead? Oh, say he is not dead!' Bryda moaned. 'Say he is not dead!'

But the doctor did not reply. He unfastened the high cravat, with its lace ends, unbuttoned the two-fold waistcoats, one of cherry colour the other of buff, the deep red edge showing against the paler hue. He flung back the frilled shirt and put his head against Mr Bayfield's side, took the long, limp hands in his, put his finger on the pulse, and finally drew his large watch from his fob and looked narrowly down at its round white-rimmed dial.

'No, he is not dead,' he said shortly to Bryda; 'go to my gig, open the well behind, and bring me a black case—make haste.'

Bryda staggered to her feet and did as she was bid. The doctor unstrapped the case, and taking out a small bottle, dropped some of its contents between the Squire's lips.

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A slight movement of the eyelids followed just as old Silas returned with the horse and gig, which had been waiting with a servant till Mr Bayfield joined them about a quarter of a mile down the lane.

'Who did it?' the servant asked. 'Whose work is this?'

'It was a fight,' Bryda faltered; 'it was a fight.'

'A fair fight—eh? Who began it?'

Poor Bryda burst into weeping.

'Oh, do not ask me—do not ask me,' she murmured.

'Poor little dear!' said the doctor. 'Was it a fight about you—eh? Why, it's one of old Farmer Palmer's grand-daughters, I declare. Cheer up, my pretty one, yours is not the first pretty face which has made mischief between two suitors. There! there! he isn't dead yet, and he may live. I can't say yet, but we must get him home. How far is it?'

'A matter of twelve miles, sir.'

'Well, we must lay him across my shandry, it's more roomy than his gimcracky gig. And you,' he said, turning to the servant, 'must lead the horse. I'll watch him, and we can make a roughish sort of bed with the cushions from the gig. And what shall I do with you, my dear?' the doctor asked.

'Nothing! nothing! I must go back to Bristol. Madam will be so angry. Silas, give my love to Betty, and tell her I will write to her. I dare not go home—no, I dare not, Silas. Aunt Dorothy would say it was all my fault, and so it is! so it is!' Then Bryda turned away, saying, 'He is not dead, you are sure?'

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'Quite certain sure,' Silas replied. 'But lor' bless you, Miss Bidy, come along home; you look like a ghost!'

'No, no, I must go back, and I must see—' She dared not mention the name even to Silas. 'I must tell him the Squire is not dead.'

Then, with a terror at her heart, and a nameless dread as if a phantom of evil were pursuing her, Bryda fled downhill with a speed which surprised herself, and reached the ferry just as the Bristol clocks struck six.

When she found herself at Dowry Square she first recognised how faint and worn out she was—she had not tasted food since breakfast. She could hardly totter into the little lobby, and when she tried to tell the footboy to let Mrs Lambert know she was too tired to come into the parlour, she fell prone upon the floor, and remembered nothing till she found herself on the couch in the parlour, the twilight deepening, and Madam Lambert sitting by her like a gaoler, with a glass of brandy on the little table, which she insisted on Bryda sipping.

It was all like a dreadful dream. Bryda's head ached, and she was too bewildered to say much.

Madam Lambert poured out a string of questions. Had she seen her sister? What was the bad news? Was the poor old man dead, or had he had a stroke? Had the Squire put bailiffs into the house? What was wrong at the farm?

But Bryda had just presence of mind enough to keep back the real facts of the case. It had struck her that Jack Henderson would be in danger of his life if, indeed, it turned out that the Squire was dead—in danger, too, if he were seriously hurt. So she parried all questions, and went feebly to the door murmuring,—

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'I am so tired. May I go to bed?'

'To bed, sure you may, and I will get Mrs Symes to bring you up some hot posset. I don't wish to pry, Miss Palmer, but I should like to hear what has upset you? I think it is my due.'

'To-morrow—to-morrow,' Bryda said. 'I cannot talk now. I cannot—'

'There is some mystery, depend upon it,' Mrs Lambert said, as she folded her mittened hands and twirled her thumbs one over the other, in a meditative mood; 'but I'll ring for Symes to get her a hot posset, poor thing.'

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## CHAPTER XV

### THE LAST EVENING.

Bryda rose and went about her accustomed duties the next day with a wan, white face and wistful, anxious eyes.



She was longing for news, and yet dare not ask a question lest she should betray Jack Henderson's share in the scene on the hillside the day before. She was haunted by the memory of that rigid upturned face on which the hail beat so mercilessly. It was always before her; and there was no one near with whom to share her fears. It happened that Mr Lambert was called away on business to Bath, and bustled off to the coach office immediately after breakfast, and had only time to say to Bryda,—

'You look as if you had seen a ghost, Miss Palmer.' Then, with a laugh, 'Ah! I remember it was at Easter you were to make your decision. Well, well, don't take it too much to heart. Good-bye, mother. Don't expect me till you see me,' and then the little lawyer, bristling with importance, was gone.

It was a long and weary day—cold and stormy; and after Bryda had finished her domestic duties she could only sit in the parlour with Mrs Lambert, listening for the sound of every step upon the pavement, starting when the door bell rang, and relieved when Sam appeared in the parlour with some message or note for Mr Lambert, which was to be delivered to him on his return.

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Even if Chatterton had still been at the office Bryda might have gained some news. She wondered if the story of the fray had reached Bristol, for birds of the air do carry a matter even from the loneliness of the upward path to the table-land of the Mendips. But the day dragged wearily on to evening, and still no news. Mrs Lambert was very fractious and fault-finding, and complained that a hole in a bit of lace had been so ill mended that she must have every thread unpicked. Then the water for the tea was smoked, and the 'muffin' too much buttered, with a dozen more grievances of a like character, which were simple torture to poor Bryda's heavy, anxious heart.

Just as the twilight of the spring evening was deepening, and Mrs Lambert ordered Bryda to fetch the candles and lay the cloth for supper, a very gentle ring at the bell was heard—so gentle this time that it did not attract Mrs Lambert's attention, and Bryda was in the hall before Sam had time to appear.

As he opened the door Bryda heard a voice she knew to be Chatterton's.

'I must see Miss Palmer,' he said. 'Let me in, you little fool.'

Sam made a grimace and said,—

'You ain't wanted here. They say you are a bad 'un—so be off.'

Then Bryda sprang forward.

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'Let me speak to Mr Chatterton,' she said; and in another moment she was standing on the doorstep with him.

'I have brought you a message, Miss Palmer. I saw Jack Henderson aboard ship for America last night. He bid me say you need never trouble about him again, but that, wherever he goes, he will hold you in remembrance. Poor fellow! he seemed in frightful misery about killing the man; but if, as he says, in fair fight, there is nothing so extraordinary in it—it happens every day—only last week, in Bath, a man was killed in a duel.'

'But it is dreadful—*dreadful!*' Bryda exclaimed, 'because it is all my fault. And Jack gone—do you say quite gone?'

'Yes, he is a long way down channel by this time. Now, Miss Palmer, do not take on; things are sure to brighten for you.'

'Oh! he ought to have waited till he knew more. It was cowardly of Jack—'

'Well you know he did not feel sure you cared for him—thought maybe it was the Squire after all.'

'Have you heard anything else?' Bryda asked. 'Is it the talk of Bristol what happened yesterday?'

'Well, it is known, because Mr Barrett has been sent for to the Squire to try to mend his broken head. It is a pity Henderson did not wait till he knew whether he was dead or alive. I should have thought you would have heard something from Corn Street, for no doubt there is a row there at Jack's absence from the silversmith's shop.'

'Mr Lambert is away for the day,' Bryda said. 'Oh, it has been such a long, long day. I am so miserable, so wretched. I dare not stay a minute longer. Good-bye.'

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'A long good-bye, a *last* good-bye, Miss Palmer. I am off to London by the coach to-morrow. Wish me better fortune than I have had here. If you could visit my poor mother sometimes I should be glad. She takes on at the idea of parting with me. You see you can't make a mother see that leaving her is for her son's benefit. No,' he said, 'it's gospel truth, there is no love to compare with a mother's;' and he added, 'Though I love the muse, and love and court her as a knight would court his ladye love, I love my mother, who, dear soul, never understood a word of poetry in her life—and sister is almost as bad. But, bless them both, they will be glad enough when I come back to Bristol famous.'

Then, with the courtesy of the knights of old of whom he spoke, Chatterton doffed his cap, bowed low, and, kissing Bryda's hand, was gone.

It was his last night in Bristol. He was off by the mail to London the next day, but scantily provided with clothes, though his mother had done her best, but scantily provided with money,

but full to overflowing with high hope and enterprise. Of his bulky manuscripts—his much-cherished possession—he never lost hold throughout the long, cold journey. They were securely packed by his own hand in a canvas bag; his mother might pack his clothes, his sister might mend his stockings, and water them with her tears as she rolled them up and placed them in the heavy trunk, but no hand but his own should touch his manuscripts, for they represented to him, poor boy, silver and gold, and what he cared more for—Fame.

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A few friends stood with his tearful mother and sobbing sister at the coach office at the Bush Inn to bid him farewell. He took both mother and sister in his arms and kissed them lovingly, said good-bye to the others, and then he sprang, still grasping his precious bag in his hand, into what was called 'the basket' of the mail coach, and cheaper, by reason of its low position outside the clumsy, lumbering vehicle, and then he was off.

Not one backward glance did he give of regret to Bristol. He was sore at what he conceived to be the ill treatment he had received from his native city, and burning with desire to avenge his wrongs by returning to it crowned with the laurel wreath of Fame, to be courted instead of spurned, to have at his feet those who had trampled on him, and to find his native City of the West awaking at last to the fact it had been so slow to recognise that he was a son of whom it might be justly proud.

The fulfilment of the last part of his high-set hope may perhaps have come, and now, at the distance of a hundred and twenty years, the figure of the marvellous boy stands out with a distinct personality which no 'animated bust' could give it. Time throws a veil of charity over his faults, and deep pity stirs in every heart, as in mine to-day as I write these fragments gathered from his short life, that he had no anchor of the soul on which to take firm hold in the troubled waters of that stormy sea on which he was launched on the 26th day of April 1770.

Deep pity, too, that no kindly hand was outstretched to help him in his hours of darkness, no voice to tell him of One to whom he might turn as of old one turned in his despair with the cry of 'My Father, I have sinned,' to find as he did pardon and peace.

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Full tidings came to poor Bryda the day after she had parted with Chatterton—tidings from the farm. An ill-written and hurried letter from Betty was left at the office by the carrier that morning, and brought by Mr Lambert to Dowry Square when he returned for dinner.

Bryda opened the letter with trembling fingers. She could not dare to read it in the presence of others.

'DEAR BRYDA,'—Bet said,—'They brought the Squire here Sunday evening like to die. They could not get him further. The doctor said it would kill him outright. He is laid in the parlour, for they could not carry him upstairs. Two gentlemen justices have been here to-day, and the constables are on the search for him who did the deed. The doctor thinks he knew him. Oh, Bryda, it was Jack Henderson. Mr Barrett has come from Bristol, and shakes his head over the Squire. He neither speaks nor moves. It is dreadful. Can you come home? And, Bryda, you must know was it Jack—and where is Jack? If they catch him—oh, it will be more than we can bear. The doctor is not sure it was Jack. His face was covered with blood when he met him running downhill like a madman. Was it Jack?—Your sister, BET, in sorrow and love.'

Was it Jack? Ah, yes, she knew it only too well, and on her return to the parlour she found Mr Lambert telling the story in his short, concise, lawyer-like fashion, Madam Lambert nodding and ejaculating from time to time, 'Good Heavens!' and Sam listening with open mouth to the story as he waited at table.

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'The young scapegrace's mother has been at Corn Street to-day. She is in a towering rage against you, Miss Palmer. She looks on you as the cause of the fray. The constables can hear naught of the boy, and he is got off scot-free, I daresay. Well, it's no use crying over spilt milk. You had best have taken my advice, Miss Palmer, and married the Squire.'

'Oh,' Bryda cried, with the cry of a hunted animal in pain, 'oh, spare me, sir, spare me. I—I cannot bear it.'

'Compose yourself, for goodness' sake, Miss Palmer, or you will make me ill. You agitate me, and before my footman, too. Pray, miss, be quiet.'

But poor Bryda had lost all self-control, and crying aloud 'Spare me,' she left the parlour.

But her fate pursued her, for Sam opened the door to Mrs Henderson, who came hastily in, brushing past Sam, and saying, as Bryda was hastening upstairs,—

'Stop, Bryda Palmer. Let me at least tell you what I think of you, you minx. To draw my poor son into a mess like this, to ruin his prospects, to turn him into a hunted felon—he who never so much as hurt a worm, he who is my eldest son, like to make his fortune, come in for his uncle's business and his money. Oh, did I not warn him that you were a good-for-nothing hussy, thinking yourself clever, and a wit, and a poetess. Yes, you may well cry and moan.'

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'My good woman,' said Mr Lambert, now coming into the hall, 'I can't have any brawling here. You must be so good as to leave the house. My mother is not fit for any agitating scene. Come now, why rage at poor Miss Palmer? Pretty girls like her are sure to get suitors and set them by

the ears. I daresay you did the same in your day, may do it now you are a fair widow—eh?'

This soothing flattery had the desired effect. Mrs Henderson calmed down, and the torrent of her abuse was stemmed. Then the mother's love asserted itself, and she said, in a tone of real sorrow,—

'But if I have lost Jack, my fine, handsome boy, no one can give him back to me, and I was so proud of him. But I won't stay here. Why should I?' and then Mrs Henderson, covering her face with her handkerchief was gone.

Bryda felt as if the last straw had been laid on her heavy burden, the last drop in the bitter cup. She went to her room and lay down on her bed, worn out with misery. Should she go home? Was it kind to leave Betty with all this trouble alone, with no one to sympathise? And yet how she dreaded her aunt's tongue and the neighbours' gossip—and *how* she dreaded to see the Squire's face, the face that haunted her night and day, lying on the road, with the hailstones dancing on it unheeded.

Perhaps, happily for Bryda, she was left no choice in the matter. When she went back to the parlour it was time for tea, of which she was sharply reminded.

Bryda went about the preparations as usual, washed the silver left from dinner, which no one but herself was ever allowed to touch, and listened in dumb patience to Mrs Lambert's tirade against the world in general and herself in particular.

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Mrs Lambert was one of those people who do not concern themselves greatly about the misfortunes of others if they are allowed to see and hear of them at a distance. But it is quite a different thing if by any chance the misfortunes of another affect directly or indirectly their own particular comfort.

Thus, when Bryda said in a choked voice,—

'Will you grant me leave to go home, madam, and release me from my engagement in your service?'

'Go home! Leave me, after all my kindness to you, leave me with no one to take your place! A pretty thing indeed! No, miss, you will stay here till this day six months, according to agreement. Then, if it suits *me*, I may send you packing. Go home, indeed! You would not have a vastly warm welcome, methinks. No, stay here, do your duty in the station of life into which it has pleased God to call you, and you will find activity the best cure for any uneasiness,' Mrs Lambert concluded, with dignified emphasis.

Bryda was about to remonstrate, but she felt it would be useless. She must try to possess her soul in patience, and hope that after a little time Mrs Lambert might relent, and, at least, give her leave of absence for a few days.

But the efforts to keep up an appearance of cheerfulness, and to be at Madam Lambert's beck and call, was a very great strain on her.

Then the gossips who came in to supper or tea were for some days full of the event of the previous Sunday, and Bryda had to sit by and listen to various versions of the story—to reports which one day would be that the murderer had been caught, and the next that the Squire was dead. And then there were whispered questions not intended for Bryda's ear, which concerned her, she was sure, and ominous shakes of the head and glances of curiosity, till often Bryda was constrained to throw down her work and leave the parlour.

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So passed the long and miserable weeks, with now and again a message from Bet, or a few lines hastily scrawled, and often scarcely legible. The Squire was alive, but light in his head, and seemed to know nothing, nor heed nothing. There seemed no comfort anywhere. Jack was, it is true, out of reach and safe whatever happened; but, as is often the case, the faithful lover of her youth was, by separation, raised to a very much higher level than when he was with her every Sunday, and poor Bryda's heart ached with self-reproach and vain longings that she had been kinder to poor Jack who loved her so well.

It was one day in June, when all Nature was rejoicing in the freshness of early summer, that Mr Barrett called at 6 Dowry Square and asked to see Miss Palmer.

Bryda was in the kitchen, doing her best to prepare a particular dish to please Mr Lambert for his supper-party that night, when Sam came down to say Mr Barrett wanted to see her on business. Bryda threw off her large apron, pulled her sleeves over her elbows, and with a hasty glance at the little bit of square glass, which distorted her face beyond recognition, she hastened upstairs with a beating heart. She found Mr Barrett in the hall.

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'Can you come with me to-morrow to Rock House, Miss Palmer? The Squire, Mr Bayfield, was moved to his own home yesterday, and I superintended the removal. He has something on his mind which he says he must tell you, and none but you. Poor fellow, he is a mere wreck of a man. You had better take pity and hear what he has to say, for his position is very forlorn in that rambling old place. I have provided him with an experienced woman as nurse, and his father's friends look in on him, but it is a pitiable case. I will drive you to Rock House. Let me advise you not to delay.'

'I must get leave,' Bryda said, with trembling lips, 'I must get leave. And oh,' she exclaimed, clasping her hands, 'I do dread it—I do dread it.'

'Well, there's nothing to fear. The poor fellow can scarcely lift a finger. Not only his head but his back has had a sharp concussion. He can never be the same man again, unless by a miracle,

and we doctors can't work miracles.'

Mrs Lambert gave a very reluctant permission to Bryda, and began to wonder what she should do about the 'chayne' the next day. It was the day for washing and dusting the best 'chayne' in the glass cupboard, but she supposed she must suffer inconvenience—it always was her fate.

'Pray when will you return, miss?' she asked.

'I should like to stay at home for Sunday, madam.'

'Sunday! And who is to walk with me to church? Dear me! how inconsiderate you are! I suppose you think a gentlewoman like me can take Mrs Symes' arm?'

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Bryda thought nothing about it, but left the room to tell Mr Barrett she would be ready at the hour he was pleased to name.

'It must be early—say eight o'clock, Miss Palmer;' and he added, looking anxiously into her face, 'don't fret, or we shall have you ill next,' and taking Bryda's little thin hand in his the doctor felt her pulse. 'You are weak as a fly,' he said. 'Give up here and go home. We will talk more of it to-morrow. Good-day.'

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## CHAPTER XVI

### FORGIVENESS.

During the drive to Rock House the kind-hearted surgeon did his best to divert Bryda from dwelling upon the past or the dreaded interview with Mr Bayfield. He did not know how sharp was the pang his companion felt as the old thorn tree came in sight, nor how she bit her lips and clenched the rail of the high gig with a grasp that gave her physical pain to deaden the terrible ache at her heart.

Mr Barrett talked of many things in all ignorance of the intensity of her feelings, roused by the sight of the very spot where she had last seen Jack and that rigid upturned face.

'You take an interest in the poor boy Chatterton, Miss Palmer, I know. I am afraid the sunshine of his first weeks in London is a little clouded.'

'I have seen his mother once or twice,' Bryda said. 'She showed me his first letter, written in high spirits.'

'Ah, yes! and there have been others since, but they don't deceive George Catcott, who is always thinking of him, having the notion that there never was a poet like him since Shakespeare. He is making a mistake now in rushing into politics in the *Middlesex Journal*. He sends Catcott the papers. What will Lord Hillsborough or the Lord Mayor care for all his violent reproaches anent this affair at Boston? Not a brass farthing—not they! That's a fine letter to the freeholders of Bristol, I own, in which he chronicles the speech of his glorious Canynge, when he said, "dear as his family were, his country was dearer," or something like that. It is all very fine, but Chatterton has to earn his bread, and I don't think he is going the right way to do it. He seems proud of his intimacy with the editor of the *Political Register*, but I fear it won't do him much good.'

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'He still writes poetry, sir,' Bryda said, 'so his sister tells me,' and she added, with enthusiasm, 'his poetry is beautiful!'

'Yes, yes, you know, I take it, many folks think there never was such a person as "Rowley the priest."'

'*Never!*' Bryda exclaimed, 'not all those hundreds of years ago.'

Mr Barrett smiled.

'Rowley the priest is one and the same with Thomas Chatterton, so some say—not good George Catcott and not Mr Clayfield. I am in no position to decide the question.'

Mr Barrett talked on, discussing Chatterton and his work, and Bryda grew interested in spite of herself, and was almost surprised when the white gates of Rock House came in sight, and the dreaded moment of the interview was close at hand.

How well she recalled her first and only visit there, more than a year before, the courage that then emboldened her to plead her grandfather's cause, the despair with which she turned away and ran down the avenue of firs, with Flick by her side, and had to confess to herself that her errand was in vain. Then arose those questionings which torture us all when we look back on the irrevocable, and she asked herself,—

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'If I had never come here that day, if I had never tried to move his hard heart to pity, all this misery and distress might—*would* have been saved. Oh! why did I ever come, why did I ever do it?'

These and other thoughts of the same kind filled Bryda's mind as she waited in a dull room opposite the library, where Mr Barrett had left her while he went to prepare the Squire for her coming.

The waiting seemed like hours instead of minutes, and yet when the door opened and Mr Barrett beckoned her to follow him she drew back.

'Oh! I cannot—cannot come.'

Then the good doctor took her trembling, cold little hand in his, and said,—

'Come, my dear, there is nothing to fear. Take courage, you will not regret your visit I am sure.'

Then the door of the same room where Bryda had first seen the Squire opened and closed behind, and she found herself alone with Mr Bayfield.

But *could* it be he? There was scarcely a trace of the handsome, stalwart young man of thirty left in that pale, emaciated form lying on a couch before her.

'I cannot rise to greet you, madam,' were Mr Bayfield's first words. 'Come nearer, please; I have something to say to you, and my voice is weak.'

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Then a long thin hand was outstretched to Bryda, and her fears seemed to vanish. She went up to the couch and said in low tones,—

'I am grieved, sir, to see you so—ill, and—'

The large wistful eyes fastened on Bryda's face had now nothing offensive in their gaze. There was the far-off look in them of one who had done with the world and all the world's sin and sorrow.

'Miss Palmer,' he said, 'I wished to see you to seek forgiveness. You told me on that day long ago I had no mercy; it was true. I had no mercy, and I deceived you cruelly.'

Then from a small pocket-book, worn with age and fastened with a ragged strap, Mr Bayfield took out a paper—two papers.

One, that which he had shown to the old farmer on the night of his first visit; the other dated only a few months before the old Squire's sudden death. He put both into Bryda's hands and said,

'Read them, and then grant me your pardon if you can.'

Bryda unfolded the papers with trembling fingers, and on the last read:—

'I hereby wish to leave on record, should anything happen to me, that Peter Palmer of Bishop's Farm is not to be pressed for the discharge of his debt to me. The heir of my body, my only son, is a wanderer on the face of the earth. He left me shortly after his sainted mother's death, fifteen years ago, and I have given up all hope of his return; but should he return, I hereby instruct him that I discharge the said Peter Palmer from his liability to me. He is an old man, and a man of many troubles. The sum of money was borrowed in a time of sore anguish, and I will not bring his grey hairs to the grave in added sorrow by demanding payment. This for my son, if ever he returns. And by my will my executors are bound to keep this small estate intact for two years after my decease, and then, should my son make no sign, let it be put into the market, with all my goods and chattels, and the money divided amongst certain poor folk and charities named in my last will and testament.'

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(Signed) 'CHARLES BAYFIELD.'

A profound silence reigned as Bryda read the rather illegible writing of the old Squire. When she had finished she looked up, and, with a deep sigh, said simply,—

'I am thankful for grandfather! Oh! if we had known this sooner!'

A spasm of pain passed over Mr Bayfield's face.

'Yes,' he said, 'and there rests my sin against you. This paper, dated only a few months before my father's death, was in this pocket-book, the other paper in the deed box, of which his executors took possession. No one knew of this paper but me. I kept it back, granting the reprieve for your sweet sake. If I had obtained possession of you I might have told you of it—I do not know. I cannot answer for myself—my old self,' he repeated. 'God forgive me, I am punished. Can *you* forgive me?'

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Then he paused again, silent, and Bryda to her latest day remembered how in that profound stillness a thrush outside, in the glory of the summer noontide, broke out into song, and ceasing, the deep sob of an oppressed heart seemed to touch the two extremes of joy and grief, these constantly recurring contrasts in this beautiful world, given to us by a loving Father, richly to enjoy, and where sin is ever sounding its strain of sorrow, and often of despair.

All the true woman awoke now in Bryda's heart. She knelt down by the couch, and taking the Squire's hand in both hers, bent her face upon it, and whispered,—

'Yes, I forgive you. I am so sorry,' and in a lower whisper still, 'Please forgive poor Jack; he is gone far away. I shall never, never see him again, and it was all because he loved me. Please

forgive him.'

'For *your* sake, yes,' was the reply, 'for your sake, and pray for me as I lie here alone. Your sister has tried to make me a better man. She was as an angel of God sent to drive out the evil spirits in me. My mother!—ah! my mother used to pray for me—and in this very room *I* have prayed at her knee. Once, in my fits of passion and rage, she told me of a king who like me had an evil spirit—Saul, yes, it must have been Saul—and she prayed God that one of His angels might be sent to me to drive it out. Two angels have come at last—*you* and your sister—and I shall never forget you. Kiss me on the forehead before you go—a seal of forgiveness, of pardon.'

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Bryda rose and did as he asked her, and then without another word left the room.

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Mr Barrett dropped her at the farm, where Betty received her, and, flinging her arms round this gentle sister, she said,—

'Oh, Betty! dear Bet! take me upstairs. I can bear no more.'

No, she could bear no more—overwrought, and ill in mind and body, Bryda lay down in her tent-bed in the upper chamber of Bishop's Farm; and Mrs Lambert, to her intense surprise and vexation, was obliged to look for someone else to supply Bryda's place, mend and clear starch her lace, and prepare dainty dishes for Mr Lambert's friends, attend her to the cathedral, and indulge all her whims.

It is never too late to mend, though, of all ugly weeds which grow unchecked in the human heart, selfishness is the hardest to pluck up, especially if for seventy years it has flourished unchecked.

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Bryda lay in a state of feverish exhaustion on her bed for many weeks, tended with loving care by Betty, who did her best to divert her mind from sad thoughts.

Betty said very little about the time when the Squire lay in the parlour below, and Bryda was too languid to ask many questions.

In the farm things seemed to have taken a turn for the better. Peter Palmer, having been assured that he was delivered from debt, seemed to take a new lease of life. The wheat harvest promised to be plentiful, the berry crop had been good, and old Silas reported well of the sheep, the last flock driven to Bristol market having fetched a fair price from the dealers; and as to the poultry, Dorothy Burrow declared that, now Goody Renton was dead, the later broods were all healthy, and that it was her evil eye which had done to death so many in previous summers.

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Mr Barrett was still in occasional attendance on the Squire, and never failed to stop at Bishop's Farm when he passed, either going or coming.

He was always cheery and hopeful, and in advance of the general practitioner of those days in many ways. He brought Bryda books and newspapers; but when she asked news of Thomas Chatterton he would put off a direct answer.

Another question, often on her lips, about the Squire he parried; and when she asked, 'Is there any way of getting Jack Henderson back—of letting him know?' Mr Barrett would shake his head.

'I am afraid not; but don't vex yourself, my dear. He may be making his fortune, and come back one day a rich man.'

'Ah! but he will always have that face before him, lying dead, as he thought. Even now I can't forget it.'

'Oh! come, come! the Squire is better. He was able to set his hand to a document to-day, and Nurse says he is not so wandering in his sleep. He'll do in time.'

And while these glowing August days of 1770 went on, and the golden corn ripened, and the trees in the orchard were laden with rosy fruit, while the hills wore their imperial robes of purple and gold, and partridges, all unconscious of their coming fate, rose in covies from the stubble, London streets were hot and dusty, and there, up and down, paced the boy poet, nearing the tragic end of all his bright dreams and all his proud aspirations.

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The pathetic story need not be told in detail here. From the moment when he left Mr Lambert's house, and went to try his fortune in the great city of London, he drifted away from his Bristol friends and Bristol ties.

Mr Barrett and his staunch friend Mr George Catcott had letters from him, and it is plain that he applied to Mr Barrett for a certificate to go out as a ship's surgeon.

But this request he could not honestly grant. Letters to his mother and sister are also preserved, which are pathetic, indeed, as they are evidently written with the one desire of keeping them in ignorance of his real condition.

He sends them presents, and denies himself food that he may do so. He writes of orders for copy for the reviews and magazines, and keeps up the hope of the mother he loves so well, when

his own hope was dying day by day.

One hot morning Bryda was lying in her upper chamber in the old farmhouse, paper and pens at her side, on a little table, where Betty, her faithful sister, had placed a little jar of monthly roses and mignonette. Life was returning to her, and she rose from her couch, and throwing a shawl over her head, without telling Betty, she crept feebly downstairs and went out into the orchard, the boughs of the old apple trees, heavy with their rosy and russet load, touching her as she passed. Bryda went through the wicket-gate and sank down on the boulder where long ago she sat meditating on the dead lamb, and, hearing the chime of the Bristol bells, was filled with desire to take flight to the busy city, and had consented to write to Madam Lambert and let Jack Henderson convey the letter to Bristol the next day.

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Jack—where was Jack? An exile and a wanderer for her sake, and her heart failed her when she thought she should never see him again, never be able to atone to him for what he had suffered. The knights of old, of whom Thomas Chatterton wrote, rescued their lady loves from the grasp of lawless men, and, at the risk of life and limb, were ready to die in the attempt. And poor Jack had done the deed worthy of the knights of old, and how severely he had been punished.

As Bryda went over the past she heard quick footsteps behind her. The wicket-gate opened and shut with a click, and Mr Barrett stood by her side.

'Well done, my fair lady,' he said. 'I wanted to get you into the open air. You have stolen a march on Betty, who is hastening after me with another shawl and a cloak.'

Then, as Betty came up full of fear that Bryda should suffer, and covering the ground with an old cloak that Bryda's feet might rest upon it, Mr Barrett's cheery manner suddenly changed. With a deep sigh he said,—

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'I have had sad news to-day. The poor boy, poor Chatterton, is dead—aye, and worse, died by his own hand.'

'Dead!' both girls exclaimed in an awe-struck tone.

'Yes, and we in Bristol have all been guilty in the matter. Poor George Catcott is racked by self-reproach, and well he may be, well may I be. He was starving and half-mad, that last letter to Catcott shows. We should have sent someone to him, poor, poor boy. I shall find it hard to forgive myself, I know that. And in that letter he said "I am no Christian—"

Mr Barrett's voice was choked with emotion, and, unable to say another word, he went hastily down the lane, and very soon his horse's feet and the wheels of his high gig were heard rattling on the highroad beyond.

'Oh, Bryda, don't fret,' Betty said, as poor Bryda covered her face with her hands.

'I would like to be alone,' Bryda replied. 'Leave me, dear, just a little while. Come back for me, but leave me now.'

Betty obeyed, and Bryda was left alone once more to face the great mystery of death.

'Yes,' she thought, 'he was mad. He could not be taken to account for his actions. How his eyes flamed, as if a fire burned in their depths. How he would fall into silence all of a sudden. How he would burst out into wild rage, and then how gentle and kind he could be. How gentle to me that last night when he came to tell me about Jack.' Then Bryda looked up into the clear sky above her head, as if to seek an answer to her question there, as if there she could solve this mystery.

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And although not in words, there came to her soul a great overpowering sense of the Love of God; and in that Love alone we can find the key which opens out the boundlessness of His mercy.

Like as a father pities! When man is pitiless and forgetful, when man judges with a hard judgment, the All-loving One *remembers* our frame, and in His love and in His pity redeems and pardons.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### THE LAST.

Ten years had passed away, and Peter Palmer had long been laid to rest under the yew tree shade in the village churchyard.

Dorothy Burrow had found a soft place in the heart of a neighbouring farmer, and had taken to herself a second husband, and gone to live near Bath.

The old farm had passed into other hands, and little fair-haired children played under the

boughs of the orchard, whence many of the old trees had been cleared and young ones planted in their stead.

The lichen-covered roof of the homestead had been repaired, and the appearance of the place bespoke prosperity and comfort.

It was a May evening in 1780 when heavy footsteps were heard coming slowly up the lane at the side of the farm, and a tall athletic man went to the wicket-gate and leaned upon it with folded arms.

Presently a woman, with a child in her arms, came up to him and said,—

'Good evening. Fine weather, isn't it? There was a sharp shower this morning, and we can almost see the things growing.'

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'Who lives here at Bishop's Farm?'

'I do,' was the prompt reply. 'My husband bought the place when Peter Palmer died four years ago. Are you a stranger in these parts?'

'Yes; that is, I knew the place once, years ago—ten years ago.'

'Ah, there's many changes in ten years! I can scarce believe it is twelve since I married, only for the children,' looking fondly down on a crowd of little boys and girls who were under the care of a tall girl of ten, 'only the children tell me it's true.'

'Do you happen to know where the Miss Palmers are? Are they—married?'

'One is married to the Squire at Rock House—a grand match it was. But she was a pretty, notable girl, and nursed him, so I hear, in an illness; but it was all before we came from the other side of Bath.'

'What do you mean? What is the Squire's name?'

'Bayfield, of course, of Rock House, six or seven miles off Binegar way. The other sister lives with Mrs Henderson, who had a seizure just about the time Farmer Palmer died. She was a fine ladyish person, and things would have gone to wrack and ruin if Miss Palmer had not gone to her. She has been like a mother to the girls, and taught them lots of things. Two are out in service, and one in Mrs Hannah More's school.' Jack turned away, the woman calling after him,—

'Come in and rest, sir, and take a cup of cider. You look very tired.'

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But Jack shook his head and set off at a quick pace towards his mother's house.

No one recognised him; he was bronzed with exposure to the air, and his face was deeply lined with care, so that he looked prematurely old. His thick curly hair was streaked with grey, and his huge frame was a little bent, as he leaned heavily on his stick. The news he had heard filled his heart with strangely mixed feelings. The Squire was alive, the great burden of manslaughter, which had lain so heavily upon him for ten long years of exile, was removed. But Bryda had married him.

Of course he saw it all—desire in her part to atone for what he had done for her sake. Did not the woman say she had nursed him through an illness? Yes, it was all plain—Bryda was lost to him for ever.

He could not make up his mind to see *her*, but he would like to see Betty, and so he walked on slowly towards his mother's house.

He felt more like a man in a dream as he passed all the familiar objects on the road—all associated with the love of his whole life.

A high gig passed him at a quick trot. Looking up, he recognised his brother, his red hair gleaming in the sunshine; but he did not see him, or, if he saw him, did not recognise him.

'He looks prosperous, anyhow,' Jack thought, as he looked back at the cart wheeling swiftly down the road. The children at a few cottage doors looked up from their play to gaze at the traveller. 'They don't know me. No one knows,' he thought bitterly. Then he remembered that the children of ten years ago were men and women now. 'How could these little things know him? Betty won't know me,' he said, 'like as not. Well, I must see her. I must hear what she can tell me, and then I shall be off again. I could never, never look on *her* face—the wife of that man—never.'

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He was at the garden gate of his old home now, against which two large lilac bushes grew, and, now in full blossom, scented the air with their fragrance.

Jack took up his position so that he was shielded from observation by the overhanging boughs of one of the bushes, and looked up the straight path to the house.

Everything was apparently well cared for, and the borders on either side of the path were full of spring flowers. Flowers, too, were in boxes on the ledges of the windows, and the diamond panes of the lattices bright and clear.

Jack noticed all these little details, and the gambols of two grey kittens in the porch, an old dog lying, with his nose on his paws, entirely regardless of his frisky neighbours.

Presently a maid-servant brought out an easy-chair and a cushion, and was followed by two figures—his mother, leaning heavily on the arm of—Betty, her poor head shaking tremulously, and her querulous voice raised in some complaint about the position of the chair.

Betty! But was it Betty? There had been many changes in ten years, but as Jack's eyes, shaded by his hand, examined the figure leaning over his mother's chair and gently arranging the

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cushions, his heart gave a great bound, and then seemed to stop beating. He clenched the gate for support, and knew that he was looking at his lost love—Bryda.

The gate gave a sharp click as his heavy hand grasped it, and Bryda looked up. She came swiftly down the path and said,—

'Can I do anything for you? You look—' Then, with a sudden radiance illuminating her beautiful face, she exclaimed, 'Jack, I am so glad!'

Jack was still mastered by the strength of his emotion, and was speechless, his broad chest heaving, and the words he would have spoken refused to be uttered.

Yes, it was Bryda. The girl had changed into the woman, but except an added sweetness and refinement in her face she was the idol of Jack's dreams.

'Come outside, please,' she said, laying her little hand on his and pushing open the gate. 'Your mother could not bear the shock of joy your return would give her. I must prepare her for it. Come round to the garden behind and sit down in the arbour. You look so ill, Jack, I must fetch you something.'

He found his voice at last.

'Are you married, Bryda?'

'Married! Oh, no. I will tell you all if you will only come and rest. Married! No, Jack, I came here to take care of your mother and sister, because it was through me they lost you. Your poor mother had no one to nurse her, and I have been so happy here. The children love me, I think; and as to Tim, he is a very good fellow, and takes me as a sister.' She did not add how often she said Tim had asked her to marry him, nor how many other suitors had in vain tried to win her favour.

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'And Betty, then, is the fine lady. The woman at the farm told me it was *you* who had married the Squire.'

A cloud of sadness passed over Bryda's face as that name was mentioned.

'Betty is not a fine lady,' she said; 'she is still the same dear unselfish Betty she ever was. She is very happy, and David Bayfield is a good husband. Betty is the mistress of Rock House, and the gentry all around respect her, for she never takes airs on herself—she is far, far above that.'

'I never knew he was alive till an hour ago,' Jack said, with a deep sigh; 'it is a burden lifted, it is a chain loosed from my neck—that it is, Bryda.'

Bryda's beautiful eyes were full of tears.

'Yes, dear,' she said gently, 'I know how great the relief must be. And now, Jack, let us forget the sad past. The Squire, David Bayfield, is not a strong man, and cannot hunt or ride to cover, but he has done much for the estate, and Bet and he are good to the poor, and kind—how kind—to the sad and sorrowful. Now I must go and tell your mother I have heard of you.'

'But first—first, Bryda, tell me, can you love me? It is too much to ask, I know; but I have made money out in America, and if you can care for a stupid fellow like me—you are so clever and so beautiful. Oh, Bryda, can you care for me at last?'

'I think I can, Jack,' she said, with a sweet smile. 'Ten years of separation have taught me many things, and one is—' He put his arm round her and drew her towards him. 'And one is,' she whispered, 'that I have always loved you, and that, though you never knew it, I should never, never have married any man but you.'

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Sweet were the mutual happiness and thankfulness of that May day to Jack Henderson and Bryda; and as they sat for a few blissful minutes in the arbour, which had been Mrs Henderson's pride in earlier days, Bryda said,—

'All through these long years I have never lost hope, and although, as poor Chatterton said, "She did seem to take her high flight, shrouded in mist, and with her blinded eyes," I always knew I should greet her some day—"the holy sister, sweeping through the sky in crown of gold and robe of lily white." I shall have to make you love Chatterton's poetry, Jack. Poor boy, I never forget him. You *must love* poetry now, Jack.'

'I shall love you,' Jack said firmly. 'Won't that be enough for a dullard like me?'

'No, not *quite* enough,' she said, laughing. 'And now wait here while I go and tell your mother that the wanderer is come home.'

**THE END.**

### Transcriber's Note

Typographical errors corrected in the text:

Page 36 needlework changed to needlenwork  
Page 37 missing quotes added  
Page 41 whether changed to whither  
Page 53 missing quote added  
Page 54 tonight changed to to-night  
Page 61 Dorory changed to Dowry  
Page 62 auther changed to author

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