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**Title:** Miss Grantley's Girls, and the Stories She Told Them

**Author:** Thomas Archer

**Release Date:** May 30, 2009 [EBook #28996]

**Language:** English

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ANTOINE DISCOVERS THE MINIATURE.

**MISS GRANTLEY'S GIRLS,**

AND

**THE STORIES SHE TOLD THEM.**

BY

**THOMAS ARCHER,**

[2]

[3]

ILLUSTRATED.



LONDON:  
BLACKIE & SON, 49 & 50 OLD BAILEY, E.C.;  
GLASGOW, EDINBURGH, AND DUBLIN.  
1886.

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## MISS GRANTLEY'S GIRLS, AND THE STORIES SHE TOLD THEM.

### CHAPTER I.

#### OUR GOVERNESS.

**T**HERE was nothing romantic in Miss Grantley's appearance, and yet she was the sort of person that you could not help looking at again and again if you once saw her. She was not very young, nor was she middle-aged—about thirty, perhaps. She was certainly not what is called a beauty, but she was not in the least plain. She was what some people would call "superior looking" or "rather remarkable," and yet they would not be able to say why she attracted attention. She was very little taller than Marion Cooper, who was the tallest of the girls in our first class; but yet she gave one the impression of being rather above the middle height, because she walked so well and moved in that easy graceful manner which belongs to a person who, as the old housekeeper at the school used to say, "was born and bred a lady." There is no way of describing her; though Annie Bowers, who could draw beautifully, made several pencil sketches that were wonderful likenesses. Her hair, fine, soft, and wavy, was dark chestnut, with that warm brown tinge that looks so well with a rather pale creamy complexion; her features were regular, her eyes of that strange gray that looks dark at night and steel-blue in the sunshine—eyes that seemed to see into one's thoughts, and would have been severe except for the smile that flitted about her clear well-cut mouth whenever anything humorous happened, or a pleasant thought was passing through her mind. She always looked well-dressed, though she wore silver-gray alpaca or dark brown merino in school, and rather plain black or gray silk when she went visiting. But there was mostly a rose or some other flower in her silver brooch, and the lace that she sometimes wore at her neck and

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wrists was so fine and elegant that Mrs. Durand, who was the widow of a general officer and had been educated at a convent, declared it was very valuable indeed, and never was made in England. Somebody, speaking once of Miss Grantley's appearance, compared her to fine old china; and she had just that clear unsullied nice look that reminded you of an old china figure, though there was nothing particularly old-fashioned about her. She had some very pretty old-fashioned things, though—quaint ivory carvings and porcelain bowls, and a delightful old tea-set, and some old plate of that dark-looking silver that always seems to have a deep shadow lying under its smooth shining surface. She was something like that silver, too; for though she was bright and pleasant and with a constant liking for fun, there was a great deal of gravity beneath her smile. No one could have treated her with familiar levity, though she was gentle and sweet-tempered; for no one who had seen her very rare expression of deep displeasure would care to provoke it. Of course I am chiefly speaking now of our girls, but I think other people—grown-up and important people—thought much the same as we did of Miss Grantley. The truth was, nobody thought of her except with kindly feelings, because everybody liked her. She had gone through much trouble. Her father, who had been a wealthy squire, lost all his money in buying shares in mines, or something of that sort, and died a poor man. His wife had been dead for years, so that Miss Grantley was left an orphan and with few relations except one brother, who had gone abroad to seek his fortune, but without finding it, I suppose, since Miss Grantley, after passing examinations and being a teacher in a great school in London, came down to Barton Vale to be our governess.

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Barton Vale is a pretty, quiet, secluded place. It is not exactly a village, but is a suburb of a large town, only the town is nearly two miles away, so that the Barton Vale people heard very little of the factory people, and didn't smell the smoke from the tanneries and the alkali works at Barton-on-the-Lees. In fact most of the principal people of the town had come to live about the vale. The vicar, and the principal manufacturers, the Jorrings, who were county people, and Mr. Belfort the banker, and Mrs. Durand, and the Selways, and old Dr. Speight, and the Norburys, had handsome houses and kept their carriages. Even the Barton doctor, Mr. Torridge, was more in the vale than in the town; and the solicitor had a pretty little villa next door to the old-fashioned house that Miss Grantley had taken to open a school in.

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Most of these folks knew Miss Grantley; and many of them loved her as much as her girls did, for some of the girls belonged to the families I have mentioned. They came to her school as daily pupils instead of being sent to the cathedral town to live away from home; and that was one reason that she got on so well, for the dear old vicar and his wife had known her parents, and would have liked her to make the vicarage her home. The banker's married daughter, Mrs. Norbury, had been a schoolfellow of Miss Grantley, and called her "dear Bessie" when they met, and wanted to take lessons of her in French and German; because Miss Grantley had studied abroad, and spoke both these languages very well.

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It was because so many people there and in the town and in London, knew her, that she was able to take the old house which was once the maltster's, and have it done up nicely, and the great long room that had been the front office and sample-room turned into a school-room, and the pretty little parlour fitted with French windows, that it might open to the garden full of rose-bushes and standard apple-trees, and with its red brick walls covered with plums and jessamine. She began with nine young girls whom she brought with her as boarders, and five more soon came, so that she had fourteen in the house, and three more little ones as day-boarders (two Selways and one Jorring), and eight of us seniors, who went for lessons from ten to one, an hour for lunch, and then home at four to late dinner.

It was of course a good thing for Miss Grantley that she had her own old nurse there for cook and housekeeper, with a strong girl to do the housework, and a woman from one of the cottages at Vale Farm to help twice a week. The solicitor's villa had a large garden, and the gardener and his wife lived in the cottage which had once belonged to the maltster's foreman at the end of the orchard and close to the old kiln, so they were always ready to help too; and our governess had very little to pay for gardening except a few shillings for a labourer now and then. You may very well believe, then, that Lindley House School was a very pleasant place. Miss Grantley called it Lindley House because, she said, old-fashioned people always connected the idea of education with Lindley Murray's Grammar—not that she taught grammar from Lindley Murray's book, for she declared the way of teaching was quite different now, and that there were a good many queer rules in the old grammar which could only be accounted for by the fact that the old gentleman who wrote it lived for many years chiefly on boiled mutton and turnips!

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When Miss Grantley said things of this kind Mrs. Parmigan used to cry out, "My dear—pray, now—do consider." And Miss Grantley used to smile at her, and then the old lady would laugh till she shook the room. That was the way with our governess; she seemed able to make some people laugh by only smiling at them; and she could make people cry too by looking at them with quite a different sort of grave smile and the strange light in her earnest gray eyes.

Oh!—I have forgotten about Mrs. Parmigan! She was a dear old thing; had actually been nursery governess to Miss Grantley; and, having married and been left a widow, had heard of her former pupil and young mistress being left fatherless and motherless, and now brought her small annuity to Barton Vale, and helped to teach in the school and to be a sort of mother to Miss Grantley, without wanting any wages, and only just her board and lodging, beside which she could afford to pay for a good many things towards the housekeeping.

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She used to teach the juniors, and taught them well too, though some of them were

occasionally spoiled; and as it was very often somebody's birthday, seed-cake and gingerbread and lemon toffee were more common than they are in most schools. Even the senior girls came in for some of the goodies, and used to say that, as they lived in a world where somebody was born every minute, it would be hard if they couldn't keep a birthday once a week.

But this saying reminds me that we might go on gossiping about our governess for the hour together, and yet not get to the stories that she used to tell us. It was one of her delightful plans to devote an afternoon in each week to fancy needlework; and we used to take our work with us on that day, and instead of going home to dinner we had luncheon and stayed as her guests to tea, with cake or home-made bread and butter, jam, or in summer, ripe plums and apples from the garden, or plates of strawberries and cream from Ivory Farm.

It was then that we read in turns from some of the best books of fiction; for Miss Grantley said, "Girls are sure to read novels, and the imagination needs to be cultivated as well as the intellect and the memory." So we read stories, and sometimes poems by Tennyson and Browning and other modern writers, as well as Shakspeare, Dante, Schiller, and Goëthe. Our governess would explain the passages to us, and we used to talk about them afterwards; but very often the conversation took a good deal more time than the reading, for it was then we found out that Miss Grantley had travelled in Germany, France, and Italy, and that she had been a student not only of subjects that she might have to teach, but of people and their ways. [14]

We found out too that she could tell stories of her own; and now and then we used to persuade her to "spin a yarn," as Bella Dornton, whose father had been a naval officer, used to say.

One summer there were to be great doings at Barton-on-the-Lees. A grand fancy fair was to be held in the town-hall for the benefit of the infirmary, and we had all promised to work for it; so that nobody was offended when Miss Grantley made known that she intended to give a half-holiday every day for a week, that we seniors might be her guests from two o'clock to eight, and all work together in the garden parlour, or out in the orchard beneath the apple-trees.

It was then that we made a compact with her, after a great deal of trouble, that she should tell or read a story every day after tea, and in return we each promised to make some specially pretty article for her stall—for our governess had been persuaded to take a stall by some of the people who subscribed to the infirmary, and her old school-fellow Mrs. Norbury was to share it with her. [15]

I don't suppose that any of us will ever forget Miss Grantley's pretty parlour. It was a pattern of neatness and freshness, with its green silk curtains just shading the French window which was opened to the soft July air bearing the scent of the roses and jessamine; its low easy-chairs, of various patterns, its oval table with a cover of white and gold, its neat cabinet piano, the pretty dainty chimney ornaments, the few cool light sketches in water-colour that adorned the walls, the small book-case with a few charmingly bound volumes which filled up one recess by the fireplace, and the china closet that occupied the other. The contents of this china closet were always interesting to us, for they consisted of some rare specimens of porcelain, old Chelsea, and other exquisite ware, including the delicate tea-service which was brought out on high days and holidays, and was in daily use during the memorable week that we had devoted to the fancy fair.

One might go on gossiping about some of the "belongings" of this room, and the old china and the quaint handsome tea equipage, but that this is only a kind of introduction to our governess, or rather to the stories she told us out of school during that working holiday. It was on the Monday evening, after we had come in from the orchard and had finished tea, one toothsome accompaniment to which was some delectable apricot jam upon crisp toast, that Annie Bowers, who had been so quiet that she might have been asleep, said in her usual deliberate way: "Miss Grantley, that lovely silver cup (or shall I call it a vase?) fascinates me more every time I look at it, and I shall never be contented till you let me make a sketch of it; but the worst of it is there is no way of making a drawing that will show all the gleam and shadow that plays upon old silver." [16]

"Dear me, how very poetical we are!" said Sarah Jorring interrupting.

"Not at all," said Annie in the same sleepy voice. "Anybody with an eye can see how beautiful that is. There is something regal in the ornament of it. The slender stem seems to grow as it expands into the bowl, the chasing is so simple and yet so firm and grand, the handles are like curves of the lip of the cup itself, as though they were a part of the whole design, and not as though they were stuck on as they would be in modern works. I could fancy it the wine-cup of a king or an emperor."

We had none of us seen this handsome goblet before, as it was usually locked up with other silver in a chest that stood in a wardrobe closet in Miss Grantley's bed-room. The fact is, we were all looking at it with some curiosity, for it had been brought down with the tea-spoons and sugar-tongs, and now stood on the table filled with pounded sugar for the strawberries that were to be eaten by and by. [17]

"Is it an heirloom, Miss Grantley?" asked Marian Cooper. "Has it always belonged to you, and did some ancestor leave you the history of it?"

"Well, it has been in our family—in my mother's family—for perhaps two centuries," replied our governess with her grave gentle smile.

"You know that my mother, or at all events my great grandmother, belonged to the Huguenots, those French Protestants, many of whom escaped from the persecutions in France and came to

England, where they worked at many trades. A number of these *émigrés*, as they were called, settled in a neighbourhood close to the city of London; a place called Saint Mary Spital. The part that they lived in was named the Spital Fields, and there they set up in business as weavers of silk. This cup came to my dear mother as a part of the old property that belonged to her grandmother, and it had been brought from the south of France, from the district where the persecution was carried on longest till the French revolution changed everything. The 'Reign of Terror,' as it was called, brought a terrible punishment to those who had themselves shown no mercy; and another kind of persecution to those who, rather than deny their religion, had endured the cruelties of a fierce soldiery. They had seen houses burned, even women and children tortured and killed, property destroyed, and existence made so hard and sorrowful that they ceased to fear death, and fought on with desperate courage, or abandoned the country that their tyrants had turned into a desert, and carried their arts and manufactures to other lands where they might meet and pray in peace."

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"Miss Grantley," said Sarah Jorring when tea was over, and our governess had "washed up" the dainty cups and saucers, "we don't want you to read to us to-night, I think. You are to tell us a story instead, you know, and it seems that there ought to be a history belonging to the Silver Goblet."

"Yes, yes," we all cried out, "surely you know ever so much about it, and if it's not a family secret, or if you don't wish to tell us"—

"Well," replied our governess laughing, as we all hurried to our work-baskets and drew round the table which had been moved nearer to the window, "as I can work and recite at the same time I may try to tell you the only story I ever heard about this Huguenot Goblet; but mind it isn't very romantic, and it isn't very cheerful. There is a love story in it, though, and as girls are always supposed to prefer something of that kind—though I have always found that girls are more interested in the stories provided for their brothers than in their own books—I will say on as well as I can."

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE SILVER GOBLET.

**T**HERE was a time when, on rare occasions, it flushed with the glow of rare old wine spiced with fragrant spices; or, better still, held the essence of odorous flowers distilled into subtle perfume. Need I say that this goblet is "old silver?" It was in France that it held a place of honour in the house. That house was one of note in Languedoc, not that its owner was noble by birth, but he was of the great Protestant families—the old Huguenots—whose undaunted spirit Louis the Fourteenth could not quell, even with the fortresses that he built to frown them into submission, or with the help of a fierce soldiery.

They were troublous times even long afterwards, when Anton Dormeur, owner of looms and manufacturer of velvet, went about with a serious face, and trusted few of his neighbours. Anton Dormeur was a man who kept his own counsel, and, when the persecutions had for a time been stayed, he saved money, hoping to rebuild the fortunes of his house for those two daughters, who were but children when his wife died and left a vacant place that never could be filled.

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They were lovely—these girls—each in a different fashion. The elder, tall, slender, dark-haired, haughty, with the complexion of a peach; the younger, soft and fair, with locks that hung like silken skeins upon a neck of snow, and eyes of that dark changeful sheen that is either gray, or black, or blue, as you seek to look into their depths.

Hers were the plump white fingers that pulled the delicate rose-leaves with which this cup was filled, till the air of that gloomy room was fresh with the odours of a garden after evening rain.

Mathilde, her dark, proud sister, loved lilies best, and set them in a jewelled vase. That vase perished in the great calamity that fell upon the house, and the silver cup was among the few relics that were saved. Alas! the beautiful, imperious Mathilde perished also in those evil times.

Yes, this beautiful creature, whose coming seemed to lighten the dim room in the old château with its hangings of amber damask, its gilded panels framed with long slips of looking-glass; its

satin chairs, its quaint carved cabinets, filled with rare knick-knacks of ivory carvings, jade-stones, jewelled daggers, boxes of filligree, and rare cups of porcelain, like great opals, gleaming with strange lights that paled the pearls with which their rims were set. There were tables and tripods too, bearing bronzes and Oriental jars filled with scented woods and spices; but it was over this silver cup that the sweet glowing face of Sara Dormeur bent, as she stood watching for her lover's fluttering signal amidst the trees that belted the sloping parterre, beyond the broad stone balcony on which the windows opened.

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For the father, Anton Dormeur, was averse to young Dufarge, who though he belonged to a Protestant family among the tanners of Alais, was a man of the people, without that connection with the old nobility which the Huguenots cherished, even though they suffered continually by the laws that king and nobles put in force against them.

The Protestants were loyal to the caste which yet refused to own them, though they were of the best blood in France, or owned them secretly and in fear, lest to be identified with the heretics might bring fire and sword upon themselves.

Thus old Dormeur forbade Sara to have any more to say to Dufarge, but encouraged the lover of his eldest girl, a man of twice her age, the grim and saturnine Bartholde, by birth seigneur of an estate near Lozère, where, however, he lived only on sufferance, for the title had been abated after the persecutions following the Edict of Nantes, and though Bartholde was rich, he had abandoned both title and the display that belonged to it.

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His was just such an alliance as the stately reserved manufacturer might have been supposed to choose for his eldest daughter, and, indeed, after they were married he would go and stay for days together at his son-in-law's house—a place less gloomy for him now that the light had gone out of his own; for Sara, having pleaded in vain, fled with her lover to the north and there they were married. After this they hoped and believed that the old man would relent. He never relented, or at least never to their knowledge. As his sweet fair daughter knelt to him, her golden hair streaming about her, her hands held up in supplication, he denounced her in words taken from Holy Scripture, and would have struck her but that the young husband stood with earnest eyes and folded arms, he having knelt in vain, or, as he said, bent his pride to his love for his sweet wife's sake.

So Sara Dufarge went out cursed, undowered, and an orphan, from the old house, and Père Dormeur was left desolate indeed.

Yet amidst the gloom that settled on his life, and the hard unyielding determination which resisted any attempts on the part of her sister to bring him to receive his disowned daughter again, the manufacturer had frequent struggles with his pride and obstinacy. They were scarcely acknowledged even to himself. He thought he could trample the suggestions of nature under foot, and he succeeded in so far as to suffer in silence, and to make no sign of yielding, nor of admitting the possibility of foregoing his resentful purpose.

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He had much to occupy his thoughts at that time, for there were rumours of renewed persecutions of the Protestants by command of bishops and clergy. Not contented with refusing them the legal registration of marriage and the certificate of death, it was said that a general confiscation of property was ordered, and that recantation or death by fire and sword might once more be the doom of the sectaries. Anton Dormeur was frequently at Alais with Bartholde, and the people there whispered that it would go hard with the manufacturer when the dragoons came. He had already made some preparations, however. Always in communication with the refugees who had settled in Spitalfields and Coventry, he held money in England. This was pretty well understood; but what few people knew was, that for weeks before the blow fell he had had a ship ready, and that some of his most valuable effects and merchandise were stowed among the cargo. This very cup was hidden away in a case, surrounded by silk brocade and velvet, clothes, and lace. For days the vessel swung with the tide, waiting for Anton Dormeur, who sought to bring his daughter Mathilde and her husband, with their child, to be his companions in flight. But Bartholde delayed, loath to part from the farms and land that were his birthright. He and his little boy—the first and only child—were on a visit to the old lonely house and its grave master, when a messenger, his horse covered with blood and foam, came thundering at the door, with the fearful intelligence that the alarm was ringing at Alais, and that the persecutions of the Protestants had begun.

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Bartholde was in the saddle in a minute.

"Stay for nothing, but bring my daughter. Come on straight for your lives to Saint Jean," cried the old man. "There will be post-horses there, and I will order relays along the road where the people know me. Meantime I will take the boy; he will be safe with me."

They never met again in this world. Bartholde died fighting on his own threshold; his wife, the beautiful Mathilde, perished, perhaps, in the flames. At all events, a wild figure was seen at an upper window just before the great leaden roof of the château curled and fell. Fire and sword spread in a widening circle round that district; the house of Anton Dormeur was sacked. Achille Dufarge and his wife, the lovely Sara, were in Paris, where no word reached them till long after, and then only by a stranger, an old workman of the factory in Languedoc; so the months went by, and then came the awful revolution that put an end to the royal family, and enthroned the guillotine. Then the revolution passed out of the hands of men, and the destinies of France seemed to be in the keeping of murderers like Robespierre and Couthon. By that time the old

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man and his grandson were in England; the boy having grown to be a tall and handsome youth.

On the door-posts of a tall gaunt-looking house in a street of that strange part of London lying between Spitalfields and Norton Folgate, and known as "The Liberty of the Old Artillery Ground," might be seen the words "A. Dormeur, Silk Manufacturer."

It was a dim-looking place enough, where the yellow blinds were nearly always drawn over the front windows, and the summer's dust collected in the corners of the high flight of steps, and was blown round and round in little eddies, along with bits of string and snippings of patterns or shreds of silk and cotton. The front door stood open every day from ten till five, to give buyers access to the warehouse, in which Anton Dormeur—old, withered, slightly bent, and with a set look upon his face which even his rare smile failed to disturb—unrolled pieces of silk, made bargains, examined with a critical eye and with the aid of a magnifying glass the fabrics brought in by the weavers, and in fact carried on his trade as though he had for ever been separated from the tragedy which befel him in Languedoc nearly fourteen years before.

And yet that heavy affliction darkened his mind as he rolled and unrolled his silks, or carefully matched the skeins that came from the dyers. The sun was shining through the windows, the lower panes of which were dulled in order to obtain a clear high light; but the cloud upon his puckered brow was not lifted. Hour by hour the warehouse clock ticked away the afternoon. Customers departed; the sound of the scale and the clatter of reels and bobbins, in another warehouse beyond the long passage, had ceased since midday. [27]

Presently some passing thought too bitter for absolute self-control, crossed the old man's mind, and he bowed down his gray head for a moment upon his folded hands; but the next instant glanced round with the half-startled look of a man who fears he has betrayed himself. He was busy over his patterns again as he noted that a young man at the other end of the room was regarding him with a wistful, pitying look.

"Come, Antoine," he said, "you have had a long day's work, and we dined early; it is time you had finished your ledger for the day. Come and help me put up these pieces, and then get you into the fresh air. Would that I could make the old house more cheerful for thee, boy; but remember it is all thine own one day, and do not add to the sorrows of the past, anxiety for the future!"

The young man had come to his side—a slender, handsome fellow, with an olive cheek, curling hair, and a dark eye both frank and fearless. [28]

"And you, grandpère," he said, touching the old man's hand; "why will not you go out and seek some change from your dull life? What sorrow is it that seems to press so hard on you to-day, and why do you think it necessary to give me words of warning? What shadow has come between us?"

"What shadow!" echoed the old man, peering at him from under his bent brows. "None of my throwing, boy; but do you forget what day it is? A dark anniversary for me, if not for you; and I scarcely thought you would have let it pass without a thought. Nay, I need not wish its darkness to lie on you for ever either; but, Antoine, remember you are all I have left. In my silent, lonely life, and this dull house—and I always a reserved and seeming loveless man—you may well pine for something more, some lighter, gayer time, and ever brood over the means to find it. But remember, my son, that you are by birth above the paltry pleasures of the herd; that you can come to me and ask for money if you covet some pastime that befits you; that you need conceal nothing from me—have no friend that I may not know also."

Antoine's face flushed for a moment. It was seldom, indeed, that his grandfather spoke in a voice so tender and so yearning. Almost insensibly his arm stole round the old man's neck. [29]

"What is it?" he said again. "What have I done?"

"I accuse you of nothing, lad," replied his grandfather, gently disengaging himself. "I thought perhaps your tastes may have needed more money. You do not gamble, Antoine; you are never out late, for I can hear you come in, and the sound of your violin penetrates to my room, so that I know when you are at home. I don't expect you to be always with me; I would not have it so; but when you want money—"

"Grandfather," said the young man hastily, "I know not what you mean. Have I ever asked for more than the allowance you make me? Do I complain? Except for the two or three bills that you have paid for me of your own free-will, do I exceed your bounty?"

"Talk not of bounty, boy," said the elder, flushing in his turn. "Antoine, could you read my heart you would see that all I desire is to show to you the love that the world would give me no credit for, that my own children even, thy—thy mother, Antoine, and—and Sara—ah! leave me just now, my dear; I am surely growing old and childish, but I have still enough of the old manhood left not to wish even my grandson to witness my weakness. Leave me, boy, and let us meet at supper in my room. I shall go out presently to see old Pierre, and, if I can, to bring him home with me. Poor old faithful Pierre!"

The young man slowly left the warehouse and ascended the stairs into the house, when he shut himself in his own room, and flung himself into a chair, in profound dejection. [30]

He had scarcely done so when a man came from the upper warehouse, a room whence silk—both warp and woof—was given out to the workpeople to be wound on bobbins or spread into the web before it was fixed in the loom. After every such operation this silk was brought back to be reweighed, and only when the piece was finished in a woven fabric did it find its way into the lower warehouse, there to be measured and inspected. Access was gained to this upper warehouse by a door in a back street, inscribed with the words "A. Dormeur. Weavers' Entrance." And thence the workpeople, of whom there were many each day waiting their turn, went across a paved yard and into a passage terminating in a kind of square lobby, at the bottom of the deep well which lighted the gloomy staircase by a glazed window from the roof of the house.

Close to this lobby was a sliding panel, opening on a counter where the great scales hung for weighing the silk; and here weavers and winders gave in or took out their work from the "scale-foreman," whose name was Bashley—one of those bad men who, with a bullying pretence of candour and honesty, contrive to impose even on the victims over whom they tyrannize, and at the same time, as it were, wrest from their superiors the acknowledgment that they are "rough diamonds."

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By a horrible fiction it is often thought that such a man is "just fit to deal with workpeople." The same opinion prevailed then, and thus Bashley was able to get a character which obtained for him a place in the warehouse of Anton Dormeur. He had been there for some twelve months, in place of old Pierre Dobree—a faithful fellow who had joined his old master in London after the calamities which drove them both from France. Pierre had been in Paris, and had escaped to bring to his master the awful intelligence that the daughter he had denounced was now beyond his relentless anger; but the old man, having grown old and feeble, had retired with a pension to the French Hospital which then stood in St. Luke's, and was called La Providence: a refuge founded to receive poor Protestant émigrés, mostly aged men and women, who had their little rooms quaintly furnished with their own poor household goods; and who walked daily in the quadrangle, laid out in beds and borders.

Bashley had been only fifteen months in Dormeur's service, and yet he had come between the grandfather and Antoine, suggesting suspicions of the young man's probity, but so artfully that while he only seemed to hint at small blemishes, which he pointed out for the sake of the lad's future welfare, he left so much to be inferred that the old man had already a new trouble added to his load.

[32]

Bashley's insinuations, when analysed, came in effect to charging Antoine with small peculations in order to increase the amount of his allowance—to taking beforehand what he, of course, might consider would be his own some day, as the scoundrel would have put it. Not only this, but he hinted at low companions—at a secret love affair with a girl far beneath him in station—of this he would, if necessary, furnish proof.

It was with a troubled heart that Anton Dormeur, having at last escaped from a whispered conference with Bashley, locked up the warehouse, and went slowly out towards Shoreditch on his way to the "Providence." Old Pierre had been the early guide, philosopher, and friend of the little orphan boy; and the keen-faced, pippin-skinned old Frenchman had the courage of his convictions, and roundly swore many innocent French oaths that afternoon, when his old employer, and present patron and friend, paced with him along the path of the old quadrangle and told him his suspicions.

"So, that man of blague, that Bashley, is at the bottom of this also," he said presently. "Why did you send me away, and take that liar, that—that—ventrebleu—that hyena?"

"But what should it be true, Pierre? My heart is very heavy."

"I tell you it is not true."

"But about the girl? He said he could prove it. And yet the boy came and rested his hand upon my shoulder to-day as if he were candour itself."

[33]

"Let him prove it."

"He swears he will."

"What then?"

"What then! Do you, too, think it is possible, Dobree?"

"I think it is quite possible that Antoine may be in love, and in love with one who is poor, but not ignoble—no, never—not ignoble."

There was a strange light in the old foreman's eyes, a strange look in his face, as he said this, so that Anton Dormeur stopped him suddenly.

"Pierre, you know something of this," he cried. "You shall tell me—what does it mean?"

"I am not sure that I can tell you," replied the old man thoughtfully. "Still, you invite me to sup with you to-night. Antoine will be there?"

"Ah! there again. This man Bashley told me, as one proof of his knowledge, that even to-night—this night that I have bidden him to meet me—Antoine will not be at home; that he may stay away altogether to avoid my questioning; that he will certainly disappoint me for the sake of this girl



with whom he has an engagement. How then?"

Pierre was silent for a moment; a troubled look puckered his face, then a keen sudden gleam of surprise and intelligence seemed to shoot across it. "You said supper at nine, did you not?" he said quietly. [34]

"Yes—the nights are dark."

"Make it ten, nevertheless."

"Agreed, but why? and what is there working in your brain, Dobree?"

"Never mind, monsieur, but lend me one, two, three sovereigns."

"Pierre, you are extravagant. What can you want with them? There will be no company; your dress is good enough."

"There will be Master Antoine, perhaps a lady, but that I cannot tell; there may even be two ladies."

"Pierre, it is ill-jesting," said Dormeur, turning pale and with an angry glance; "do you remember what day it is?"

"Good Heaven! Master, forgive me. I had quite another thought than of the day; pardon me a thousand times—pardon me. I could cut out my thoughtless tongue; and yet, believe me, I meant—never mind what I meant."

They had reached the passage leading to Dobree's queer little oak-panelled room, and as the door was open, both the old men entered; Dormeur walking up to the mantel-piece, and fiddling about there with some old china cups, and other little ornaments with which it was adorned. Turned with its face to the wall was a small trumpery frame, containing as it seemed some common-looking picture; and quite absently, and as though he scarcely knew what he was doing, the old man placed his fingers on it to turn it face outwards. Anton Dormeur gave a low cry, and placed his hand upon his companion's arm. [35]

"Where did you get this?" he said slowly, looking his old foreman in the face. "It is not old, it cannot have been painted more than a year; and yet, as a mere likeness from memory, it is wonderful. Who could have done it?—not you, Pierre, that is impossible."

Dobree had recovered himself. "You know that I came from Paris," he said, with his eyes cast down; "you know, too, how a picture may be retouched and made to look like new."

"But you are deceiving me; this is no retouching; it is clumsy—coarse; and, except in the evidence that the face itself must have been beautiful, not a good likeness. You wonder I can talk so calmly of this, a poor resemblance of the bright fair girl—of my Sara—mine although—Dobree, tell me how you came by this."

"I will tell you to-night," muttered the old man; "I swear to you that I will tell you to-night."

"And to-night I will show you a portrait on ivory, one that will make you think you see her as you once knew her, Pierre: a picture I keep among some relics, and look at often—oftener than you think, or anyone in the world could guess. Good-bye—or rather till nine—no, ten to-night, *au revoir*." [36]

When his grandfather had left the house, Antoine, who was restless, unhappy, and full of vague surmises, sat for some time with his head in his hands, and at last only roused himself with an effort. It was growing dusk already, for autumn had given place to winter, and the days were short. There was still light enough, however, for him to see to write a letter, and in a few lines he told his grandfather that he should be with him at nine o'clock, and would then ask him to give him back the confidence that once existed between them, or to charge him with the fault that he had committed. He felt how vague this was, and almost hesitated; but he carried the letter to the sitting-room, nevertheless, and opening the door gently advanced towards the table.

It was a large barely furnished room, and yet not without evidence of luxury, or at all events of ornament. The great carved chimney-piece was surmounted by an old mirror with sconces containing candles; a leathern chair was drawn up to the hearth; on the table itself was a silver standish with writing materials, and a tall goblet of Venetian glass, while some rare china stood on a cabinet near the window.

Antoine so rarely entered this room except at night, and to bear his grandfather company for an hour or two before bed-time, that he involuntarily glanced round it now in the fast-fading twilight. In that moment he remarked that the door of the cabinet was unlocked—a circumstance so unusual that he went towards it and looked inside to note what might be the reason of such carelessness. Then seeing this silver cup on the shelf, he carried it to the window, and looked curiously at its contents. There was some reason for his doing so. In that dim silent room—where only its master came daily, and the one domestic who, with an old housekeeper, attended to the wants of Dormeur and his grandson, and did a little dusting once a week—the silver cup had become the receptacle of small trinkets, of coins, and quaint pieces of jewellery. [37]

It was a common custom for the old man to take it out of the cabinet when his eyes were tired with reading, and to turn over these tarnished treasures, some of which were in small morocco cases. To one of the latter Antoine's attention was directed, for it lay open as though it had been

hastily placed there, and covered with a piece of torn point-lace. Removing this the young man saw a portrait, the picture of a face so sweet, and eyes so penetrating, that he uttered an involuntary cry. It was a deeper feeling than mere surprise or admiration that prompted it, however. His hand trembled as he replaced the miniature, after gazing at it with an expression of mingled wonder and terror. At that instant the watchman passed crying the first hour after dark; and, carefully replacing the cup, he turned the key in the cabinet door and hurried from the room.

[38]

Now all of my story that remains to tell took place in the next three hours, after Antoine left the house with a strange sense of wonder and confusion in his mind; so I must explain a little the situation of the young man—the enmity of Bashley.

It had happened, then, some months before, that Bashley being away for a day's holiday, Antoine took his place at the scale; for it was a slack time, and few workpeople were there to be served. He believed he had given out the last skein of silk, and had weighed the last bobbin, so shutting the slide, and putting up the bar, he unlocked an inner door, and went into the house and up the stairs. Pausing on the first landing, as he frequently did, to look thoughtfully over the balustrade and down the well-staircase, he became aware that one person yet remained quietly seated on the bench below. As he uttered some slight exclamation at his own negligence, a face was turned upward towards his own—a face of such sweet, pure, girlish beauty that he held his breath lest it should be bent from his searching gaze—as indeed it was, but not before the plain straw bonnet had fallen backward and left a wealth of sunny hair glowing beneath the light that shone down upon it. A confused sense of some picture of an angel upon Jacob's ladder that he had seen in an old family Bible came into Antoine's thoughts as he stood and looked; but in another moment the girl had replaced her bonnet, and with her face bent down sat waiting as before.

[39]

In a minute he was beside her.

"Pardon me," he said, with an involuntary bow; "I thought everyone had gone. What is it that I can do for you?"

There was no embarrassment except that of modesty as she curtsied before him. She might have been a young duchess by the frankness with which she met his look.

"I come from Marie Rondeau," she said, "who has sprained her foot and cannot walk. Mr. Bashley said she might send for the money due to her if she was still lame."

"Your name then is—" he inquired, pausing for her to fill up the question by her answer.

"Sara Rondeau," she said simply; "it is for my aunt that I come. I live with my aunt."

"And Bashley, does he—did he—has he visited you to bring you money?" Already the lad felt a short jealous pang, but knew not what it was.

"He has been to measure our work, but not to bring money. My aunt comes here herself."

But Bashley had been there, and the image of this young girl had roused his sordid fancy. Is it a wonder that he soon began to hate his young master?

[40]

Antoine felt the warm blood in his face as he wrapped in a paper the few shillings that were due.

"Do not come again on such an errand," he said. "I will call and see if your aunt is better, and will, if necessary, bring some more money myself."

There is little need to say that Antoine kept his promise; that merry bustling little Marie Rondeau (how unlike her niece she was, to be sure!) was in a constant tremor when the little wicket-gate of her garden clicked, and she, looking through the leaden casement of the upper room, saw the young master coming along the little path, with its two rows of oyster-shells dividing it from the gay plots of gilliflowers, double-stocks, and sweet-williams. She trembled too for the peace of the fair girl, who had too soon learned to know his footstep, and to flush with pleasure at his approach.

Already trouble seemed to threaten them, for Bashley had warned her, and in a coarse insolent way had said he meant to be Sara's sweetheart himself—or they might seek work elsewhere.

One night, when Antoine entered the garden, he was surprised to find old Pierre Dobree there.

"You must come no more yet, if you would spare this child from sorrow," he said, after talking long and earnestly. "Your new foreman watches you, and already hints to your grandfather that you are engaged in some mean intrigue. You bring evil where I would have you do good, Master Antoine. Come no more, I entreat you."

[41]

"And Sara—does she wish that also?" said the young fellow, reddening. "I have never spoken a word to her that could not be said before her aunt. Why do you interpose, Peter Dobree?"

"Excuse me. The aunt is my cousin, the child my ward, and I know your grandfather well. For a month you must not come, but trust me and give me your word, and all may yet go well."

So it was a month since Antoine had been to the little house in Bethnal Green—and in all that slack time neither Sara nor her aunt had been to the warehouse for work or money.

But on that night, when Antoine was to sup with his grandfather, the month's probation was at an end. Even had it not been, he would have felt that he must break his promise, for on that very morning as he stood at the door after the warehouse had been opened, a boy ran up and placed a note in his hand—a mere slip of paper, on which was scrawled—

*"Will you never come again?—S. R."*

His sensitive nature was shocked at such a summons, and for the first time he had a sharp pang of doubt whether he was not to be awakened from a foolish dream. It was with a heavy heart that he bent his steps along the narrow tangle of streets that lay between his house and the edge of a great piece of waste ground known as Hare Street Fields, and even had he been less preoccupied he might not have noticed that he was followed by two men, who kept close to him in the shadows of the houses, and walked as noiselessly as cats, and with the same stealthy tread. [42]

Mrs. Rondeau was sitting in her lower room, sewing by the light of a weaver's oil-lamp which hung from a string fastened to the mantel-piece. The place was very bare. Few of the little ornaments that usually decorate even a poor home remained, and the good woman's eyes were red with recent crying. The loom in the upper part of the house was empty, and so was the cupboard, or very nearly so.

"There goes the quarter," she said, as she heard the chiming of a distant clock. "I wish I'd gone myself instead of sending the poor child. What would Peter say if he knew—ah! and what would that old flinty-hearted wretch say if *he* knew! How I wish she would come, even if she came back without the money!"

The night had set in gloomily enough, as Sara Rondeau went quickly through the now almost deserted streets on her way to a dim shop, where three golden balls hung to an iron bracket at the door, to show that a pawnbroker's business was carried on within. It was not the first visit she had made to this establishment, for the poor little household ornaments, the loss of which had left her home so bleak and bare, were now in the safekeeping of the proprietor; but still she shrank back as she approached a dim side entrance in a narrow street, and drawing her bonnet closer over her face, pushed open a baize door, and entered a dark passage divided on one side into a row of narrow cells, separated from each other by wooden partitions. [43]

She made so little noise, and still kept so far back in the pervading gloom, that her presence was unnoticed by a shabby-looking man, who was just then engaged in earnest conversation with somebody in the next box. Before she had spoken, and while she was yet in the shadow of the partition, she thought she recognized the voice of the person who was speaking as that of Bashley, and held her breath to listen, for a name was mentioned which sent the blood back to her heart and made her feel sick and faint.

"Well, as long as everything's safe," said the pawnbroker's assistant, who leaned his elbows on the counter, so that his head was close to the partition; "but we've got a good deal here now, you know, and if the thing should be found out—"

"Yah! who's to find it out?" retorted Bashley; "I tell you everything's ready, and the risk's mine. Old Dormeur's half childish; and as to the young one, I tell you he's safe enough for a week, if I like to keep him so. He'd an appointment to supper with the old man to-night, and he won't keep it. If he's not on his way now to see the girl, he's tied up neck and heels, by this time, and in a safe place out of harm's way. I tell you I can be back here in an hour or two. You're too deep in now to draw back; and besides, who can swear to raw silk? I shall go first, and look after the girl; then I mean to call on the old man, and send him out on a wild-goose chase. The rest's easy, for I've a key, and a light cart at the back of the warehouse will bring the silk here in no time. The game's in my hands now, and I shall play to win." [44]

"But when the young one tells his version of the story?"

"How can he? He comes out without knowing where from; and if ever he did, he's been in an empty house. A pretty story! No, no; if the old man believes it, he won't face the disgrace, for he more than half suspects his grandson as it is. Come now, will you or won't you?"

Sara Rondeau, crouching by the door, hears this with an undefined fear which paralyses her for a moment, but leaves one thought in her troubled mind.

Some foul plot is hatching against Antoine, and she is powerless to hinder it. No—one thing she can do, if only she can creep back unnoticed. She will use all her strength to reach Mr. Dormeur's house, and tell him what she has heard. [45]

It is a question of minutes. Walking backward and pressing slowly against the noiseless door, she slips out again, and, like one pursued, begins to run at her utmost speed through the darkened streets.

. . . . .

Anton Dormeur sits alone in the grim old house. Cook and housekeeper have gone to market for the means of providing supper. Not a footfall sounds in the street; only the wailing voice of the watchman calling the hour at a distance breaks the dead silence, amidst which the old man can hear the ticking of the gold repeater in his pocket, the tinkle of the ashes that stir in the old wide grate, where a fire has been lighted, and the gnawing of a mouse behind the wainscot. He sits with the silver goblet beside him on the table, his knees towards the fire, his furrowed face

quivering as he bends it down over the miniature he has taken from its case, the miniature of his younger daughter, dead and—no, not unforgiven—dead and mourned for now, with a silent grief that speaks of years of desolation and remorse.

The light of the shaded lamp falling on the picture in his hands seems to expand its lineaments; the tears that gather in his eyes almost give quivering motion to the face before him. A strange emotion masters him. His temples seem to throb, his hands to shake. The sudden sound of a light single knock at the street door sets his nerves ajar; the quiet click of the lock—a pause of deadest silence—and then the light tread of an uncertain foot upon the stairs make him tremble; yet he knows not why—does not even ask himself the reason. There is a lamp outside upon the landing, he knows—the light of it shines down into the hall—and yet he cannot stir towards it. What superstition holds him? Even at the moment that he starts up from his chair, the portrait still in his hand, his highly-strung senses enable him to hear a rustle that sounds quite close, and is followed by a low knocking at the door of the room itself.

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In a voice of hope, of dread, of fear, he knows not what or which, he hoarsely cries, "Come in."

In the mirror above his head he sees the room-door partly open, and then—yes, then—either to his waking vision or in disordered fancy, the living original of the picture stands with pale and earnest face in the upright bar of light that streams in from the landing.

His daughter—not as he had last seen her, but with a difference unaccountable if he had had time to think or strength to reason. His daughter, with the past years rolled back to show her in her youth, and yet with poor and scanty dress, and long fair hair tossed in confusion on her shoulders, whence a battered bonnet hung.

He had no time to note all this at first. He only knew that his heart seemed to be going out in some dumb movement towards this apparition—that he sank again into his chair—that he felt a living hand upon his shoulder—saw a frightened face looking into his. Then his senses came back, and he heard the voice speak rapidly, and in French.

[47]

With swift steps, but without picking his way, taking the nearest road rather by habit than with any observation, Antoine Dormeur traversed the narrow streets leading to his destination. There were so few people abroad that the way was clear enough, and yet there were some apprentices or worklads on their way home; while in that neighbourhood, just on the edge of Spitalfields, a lower colony of petty thieves and receivers kept up the trade of two or three disreputable taverns, where dogs, birds, and pigeons were exchanged or betted on. It may have been in consequence of this taste for pigeon-flying that the whole neighbourhood resounded with whistles and bird-calls. Men and boys gave each other this shrill greeting as they passed, or warned each other by it, or used it to express reproach or pleasure, hilarity or dismay, varying its peculiar note to suit each emotion. The Hare Street whistle was as well-known an institution there as the jödel is to the Tyrolese peasant.

It scarcely surprised Antoine, therefore, when, as he reached a beer-shop (the last lighted house before the stragglng street opened into a dirty lane leading to the open fields), a man who was just emerging from the place gave a low whistle as he turned in the opposite direction and crossed the road. Had he given the matter a thought, he might have hesitated for a moment before plunging into the gloom of the muddy lane, or at least might have grasped his walking-cane more firmly and looked about him, in which case it is just possible he would have seen two shadows that moved in the darkness of the wall some fifty yards behind. As it was, he did neither. The course of his gloomy thoughts was unbroken by so trivial an interruption, and continued to be so till he approached a corner where a high ragged fence turned off on the edge of a footpath.

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Only a sudden scuffle, a muttered oath, and the grasp of two powerful arms that pinioned his elbows to his side awakened him.

Three men had leaped out from the projecting corner of the fence, where a light cart was drawn up, and were upon him before he could raise a hand; but he was quick and active, so that by a sudden turn and trip he bore to the ground the fellow who held him, and fell upon him heavily.

"Give it him, and quick there with the sack!" cried this worthy, as they rolled on the path together. Another ruffian seized Antoine by the throat. A weapon gleamed before his eyes; but in that moment a quick patter of feet sounded in the roadway, followed by two reports like the sudden breaking of a cocoa-nut. Crack! crack! and the ruffian's body fell heavily against the fence, as two shadows—the two shadows that had been following Antoine so long—danced in the footway, whence they had just struck a second of the ruffians through a jagged hole in the fence, and left him sticking there till he recovered his senses. In a moment the young man felt his arms released, and struggled to his feet, his late antagonist escaping by a plunge through the fence and a desperate run across the fields, where he was followed by a flash and the report of a pistol, which failed to stop him.

[49]

"Who fired?" said one of the shadows, now visible—a light active fellow, armed with a knotted cudgel.

"I did, Mat," replied a voice that Antoine knew, as a thin spare old man came from the open space beyond.

"Are you hurt, my boy?" he asked tenderly, approaching Antoine, who stared from one to another in amazement.

"Pierre—Pierre Dobree!" exclaimed the young man; "you here—and these—how is all this?"

"I will tell you presently," said the old pensioner, for it was he indeed. "I expected a trap, and had you followed by two lads that I could trust.—Gave him a body-guard of a couple of weaver-lads, eh?" he said, turning to the rescuers. "You've done your work well, boys." [50]

"Why, we haven't been three years at sea and learnt the knack of the press-gang for nothing, daddy," replied one of them grinning; "but we must be off; we ain't constables, you know, and there may be trouble about."

"Antoine, you sha'n't be disappointed of your ride in the cart," said Peter; "we must hasten, or your grandfather will be waiting supper. He will have to excuse me, though. Come, in with you."

The two shadows leaped lightly up, and one of them took the reins.

"Stop, though," he said suddenly; "this isn't our cart. This will be brought in stealing. It might be a hanging matter, daddy."

"I'm going to take it to the owner if I'm not much mistaken," said Peter, as he and Antoine scrambled in at the back.

"But, Pierre Dobree, what of Sara? what of your niece? I must know. If she is in danger, and through me, I will brave my grandfather's displeasure, lose my hope of the fortune for which I care so little. I will, I must find her!"

"You can no more find her than I," said the old man. "One word with your grandfather, and then I go to seek her."

"What! She has left home then?" [51]

"Only this evening, and for an hour or two; but if my hopes do not play me false we shall overtake the scoundrel who detains her, and he shall answer for it with my hand at his throat but I will have her back."

Pierre Dobree was ordinarily a calm, rather rosy, cheerful, high-dried old Frenchman, quite small and thin, and with a very perceptible stoop; but Antoine said afterwards that there was a very terrible look in his face just then—such a look as may have been born, perhaps, in the days of Terror, when he stood in the crowd beneath the guillotine and saw the head of Achille Dufarge fall into the sack.

. . . . .

It was many minutes before old Anton Dormeur could clear his mental vision or recover his senses sufficiently to determine that the girl who stood beside him touching his shoulder was real flesh and blood; but at last, with a strong effort, he roused himself to listen; and only half comprehending her hurried story, rose from the chair into which he had fallen.

"And you, little one, who are you? what are you?" he asked presently, without taking his eyes from her face. "Your name is Sara? it must be—shall be," he exclaimed almost passionately.

"It is," said the girl—"Sara Rondeau."

"Rondeau, Rondeau! where have I heard that?" [52]

"It is my aunt—she is a weaver; we work for you, monsieur. See you not that this Monsieur Bashley, having a spite against us, and against monsieur your grandson—"

"Who and what are you?" again said the old man; "you talk as one of us—speaking of monsieur my grandson. Has he seen you? do you know him? Your mother never saw him? she was— Mon Dieu! what am I saying?" he added wildly.

"Pray, pray delay not!" said the girl, clasping her hands.

"No, no, I come—first to the watch-house, and then to your house, did you say?" And with a great effort, but almost without taking his eyes from the child's face, Dormeur strode to a closet beside the window, and took down a sword, which he drew quickly from the scabbard.

Sara feared him, and retreated to the door.

"What!" he said; "dost think I'd harm thee, little one? Come, take my hand. Tell me, how did you get in?"

"I found the street-door unfastened, and knocked, but could make no one hear; then I came in and listened, and there was a light up here, and so I came and knocked, not knowing what to do; but there is some one there now—hark!"

"'Tis the servants come back, child," said Anton; but he trod softly for all that, and, turning about, traversed noiselessly the long winding passage that led towards the back of the house. [53]

At the end of that passage the well stair-case sent a cold gray gleam from the skylight in the roof, but down at the basement, where the lobby opened in the yard, there was a stronger light—

the light of a lantern, by which a man stood impatiently examining a key, and picking it with a penknife, as though it had been clogged.

"I wanted to unlock that closet too," he muttered, "for I would swear he keeps gold there, but the cart will be here directly. It's rare luck that he should be out, and the women too as I verily believe, for not a soul is stirring in the kitchen. Fancy leaving the house alone! I was a fool not to take the chance before."

The sound of wheels aroused him, and Bashley—for it was he—gave a half-frightened glance behind him, for he had suddenly become conscious that he was talking to himself. He looked upwards also, as though by some strange instinct; and there, leaning over the wooden balustrade of the "well," their faces lighted in the gleam of his lantern, were Anton Dormeur and Sara Rondeau, looking down upon him.

He made a dash at the door leading to the yard, then suddenly turned and, with a desperate oath, drew a pistol and fired it from the stairs; but his aim was uncertain, and the ball went straight upward crashing through the skylight. Another moment, and a door clanged open, a torrent of air rushed up the well, and amidst shouts and cries, and the sound of falling glass, Bashley was smitten down, and handcuffed between two officers, who had been posted in the street, according to the instructions they had received from Peter Dobree. The old weaver had not counted on such a success, but he had actually driven Antoine home in the very cart which was to have carried away the plunder, after having conveyed the young man to some place of imprisonment, where he might have died before aid could reach him.

[54]

The first thing that Antoine saw clearly, when they had all got into the house again, was his grandfather carrying a woman in his arms. The old man had darted down the stairs at the moment Bashley fired his pistol; but Sara had fainted. Poor child, she had been long without food, and her strength gave way amidst that awful scene.

Arrived at the door of the room, the second thing Antoine saw was that this was the very girl whom he had gone out to seek. As she lay there in the great leathern chair, with a wan face and closed eyes, a keen anguish wrung the lad's heart—anguish not unmingled with utter amazement, for there, bending over her and kissing her hands, which he held gently to his breast, was the proud old man, who had so rarely displayed emotion.

[55]

Antoine covered his face with his hands, for his head began to reel. So Peter Dobree found him standing outside the half-open door, when he came panting up.

"Why, what's the matter, boy? you're not wounded surely—say?" asked the old foreman anxiously.

Antoine pointed to the scene within the room, and Peter stooped down and peered in—well he might. Anton Dormeur was on his knees beside the child, moistening her lips with brandy from a teaspoon (it was a spoon that had fallen from her dress, but he knew nothing of that, for he found it on the floor without thinking how it came there). He spoke encouraging words to her, talked to her as men talk to babies; touched her forehead with his fingers, and took up one of her long fair tresses to press it to his lips.

Presently she sighed heavily, and opened her great eyes upon him, then flushed, drew herself further back in the chair, and began to cry.

"Pierre—Pierre Dobree!" shouted the old man, striding to the door, "he should be here; where is he?"

"Here am I," said Peter, suddenly confronting him, and drawing Antoine into the room, all grimed and torn, and smirched with mud, as he was.

"What is the meaning of that?" said old Dormeur, glaring into Peter's eyes, and laying a grip upon his shoulder that must have left a bruise there.

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"The meaning of *that* is," said Peter steadily, and looking back with an eye as fierce as his master's—"the meaning of *that* is, that when nearly nineteen years ago I stood under St. Guillotine and vowed a vow, I meant to keep it. That when Sara Dufarge—once Sara Dormeur—my loved and lovely mistress, joined her husband—not by the guillotine, but by a broken heart in a little country lodging at Nogent—she left her child—*that* child—to the nurse who had been faithful to her—to my own good sister Nancy, who, bringing her to England when she and her husband came to escape the troubles, found here another sister, the widow Rondeau—childless—to whom came as a legacy that same little orphaned one who lies now in her grandsire's chair."

Anton Dormeur stood and glared for a moment at the undaunted little old man, who had thus kept a secret for eighteen years, though he had been here in his service; but even in his bitter anger there came to him the recollection of the stern relentless temper with which he had blotted out his daughter's name from the family record; and, with a drooping head and tears that fell fast on his furrowed cheeks, he went again and knelt beside the girl, who now sat looking at them all with wide and wondering eyes.

"Peter Dobree," he said presently, "go or send for your sister Rondeau.—Antoine, dear lad, go you into the kitchen and see if any one has come in; for we will have supper through all, and Sara, Sara, my child, my little one, you must never leave me more."

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"What! and are you, monsieur, truly my grandfather, and Monsieur Antoine truly your grandson? Then he is—no, not my brother; what then?—But I may kiss him?" said the wondering girl, as she stood the centre of a talking group, apart from which stood the lad, who still looked at her wistfully enough.

They broke into a laugh, at which she turned red as a rose, and with a sudden gesture, which shot a pain to the old man's heart, for it was that of her mother once again, turned away.

"Yes, but you may kiss him," said Anton gently, and leading her to where Antoine stood—"a cousin's kiss, you know—have you learned what that is?"

"No, I never had a cousin—at least, Antoine never kissed me," she said simply, and held up her sweet face to the young man, who bent and touched it with his lips.

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"I do not think I need say any more; but that is the story of the Silver Goblet," said our governess as she rang the bell for the strawberries and cream.

On the following evening the weather was so close and lowering that we had to remain indoors. It was one of those heavy days which sometimes occur in the summer months, when the whole atmosphere appears to be one low-hanging cloud, enveloping everything in a kind of dark-gray mist, that is only now and then pierced with red rays, and droops upon the distant fields in a straw-coloured vapour—the effect of the sunlight behind the atmosphere of mist.

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"What a dim, uninviting evening!" said Miss Grantley as we stood at the window looking out at the garden, where the roses seemed to droop heavy-headed in the moisture-laden air, and the song of the birds was hushed, or only an occasional chirp was heard as one or two thrushes flashed from amidst the plum-trees, or a martin twittered beneath the eaves. "What a dim evening! It almost reminds one of a London fog—not a black fog, but a yellow one, such as one sees in the city sometimes on a late autumn afternoon or an evening in February."

"Oh! do tell us a story about London, Miss Grantley. You *must* know ever so much of the streets and places there, or how could you have learned so easily about Spitalfields and all that? Beside, you've lived in London, haven't you?"

"Well, yes. I was in London for more than two years, and near the city too, and I think I must have spent too much time in wandering about some of the quaint old streets and lanes, where there are rare old churches, and halls belonging to city companies, and ancient houses that once belonged to noblemen of the court of King James and King Charles, but are now used for counting-houses and warehouses, such of them as are not pulled down at least. I made some odd acquaintances too; and a kind old couple, who were caretakers at one of the smaller city halls, used to ask me to take tea with them, for the old gentleman had known my great-uncle Joseph, who was an East India merchant, and belonged to the company that used to meet in the hall. I think the old gentleman said he had been the 'master;' but at any rate his portrait was on the wall along with many others, and he was so like my dear father that I stood and cried, and often wished I could take the portrait itself away, but that of course was impossible."

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Here Miss Grantley became silent, and we could see tears shining in her eyes, till Annie Bowers, who was standing near her, gently took her in her arms and kissed her on the cheek, and without saying a word held her round the waist.

"Well," resumed our governess, smiling, and pressing Annie's hand, "I was going to say that the old gentleman had kept a kind of diary or great memorandum-book, in which he had written—oh, in such a neat, stiff, stalker kind of hand!—all kinds of things that had happened among his friends and acquaintances for many years. He used to read it to me sometimes; and once, when I had to stay there in the little cozy parlour for a whole winter evening because of a downpour of rain, he asked me if I should mind his reading to me a little story that he had written about a very strange occurrence to an old friend of his who lived in just such another lane, near just such another old hall in the city. He said that he felt like Robinson Crusoe sometimes, except that his wife was there with him in that quiet island of bricks and mortar; and, like Robinson Crusoe, he had learned to put his narratives upon paper in quite a remarkable way, so that if I didn't mind listening he would read me a bit of a romance that was as true as anything I should be likely to get out of the circulating libraries.

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"I said of course that I should like it very much; and so, while his wife sat on one side the fire knitting, and I was half lost in a great leather easy-chair on the other side, the old gentleman took a bundle of papers out of a drawer in the bookcase and read me the story that I am now going to read to you; for as I was very much interested in it he was so pleased that he made me a low bow, and handed me the paper neatly folded and tied with a bit of red tape. He said it would be something to remember him by when I went away from London."



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## CHAPTER III.

### A BABY'S HAND.

**P**EOPLE who know the city of London, and like to wander up and down the streets, soon learn to leave the broad and more modern thoroughfares and to plunge into the silence and seclusion of the queer by-ways which lie away from the great roaring sea of traffic, like the caves and shallows that skirt some great ocean bay.

Amongst these retired spots none are more suggestive than the old churchyards all blurred and dim with London smoke, but yet in which a few trees yearly put forth green leaves of little promise, and a choir of sooty sparrows chirp around the queer old steeples or perch impudently upon the leaden ornaments which adorn the sacred porch. In these places—which even in summer are well-like in their cool impenetrable shade—there is no little business going on, however, for all round the rusty iron railing which incloses the weed-entangled graveyard the houses of city merchants seem to crowd and hustle for space; and, if they had any time for it, the clerks behind those dust-blinded windows might spend an hour not unprofitably in looking down upon the decaying monuments of departed citizens and meditating at once on the uncertainty of human affairs and the benefits of life assurance. [62]

Amongst the dozen or so of such places illustrating the brick-and-mortar history of the city none are more suggestive than the church and yard of St. Simon Swynherde, which, lying in the circumbendibus of a lane named after the same saint, forms, as it were, a sort of outlying island, upon whose quiet shores the incautious wayfarer, being sometimes lost or cast away, can hear the humming surges of the great sea as they boom in the thoroughfares beyond. There is no alteration in this place from year to year, except such differences as are brought about by the change of seasons; no civic improvement troubles its sedate gloom—no adventurous speculator regards it as a promising site for building blocks of offices—no railway company casts an evil eye upon its seclusion within the area formed by the church and the tall dim houses which have mouldered into uniform neutrality of colour.

Even the march of time seems to have been arrested amidst the decay of the place, since the bell of the church clock rusted from its bearings and the index of the old sun-dial fell a prey to accumulated canker. The spring brings a few green buds and feeble leaves upon the grimy trees; the summer serves to accumulate the store of dust and torn paper and shreds of light rubbish which the autumn wind swirls into neglected corners on the dim evenings when the rain weeps on the blackened windows and the mist creeps up to the steeple in long ghostly shapes. The winter brings a frozen cyclone which whistles round and round or gently covers the graveyard with snow, the unbroken whiteness of which is gradually spotted and interlaced with sooty flakes, as though the genius of the place resented the intrusion and would make no further compromise than half mourning. [63]

The dimmest, darkest, and dirtiest of all the houses round the yard was that of Richard Dryce & Co., factors and general merchants. It was never known who was the Co., for Richard Dryce managed his own business, and lived in the house, in one of the back rooms of which overlooking a square paved courtyard he had been born. The business belonged to his father before him, and he himself had married into the business of another factor and general merchant. His wife had died some twenty years before the period of this story—died in giving birth to a boy, who was sometimes mistaken for the Co., but who at present occupied no better position than that of a superior clerk, with the questionable advantage of living with his father in the dull old house, where he had to go through the warehouse amidst innumerable bales and crates and packages to reach the staircase that conducted him to the gloomy rooms, the old-fashioned furniture of which suited his father, but was sorely against his own taste. [64]

How he should have come to have any opinion of his own is perhaps a mystery, for he resembled his mother, who was a simple creature, easily influenced, and with all her tastes apparently moulded on the pattern set before her by her husband. Still, however it may have been, though he was born in the gloomy house, and was subject to the same influences, the younger Dryce—whose name was Robert—never took kindly to the dull routine to which his father's habits doomed him. He was too dutiful and too mild in disposition—in fact, too unlike his own father—to offer any direct opposition to it, or to complain very often of its exactions; but he felt that at twenty he was kept with too tight a hand, and that there were worlds beyond Saint Simon Swynherde, which might be harmlessly explored.

Richard Dryce was, however, not a bad man, not a cruel or a hard man in his inmost heart; but he had been himself devoted from early life to one condition of things, which were in some strange way in accordance with his natural constitution, or with which he had become identified till they grew into a necessary part of his existence. He was a self-contained man—an undemonstrative man, whose mind was attuned to respectable solitude, and who, without being a misanthrope, regarded his fellow creatures through a ground-glass medium, which made them seem shadowy and unapproachable. A few business acquaintances he had, with whom he would sometimes take his chop and glass of old port at a city tavern of an evening; he would even, on rare occasions, go the length of smoking a cigar in company with one or two of his less distant companions; but his laugh was like the harsh echo of a disused violin, and he seldom or never invited anybody to see him at home. [65]



One of the people whom he disliked most said that he was "a buttoned-up man," and Richard Dryce could never forgive him—the description was so true.

One of his most intimate friends, an alderman, of congenial temperament, who had greatly distinguished himself by quarrelling and exchanging vituperative epithets with another alderman on the magisterial bench, seriously advised him to become a candidate for civic honours; but he strenuously refused, although he ultimately permitted his son Robert to achieve something like independence by becoming a liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Twidlers, whose hall stood within the precincts of Saint Simon Swynherde. It was only on the occasion of one of their dinners that Robert was allowed to be out after ten o'clock; but that restriction did not prevent his spending the larger number of his evenings between eight o'clock and ten at the Twidlers' Hall, which mouldy old structure, with its great, cold, lonely dining-room and awkward polygonal ante-rooms decorated with portraits of deceased dignitaries, held an attraction not to be found elsewhere, in the person of pretty Agnes Raincliffe, the only daughter of the company's beadle. [66]

For six months they had been under the sweet illusion that disinterested affection must eventually win for itself a way to union; but old Mr. Raincliffe had spoken seriously to them, and altogether forbade their further meeting until Robert had spoken to his father. He went home that very night, and, nerved to a sort of desperation, *did* speak to his father, ending with the usual declarations that his choice was unalterable. Perhaps it was; but, whether or not, Richard Dryce went the very way to make it so when he laughed that discordant laugh, and, with a taunt against his son's weakness of purpose and his dependent position, told him to dismiss such a scheming little hussey from his thoughts, for he was to marry when he had permission, which would never be granted to such a match as the beadle wanted to bring about.

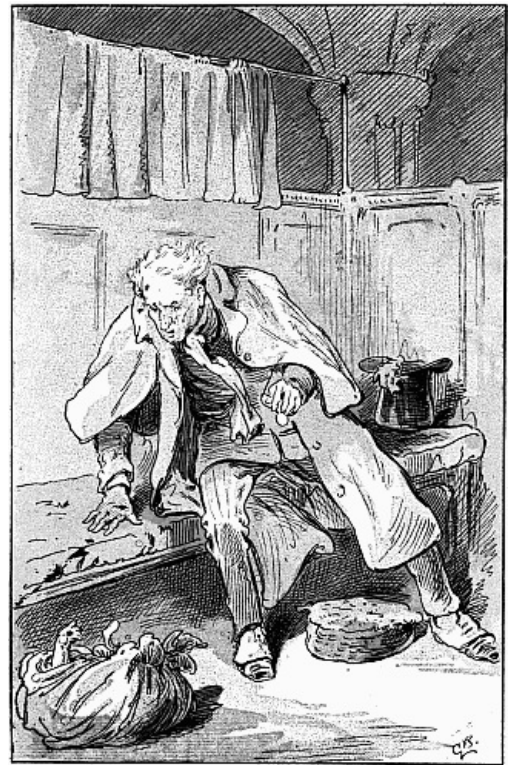
Robert left his father's presence without a word; but in a week from that date he had followed Agnes down into the country, whither she had been sent out of the way. When he returned he wrote a letter to his father, to say that they were married. It is easy to guess what followed. When he called for an answer to his communication, he received a brief note, saying that he was discarded from that hour, need never trouble himself to enter the doors of the old house again, and that henceforth he must look to his own exertions for the means of living. This letter was sent by the hand of a sort of managing clerk, one Jaggars, who was at the same time commissioned to tell Robert that he could, if he chose, obtain a situation in a house at Liverpool, where his father's interest was sufficient to secure him a clerkship at a very moderate salary. Now it so happened that Jaggars had always appeared to be the best friend young Robert ever had; he had sympathized with him on the subject of his father's harshness; had applauded his noble sentiments when he had imparted the secret of his engagement to Agnes; had wished that *he* was master of the establishment in St. Simon's Yard, that justice might be done to disinterested virtue, and had generally assumed the part of guide, philosopher, and friend, tempered by humble deference, to the young man. It was arranged between them, therefore, that, after a time, during which Robert should accept the situation at Liverpool, a more successful appeal might be made to Dryce senior, and that a letter addressed to him should be sent under cover to Jaggars, who would lay it on his table. [67]

Robert and his young wife went away, leaving this good-natured fellow to watch their interests. A year passed, and the letter had been written, but remained unanswered; indeed, according to Jaggars's showing, Richard Dryce was more inveterate than ever, and was unapproachable on the subject of his undutiful son, in pleading whose cause he, Jaggars, had very nearly obtained his own dismissal. The firm in which Robert was a clerk became bankrupt in the commercial crisis, and he was thrown out of employment. Again he wrote to his father, saying that he had an appointment offered him in Australia, and only wanted the money to pay his passage. He received no reply, but some people who knew him in Liverpool made up the sum, and his wife came to London to live with her father (who was now superannuated in favour of a new beadle), and to wait for his return, or for the remittance that was to come by the first mail, that she might join him there. [68]

Their first child, a girl, had been a poor sickly little creature, and was dead; but Agnes was likely again to become a mother, and waited anxiously for the money which would enable her to prepare for such an event. Anxiously as she waited, it never came, and Jaggars, to whom it was to have been directed, advanced her a sovereign, as he said, "out of his small means," and then lost sight of her, for she and her father had moved into other lodgings, where the managing clerk could scarcely trouble himself to go, unless he had good news to take with him. Indeed, he had so much to occupy his attention, that some months had elapsed since he had seen Agnes; once only he had written a short reply to a note imploring him to say whether any remittance had arrived; but how could he spare time to attend to such matters when Mr. Dryce was every week taking a less active part in the business, and the Christmas quarter was stealing on with the balance-sheet not even thought of in the press of country orders. Mr. Richard Dryce was still hale and active; but those who knew him best, thought that he was breaking. His voice was less harsh, his hair had turned from iron-gray to white, and in his face there was an anxious look as of one who waits for something that does not come. Once or twice old acquaintances ventured to ask after his son, but he shook his head, and said that he knew nothing of him; he had written to his last address, but had received no reply. [69]

It was cold dull wintry weather, and the old man looked so solitary, that one or two tried to rally him, and even asked him to come and dine or spend the evening with them, to which he responded by his old harsh laugh, and putting on his worsted gloves, trudged home through the snow. [70]

One morning he awoke early, almost before daylight had penetrated the dull rooms where he lived, and had a sudden fancy to walk into the church. It was already daylight in the streets, but the interior of St. Simon Swynherde was dim with mist and with the obscurity of the high windows. He could only just see the pillars and the organ, where his own name had been painted in gilt letters since the time that he had been churchwarden and helped to restore it. Even as he looked up at it, the notes of the Christmas hymn came trembling into the chill morning air, for the organist had come there to practise, and expected the parish school children to come in to sing at a morning service. To most people there might have been nothing in the place or its associations to evoke much gentle feeling; but as the tones of the organ swelled and the music grew louder, old Richard Dryce sat down in the corner of his own pew and leaned his head upon the book-board, with his hands clasped before his face. Not till the warm tears had trickled from between his fingers did he raise his head, and then it was to look round him to the cushion at the other end of the pew, for from some place near him he thought he had heard a sound that was out of all harmony with the organ, but not altogether apart from the associations of the Christmas hymn—the wailing of a child. Another moment and he was bending over a bundle seemingly composed of a coarse blue cloak, but from which there presently came out a baby hand and, the covering once pulled aside, a little round rosy face in which a pair of large blue eyes were wide awake in utter astonishment. Who can tell what had been the thoughts busy in old Dryce's mind? Was it prayer? Was it that yearning which finds no words of entreaty, but yet ardently and dumbly implores—all vaguely—that the crooked paths of former error may be made straight at last—that the rough places of a mistaken course may become divinely plain? He could not tell; and yet in some way he accepted this child as a visible answer to a petition that he had meant to frame. When the organist and the sextoness came down presently, and with indignant virtue advised the removal of the child to the workhouse, he regarded their suggestion as little less than impious, and expressed his determination of taking the little one home with him.



MR. DRYCE'S PETITION ANSWERED.

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His old housekeeper and the younger servants were not a little surprised to see the merchant come home with such a companion; but Mr. Dryce was master in his own house, and the little guest was fed. Then Doctor Banks was sent for, and he declared that it would be necessary to provide a nurse, while, as luck would have it, he had that very morning been sent for to see a casual applicant for relief at the Union workhouse—a woman who had just lost a child. Temporarily she might do well enough, and Doctor Banks wanted to get home to dinner; so away went the housekeeper in a cab with a letter from the doctor, and in two hours came back bringing with her a pale pretty young woman whose name was Jane Harris, and who, her husband having gone abroad and left her with a child which she had just lost, was reduced to apply at the workhouse. She was so timid, and had at first such a scared look, that Mr. Dryce had much trouble to induce her to stay; but it was quite wonderful the way in which the child took to her, and so a room was got ready for them both, and she was comfortably settled, almost, as the housekeeper said, "as if she was a lady, though for the matter of that, Doctor Banks knew more about her than he said." At any rate Doctor Banks said the next day, after he had had a little conversation with the new nurse, that she was thoroughly trustworthy, and that he himself had known her father, who once held a very respectable position in the city. So Mrs. Harris became an inmate at the dim old house, and her charge throve under her care.

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He was a bonny boy, and every day his little baby ways became of so great interest to the lonely old man, that he was never happy after business hours until he had the little fellow in the room. He never stayed at his old tavern now for more than half an hour beyond the time it took him to eat his dinner, and even went so far as to tell two or three of his friends what he had done, and invite them home to see the child, in whom—they being themselves fathers of families—they could see nothing extraordinary, and wondered amongst themselves at old Dryce's strange infatuation.

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When the boy at last grew able to crawl about, and even to walk from chair to chair, he seemed to have so grown to the old man's heart that Dryce became subject to a kind of transformation. His laugh grew more mellow, as though the violin had been laid near the fire, and played upon gently; a dozen old and forgotten picture-books were disinterred from some box, and toys strewed the floor of the dingy sitting-room. At about this time Mrs. Harris was for a week or more strangely agitated by a letter which was brought to her one morning, and came as she said from her husband, who had been for some time in Australia. Upon her recovery Mr. Dryce inquired a little into her husband's circumstances, and hearing that he was endeavouring to establish an agency in Sydney, wrote a letter requesting him to make some inquiries about a house to which Dryce & Co. had made large consignments, but whose promised remittance had not duly arrived. The old man had other matters to occupy him, however, for with something like a resumption of

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his old vigour and his business habits he had called for his books, for he had had some serious losses lately, and began to think it necessary to give more personal attention to the current accounts. Still every day he had his little pet into the room to play about his knees, and indeed refused to part with him even when nurse Harris came to put him to bed, often making her stay and take some wine, or consulting her as to some future provisions, for her little charge, for whom she seemed to have even more affection than the old gentleman himself.

It was late one evening that he sat talking to her in this way, but still with a rather absent manner, for his heavy ledgers and cash-books lay beside him on the table. She would have taken the child away, but Mr. Dryce told her to let him remain, and at the same time asked her to step down into the counting-house, and if Mr. Jagggers had not left for the night, to ask him to come up.

Now Mr. Jagggers had so seldom been invited to come upstairs, that, although he of course knew of the adoption of the little foundling, he had never seen the nurse; but that was scarcely any reason for her stopping on her way downstairs and pressing her hand to her side with a sudden spasm of fear.

She got down at last, however, and opening the two doors which led to the passage, at the end of which was the private counting-house, stood there in the shadow and looked in.

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Mr. Jagggers was busy at his desk tearing up papers, some of which already blazed upon the hearth. The desk itself was open, and by the light of the shaded lamp she could see that it contained a heavily bound box in which hung a bunch of keys. As she delivered Mr. Dryce's message, still in the shadow of the door, he looked up with a scared face, and dropping the lid of the desk with a loud slam, peered into the darkness.

Mrs. Harris repeated her message, and returned swiftly up the stairs, nor stopped even to go in for the child, but shut herself into her own room. Somehow or other Mr. Jagggers felt a cold perspiration break out all over him, and yet he need scarcely have been cold, for he already had his greatcoat on, and there was a decent fire in the grate burning behind a guard. Still he shivered, and after taking the lamp and once more looking into the entry, gave a deep sigh of relief, and in a half-absent manner locked both box and desk and carefully placed the keys in a breast pocket. Leaving the lamp still burning, he went upstairs and found Mr. Dryce alone, sitting at the table with the books open before him. He looked up as his clerk entered. "Take a seat, Jagggers," he said, "I shall want you for an hour or more, for there are several things here that require explanation."

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Mr. Jagggers turned pale, but he took off his coat and laid it along with his hat on the great horsehair sofa at the other end of the room. Then both he and his employer plunged into figures, till the chimes of a distant clock sounded nine. "We must finish this the day after to-morrow, Jagggers," said Mr. Dryce. "I won't keep you longer."

Mr. Jagggers put on his coat and hat, and bade his employer good-night, and he had no sooner left the room than Mrs. Harris came in to fetch the little one, for, as she said, "it was already past his bedtime."

Richard Dryce fell into his chair, and was as near having a fit as ever he had been in his life.

"Good heaven! Mrs. Harris—you don't mean to say you haven't got the boy. He's not here; run and see whether he has gone into Betsy's room; she runs away with him sometimes."

"Mamma!" said a sleepy little voice under the sofa, and Mr. Dryce and the nurse were both on their knees in a moment.

"The precious! why, if he hasn't been asleep all the time!" said Mr. Dryce, kissing the warm rosy cheek; "take him off to bed directly, and bring him down to breakfast in the morning."

Mrs. Harris only just escaped meeting Jagggers on the stairs, up which he was coming, followed by Betty with a flaring tallow candle, and looking carefully on every stair. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said, with a scared look, as he opened the room door, "but have you seen my keys anywhere? I must have dropped them somewhere in the room, I think."

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"No," replied Mr. Dryce, "I've seen nothing—most extraordinary!" he said to himself, thinking of the child and forgetting Jagggers.

"It is, sir, very extraordinary," said the clerk, groping on the floor and patting the carpet with his hands. "I know I had them when I came up here, and I can't open my desk where I keep my money."

"Oh! never mind, Jagggers," said Mr. Dryce sleepily. "Here are a couple of sovereigns. If we find the keys, you can have them to-morrow; and if not, we will have a new lock. Come, good night! I'll come down and bolt the office door after you."

Jagggers entreated his employer not to take so much trouble, and delayed so long that the old gentleman began to grow a little impatient. At last he got rid of him by giving him permission to come early on the following morning, when, if his keys were not discovered by the servant in sweeping, he might pick the lock.

Mr. Dryce was in a brown study, sitting looking at the fire, and sipping a glass of hot negus, when Mrs. Harris knocked at the door.

"Excuse me, sir, but have you missed your keys?"

"Hang the keys!" said Mr. Dryce absently. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Harris; sit down a moment. I was thinking what I could buy our little fellow for a present."

"But these keys, sir? I took them out of the bosom of baby's frock when I undressed him. How he got them I can't tell."

Mr. Dryce took the keys in his hand and looked at them mechanically; then he started and singled out one particular key, held it nearer the light, at the same time comparing it with one of a bunch which he took from his own pocket. He had turned stern and pale.

"I want you to come downstairs with me, Mrs. Harris," he said: "these are the keys Mr. Jiggers has lost, and I'm afraid I shall want a policeman."

First the door of the great iron safe let into the wall. Mr. Dryce knew that it was a cunningly-made lock, and thought that no key but his would open it. It opened easily with Jiggers's key, however; and from the lower drawer was missing all the property which in those days were often kept in such places—bills, gold, and notes to the value of four thousand five hundred pounds.

With feverish haste the old man unlocked the desk and the brass-bound box within it. The latter contained all the missing property, evidently placed there for immediate removal. In the desk were found bills, letters, and correspondence, a glance at which disclosed a long system of fraud and speculation. Above all, amongst the loose papers were the letters that Robert sent to his father, and those which had been written by himself in repentance of the harsh parting which he had brought about with his lost son.

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While they were both looking with mute astonishment at these evidences of Jiggers's villany, there came a low knocking at the door, and two men entered, one of them a broad, brown-bearded man in a half seafaring dress, the other a policeman.

"A clerk of yours, named Jiggers," said the latter. "I want to know whether he has robbed you, or if you have reason to suspect him. This party has given him in custody on another charge."

There was a loud scream, and Mrs. Harris fell into the arms of the stranger, who had taken her aside to whisper to her.

"She is my wife," said he to Mr. Dryce. "I am the person to whom you wrote, and I have brought the remittance with me from Australia."

They all went upstairs together, except the policeman, whose question was answered by a recital of the events of the night, and the present of a sovereign.

"Bring down the boy, and let me look at his dear little face," said old Dryce, when they were sitting round the fire.

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The child was brought down tenderly, and still asleep.

"God bless him!" said the bearded stranger. "He's not like either of us, Aggy."

"Like either of you?" said Mr. Dryce, surprised. "How should he be like your husband, Mrs. Harris?"

"Don't you know me, sir," said the stranger, taking Mr. Dryce's hand and sitting in the firelight. "My name is Robert Dryce, and this is my child, whose mother left it to the mercy of Heaven, and found that it had reached its natural home. Forgive us, sir, for our child's sake."

Old Dryce was a shrewd man, but it took an hour to make him understand it all; events had come about so strangely.

"Well," said Robert at last, "I'm glad you were in time to save the money."

"Confound the money!" ejaculated the old man; "at least, too much of it," he added, correcting himself. "This baby's hand has unlocked more treasures for me than all the Bank of England could count on a summer's day."

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"Oh, I shouldn't like to live in London always," said Kate Bell, whose father was one of the large mill-owners at Barton. "I've been up twice with papa, you know; but we lived in a great square where we could hear the noise of the cabs all night, and of the carts and wagons as soon as daylight came. And then there are such crowds of people in the streets; and if you walk you are pushed about so, and if you ride you can't see anything except from an open carriage. Except the theatre, where I went twice, and the Zoological Gardens and the Crystal Palace, and Hyde Park, where everybody goes before dinner, there's nothing to care for."

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"Nothing to care for!" exclaimed Annie Bowers; "why, the streets and the old historical buildings—Westminster Abbey, the Picture Galleries, the great solemn churches, with monuments of poets and warriors, and the constant life and movement and change, must be grand, if one only could stay long enough to get over the feeling that you are only sight-seeing. To be a part of it all, and to be able to go about quietly and live in it, looking and thinking and making one's own pictures and one's own romances of it, would be delightful for six months in the year. I often think it would be grand to spend a summer day in the middle of one of the

bridges—Westminster or London Bridge—and watch the boats on the river and the tide of people coming and going, and see the clouds and the sunshine change the colour of the stream and the outlines of the great buildings, and then to go back just at dark and see the same scene by moonlight, with everything transformed and solemn, and listen to the rush of the tide and watch the lights twinkling on wharves and on board boats and barges, and the moon on the great lovely buildings of Westminster, and the dome of St. Paul's in the distance: that is what I should like to do."

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"I used to think very much as you do, Annie, when I was last in London," said Miss Grantley; "but then I had very little opportunity of going to theatres or other amusements, for I had no one to take me except in a family party, and had to make the most of the pleasure that is to be found in the wonderful aspects of the great city itself. Of course it is only possible for a poor unprotected creature to see a part of the greatest capital in the world; and so when I went to explore the bridges or any other neighbourhood after dusk I took an escort, and one who knew London so well that he was able to say where I ought and where I ought not to go."

"A policeman, was it, Miss Grantley?" said Kate Bell.

"Oh, dear! no. Policemen have no time to go out as escorts to young or middle-aged ladies," said our governess laughing. "My cavalier was a boy who worked at a printing-office. His mother was a very respectable woman who lived in a tidy house in a very quiet street where she let two furnished rooms, and I was her tenant while I was studying to pass two examinations. I had been staying with old friends of my dear father, for they did not desert me altogether though I was only a governess; indeed, they gave me too large a share of the amusements and sight-seeing which take up so much time, so that I was obliged to bid them good-bye for a good while, and restrict my visits to Sundays or one evening a week. I think my landlady, who was a widow, had been their cook; but at all events she was a good motherly woman, and her boy of fourteen was always ready for an excursion when he came home from work."

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"At first I was obliged to repress his sense of being a sort of champion; and once when a bigger and very dirty boy, who had a dog in a string, splashed my dress with mud and nearly threw me down, I had to go home again because my young friend gave him battle, and after fighting for several minutes came out of the fray with his collar so ruffled, his best cap so crushed, and his face so smirched that it was a dearly-bought victory. But he was an excellent boy and an apt pupil, for I used to give him easy lessons in French and mathematics sometimes, so that when I left he was able to attend an advanced class at an evening college in the city. He had the sentiment of a gentleman too, though he was a printer's boy and was always called Bob. He never talked to me unless I spoke to him first or he had to give me some direction or tell me which way we were going; and in the great thoroughfares he would walk either just in front or at a little distance, so that no one would have known we were companions. I used to remonstrate with him sometimes, for it made me feel that I was selfish and discourteous to have him to guide or follow me without acknowledgment; but he always replied that people couldn't talk in the noise of the streets, and that what I came out for was 'to see London or to look at shop-windows, or to see how places looked after dark, or to get a walk and some fresh air on London or Blackfriars' Bridge, and to be able to fancy all manner of things, and yet to have somebody that knew all about London to keep me from being run over or pick-pocketed or interfered with by anybody.'

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"Never had lady a more devoted squire; and I really believe he used to read up the history and anecdotes of some of the churches and public buildings, that he might be able to have something to say when I insisted on talking to him as we strolled quietly along in the less-crowded thoroughfares—especially those around St. Paul's and the Royal Exchange, where the city is nearly deserted after the hours of business."

"Well, Miss Grantley, and is it about this very agreeable boy that you are going to tell us a story?" asked Sarah Jorring, who was often rather abrupt and impertinent.

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For a moment a shaft of light seemed to dart from those expressive eyes upon the questioner, but the instantaneous gleam of surprise and annoyance passed into a smile.

"I would never willingly forget or be ashamed to speak of true service and real courtesy," she said. "I should—we most of us would—feel some satisfaction in acknowledging the politeness shown to us by a duke or an earl, even though to be scrupulously courteous should be regarded as duties and customs belonging to their station. To have received true and delicate consideration from a printer's boy is therefore more remarkable, and to speak of it with grateful recollection is only just. My own want of courtesy, however, led me to forget that we seldom feel much enthusiasm about the attentions that are bestowed on other people."

We were all silent for a moment, for there was a rebuke even in the gentle tone in which the words were uttered; but presently Annie Bowers said:

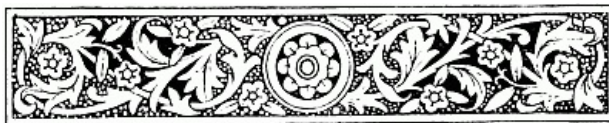
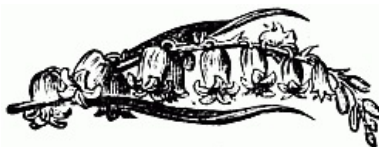
"Did you ever know an actor, Miss Grantley?"

"Well, I cannot say I never met an actor," replied our governess; "and yet it was not in London, but at the village near which I lived when I was at home with my dear father, whose house and grounds were not far off, and whose pew in the church had belonged to his family from time immemorial."

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"Oh! do let us hear something about that, then," we said.

"Well," replied our governess, "that shall be the story for to-morrow evening—the story of a stranger from London who visited our village."



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## CHAPTER IV.

### A STRANGER FROM LONDON.

**N**OW it was that we began seriously to consider the expediency of organizing "Penny Readings" in the school-room attached to the quaint old square-towered church at Chewton Cudley I haven't the remotest idea. I fancy it must have been Mr. Petifer, the curate, who suggested it after he had been to preach for a friend of his in London. I know that he was much impressed by what the congregation of St. Boanerges—his friend's church—were doing, and that there was a noticeable difference in his delivery when he read the lessons after his visit. We all observed it, and some of the old-fashioned people thought that he was going to *intone*—to which there was a strong objection—but his efforts not carrying him beyond a peculiar rising inflection towards the middle of a verse, and a remarkable lingering fall into deep bass at the end, we soon regarded it as a praiseworthy attempt to give variety to his previous vapid utterances, and came rather to like it, as it gave the church somewhat of a cathedral flavour. The old pew-opener and sextoness said that to hear him publish the banns was almost as good as listening to the marriage service itself.

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The truth is that we had few changes of any kind at Chewton. It had ceased to be a market town when the new line of railway took the three coaches off the road, and opened a branch to Noxby; and though the tradesfolk contrived to keep their shops open they did a very quiet business indeed. There was nothing actively speculative about the place, and the motto of the town was "Slow and sure." From the two maiden ladies—the Misses Twitwold—who kept the circulating library, and sold stationery and Berlin wool—to the brewer who owned half the beer-shops, or the landlord of the "George and Gate," who kept a select stud of saddle-horses, and had promoted the tradesmen's club—nobody was ever seen in a hurry, not even the doctor who had come to take old Mr. Varico's practice, and was quite a young man from the hospitals. He began by bustling about, and walking as though he was out for a wager, and speaking as though he expected people to do things in a minute; but he soon got over that. Folks at Chewton Cudley had a way of looking with a slow, placid, immovable stare at anybody who showed unseemly haste. If they were told to "be quick" or to "look sharp," they would leave what they were about to gaze with a cow-like serenity at the disturber. It was quite a lesson in placidity even to watch a farm-labourer or a workman sit on a gate or a cart-shaft to eat a slice of bread and cheese. Each bite was only taken after a deliberate investigation of the sides and edges of the hunch, and was slowly masticated during a peculiar ruminating survey of surrounding objects. The possessor of a clasp-knife never closed it with a click; and if any adult person had been seen to run along the High-street public attention would have been aroused by the event.

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The vicar was really the most active person in the town; and though he had lived there in the quaint, ivy-covered parsonage house for twenty years, and had been constantly among his parishioners, he had the same bright, pleasant, and yet grave smile, the same quick, easy step, the same lively way with children and old women, the same impatient toleration of "dawdlers," as had distinguished him on his first coming. He had been a famous cricketer at college, and one of the first things he did was to form a cricket club; but he always said the batsman waited to watch the ball knock down the wicket, and the fielders stood staring into space when they ought to have made a catch. This was his fun, of course, and the cricket club flourished in a sedate, slow-bowling sort of way. So did the penny bank, and the evening school, and the sewing-class—for he was well loved, was our vicar, in spite, or perhaps because, of his offering such a contrast to the larger number of his flock.

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He was a bachelor, and his sister kept house for him—a quiet, middle-aged lady a little older than himself, and more accomplished than most of the Chewton ladies were, not only in music and needlework, but in the matter of pickles, puddings, preserves, and domestic medicine, about which she and the doctor had many pleasant discussions, as he declared she was the best friend he had, since her herb-tea and electuaries made people fancy they were ill enough to send for him to complete their cure. That the vicar should have remained unmarried for so many years had almost ceased to be a topic for speculation, for it had somehow become known that some great sorrow had befallen him years before, and it was supposed that he had been "crossed in

love;" though, to give them credit, there were unmarried ladies of the congregation who never could and never would believe that a young man such as he must have been, could have spoken in vain to any well-regulated young person possessed of a heart. They came to the conclusion, therefore, that he never *told* his love; and as he had certainly never told it to *them*, only a few of his more intimate friends knew that the shadow which had fallen on the lives of those two kindly beings at the vicarage was the early marriage of a younger sister with some adventurer, who had taken her away from the home to which she never had been returned. Only occasional tidings were received of her, for she was seldom to be found at any stated address, and was travelling with her husband from one poor lodging to another in the large towns, where they had sometimes sought for her in vain.

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But the vicar was no kill-joy. He entered with hearty good-will into the scheme for weekly penny readings, and delivered an address at the preliminary meeting, in which he alluded with a sly touch of humour to the capabilities of Mr. Binks, the saddler, who was reputed to sing a famous comic song, and of Raspall, the baker, who had once tried his hand at an original Christmas carol. He even called upon the ladies—and we were all of us rather shocked at the time—to bring their music; and as a piano had actually been hired from somewhere, and stood on the platform, he called upon his sister for a song there and then, and she actually—we *were* surprised—sang one of those old English ballads to hear which we had regarded as the sole privilege of the select few who were invited to take tea at the vicarage, at the sewing meetings which we had associated with the name of Dorcas the widow. We should as soon have thought of seeing Dorcas herself at a sewing-machine as the vicar's sister at a piano *in public*—but she sang very well, and the applause at the back of the room was uproarious.

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So it was when the vicar himself followed with Macaulay's "Lay of Horatius," though of course it was only intended for the front rows—for how *could* the tradespeople and the labourers understand it? More to their taste was the performance of Mr. Binks, who was with difficulty persuaded to sit on the platform, where, after fixing his eye on the remotest corner of the ceiling, he began by giving himself a circular twist on his chair and, moving his arm as though he were gently whipping a horse, started with a prolonged "Oh-o-o!" and then stopped, coughed, cogitated, and, gathering courage from the ceiling, started again with a more emphatic

"Oh-o-o! Terry O'Rann  
Was a nice young man,"

and went on to describe in song how some person of that name

"Took whisky punch  
Every day for his lunch."

The landlord of the George, who was about the middle of the room, shook his head in a deprecating manner at this, and we ladies in the front row were saddened; but the vicar laughed, the brewer led off a round of applause with the farmers, the doctor grinned, and the smaller tradespeople and the boys near the door stamped till the dust from the floor made them sneeze; and when

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"Jerry's dead ghost  
Stood by the bed-post,"

with an imitation of the Irish brogue which everybody admitted was singularly "like the real thing," Mr. Binks had risen in public estimation, and his name was put down on the committee.

The baker was scarcely so successful, for he could remember nothing but the Christmas Carol by which he had risen to transient fame; and as it contained some slight but obvious allusions to Raspall's French rolls and Sally Lunn's, with a distant but rhyming reference to rich plum-cake and currant buns, a few disrespectful ejaculations were heard from some unruly boys on the side benches, and the recitation ended in some confusion and suppressed chuckling on the part of the farmers and their wives. But the eldest Miss Rumbelow was persuaded to attempt one of Moore's melodies, and selected "Young Love Once Dwelt," with a singularly wiry accompaniment, and this having restored complete decorum the curate came forward in a surprising manner, and astonished us by that change in voice and delivery to which reference has already been made. He had chosen "Eugene Aram's Dream" as his recitation, and the tone in which he announced the title was, as Mrs. Multover said, "like cold water running down your back." Every breath was held, every eye started as he told us—

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"It wors the prame of summerer tame,  
An even-ing ca-alm and kheoule,  
When-er fower-and-twenty happy baies  
Cam trouping out of skheoule."

The boys shifted uneasily on their seats; their master looked anxious, as though something personal was coming; and when the drama reached its height we timid ones in front were fain to pinch each other in a stress of nervous excitement. The tragical conclusion was marked by a simultaneous, low, long, agricultural whistle, which did duty as a sigh, and the audience first stared into each other's faces and then gave a roar of applause, amidst which the vicar announced that the penny readings were established from that night; that books containing suitable pieces for recitation could be obtained at the circulating library; and that practice nights for efficient members would be held on Wednesday evenings.

But everybody went away impressed with Mr. Petifer's sudden accession of dramatic power.

"That comes of the play-house, mark me if it do'ent," said Farmer Shorter, as he buttoned his coat. "Folk do'ent go up to London for notheng, an' curat's been to the tradigy—that's where he's a'been."

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This first meeting of our "Penny Reading" Society gave a decided tone to our subsequent proceedings, but we had made but slow progress, and there was still some difficulty in inducing many of the readers to meet the audible remarks, the half-concealed mirth, and even the exaggerated applause of their audiences, when the vicar one evening announced his intention of leaving Chewton for a fortnight on a visit to London, and coming back in time to prepare a grand entertainment at the school-room.

In a few days the vicar returned, and told his sister to have the guest's room got ready, as he expected a professional gentleman from London to visit him in a day or two.

It was on the Wednesday that the idlers about the old coach-yard of the George and Gate woke up from their usual expressionless stare at things in general to notice a stranger who came along at a brisk rate, carrying a small portmanteau, and looking sharply and with a quick penetrating glance at them and the sign and the bar of the tap, where he called for a glass of ale and inquired his way to the vicarage. He was a well-knit, active man of about forty-five, with dark, glossy hair, just beginning to gray; a dark, short moustache; shaven cheeks and chin, with a blue tinge where the beard and whiskers would have been; and he wore well-fitting but rather shabby clothes, which scarcely seemed to be in keeping with the big (false or real) diamond ring on his right hand and a huge breast-pin in his satin stock.

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These were the remarks some of us made about him when he appeared on the low platform at our penny reading the next evening, and was introduced by the vicar as "My friend Mr. Walter De Montfort, a gentleman connected with the dramatic profession in London, who has consented to favour us with a reading and to contribute to our improvement as well as to our entertainment."

A good many of us thought we had never heard reading, or rather recitation, till that evening; there was such a keen, bright, intense look in the man's face; such a rich, flexible, sonorous roll in his voice; such a conscious appropriateness in his rather exaggerated gestures, that when he commenced with what I have since learned was a peculiarly stagey expression the poem of "King Robert of Sicily and the Angel," and began to tell us how—

"King-ar-Rroberut of Sissurlee"

dreamed his wonderful dream, we were all eye and ear, and when he had concluded people looked at each other and gasped.

Who was he?—an actor—a manager of a theatre—a great tragedian? How did the vicar first know him? How long was he going to stay? What theatre did he perform at? All these questions were asked among ourselves, and to some of them we obtained answers at the next Dorcas meeting, which was held at the vicarage. Mr. De Montfort was not a regular actor now. He had been, but he now taught elocution and deportment, and had been introduced to the vicar by a brother clergyman in London much interested in the union of church and stage. His credentials were undoubted, but it was feared he was poor. Of his ability everybody spoke highly, and he was so accomplished that the vicar had invited him to stay for several days; but he had told them he must be in London, for he was a widower, with one little child, a girl who was at school, but would be waiting for him to fetch her home for her one week's holiday in the year.

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It was evident that the vicar's guest had created a very favourable impression on us all, for though Mrs. Marchbold looked at us rather hard, and then pursed up her lips and looked steadily at the vicar's sister, evidently meaning to disconcert that lady with some indication of the thought that was in all our minds, we rather resented the rudeness, and murmured in chorus that it was evident that Mr. De Montfort was quite a gentleman.

"Which is just what he is not," said the lady, who bore Mrs. Marchbold's deprecatory stare with the most complete indifference. "He is not quite a gentleman, and my brother the vicar knows that very well; but he is a clever, amusing man, and his reading will help on the society. On the whole, though, I think it's quite as well he should leave before long, for I'm certain idling about in Chewton will do him no good, especially as he has already kept us up late two nights, because a deputation came to ask him to be a visitor at the tradesmen's club at the George."

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Further discussion of the merits or demerits of the gentleman was prevented by his entering the room along with the vicar, who told us he had prevailed on Mr. De Montfort to take tea with us and to read us something from Shakespeare while we were at work. Mr. De Montfort took tea, and talked unceasingly of London, of its streets, shops, people, trades, and amusements. He described to us the stage of a theatre, and told us all about how a play was performed and how the actors came on and went off, opening the door between the parlour and the drawing-room and hanging it with table-covers to represent the front of the stage. Then he recited *Hamlet* and *King Lear*; and we all left off work to look at him; and when he wound up with a performance of legerdemain, and brought a vase that had previously been on the mantel-piece out of Mrs. Marchbold's work-bag, and took eggs from a pillow-case, and took four reels of cotton out of Miss Bailey's chignon, we didn't know whether to scream or to laugh, but we all agreed that he was the most entertaining person we had ever met or were likely to meet again.



Mr. De Montfort had grown more familiar to the Chewton Cudley people by that time. He had only been with them a few days, and yet he had a dozen invitations. The vicar had evidently taken an unaccountable liking to him. There were even people who went so far as to say we should hear him read the lessons in church if he were to stay over another Sunday. He had been to two more penny readings, and had held an extra night for instructing some of the members in the art of elocution. Only three people seemed rather doubtful as to their opinion of the visitor. One of these was the vicar's sister. She said nothing slighting, but it was evident that she mistrusted him a little. Another was Mr. Petifer, and his coolness to the stranger was set down to jealousy, especially when he fired up on the subject of the probable reading of the lessons. The third was Mr. Femm, the doctor, but he only grinned, and said he thought he remembered having heard De Montfort recite under another name when he was a student at Guy's Hospital, and used to go to a Hall of Harmony in the Walworth Road. "It's dreadful to hear a doctor talk so," said Mrs. Marchbold; "these young medical men have no reverence."

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But the visitor showed such remarkable good humour, and was so very entertaining and was so sedate and respectful to all the ladies that I fancy there was something said about his bringing his little daughter down to Chewton for the holidays. Mr. Binks would have taken De Montfort off the vicar's hands in a minute. Raspall was heard to intimate that he had a nice warm spare room over the bakehouse doing nothing; and our principal butcher, Mr. Clodd, declared boldly that a man like that, who could amuse any company, and was fit for any company, was worth his meat anywhere at holiday-time.

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But we had all heard that Mr. De Montfort was about to leave. He had received an invitation from the landlord of the "George and Gate," countersigned by the members of the club, to spend the last evening with them, and they had even gone so far as to wish that the vicar himself—"if they might make so bold—would condescend to look in for an hour."

This request of course could not be complied with, and the guest was about to send a polite refusal—reluctantly, it must be confessed—but the vicar readily excused him. The townsfolk naturally wanted to have him among them again for an evening, and he could return about eleven for a glass of hot spiced elder-wine before going to bed. The vicar had put his hand on De Montfort's shoulder as he said this, and was looking at him in his kind, genial way, when his visitor looked up, rose, hesitated, and seemed about to say something. There was such a remarkable expression in his face that the good parson afterwards said he should never forget it; but it passed, and with a smile, which was half trustful, half sorrowful, the actor turned away.

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"Well, then, if you think I ought to go, I'll say yes," he replied; "but I had thought to spend the last night here with you."

"I sha'n't have done work much before ten myself," said the vicar; "for I must see about the beef and bread for the pensioners, and there are the cakes for the school treat, and no end of things. So we'll meet at a late supper; don't stay to the club pies and sausages, but get back in time for ours. There's no need to say, Don't drink too much of the 'George and Gate' ale and brandy, for you never take much of either, so far as I know."

It was a special evening at the "George and Gate," and every member of the club who could leave his shop was there by eight o'clock. The low-ceilinged but handsome parlour was all bright and tidy, and the plates stood on a sideboard ready for supper. Two noble punch-bowls graced the table, and a number of long "churchwarden" pipes supported the large brass coffer filled with tobacco, which opened only by some cunning mechanism, set in motion by dropping a halfpenny in a slit at the top. Mr. Binks was in the chair; Clodd, the butcher, sat opposite; a great fragrance of spice and lemon-peel pervaded the place. It only needed a speech to commence the proceedings, and Mr. Binks was equal to the occasion. It was a hearty welcome to their visitor. He responded with a few words and a recitation. There was a song and another toast, and then the accomplished visitor played on the "George and Gate" fiddle in a manner that astonished everybody—played it behind his back, over his head, under his arm, between his knees with the bow in his mouth. Then he showed a few tricks with the cards, spun plates, passed coins and watches into space, and sung a song with a violin accompaniment. The evening was in his honour, and he opened his whole repertoire of accomplishments. Time passed quickly; the waiters were at the door with the table-cloths ready to lay for supper. Mr. Clodd proposed "The Health of the Vicar." They all rose to do it honour, and called upon De Montfort to reply. He had his glass in his hand—just touching it with his lips. "I wish," he said, and then he stopped; "I wish—I could say what I would do to deserve that he should call me his friend; but—it—can—never—be." They wondered what he would say next, there was such a strange look in his eyes. They were about to ask him what he meant, when everybody there was startled by a sudden cry in the street—a sudden cry and an uproar that penetrated to the inn-yard—the cry of "Fire!" and the trampling of feet. They were all out in a minute, De Montfort first, and without his hat.

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"It's your place, Raspall, as I'm a living sinner," said Clodd, forcing himself to the front and commencing to run.

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"Don't say so! Don't say so!" cried the baker, "for my missis is up at the school makin' the cakes, and the man's down below settin' the batch, and my little Bess is in bed this hour an' more. Oh, help! help! where's that engine?" But the key of the engine-house had to be found, and the wretched old thing had to be wheeled out, and the hose attached and righted; and before all this could be done the flame, which seemed to have begun at the back of Raspall's shop, had burst through the shutters, and was already lapping the outer wall. It was an old-fashioned house, with a high, rickety portico over the door, and a tall, narrow window a good way above it.

At this window, where the flicker of the flame was reflected through the smoke that was now pouring out and blackening the old woodwork, a glimpse of a child's face had been seen, and Raspall was already in the roadway wringing his hands and calling for a ladder.

"We must get her down from the top of that there portico," cried Clodd; "but I'm too heavy. Here; who'll jump atop of my back, and so try to clamber up?"

"Stand away there!" shouted a strong deep voice; and almost before they could move aside a man shot past them like a catapult, and with one bound had reached the carved cornice of the portico with his right hand. The whole structure quivered, but in another moment he had drawn himself up with the ease of a practised acrobat, and was standing on the top. It was De Montfort. [104]

The window was still far above him, and the glare within showed that the fire had reached the room; but a gutter ran down the wall to the leaden roof of the portico, and he was seen through the smoke to clasp it by a rusty projection and to draw his chin on a level with the sill, to cling to the sill itself with his arm and elbow, and with one tremendous effort to sit there amidst the smoke and to force the sash upward. They had scarcely had time to cry out that he had entered the room when he was out again—pursued by the flame that now roared from the open space, but with something under his arm. Somebody had brought out a large blanket, and four men were holding it; the engine was just beginning to play feebly where it wasn't wanted; and a short ladder had been borrowed from somewhere. He dropped a little heavily from the window, but was on his feet when they called to him to let the child fall, and a cheer went up as he seemed to gather up his strength, and tossed his living burden from him, so that it cleared the edge of the wood-work, and was caught and placed in her father's arms.

"Jump! jump for your life!" they cried, for the wretched portico had begun to sway, and every lip turned white. It was too late; he had stooped to swing himself off, when the whole thing fell in ruin, and he in the midst of it, covered with the heavy lead and woodwork, and the stone and bricks that had come down with it. [105]

A score of strong and willing hands lifted the wreck away piecemeal, and, under the direction of the doctor, got him out and placed him on a hurdle made soft with blankets and straw. He was insensible, but his face and head were uninjured, for he was found lying with his arms protecting both. Carefully they bore him to the vicarage, the vicar following, and his sister already at the door with everything ready.

It was nearly an hour before the sad group of men who stood outside anxiously waiting heard that he was so seriously injured that his life was in danger, and that he was still unconscious. Raspall was crying more for the accident than for his injured house, which was still smouldering, though the engine had at last put out the fire. His child was safe, but he felt almost guilty for rejoicing that her life had been spared. Binks and Clodd sat patiently on the fence opposite the vicarage talking in low tones. At last the vicar came out to them and told them to go home. The patient would not be left for a moment. In the morning he would let them know if there was any change. [106]

There was a change, but only after long efforts to restore consciousness; and the vicar himself sat by the injured man's bedside, with something in his hand upon which his tears fell as he looked at it by the light of the shaded lamp. When De Montfort had been carried in and placed upon the bed the doctor had asked to be allowed to undress him—without help—as it required a practised hand, and for a moment the vicar left the room to bring up some restorative and the bandages which had been sent for to the surgery. He had turned into the dining-room, when to his surprise the doctor came quickly but softly downstairs, entered the room, and gently closed the door.

"Do you feel that you could bear another great shock just now?" he said in a curious tone, taking hold of the vicar's wrist as he spoke. "Yes, I think you can; your nerves are pretty firm."

"What do you mean? Is he dead?"

"No; but I have undressed him, and under his shirt near his heart found something which I think you ought to see. I may be mistaken, but I seldom miss observing a likeness, especially one so strong as this"—and he held out a locket attached to a silken cord and holding a likeness.

The vicar trembled as he stretched out his hand for it. Some prevision of the truth had already flashed upon him; and as he carried the trinket to the candle above the mantel-piece he leaned heavily against the wall and groaned as though he had been smitten with sudden pain. [107]

"A man like that could scarcely have been cruel to a woman, at all events," said the doctor in a low but emphatic tone. "Poverty is not the worst of human ills, and even occasional want, if it be not too prolonged, is endurable—more endurable than brutal neglect and indifference. This poor fellow was going home to his child, I think?"

The vicar clasped the young man's hand, and bent his noble gray head upon his shoulder. "Take my thanks, my dear friend," he said with a sob. "You have recalled me to myself. He was my sister's husband."

As the vicar sat by the bedside that night watching, watching, the injured man moved and tried to raise himself, but fell back with a heavy sigh.

The good parson was bending over him in a moment.

"Shall I fetch the doctor again?" he asked.

"No; I must speak to you now, alone."

It was nearly an hour before the vicar went to the stair-head, and called for his sister and the doctor to come up. We never heard quite what took place—what was the conversation between the vicar and his guest. But the next day the vicar went to London, and before the week was out a plain funeral went from the vicarage to the old churchyard, and the curate conducting the burial service had to stop with his handkerchief to his eyes, for in the church, clad in deep mourning, was a little girl whose silent sobbing was only hushed when the aunt whom she had but just found took her in her arms and pressed the little pale face to her bosom. [108]

Nobody knew what name was on the locket, for it was replaced where it so long had rested, and was buried when the heart beneath it had ceased to beat; but the name afterwards carved on the tombstone was not De Montfort.

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"I don't think I shall be able to collect my wits enough to *tell* a story this evening," said our governess as we sat at tea on the Thursday evening, "for I've had a long letter to answer and to think over; but I fancied you liked my story about the Baby's Hand, and so if you please I'll read you another from a little black-covered manuscript book which my old friend gave me. He said it was a story about a very near friend and schoolfellow of his, and was one of the most pathetic and affecting histories that he had ever known. I don't suppose you'll think so. Still it is rather affecting, though it is only a tale of disappointment in love; but then it was a love that lasted for a lifetime and survived death."



## CHAPTER V.

### THE STORY OF A BOOKWORM.



YES, she is dead, and on her snow-strewn grave I left a bunch of winter flowers but yesterday. Ah, me! I never go and wander in that dingy churchyard, where the sound of the great roaring city is hushed to a sleepy murmur, but I seem to leave half my poor life there; would that I could leave it all, I sometimes think, and that when the sexton comes to bring the keys of the church on a Sunday morning he should find the mere body of me lying there, my head leaning on the stone that bears her name—not *his* name—*her* name, her one dear name by which I called her last of all. [109]

But these are ill thoughts, and as the poet says "this way madness lies." Let me get to my books, there is comfort and companionship in them; and yet I have held my finger in this page till the light is gone and it's too dark to read.

I suppose I was meant for a bookworm, and yet I didn't like school. At all events I didn't like the Free Grammar School of St. Bothwyn By-Church, to which I had the privilege of being elected when my poor father was clerk of the Company, and lived in the old hall till he bought this little house in Hoxton. Ah me! how I seem to see the old black oaken wainscot of the court room, and the little parlour where the firelight danced in deep crimson flecks and pools in the polished floor, and the shadowy panels! How I can remember going in after dark in winter evenings and sitting there, a lonely motherless boy, and seeming to be lost in some mysterious way to the outside world, as I pored over tales of old romance, or when I grew older traced the origin of some quaint custom in one of the heavy leather-bound volumes that filled the narrow cramped bookcase of the clerk's office! [110]

In the midst of my dreaming one thing was real to me, and I suppose it was a part of my queer character, that what was said to be fancy in other young men was the one fact of my life. I mean love. Apart from the daily routine of the office, which often became mechanical, so that I could pursue it and think of other things even while it was going on, I had no true life in the present—that is to say no strongly conscious life of my own, apart from the region of imagination—except when I was sitting in the deep old escutcheoned bay-window of the Hall, looking out upon the old shaded courtyard, where the sunlight, darting amidst the spreading plane-trees, flecked and chequered the marble pavement, and the little carved fountain trilled and rippled till it incited the canary hanging in its gilded cage to break into song that drowned its splashing murmur, and silenced the sparrows twittering about the heavy woodwork of the old porch. That was my real world, because there was one figure, one face, that held me to it, as though by a spell that I could not, and never sought to break. I scarcely remember the time I did not love her. [111]

Mary never suspected, as I sat watching her at work, or reading to her on those summer

evenings, that my heart was ready to break out into words of passionate entreaty. She had been so used to see me sitting there, or to run with me round the little paved courtyard, or the old dingy grass plot in the midst of its prim gravel walks at the side of the hall that I had become an ordinary association of her life. I had left school while she was still learning of a governess, who came four times a week to teach her, for her father was a man of more consideration than mine. But Mary was motherless as I was. Our mothers had been dear friends in their school-girl days and afterwards; and our fathers were old acquaintances; and so it came about that I was often at the Hall for the week round after office hours, and that I seemed to belong as much to the place as the old, fat, wheezy, brown spaniel that stood upon the broad stone step and welcomed me with tail and tongue. But while I remained, as it were, stationary—an old-fashioned boy, an older-fashioned youth, an antiquated man—she altered. Occasionally when I went to see her she had gone out visiting, and I was left to dream away the evening in the old window waiting for her return, or, if I knew which way she came, loitering in the street in case she should be unattended by the maid who was usually sent to meet or to fetch her when her father did not go himself.

[112]

It was on one of these evenings that I suddenly understood what was the cause of the undefinable change that I had noticed in her manner some time before. In the previous week the company had held a court dinner, and that was the evening when the alderman introduced his son—"My son, the captain," as he called him—a captain by purchase, and with the right to wear a brilliant uniform and long moustachios. A chuckle-pated fellow, for all his scarlet coat and clanking heels, but with a bullying, insolent air. When the feast was over, and the guests were preparing to go, it was time for me to go too, for I had been late helping to make up some of the accounts in the office; and, after taking my hat off the hook in the passage, turned to the old sitting-room to look for Mary, that I might say, "Good-night."

It was beyond her time for being about, especially on the court nights, but to my surprise, as I opened the door she was standing there with the captain, who was holding her hand. He had no business there, and she knew it. The other diners were already coming down the stairs at the end of the passage. He must have stolen down quickly, and she must have been waiting for him. This all passed through my mind in a moment as I stood looking at him, such an ugly leer upon his face as he bent over her hand that I had to clench my fingers till the blood started in the nails to keep down my rising wrath.

[113]

"Hallo! who is this?" he said, as he turned with a swagger, but without dropping her hand.

"Oh! Richard, I thought you'd gone home long ago. It's only a friend of my father's, and he's so near-sighted I suppose he did not see anybody here," she replied in a flutter.

"Confounded little manners," said the captain, staring at me.

I was dumb—and my limbs seemed to be rigid.

"Is he deaf too?" asked the captain with a grin. "Confounded little manners, really."

"You're welcome to the little there are," I blurted out; "you have none of your own. Mary, shall I take you to your father?"

She pushed away my outstretched hand and hurried from the room; and he went out also after bestowing upon me an oath which I could hear him repeat as he sought his hat and cloak in the hall. I stood there without a word. My heart had seemed to drop within me as a coal fire burnt to ashes falls together in a grate. The warmth that kept it alive had gone out suddenly. But it smouldered yet, and when I went to meet her a few evenings afterwards I had determined to gather courage and speak to her once for all. I walked mechanically through the streets between the Hall and Doctors' Commons, where she had gone on a visit, and was just turning by the old garden beyond the Proctors' College when I heard voices close to me, and looking up, saw her walking with *him*, clinging to his arm, looking into his face. I hesitated for a moment, and they saw me. "Good-night!" said she in a formal voice as she clutched his arm tighter, and they both passed on.

[114]

So all was over. It was many weeks before I went again to see her father. It might have been many more. I think I should never have gone again but for my own father saying to me, "Dick, my son, I can see and feel for you too, but bear up; you are no boy now, you know. And I had set my heart on it too; so had our old friend. He wants you to go and see him, Dick, to help him make up his quarterly account, as you used to do. Perhaps she'll tire of this popinjay—and, when she comes to her senses—"

"Or when he deserts her," I interrupted bitterly.

The dear old man said no more, but pressed my hand—his other hand upon my shoulder. "Go and see our old friend," he repeated presently.

[115]

I went—taking care to avoid the familiar sitting-room and to go only to the office. There her father sat, looking strangely worn and anxious, but he rose to greet me.

He was pleased to see me. I could see that by the smile that brought something of the old look back upon his face; but his voice shook as he told me that at the first rumour of active service the pompous alderman had bought the captain off, and that now he had all his time to dangle after Mary. It had broken him, he said; he was not the man he had been. His accounts confused him, and his cash-balance was short. He was going that very night to see an old cousin, to ask if she would take charge of Mary for a while; and if I would only once more look through the books

while he was gone, perhaps I might put them right.

It was a cold night, near Christmas, and there was a bright fire in the office, which seemed to light the room with a ruddy glow that quite paled the flame of the shaded lamp upon the writing-table. All was so still that the ticking of the old clock upon a bracket seemed to grow into an emphatic beat upon my ear quickened with nervous pain; but I sat down and was soon immersed in my accustomed drudgery of figures, so that, when I had taken out sundry balances, and checked the totals with a sum of money in gold and silver that lay upon the table in a leather bag, I had ceased to note how the night wore on; and after tying up the cash and placing it inside the secretaire, of which I turned the key, I sat down before the fire in a high-backed old leather chair and began to think, or dream, no matter which. [116]

Above the high carved mantel was a little round old-fashioned mirror, and as I lay back in the chair my purblind eyes were fixed upon it as it reflected the mingled gleams of lamp and fire that touched the shining surfaces of the oaken wall or the furniture of the room. My back was to the door, and yet by the sudden passing of a shadow across the glass I saw that it was being opened stealthily—and all the doors were too heavy and well hung to make a sound, if only the locks were noiselessly turned. I was so concealed by the great chair, and by the darkness of the corner where I sat beyond the radius of the lamp, that the intruder advanced quickly. He evidently expected to find nobody there, and, with scarcely a glance round, went to the table, peered amongst the books, and then, as though not finding what he sought, turned to the secretaire, and with a sudden wrench of the key opened it. I had had time to think what I should do, and as his hand closed on the bag of money I sprang to the bell beside the fireplace and rang it furiously; then darted across the room and stood with my back to the door. The captain—for it was he, and I had known him by his height and figure—gave a sort of shriek and turned livid as he dropped the bag and came towards me. [117]

"You here!" he said. "It's well that I happened to come in and catch you."

"Stand back!" I cried, "or I'll raise the neighbourhood to see the noble captain who has turned thief. You don't go till the servants at least know who and what you are."

"You fool!" he retorted, his face working. "It's only your word against mine; and who has the most right here, I'd like to know?"

All this time some one was pushing heavily against the door from the outside, and a woman was whimpering there. I stepped back, still facing him, and flung it open. It was Mary, looking white and wild, and holding a sealed letter in her hand.

"What is this? Why are you here, Algernon?" she asked, turning to the captain.

"He was here to rob your father of another treasure besides yourself," I said. "He is a thief, and I will proclaim him as such."

"A thief! How dare you?" she said, her face all aflame. "Do you know you are speaking of my husband?"

"Husband!" I cried—"Husband!" And I leaned on a chair for support. [118]

"Richard," she said, placing the letter on the table, "I brought this that I might leave it for my father when he came in. You will see that he has it, will you?—or if you go before his return, let him find it when he comes."

Married! The room swam round; and as I stood there, dumb and sick, they seemed to swim with it out at the door.

When I came to myself the place was still as death, save for the ticking of the clock and the click of the failing fire. But there lay the letter. Another moment, as it seemed to me, and her father had let himself in and I had placed it in his hand. He read it half through before he quite understood what had been inclosed in it—a narrow printed slip of paper. Suddenly he unfolded that and carried it nearer the light.

"Married!" he said. "Well, thank God for that! But—but—married, and to him!"—and he fell forward on the table.

He didn't die. People don't mostly die of these shocks. The months went on; the years went on; and though he'd never seen his daughter, nor rightly knew where she was, he heard that her husband had an allowance made him by his father after his gambling debts had been paid; but the alderman had taken his head clerk into partnership, and there was an end of the captain's going into the business.

My dear old father died and left me this house and his small savings. I seldom went to the Hall, though I should have been welcome there. Four times a year I lent a hand with the accounts for the sake of old routine, and stayed to eat a little supper and drink a glass of the famous claret, or to smoke a pipe with the old gentleman, who was failing greatly. His daughter was never mentioned between us, and I supposed he had lost sight of her altogether, when, one night, he said quite suddenly: "Dick, I wish you'd take a letter and a message to Mary for me." [119]

He hadn't called me Dick for years, and I thought he was drivelling, but he held an open letter into which he was folding some banknotes.

"You may read it, Dick. They are in London, but she has not been to see me, and she writes for help to tide over some difficulties, she says, till her husband can see his father. She evidently doesn't know that the alderman's in the bankruptcy court. Poor dear, poor dear, she's reaping the fruits of her disobedience, and yet she will not come to see me. To her own hand, Dick, to her own hand only, must this letter go. It tells her how, in the last resort, she may seek my cousin, if she will not come to me before I die. My poor savings—they are but little, Dick—will be in trust for her with my cousin, but she sha'n't know that from me. Could you take this to-morrow morning, Dick?"

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I could do no less than promise to convey it to her, and the next morning set off to find the house, in a rather mean neighbourhood, where I found that she and her husband had taken furnished lodgings. A servant girl took up my name, and I was asked to walk upstairs. There, upon the landing, stood the woman I had not seen since the night she left her father's home, but changed, as years should not have changed her, and with a pleading anxious look in her scared eyes that was grievous to see.

"Richard," she said with a faint smile, and holding out her hand, "is it you?"

"I come as the bearer of a written message," I replied; "but if I can ever do you real service you know well enough that I should gladly aid you."

"Thank you, Richard," she said gently, "I know it; but my father, he is well? His writing has changed though, it trembles so," and she burst into tears as she went to the landing window to read the letter. She had but just finished, and was slipping it into the bosom of her dress, when, with a sudden gesture, she said, "I dare not stay. I hear him coming up the street. Good-bye, good-bye, and take my love to papa, my dear, dear love. Say I'll write again or see him; but now go, and take no notice."

I went down, and should have passed quietly from the house, but a latch-key turned in the street door, and, as I tried to go out, the "Captain" stood in the way. I knew him, bloated, shabby, and broken down as he looked, but should have said nothing had he not also recognized me, and turned upon me with an oath, wanting to know what I did there.

[121]

I had heard of their address, I said, and that misfortune had overtaken his father, and had come to see whether I could do anything to help them.

Could I lend him a ten-pound note there and then? he asked, with an ugly laugh; and when I said, I had no such sum, he broke out again in a torrent of abuse.

I would have pushed past him, but he seized me by the arm, and swung me round facing him. I still strove to get away, when I heard his wife's imploring voice upon the stairs; and he spoke words that made the little blood that was in me surge swift and hot to my face. In a moment I had wrenched myself free, and struck him full on the mouth with my clenched hand. He was cowed for a moment, and turned white, but there were two or three people looking on by that time.

"You miserable old pantaloon," he screamed, as he made a rush at me.

But I had one hand on the knob of the door, and, swinging round as though I worked on a pivot, I caught him full between the eyes, and sent him sprawling among the hats and umbrellas that he had knocked down in his fall. Then I closed the door, and walked away. The page is turned for ever now, I muttered to myself. I cannot even meet her father again. Poor old gentleman!—he died—he died too soon; but not before I'd seen him and held his hand in mine. But she had never been to the old home; and on inquiring at the place where they had lodged, it was believed that they had gone abroad after the death of their two children.

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So that was the bitter ending, I thought. And all that dead past was to be closed like a page in a book that is read and clasped.

Yes; but the book is reopened sometimes, where a sprig of rue has been placed to mark between the leaves.

I didn't change. I was long past changing. And I followed my old pursuits; went to my old haunts; wore my old clothes, as I do now, from day to day.

So years went on, until one dreary afternoon in November—one bright and sunny afternoon it might have been for its influence on my dim calendar—I was rummaging one of the boxes of a bookstall in Holborn, when the keeper of it came out and put two or three battered volumes among the rest. Instinctively I took one of them up and opened it. A great throb came into my heart and made me reel; for it was a prayer-book, and there on the title-page was *her* name—*hers*, and in *my* handwriting of years and years ago. The prayer-book that I had given her.

[123]

"Dear me, sir, you look faint-like," says the dealer; "let me fetch you a stool, or come in and sit down a bit."

"Can you—tell—me," I gasped, "where you bought this book? Where and when?"

"Where? Why here. When? Why five minutes ago, along with two or three more, of no particular value, of a poor little thing that said it was all her mother had to part with—Stop, sir, stop; why, there she is coming out of the grocer's shop this very minute. Run after the old gentleman, James; he'll do himself a mischief, or be run over, or something."

For I had dashed after the child like a madman, my hat off, the open book in my hand. James had outrun me though, and was now coming back with a child—a young girl—poorly clad; oh! so poorly clad; but yet like Mary—my Mary—on the day I wrote that name in the book still open in my hand.

"Mary!" I gasped.

"Yes, sir," said the child; "I must make haste home, or my mother will have no tea."

No, no, I will not dwell on the recollection of that poor room, with its evidences of want, its signs of suffering; nor of all that might have been said and was not. By the bedside of the woman whom I had loved and lost, and who was now passing from the world into the great reality of life, I had few words to speak. The only witness of the promise I made—except the Lord and His angels—was the silently weeping girl, *his* only remaining child. Almost the only words were:—

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"Mary."

"Dick."

And the child stood there clasping her mother's hand—*my* hand; to be in future my child and the child of the mother in heaven; and who shall tell but at the resurrection—

Ah! I hear her foot upon the stair, her sweet voice singing as she comes—that sweet sweet voice that one day, maybe, will sing me to sleep.

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"Ah-h-h!" sighed Mrs. Parmigan, who had listened to the last two stories without saying a word but with an expression of wonder. "How you can remember so much about people I can't imagine; but really, my dear, these love stories never do end except in the saddest way. Now if I could only write a tale, which I know is, of course, quite impossible, it should be every word of it true, and everybody should be as happy as the day is long."

[125]

"But then you see, dear Mrs. Parmigan, that wouldn't be every word true," said Miss Grantley with her grave smile. "I hope, my dear young friends here are mostly happy with me at school, but there are times when we don't feel altogether in harmony, and lessons are not learned, and our tempers get the upper hand, and the sun seems to have gone behind a cloud and the world turns the wrong way, till the storm lowers and breaks, and then come regret and forbearance, and the stillness, and 'the gentle shining after rain.' Life is often a rather difficult school, and our education in this world is not completed without trouble and the discipline of pain and the finding of strength through weakness and of truth through error. But come, old lady, I am not to be led into a lecture, especially to a person of your years and experience, so tell me what you mean,—where am I to find 'a love story,' as you call it, that shall be without bitter-sweet, and come to a bright ending without going through a dark passage?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, my dear, I was first thinking of my own very happy, but at the same time very commonplace and unromantic married life with Mr. Parmigan, who, as you know, was in the Bank of England, and came home as regularly as the clock struck half-past five; but then I was trying to recall what Mrs. Schwartz the cooper's wife was telling you that day when we went into her house out of the rain after our long walk from Fernside."

[126]

"What! has that pretty, fair, round rosy-cheeked German woman a romance in her life?" asked Annie Bowers. "I declare I've often thought there must have been some kind of sentimental recollection in those great dreamy blue eyes. What a fine, strong-looking man her husband is too! Marion and I have often stood looking into the shed while he has been at work making tubs and casks, and sometimes we have heard him singing some German song as we walked that way. He speaks English so well too; but Mrs. Schwartz has a pretty buzzing accent, even the two flaxen-headed children have caught it, and talk in what seems to be a German idiom."

"Well, would you like me to try and repeat Mrs. Schwartz's story as she has told it to me?" said our governess. "I must let you know, however, that she and I are very old friends, for I have been to see her over and over again, and she and her children have been here to tea several times in the holidays, her husband fetching them home in the evening. I was selfish in that, for I wanted to refresh my own ear with the German accent, and they both speak well, particularly the master cooper, who like most of his countrymen was a true journeyman, and travelled all over the country to practise his trade before he was drafted off to the army to fight in the Franco-German War."

[127]

"Oh tell us the Schwartz love story!" said Sarah Jorring, "and try to tell it just as you heard it; it would be so much more sentimental."

"But not in German," we cried, "that wouldn't be fair, to give us a German exercise under the pretence of a story; we'll have it in English."

"Well, you shall have it in something like the original German-English, which seems to me very much to resemble real old English, and sounds to my ear more simple and more fit for story-telling than the more modern tongue. You must try to picture to yourselves Mrs. Schwartz when she was younger and paler, and wore a round white cap and great silver ear-rings, and was in fact a slender, rather pale pretty girl with a plaintive look in her great blue eyes, and a voice soft

and low. The story arose from our talking about the fashion of Christmas-trees having been adopted in England, and the recollection of the last Christmas-tree that she had seen at her old home with her former mistress caused her to say with a deep sigh, 'Ach! *Ich habe gelebt und geliebet;*' so I will call the story 'I have lived and loved,' and you must try to fancy that Mrs. Schwartz is speaking."

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## CHAPTER VI.

### "I HAVE LIVED AND LOVED."

"SO we will hang up the Polichinello that thy dear father sent thee from afar, little Loisl; for who knows but thou and Heinrich, and I, thy mother, may see him yet before the eve of Christmas, and while the snow is on the ground. We will keep the tree here, near the window, and should he come not, we will light it afresh every night that it may shine a welcome to the dear father, and keep our hearts alive with hope."

This is what I heard my dear mistress say when it wanted yet a week to Christmas in the year 1871, and the master, her husband, was still there with the Crown Prince before Paris along with his regiment. He was ober-lieutenant, one of many going to fight against France, and ever since the beginning, till after Sedan, after Domremy, after Metz, had been with his men in the camp, and wherever there was much danger always in the front. It was wonder to me how I had come to learn all about the war and the campaign, but girl as I was (Lisba is but a child even now, my dear mistress would say), I also had one dear to me—with the Red Prince and the army before Orleans.

[129]

Herr postmaster Schwartz—ah! he came to talk to my mistress and to bring letters to her from her brave husband, and I was sewing, or busy in the room, and heard all—as he would stay in the kitchen on his way out and tell us all about it—Bertha and me; and once he handed me a letter.

Oh! how my hand trembled as I took it; how the Herr postmaster looked at me through his horn spectacles and watched me, for he knew the writing! it was his son's, the writing of Franz. And I felt the blood rush up hot to my face, and the tears blind me as I placed in my bodice the little letter that I dare not open while there were questioning eyes to ask: "What is he to thee, Lisba, and what says he?"

Bertha knew. Bertha was yet more of a child than I, for she was two years younger, but old was she in sentiment, and too often we would talk together far into the night, but in whispers lest we should wake the little ones, for Bertha slept next the great nursery, where our mistress had also made her bed, and I would steal into her room to pore over the map that the Herr postmaster had drawn with his pencil in the kitchen to show where our armies had been, and where the cruel battles were fought. In Alsace and to Lorraine, by Neiderbronn, at Weissenburg, at Woërth, at Saarbruck, at Metz, at Sedan, "where," said Herr postmaster, "we have received the sword of the Emperor Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, who is now our prisoner in the Palace of the Habichtswald."

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Then—ah! me, to think that they should be taken to the end of the world—right into France, to Donchery, to Chalons. As near as Strasbourg, as far as Rheims, and then on to Paris—or near it—at the place called Nogent-sur-Marne; that is where our dear master, the ober-lieutenant, was with the army of the Crown Prince; and we grieved and waited, for he had had a wound, we heard, though now he was healed. And the fighting went on, though hundreds of our brave men of the troops—the landwehr, the reserve—were hurt, or maimed, or killed. And many women wept over their knitting or their spinning; and the coming of the holy Christmas time brought not peace, though the Herr postmaster said the hungry war was now nearly over, but its jaws were not yet done clinking, and would yet gnash many to death.

Franz! ah! he was with the Red Prince at Orleans, where they had fought the French army of the Loire. Nor did Franz go alone, for there went with him his best friend, his dutz brüder, Hofer, from Esmansdorff, whither Franz had gone three years before to follow his trade of cask-cooper and wheelwright, and there met Hofer, whose family were of the Tyrolese Protestants that came from Zitterthal to find a refuge in our land.

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He came to Saeichenwald, to our village, this Hofer—a dark well-looking man—not fair like Franz, nor with his broad chest and clear blue eyes—but tall and quick, with crisp curling hair, and long fingers. I have told him that he had hawk's eyes, for he could see the birds on the trees, and if he had pleased, could have shot them with his rifle, so far was his sight, so true his aim; but he hated to kill or hurt any living thing, and loved best to play the fiddle when he was not at work in his tan-yard. Yet now, he too was gone to the war, and was in the midst of the slaying and burning. When first he came home with Franz to Saeichenwald, I was afraid, for though I loved him not, but loved Franz only, his eyes were ever fixed on me, and he came often to the



homestead; even when Franz came not he would be there in the yellow sunshine of the autumn evening by the gate that led to the apple orchard, or at the wicket, where Bertha and I used to stand after coming from the dairy or the hen-house; nor was he unwelcome to the master, who wondered at his shooting and leaping with a pole; nor to the dear mistress, for whom he brought a work-box, all of beautifully carved wood; nor to the little ones, Loisl and Heinrich, to whom he played the fiddle, and whom he taught to dance or showed how the chamois is hunted.

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Often when I have stood with Bertha—for we always went together—at the gate, he would come with his keen bright laugh and hawk's eyes, and leap the wall that inclosed the dairy yard. Franz, too, had noticed how he sought us, and one red evening when we were crossing the orchard, and Hofer walked between us with an arm about each, Franz came in by the old path from the wood on the other side, and stood there looking still and grieved. Laughing ever, Hofer carried us both in to where Franz stood, and with his long arms still about us caught him with a hand on each wrist, and so stood we, two girls in the midst of two men's encircling arms.

"Hof, is it that thou lov'st Lisba?" said Frank sternly; "if so, thou doest not well."

"I both love her and do well, my brother," replied Hofer. "I love her because I love thee, and in mine eyes she is thy wife. See thou then," and he held up his long right hand, "I am no brawler; but he who would do her ill or move his tongue against her would have to reckon with me as much as with thee, for she is thine and I am thine too, as thou art mine, or what means the dagger scar in our arms that we both know of?" Then taking me by the hand he leads me to Franz and kisses me gently on the forehead, and even while I am putting the face of Franz from mine I see that Hofer has stooped to kiss the poor child Bertha also, whose hand is in his, but whose face is bowed down and red as the wild berry. If I am a child, as my dear mistress says, then is Bertha but an infant, and cannot know of love that should turn her cheek to flame and bring bright tears into her eyes.

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Ah me!—that evening—how we stood and watched the sun go down till the night came, and with a dark blue shutter left only a long crevice where the fire shone through; how we wandered back hand in hand, and parted with a hasty "good-night" when we heard the church clock chime; and that is not long ago, though it seems to have gone so far back; for next day came the tidings of a levy for the army—men were wanted. Not one by one, but altogether, the young and then the middle-aged were called out to fight in France or to guard the frontier, and we—we were left (the dear mistress said "we")—to wait and weep, and with only the Herr postmaster, the father of Franz, to bring us news, and read to us the stories of the battles, and bring to the dear mistress her letters. For I had one letter and no more; and that told me that Franz and Hofer had met in the same army of the Red Prince and were comrades, but not in the same corps; but that once they came near together on the field, and in the thick of the fight Franz had struck down a man's arm uplifted to kill his brother.

It is easy to see how I came to learn so much of the war, and of the places where it raged, for old Schwartz was proud of his knowledge, and read to us and drew maps, and we had nothing else to talk about. The village was very still, and people from the nearest town talked only of the war and of those who had left them. Ours is a quiet place with romantic scenes around it, and but just beyond the shadow of the giant mountain Riesengebirge. We can see the blue profile of the Schneekoppe; and there are those—the old ones—who still talk of the legends of Rubezahl, the counter of turnips (the mountain spirit), who took all kinds of disguises to punish avarice and cruelty, and to reward honesty and help the poor. Among the poor went our dear mistress now, or they came to her for sympathy; she who, like themselves, like all of us, except brotherless young ones such as Bertha, grieved for a lover, or a husband, or a brother, gone to the war. It was not likely to be a merry Christmastide in Germanland, except that the news of victory, or of fortresses taken, came and stirred the slow blood of the people who were left. But we longed and prayed for peace—we women did at all events—and with some there was scarcely heart to trim and deck the Christmas-tree; to tell the children to prepare for the visit of the Christ Kindlein on Christmas Eve, who would bring good gifts to the good, but would leave the naughty to Pelsnichol to come and whip them with his great birch. In some villages like ours an old man disguised with a long beard and gown, and a great bag, would go about at Christmastide to the houses where the people had expected him, and would carry the gifts to the children, and would show others who were naughty the birch, and give them nothing. But we had no Pelsnichol at our house, only sweet talk about the child Christ, and the gifts of the wise men, and of the love that should be among little ones—the love and the heart-giving.

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So the tree was decked, and placed in the window ready to light on Christmas Eve, in the hope that it might be a sign of love and welcome. And we were on the watch all day, and every night Bertha would go out and sit upon the wall, looking out towards the road to the town, until the light was no more seen in the belfry of the church, and the clock chimed supper-time. I told not our dear mistress of this, for was it not for Franz and the dear master that the child kept watch?—but I went not myself to that outlook, though my heart stood still every time Bertha returned, with her head bent down, and had seen no one coming. She had a presentiment or fancy, she said, that the wanderer would return after nightfall. I knew not,—I began to tell lies to myself that I cared not,—and for this reason; I had long feared that the Herr postmaster liked not me to be loved by his son; for behold he was postmaster, and had been a builder of organs, and the dear master was godfather to Franz, while I—well, I had nothing, but the dear mistress was my godmother, and my father had been pastor of a village, and had taught me some things before he died.

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We are now but a few days to Christmas, when one night the old man comes in with a letter for the dear mistress, at which she first sobs and turns white, and then laughs and turns red. The dear master is wounded, but is at the frontier, whither he had been sent, staying till he is strong enough to come home; "but there," he writes, "I have had the luck to fall into the hands of a good nurse, an old acquaintance, who will bring me home."

"Ah! ha! that he could already come home," sighs the mistress. "Loisl—Heinrich, thy dear father may yet be here before the tree is lighted; and brings with him a nurse—who can she be, think'st thou, Lisba?"

"I know not, unless it be one of the deaconesses who go to the hospitals; but is it not possible, dear lady, that it is a comrade, a surgeon of the army, an ambulance officer?"

"It is Hofer," cried Bertha, who was standing at the door of the big kitchen, where we were listening to such parts of the letter as the mistress pleased to read to us.

"Hofer! the lass has gone silly!" cries the Herr postmaster. "Hofer and Franz are fighting with the army of the Loire, as the French call it, and are who knows where. I have a letter here that reached me yesterday, written some days ago, where Franz says—let me read it:"

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(Here the old man pulls on his horn spectacles and opens a thin sheet of paper.)

"Franz says:—'We are in quarters here at a tavern, but it has few customers, and we are obliged to seek for what we need. It is, in fact, almost an empty house, dismantled, half burnt, and with a good many shot holes. Still we keep up our spirits. We have begun to hold our Christmas already, for we have a long table and a few chairs, and somebody last night found a great milk-pan in the half-ruined dairy of the inn, and, having on hand a few bottles of very good red wine, we made a fine bowl of *grog-au-vin*, with the aid of a wood fire and an old saucepan. In came Hofer and gave us a toast and a song, and then they called on me, and I gave them the old *Lied*, that thou hast so often played, and for a toast, 'Fifine.' If Fifine had been there she would have been lying on my shoulder, but since I rescued her from the teasing of a big drum-major she has grown shy and doesn't like company; and though she would soon be a pet with most of our men, keeps her love for me alone, and would be a very charming companion if I had time to devote to her pretty ways.' So you see Franz and Hofer are in France," says the old man, taking off his spectacles.

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My heart has grown cold and heavy all in a moment, and I have to lean on the back of a chair for support.

"Who, then, is Fifine?" I ask, under my breath.

"Aha!" cries the Herr postmaster, "who, indeed? but what is it to thee? I now, his father, might well ask; but there it is, no sooner does a young honest fellow go out of Germany than he is thrown into the company of these cats of Frenchwomen, and then—but I must say good-night. Good-night, madam. Good-night, girls."

So he is gone, and the dear mistress and I look in each other's face, and both cry "Oh!" but say no more.

So I go not to watch by the wall; but Bertha goes, and still she says it is Hofer will bring the dear master home. The child, we say, is gone silly with sitting on the wall in the cold, for sometimes she will come in without her cloak; but yet we have not the heart to forbid her going thither.

One, two, three, four days, and it is the blessed eve. We are all so still, and our hearts are heavy, so we go about softly, as though some one were sick or dead, when it is but our own hearts, or hopes, or fancies, that seem dead. The dear little ones are quiet now, for we are in the small room by the window, and as the last chime of sundown sounds from the church, the candles on the Christmas-tree are lighted, and shine on the pretty gifts that hang upon the branches. The dear mother hugs the children to her heart; outside the twinkle and beaming of the candles makes a short track of light upon the snow; the signal is all a-glow. Will the wanderer return to-night? Where is Bertha? What is this white-armed, loose-haired figure, flying up the path? Her hand is on the door-latch, and as she stands there, wan and panting, she cries, "They come! they come! The ox-wagon is now upon the hill. I saw it coming through the snow, and the lantern shone upon the epaulette and the buttons." She speaks and is gone, and we, the dear mistress and I, go to the kitchen, where I stand, with a heart of lead and hands of ice.

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There is a tramp of feet, a shout, the door bursts open—the dear mistress is in her husband's arms—the little ones are clinging to him. "Take care of my leg, darlings," he says; "the bone has not grown too strong just yet, and I doubt if ever I shall bend the knee again. As to Franz here, he, as you see, has his arm in a sling yet. He caught me up in the wood, me and Hofer. Ah! that dear Hofer, he was in hospital, just getting over a sabre cut in the cheek when I was taken there, and he has been my good nurse ever since."

I am standing still, with downcast eyes, and there stands Franz staring at me, with his one arm ready to take me to his heart.

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"And where is Fifine?" say I, bursting into tears.

"Fifine—ah! I was near forgetting her," and he plunges his one hand into the deep pocket of his

military coat and pulls out a creature which climbs to his shoulder, and there sits purring—a white fluffy cat with pink eyes.

"Why, you little fool," cries old Herr postmaster as he comes behind me and lifts me within reach of Franz, "didn't I say it was a cat of a French woman?"

There is a light quick stride at the door—a loud jödel—a bright laugh—and Hofer stoops his tall body and looks round. A cloud comes over his face almost before he has greeted the dear mistress, and kissed me on the cheek. "Where is Bertha?" he asks, and before we can answer him he has darted out again, and we have scarcely lost the sound of his rapid step before he is back among us, bearing the poor child in his arms. We chafe her hands and feet, and warm and comfort her. Dear Bertha, she had been so faithful watching there by the wall, and Hofer had stopped behind to help up a fallen horse, and when he came not she fainted and fell with cold and fear. But now we are all together in the great kitchen, and supper is getting ready, and wine is on the table, and the dear master and mistress are with their little ones at the Christmas-tree, that makes a path of glory on the outer snow.

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"Bertha, thou surely hast the second sight," says the old postmaster as he looks at her. The colour comes again rose-red into her cheek as Hofer draws her closer to his side.

"Yes," says she, "it is love that gives it. One has second sight when one thinks no longer of one's self but of another."

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It was Saturday afternoon, and our week's work was nearly over. On Monday the great fancy fair was to be held, and the side-table in Miss Grantley's pleasant parlour was covered with samples of all kinds of needle-work, in lace, wool, crewel, applique, and on linen, satin, velvet, silk, and cloth. There were handscreens, water-colour sketches, embroidery, bead-work, and all kinds of dainty knick-knacks, and we still had the finishing touches to put to some of our presents—still had a few completing stitches to put to some of the plainer articles, which were to make the back ground for the stall where Miss Grantley was to be saleswoman.

When we came into the parlour she was not there. Saturday was a holiday, so there had been no school in the morning, and we had gone on purpose to finish our week's work for the fancy fair.

We had scarcely taken off our hats, and indeed most of us had stepped outside the window into the garden when she came into the room. There was a singularly radiant eager look in her face, her eyes shone bright as though they had been washed with glad tears, and as she kissed us one by one there was more than the usual impressiveness, or what the French would call *effusion* in her manner. Annie Bowers looked at her with a quick inquiring glance, but said nothing. Marian Cooper, who had grown as tall as Miss Grantley was herself, held her hand tight, and spoke in a low tone, but loud enough for us all to hear as we had clustered round. "What story have you to tell us this evening, Miss Grantley? Something has happened. Is it a love story, dear? Are you going to tell us that you have promised to be married?"

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"No, indeed, I am not, for no such promise has been given; and there is no love story of which I am the heroine, I assure you. For all that, I have had a letter from a gentleman—a letter from my brother in Australia—which may alter my plans for the future. My dear girls, my dear friends and companions, I think you know that you are all very dear to me, and I believe you love me too a little; but of course in a few months at farthest most of you will leave me. You will have given up school, but not, I hope, given up reading and as much work and study as will keep you a good and useful place in the world. It is most likely that some of you will be married before I am, for I shall remain here for some time, and until I find a successor to take the school, and then I intend to go to the other side of the world. Whether Mrs. Parmigan will go with me I don't know. What I do know, and the only thing I can think about at this moment, is the real sorrow I shall have in parting with you all. But we should have to part in any case. The world of new duties and of new interests would be opening to you even if I remained here and grew old as the governess of Barton Vale. I should always rejoice to hear of your happiness and sympathize with you in trouble; but you would not be likely to be in a position to seek either my sympathy or my counsel, for others would have the greater right and the closer communion. But believe me, pray believe me when I tell you, that as the next six months go by I shall dread our parting, though more than half of you seven girls will have left me before that time arrives. Now, my dears, let us have tea, and then I will read you my brother's letter, for you are all my dear friends—my very closest friends to-night; and that letter shall be my story. It's more of a man's story than a girl's, but it is nearly all about a girl for all that."

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It was not a very quiet tea-table, for we were all excited and talking fast, as though that was the best way to keep from crying. It was not till we had discussed Miss Grantley's intended voyage and made out quite a romantic future for her that she opened her brother's letter, that we might, as she said, hear what kind of fellow he was.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### MISS GRANTLEY'S BROTHER.

MARIMOO, HOBART TOWN,  
December 27th, 18—.

**D**EAR BESSIE,—It's time you came out here instead of staying in the old country, even though you haven't learnt to make butter and cheese, and don't know how to bake bread, or even to make "damper" properly. The fact is, you must come; and if you like to take classes, you can make use of your science degrees here, I can tell you, for they want "sweet girl-graduates;" and even if they have grown to be severe and exacting female professors, we take very kindly to them.

The fact is, Bess, I waited as long as I could for you to come over this side to look after me, that I might cease wandering and settle down. As you know, I've tried my hand at a good many occupations, often for the freak of the thing, but always with a reserve force for doing the right thing at last, and somehow I've mostly made bread and cheese and a little more. The gold fever was over long before I reached Australia, but I had a turn at the cradle and pan for all that, and turned up a pretty good "claim"—enough to take me on my travels afterwards. I've been out prospecting; I've had a turn in the great grazing grounds, though I didn't care to sink the little money I had in a fancy flock in the hope of turning it into a herd, or to spend my life on horseback galloping after half-wild cattle on the plains. I wasn't long "beating about the bush," though I've once or twice been out with the natives and have had a brush with the rangers, one of whom—Black Jack—carried a bullet of mine about in his shoulder for some time before he fell in a fight with the police just outside Melbourne. His skeleton's in the museum now; but the worst time I ever had was when I was driving —; but I'll tell you that another time. I meant when I began this letter to start with an announcement that ought to take your breath away, and somehow I'm as shy of saying it on paper as I should be if you were standing before me with those "clear cold eyes" of yours, that yet were always shining with love to your wild brother, though you always "looked him through." The plain truth is, I now invite you to come over here and live with *us*. Do you read that?—*us*. For I am—we are—*married*. Yes; a fact. And who do you think *we* are? There's me to begin with, and who's the other party, the "Co.," should you fancy? Well, don't guess. I'll tell you. Mary Deane. You remember how I used to sing:

"I'm sitting on the stile, Ma-ree,"

in the old house at home, when she was a little wisp of a dark-eyed lassie, just thinking about going to the old farm belonging to her Uncle Deane, in Herefordshire; and how she ran away and hid herself when I wanted to say "good-bye" to her before I left. Well, her uncle made up his mind to come to this side—as you wrote me he had—and I'd nearly forgotten all about it, until one day, as I was strolling along towards the bank in Sydney, who should I come upon quite suddenly but Mr. Deane, and walking beside him a slim, elegant, bright-eyed beauty, to whom I raised my hat, not knowing who she was, till a peal of silvery laughter brought back my memory to the days of old, when we used to sit in the garden on a summer evening at Barnes, and slip down the lawn to the boat-house, that we might launch the dear old pater's wherry, and have a moonlight trip, with soft singing of part songs, to which I know I growled a villainous bass. Dear pater, had he lived I might have stayed in the old country, and tried to keep up the old place; but I fear I should have disappointed him, and so—well, all may be for the best.

Perhaps it was the remembrance of the dear balmy evenings "under the Abeles" that put me in mind of proposing a picnic, for it was the winter before last that I met the Deanes, and therefore our midsummer, and a precious hot one too I can tell you, so that all the ripe fruit, bottled beer, champagne, and everything else that was cool and slaking was at a premium.

Mr. Deane was not altogether unacquainted with Sydney. He had been for some time in the colony, and had done a good thing in cattle agency. "I landed a pretty fair commission out of one lot that I had out beyond Gomaree Flats," he said to me, "a wild lot they were too, and I bought them on spec and sold them three weeks after with my own brand upon them."

"You don't mean to say that they were at Goobong station and branded D," said I.

"Just so, have you seen any of 'em?"

"Why I *helped* brand them," I cried; "I was on the station and rode out after a bull that had gone away. I must have been within a couple of miles of your place if you were at Gomaree; and—was Miss Deane with you?"

"Mary was with me, Tom Grantley," says Mr. Deane, "and I don't think you used to say 'Miss' in the old time when I knew your father."

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"No; but then you see Mary wouldn't even come to say 'good-bye,'" I replied; and, as I looked, I saw the girl—she *is* a lovely girl, Bessie, though she's now Mrs. Grantley—blush like a rose, and actually, I think, a tear stood in her eye, though she laughed again when putting her hand in mine. She said, "Forgive me, Tom; for if you and uncle are to continue friends, *I* must be friendly with you too; so I make the first overture of reconciliation."

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I felt I was a "gone coon" if I let this sort of thing go on; so I asked them what they were doing in Sydney, dined with them the same evening, and by that day week we had made up a picnic to Parramatta, where we could have the pleasure of a boat on the salt-water creek that people there call the Parramatta River, and could have a pleasant country ramble and a dinner out in the sunshine, with the thermometer at 85° in the shade, or thereabout—capital weather for plum-pudding; but we *had* plum-pudding and roast-beef, too, with iced champagne; the plum-pudding made beforehand and heated over a fire made of sticks in an iron skillet; the roast-beef cold, with Sydney pickle, and bottled beer from England, rather dearer than champagne, and, what was better than either, some Australian wine, made from the Reisling grape, and about as good as most of the hock we ever get in London.

Of course we had some delightful drives along the south shore to Port Jackson, and back to Sydney along the south-head road—a drive in which one may see most of the beauties of Sydney vegetation—the great Eucalyptus or blue gum trees, between the giant boles of which shine the glittering waters of the harbour; but there are a hundred healthy orchids, and wild flowers of varied vivid hues, though but few of them have any perfume. Parramatta is to Sydney what Richmond is to London, or what Versailles was to Paris; but it is less secluded than it once was, of course, and Cockatoo Island, once the penal settlement, is less unfrequented than the Isle of Portland, where English convicts work out their sentence. This, and Shark Island, are likely places enough to attract strangers, but Parramatta was our resort on this Christmas Eve. Nothing came of it, except that I found myself when I got back to the hotel at night, and had bidden good-bye only after there was no further pretext for staying for "another cigar," in the large, bare, cool room which Mr. Deane had hired as a sitting-room in a large house in Sydney. The drive home had been a merry and yet a melancholy—not a sentimental one; there was a good deal of twilight about, and there was laughing—but somehow, Mary Deane and I didn't seem to find much to laugh about—I didn't, I know, for she told me they were going away to Bathurst, and I think I heard a sob, I know I felt her hand tremble when I took it in mine, and it was lucky I had been used to driving a team, for to hold whip and reins in one hand might give a hard-mouthed boring horse a chance of going at his own pace down a gully.

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However, before I said my final farewells it had been settled that I was to go with Mr. Deane and Mary as far as the Bathurst Plains, for I had a little business of my own in the Blue Mountain district. We were to start in a week, and I could scarcely believe that the whole affair was other than a dream, as I sat at the open window smoking till the pinky-gray dawn of Christmas Day broke over the scrubby garden of the hotel. I had been in a sort of dream, in which the form of Mary Deane was the chief figure, but there was another less pleasing shape, which came and went in my visions in a purposeless kind of way, one which I had seen that day lounging about the landing-stage, where he passed me first with a scowl and then with a muttered oath.

Now, I had first made his acquaintance in this wise.

One night as I was coming into Sydney, about a mile from the town I heard a sharp, sudden cry from the side of the road.

The cry came from a little "black fellow," who had been a sort of retainer of mine in the bush, and on the plains a bright active lad, as supple as a snake, and, as he used to say, the son of a chief. He was called Jacky Fishhook, and was a very useful fellow out there, for he could follow a trail like a hound, could climb trees, kill game, and in fact had a good many of the savage accomplishments, and few, if any, of the vices of civilization—rather a rare thing among the natives. On my return to Sydney we had parted company, and Fishhook had passed some of his time among his own people, and had also come into town now and then to work as a light porter, or do other odd jobs. The wants of the natives are few; and Jacky, unlike some of his people, did not drink rum or other spirits, so if he earned sixpence he was able to keep it. He it was who had given a shrill shout, and as I ran across a piece of waste ground to see what was the matter, I saw him crouching on the ground, while over him stood a big bully, whom I had before seen at the door of a low grog-shop; making a vicious cut at the "nigger" with a heavy stock-whip. He was a burly, powerful fellow, and, as Jacky was unarmed and only half clad, the cut of a thong like that was bad punishment. As soon as I appeared the Maori gave a yell of satisfaction. "You know Fishhook, black-fellow, sar?" he screamed. "You know, sar, Jacky not take stink-water (the native word for rum), but he give no sixpence, sar; he make for carry big thing, sar." Jacky pointed to a huge bale of hides, or something of the kind, that had been pitched on the ground. Evidently the bully had insisted on the poor fellow carrying the burden for payment to be made in the shape of a glass of rum; and, discovering this, Jacky had refused to go further.

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Again the whip was raised to strike, but I caught the uplifted arm, and with an oath the fellow turned on me, wrenched away his wrist, and came at me like a bull. There was nothing for it but to let him have it, and—excuse me, Bess; you know how you used to stand by when Willie and I had a set-to—I put in my left, and followed it up with a staggerer. He was not easily vanquished, however, though the blow drove him back three or four paces; and, before I could get within reach, he had snatched a pistol from his pocket. I was obliged to close with him, and his weight was against me. My only chance was to grip his wrist, or I should have a bullet in me. Luckily he

was giddy, and one eye had begun to swell; so that I had his arm at the very moment he pulled the trigger, and the ball went somewhere into space. The tussle was a short one, for there came a quick patter of feet along the path, and two officers of the Sydney police came up.

"Hullo, Buffalo Jim!" cried one of them, "up to your tricks again. Look here, my fine fellow, if you once get into quad, you're not likely to come out for a while, for there's a pretty bit of evidence likely to be turned up when once we start. Just take yourself home, and we'll come along to see what's in that bundle. Now, then, up you come;" and in a second they had lifted the bundle on to the fellow's shoulder, and marched him on before them. "We saw it all before we came up, Mr. Grantley," said one of the men as he passed, "but I s'pose you won't charge him." [154]

"No," said I. "He richly deserves all I gave him; but I don't want to be dangling for a week about the Sydney court-house."

As they went away, the fellow gave me an evil look. Jacky had vanished. Now, I had seen this big brute again while we were at Parramatta, and I was helping Mary out of the boat at the landing-stage. He had seen me, too, and turned away with a scowl and a muttered oath; but happening to glance round afterwards, I noticed that he was watching us from behind the corner of a fence. I forgot all about him for the rest of the day; but now, at night, his ugly face and bloated form intruded upon my dreams. I couldn't account for it; perhaps it was prevision.

I had forgotten it all again by the time we were ready for our journey to Bathurst. Mr. Deane was to drive with Mary in a light trap and I was to ride, for I had a good steady horse at stable in Sydney growing fat and restive for want of exercise. So we set out and went as far as the inn at Gum Ferry on the Nepean before we made any change in our arrangements. On the second day's journey we were likely to have a long ride, and Mary was anxious for a canter over Gum Plain, and beyond the first span of the mountain, where the way is over sand, shaded on both sides by the dark thicket of the gum tree and the forest scrub. She had brought her habit with her, and as she had been taught to be a first-rate horsewoman up at her father's cattle station, I resigned the saddle, and the horse, feeling such a light weight and such a dainty hand, was off like a bird. It was good to watch her as we drove far behind; good to note her pretty figure as she came cantering back and then shot forward for a long stretch across the plain. We were approaching the sandy course—where few passengers were seen except wagoners—and all was still and silent till we reached the fringe of forest and heard the chattering scream of a flight of green parrots. But above the chatter of the birds came another cry, and there, straight ahead of us, but beyond our power to overtake, were *two* riders. Mary was one; the other, a big rough-looking fellow, on a powerful horse, had dashed out from the thicket, caught her horse by the rein, and was now taking it at a furious gallop. The thought flashed through my brain in a moment. It was Buffalo Jim, and this was the scoundrel's revenge. The thought was horrible. Mary was completely in the scoundrel's power, unless she could throw herself out of the saddle and defy him until we came up. At the pace they were going, to overtake them was impossible, though we urged our nag to its utmost speed, and the wheels ploughed swiftly through the dry sand. What was to be done? There straight ahead, and getting further and further,—but plainly seen in that clear sunny air,—the two horses kept up the furious pace. We could even see the brave girl lean aside, and strike with all her might at the ruffian with the light whip she carried. We could fancy his hoarse laugh of defiance as he checked speed for a moment, and sought to wrest the whip from her hand. My head was on fire, but neither Mr. Deane nor I spoke a word; our eyes were simply fixed on the two figures before us, when suddenly there seemed to be a third—right out there in the very middle of the sunlit course. A figure like a bronze statue, which suddenly appeared as it were from the ground,—and now stood in midway, and with uplifted hand as though in warning. Would the horses ride him down? No; there was a sudden check, a scurry, a wild yell, and Buffalo Jim threw up his arms and went backward, rolling over in the sand, while Mary's horse, released, darted forward for fifty yards or so, and was then brought round. She met us half-way toward the place where the riderless horse had dashed into the forest. There in the sand lay the ruffian transfixed by a slender native spear, which had gone with unerring aim through his neck; we had to break off the point and draw the shank through. Lucky for Buffalo Jim if the wound were not poisoned. All we could do was to place him in the chaise, and for Mary to remount and keep near us. The bronze figure had vanished, as a snake might glide into the brushwood. Indeed, for a moment, when we reached the spot, I fancied I saw the glint of a fierce emu eye away in the dark leaves that hung by the bark of a mighty Eucalyptus, and I gave the *cooee* of the native, but no response came. [155] [156] [157]

Well, to make an end of this unconscionable letter, I need not tell what trouble we had when we took the wounded man to the next station, nor how we were detained to be examined and questioned. Buffalo Jim died in the prison infirmary a good while after, and though we had not forgotten the adventure, we had about ceased to think of it by the time I had settled here in Hobart Land, for the fact is there was a magnet here that I could not but follow, and another Christmas picnic on the Derwent, amidst the lovely woods and gardens that fringe a part of its banks completely settled me. The end of all which is Mary Deane became Mary Grantley, and here we are on our own lot, with very pretty farming and a capital dairy, and a good heart's welcome for you if you will only come out to us. Oh, I ought to say as a sequel that about a month after we settled down here one of the men came in and said there was a black fellow at the fence gate asking to speak to me. Out I went, and there, looking at me with a smile or rather a grin, was Jacky Fishook. "How do, sar?" said he. "Just come from Sydney, sar, to look for job. Massa take me for man, sar? yes? Jacky, sar, good black fellow, no stink-water, sar, ride sar, fish, shoot, fetch bullocks, sar? yes." [158]

"And then the spear, eh?" said I, frowning, "Who was it killed Buffalo Jim, you villain?"

"Buff'lo Jim, sar, bad white fellow, sar—he try kill Maori, but Maori too much not kill, sar. Jacky Fishook stupid fellow, sar—not know Maori—but Maori throw spear—yes." And there and then the muscular lithe figure was drawn up like a statue; the beady eye glaring straight forward, the arm poised as though to hurl a javelin. It was quite enough—I knew who had appeared suddenly in the sandy road that day. Buffalo Jim had come out to hunt, and had himself been tracked down and hunted.

But Jacky Fishook stayed with us. He is at this moment cleaning up my gun; and when I go shooting to-morrow he will carry home the game—parrots if we can get nothing better.

Your affectionate brother,  
TOM GRANTLEY.

Even though it is now a year or two ago that we parted with Miss Grantley, and Mrs. Parmigan took over the school at the request of the parents of the junior pupils, and was joined by a lady from London with famed certificates, none of us can speak without emotion of the happy time when we sat at work in the pretty old parlour or sat under the trees in the pleasant orchard. We are not all at Barton now, for Annie Bowers is studying art abroad, and Sarah Jorring, who is "engaged," is living with her friends at Barton; but those of us who are still in the Vale go and drink tea with Mrs. Parmigan sometimes, and none of us are likely to forget our governess and the stories that she used to tell.

[159]

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**Transcriber's Notes:**

Obvious punctuation errors have been corrected.

The remaining corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.

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\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MISS GRANTLEY'S GIRLS, AND THE STORIES SHE TOLD THEM \*\*\*

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