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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DAVID'S LITTLE LAD ***

L.T. Meade

"David's Little Lad"

Chapter One.

This is the Story within the Story.

Yes, I, Gwladys, must write it down; the whole country has heard of it, the newspapers have been full of it, and from the highest to the lowest in the land, people have spoken of the noble deed done by a few Welsh miners. But much as the country knows, and glad and proud as the country is, I don't think she knows quite all—not exactly what mother and I know; she does not know the heart history of those ten days. This is the story within the other well-known story, which I want to write here.

On a certain sunny afternoon in September, 1876, I was seated up in the window of the old nursery. I say *in* the window, for I had got my body well up on the deep oak seat, had flattened my nose against the pane, and was gazing with a pair of dismal eyes down on the sea, and on some corn-fields and hay-fields, which in panoramic fashion stretched before my vision.

Yes, I was feeling gloomy, and my first remark, after an interval of silence, was decidedly in keeping with my face and heart.

"Gwen," I said, "what is it to be buried alive?" Gwen, who was singing her charge to sleep to a lively Welsh air, neither heeded nor heard me.

"Gwen!" I repeated in a louder key.

"Men are false and oft ungrateful,
Derry derry dando,"

sang Gwen, rocking the baby, as she sang, in the most dexterous manner.

Gwen had a beautiful voice, and I liked the old air, so I stayed my impatient question to listen.

"Maids are coy and oft deceitful,
Derry derry dando,
Few there are who love sincerely,
Down a derry down.
Say not so, I love thee dearly,
Derry derry down down,
Derry down down derry."

"None but thee torment and tease me,
Derry derry dando,"

I shouted in my impetuous manner, and leaving my seat, I went noisily to her side.

"Gwen, I *will* be heard. I have not another soul to speak to, and you are so cross and disagreeable. What is it to be buried alive?"

"'Tis just like you, Gwladys," said Gwen, rising indignantly. "Just after two hours of it, when I was getting the darling precious lamb off to sleep, you've gone and awoken him. Dear, dear! good gracious! there never was such a maid!"

Gwen retired with the disturbed and wailing baby into the night nursery, and I was left alone.

"None but thee torment and tease me,
Derry derry dando,"

I sang after her.

Then I returned to my seat on the window-sill, curled myself up tighter than ever, flattened my nose again against the pane, and began to think out my dismal thoughts.

Yes, my thoughts were undoubtedly dismal, and very melancholy must my eyes have looked, and absurdly long and drawn down the corners of my mouth. Had anybody been there to see, they must have pronounced me sentimental in the extreme; but no one was by, and—there was the rub—that was the reason I looked so melancholy. Even Gwen, rocking baby to sleep, could be disturbed at least by my long drawn sighs, but Gwen had retired into the night nursery, out of reach of my despondency, and though I could hear her cheerful voice in the distance, she certainly could no longer hear me. I was utterly alone.

I pressed my face against the window pane, and gazed at the scene before me. It was a fair scene enough. A broad sweep of sea, the waves sparkling in the sunshine—some rugged rocks—a little patch of white sand; all this lay close. In the distance were some hills, magnificently clothed. To the right, I saw oak, ash, beech, in their autumn dress; to the left, yellow fields of corn, an orchard or two; some mowers were cutting down the corn, and laughing merrily; some children were eating apples in the orchards—over all a gentle breeze stirred, and the sun shone out of an almost cloudless sky.

Yes, the scene was very fair, but I did not appreciate it. My eyes had rested on those trees, and those hills, and that sea all my life—I was tired of the unvarying monotony. Nothing wearied me so much as when visitors came to stay with mother, visitors who did not know our country, and who consequently went into raptures over our Welsh scenery. I am quite sure now that the raptures were genuine, but at the time they seemed to me very like duty talk. I always listened contemptuously; I always answered carelessly, “Oh, yes, the place is well enough;” and I always thought bitterly in my heart of hearts.

It is easy for you, fine sir or madam, to speak and to admire, who need only stay in this place for a week or fortnight, but what if you had to live here *always*, from year’s end to year’s end. If you had to see the meadows, and orchards, and sea, and the old grey house, and the trees and sky—in short, all the fair landscape, not only in its summer glory, but in its winter desolation, would not the country then appear a little tiresome to you? Might you not then find an occasional visit to Cardiff, and an occasional ride across the fields, and a far from occasional stay at home, slightly wearying, and might it not possibly occur to you that yours was a dull life? For this was my fate. I had always lived at Tynycymmer. I had always seen the hills clothed with trees in the distance; I had always watched the ripening fruit in the orchards, and the ripening corn in the fields. In short, I was a Welsh girl who had never gone out of Wales in her life. Never had I even seen Gloucester, never had I set foot on English soil.

Circumstances too many to mention had conspired to thus isolate me. I had once paid a visit, when a little child, to North Wales, but all the rest of my sixteen years had been spent with mother, at Tynycymmer, in the county of Glamorganshire. A rich country, a rambling, romantic old home, a fair scene, where gentle care had tended me, this I acknowledged, but I also knew that I was tired, weary, sick of it all.

With my absurdly dismal face gazing outward, I repeated the question to myself, which nurse Gwen had refused to answer; “What is it to be buried alive?”

The question had arisen in my mind from a paragraph in a local paper, which I had seen to-day.

This paragraph was headed “*Buried alive.*”

It contained an account of some colliers in a not very distant part of Glamorganshire, who had been killed in a mining accident, truly buried in their full health and strength by the sudden giving way of a column of coal.

I had read the paragraph aloud to mother and David at breakfast.

I had seen David’s face flush and then grow pale, had heard mother say, “That place is not far from Ffynon; I am glad the accident did not happen in our mine, David.”

“Thank God! and it might have been,” from David.

Then mother added—

“Things will mend in the old place soon, my son.”

“I trust so,” from David.

Then expressions of pity and sympathy from both pairs of lips, for the injured and killed.

In this sympathy I had freely joined, for I was not hard-hearted; then I had forgotten the circumstance. The widows and children in the dismal coal country might be weeping and mourning, but I, Gwladys Morgan, in my fair home, in this fair land, had no room for them in my selfish heart. In half an hour I had ceased to remember the paragraph in the *Hereford Times*, all but its heading. But the heading, as I said, haunted me; it had another meaning besides going down into the bowels of the earth, and finding its walls close round one, and feeling oneself shut into a living tomb. It had another meaning besides the palpable and material horror of slow starvation and of coming madness. Of these things I could form no conception, but I could conceive of other things, and feel them through and through my childish and inexperienced heart. I imagined another meaning to the words, and this meaning I hunted up and pondered over, with a deeper and deeper melancholy, adding strength to my gloom.

Having roused up the skeleton, I clothed it with flesh, I filled its veins with warm young blood, I made its limbs fair and round, I gave to its face the healthy hue of youth, I coloured its eyes blue, and its hair a golden brown, and I called it, when I had given it life and being, Gwladys Morgan.

I took this fair young person of my creation, and buried her in a living tomb; true, the fresh air of heaven still blew upon her, the sun shone over her head, and the flowers blossomed at her feet. She could walk through lovely gardens, she could watch the coming and going of the fresh tide, on the fresh ocean, she could repose at night in the softest of beds, in a spacious oak-lined room. She could receive counsel and love, from the kind and tender lips of mother and brother. All this she could have, but still she was in a tomb, and the name of the tomb was Tynycymmer. Her body was free, as far as the walls of her prison allowed it, to roam, but her mind, with its noble aspirations, her soul, which had conceived great and possible commissions of wide and ever-widening usefulness, these were shut up in a tomb; in short, this feeling, breathing creature, with her talents and her longings, was buried alive.

Having consigned Gwladys to this fate, I went on to imagine the result. She would struggle in vain for freedom, she would beat with her wings—poor imprisoned bird—against her cage, she would pant and long for a less confined air, for emancipation from her living grave, she would suffer in uncomplaining silence, and then gradually, her mind would recoil upon itself, her aspiring soul would cease to struggle, and starved out with earth’s hard fate, would soar to nobler worlds!—(here my tears began to drop).

But I had not done yet; I imagined still further, and in all its minutest details, the body’s decay of this suffering creature. How thin and hollow, how pale and worn the once round and rosy cheeks would become! what a pathetic and far-away look of sad yearning would enter the blue eyes! how the curling hair would begin to grow!—I did not like the idea of the hair growing thin, it was not poetical—had not nurse Gwen a great bald division in her hair, a division clefting her raven locks asunder, deep and wide as a potato ridge? No, I substituted thin locks for grey, and so completed the picture.

Over my completed picture I should assuredly have wept, had not, at this opportune juncture, the blue eyes, which were certainly anything but dim as yet, descried, bowling smoothly along the road, and making swift advances to Tynycymmer, a little pony-carriage, driven by a pair of hands, very well fitted for their present task, that of keeping two spirited ponies in order. Into the long, winding avenue the carriage dashed, down the avenue it sped, and the next instant it had drawn up at the front entrance, and a large, strongly-made man was helping a delicate, stately woman to alight. The strong man was my brother, the woman was my mother.

Quick as lightning, I had left my seat in the nursery window, had wreathed my face with smiles, had filled my heart with laughter, had, for

the time being, banished every trace of the ugly, bad dream in which I had been indulging, had descended the stairs almost like an arrow from its bow, had lifted mother bodily up the steps, and placed her amid my own and David's laughter, in the old oak arm-chair, the family heirloom, the undoubted gift of some old Arch-Druid ancestor, which stood in the wide entrance hall.

"Well! mother, what an age you've been away! Did you catch the first train this morning? Aren't you dreadfully tired? What was it like, was it glorious? Were there crowds of people? Did the Bishop preach? Is the music ringing in your ears? Doesn't your head ache? And oh! *did* you get a new fashion for my blue silk gown?"

These questions I poured out, toppling them one over the other, down on my knees the while, removing mother's boots, and encasing her dear, pretty feet in a pair of warm, fur-lined slippers.

"I saw one or two nicely-dressed girls," began mother slowly, whereupon I suspended my operations with her feet, and looked up with a face of absorbed interest.

"And, Gwladys," said David, laying his hand on my shoulder, "you are to come to-morrow, the Messiah is to be sung, and I will take you over."

"Oh! oh! oh!" I exclaimed, beginning to dance about, but then observing that mother was gazing at me a little sadly, I stopped short, and exclaimed with a sudden burst of unselfishness—

"The pony-carriage only holds two; I don't want to take mother's place."

"No, my darling, I am tired, I should not care to go again to-morrow, and I want you to hear the Messiah."

"We must start even earlier than to-day, Gwladys," continued David, as he led the way to the supper-room. "We nearly missed the train this morning, and I have unfortunately failed to get reserved seats, but you don't mind a crowd?"

"I *love* a crowd," I answered energetically; looking and feeling, as I spoke, a totally different creature from the sentimental being who had gazed with dismal eyes from the nursery window, half an hour before.

"What kind of voice had Madame Edith Wynne, mother, and did you hear Sims Reeves?"

"Sims Reeves did not sing to-day, but he will to-morrow in the Messiah," replied mother.

"And I shall be there to-morrow!" I exclaimed again, then a sudden thought darted through my brain, and I fell into a reverie.

In my great excitement and delight at the prospect of going to Hereford, to the festival of the Three Choirs, I had forgotten something which now returned to my memory with painful consciousness. I had nothing to wear. My blue silk, my beautiful navy blue, mother's last present, was still unmade, and my white dress was with the laundress. My white dress, though simple and childish, was new and tolerably fashionable, and in no other could I think of appearing before the great and gay world of Hereford, on this my first visit.

"Mother," I said, jumping from my seat, and upsetting a cup of hot tea over Gyp the terrier, "I must go this very moment to speak to Nancy at the lodge; she has got my frock, and she must iron it to-night."

Without waiting for a reply, I ran out of the room, and bonnetless and hatless sped up the avenue. The light autumn breeze tossed my curls into wild confusion, my gay voice rose, humming a merry Welsh air. Very far away now were my gloomy thoughts, very like a child I felt, as I walked on. My mind was fully occupied with my promised treat, my dreams were all rainbow tinted, my world all tinged with sunshine and glory. The only cloud that shadowed the gay expanse of my firmament was the possibility of my white dress not being ironed in time for me to wear.

Chapter Two.

David, I am Tired of Tynycymmer.

When I reached the lodge, Nancy, a stout, red-faced Welsh woman, came out to meet me, accompanied by a troupe of wild-looking children, who stood round and stared with open eyes and mouths, for Miss Morgan of Tynycymmer was a great person in their eyes.

"Is my white dress ready? Nancy; I want to wear it to-morrow morning early."

"Eh! dear, dear, Miss Gwladys," dropping a profound curtsey. "Eh! goodness me! yes, I'll h'iron it to-night, miss. Get out of that, Tum," addressing her sturdy-limbed son, who had placed himself between his mother and me.

"I know what Tum wants," I said. "Here, Tum, Dai, Maggie, catch!"

I threw some halfpence amongst the children, and turned away.

As I did so, two ladies came out of the lodge; one, a handsome dark-eyed girl, a casual acquaintance of mine, came eagerly to my side.

"Now, Miss Morgan, I call this provoking; what right have you to go away, just when I want to know you!"

"What do you mean?" I asked, bluntly.

"You are going away from Tynycymmer?"

"Indeed we are not," I said.

"Well, but my mother heard it from—oh! I forgot," blushing deeply and looking confused. "I was not to say. Of course it is not the case, or you would know—just idle gossip; I am sorry I mentioned it, but so glad you are not going."

"Good-night," I said, holding out my hand.

I had retraced a few steps home, when my little friend ran after me.

"Please, please, Miss Morgan, you won't speak of this; I should get into trouble, indeed."

"Oh, dear, no!" I answered, lightly; "there is nothing to repeat. Make your mind easy."

The girl, satisfied, ran away, and I walked on.

But I was not so cool and unconcerned as she supposed her words had excited me, her words had aroused both discontent and hope. I

forgot my certain pleasure of to-morrow, in the bare possibility of a greater and a wider pleasure, and as a moth round a candle, my thoughts fluttered round the magic words, "You are going away."

Could they be true? could the gossip the girl had heard be correct? How certain she looked! how startled and frightened, when she found herself mistaken. And, little fool! she had made me promise not to betray her, just too when I wanted to solve the mystery. Oh, if only she might be right! if only we might be going to leave this dull life, this stupid country existence! Could it be the case? gossip was often mistaken, but seldom utterly without foundation. I asked myself this question tremblingly and eagerly. Instantly I had a reply. Sober reason started to the forefront of all my faculties, and said—

"It is impossible; the girl has made a mistake; the gossip is false. How could you leave Tynycymmer? Is not David master here? does not the place belong to David, as it did to his father before him? and do not he and mother love every stone in the old house, every tree in the old ground? would not the idea, the most distant idea, of going away break their hearts?"

Yes, it was quite out of the question that mother and David could think of leaving Tynycymmer. But my little friend had said nothing about mother and David, she had only whispered the delicious and soul-stirring words, "*You* are going away."

Perhaps I was going to school; perhaps some London cousins had asked me to pay them a visit. Oh! yes, this last thought must be right, and how pleasant, how lovely, how charming that would be! I should see the Houses of Parliament, and Westminster, and visit the Parks, and the Museums, and Madame Tussaud's.

Yes, certainly this was going to happen. Mother had not told me yet, which was a little strange, but perhaps she had heard it herself very suddenly, and had met some friends, and had mentioned it to them. Yes, this must be the mystery, this must be the fire from whence the smoke of Sybil's gossip came. I felt it tingling from my throat down to my very toes. I was *not* going to be buried alive. So cruel a fate was not in store for me. I should see the world—the world of beauty, of romance, of love, and all possible things might happen to me. I skipped along gaily.

David was smoking his pipe, and pacing up and down under some trees which grew near the house. The short September sun had set, but the moon had got up, and in the little space of ground where my brother walked, it was shedding a white light, and bringing into relief his strongly marked features.

David's special characteristic was strength; he possessed strength of body, and strength of—mind, I was going to say, but I shall substitute the word soul. His rugged features, his height, his muscular hands and arms, all testified to his great physical powers. And the repose on his face, the calm gentleness and sweetness that shone in his keen, dark eyes, and played round his firm lips, showed how strong his soul must be—for David had known great trouble.

I mention his strength of character here, speaking of it first of all in introducing him into my story, for the simple reason that when I saw him standing under the trees, I perceived by the expression of his face, that he was yielding to a most unusual emotion; he looked anxious, even unhappy. This I took in with a kind of side thought, to be recurred to by and by, but at present I was too much excited about myself. I walked with him nearly every evening when he smoked, and now I went to my usual place, and put my hand through his arm. I longed to ask him if the surmise, which was agitating my whole being, was correct, but by doing this I should betray Sybil, and I must not even mention that I had seen her.

"What bright cheeks, and what a happy face!" said David, looking at me affectionately, "are you very glad to come to the Messiah with me? little woman."

"Yes," I answered absently, for to-morrow's treat had sunk into insignificance. Then out it came with a great irrepressible burst, "David, I am *longing* to see London."

David, who knew nothing of my discontent, who imagined me to be, what I always appeared to him, a child without the shadow of a care, or a sorrow, without even the ghost of a longing outside my own peaceful existence, answered in the tone of surprise which men can throw into their voices when they are not quite comfortable.

"London, my dear Gwladys."

"Yes, why not?"

"Well, we don't live so very far away from London, you may see it some day."

It was quite evident, by David's indifferent tone, that he knew nothing of any immediate visit in store for me. I bit my lips hard, and tried to say nothing. I am sure I should not have spoken but for his next words.

"And in the meantime you can wait; you are very happy, are you not?"

"No, I am not. I'm not a bit happy, David," and I burst into tears.

"What's this?" said David in astonishment.

"I am not happy," I repeated, now that the ice was broken, letting forth some of my rebellious thoughts, "I'm so dull here, I do so want to live a grand life."

"Tell me, dear, tell me all about it?" said David tenderly. To judge from the tone of his voice he seemed to be taking himself to task in some strange way. The love in his voice disarmed my anger, and I spoke more gently.

"You see, David, 'tis just this, you and mother have got Tynycymmer, you have the house, and the farm, and all the land, and, of course, you have plenty to do on the land, riding about and seeing to the estate, and keeping the tenants' houses in order, and 'tis very nice work, for 'tis all your own property, and of course you love it; and mother, she has the house to manage, and the schools to visit, but I, David, I have only dull, stupid lessons. I have nothing interesting to do, and oh! sometimes I am so dull and so miserable, I feel just as if I was buried alive, and I do so want to be unburied. I have no companions. I have no one to speak to, and I do long to go away from here, and to see the world."

"You would like to leave Tynycymmer!" said David.

"Yes, indeed, indeed I should. I should dearly love to go out into the world as Owen has done; I think Owen has such a grand life."

Here I paused, and finding that David did not reply, I ventured to look into his face. The expression of his silent face was peculiar; it showed, though not a muscle moved, though not a feature stirred, the presence of some very painful thought. I could not believe that my words had given birth to this thought, but I did consider it possible that they might have called it into fuller being; quickly repentant I began to apologise, or to try to apologise, the sting out of my words.

"You know, David, that you and mother are not like me, you both have plenty to interest you here. Mother has the schools, and, oh! a thousand other things, and you have the place and the farm."

“And I have my little lad.”

“Of course—I forgot baby.”

“Yes, Gwladys,” said David, rousing himself and shaking off his depression, “I have my son, and he won’t leave me, thank God. I am sorry you find your home dull, my dear. I have always wanted you to love it, there is no place like it on earth to me.”

He took my hand very gently, and removed it from his arm, then walked with great strides into the house. His face and manner filled me with an undefined sense of gloom and remorse.

I followed him like a guilty thing. I would not even go into the drawing-room to bid mother good-night, but went at once up to my own room. When I got there, I locked the door; this conversation had not tended to raise my spirits. As I sat on my bed, I felt very uncomfortable.

What an old, old room it was, and all of oak, floor, walls, ceiling, all highly-polished, and dark with the wear of age. Other Gwladys Morgans had carved their names on the shutters, and had laid down to rest on the great four-post bedstead. Other daughters of the house had stood in the moonlight and watched the silent shining of the waves. Had they too, in their ignorance and folly, longed for the bustle and unrest of the great wide world, had they, too, felt themselves buried alive at Tynycymmer? With David’s face in my memory, I did not like these thoughts. I would banish them. I opened a door which divided my room from the nursery, and went noisily in. What an awkward girl I was! I could do nothing like any one else; every door I opened, shut again with a bang, every board my foot pressed, creaked with a sharp note of vengeance. Had nurse Gwen been in the nursery, what a scolding I should have merited, but nurse Gwen was absent, and in the moonlit room I advanced and bent over a little child’s cot. In the cot lay a boy of between one and two, a rosy, handsome boy, with sturdy limbs, and great dark-fringed eyes; he was sleeping peacefully, and smiling in his sleep; one little fat hand grasped a curly, woolly toy dog, the other was flung outside the bedclothes; his little pink toes were also bare. With undefined pain still in my heart, and David’s face vividly before me, I bent down and kissed the child. I kissed him passionately, forgetting his peculiar sensitiveness to touch. He started from his light slumbers with a shrill baby cry, his dark eyes opened wide. I took him out of his crib, and paced up and down with him. For a wonder I managed to soothe him, skilfully addressing him in my softest tones, rubbing my forehead against his soft cheek, and patting his back. The moon had left this side of the house, and the room was in complete shadow, but I did not think of lighting a candle, for to the child in my arms the darkness was too dense for any earthly candle to remove; he was David’s little lad, and he was blind.

Chapter Three.

Some Day, you will See that he is Noble.

I have said that David’s great characteristic was strength, but by this I do not at all mean to imply that he was clever. No one ever yet had called David clever. When at school he had won only second or third class prizes, and at Oxford very few honours had come in his way.

He had a low opinion of his own abilities, and considered himself a rather stupid, lumbering kind of fellow, not put into the world to make a commotion, but simply, as far as in him lay, to do his duty.

David was never known to lecture any one; he never, in the whole course of his life, gave a piece of gratuitous advice; he could and did advise when his advice was directly demanded, but he was diffident of his own opinion, and did not consider it worth a great deal. To the sinners he was always intensely pitiful, and so gentle and sorrowful over the erring, that many people must have supposed he knew all about their weaknesses, and must once have been the blackest of black sheep himself.

No, David possessed none of the characteristics of genius; he was neither clever nor ambitious. To be in all men’s mouths, and spoken highly of by the world, would not have suited him at all; he cared, we some of us thought, almost too little for man’s opinion, and I have even on one occasion heard Owen call him poor-spirited.

But all the same, I am not wrong in saying that David’s great, and grand, and distinguishing characteristic was strength. He possessed strength of body, soul, and spirit, to a remarkable degree. Long ago, in the past ages, there were men of our house, men who ate roast beef, and quaffed beer and cider, and knew nothing of the weak effeminacy of tea and coffee; these were the men who would laugh at a nerve ache, who possessed iron frames, and were of goodly stature. Of course we degenerated since then, our lives became less simple, and more luxurious, and our men and women in their paler cheeks and slighter frames, and bodies capable of feeling bodily suffering, bore witness to the change.

But David was a Morgan of the old race—tall, upright, broad, with massive features, neither handsome nor graceful, but strong as a lion. He had never in his life known an ache, or a day’s serious illness. When Owen and I suffered so much with the measles, David did not even stay in bed; so also with whooping-cough, so also with all other childish maladies. He caught them of course, but they passed over him lightly as a summer breeze, never once ruffling his brow, or taking the colour from his cheek. Yes, David was strong in body, and he was also strong in mind; without possessing talent, he had what was better, sense; he knew which path was the wisest to tread in, which course of action would lead, not to the happiest, but to the best result. His mind was of that calm and rare order, which decides quickly, and once for all; he was never troubled with indecision, and he never asked of others, “What shall I do here? There is a lion in my path at this juncture, how shall I overcome him?” No, he slew his own lions, and in a silent warfare, which gave no token of the tears and blood expended by the victorious warrior.

But the strongest part of David, that which made him the man he was, was his soul; and here, he had asked for and obtained, the aid of a higher Power.

His was the sort of character that never could have got on without the conscious presence of a God. His soul must be anchored upon some rock which would balance the whole equilibrium of a grand but simple nature.

His faith was primitive, and undisturbed by modern doubts. He took the commandments of God in their obvious and literal meaning, he believed what the apostle said when he told men to “pray without ceasing;” he hearkened to him again, when he entreated men to “search the Scriptures;” he was a man of few rather than of many words, but he always found some to cry to God with; he cared very little for books, but he read his Bible daily. Thus his views of life were clear and unclouded. He was put into the world to do his duty. His duty was to love God better than, and his neighbour as well as, himself. This simple rule of action comprises much, and here David acted right nobly, and proved the strength of his soul. And he was early tried, for our father died when he was twelve years old, and then the most obvious part of the duty which stared him in the face lay in the text, “Bear ye one another’s burdens.” This was one of David’s plainest and earliest duties; a duty which he performed humbly, hardly knowing that he performed it at all. Others leant upon him, and he bore their burdens, so fulfilling the law of Christ.

I think I may truly say of David, that he was the most self-sacrificing man I ever met.

But for all that, for all his gentleness, his kindness, his affection, he was not my favourite brother, nor was he my mother’s favourite son.

I remember an early incident which revealed this fact in my mother's heart, and perhaps unduly biased my own.

I was standing, shortly after my father's death, in the deep recess of the nursery window—I was standing there watching David and Owen, both home for their holidays, pacing up and down on the gravel sweep in front of the house. David was very strong, and showed his superior strength in his great size even then, but Owen was very beautiful. David was stout and clumsy, Owen slightly made and graceful. As I watched them, mother came behind me, put her arms round my tiny waist, kissed my brow, and whispered as she looked at the two lads—

“My noble boy!”

“Which? mother,” I asked.

“My Owen,” replied mother.

I opened my eyes very wide, gazed again with new wisdom at the boys, perceived the superior beauty of the one, worshipped the beauty, and from this time I loved Owen best.

And Owen was very lovable, Owen was beautiful, brilliant, gay, with lofty ambitions, and versatile showy talents. If his affections wanted depth, they never wanted outward warmth. His smile was a thing to remember, his caress was worth waiting six months to obtain. How well I remember those summer holidays, when he flashed like the sunshine into the dull old house, when his whistle and gay laugh sounded from parlour to cellar. When Owen was at home, Tynycymmer was the happiest place in the world to me; then mother put on her best gowns, and wore her most festive air, then my lessons, always scant and desultory, were thrown to the four winds, and I was allowed unbridled liberty. What fishing expeditions we made all round the coast! how daring were our exploits!

I was much younger than my brothers, but the brothers were always gentle to the only little sister—both the brothers—but while I oftenest rode on David's broad shoulder, I received most caresses and most loving words from Owen, so I loved Owen best. So too with mother, she thought very highly of that broad-shouldered, plain-faced, sensible lad, who was so ready to fly at her slightest bidding, so anxious to execute her smallest command. She said over and over again that David was the best boy that widowed mother ever possessed, and that he was the comfort of her life. But her eye never brightened at his approach, as it did when Owen came and sat by her side; to David she gave her approval, but to Owen she gave of the fulness of her mother's love.

He was an exacting boy, and from those who gave much, he demanded more.

Though David was the eldest and the heir, Owen had double his allowance of pocket money when at school; but then Owen was delicate, fastidious, refined; he needed small indulgences, that would have been wasted on David's coarser strength. He was taught accomplishments, for he was an inborn artist, and his musical ear was fine. At Oxford he entered an expensive and learned college, but then his intellect was of the first order. For every indulgence he demanded, an excuse was found; and for every granted indulgence, he was only loved the more.

To the worship of his women folks, Owen returned an easy, nonchalant regard; but David he loved, to David he gave his strongest and deepest affection. And yet David was the only one who opposed him, the only one who was not carried away by his fascinations, the only one who read him aright; and some of the heaviest burdens of David's youth, had been borne because of, and through Owen. I heard it dimly whispered, first in the early college days, something about Owen and his wild oats. It came to me through the servants, and I did not know what it meant. I was an innocent country child, I had never even read a novel. Owen was sowing his wild oats. I remember puzzling over the phrased I should have forgotten what was to me so meaningless an expression, but for some events that happened about the same time. Mother got some letters, which she would not show to me, which she carried away to her own room to read, returning to my presence, some time after, with her eyes red with weeping. Then there was a visit from a man, a lawyer, nurse Gwen informed me, who brought with him piles of papers, and was closeted with mother for the best part of a day; and soon after, most wonderful of all, David came home suddenly, in the middle of the term, came home without Owen, and I was informed that Owen had gone abroad for a time, and that David was not going back to Oxford any more. David settled down quietly at home, without taking his degree, and his coming of age, which took place a couple of months after, was let pass without any celebration. This made a deep impression on me, for we four, mother, David, Owen, and I, had so often spoken of it, and of the grand things that should then be done. Never a Morgan had come of age yet, without oxen being roasted whole, without beer and cider flowing freely, without dancing and festivity. But this Morgan stepped into his honours quietly; the day unnoticed, except by an extra kiss from mother and sister, his brother far away, his own brow thoughtful, and already slightly careworn.

The tenants were angry, and voted him stingy—close—an unworthy son of the ancient race, no true chip of the old block, and fresh signs of what they considered closeness and nearness, were soon forthcoming. Several servants, amongst them the housekeeper, were dismissed, the establishment was put upon a smaller scale, a humble pony phaeton was substituted for the old and time-honoured family coach. I was twelve years old at that time, a good deal with nurse Gwen, and many words, unmeant for my ears, were heard by me. The substance of them all lay in this remark—

“If the young master gave the tenants any more of his closeness, he would be the least popular Squire Morgan who ever lived at Tynycymmer!”

Indignant, and with tears in my eyes, I sought David, told him what I had heard, and demanded an explanation.

“There is nothing to explain, dear,” he replied. “We have lost some money, and are obliged to retrench for a bit. But don't repeat the servants' foolish talk to the mother, Gwladys, 'twill only pain her.”

After this, we settled down very quietly, no fresh event occurring for some time. David went more and more amongst the people, acquainting himself with every man, woman, and child on the estate, winning his way just in the most natural way into their hearts, learning all about their private history, finding out exactly where the shoe pinched John Thomas, and where Thomas John's sorest trouble lay, until gradually I heard nothing more of his stinginess, but much of his love, and when he took the babies in his arms, and called the tiny children by their names, the mothers prayed God to bless the young squire with a fervour they had never used for the old.

This took place very naturally, and mother's face began to grow contented and happy. Still, Owen never came home; he was spoken of lovingly, hopefully, but neither mother nor David mentioned his return, and I grew tired of asking questions on this subject, and tired of wishing him back. I dreamed dreams of him instead, and imagined with pride the great deeds he must be doing, and the glory he must be winning. So far away, so little mentioned, his return so indefinite, he became clothed with a halo of romance to me. My love grew in intensity, and I magnified my beautiful and gifted brother into a hero. It was just then David's great joy, and also his great trouble, came to him.

We Morgans of Tynycymmer were very proud. Why not? we were poor, old, and Welsh—quite enough to account for any haughtiness we might assume. We believed ourselves to be, if not the direct descendants, at least a collateral branch of that Morgan, son of Leir, some time a king of this land, after whom this county was named. There was a time when to be a true Morgan, of Glamorganshire, meant more to its happy possessor than many a higher sounding title. Of course that time and its glory had passed away, years had deprived us of more than the old stout hearts of our ancient ancestors; our gold had also taken to itself wings, our grey and ivy-covered home had fallen, much of it, into ruins, and our broad and goodly acres passed into the unloving hands of strangers. Still, firmly as the limpet to the

rock, the poorer we grew, the more did we attach ourselves to the wild old Welsh country. Each squire of Tynycymmer bringing home, in his turn, a bride who often possessed neither money nor beauty; but always something else, without which she could never have married a Morgan of our house—she had pure, untainted Welsh blood in her veins. None of the Morgans were so foolish, so unfaithful to the old stock, as to marry an English woman; if our gold was scant, our blood at least was pure. So we went on, each fresh master of Tynycymmer a little poorer than his father, when suddenly and unexpectedly a chance came in our way. There was born into the world, a Morgan either more sensible or more lucky than his progenitors; a Morgan who, going abroad to seek a bride, brought home one who not only could boast of blue Welsh blood, but had also beauty and a fortune. This lucky Morgan was my father, his rich and lovely bride my mother.

Esther Williams was the daughter of a Glamorganshire man. Her father possessed, at the other side of the county, a fine extent of coal country, and a very large fortune was he able to bestow upon his only child. The fortune consisted of some coalfields, and with the rental from these my father was able to restore Tynycymmer to much of its ancient splendour. My mother's family was not so old as ours, but being true Welsh, and having beauty and a fortune, this fact was graciously overlooked by us, and we condescended to use her money to our own aggrandisement. I have said that we were a proud family—but of us all, there was none who so upheld the family traditions, and who so rejoiced in the family honour, as the one who was herself only a Morgan by marriage, my mother.

Of the days when she was only Esther Williams, she never cared to speak; her money was never "her money," but the "Morgans' money." Money that brought fresh glory to the old house, was honoured indeed—she regarded herself individually, as a humble instrument destined to do much good—for herself, her appearance, her character, she felt little pride or satisfaction; but for the sake of the name given to her by her husband, she would indeed walk with stately mien, and uphold her dignity to the last; and well she could do it, for though a little woman, she was singularly dignified and graceful-looking, and was, in short, every inch worthy of the high position she believed herself to have attained. She possessed the dark eyes and raven locks of the true Welsh woman. How I came to be fair-haired and blue-eyed remained a mystery, and was reckoned rather a disgrace. When a tiny child, Gwen had impressed this fact upon me, and I remember blushing and looking distressed, when fair people were mentioned. Yes, my mother was a beautiful woman; I have a vivid memory of her, as she looked in my father's lifetime, dressed in the time-honoured black velvet, the old jewels flashing in her hair, as bending down her haughty dark face, until it touched my fair one, she filled my greedy and receptive little brain with the ancient stories of our house.

I heard of the ghosts and the deeds of vengeance from Gwen, of the fairies and deeds of glory from mother.

Yes, my mother was very beautiful, and with the exception of two specks in the fair fruit of her heart, the best woman I know. How loving she was, how tender, how strong, how brave! But the specks marred the full perfection: one speck was her pride, the other her unjust preference for Owen. At the time of which I write, I did not consider this preference unjust, for I too loved Owen best, but even then I had felt the full power of her pride. I mention it here in order to make David's sorrow and David's joy more fully understood.

Those retrenchments which took place when David came of age, were no small sorrow to mother. When the housekeeper went away, and many of the servants were dismissed, when the old coach was not sold, but put out of sight in some unused coach-house, when the horses were parted with to the highest bidder;—mother felt pain, though of her feelings she never spoke, and to their expression she gave no vent; her pride was hurt by this lowering of the Morgans' importance, but her very pride was its own shield in preventing its betrayal, and *she* knew then, though I did not, why these things were done. But a year later, that pride received another blow. I remember the beginning of it. The postman brought to us a letter. I say to *us*, for all our letters, with the exception of those few received when David returned so suddenly from Oxford, were public property. This letter contained news. A distant cousin of mother's had died in London; had died and left one orphan daughter quite unprovided for. This cousin was a Williams, but though calling himself by the well-known Welsh name, was no true Welshman: his family had long ago settled in England, had married English wives, and had become, in mother's opinion, nobodies. The unprovided daughter had not written herself, knew nothing indeed about the letter, but a friend of hers in despair how best to help her, had ventured to inform Mrs Morgan of Tynycymmer, that her cousin's child was a pauper.

"Have her here on a visit," said David, promptly.

Mother, her heart full of sorrow and pity for the lonely girl, assented at once. Amy Williams was invited and came.

And now came mother's trouble and the shock to her pride, for David fell in love with the penniless English girl.

I am not surprised at it, and looking back on it now, I am glad. Amy was the only person I ever met who understood David, and who appreciated him. I am glad for his sake, and hers, that they had one short happy year together. For however tender and considerate David was with mother, on this point he was firm; he thought more of Amy's happiness than mother's pride, and he married Amy though mother opposed it bitterly. Of course I did not hear a great deal about it. I was very young, only fourteen, at the time, and mother ever kept her feelings well under control, and not one of the servants even guessed how much she disapproved of this marriage; but I remember on David's and Amy's wedding-day, running in to mother to show her my white muslin bride's-maid's dress, and mother kissing me, and then saying, with concentrated bitterness, "Had Owen been the eldest son, whatever his faults, he would never have given me the pain David has done to-day."

Fond and proud as I was of Owen, I did not quite like mother to say that of David on his wedding-day. Well, he and Amy were married; they spent a week in North Wales, another week in London, and then came home. Mother wanted to transfer the reins of authority into Amy's hands, but Amy would not take them; she was the meekest little thing I ever knew, she was quite too meek to please me. I never got to know her, I never really cared for her; but she suited our David, and he suited her. His presence was to her as the sun to the flower, and truly he was a great sun for the little fragile thing to bask in. I am sure she had a great deal in her which David alone could draw out, for after talking to her he always looked happy, his whole face in a glow. Looking back on it now, I can recall nothing brighter than David's face during that year. I have said that Amy was meek, I never remember her showing any spirit but once, but that occasion I shall not quickly forget. She and I were sitting together in the arbour overhanging the sea. She was not very well, and was lying back in a little wicker chair, and I was seated at her feet, arranging different coloured sea weeds. As I worked, I talked of Owen. I did not mean it in the least, but as I spoke of my favourite brother, of his beauty and talent, I unconsciously used David as a foil to show him off by. I was speaking more to myself than to Amy. I was not thinking of her at all.

Suddenly she started to her feet, her pale face grew crimson, her soft brown eyes flashed angrily.

"Gwladys," she said, "little as you think of David now, some day you will see that he is a nobler man than a thousand of your Owens."

"How can you speak so, when you don't know Owen," I retorted, the hot blood of the Morgans flying into my cheeks at this unexpected show of spirit.

"I know David," she replied, and she burst into tears.

Poor little Amy! that night a son was born to her and David, and that night she died.

Perhaps had mother and I understood Amy, and cared for her more, David might have told us something of the sorrow which followed quickly on his joy. Most of the time between Amy's death and her funeral, he spent in her room. After the funeral he went away for a week; he told neither mother nor me where he was going! we never heard how or in what part of the world he spent that week; on his return he never mentioned the subject. But his face, which on the day of Amy's funeral was convulsed with agony, was after that short

absence peaceful, and, I say it without expecting to be misunderstood, even happy.

It was about this time I really noticed what a religious man my brother was. With all his want of talent, he knew the Bible very well, and I think he was well acquainted with God. It must have been God who gave him power to act as he did now, for if ever a man truly loved a woman, he loved Amy; but he never showed his sorrow to mother and me; he never appeared before us with a gloomy brow. After a time even, his face awoke into that pathetic joy which follows the right reception of a great sorrow.

I *did* once see him, when he thought no one was by, dropping great tears over the baby.

“My boy, my little motherless lad,” I heard him say.

I longed to go up and comfort him; I longed to tell him that I cared for Amy now, but I did not dare. Mother, too, who had not loved her in life, could not speak of her in death. So David could only tell his sorrow to God, and God comforted and heard him, and the baby grew, healthy, handsome, strong, worthy in his beauty and his strength of the proudest Morgan of the race, and David loved him; but, alas! the little lad was blind.

Chapter Four.

Owen is Coming Home.

I managed to hush little David into a sound sleep, before Gwen returned from her supper in the old servants' hall. When I had done so, I went back to my room and undressed quickly, hoping much that I too would soon sink into slumber, for I was in that semi-frightened and semi-excited condition, when Gwen's stories about the Green Lady—our Welsh Banshee—and other ghostly legends, would come popping under my eyelids, and forcing me to look about the room with undefined uneasiness. I did sleep soundly, however; and in the morning the brilliant sunshine, the dancing waves which I could even see from my bed, put all my uncomfortable fears to rest. To-day I was to visit Hereford, for the first time to set my foot on English soil. Laid out on a chair close by, lay my clean white muslin dress. I must get up at once, for we were to start early, the distance from our part of Glamorganshire to Hereford being very considerable. I rose and approached the window with a dancing step; the day was perfection, a few feathery clouds floated here and there in the clear blue of the sky, the sea quivered in thousands of jubilant silver waves, the trees crimsoned into all the fulness of their autumnal beauty. My heart responded to the brightness of the morning; ages back lay the ugly dreams and discontented thoughts of yesterday. I was no longer enduring the slow torture of a death-in-life existence. I was breathing the free air of a world full of love, glory, happiness. In short, I was a gay girl of sixteen, going out for a holiday. I put on my white dress. I tied blue ribbon wherever blue ribbon could be tied. I had never worn a bonnet in my life, so I perched a broad white hat over my clustering fair curls, made a few grimaces at myself in the glass, for reflecting back a pink and white and blue-eyed image, instead of the proper dark splendour of the true Morgans; consoled myself with the thought that even blue eyes could take in the beauties of Hereford, and ears protected by a fair skin, could yet communicate to the soul some musical joys. I danced downstairs, kissed mother and David rapturously, trod on Gyp's tail, but was too much excited, and too impatient, to pat him or beg his pardon; found, under existing circumstances, the eating of a commonplace ordinary breakfast, a feat wholly impossible; seated myself in the pony-carriage full ten minutes before it started; jumped out again, at the risk of breaking my neck, to adorn the ponies' heads with a few of the last summer roses; stuck a splendid crimson bud into my own belt; hurried David off some minutes too soon for the train; forgot to kiss mother, and blew a few of those delightful salutes vigorously at her instead; finally, started with a full clear hurrah, coming from a pair of very healthy lungs, prompted by a heart filled, brimming over, leaping up with irrepressible joy. Oh! that summer morning! Oh! that young and happy heart! Could I have guessed then, what almost all men have to learn, that not under the cloudless sky, not by the summer sea, but with the pitiless rain dropping, and the angry waves leaping high, and threatening to engulf all that life holds dearest, have most of God's creation to find their Creator? Could I have guessed that on this summer day the first tiny cloud was to appear, faint as the speck of a man's hand, which was to show me, in the awful gloom of sorrow, the face of my God?

From my fancied woes, I was to plunge into the stern reality, and it was all to begin to-day. When we got into the train, and were whirling away in the direction of that border county, which was to represent England to me, my excitement had so far toned down as to allow me to observe David, and David's face gave to my sensations a feeling scarcely of uneasiness, but scarcely, either, of added joy. Any one who did not know him intimately, would have said what a happy, genial-looking man my brother was. Not a wrinkle showed on his broad forehead, and no shadow lurked in his kind eyes; but I, who knew him, recognised an expression which had come into his face once or twice, but was hardly habitual to it. I could not have told, on that summer morning, what the expression meant, or what it testified. I could not have read it in my childish joy; but now, in the sober light of memory, I recall David's face as it looked on that September day, and in the knowledge born of my sorrow, I can tell something of its story.

My brother had looked like this twice before—once on his unexpected return from Oxford; once, more strongly, when Amy died. The look on David's face to-day, was the look born of a resolution—the resolution of a strong man to do his duty, at the risk of personal pain. As I said, I read nothing of this at the time; but his face touched me. I remembered that I had rather pained him last night. We had the carriage to ourselves. I bent forward and kissed him; tossed my hat off, and laid my head against his breast. In this attitude, I raised to him the happiest of faces, and spoke the happiest of words.

“David, the world is just delicious, and I do love you.”

David, a man of few words, responded with a smile, and his invariable expression—

“That's right, little woman.”

After a time, he began to speak of the festival.

He had been at the last celebration of the Three Choirs at Hereford. He told me a few of his sensations then, and also something of what he felt yesterday; he had a true Welshman's love of music, and he spoke enthusiastically.

“Yes, Gwladys, it lifts one up,” he said, in conclusion, “I'd like to listen to those choirs in the old cathedral, or go to the top of the Brecon—'tis much the same, the sensation, I mean—they both lift one into finer air. And what a grand thing that is, little woman,” he added, “I mean when anything lifts us right out of ourselves. I mean when we cease to look down at our feet, and cease to look for ever at our own poor sorrows, and gaze right straight away from them all into the face of God.”

“Yes,” I said, in a puzzled voice, for of course I knew nothing of these sensations; then, still in my childish manner, “I expect to enjoy it beyond anything; for you know, David, I have never been in any cathedral except Llandaff, and I have never heard the ‘Messiah.’”

“Well, my dear, you will enjoy it to-day; but more the second time, I doubt not.”

“Why? David.”

“Because there are depths in it, which life must teach you to understand.”

“But, dear David, I often have had *such* sad thoughts.”

"Poor child!" a touch of his hand on my head, then no more words from either of us.

Just before we reached Hereford, as I was drawing on my long white gloves, which I had thrown aside as an unpleasant restraint during the journey, David said one thing more, "When the service is over, Gwladys, we will walk round the Close, if you don't mind, for I have got something I want to tell you."

It darted into my head, at these words, that perhaps I was going to London after all. The thought remained for only an instant, it was quickly crowded out, with the host of new sensations which all compressed themselves into the next few hours.

No, I shall never forget it, when I have grey hairs I shall remember it. I may marry some day, and have children, and then again grandchildren, and I shall ever reserve as one of the sweetest, rarest stories, the kind of story one tells to a little sick child, or whispers on Sunday evenings, what I felt when I first listened to Handel's "Messiah." David had said that I should care more for it the second time. This was possible, for my feelings now were hardly those of pleasure, even to-day depths were stirred within me, which must respond with a tension akin to pain. I had been in a light and holiday mood, my gay heart was all in the sunshine of a butterfly and unawakened existence; and the music, while it aroused me, brought with it a sense of shadow, of oppression which mingled with my joy. Heaven ceased to be a myth, an uncertain possibility, as I listened to the full burst of the choruses, or held my breath as one single voice floated through the air in quivering notes of sweetness. What had I thought, hitherto, of Jesus Christ? I had given to His history an intellectual belief. I had assented to the fact that He had borne my sins, and "The Lord had laid on Him the iniquity of us all;" but with the ponderous notes of the heavy music, came the crushing knowledge that *my* iniquities had added to His sorrows, and helped to make Him acquainted with grief. I was in no sense a religious girl; but when "Come unto Him, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and He will give you rest," reached my ears, I felt vibrating through my heart strings, the certainty that some day I should need this rest. "Take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him."

"His yoke is easy, and His burden is light." I looked at David, the book had fallen from his hands, his fine face was full of a kind of radiance, and the burden which had taken from him Amy, and the yoke which bade him resign his own will and deny himself, seemed to be borne with a sense of rejoicing which testified to the truth of how lightly even heavy sorrow can sit on a man, when with it God gives him rest.

The opening words, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God," would bring their own message at a not very distant day; but now they only spoke to me, something as a mother addresses a too happy, too wildly-exultant child, when she says in her tenderest tones, "Come and rest here in my arms for a little while, between your play." Yes, I was only a child as yet, at play with life; but the music awoke in me the possible future, the possible working day, the possible time of rain, the possible storm, the possible need of a shelter from its blast. To heighten the effect of the music, came the effect of the cathedral itself. It is not a very beautiful English cathedral, but it was the first I had seen. Having never revelled in the glories of Westminster, I could appreciate the old grey walls of Hereford; and what man had done in the form of column and pillar, of transept and roof, the sun touched into fulness of life and colouring to-day. The grey walls had many coloured reflections from the painted windows, the grand old nave lay in a flood of light, and golden gleams penetrated into dusky corners, and brought into strong relief the symmetry and beauty of aisle and transept, triforium and clerestory. I mention all this—I try to touch it up with the colour with which it filled my own mind—because in the old cathedral of Hereford I left behind me the golden, unconsciously happy existence of childhood; because I, Gwladys, when I stepped outside into the Cathedral Close, and put my white-gloved hand inside David's arm, and looked up expectantly into David's face, was about to taste my first cup of life's sorrow. I was never again to be an unconscious child, fretting over imaginary griefs, and exulting in imaginary delights.

"Gwladys," said David, looking down at me, and speaking slowly, as though the words gave him pain, "Owen is coming home."

Chapter Five.

Why did you Hesitate?

Let no one suppose that in their delivery these words brought with them sorrow. I had been walking with my usual dancing motion, and it is true, that when David spoke, I stood still, faced round, and gazed at him earnestly, it is also true that the colour left my cheeks, and my eyes filled with tears, but my emotions were pleasurable, my tears were tears of joy.

Owen coming home!

Nobody quite knew how I loved Owen, how *my* heart had longed for him, how many castles in the air I had built, with him for their hero.

In all possible and impossible dreams of my own future, Owen had figured as the grand central thought. Owen would show me the world, Owen would let me live with him. He had promised me this when I was a little child, and he was a fine noble-looking youth, and I had believed him, I believed him still. I had longed and yearned for him, I had never forgotten him. My love for my good and sober brother David was very calm and sisterly, but my love for Owen was the romance of my existence. And now he was coming home, crowned with laurels, doubtless. For he had been away so long, he had left us so suddenly and mysteriously, that only could his absence be accounted for by supposing that my beautiful and noble brother had gone on some very great, and important, and dangerous mission, from which he would return now, crowned with honour and glory.

"Oh, David!" I exclaimed, when I could find my voice, "is it true? How very, very happy I am."

"Yes, Gwladys," replied David, "it is true; but let us walk up and down this path, it is quite quiet here, and I have a story to tell you about Owen."

"How glad I am," I repeated, "I love him more than any one, and I quite knew how it would be, I always guessed it, I knew he would come back covered with glory. Yes, David, go on, tell me quickly, what did my darling do?"

I was rather impatient, and I wondered why David did not reply more joyfully, why, indeed, at first he did not speak at all. I could see no reason for his silence, the crowds of men and women who had filled the cathedral had dispersed, had wandered to hotels for refreshment, or gone to explore, if strangers, the beauties and antiquities the old town possessed. There was no one to molest or disturb us, as we walked up and down in this quiet part of the Close.

"Well, David," I said, "go on, tell me about my darling."

"Yes," said David, "I will tell you, but I have got something else to say first."

"What?" I asked, impatiently.

"This; you have made a mistake about Owen, you imagine him to be what he is not."

"What do I imagine him to be?" I asked, angrily, for David's tone put into my heart the falsest idea it ever entertained—namely, that he was jealous of my greater love for Owen.

"What do I imagine?" I asked.

"You imagine that Owen is a hero. Now, Gwladys, you cannot love Owen too much, nor ever show your love to him too much, but you can do him no good whatever, if you start with a false idea of him."

I was silent, too amazed at these words to reply at once.

"I tell you this, Gwladys," continued David, "because I really believe it is in your power to help Owen. Nay, more, I want you to help him."

Still I said nothing, the idea suggested by David's words might be flattering, but it was too startling to be taken in its full significance at first. What did it mean? In all my dreams of Owen I had never contemplated his requiring help from me; but David had said that my ideas were false, my dreams mistaken. I woke up into full and excited listening, at his next words.

"And now I mean to tell you why you have not seen Owen for so long—why he has been away from us all these years."

"Four years, now," I said. "Yes, David, I have often wondered why you gave me no reason for his long, long absence. I said nothing, but I felt it a good bit—I did indeed."

"It was a story you could hardly hear when you were a little child. Even now I only tell it to you because of Owen's unlooked-for and unexpected return; because, as I say, I want you to help Owen; but even now I shall only tell you its outline."

"David, you speak of Owen's return as if you were not glad—as if it were not quite the happiest news in the world."

"It is not that, my dear."

"But why? Do you not love him?"

"Most truly I love him."

"Well, what is the story? How mysterious you are!"

"Yes, I am glad," continued David, speaking more to himself than to me. "I suppose I ought to be *quite* glad—to have no distrust. How faithless Amy would call me!"

When he mentioned Amy, I knew he had forgotten my presence—the name made me patient. I waited quietly for his next remark.

As I have said, he was a man of few words. His ideas moved slowly, and his language hardly came fluently.

"There are two kinds of love," he began, still in his indirect way. "There is the love that thinks the object it loves perfection, and will see no fault in it."

"Yes," I interrupted, enthusiastically; "I know of that love—it is the only kind worth having."

"I cannot agree with you, dear. That love may be deep and intense, but it is not great. There is a love which sees faults in the object of its love, but loves on through all. Such—"

"Such love I should not care for," I interrupted.

"Such love I could not live without, Gwladys. Such is the Divine love."

"But God's love is not like ours," I said.

"No, dear; and I have only made the remark to justify myself—for, Gwladys, I have loved Owen through his faults."

I started impatiently; but David had now launched on his tale, and would not be interrupted.

"Yes," he continued, "I loved and love Owen through his faults. I know that mother thought him perfect, and so did you. I am not surprised at either of your feelings with regard to him—he was undoubtedly very brilliant, and on the surface, Gwladys, you might almost have said that so noble a form must have held a noble soul. I do not say this will *never* be so; but this was not so when you knew him last."

I would have spoken again, but David laid his hand on my arm, to silence me.

"He had much of good in him; but he was not noble; he had one great weakness—pleasure was dearer to him than duty. Even when a little lad he would leave his tasks unlearned, to play for half an hour longer with you; this was a small thing, but it grew, Gwladys—it grew. And he had great temptations. It was much harder for him to do the right than for me; he was so brilliant—so—so, not clever—but so ready-witted. He was a great favourite in society, and society brought with it heaps of temptations. He struggled against the temptations, but he did not struggle hard enough; and his natural weakness, his great love for pleasure, grew on the food he gave it.

"We were in different colleges, and did not see each other every day. He made some friends whose characters—well, they were not men he ought to know. I spoke to him about this; poor fellow! it has lain on my heart often, that I may have spoken harshly, taking on myself elder brother airs, and made myself a sort of mentor. I *could* not do this intentionally, but it is possible I may have done it unintentionally. I felt hot on the subject, for the fellows I spoke against seemed to me low, in every sense beneath his notice. I did not know that even then, they had a hold on him which he could not, even if he would, shake off. He got angry, he—quarrelled with me. After this, I did not see him for some time. I blame myself again here, for I might have gone to him, but I did not. He had said some words which hurt me, and I stayed away." David paused. "Yes," he continued, taking up his narrative without any comment from me, "I remember, it was the middle of the term. I was sitting with some fellows after dinner; we were smoking in my rooms. I remember how the sun looked on the water, and how jolly I felt. We were talking of my coming of age, and I had asked all these fellows to help me to celebrate the event at Tynycymmer, when suddenly a man I knew came to the door, and called me out; he was a great friend of mine, he looked awfully white and grave; he put his arm inside mine, and we went down through Christ Church meadows to the edge of the river. There, as we stood together looking down into the river, and nodding, as if nothing were the matter, to some men of our college as they rowed past us; there, as we stood and listened to the splash of the oars, my friend told me about Owen. A long story, Gwladys. Shall I ever forget the spot where I stood and listened to it? As I said, I am not going to tell you the tale; it was one of disgrace—weakness—and sin. Evil companions had done most of it, but Owen had done some. It was a long story, dating back from the day of his first arrival; but now the climax had come—Owen had fallen—had sinned. I never knew until my friend spoke, how much I loved Owen. I blamed myself bitterly. I was his elder brother. I might have so treated him as to win his confidence, and to save him from this. He had fallen by means of the very temptations that must assail such a nature as his, and I, instead of holding out a helping hand, had stood aloof from him. In this moment of agony, when I learned all about his sin, I blamed myself as much as him. I started off at once to find him, I could not reproach him. I could only blame myself. When I did this, he burst into tears."

Here David paused, and I tried to speak, but could not.

"Owen had sinned," he continued, "and in such a way that the most public exposure seemed inevitable. To avoid this, to give him one chance for the future, I would do anything. There was one loophole of escape, and through that loophole, if any strength of mine could drag him, I was determined Owen should come. I could not leave Oxford, but I wrote to my mother. Her assistance was necessary, but I felt little doubt of her complying. I was not wrong. She helped me, as I knew she would. Nay, I think she was more eager than I. Between us we saved Owen."

Here David paused, and taking out his handkerchief, he wiped some moisture from his brow.

His words were hardly either impassioned or eloquent; but no one knew, who did not hear them, with what pain they came slowly up from his heart.

Then I ventured to put the question which was hanging on the top of my lips—

"What was his sin?"

"The sin of weakness, Gwladys. The sad lacking of moral courage to say no, when no should be said. The putting pleasure before duty, that was the beginning of it. Then evil companions came round; temptation was yielded to, and, at last, the very men who had ruined and tempted him, managed to escape, and he was left to bear the brunt of everything. However, my dear, this is a story you need not know. I have told you the little I have, because, now that Owen is coming home, I want you to have a truer idea of his character, so that you may help him better. I need and want you to help him, Gwladys. I have said all this to you to-day for no other reason."

I said nothing. David looked into my face, and I looked into his, then he went on.

"After that dreadful time at Oxford he went abroad, and I came home. Now he, too, is coming home."

"To live with us at Tynycymmer?" I asked.

"No, no, my dear; he is coming home with a definite purpose; I have had a long letter from Owen, I must tell you some of it. He always wrote to me while he was away, but his letters, though tolerably cheerful, and fairly hopeful, were reserved, and seemed always to have something behind. I used to fear for him. Dear fellow, dear, dear fellow, my weak heart fears for him still, and yet with it all, I am proud and thankful. There *is* something great in Owen, otherwise this would never have so weighed on his mind.

"I must tell you that to save Owen, I had to spend money; that really was no sacrifice to me, a thing not worth mentioning, but it seems to have weighed much on him. In his letter, he told me that he has never ceased working hard at his profession, learning all he can about it. He says that he is now nearly qualified to work as a mechanical engineer; and in that particular department he has made mining engineering his special study. In his letter he also said that he had done this with a definite hope and object.

"There is a large coal mine on my property, a mine that has never been properly worked. Owen believes that out of this mine he can win back the gold I have spent on him; he has begged me to allow him to take the management of the mine; to live at Ffynon until this object is effected. I hesitated—I thought—at last I yielded."

"Why did you hesitate? David."

"Because, Gwladys, the object with which Owen works is worthless to me. I am glad he is coming to manage the mine, I have no doubt whatever as to his ability in the matter. I know in his profession he has much talent. Had he not written to me, I should have been obliged to ask a London engineer to take his place for a time. Yes, Gwladys, I like his work, but not his motive. The mine at Ffynon yields me little money, that is nothing; it also is dangerous, that is much; many accidents have taken place there, many lives have been lost. I want Owen to make the mine safe, as far as man can make it safe: I don't care for the money. And this is the object I want you to help me in, Gwladys, not in words, but in a thousand ways in which a loving and true sister can. I want you to show to Owen that we none of us care for the money."

"You lay upon me an impossible task," I said; "you forget that I shall not be with Owen."

"You said last night you were tired of Tynycymmer?"

"So I am, very often."

"You are going to leave it, at least for a time; you and mother are to live with Owen at Ffynon."

Chapter Six.

Gwen's Dream.

If I felt excited when starting for Hereford on the morning of that day, how much more feverishly did my heart beat when I returned home in the evening!

I was in that state of mind when the need of a confidante was sore and pressing.

In whom should I confide? I loved my brother David, I dearly loved my mother, but in neither of them would I now repose confidence. No, they knew too much already. Into fresh ears, but still into ears that communicated with a very affectionate and faithful heart, would I pour my tale—or rather that portion of my tale of which I wished to speak. David had given me, in the old Cathedral Close, two very distinct pieces of information—two pieces of information, either of which would have proved quite sufficient to keep my eyes wakeful for many nights, and my heart restless for many days. Mother and I were going to leave Tynycymmer! Owen was coming home! Round this last item of intelligence floated murky and shadowy words. Owen had sinned! Owen was not the spotless hero I had imagined him! With regard to this piece of news I wished to take no one into my confidence; by the sheer strength of a very strong will I pushed it into the background of my thoughts; I managed to give it a subordinate place where the full sharpness of its sting would not for the present be felt. By-and-by I would drag it to the light; by-and-by I would analyse this thing and pull it to pieces; by-and-by I would face this enemy and dare it to do its worst; by-and-by, defeated, baffled, I would writhe under its blows; but, as I said, for the present it lay in abeyance, and other thoughts pressed upon me.

How much a change, even a little change, does signify to us girls! I once met a man who told me calmly, and with easy nonchalance, that he was about to visit Australia. I observed his eye never brightening at the prospect of the gay sea voyage, and the sights to be witnessed in the tropical richness of the far-off land; he had seen many changes, he had visited many lands, to him change was a thing of every day, and he told me, when I pressed him to speak, that he was weary of it all, and that there was nothing new under the sun. But to me! What did not a change, even from one end of Glamorgan to another, mean to me? How very long it would take before I could be satiated with fresh places, or my eyes grow weary of new sights. So much did this one very small change mean to me, that I almost fancied, as we were whirled back in the train, that my fellow-passengers must know something of the uprooting about to take place, and some disquieting waves from the agitation which was surging round me, must be pulsing in their own hearts.

I, who had lived all my sixteen years at Tynycymmer, was going to make another place my home! It was on this item of David's news that I longed so for a confidante.

When I got home, my eyes were bright and my cheeks flushed. Mother looked anxiously from David to me.

"She knows, mother," said David, going over and kissing the stately and beautiful face, and looking down tenderly into the dark depths of the eyes, which were raised inquiringly to his.

Mother glanced at me; but I could not speak of it to her—not then. She knew all, and of all I would not speak. I pleaded hunger as a reason for my silence. After supper, I pleaded fatigue, and made a hasty retreat to my bedroom. On my way there, I passed through the nursery. Gwen was in the nursery, knitting a long grey stocking, by little David's bedside.

"Gwen," I said, "I want you—come into my room."

When we got there, I locked the door, pushed Gwen down into an arm-chair, seated myself in her lap, put my arms round her neck, laid my head on her bosom, and burst into tears. These tears were my safety-valve, but they frightened Gwen.

"Now, Gwladys, my maid, what is it? What is wrong? Ah! dear, dear! she's tired—the poor little maid."

I wanted Gwen to soothe me. I meant her to stroke my cheek with her large, but soft hand. I meant her to pour, with her dear Welsh accent, some foolish nothings into my ear. Gwen's soothing, joined to my own tears, were, as I said, my safety-valve. When enough of the steam of strong excitement was evaporated by these means, I started up, dried my eyes, and spoke.

"Gwen, we're going away. Mother and I are not going to live at Tynycymmer any more. We're going away to the black ugly coal country—to Ffynon."

"Yes, Gwladys," said Gwen; "my mistress told me to-day. She said you was to move quick, so as to have things ready for Owen. And, goodness me! Gwladys, what I says is, that little David and me should go too. What if little David was took with the croup, and me to lose my senses; and what could the Squire do? What I say is, that David and me should go—least for a year—till his h'eye teeth are down—and they do say as there's holy wells out there, what works miracles on the sight, if you dips afore sunrise."

It was plain that Gwen had her own troubles in the matter. She spoke vehemently.

"And who's to brush h'out your yellow hair, my maid? and who's to make things comfort for my mistress? Dear, dear Gwladys, 'tis worse nor folly me not going with you."

"Well, where's the use of making a fuss about nothing?" I said, finding that I had to listen to a complaint instead of making one. "Who says you are not to come!"

"My mistress, dear. She says the Squire wishes little David to stay at Tynycymmer. Dear heart! what store he do set by the little lad. Seems to me he loves the blessed lamb h'all the better for being blind."

"Well, Gwen, that is all right. Of course David wishes to keep the baby—and I think," I added virtuously, "that as he *does* wish it, it would be very selfish of us to take him away."

"Dear, dear Gwladys," said the penitent Gwen, "don't think as I have no thought for the Squire. I don't see why the house is to be broke up for—but there! Owen and David aren't the same, Gwladys, and no one will make me think 'em the same. But if you and my mistress must go, I was only supposing what 'ud be best for the baby in case he was took with sickness. 'Tisn't I as 'ud be the one to neglect the Squire, Gwladys. Course I'll stay; though dear, dear, dear! I'll be lonesome, but what of that?"

As Gwen spoke, I no longer found her arms comforting. I rose to my feet, went to the window, from where I could see the silver moon reflecting glorious light on the glistening waves.

"Good-night, Gwen," I said, when she had done speaking. "I'm tired; don't stay any longer—good-night."

"But, Gwladys," said Gwen, looking at me with astonishment.

"Good-night," I repeated, in a gentle voice; but the voice was accompanied with a little haughty gesture; and Gwen, still with a look of surprise, went slowly out of the room.

I shut the door; but though I had told her I was tired, I did not go to bed.

I knelt down by the open window, placed my elbows on the window-sill, leant my cheeks on my hands, gazed steadfastly out at the silver-tipped waves, and now I called up David's last item of news. I summoned my enemy to the forefront of the battle, and prepared to fight him to the death.

Owen had sinned!

I was a proud girl—proud with the concentrated pride of a proud race. Sin and disgrace were synonymous. I writhed under those three pregnant words—*Owen had sinned*. But for David, Owen would have been publicly disgraced. Had he been a cousin, had he been the most distantly connected member of our house, such a fact in connection with him could hardly have failed to make my cheeks burn with humiliation. But the one who brought me this agony, was not a stranger cousin, but a brother—the brother I loved, the brother I had dreamed of, the brother I had boasted of, the brother who had, hitherto, embodied to me every virtue under the sun. How well I remembered the graceful, athletic young form, the flashing, dark eyes, the ring of the clear voice, as he said to me—

"You—a Morgan! I would *scorn* to do a dirty action, if I were you."

I was the culprit then. I had been discovered by Owen, surreptitiously hiding away for private consumption some stolen cherries. I was eight years old at the time, and the sharp words had wrung from me a wail of shame and woe. I flung the fruit away. I would not show my ashamed face for the rest of the evening. I was cured for ever of underhand dealings. The next day I begged Owen's pardon—it was granted, and from that time his word was law to me. I was his slave. For the next four years, until I was twelve years old, I was Owen's faithful and devoted slave. He was my king, and my king could do no wrong. His vacations were my times of blessing, his absence my time of mourning. He ordered me about a great deal, but his commands were my pleasure. He rather took advantage of my affection, to impose hard tasks on his little slave; but the slave loved her taskmaster, and work for him was light. I was a romantic, excitable, enthusiastic child, and Owen played with a skilful hand on these strong chords in my heart. He knew what words would excite my imagination, what stories would fire my enthusiasm; these stories and these words he gave, not always—sometimes, indeed, at rare intervals—but just when he saw I needed them, when I was weary and spent after a long day of waiting on my despotic young king—standing patient while he fished, or copying with my laboured, but neat hand, his blotted exercises; then my reward would come—a few, well-selected lines from Byron, a story from history, or a fairy tale told as only Owen could tell it. I would lie at his feet then, or better still, recline with my head on his breast, while he stretched himself under the trees. Then after an hour or two of this, would come in a soft, seductive whisper in my ear—

"Now, Gwlad, you will get up at six to-morrow, and have those exercises finished for me before breakfast."

Of course I did what he asked, of course I was proud of the stealthy stealing away from Nurse Gwen, of course I enjoyed the cool of the study, the romance of copying verses, and making themes appear neat and fair for Owen; and if before the hour of release came, my back ached a trifle, and my face was slightly pale, were not the fatigue and the pain well worth while for Owen's sake? For Owen, as I said, was my hero. How grandly he spoke of the noble deeds he would accomplish when he was a man—they were no idle words, they were felt through and through the graceful young frame, they came direct from the passionate heart. A thousand dreams he had of glory and ambition, and he meant them, meant them truly, as he lay in the long summer days under the great cool horse-chestnuts. Very goodly were the blossoms, and very fair to my inexperienced eyes the show of fruit, in that heart and nature.

In those days, it never occurred to me that while Owen spoke, David acted. David had so few words, David never alluded to the possibility of a grand future. Once he even said, almost roughly, that he had no time to dream. Oh! how inferior he seemed, how far beneath Owen!

This intercourse, and this instruction of heart and life, I had with Owen more or less from my eighth to my twelfth year; then suddenly it ceased. How little grown people remember of their own childhood! how very little most grown people understand children! There was I, twelve years old, slim, tall, awkward, gaily bright on the surface, intensely reserved within; there was I, the child of an imaginative race, great in ghost lore, great in dreams; there was I, come to an age when childhood and youth meet, when new perceptions awaken, and new thoughts arise, left to puzzle out a problem in which my own heart and life were engaged. How little the grown people guessed what thoughts were surging through my brain, what wondering ideas were taking possession of me! When mother and David told me, that for a reason they could not quite explain, Owen had gone for a time abroad, did it never occur to them that when I accepted the fact, I should also try to fathom the reason?

I don't suppose it ever did. Their childhood was a thing of the past, they were pressed hard by a sorer trouble than any I could know. Could they have read my thoughts, could they have guessed my feelings, perhaps they would have smiled. And yet, I think not; for the pain of the child is a real pain: if the shadow that eclipses the sun is a little shadow, yet it falls upon little steps, and its chill presence keeps out the light of day, and the joy of hope, as effectually as the larger, darker shadow dooms the man to despair.

When Owen went away, this shadow fell on me. The shadow to me lay in the pain of his absence, in the fact that no long summer days, no joyous winter evenings, were bringing him back to me. I never connected disgrace and Owen; how could I? Was he not my hero, my darling?

When no reason was given for his lengthened absence, I formed a reason of my own. He had gone to win some of the glory he spoke of, to execute some of the brave deeds, the recital of which had so often caused both our eyes to sparkle, and both our hearts to glow.

I could hardly guess what Owen was to do, in those distant countries where he had gone so suddenly and mysteriously, but that some day he would return covered with fame—a knight who had nobly won his spurs, I felt quite sure of. This was the silver lining to the cloud, which Owen's absence had cast upon my path, and this thought enabled me to bear the long years of his absence, with outward gaiety and inward patience.

And now, kneeling by my window, looking out at the fluctuating, shifting, restless tide, I told my heart that the long probation time was over, that at last, at last, Owen was coming home; but *was* the hero returning? was the laurel-crowned coming back with his long tale of glorious victories? Alas! Owen had sinned. This fact danced before me on the treacherous waves, floated in front of my weary eyes. Owen was no great man, gone away to perform noble deeds; Owen had gone because of his sin.

Oh! my gay castle in the air! Oh! my hero-worship, with my hero lying shattered at my feet. He, a Morgan, had brought disgrace on his race; he, a Morgan, had sinned; he, my brother, had sinned bitterly. And I thought him perfect.

The blow was crushing. I laid my head down on the window-sill, and sobbed bitterly. I was sobbing in this manner loudly and unrestrainedly, when a hand was laid on my shoulder, a firm cool hand that I knew too well to startle me even then.

"What is it? my maid; what's the trouble?" said the tender voice of Gwen.

I had been deeply hurt with Gwen for the tone in which she had spoken of Owen half an hour before, but now I was too much broken down, and too much humbled, to feel angry with any one, and I turned to my old nurse with an eager longing to let her share some of the burden which had fallen upon me.

"Gwen, *do* you know about Owen?"

"Of course I do, my lamb. Dear, dear, praised be the Lord for His goodness!"

Gwen was a Methodist, and I was well accustomed to her expressions, but I could hardly see their force now, and raised my tear-dimmed eyes questioningly.

"And why not? Gwladys," she said, in reply to my look. "Have we not cause to praise the Lord? have we not hope that the prayer that has gone up earnestly has been answered abundantly? Don't you be foolish enough to suppose, in your poor weak little heart, that no one cared for Owen Morgan but you. Yes, my maid, others gave a thought to the lad in the far-away country, and many a strong prayer went up to the God of gods for him. Why, sweet Mistress Amy has told me how the Squire prayed, and I know she prayed, bless her dear heart! and I have had my prayers too, Gwladys, my dear, and now perhaps they're being answered."

It was quite evident, from these words, that while I was in the darkness of despair with regard to Owen, Gwen was in the brightness of some hope. It was also evident that she had known for years what I only knew to-day, but I was too sore at heart to question her on this point now, though I turned eagerly to the consolation.

"How do you know that your prayers are answered?" I asked.

"Nay, Gwladys, I don't *say* as they're answered, but I have a good strong hope in the matter. Don't it stand to common-sense, my maid, that I should have hope now; the lad is coming back to his own people, the lad is ready to work, honest and hard too, in the coalfields. Don't it look, Gwladys, something like the coming home again of the prodigal?"

I was silent. Gwen's words might be true, and she, even if she did love Owen as I loved him, might take the comfort of them. She who had known of the sorrow and pain for four years, might be glad now if she could; but I, who until a few hours before had placed Owen far above even the elder brother in the father's house, how could I think of the repentant prodigal, in his rags and misery, without pain, how could I help failing to receive comfort! I little knew then, I little dreamt, that our rags and misery, our shame and bitter repentance, may often but lead us nearer to the Father and the Father's home. If the storm alone can bring the child to nestle in the Father's breast, surely the storm must be sent for good!

"Gwen," I said, at last, "I think 'tis very hard."

"What's hard? my dear."

"I think 'tis hard that this should have been kept from me all these years, that I should have been dreaming of Owen, and fancying good and glory, when 'twas all shame and evil. I think 'twas very bitter to keep it from me, Gwen."

"Well, my dear, /'d have broke the news to you, and so I think would the Squire, but my mistress, she was so fearful that you'd fret—and—and—she knew, we all knew, how your heart was bound up with Mr Owen."

"I think it is bitter to deceive any one," I continued, "to let them waste love. Well, 'tis done now, it can't be helped." There was, I knew, a bitter tension about my lips, but my eyes were dry, they shed no more tears. I felt through and through my frame, that my hero was gone, my idol shattered into a thousand bits.

"Gwen," I said, "I could not ask David to-day, but I had better know. I don't mind pain. I'm not a child, and I've got to bear pain like every one else. What was it Owen did, Gwen,—what was his sin?"

"Nay, my dear, my dear, I can't rightly tell you, I don't rightly know, Gwladys. It had something to say to money, a great lot of money, and I know David saved him, David paid it h'all up and set him free. I don't know what he did rightly, Gwladys, my maid, I never heard more than one little end and another little end, but I believe there was dishonour at the bottom of it, and 'twas that cut up the Squire, and I'm quite sure too, Gwladys, that the Squire never told my mistress the half; she thought 'twas all big debts that they must cramp the estate to pay, but 'twas more."





“Don't say 'did,' my maid; you love him still.”

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“What was it?” I said, “I don't want to be deceived again, I wish to know all.”

“I can't tell you, my dear, I don't know myself, 'tis only thoughts I have, and words Mistress Amy has dropped, but she did not mean me to learn anything by 'em. Only I think she felt bitter, when people called the Squire stingy, for she knew what an awful lot of money it took to clear Owen.”

“I must know all about it,” I said; “I shall ask David to tell me if you won't.”

“My dear, I can't, and I think, if I was you, I'd not do that.”

“Why?” I asked.

“My maid, isn't it better to forget what you does know, than to try to learn more.”

“I don't understand you, Gwen, what do you mean?”

“Why, this, my lamb, don't you think when the Lord has forgiven the lad, that you may forgive him too, where's the use of knowing more of the sin than you need to know, and where's the use of 'ardening your 'art 'gainst the one you love best in the world?”

“Oh! I did love him, I did love him,” I sobbed passionately, all my calm suddenly giving way.

“Don't say 'did,' my maid, you love him still.”

“But, Gwen,” I said, “he has sinned, the old, grand, noble Owen is never coming back. No, Gwen, I *don't* love the man who brought disgrace and misery on us all—there—I can't help it, I don't.”

“Dear, dear,” said Gwen, beginning to smooth down her apron, and trying to stroke my hair, which I shook away from her hand. “What weak creatures we are! dear, dear, why 'tis enough to fret the Lord h'all to nothing, to hearken to us, a-makin' idols one time o' bits o' clay, and then when we finds they ain't gods for us to worship, but poor sinnin' mortals like ourselves, a-turnin' round and hating of 'em; dear, dear, we're that weak, Gwladys, seems to me we can never have an h'easy moment unless we gets close up to the Lord.”

“I wish you wouldn't preach,” I said, impatiently.

“No, my dear, I ain't a-going, but, Gwladys, I will say this, as you're wrong; you were wrong long ago, but you're more wrong now; you did harm with the old love, but if you ain't lovin' and sisterly to Owen now, you'll do harm as you'll rue most bitter. I'm a h'ignorant, poor spoke woman, my maid, but I know as Owen will turn to you, and if you'll be lovin' to him, and not spoil him, as h'everybody but David has h'always bin a-doin', why you may help on the work the good Lord has begun. But there, you'll take what I says in good part, my dear, and now I may as well tell you what brought me in at this hour to see you.”

“Yes, you may tell me,” I said, but I spoke wearily, there was no interest in my voice.

“I thought how 'twould be,” continued Gwen, “I guessed how the maid would fret and fret, and when you turned me out of your room so sharp, I was fit to cry with the fear on me that you thought poor old Gwen had turned selfish, and 'ad an h'eye to her own comfort and meant to leave the Squire.”

“Why, my dear, it stan's to reason I should fret. Do I not remember the old time when the old mistress was alive, and when your mother came home a bride, so grand, and rich, and beautiful; and now to know that there'll never be a woman of the house about, and only the Squire and the little blind darlin' to live at Tynycymmer; but you're right, Gwladys, 'twould never do to part the Squire and the little lad; and I was 'shamed o' myself for so much as thinkin' of it; and before I dropped asleep, with the baby close to me, so that I could see his little face, I made up my mind that I'd think no more of the lonesomeness, but stay at Tynycymmer, after you and my mistress went away. When I settled me to do that, I felt more comfort; but still, what with the feel of not seeing my maid every day, and being worried, and kissed, and made a fool of by her; and what with the thought that she had a sore heart of her own for Mr Owen's sake, who was coming back so different from what she fancied; I was no way as easy in my mind as I am most nights. And 'twas that, Gwladys, and the moon being at the full, and me only asleep for a few minutes, that made me set such store by the dream.”

Gwen's last words had been very impressive, and she and I believed fully in dreams.

“What was it?” I asked excitedly, laying my hand on her arm.

“Well, my dear; 'twas as vivid as possible; though by the clock, I couldn't 'ave bin more'n five minutes dreamin' it. I thought we had h'all gone away to the black coal country, where there's never a green leaf or a flower, only h'everything black, and dear, dear! as dismal as could be; and I thought that David went down into one of those unearthly places they calls a mine. Down he would go, into a place not fit for honest men, and only meant for those poor unfortunets as 'ave to trade by it.”

"I mean to go into a mine when we live at Ffynon," I interrupted.

"Then, my dear, I can only say as you'll tempt Providence. Why, wot was mines invented for? Hasn't we the surface of the earth, green and pleasant, without going down into its bowels; but there, Gwladys, shall I finish the dream?"

"Oh, yes!" very earnestly; "please go on."

"Well, my maid; David, he went down into the mine, and we all waited on the surface to see him drawn h'up; and the chains went clankin', and one after the other everybody came up out of the pit but David; and after a while we heard that David had gone a long way into the pit, and he couldn't find his way back again; and the place where he went was very dangerous; and all the miners were cryin' for the Squire, and they went down and they tried every mortal man of 'em to get him out of the mine; but there was a wind down below in that dreadful place louder than thunder, and when the men tried to get to where David was shut up, it seemed as if it 'ud tear 'em in pieces. So at last they one and all was daunted, and they said nothing could be done. Then, Gwladys, we all cried, and we gave the Squire up for lost, when suddenly, who should come to the pit's mouth but Owen—Owen, with his breath comin' hard and fast, and his eyes shinin', and he said, 'I'm not frightened; David saved me, and I'll save David, or I'll die!' And with that, before anyone could hinder him, he went down into the dark, loathsome pit!"

"Well?" I said, for Gwen had paused.

"That's h'all. I woke then. The rest was not revealed to me. When I woke, the cock crowed sharp and sudden, that made it certain."

"What?" I asked, in an awe-struck, frightened voice.

"Why, 'twill come true, my maid. 'Twas sent to us for a comfort and a warnin'. If David saved Owen, Owen will save David yet."

Chapter Seven.

Very New and very Interesting.

It is certainly possible when one is only sixteen to go to sleep in the depths of misery, and to awake after a few hours of slumber, with a heart, if not as light as a feather, yet quite sufficiently so, to enable one to dance, not walk, to eat with an appetite, and to laugh with more than surface merriment. These easily changed feelings may be reckoned as some of the blessings of this pleasant age.

At sixteen we have our sharp sorrows, but we have our equally keen pleasures, and it is quite impossible for us to be sad always.

So on the morning after Gwen had related to me her dream, though there were sore places which I could not quite bear to touch, somewhere about my heart, yet the leading fact which danced before my young eyes lay concentrated in the one word—*change*. We were going away, we were going to make another place our home; we would soon be in all the grand excitement of a move. I was very childish in the matter, for this experience was so new to me, so completely novel. I had never seen a house in the chaos of a removal. I had never seen furniture ruthlessly piled up in corners, beds in packing-cases, chairs and tables upside down, carpetless and straw-littered floors.

It must have been centuries since Tynycymmer had known such a revolution. Except in the attics, everything was in apple-pie order. Even the Tynycymmer attics were not half so disorderly as they should be. Regularly twice a year they were well cleaned out, and reduced to an alarming degree of niceness. The drawing-rooms, dining-room, study, library, were always destined to hold just their own furniture, and no other. And how proper and staid that old furniture looked! those chairs would never tumble down with one, those rather thread-bare carpets would fade and fade, it was true, until all brightness and beauty had left them, but how provokingly orderly they would keep, and how unnecessary it was to do anything to them except at the grand annual cleanings!

I have been so put out and so tired by the everlasting sameness of Tynycymmer, that on some of these exciting occasions, I have forced my way into the dethroned and disarranged rooms, tied the housemaid's white apron over my hair, and flourished wildly about with a mop, never subsiding into rationalism until I had laid one or two articles of value in fragments at my feet.

But now we were going to have confusion grand and glorious, for the cottage at Ffynon was to be furnished with some of the superabundance of Tynycymmer.

Mother and David went through the old rooms many times, and everything that was small enough, and choice enough, and pretty enough, was marked to go. Mother and David both looked sad during these pilgrimages through the Tynycymmer rooms. But whenever David said, "Mother I should like you to have this, for such a corner," or, "Mother, we will put this in Owen's room," she just bent her stately head in acquiescence, and said, "It shall be as you wish, my son."

So the rare cases of old china went away, and the choicest landscapes were removed from the walls; only the family portraits remained in the portrait gallery, and a painter's proof of Noel Paton's "*Mors Janua Vitae*," which David and Amy had brought home after their wedding tour, was left undisturbed in David's study.

Then the waggons came, old-fashioned, slow, and cumbersome, and the furniture was stowed in, and Gwen and mother and David went to and fro.

At last the cottage was ready, everything to our least belongings, packed and put away, and mother and I saw the day dawn when we were to leave Tynycymmer, and take up our abode at Owen's house. I found on the morning of that day in late October, I found on that last day, to my astonishment, that even going away had its sorrows. A mist of tears came dimming my eyes as I looked at the sea, as I wandered through the gardens and grounds, as I peeped into the no longer orderly rooms. Memories I had tried to put out of sight returned to me. That arbour overhanging the sea, where I had talked to Amy of Owen, and Amy, in a short, vivid, last flash of resentment, had told me I was wrong; that David was the brave man. Poor little gentle Amy! I had never loved her very much, I had scorned her earnest words; but they were true. I acknowledged them with a great stab at my heart, when I visited the arbour for the last time.

Here was the horse-chestnut-tree where Owen and I had sat and dreamed dreams, summer after summer. I hurried away from it. Here was the cherry-tree from which I had stolen the cherries, for which Owen had reproved me. Here, crawling listlessly after me, was the lame, and half-blind terrier, which had once belonged to Owen, and had been sportive enough when Owen and I were together. Here was the study, where I had copied Owen's exercises. Here the stain, still left in the carpet, where Owen had upset the ink. Here the spot—here, by the deep, mullioned window—where, after a long labour for Owen, he had put his arm round my childish neck, looked full into my eyes, and "called me the best little sister in the world."

Oh! what ailed the place this morning; it was alive with Owen, peopled with Owen in every nook. From each corner Owen started up and confronted me, as he was. *As he was*—what was he now? I dashed my blinding tears away. Kissed little David, hugged Gwen, who was absolutely speechless with her own sorrow, got into the carriage beside mother, and was off—away! For mother's sake, who was very white, and seemed to be suffering intensely, I abstained from shouting. For David's sake, who kept his hat well down, and who never spoke, I, too, remained silent. In process of time we arrived at Ffynon, and at the cottage which was to be our future home. A tree or two

surrounded it; a little scrap of a garden, neat with gravel, and bright with late geraniums in pots, led up to it. Inside there was a drawing-room, low and small; a dining-room to match; behind, kitchens, a pantry, and cellars; over head, four bed-rooms. That was absolutely all. Goodness me! dear, dear! as Gwen would say, was there ever such a nutshell of a place! Why, it was a toy-house, a doll's abode. I could stand on tiptoe and touch the ceiling of the apartment set aside for my slumbers. I could stand by the bedstead at one end of the room, and nearly pull the bell at the other. But then the bedstead was so pretty, so tiny, so bright! The whole room, encased in its fairy-like pink and white, was like a little bower; the muslin curtains were partly drawn, the blinds partly down, the evening sun cast a glow over everything. I approached the window, whistling to my canary as I went. I drew up the blinds, and pushed back the curtains. My cheeks were hot, I wanted to see my waves. Perhaps from long habit, I thought I should see them. I looked out, and behold! a black country—hills, low and barren destitute of trees, clothed with coal dust; straight, red brick chimneys, from which curled volumes of ugly smoke; roads winding everywhere, of a grimy grey; a train of coal trams, whizzing up to the noisy dirty station; the roar of steam-engines filling the air; dark figures rushing here and there, and the machinery and shaft of what I afterwards learned was David's mine, quite close. The entrance to this mine lay within not many hundred yards of the house. Oh! there was noise enough and life enough here, but it was ugly! ugly! ugly! I quickly shut down the window; I drew the blinds and curtains into their former position. I would not acknowledge, even to myself, how my heart rose up in wild longing for the green trees, and the fresh, sweet, salt waves of Tynycymmer; I only said to myself, "The cottage is lovely, fairy-like; but the view is ugly!"

That night I slept well in my little room, and in the morning was able to acknowledge that, though the coal country was far from beautiful, and Ffynon was not quite the home to choose, yet any change was welcome to me; and had Owen only been coming back the hero I had painted him, had dear old David's brave face not worn such a patient look, had my mother not been quite so silent, and quite so sorry for leaving Tynycymmer, and had Gwen been still to the fore to scold me, and pet me, I should have been, notwithstanding the ugly view, the happiest girl in the world.

I got up early this first morning, and went out. I ran down, without anyone knowing it, to the place where the machinery roared loudest, and the black coal dust was thickest. I looked into the mouth of the shaft, watched with interest the rows of grimy miners getting into the cage, and descending into the mine; started back at first from their black faces, which, relieved by the dazzling white of teeth and eyeballs, made them look hardly human; presently gathered courage, came close, asked eager questions, made all verbal preparations for a speedy descent into the coal mine; rather laughed at the idea of fear in the matter, and returned home in time for breakfast, my light dress covered with dirty stains, my golden hair full of coal dust, my whole person very dirty indeed.

"Gwladys," said mother, "you must never venture near the shaft alone again."

"If you do, Gwladys, I must take you back to Tynycymmer," said David.

I did not want that; if Ffynon was dirty, it was very new and very interesting.

Chapter Eight.

I said I would do much for these Children.

We were a fortnight at Ffynon. All my possessions were unpacked and put neatly away in the wardrobes allotted to them. My favourite books, my "Cambrian Magazine," my "Westward Ho!" my "Arabian Nights," my "Mabinogion," reflected gay colours behind polished glass doors. Packing-cases had disappeared. The cottage inside was perfection, bright with potted plants, cool with muslin drapery, glowing with rich crimson curtains. The rare and lovely Tynycymmer china filled niches in the drawing-room, exquisite landscapes from the pencils of Fielding and Cooper adorned the walls, the blackest of coal sent out the clearest flames of ruddy hue from the highly-polished grates. Every room was perfect, perfect with neatness, cleanliness, order, and perfect also with a minute, but highly-finished beauty. The tiny abode hardly needed even a fairy's touch to render it more lovely, on the day Owen was expected home. On this day mother came down in the black velvet robe which had lain by for years. It was worn high to her throat, finished off at neck and wrists with Honiton. A tiny Honiton cap rested becomingly on her shining, abundant, still raven black hair.

I was lying on my bed, my face flashed, my yellow locks in confusion, a rumpled cotton dress, too soiled for July, too out of season for October, adorning my person, when mother in her massive folds, her eyes bright as stars, came in.

"Make yourself nice, my darling. Owen will be here before long," she said.

She kissed me and went away. When she left me I jumped up, and looked at my watch. It was not yet four o'clock. Owen could not arrive before another hour. I cared nothing about my dress. I could not sit in state in the tiny drawing-room to meet Owen. I put on a winter jacket, and my hat, ran downstairs, and went out.

Mother saw me from the window, and called after me, and I called back in reply—

"I shall not be long, I shall return in time for Owen."

Mother turned away with a sigh. What a rebellious, thoughtless young thing I was! Of course mother wanted me. She would like to look at me in my trim, orderly, number one gown, to arrange a ribbon here and a curl there, to sigh, and smile, and talk, to hazard a thousand sweet innocent conjectures. Should we know our darling? What would he think of me? I had been such a little one when he went away!

These remarks, these touches, these looks, would have helped mother through that last trying hour of suspense, that hour which, if all *has* been well, if all *will* be well, is still fraught with pain through its very intensity. Yes, they would have helped mother, and driven me wild. I was selfish. I went on my way. Oh! that ugly coal country, with the wintry fading light of the first November evening over it! I kicked up coal dust with my feet, and two heavy tears fell from my eyes. Yes, Owen was coming home. Even now, each moment was bringing him nearer to us. Owen was coming home, and I was unhappy. Between this hour, and the hour six weeks before, when David had broken to me one sad fact, a strange but complete revulsion had taken place within me. I was a childish creature still, childish in heart and nature; but just, perhaps, or in part, perhaps, because I *was* so inexperienced, so immature, I had turned from my hero, I had hardened myself against the warmest love of my life.

Yes, I had made a god and worshipped it. Nothing was too good for it, no homage too great to lay at its feet, no sacrifice too worthy to offer at its shrine. Mother, David, Amy, were all as nothing in comparison of this my hero. My dream lasted through my childhood and early youth, then suddenly it vanished. My god was a clay god, my idol was dust.

Owen Morgan still lived. Owen Morgan was coming back to his mother, brother, sister, but my perfect Owen was dead. A man who had sinned, who had brought disgrace on us, was coming home to-day. More and more as the time drew nearer I had shrunk from seeing, from speaking to, from touching, this altered Owen. I was intensely unmerciful, intensely severe, with the severity of the very young. No after repentance, no future deed of glory could wipe away this early stain. I had been deceived—Owen had sinned—and *my* Owen was dead. As I walked quickly along the barren, ugly coal country, I pictured to myself what my feelings would have been to-day had this not been so. Would mother have sat alone then in her velvet and lace to meet the returning hero? Would I? ah! what would I *not* have done to-day? I could not think of it. I dashed away another tear or two and walked on. I chose unfrequented, lonely paths, and these abounded in plenty, paths leading up to old, used-up shafts, and neglected mines; paths with thin ragged grass covering them, all equally ugly. At last I came to a huge cinder-heap, which had lain undisturbed so long, that some weak vegetation had managed now to grow up around

it. Here I sat down to rest. The cinder-heap was close to the closed-up shaft of an unused pit. In this fortnight I had already learned something of mining life, and I knew where to look for the old shafts, and always examined them with curiosity. As I sat there, I heard the voices of two children, who, evidently quite unaware of my close neighbourhood, were talking eagerly together, at the other side of the cinder-heap. It was a boy's voice I heard first—high, shrill, passionate.

"Yes, indeed, Nan; they'll call me a coward. No, Nan; I'll not be daunted. I will go down on Monday!"

To these words the girl replied with sobs. I heard the boy kissing her; then there was silence, then the same eager voice said—





“Don’t cry, Nan; Monday ain’t come yet.”

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“Don’t cry, Nan; Monday ain’t come yet. Let’s talk of something pleasant.”

“Don’t talk at all, Miles. Let’s sing.”

“Shall we sing ‘The Cross?’”

“I don’t—no, I do care. Yes, we’ll sing that.” There was a pause, then two sweet, wild voices took up the following words to a plaintive Welsh air:—

“The cross! the cross! the heavy cross!
The Saviour bore for me!
Which bowed Him to the earth with grief,
On sad Mount Calvary.

“How light, how light, this precious cross
Presented now to me;
And if with care I take it up,
Behold a crown for me!”

Here the voices ceased suddenly, and I again heard a kiss of comfort, and the sound of a girl’s sob. I could bear no more. I started to my feet, ran round the cinder-heap, and confronted the children.

“Please don’t be frightened! I heard you sing. I want you to sing again. I want to know what’s the matter. I’m Gwladys Morgan—you may have heard of me; my brother is going to manage the mine at Ffynon.”

Two pairs of black eyes were raised to my face, then the boy rose slowly to his feet, came forward a step or two, and after gazing at me with the most searching, penetrating glance I had ever been favoured with, said brightly, as if satisfied with the result of his scrutiny—

“I’m Miles, and this is little Nan.”

“And father works down in the mine,” said little Nan.

“Father’s name is Moses Thomas—he’s deputy,” said the boy again, in a proud tone.

“Go on,” I said, seating myself close to the children; “tell me all about yourselves. I’m so glad I’ve met you. I am sure we shall be friends. I like you both already. Now you must let me know your whole story, from beginning to end; only first, do, *do* sing that lovely hymn again.”

“I’ll sing, Miss Morgan,” said the boy, instantly; “but you’ll forgive little Nan; little Nan’s in trouble, and her voice ain’t steady.”

Throwing back his head, looking straight before him, and clasping his hands round his knee, he sang to the same wild measure the next verse of the Methodist hymn:—

“The crown! the crown! the glorious crown!
A crown of life for me.
This crown of life it shall be mine,
When Jesus I shall see.”

“When Jesus I shall see,” he repeated, under his breath, looking at the girl as he spoke. As the children looked at each other they seemed to have forgotten my presence.

“What’s the cross you’ve got to bear? Nan,” I asked.

An old-fashioned, troubled, anxious face was raised to mine; but it was Miles who answered.

“’Tis just this, Miss Morgan: ’tis nothing to fret about. I’ve got to go down into the mine to work on Monday. I’ve never been into the mine before, and little Nan’s rare and timmersome; but I says to her that she’s faithless. She knows, and I know, that the Lord’ll be down in the mine too. ’Tis none so dark down there but He’ll find me h’out, and take care on me.”

“He didn’t find out Stephanie,” sobbed Nan, all her composure giving way. “He took no care on Stephanie.”

“What is it?” I said; “do tell me about it; and who is Stephanie? Miles.”

“Stephie is dead, Miss Morgan. There’s only us two now—only us and father. Mother died arter Stepfie went; she fretted a good bit, and she died too; and then there was Nan, and me, and father. We lives near Ffynon Mine, and father’s deputy; and we’re none so rich, and father works rare and ’ard; and he don’t get much money, ’cause the times is bad; and I’m fourteen, and I’m very strong, and I says I should work.”

“No—no—no!” here screamed the girl, forgetting, in a perfect paroxysm of fright and grief, the presence of the stranger. She clasped her arms round the boy’s neck, and her white lips worked convulsively.

“There it is,” said Miles; “she’s sure set agen it, and yet it must be.” Then bending down and speaking in a low voice, in her ear. “Shall I tell the lady about Stephanie? Nan.”

"Yes," said Nan, unloosing her hold, and looking up into his face with a sigh. She had the scared look in her wild, bright eyes, I have seen in the hunted hare, when he flew past me—dogs and horsemen in full pursuit. Now she buried her head in her brother's rough jacket, with the momentary relief which the telling of Stephanie's story would give to the tension of her fears.

"Tell me about Stephanie," I said.

"Stephie," continued Miles—"he was our brother. Mother set great store by Stephanie; he was so strong, and big, and brave. Nothing 'ud daunt 'im. Many of the lads about 'ere 'ud try; and they'd say, 'Wait till the day you goes down inter the mine, and you'll show the white feather'; but he—he larfed at 'em. He 'ad no fear in 'im, and h'all the stories 'bout fire-damp, and h'all the other dangers—and worse'n all, the ghosts of the colliers as died in the mine, they couldn't daunt him. Other lads 'ud run away, wen they come near the h'age; but he—he on'y counted the days; and 'Mother,' 'e'd say—for mother war werry weakly—"Mother, wen you 'as my wage, you can buy this thing and t'other thing, and you'll be strong in no time.' Well, mother she thought a sight on Stephanie, and she never wanted 'im to go down inter the mine; and she used to ask father to try and 'prentice 'im to another trade, for he war so big, and bright, and clever; but the times was bad, and father couldn't, so Stephanie had to go. He *was* clever, and fond o' readin', and a man wot lived near, lent 'im books, real minin' books, and he knew 'bout the dangers well as anybody; but nothing could daunt Stephanie, and he often said that he'd work and work, and rise hisself; and he'd try then ef he couldn't find h'out something as 'ud help to lessen the danger for the colliers. At last the day came wen he was to go down."

Here Miles paused, drew a long breath, and little Nan buried her head yet farther into his rough jacket. He stooped to kiss her, then raising his head, and fixing his eyes on my face, he continued. "The day 'ad come, and Stephanie got h'up very early in the mornin', and he put on 'is collier's dress, and we h'all got up—Nan and h'all; and mother she give 'im 'is breakfast. Well, he was standin' by the fire, and mother's 'and on 'is shoulder, and 'er eyes on 'is face, when father, he came.

"Father had h'always promised to go down the first time wid Stephanie, and show 'im the mine, and put 'im wid someone as 'nd learn 'im 'is work; but now he said, 'Stephie, lad, I can't go down till night. I 'as 'ad a sudden call elsewhere, so thee 'ad better wait, lad;' but Stephanie answered, 'No, father; there's poor little James, Black William's son, and he's going down too, to-day; and he's rare and daunted, and I ain't a bit; and Black William said as he might stay along wid me the first day, so I must go, father, and Black William ull take care on us both;' then father, he said no more—on'y mother, she cried and begged Stephanie to wait. And he looked at 'er amost scornful, for h'all he loved her so; and he said, 'Does *thee* tell me to forsake the little sickly lad?' Then he kissed mother, and he kissed little Nan, and waved his hand back at 'em, and set off running to the bank, and I ran wid 'im, and he said to me, 'Miles, lad, don't you h'ever be daunted when your turn comes to go down, for God takes care of h'everybody, in the earth and on the earth—'tis all the same to God.' Then he stepped on to the cage, and gripped the hand of little James, who was shakin' fit to drop, and he called h'out to me—"Tell mother as I'll be coming up wid the day crew, and to 'ave supper ready, for I'll be very 'ungry,' and the other colliers larfed to 'ear 'im so 'arty.

"Well, Miss Morgan, that day mother war stronger nor ordinary, and she cleaned and scrubbed the floor, and when evening came, she got a rare and good bit of supper ready, and just wen we was looking h'out for Stephanie, and mother had put a rough towel, and water in the tub, ready for him to wash hisself, who should come runnin' in but the wife of Black Bill, h'all crazy like, and 'ringin' 'er 'hands; and she said there had been a gas explosion, and h'every livin' soul in the mine was dead."

Here Miles paused; speaking again in a moment, more slowly.

"*That* wasn't true. A few did escape, and was brought up next day. But Black Bill was dead, and Stephanie, and little James. Black Bill was found all burnt dreadful; but Stephanie and little James—it was the after-damp had done for them. They was found in one of the stalls; Stephanie's arms round the little lad." Another long pause. "Mother, she never held up her head—she died three months later, and now there's on'y Nan, and father, and me. Nan is such a careful little body, and keeps the house so trim."

"You are not afraid to go down into the mine?" I said.

"Well, miss, it is a bit of a cross; partic'lar as it cuts up the little 'un so; but, good gracious! it ain't nothin'; there ain't bin a h'accident for h'ages—and / ain't daunted."

"When are you going down?"

"On Monday, Miss Morgan."

"Little Nan," I said, turning to the child, "I mean to come to see you at your own house on Monday. You may expect me, for I shall be sure to come; and I'll bring you pictures—lots; and if you like, I can show you how to colour them."

I thought this offer must charm Nan, and make her forget the terrors of the mine; but it did not. She looked gravely, almost fretfully at me, and it was Miles who said, "Thank you."

"I must go now," I said, jumping to my feet. "I have stayed too long already; but I'm very glad I have met you, Miles, and Nan. I think your Stephanie a real, real hero; and, Miles, I *love* you for being so brave, and I should like, beyond anything, to shake hands with you, and to kiss little Nan."

After clasping a small brown hand, and pressing a warm salute on two trembling lips, I started home. The children's story had excited me, and warmed my heart. For the present it absorbed my thoughts, even to the exclusion of Owen. I said I would do much for these two. This boy and girl, so lonely, so interesting, with their tragic story and tragic life, should find in me a benefactor and friend. The thought was delicious and exhilarating. David, through my intervention, should rescue Miles from the miner's life, and relieve the timid little sister from her worst fears. My spirits rose high as I contemplated this event, which a word from my lips could bring about. I entered the house humming the wild sweet air which the children had set to their Methodist hymn. The music of my voice was greeted by the richer music of gay and happy laughter. I stood motionless in the hall. My heart almost ceased to beat, then bounded on wildly. The colour fled from my cheeks and lips, returning in a moment in a full tide of richest crimson. I could have given way then. I could have rushed to Owen's side, thrown my arms round his neck, and wept out on his breast, a whole flood of healing and forgiving tears. Had I done so, my soul would have been knit to his with a love strong as the old love was weak—noble as the old passionate affection was erring and idolatrous; but I did not. I conquered the emotion, which the sound of his voice, and his laughter, had stirred within me. I told myself that *that* was not my Owen—mine, my hero was dead. Untidy, pale, agitated, but unforgiving, I opened the drawing-room door and went in. David, mother, and Owen, were standing in a loving, happy group. I went up to the group—they had not heard me come in—and touched Owen on the sleeve, and said, in a quiet voice, "Welcome home, brother."

For an instant two bright, dark eyes looked expectantly into mine—one instant the brilliant eyes wore that look—one instant after, they were blank with disappointment. Then all was commonplace—a commonplace, but affectionate brother's kiss was on my cheek, and a gay voice said, laughingly—

"Why, Gwladys, you're as wild and disreputable-looking a little romp as ever."

Whether Owen had come back, in my opinion, a hero, or an unpardoned and disgraced man, appeared after his first swift glance into my face to affect him very little, if at all; and I had to admit to myself that whatever else he may have failed in, he had arrived at Ffynon with a full knowledge of the duty which he had undertaken.

As a boy, he had always loved engineering, and when in those bright and happy days he and I had discussed his golden future, the *pros* had generally ended in favour of his becoming an engineer.

"All things considered, I should like this best, Gwladys," he would say. And though in these very youthful days he appeared to care more for poetry and the finest of the fine arts, yet it was here, I believe, that his true talent lay. Owen had not been idle during the four years of his exile, he had studied engineering as a profession when he was at Oxford, and during these years he had gone through a course of practical training with regard to the duties of a mining engineer, not only in the German mines, but in the North of England. He now brought this knowledge to bear on the rather slow working and unprofitable mine at Ffynon. This mine, which belonged to our mother, had at one time yielded a great deal of coal and was a source of much wealth, but of late, year by year, the mine yielded less, and its expenses became greater. It was worked on an old-fashioned system; it had not the recent improvements with regard to ventilation; and many serious accidents had taken place in consequence. Neither was the manager popular, he worked the mine recklessly, and many accidents of the most fatal character were constantly taking place from the falls of roofs, this expression meaning the giving way of great portions of the coal for want of proper supports being put under it. A short time before Owen's return, the manager of the mine for some more flagrant act of carelessness than usual, had been dismissed, and it was on hearing this, that Owen had written to David, telling him of his studies and his profession, reminding him also that when a boy he had more than once gone down into the old mine at Ffynon, that with his present knowledge he believed the mine to be still rich in coal, and that it only needed to be properly worked to yield a fine return. He spoke strongly against the unprofitable and expensive system which had hitherto been adopted; and finally he begged of David to give him permission to step into the manager's shoes, and for at least a year to have absolute control of the mine: promising at the end of that time to reduce order out of chaos, to lessen current expenses, and to bring in the first instalments of what should be large profits.

He had frankly told David his reason for this: he had a debt to pay, a debt of love and gratitude it was true, but still a debt that fretted his proud spirit, a debt that must be paid before he could know happiness again. But it was just on account of this reason that David hesitated to accept the services of one whose knowledge of the work he meant to undertake, was certainly great. The primary motive in Owen's heart, seemed to David, in the present state of Ffynon mine, hardly a worthy one. Coal was valuable, gold scarce, but lives were precious; it seemed to David that until all was done to insure the safety of the lives of those men and boys who worked in the mine, gold ought to weigh very low in the balance, and as he alone of us all knew something truly of his brother's character, so he hesitated to accept his offer; but while David hesitated, mother urged. Mother was ignorant of the miner's life; gold to mother was not valueless: she had dreams of the Morgans being restored to all their former riches and power, she had also, notwithstanding his one fall, still implicit faith in Owen. Owen would not only win the gold but make the mine safe. It was a grief to her to leave Tynycymmer, but it was a counterbalancing delight to live on any terms for a year with her favourite son; she urged the acceptance of his offer. Thus urged, David yielded.

We moved to Ffynon. Owen arrived, eager, hopeful, enthusiastic, as of old. Handsome and brilliant as ever he looked as gay as though he had never known a sorrow. So I thought for the first week after his arrival, then I saw that his spirits were fitful, sometimes I fancied a little forced; a bad report of the mine would depress him for the day, whereas good news would send his gay laugh echoing all over the small house.

Thus I found myself in the midst of mining life. Mother, hitherto profoundly ignorant of such matters, now took up the popular theme with interest and zest.

She and I learned what *fire-damp*, *black-damp*, *after-damp* meant. We learned the relative destructiveness of explosions by gas and inundations by water. Then we became great on the all-important subject of ventilation. We knew what the steam jet could do, what furnace ventilation could effect. I admired the Davy lamps, learned something of their construction, and at last, I obtained the strongest wish I at present possessed, namely, a visit to this underground region of awe and danger, myself. It is a hackneyed theme, and I need scarcely describe it at length. I remember stepping on to the cage with some of the enthusiasm which I had admired in Miles' brave hero brother, and long before I reached the bottom of the shaft, suffering from an intolerable sense of suffocation, and shivering and shaking with inward fear, such as must have overtaken poor little James on that fatal day. Finally, when I got to the bottom, recovering my courage, rejoicing in the free current of fresh air which was blown down from the great fan above, growing accustomed to the dim light of the Davy lamps, and then discovering little, by little, that the mine with its rail-roads, its levels, its drift ways, where the loaded trams of coal ran swiftly down, impelled by their own weight, its eager, grimy workers, its patient horses, destined many of them to live and die in this underground gloom, was very like a town, and had an order and method of its own.

The knowledge gained by the visit, the knowledge gained by listening to Owen's and David's conversation, the knowledge perhaps greater than all, which I had won by my friendship for Miles and Nan, inspired in me the strongest respect and admiration for the brave collier. He works in the dark, his heroic deeds are little heard of beyond his own circle, and yet he is as true a hero as the soldier in the field of battle or the sailor in the storm: his battle-field is the mine, his enemies, earth, air, fire, and water. Any moment the earth can bury him in a living tomb, a vast quantity of that solid coal may give way, and crush him beneath its weight; any instant, the air, in the poisoned form of black, or after-damp, may fill his lungs, take all power from his limbs, fell him in his strength and prime to the earth, and leave him there dead; or in half an instant, through the explosion of a match, the wrong adjustment of a safety-lamp, the whole mine may from end to end become a cavern of lurid fire, destroying every living thing within its reach. Or one stroke too many of the miner's pick, may let in a volume of black and stagnant water from an unused and forgotten pit, which rising slowly at first, then gaining, in volume, in strength, in rapidity, buries the miners in a watery grave of horrible and loathsome desolation.

Yes, the miners are brave; for small pay they toll unremittingly, labouring in the dark, exposed to many dangers. Day by day these men go down into the mines literally with their lives in their hands. The wives, mothers, sisters, know well what the non-arrival of a husband, father, brother means. They hope a little, fear much, weep over the mangled remains when they can even have that poor source of consolation, and then the widow who has lost her husband, dries her eyes, puts her shoulder to the wheel, and like a true Spartan woman, when his turn comes, sends down her boy to follow in his father's steps, and, if God wills it, to die bravely, as his father died before him.

I visited the schools about Ffynon, and noticed the bright dark-eyed, Welsh children, each boy among them destined to become a collier as he grew up. Many of these boys shrank from it, struggled against it, feared it as a coming nightmare; some few, as the dreaded time drew near, ran away to sea, preferring the giving up of father and mother, and encountering the hardships of the sea, to the greater hardships of the mine, but most of them yielded to the inevitable fate.

I found, too, on observation that the colliers of Ffynon were a religious people; the sentiments I had heard in astonishment and almost awe dropping from the lips of little Miles, I found were the sentiments rather of the many than the few. They lived an intense life, and they needed, and certainly possessed, an intense faith.

The body of them were not Church people; they had a simple and impassioned service of their own, generally held in the Welsh tongue. At these services they prayed and sang and listened to fervent addresses. At these services, after an accident, slight or great, the men

and women often bowed their heads and wept. Their services were alive and warm, breathing the very breath of devotion, suited to their untrained, but strong natures. They left them with the sense of a present God alive in each heart; a God who would go with them into the mine, who would accompany them through the daily toil and danger, and, if need be, and His will called them, would carry them safely, even in a chariot of fire, into the Golden City.

To the religious miner, the descriptions of Heaven as written in the Apocalypse, were the very life of his life. He loved to sit by his fire on Sunday evenings, and slowly read from the well-worn page to his listening wife, and his lads and lasses, of the city sparkling with gems and rich with gold. To the man who toiled in the deepest of darkness, a land without night or shadow was a theme of rapture. To the man who knew danger and pain, who fought every day with grim death, that painless shore, that eternal calm, that home where father, mother, brother, sister, rudely parted and torn asunder here, should be together, and God with them, was as an anchor to his soul. No place on earth could be more real and present than Heaven was to the religious collier. Take it from him, and he could do no more work in the dark and dangerous mine; leave it with him, and he was a hero. The colliers had one proud motto, one badge of honour, which each father bequeathed as his most precious possession to his son—this motto was “Bravery;” one stigma of everlasting disgrace which, once earned, nothing could wipe out, “Cowardice.” In the collier’s creed *no* stone was too heavy to roll away to rescue a brother from danger. Into the midst of the fire and the flood, into the fatal air of the after-damp, they must go without shrinking to save a companion who had fallen a victim to these dangers. Each man as he toiled to rescue his fellow man, knew well that he in his turn, would risk life itself for him. No man reflected credit on himself for this, no man regarded it as other than his most simple and obvious duty.

Into the midst of this simple, brave, and in many ways noble people, came Owen with his science and his skill. He went down into the mine day after day, quickly mastered its intricacies, quickly discovered its defects, quickly lighted upon its still vast stores of unused treasures. At the end of a month he communicated the result to David. I was seated by the open window, and I heard, in detached sentences, something of what was spoken, as the brothers paced the little plot of ground outside, arm in arm. As I watched them, I noticed for the first time some of the old look of confidence and passion on Owen’s face. The expressive eyes revealed this fact to me—the full hazel irids, the pupils instinct with fire, the whole eyes brimming with a long-lost gladness, proclaimed to me that the daring, the ambition I had loved, was not dead.

“Give me but a year, David,” I heard him say in conclusion. “Give me but one year, and I shall see my way to it. In a year from this time, if you but give me permission to do as I think best, the mine shall begin to pay you back what I have lost to you!”

David’s voice, in direct contrast to Owen’s, was deep and sad.

“I don’t want that,” he said, laying his hand on his brother’s arm, “I want something else.”

“What?” asked Owen.

“I want something else,” continued David. “This is it. Owen, I want you to help me to fulfil a duty, a much neglected duty. I take myself to task very much for the gross way I have passed it by hitherto. God knows it was my ignorance, not my wilful neglect, but I ought to have known; this is no real excuse. Owen, I have lived contented at Tynycymmer, and forgotten, or almost forgotten, this old mine. I left things in the hands of the manager; I received the money it brought without either thought or comment. And all the time, God help me, the place was behind its neighbours. I had not much money to expend on it, and I was content it should be worked on the old system, never thinking, never calculating, that the old system involved danger and loss of life. The mine is not ventilated as the other mines are; in no mine in the neighbourhood do so many deaths occur. You yourself have discovered it to be full of many dangers. So, Owen, what I ask of you is this, help me to lift this sin of my neglect off my soul. I don’t want the money, Owen; it is enough for me, it is more than enough, to see you as you now are; the money, I repeat, is a thing to me of no value, but the people’s lives are of much. I can and will raise the sum you require to put the mine into a state of safety, to perfect the ventilation, to do all that can be done to lessen the danger for the colliers. Do your part in this as quickly as possible, Owen, and let us think nothing of money gains for the present.”

While David was speaking, Owen had again drawn a veil of perfect immobility over his face. Impossible, with this veil on, to guess his thoughts, or fathom his feelings.

“Of course, of course,” he said, “the ventilation shall be improved and all that is necessary done.”

Chapter Ten.

Little Twenty.

I had not forgotten my promise to visit Nan on the day her brother first went down into the mine.

I selected a bundle of illustrated papers—some old copies of *Punch*—as, judging from the delight I took in them myself, I hoped they would make little Nan laugh. I also put a sixpenny box of paints into my pocket. These sixpenny paint-boxes were the most delightful things the Tynycymmer children had ever seen, so, doubtless, they would look equally nice in the eyes of Nan.

The Thomas’s cottage was one of a row that stood just over the pit bank. I ascended the rather steep hill which led to it, entered the narrow path which ran in front of the whole row of houses, and where many women were now hanging out clothes to dry, and knocked at Nan’s door. She did not hear me; she was moving briskly about within, and singing to her work. Her voice sounded happy, and the Welsh words and Welsh air were gay. I knocked a second time, then went in.

“I am so glad to hear you singing, Nan,” I said. “I was sure you would be in trouble, for I thought Miles had gone into the mine to-day!”

Little Nan was arranging some crockery on the white dresser. She stopped at the sound of my voice, and turned round with the large china tea-pot in her hand. When I had seen her on Saturday, seated weeping on the old cinder-heap, I had regarded her as a very little child. Now I perceived my mistake. Nan was no child; she was a miniature woman. I began to doubt what effect my copies of *Punch* and my sixpenny paints would produce on this odd mixture; more particularly when she said, in a quiet old-fashioned voice—“But he did go into the mine, Miss Morgan; Miles went down the shaft at five o’clock this mornin’.”

“You take it very calmly when the time comes,” I continued; “I thought you would have been in a terrible state.”

“Yes, ain’t I easy,” said Nan, “I never thought as the Lord ’ud help me like this; why, I ain’t frightened at all.”

“But there’s just as much danger as ever there was,” I said. “Your not being frightened does not make it at all safer for Miles down in the pit.”

I made this remark, knowing that it was both unkind and disagreeable; but I was disappointed; I had meant to turn comforter—I was provoked to find my services unnecessary.

“There ain’t no danger to-day,” replied Nan, to my last pleasant assurance.

“How can you say that?” I asked.

“Cause the Lord revealed it to me in a dream.”

Now I, too, believed in dreams. I was as superstitious as the most superstitious Welsh girl could possibly be. Gwen, my isolated life, my Welsh descent, had all made me this; it was, therefore, with considerable delight, that, just when I was beginning to place Nan very low in my category of friends, I found that I could claim her for a kindred spirit.

“You are a very odd little girl,” I said; “but I’m sure I *shall* like you. See! I’ve brought you *Punch*, and the *Illustrated News*, and a box of paints, and *perhaps* I shall show you how to colour these pictures, as the children did at Tynycymmer.”

Then I seated myself uninvited, and unrolled my treasures; my newspapers, my copies of *Punch*, my paint-box with the lid off, were all revealed to Nan’s wondering eyes.

“Get me a saucer and a cup of water,” I said, “and I’ll show you how to colour this picture, and then you can pin it up against the wall for your father to see when he comes home.”

“If you please, miss,” said Nan, dropping a little curtsey, and then coming forward and examining the print in question with a critical eye, “if you please, miss, I’d rayther not.”

“What do you mean?” I said.

“Well, miss, I’m very gratified to you; but, father, he don’t like pictures pasted up on the walls, and, indeed, Miss Morgan,” getting very red, her sloe-black eyes gleaming rather angrily, “I ‘as no time for such child’s play as lookin’ at pictures, and colourin’ of ‘em, and makin’ messes in cups and plates. I ‘as enough to do to wash h’up the cups and saucers as is used for cookin’, and keepin’ the house tidy, and makin’ the money go as far and as comfort as possible. I’m very gratified to you, miss; but I ‘as no time for that nonsense. I ain’t such a baby as I looks.”

As little Nan spoke, she grew in my eyes tall and womanly, while I felt myself getting smaller and smaller, in fact, taking the place I had hitherto allotted to her. I rolled up my despised goods hastily, rose to my feet, and spoke—

“You are not half as nice as you looked. I am very sorry that I disturbed so busy and important a person. As I see you don’t want me, I shall wish you good morning.”

I had nearly reached the door, when Nan ran after me, laid her hand on my arm, and looked into my face with her eyes full of tears.

“I ain’t a wishin’ you to go,” she said, “I wants you to set down and talk to me woman-like.”

“How old are you? you strange creature,” I said; but I was restored to good humour, and sat down willingly enough.

“I’m ten,” said Nan, “I’m small for my h’age, I know.”

“You are, indeed, small for your age,” I said, “and your age is very small. Why, Nan, whatever you may pretend about it, you are a baby.”

“No, I ain’t,” said Nan, gravely and solemnly, “it ain’t years only as makes us babies or womans, ‘tis—”

“What?” I said, “do go on.”

“Well, miss, I b’lieves as ‘tis anxiety. Miles says as I has a very h’anxious mind. He says I takes it from mother, and that ages one up awful.”

“I’ve no doubt of it,” I said. “I’ve felt it myself, ‘tis overpowering.”

“I don’t think you knows it much, miss,” said Nan. “I should say from the looks o’ you, that you was much younger nor me.”

“Mind what you’re about,” I said, “I’m sixteen—a young lady full grown. But come, now, Nan, with all your anxiety, you were merry enough when I came in—you did sing out in such a jolly style,—I thought you such a dear little thing; I did not know you were an old croak.”

“Why yes,” said Nan, half-smiling, and inclined to resume her song, “I’m as light as a feather this mornin’, that’s the Lord’s doing.”

“What did the Lord do for you, Nan?”

“He sent me a token, miss, as sure as sure could be, and it came just in the minute before waking.”

“What was it?” I repeated, for little Nan had paused, her face had grown soft and almost beautiful; the hard unpleasing lines of care and anxiety had vanished, and in their stead, behold! the eyes were full of love and faith, the lips tender, trustful, but withal, triumphant.

“I was sore fretted,” she began, “as father couldn’t go down with Miles; he had to stay to go ever the mine with the strange gentleman as is to be manager, and Miles going down h’all alone, reminded me sore of Stephe. And I was frettin’, frettin’, frettin’, and the prayers, nor the hymns, nor nothing, couldn’t do me no good, and Miles hissself, at last, he were fain to be vexed with me, and when I went to bed my heart was h’all like a lump o’ lead, and I felt up to forty, at the very least, and then it was that the Lord saw the burden was too big for me, and He sent me the dream.”

“What was it? Nan.”

“I thought, miss, as I seed the Lord Hissself, all pitiful and of tender mercy. I seed Him as plain as I sees you, and He looked me through and through, very sorrowful, as I shouldn’t trust Him, and Miles, he was standin’ on the cage, just afore it went down, and there was an empty place near Miles, and I saw that every one had their comrade and friend with them, ‘cept Miles; and then the Lord, He went and stood by Miles, on the empty space, and He put His arm round Miles, and he looked at me, and I saw the Lord and Miles going down into the dark, dark pit together.”

“I’m sure that was true,” I said, “that was very much what Miles said himself, don’t you remember? You were much better after your dream, were you not? Nan.”

“Yes, miss, I was light and easy in my mind, as if I was twenty!”

“What *do* you mean, now?” I said.

“Well, Miss Morgan, I can’t help it. I know I’m queer, the folks all say I’m queer. I know I haven’t h’aged with my years. Sometimes, miss, the anxiety brings me up to fifty, and I feels my hair’s a-turnin’ white; then again, I’m thirty, and forty; most times I feels like thirty, but now and then, as to-day, the Lord gives me a special revelation, and then, why, I’m as light as a feather, and down to twenty, but I’m never below that, miss.”

And yet I meant to offer that creature toys! Such was my mental comment, but before I could speak again, the door was opened, and a tall man—coal-black—with gleaming eyeballs, and snowy teeth, came in. He took no notice of me, perhaps he did not see me, but in passing through to another room, he called out in a full cheery voice—

“I say, little lass, how do you feel?”

“Fine, father, down to twenty.”

“Well, Twenty, bustle about, and get me some dinner; I’ll be ready for it in ten minutes.”

“I must go away now,” I said, rising.

“No, miss, that you mustn’t; I wants you to see father. Father’s a wonderful man, Miss Morgan, he have had a sight o’ trouble one way and t’other, and he’s up to fifty in years; but the Lord, He keeps him that strong and full o’ faith, he never passes thirty, in his mind; but there, what a chatterbox I am, and father a wantin’ his dinner!”

The old-fashioned mortal moved away, laid a coarse but clean cloth on a small table, dished up some bacon and potatoes in a masterly manner, and placed beside them a tin vessel—which, she informed me, was a miner’s “jack”—full of cold tea.

“Father will never go down into the mine without his jack o’ tea,” she explained; and just then the miner, his face and hands restored to their natural hue, came in.

“Father,” said Nan, in quite a stately fashion, “this lady is Miss Morgan; she’s a very kind lady, and she spoke good words to Miles o’ Saturday.”

“Mornin’, miss,” said the miner, pulling his front lock of hair, “I’m proud to see you, miss, and that I am; and now, lass,” turning to his daughter, “you’ll have no call to be anxious now no more, for this young lady’s brother was h’all over the mine this mornin’, and he and Squire Morgan promises that all that is right shall be done, and the place made as snug and tight as possible. That young gentleman, miss,” again addressing me, “is very sharp; *he* knows wot he’s about, that he do!”

“Is the mine dangerous?” I asked.

“No, no,” said the collier, winking impressively at me, while Nan was helping herself to a potato, “but might be made safer, as I says, might be made safer; another shaft let down, and wentilation made more fresh. But there! praise the Lord, ’tis all to be done, and that in no time; why, that mine will be so safe in a month or two, that little Nan might go and play there, if she so minded.”

As the big man spoke, looking lovingly at his tiny daughter, and the daughter replied, with anxious, knitted brows, “You know, father, as I don’t play,” he looked the younger of the two.

“No more you does, Twenty,” he replied, “but even Twenty can put away her fears and sing us a song when she hears a bit of good news.”

“Shall I sing a hymn? father.”

“Well, yes, my lass, I does feel like praisin’—there, you begin, and I’ll foller up.”

Little Nan laid down her knife and fork, fixed her dark eyes straight before her, clasped her hands, and began—

“We shall meet beyond the river,
By and by,
And the darkness shall be over,
By and by.
With the toilsome journey done,
And the glorious battle won,
We shall shine forth as the sun,
By and by.”

She paused, looked at her father, who joined her in the next verse—

“We shall strike the harps of glory,
By and by.
We shall sing redemption’s story.
By and by.
And the strains for evermore
Shall resound in sweetness o’er
Yonder everlasting shore,
By and by.

“We shall see and be like Jesus
By and by.
Who a crown of life shall give us,
By and by.
All the blest ones who have gone
To the land of life and song,
We with gladness shall rejoin
By and by!”

I have given the words, but I cannot describe the fervent looks that accompanied them, nor catch any echo here, of the sweet voice of the child, or the deep and earnest tones of the man. The strong spiritual life in both their natures came leaping to the surface, the man forgot the stranger by his hearth, he saw his God; the child, too, forgot her fears and her anxieties, and as she sang she became really young.

Chapter Eleven.

They Talked of Money.

Since my arrival at smoky, ugly Ffynon, I had never again to complain of being buried alive. The life I led was certainly not the life I should have chosen. I was young; I had day dreams. Had the choice been mine, I should have liked, as all other young things, to win for myself either pleasure, love, or fame. But the choice was not mine; and at Ffynon, strange as it may seem, I grew more contented than I

had been now for many years at Tynycymmer.

I was pleased with the people, I liked their occupation, their life. I soon found interests outside myself—a grand secret—thus I grew happy. Nan and Miles soon also became my real friends: I learned to appreciate their characters, to understand them; they were alike in many ways, but in far more ways were they different. Nan had more character and more originality than Miles, but Miles had far more simple bravery than Nan. They were both religious; but Miles's religion was the least dreamy, and the most practical. On the whole, I think the boy had the grander nature, and yet I think I loved the girl best.

I made many other acquaintances amongst the colliers, but these two children were my friends.

In about a fortnight after Owen's return, David went back to Tynycymmer, and we settled down quietly into our new and altered life. From morning to night Owen was busy, now making engineering plans, now down in the mine. As a boy he had been dilatory and fitful in his movements, working hard one day, dreaming or idling away the next; but now this boyish character had disappeared—now all this was changed. Now he worked unremittingly, unflinchingly; he had a goal before him, and to this goal he steadily directed his steps, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left. In his present plans, whatever they may have been, mother helped him. Mother gave him of her sympathy and her interest. Long ago, dearly as they loved each other, I don't think those two natures had quite met; but this was no longer so now; the same hope animated both pairs of eyes, the same feeling actuated both breasts. They had long conferences, anxious, and yet hopeful consultations; but it was less in their words than in their faces that I read that their wishes were the same.

I never saw mother look happier. Her long-lost son seemed now more her son than ever.

And I—had I, too, got back my Owen? had my hero returned? was this my brother, once dead to me, now alive again?

Alas! no. We were friends, Owen and I; we were outwardly affectionate, outwardly all that could be wished; but the man of the world made no advances of heart and confidence to the still childish sister; and the sister was glad that this should be so. We kissed each other affectionately night and morning, we chatted familiarly, we broached a thousand gay topics, but on the old sacred ground we neither of us ventured to set our feet. After a time I concluded that Owen had really forgotten the old days; and believing this, I yet was glad.

Why so? Why was my heart thus hard and unforgiving? Had my love for Owen really died? I do not think it had. Looking back on that winter now, with the light of the present, making all things clear, I believe that this was not so. I know now what was wrong; I know that I, by my pride, by the lack of all that was really noble in my affection, had set up a thin wall of ice between my brother's heart and my own.

Once, I think, Owen made an effort, though a slight one, to break it down. He had been talking to my mother for an hour or more; their interview had excited him; and with the excitement still playing in his eyes he came to my side, and stood close to me as I bent down to water some plants.

"Poor little girl!" he said, laying his hand on my hair, "you are very good to come and live in this poky, out-of-the-way corner of the world; but never mind, Gwladys, soon there will be plenty of money, and you can do as you like."

"How soon? Owen," I said, raising my head and looking in his face.

"How soon? In a year, at farthest."

"Will the mine then be safe 'n a year?"

The bright look left Owen's face. "What do you know of the mine? child," he laughed. "I am speaking about money."

I made no reply to this, though Owen waited for it. I watered my flowers in silence, and then walked away. Yes, there was a gulf between us.

I might have broken it down then—he gave me the opportunity: he showed by his manner that the old days still occupied some dim corner of his memory; the old days were not quite forgotten; but I would not break down the wall; I would not breathe on the ice with the breath of love. I walked away, and my opportunity was gone! As I did so, I thought of David's words when he begged of me to help Owen to keep in the right path; when he expressed his fears, and asked me to aid him. I did not aid him—I neglected my duty. Owen was not the only sinner. In God's sight, was he the worst?

Meanwhile, in the outside world, the people of Ffynon talked of a good time coming, of freedom from danger, of improvements about to be effected, which would enable the mothers to send down their boys into the mine without fear, and would insure the return of the fathers to the children, of the husbands to their wives. Higher wages, too, and more constant employment would follow the new, safe, and profitable system, which not only would save lives, but bring a much greater proportion of coal to the surface. Thus all parties were bright and happy—all parties happy from their own point of view; but while the miners talked of safety, mother and Owen talked of money.

Chapter Twelve.

You are Changed to me.

The events in this story followed each other quickly, I must not delay in writing of them. Hitherto I have but skirted the drama, I have scarcely ventured to lift the folds of the dark curtain, but now I hesitate no longer.

Here! I push back the veil, let those who will step with me beyond its kind screen. I am going into a battle-field, and the place is gloomy. Heavy with clouds is the sky, red with blood the ground, and cold with death lie the conquered, ay, and the conquerors too. But enough! my story must tell itself, the shadows must come up one by one as they will.

We were five months at Ffynon, and the dreary winter had nearly passed, a few snowdrops and crocuses were in the little garden, and all spring flowers that money could buy and care cultivate, adorned the pretty cottage within. I had been on a long rambling expedition, and had taken Nan with me, and Nan had entertained me as I liked best to be entertained, with accounts of mining life and mining danger. Strange, how when we are young, we do like stories of danger. I came back a good deal excited, for Nan had been giving me particulars, learned from her mother's lips, of the fearful accident caused in our very mine in 1856 by fire-damp, when one hundred and fourteen lives were swept in a moment into eternity. "That was a dark day for Ffynon," said Nan, "not a house without a widow in it, not a home without a dead husband or father. Mother lost her father and brother, and our Stephe was born that very night. Mother warn't twenty then, but she got old in a minute and never grew young again. Eh! dear," added the small thing, with her heavy old world sigh, "ain't it a weary world, Miss Morgan?"

"Well, I don't know," I said, "you are inclined to take a dark view of life, but things will brighten, Nan. Owen is making things so delightfully safe down in the mine, that soon you'll have no cause to be anxious, and then you'll grow young, as young as me, and enjoy your life."

"I'll never be younger nor twenty," said Nan, solemnly, "never; and, Miss Morgan, I can't help telling *you* something."

"Well, my dear, what is it?"

"They do say, father and Miles, not to me, for they knows I'm so anxious, but I hears 'em whispering when they thinks I'm asleep o' nights. They do say that for all Mr Morgan is so keen about saving the miners, and making things safe and compact, that he have the coal pillars what supports the roof, cut all away to nothing, and the timber what's put in, in place o' the pillars, ain't thick enough. It don't sound much I know, but it means much."

"What does it mean? Nan," I asked.

"Why, falls o' roofs, Miss Morgan. Oh! I knows the sign of 'em, but there," seeing how white my face had grown, "may be 'tis 'cause I'm an anxious thing, and they do say there's a heap more coal bin brought up, and the ventilation twice as good."

I made no reply to this. I did not say another word. When we came in sight of Nan's cottage, I bade her adieu by a single-hand shake, and ran home. On the gravel sweep outside the sunny, smiling cottage, might be seen the substantial form of Gwen, and by Gwen's side, his hat off, the breeze stirring his wavy brown hair, stood Owen.

Graceful, careless, happy, handsome, looked my brother, as he raised his face to kiss David's boy, who sat astride on his shoulder. The baby was kicking, laughing, crowing, stretching his arms, catching at Owen's hair, and making a thousand happy sounds, the first indications of a language he was never to learn perfectly on earth. Alas! what *did* the baby see in the darkness, that made his face the brightest thing I ever looked at, the brightest thing I ever shall look at in this world. The sight of the baby and Gwen caused me to forget Nan's words; I ran forward eagerly and spoke eagerly.

"Gwen, what a surprise! how delighted I am! have you come to stay? Oh! you darling, darling pet!" These last words were addressed to little David, whom I took out of Owen's arms, and covered with kisses. "How much he has grown! What a beauty he is!—like a little king. There! my precious lamb; go back to Owen, for I *must* give old Gwen a hug!"

Laughing heartily, Owen received him back, perched him anew on his shoulder, while I turned to Gwen, whom I nearly strangled with the vehemence of my embrace. "There! you dear old thing. *Have* you come to live with us? Oh! how dreadfully, dreadfully I have missed you. Oh! never mind your cap. I'll quill you another border in no time. Now, are you coming to live here? Do speak, and don't look so solemn."

"Dear, dear, my maid!" said Gwen, shaking herself free, and panting for breath. "Good gracious! Gwladys, my maid, I'm a bit stout, and none so young; and you did shake me awful." A pause, pant-pant, puff-puff from Gwen. "Why, there! I'm better now, and fit to cry with the joy of seeing you, my maid; but,"—with a warding-off gesture of her fat hands—"good gracious! Gwladys, don't fall on me again." A peal of laughter from Owen, in which the baby joined.

"Speak," I said, solemnly; "if you don't instantly declare your intentions, and the duration of your stay, I shall *strangle* you."

"'Twas on account o' the fever," said Gwen. At these words my hands dropped to my sides, the baby's laughter ceased to float on the air, and Owen was silent. "There's nought, to be frightened at," continued Gwen, observing these signs; "on'y a case or two at the lodge, and little Maggie and Dan, the laundress's children were rather bad. The Squire said it warn't likely to spread; but it would be best to make all safe, so he sent little David and me here for a fortnight, or so. Dear heart, he was sore down in the mouth at sayin' good-bye to the baby; but I was pleased enough, Gwladys, my maid. I wanted to get a sight o' your yellow hair, and to see my mistress, and Mr Owen."

"And I'm delighted to renew my acquaintance with you, Gwen," responded Owen, heartily. "I assure you I have not forgotten you. There! take baby now," he added. "I think I hear my mother calling you." When Gwen was gone, Owen, to my surprise came to my side, and drew my hand through his arm.

"I want to talk to you about the baby," he said. "What a splendid fellow he is? How sad he should be blind. Somehow I never realised it before. I always knew that David's boy was without sight, but, as I say, I never took in the meaning of it until I looked into those beautiful dark eyes. Isn't David awfully cut up about it? Gwladys."

"I'm not sure," I replied. "You must remember, Owen, that he is accustomed to it; and then all about baby's birth was so sad. Indeed, David does not like even to talk much about him; and when we are by, he never takes much notice, when he is brought into the room, only Gwen tells me how he comes up every night to see him, and how he kisses him—indeed, I know he quite lives for baby."

"Gwladys, I wish you would tell me about Amy? Was she worthy of that noble fellow?"

I looked at Owen in surprise—surprise from a twofold cause, for the voice that brought out the unexpected and unusual words trembled.

"He is the noblest fellow I know, quite," said Owen, emphatically, looking me full in the face. "What kind of woman was his wife?"

"I did not know her very well," I replied. "I don't believe I cared greatly for her. Still, I am sure, Owen—yes, I *know* that she was worthy of David."

Owen turned away his face, looked on the ground; in a moment he spoke in a different tone, on a different subject.

"I was quite glad to see that little bit of enthusiasm in you; you used to be a very affectionate, warm-hearted child, and I thought it had all died out."

I felt my face growing crimson. I tried not to speak, then the words burst forth—

"It has not died away; I can love still."

"I make no doubt of that, my dear," continued he, carelessly, "but you have not the same pleasant way of showing it."

He dropped my hand and walked towards the house, but his indifferent words had renewed the feeling with which I had parted from Nan. He too might be indifferent, but at least he should know. I would tell him Nan's words.

"Owen, I want to ask you a question."

"Well!" turning round, and leaning his graceful figure against the porch.

"We are going to be rich again, before long?"

"Perhaps; I cannot say."

"But you are getting up a lot of coal now out of the mine?"

"Certainly; the weekly supply is nearly double what it was six months ago."

"Then of course we must be rich before long?"

"There is the possibility, but mines are uncertain things." A pause, a scarcely suppressed yawn, then Owen turned on his heel. "I am going in, Gwladys; I don't care to talk business out of business hours, and I want to have a chat with mother."

His tone of easy indifference, coming so soon after seeing Nan's suffering face, and hearing her words of intense anxiety, half maddened me. I know I forgot myself. I ran forward and caught his arm, and made him look me full in the face. No fear then, as he gazed at my crimsoning cheek and angry eye, that he should say I lacked my childhood's enthusiasm.

"You are not going in yet," I said, "for I have got something to say to you—something, I repeat, which I *will* say. You need not pretend to me, Owen, that we are not getting rich, for I *know* we are. But I ask you one question, Is it right that we should have this money at the risk of the colliers' lives? is it right, in order that we should have a little more gold, that the coal pillars should be cut away, until the roofs are in danger of falling? and is it right that the timber supports should be made thinner than is safe? All this adds to our money, Owen; is it right that we should grow rich in that way?"

"Good God! Gwladys;" a pause, then vehemently, "How dare you say such things to me! who has been telling you such lies?"

"I won't mention the name of the person who has told me the truth, but I have heard it through the colliers; the colliers themselves are speaking of it."

Owen covered his face with his hand; he was trembling, but whether with anger or pain, I could not say. I stood silent, waiting for him to speak; he did not, perhaps for two minutes; those minutes watching his trembling hand, seemed like twenty.

"You and the colliers have both made a mistake," he said then; "they have exaggerated notions of the necessary thickness of the coal pillars. I never have them worked beyond what is safe. As to the timber supports, they are measured with the nicest mathematical accuracy. You and they both forget that I am an engineer, that I work the mine with a knowledge which they cannot possess. Good God! to think that I am capable of risking willingly men's lives to win gold; to think that *you*, Gwladys, should believe me capable of it; but you are not what you were. Once, such words could never have been said to *you* of *me*. You are changed to me utterly, and I am *utterly* disappointed in you." He pushed his hat over his eyes, and before I could reply was several paces away, walking rapidly in the direction of the still romantic and once beautiful Rhoda Vale.

Chapter Thirteen.

Pride's Pit.

During the long and dull winter months which preceded this spring, I had been gradually, yet surely, sinking into a state of indifference about Owen. What had commenced with a sense of poignant pain, had by this time subsided into at most an uncomfortable feeling of dissatisfaction. I knew there was a chord in my heart which when struck could set my whole nature out of tune. But was it not possible, in the airs which life played, she might leave this harsh note unsounded? This possibility took place. During the winter months mother, Owen, and I spent together, I grew accustomed to being near and yet far from him.

Our little home was very bright, a cloud which I had but dimly and unawares partaken in for years, had been removed. Why should not I too enjoy this season of serenity and bliss? Calling pride to my aid, I did enjoy it. I even loved Owen, not in the old way, but with a very considerable affection. I tried to forget all the past, to give him a place in my heart beside mother and David. And in a measure I was successful, in a measure I put out of sight the ugly cloud, the dark disappointment which had shattered my air castle, and made my childhood's hero dust. So by the hearth on winter evenings, I listened to brilliant stories from Owen's lips, stories of his foreign experience, of things he had learned when studying in the German mines; tales of adventure, funny nothings dropped from his lips at these times, pleasant things to listen to, and to think of afterwards, when I lay curled up in my warmly-curtained bed. But though Owen's mind directed his words at these times, imagination supplying the needful colour, a due sense of either absurdity or pathos supplying the necessary point, a musical voice adding intensity to the narrative; yet I think he waited until I had gone to bed, to let his heart speak. Then how near may mother and he have drawn, how truly, in a figurative sense, did the hand of one take the hand of the other, did the soul of one respond to the soul of the other, as they whispered of hopes and fears, of a dark past to be atoned for and wiped away by a bright future! For never, never once during the winter, did Owen's heart speak to my heart; never, until now, to-day—now, when it leaped up into his eyes, and addressed me with a passionate cry of pain. My whole heart responded to those words, to that bitter cry; trembling I ran up to my room and locked myself in, trembling I threw myself on my bed, fought and wrestled for a few moments with my tears, then let them come. Strange as it may seem, my tears flowed with as much pleasure as sorrow. I had made a discovery in that bitter moment. Owen still loved me. Owen had not forgotten the old days. This was a pleasure to me, this was a joy, greater than my pain; for I had made so sure that it had all passed from him, all the old happy life, the old day dreams. Now, for the first time, holding my hands before my burning, tear-dimmed eyes, did it occur to me, that *I too had sinned*. Owen had not forgotten me, that was plain; perhaps during the sad years of his exile, some of his softest and best thoughts had been given to the child, whose warm love, whose quick appreciation and sympathy, whose unselfish attentions had won so much from him in his boyhood and youth. However or in whatever way he had sinned, he had never forgotten his home or his own people; as soon as possible he had returned to them, not to idle, but to work, and so to work that he might atone for the past. No, Owen had not returned perfect, but was I perfect? How had I treated him—with any true love, with any real sympathy? Alas! he had looked for it, and had been—he himself told me to-day—bitterly disappointed.

And of what had I not accused him? How I admired him with something of the old admiration, something of the old hero-worship, as the stinging words of indignant denial dropped from his lips. *He* do so base, so cruel, so wicked a thing! how could I possibly so misunderstand him! I sat up on my bed, I wished earnestly then to put Owen in the right, and myself in the wrong, but try as I would, I could not quite come to this wished-for conclusion. Nan's words had not been the only hints I had received. I saw during the winter months, that the great popularity with which Owen had been received on his first arrival, had hardly abated, but still was clouded and tempered with a scarcely perceptible tone of dissatisfaction. The last manager had been most inefficient; in his time the mine was badly worked, it also was dangerous. Owen had begun promptly to remedy both these defects. The question now was, which did he care most for, the gold he would win from the mine, or the safety he would secure for the people? and the evil thought, kept coming and coming, he thinks most of the gold, he values the gold more than the lives of the men!

This evil thought had been with me for weeks past; not stirring into active life, lying, indeed, so dormant that it scarcely gave me pain, but none the less had it been there. And now, to-day, this living thing had leaped to the surface of my mind, had trembled in my voice and glittered in my eye, and I had accused Owen of what I suspected.

With what an agony of pain, and yet joy, I recalled his unfeigned anger, distress, reproach, that I should think of him so, that any one could accuse him of so base an act. As I recalled his look, his face, his words, the old love which I had thought dead, came surging back. I had, I must have been mistaken; the colliers and I both, in our ignorance, had misunderstood Owen, the safety of their lives *was* his first consideration. But what an unaccommodating thing is memory! how impossible it is to make her fit herself to existing circumstances, what ugly tricks she was playing me now! Event after event, each small in themselves, came crowding up before me, pointing every one of them with inexorable finger to one fact. Of wilful and purposeful neglect it would be wrong to accuse Owen. He wished to do all in his power to secure the safety of the colliers' lives, but money in his heart of hearts ranked first. I found at last a solution of the problem which relieved my pain, without satisfying me. Owen wished to do right, he meant to do right; but the easy carelessness which had

characterised his boyhood had not deserted his manhood. He meant to do well for the colliers, but careless of danger for himself, he might be for them also; and yet, how fatal and disastrous, now and then, were the effects of carelessness! At this moment one very prominent instance of Owen's want of thought rose before me. There was an old used-up mine, known in the country by the name of Pride's Pit, which adjoined the mine at present being worked at Ffynon. Close to this old pit lived the under-viewer and his family. A not very desirable residence was theirs for this reason, that the old shaft leading into the pit had never been filled up; and making it all the more dangerous, it was, from long disuse and neglect, nearly covered by a thick growth of weeds and brushwood, so that an unwary traveller might step into the mine before he was aware. This old shaft for every reason was dangerous, as its open mouth let in the rain and helped to fill the pit beneath with water, which water might by an untoward accident, a boring away of too much of the coal, help at any moment to inundate the larger mine. It was at present the terror of the young wife of the under-viewer, who had three small children, and who was never weary of warding them off the dangerous ground.

On the dismissal of the late manager, the young woman who lived in this cottage had come with her complaint to David, and had begged of him to use his influence with his brother to have the dangerous shaft filled up. David had assured her that this should be one of the first steps in the general reformation. When Owen came, I heard David speak to him on the subject, and Owen promised to have all that was necessary done without delay. I am quite sure Owen meant what he said, but in the absorbing interest of more engrossing work, month after month went by, and Pride's Pit still remained with its open shaft. A fortnight ago, I was walking with Owen, when poor Mrs Jones met us with tears in her eyes, "Was nothing going to be done to the shaft, her baby had nearly been killed there a few days since."

Owen was really sorry, declared he had completely forgotten it, won Mrs Jones's heart by his sweet graciousness and real regret, and promised to send round men to put the whole thing straight in the morning. Of course, he had done so by this time, but how great and unnecessary was the previous delay; suppose Mrs Jones's baby had been killed, would Owen ever have forgiven himself?

After thinking these and many other thoughts, I had brushed my hair, bathed my eyes, and was preparing to go downstairs, when there came a tap at my door, and Gwen, carrying little David in her arms, came in. She placed the child on the floor, came to my side, and looked hard into my face. If ever there was a purpose written in any woman's countenance it was in Gwen's at this moment.

"Gwladys, my maid," she said, "will you help your old nurse at a pinch?"

"Yes, that I will, Gwen," I replied, heartily; "what is it you want me to do?"

"And you'll keep it a secret, and never let it out to mortal?"

"Of course," rather proudly.

"Well, then, 'twasn't the fever brought me over here."

"Oh! Gwen," in a tone of some alarm, "what are you keeping back from me? is David ill?"

"Dear, dear, no, my pet; and I don't say as there *isn't* a fever, and that *that* is not the reason the Squire sent us away, Gwladys. No, I'd scorn to tell a lie, and there is a fever, though it ain't much; but that wasn't what brought me and the little lad here, Gwladys."

"How mysterious you are," I said, laughing. "What was the reason?"

"Why, you see, my maid, I'd soon have persuaded the Squire to let us stay, for I knew he'd be lonesome without me and the baby, and, Lord bless you, *he* (pointing to the child) wouldn't take the fever, God bless him; sweet and sound would I keep him, and free from all that low dirt, and those bad smells, which the negligent, never-me-care, unthrifty poor have, a tempting of Providence. No, it wasn't fright at no fever took me away, but a downright answer to prayer, Gwladys." Gwen paused, and I nodded to her to proceed. "Hadh't I been praying all the winter for some lucky wind to blow me to this place, and wasn't the fever the wind as God sent; so why shouldn't I come with a thankful heart?"

"Poor, dear old Gwen! you wanted to see mother and me. I am sorry you were so lonely."

"Well, my maid, it wasn't that; I'm none so selfish. No, Gwladys, it wasn't for myself I was praying, nor about myself I felt so happy. No, 'twas about little David. Gwladys, I mean to take little David to the eye-well."

"Oh! dear me, Gwen, what is that?"

"Hush, hush, child! don't speak of it lightly; just sit patient for five minutes, my dear, and you shall know the whole ins and outs of it."

I have said that Gwen, though a very religious woman, was, if possible, a more superstitious one. From the fountain-head of her knowledge and wisdom I had drunk deeply; of late, when away from her, I had been deprived of these goodly draughts, but I was all the more ready now to partake of the very delicious one she had ready dished up for my benefit.

"Go on," I said, in a tone of intense interest.

"I mean to take the child to the eye-well," continued Gwen; "there's one within a mile or two of this place that's famed, and justly, through the whole country. Many's the blind person, or the weak-eyed body, that has been cured by it; and many and many thoughts have I cast toward it, Gwladys; not liking to speak, for sure, if you long too earnestly, you hinders, so's the belief, the cure. Now there's wells that have a 'perhaps' to 'em, and there's wells that have a 'certainty,' and of all the wells that ever was sure, this is the one. And I've a strong belief and faith in my mind, that though I brought the little lad here blind, I may carry him home seeing."

True, oh! Gwen, dear Gwen, not in your way, perhaps in a better!

As she spoke, attracted by the sound of her voice, the child toddled to his feet, came to her side, and raised his dark, sightless eyes to her face.

"But it must be managed clever," continued Gwen, "and 'tis there I want you to help me. I don't want my mistress, nor a soul in the house but yourself to know, until I can bring in the laddie with the daylight let into his blessed eyes; and to have any success we must obey the rules solemn. For three mornings we must be at the well before sunrise, and when the first sunbeam dips into the water, down must go the child's head right under too, with it, and this we must do three days running, and then stop for three days, and then three days again. Ah! but I feel the Lord'll give His blessing, and there's real cure in the well."

Gwen paused, and I sat still, very much excited, dazzled, and full of a kind of half belief, which falling far short of Gwen's certainty, still caused my heart to beat faster than usual.

"And now, Gwladys," proceeded Gwen, "I mean to go to-morrow morning; and can you come with me, and can you show me the way?"

"I can and will come with you, Gwen, but I cannot show you the way. I fancy I *have* heard of this eye-well, but I have never been there."

"Then I must find some one who can," proceeded Gwen, rising.

"Stay, Gwen," I said, earnestly. "I know a little girl very well here, she has lived all her life in this place, and is sure to have heard of the well. I am sure, too, she would never tell a soul. Shall I go to her and find out if she can come with us?"

"Do, my dear maid, and let me know soon, for I am sore and anxious."

Chapter Fourteen.

The Eye-Well.

I found that Nan knew all about the eye-well, and had a very strong belief in its curative powers; she was only too anxious and willing to accompany us, and accordingly at five o'clock next morning, Gwen, little David, and I met her, and set off to our destination with a delightful sense of secrecy and mystery.

I look back on that day now, when, light-hearted, happy, not having yet met with any real sorrow, I stood and laughed at the baby's shouts of glee, when Gwen dipped his head under the cold water. I remember the reproving look of dear old Gwen's anxious face, and the expectant half-fearful, half-wondering gaze of Nan. I see again the water of the old well, trembling on the dark lashes of two sightless eyes, a little voice shouts manfully, a white brow is radiant, dimples play on rosy cheeks, golden brown curls are wet and drip great drops on the hard, worn hand of Gwen. Nan, excited and trembling, falls on her knees and prays for a blessing. Gwen prays also. I take David's little lad into my own arms, he clasps me firmly, shouts and laughs anew. I too, in a voiceless prayer, ask God to bless the noble boy. We are standing under a great tree, whose sheltering branches protect the old well, the bright sun shines in flickering light through the early spring leaves, on the boughs the birds sing, from the hedge a white rabbit peeps. Yes, I see it all, but I see it now with a precipice beyond. I see now where the sun went down and the dark night came on. I see where the storm began to beat, that took our treasure away.

It was the evening before the third visit to the eye-well; I heard Gwen in the room fitted up for a temporary nursery, singing little David to sleep.

Hush-a-by, little dear,
Hush-a-by, lovely child.

It was the old Welsh lullaby song. Soft, soft, softer went her voice to the queer old measure, the quaint old words—

Hush-a-by, lovely child,
Hush—hush—hush—hush!

Profound stillness, no one could keep awake after that last hush of Gwen's; I felt my own eyes closing. The next moment I found myself starting up to see the singer standing before me.

"David's asleep, my dear, and, Gwladys, you need not come with me in the morning."

In a very sleepy tone, induced by my early rising and the lullaby song, "Oh! yes, Gwen, I don't—mind—I'd better."

"No, no, my dear lamb, David and me'll go alone to-morrow; little Nan ain't coming neither."

"Very well, Gwen," I said, just asleep.

I was in bed when Gwen came again to me.

"My maid, I'm very trouble to you to-night."

"No, Gwen, what is it?"

To my surprise, Gwen burst into tears; this unusual sign of emotion roused me completely.

"Oh! my maid, I'm fearful and troubled, I don't know why. I've set my heart so on the baby getting his sight. If I could only take him back seeing to the Squire, I think I could die content."

"Well, Gwen, perhaps you will. Of course, I don't *quite* believe in the eye-well as much as you do, but still, who knows?"

"*No* one knows, Gwladys, that's what's troubling me; the Almighty has it all hid from us. He may think it good for the baby not to see. There's sights in this world what ain't right for mortal eyes, perhaps He have shut up his, to make and keep the little heart all the whiter."

"Perhaps so, Gwen; as you say, God knows best."

"Yes, only I *do* feel troubled to-night; perhaps 'tis wrong of me to take the baby to the h'eye-well, but I did pray for a blessing. Eh! dear, but I'm faithless."

"You are down-hearted anyhow," I said. "Go to bed now and dream that the baby is kissing you, and looking at you, and thanking you as he knows how, for getting him his eyesight. Good-night, dear Gwen." But Gwen did not respond to my good-night, she knelt on by my bedside; at last she said in a change of voice—

"Gwladys, have you made it up with Owen?"

I was excited by Gwen's previous words, now the sore place in my heart ached longingly. I put my arms round my old nurse's neck.

"Gwen, Gwen, Owen and I will never understand each other again."

"I feared she'd say that," repeated Gwen, "I feared it; and yet ain't it strange, to make an idol of the dreaming boy, and to shut up the heart against the man who has suffered, repented, who will yet be noble!"

"Oh! Gwen, if I could but think it! Will he ever be that?"

"I said, Gwladys," continued Gwen, "that he was coming home to His Father, he was coming up out of the wilderness of all his sin and folly to the Father's house, he aren't reached it yet—not quite—when he do, he will be noble."

I was silent.

"'Tis often a sore bit of road," continued Gwen, "sore and rough walkin', but when the Father is waiting for us at the top of the way; waiting and smiling, with arms outstretched, why then we go on even through death itself to find Him."

"And when we find Him?" I asked.

"Ah! my maid, *when* we find Him, 'tis much the same, I think, as when the shepherd overtook the lost lamb; the lamb lies down in the shepherd's arms, and the child in the Father's, 'tis much the same."

I lay back again on my pillow; Gwen covered me up, kissed me tenderly, and went away. I lay quiet for a few moments, then I sat up in bed, pressed my hands on my cheeks, and looked out through the window, at the white sky and shining moon. I looked eagerly and passionately. I had been sleepy; I was not sleepy now. After a time of steady gazing into the pitiless cold heavens, I began to cry, then out of my sobs two words were wrung from me, "*My Father.*" Never was there a girl more surrounded by religious influences, and yet less at heart religious than I. This was the first time in my whole life that I really felt a conscious want of God. The wish for God and the longing to understand Owen, to be reconciled to Owen, came simultaneously, but neither were very strong as yet. As yet, these two wants only stirred some surface tears, and beat on the outer circle of my heart. I knew nothing of the longing which would even go through the valley of the shadow of death to the Father, nothing of the love which would care a thousand times more for Owen *because* he had sinned and had repented. I wanted God only a little, my cry was but from the surface of my heart, still it was a real cry, and had more of the true spirit of prayer in it than all the petitions I had made carelessly, morning and evening since my babyhood.

After a time I lay down, and, tired out, went to sleep. I did not sleep easily, I had confused dreams of Owen, of little David, of Gwen. Then I had a distinct vision. I saw the children of the under-viewer, playing on the place where the shaft leading down into Pride's Pit had been; the ground was smooth, the danger was past, the children played happily and shouted gleefully. Two of them ran to tell their mother, the baby stayed to throw gravel into the air. All looked secure, but it was not so; as I watched, I suddenly perceived that the work was badly done, the place only half filled up; as I watched, I saw the loose stones and rubbish give way, and the baby sink into the loathsome pit below; although I was quite close, I could hold out no hand to save the under-viewer's baby.

Chapter Fifteen.

That Man was Owen.

Tired with my two days' early rising, I did not get up until late. I had nearly finished dressing, and was standing by my window, when I heard a woman's voice calling me in muffled tones below.

My room looked to the back of the house, and the woman had come to the inside of a thick fuchsia-hedge, which here divided the cottage, and its tiny surroundings, from the road.

Looking out, I saw the under-viewer's wife, gazing up with clasped hands and a white face.

"For the love of God, come down to me quietly, Miss Morgan."

The pain and anguish in the woman's face communicated part of her intelligence to me. I knew there was great and urgent need for me to go downstairs without anybody hearing. The immediate action which this required, prevented my feeling any pain. I stood by the woman, looked hard into her eyes, and said, "Well?"

"Dear heart, you must know it," she said, taking my hand. "Come with me."

She almost pushed me before her through the little gate; when we got on the high road, she began to run. I knew that she was going in the direction of Pride's Pit. My strangely vivid dream returned to me. Here was a solution of the mystery. I believed in dreams—this dream was not accidental. It had been sent to me as a warning—it was true. Owen had neglected to have the shaft, leading into Pride's Pit, filled up, and the under-viewer's child had fallen a victim to this neglect. The child had fallen down the old shaft. He was dead, and the mother was bringing me now to show me face to face what my brother's carelessness had effected. The life of a little child was sacrificed. I was to see for myself what Owen had done. I felt sure of this. The woman ran very fast, and I kept pace by her side. The distance was over half a mile, and partly up-hill. When we came to the ascent, which was rather steep, we could not go quite so quickly, and I had time to look in the woman's face. It was hard and set, the lips very white, the eyes very staring. She neither looked at me nor spoke. It came into my heart that she was cruel, even though her child *was* dead, to hurry me forward without one word of warning: to show me, without any preparation, what my brother had done. I would not be treated so. I would not face this deed without knowing what I was to see. The instant I made this resolution, I stood still.

"Stop!" I said. "I *will* know all. Is the baby dead?"

The woman stood still also, pressing her hand on her labouring breast. "Dear heart! she knows," she gasped. "Yes, yes, my dear—the baby's dead."

I did not say I was sorry, nor a single word. I simply, after my momentary pause, began to run harder than ever. We had now got in sight of the pit, and I saw a little crowd of people about it. Some men in their miners' dresses, a boy or two, a larger proportion of women. I half expected the men, women, and children to curse me as I drew near. We ran a little faster, and the woman's panting breath might have been heard at some distance. Suddenly a boy caught sight of us, and detaching himself from the group, ran to the woman's side.

"Does she know?" he exclaimed, catching her hand almost frantically. "She must not see without knowing."

The boy, who spoke in a voice of agony, was Miles Thomas.

"Yes," replied the woman; "she guessed it herself. She knows that the baby's dead."

"Thank God!" said the boy. I looked from one face to the other. I could not help pitying myself, as though it were *my* sorrow. I thought the boy's tone the kindest—he should take me to see the murdered child. Suddenly I changed my mind. Why should I need or look for compassion. The mother had come all this way to punish me and mine—the mother's just revenge should not be foiled. When we got into the group, I took her hand.

"You shall show him to me," I said. "You shall show me your little dead baby."

There was a pause on all sides—one or two people turned aside. I saw a woman put her apron to her face, and heard a man groan. Every eye was fixed on me, and, at the same moment, the under-viewer's wife and Miles went on their knees, and began to sob.

"Oh! my darling; you are wrong—you have made a mistake," began the woman.

"I *felt* she did not, could not know," sobbed Miles.

The crowd opened a little more, and I went forward. Very near the mouth of the old shaft, lying on a soft bed of grass and undergrowth, was a woman—a woman with a face as white as death. I went up close to her, and gazed at her steadily. Her face looked like death, but she was not dead—a moan or two came through white lips. By the side of the woman, stretched also flat, lay a child; his hat was thrown by his side, and one little leg was bare of shoe and stocking. A white frock was also considerably soiled, and even torn. I took in all these

minor details first—then my eyes rested on the face. I went down on my knees to examine the face, to note its expression more attentively. On the brow, but partly concealed by the hair, was a dark mark, like a bruise, otherwise the face was quiet, natural, life-like. A faint colour lingered in the cheeks; the lips were parted and smiling.

The woman was groaning in agony. The child was quiet—looking as a child will look when he has met with a new delight. I laid my hand on the little heart—it never stirred. I felt the tiny pulse—it was still. The injured and suffering woman was Gwen. The dead baby was not the under-viewer's child, but David's little lad.

I took no further notice of Gwen, but I kept on kneeling by the side of the dead child. I have not the least idea whether I was suffering at this moment; my impression is that I was not. Mind, body, spirit, were all quiet under the influence of a great shock. I knew and realised perfectly that little David was dead; but I took in, as yet, no surrounding circumstances. Finding that I was so still, that I neither sobbed nor groaned—in fact, that I did nothing but gaze steadily at the dead child, the under-viewer's wife knelt down by my side, and began to pour out her tale. She did this with considerable relief in her tone. When she began to speak, Miles also knelt very close to me, and laid his hand with a caressing movement on my dress. I was pleased with Miles' affection—glad to receive it—and found that I could follow the tale told by the under-viewer's wife, without any effort.

I mention all this just to show how very quiet I not only was in body, but in mind.

"No, the shaft was never filled in," began the woman. "I waited day after day, but it was never done; and little Ellen, and Gwenllynn, and the baby, they seemed just from contrariness to h'always want to go and look over the brink. And what made it more danger, was the brambles and grass, and growth of h'all kinds, which from never being cut away, has got thicker year by year; so that coming from that side," pointing west with her finger, "you might never see the old shaft at all, but tumble right in, and know nothing till you reach the bottom. Well, I was so frightened with this, and the contrariness of the children, that finding Mr Morgan had forgot again to have the shaft filled in, or closed round, only last night I spoke to my husband, and begged him to cut away some of the rankest of the growth, as it war, what it is, a sin and a shame to have the shaft like a trap, unknown to folks; but my husband, he war dead tired, and he knowed that I'm timmersome, so he only said, 'Let be, woman—let be.' And this morning he was away early—down to the mine. Well," after a long pause, "I had done my bit o' work. I had dressed the baby—bless him—and given Ellen and Gwenllynn their breakfast, and I was standing by the house door, my eye on the old shaft, and my mind set on the thought that I might put up a fence round it myself, so as to ward off the children, when sudden and sharp—almost nigh to me—I heard a woman scream, and looking, I saw a woman running for her bare life, and screaming and making for my cottage; and she had a child in her arms; and sudden, when I saw her, I knew who she was, and why she was running. I knew she was the nurse of Squire Morgan's little son, and that she had the child with her. I knew she had been to the eye-well, for the cure of the sight of the baby, and that she was coming by this short cut home. And she never knew that she'd have to pass through the field with Mr Daniels' bull. Well, I saw her running, and the bull after her, but he was a good way behind; and I thought she'd reach the cottage. And I shouted out to encourage her; when all on a heap, it flashed on me, that she was making straight for the shaft, and that she'd be right down in the pit, if I couldn't stop her. Just then, two men came up, and turned the bull aside, but she didn't know it, and kept on running harder and harder. 'Stop!' I shouted. 'Stop! you'll be down in the mine'; but she neither heeded nor heard me, and she went right through the thicket and the underwood. I heard it cracking under her feet. I saw her fall, and scream more piercing than h'ever." Another pause from the narrator—then in a breathless kind of way, "I war at the other side o' the pit in a twinkling. She had not gone down—not quite. Her head was above the ground, and she was holding on for bare life to a bit of underwood. She could only hold with one hand; the other was round the child. In one second she'd have been down, for the weight was too much, when I threw myself on my face and hands, and grasped the baby's frock. 'Hold the tree with both hands,' I said, 'and I'll keep the baby.' Poor soul! she looked up at me so anguish-like; but she did what I bid her, or they'd both have gone down. I was drawing up the baby, when a loose stone came tumbling—it was not much, it but hit him sharp on the temple. He never cried out, but his head dropped all on a sudden. When I got him to the top, he was dead. I laid him on the bank, and just then the men who had turned away the bull, came up, and they lifted the woman out of the shaft—one of her legs was broke!"

The under-viewer's wife paused to wipe the moisture from her brow. Just then little feet came pattering, and the living child of the under-viewer, about whom I had grieved and dreamt, came up and looked down at the dead child of my brother. The face of the living baby gazed solemnly at the face of the dead baby. Nobody interrupted him, and he sat down and put, half in play, as though expecting an answering touch, his plump hand on the little hand that was still. At this moment there was a commotion in the crowd, then profound stillness, then a giving way on all sides, and a man's hasty footsteps passed rapidly through our midst. Up straight to where the dead child was lying, the man came. He bent his head a little—he saw no other creature. This man was Owen. For about half a minute he was still. Then from his lips came one sharp cry—the sharpest cry of anguish I ever heard from mortal lips—then he rushed away.

Chapter Sixteen.

The Little Lad.

"Mother," I said, "I will go to Tynycymmer, and tell David."

"No, no, my dear child; you are not able."

"Mother, some one must tell him; you have to stay here to take care of poor Gwen when they bring her home, and perhaps Owen will come back. Mother, I will tell David, only I may tell him in my own way, may I not?"

"As you please, my child, my child!"

Mother put her head down on the table and began to sob.

I kissed her. I was not crying. From the first I had never shed a tear. I kissed mother two or three times, then I went out and asked Miles, who had followed me home, to get the horse put to Owen's dog-cart; when the dog-cart was ready, I kissed mother again and got into it.

"Come with me, Miles," I said to the boy.

The bright colour mounted to his cheeks, he was preparing to jump into the vacant seat by my side, when suddenly he stopped, his face grew pale, and words came out hurriedly—

"No, I mustn't, I'd give the world to, but I mustn't."

"Why not, when I ask you? you needn't go into the mine to-day."

"Perhaps not to work, but I must, I must wait for Mr Morgan; I must take him into the mine."

"Well, I cannot stay," I said impatiently; "tell Williams to take me to the railway station at P—." As I drove away I had a passing feeling that Miles might have obliged me by coming, otherwise, I thought no more of his words. After a rapid drive I reached the railway station; I had never travelled anywhere, I had never gone by rail alone in my life, but the great pressure on my mind prevented my even remembering this fact. I procured a ticket, stepped into the railway carriage, and went as far in the direction of Tynycymmer as the train would take me. At the little roadside station where I alighted, I found that I could get a fly. I ordered one, then went into the waiting-

room, and surveyed my own image in a small cracked glass. I took off my hat and arranged my hair tidily; after doing this, I was glad to perceive that I looked much as usual, if only my eyes would laugh, and my lips relax a little from their unyouthful tension? The fly was ready, I jumped in; a two-mile drive would bring me to Tynycymmer. Hitherto in my drive from Ffynon, and when in the railway carriage, I had simply let the fact lie quiescent in my heart that I was going to tell David. Now, for the first time, I had to face the question, "How shall I tell him?" The necessary thought which this required, awoke my mind out of its trance. I did not want to startle him; I wished to break this news so as to give him as little pain as possible. I believed, knowing what I did of his character, that it could be so communicated to him, that the brightness should reach him first, the shadow afterwards. This should be my task; how could I accomplish it? Would not my voice, choked and constrained from long silence, betray me? Of my face I was tolerably confident. It takes a long time for a young face like mine to show signs of grief; but would not my voice shake? I would try it on the driver, who I found knew me well, and was only waiting for me to address him. Touching his hat respectfully, the man gave me sundry odds and ends of information. "Yes, Mr Morgan was very well; but there had been a good deal of sickness about, and little Maggie at the lodge had died. Squire Morgan was so good to them all; he was with little Maggie when she died."

"Did Maggie die of the fever?" I asked.

"Yes, there was a good deal of it about."

"And was it not infectious?"

"Well, perhaps so, but only amongst children."

I said nothing more, only I resolved more firmly than ever to break the news gently to David.

I was received with a burst of welcome from trees and shining waves, early spring flowers, and dear birds' notes. Gyp got up from the mat where he lay in the sunshine, and wagged his tail joyfully, and looked with glad expressive eyes into my face. The servants poured out a mixture of Welsh and English. I began to tremble; I very nearly gave way. I asked for David; he was out, somewhere at the other end of the estate; he would however be back soon, as he was going on business to Chepstow. The servants offered to go and fetch him, but I said no, I would wait until he came in. I went into the house, how familiar everything looked! the old oak chairs in the hall, the flowers and ferns. I opened the drawing-room door, but did not enter, for its forlorn and dismantled condition reminded me forcibly that with familiarity had come change. A few months ago I had longed for change, but now to-day I disliked it. I knew for the first time to-day that change might mean evil as well as good. I went into David's study and sat down to wait for him; the study looked as it had done since I was a little child. No, even here there was a difference. Over the mantelpiece was an engraving, so placed that the best light might fall on it. It was Noel Paton's "*Mors Janua Vitae*." I suppose most people have seen the original. David and Amy had brought this painter's proof home after their short wedding trip. It was a great favourite of Amy's; she had said once or twice, when least shy and most communicative, that the dying knight reminded her of David. For the first time to-day, as I looked at it, I saw something of the likeness. I stood up to examine it more closely—the victorious face, humble, trustful, glad,—stirred my heart, and awoke in me, though apparently without any connection between the two, the thoughts of last night. I again began to feel the need of God. I pressed my hands to my face; "God give me strength," I said very earnestly. This was my second real prayer.

I had hardly breathed it, when David's hand was on my shoulder.

"So you have come to pay me a visit, little woman; that is right. I was wishing for you, and thinking of you only this morning. I have been lonely. Mother and Owen quite well?"

"Yes, David."

"And my boy?"

"He is well."

"How I have missed him, little monkey! he was just beginning to prattle; but I am glad I sent him away, there is a great deal of sickness about."

"David," I said suddenly, "you are not yourself, is anything wrong?"

"No, my dear, I have been in and out of these cottages a great deal, and have been rather saddened," then with a smile, "I *did* miss the little lad, 'tis quite ridiculous."

He moved away to do something at the other end of the room; he looked worn and fagged, not unhappy. I never saw him with quite *that* expression, but wearied. I could not tell him yet, but I must speak, or my face would betray me.

"How nice the old place looks?" I said.

"Ah! yes; does it not? You would appreciate it after the ugly coal country; but, after all, Owen is working wonders by the mine—turning out heaps of money, and making the whole thing snug and safe."

"Yes," I said.

"Can you stay with me to-night? Gwladys. I must go to Ffynon to-morrow, and I will bring you back then—"

"I will stay," I said.

"I would ask you to give me two or three days; but am afraid of this unwholesome atmosphere for you."

"Oh! I must get back to-morrow," I said.

I do not know how I got out these short sentences; indeed, I had not the least idea what I was saying.

"But there is no real fear, dear," added David, noticing my depression. "You shall come with me for a nice walk on the cliffs, and it will seem like old times—or stay"—pulling out his watch, while a sudden thought struck him—"you don't look quite yourself, little girl; you have got tired out with ugliness. I was just starting for Chepstow, when you arrived. Suppose you come with me. I have business there which will occupy me ten minutes, and then we can take the train and run down to Tintern. You know how often I promised to show you the Abbey."

"Oh! yes, David," I said, a feverish flush on my face, which he must have mistaken for pleasure. "I will go with you. I should like it; but can we not get back to Ffynon to-night?"

"A good thought. Ffynon is as near Tintern as Tynycymmer; we will do so, Gwladys, and I shall see my little lad all the sooner."

He went out of the room, and I pressed my face, down on my hands. No fear now that my heart was not aching—it was throbbing so violently that I thought my self-control must give way. Far more than I ever feared death, did I at that moment, dread the taking away of

a certain light out of David's eyes, when he spoke of his little lad. I could not whisper the fatal words yet: it might seem the most unnatural thing in the world, but I would go with David to Tintern. I would encourage him to talk. I would listen to what he said. He was depressed now—worn, weary, not quite himself—recurring each moment to one bright beacon star—his child. But David had never been allowed to wander alone in the wilderness without the sunlight. I would wait until God's love shone out again on his face, and filled his heart. Perhaps this would happen at Tintern.

I said to myself, it will only make a difference of two or three hours, and the child is dead. Yes, I will give him that respite. I do not care what people think, or what people say. I cannot break this news to him in his home and the child's. This study where he and Amy sat together, where his boy climbed on his knee and kissed him, where he has knelt down and prayed to God, and God has visited him, shall not be the spot where the blow shall fall. He shall learn it from my lips, it is true. I myself will tell him that his last treasure has been suddenly and rudely torn away; but not yet, and never at Tynycymmer.

Having made this resolve, I looked at my watch—it was between eleven and twelve then. I determined that he should learn the evil tidings by four o'clock; this would enable us to catch the return train from Chepstow to Cardiff and from thence to Ffynon. No trains ran to Ffynon in the middle of the day. By allowing David to take me to Tintern, I would, in reality, only delay his coming to Ffynon by an hour or two.

Whether I acted rightly or wrongly in this matter, I have not the least idea. I never thought, at that moment, of any right or wrong. I simply obeyed an impulse. Having quite arranged in my own mind what to do, I grew instantly much stronger and more composed. My heart began to beat tranquilly. Having given myself four hours' respite, I felt relieved, and even capable of playing the part that I must play. I had been, when first I came, suppressing agitation by the most violent effort; but when David returned to tell me that the carriage was at the door, I was calm. He found me with well-assumed cheerfulness, looking over some prints.

"Now, Gwladys, come. We shall just catch the train." I started up with alacrity and took my seat. As we were driving down the avenue, poor Gyp began to howl, and David, who could not bear to see a creature in distress, jumped out and patted him.

"Give Gyp a good dinner," he called back to the servants; "and expect me home to-morrow."

Nods and smiles from all. No tears, as there might have been—as there might have been had they known...

It is not very long, measured by weeks and hours, since David and I took that drive to Tintern; but I think, as God counts time, one day being sometimes as a thousand years, it *is* very long ago. It has pushed itself so far back now in the recesses of my memory—so many events have followed it, that I cannot tell what we spoke, or even exactly what we did. By-and-by, when the near and the far assume their true proportions, I may know all about it; but not just now. At present that drive to Tintern is very dim to me. But not my visit to Tintern itself. Was I heartless? It is possible, if I say here that the beauty of Tintern gave me pleasure on that day. If I say that this was the case, then some, who don't understand, may call me heartless. For when I entered the old ruin of Tintern my heart did throb with a great burst of joy.

I had always loved beautiful things—God's world had always a power over me. In my naughty fits as a child, I had sat on the edge of a cliff, gazed down at the waves, and grown quiet. However rebellious I had been when I went there, I had usually returned, in half-an-hour, penitent; ready to humble myself in the *very* dust for my sins. Not all the voices of all the men and women I knew, could affect me as nature could. For six months now, I had been living in a very ugly country—a country so barren and so desolate, that this longing in me was nearly starved; but even at Ffynon I had found, in my eager wanderings, now and then, a little gurgling stream—now and then, some pretty leaves and tufts of grass, and these had ministered to me. Still the country was ugly, and the place black and barren—what a change to the banks of the Wye, and the ruins of Tintern. When I entered the Abbey, I became conscious for the first time that the day was a spring one—soft, sunshiny, and bright. I looked around me for a moment, almost giddy with surprise and delight; then I turned to David, and laid my hand on his arm.

"May I sit here," pointing to a stone at the right side of the ruin, "may I sit here and think, and not speak to any one for half-an-hour?"

I was conscious that David's eyes were smiling into mine.

"You may sit there and lose yourself for half-an-hour, little woman, but not longer, I will come back for you in half-an-hour."

When David left me, I pulled out my watch; it was past three, in half-an-hour I would tell him.

But for half-an-hour I would give myself up to the joy—no, that is the wrong word—to the peace that was stealing over me. I have said that I was not practically religious. Had anybody asked me, I should have answered, "No, no, I have a worldly heart;" but sitting there in the ruins, the longing for God rose to a strange and passionate intensity. Last night I had said "My Father," with the faint cry of a hardly acknowledged belief. I said it again now, with the satisfied sound of a child. The words brought me great satisfaction, and the sense of a very present help, for my present need.

The bright sunlight flickered on the green grass. I sat back, clasped my hands and watched it. A light breeze stirred the dark ivy that twined round the ruins, some cows were feeding in the shade under the western window outside—I could see their reflections—two men, of the acknowledged tourist stamp, were perambulating on the walls; these men and the happy dumb creatures were the only living things I saw. But I did not want life just then, the lesson I needed and was learning was the lesson of the dead. I had looked at a little dead child that morning, now I looked at the dead work of centuries. The same thought came to me in connection with both—God did it; the old monks of Tintern are with God, little David is with God. To be with God must be for good, not for evil to His creatures. If only then by death we can get quite away to God, even death must be good.

It is a dreadful thing when we can only see the evil of an act; once the good, however faintly, appears, then the light comes in. The light came back to me now, and I felt it possible that I could tell David about the death of the child. Meanwhile I let my soul and imagination rest in the loveliness before me. Here was not only the beauty of flower and grass, of tree, and sky, and river, but here also was the wonderful beauty God put long ago into the hearts of men. It grew in chancel, and aisle, and pillar, and column. The minds may have conceived, but the hearts must have given depth and meaning to the conception. The mind is great, but the heart is greater. I saw the hearts of the old monks had been at work here. No doubt they fasted, and wrestled in prayer, and had visions, some of them, as they reared this temple, of another and greater built without hands. The many-tinted walls of the New Jerusalem may have been much in their thoughts as the light of their painted windows streamed on their heads when they knelt to pray.

Yes, they were dead, their age with its special characteristics was gone, their Abbey was in ruins, their story was a story of long ago. The old monks were dead, gone, some of them, to a world where a narrow vision will extend into perfect knowledge, where the Father whom they dimly sought will fully reveal Himself.

"David," I said, when David returned and seated himself by my side, "it is beautiful, but it is dead, I can only think of the dead here."

"Yes, my dear, the story of the old monks does return to one."

David too looked very peaceful. I could tell him. I pulled out my watch, I had a few moments yet.

"Do you remember, David, what you said once about music, and high hills, or mountains; you said they lifted you up, and made you feel

better, do you feel that here?"

"Yes, dear, I feel near God," he took off his hat as he spoke, "I think God comes close to us in such a beautiful scene as this, Gwladys."

"Yes," I said.

"But my thoughts are not quite with you about Tintern," he continued, "it is full of memories of the dead, of a grand past age, full of earnestness which I sometimes think we lack, still the central thought to me here is another."

"What is that?" I asked.

"*Thou remainest*," raising his head and looking up at the sky, "all others may leave us—all, home, earthly love—all may pass away, only to leave us more completely alone with God, only to fill us more with God." I was silent.

"Yes, Gwladys, that is the thought of thoughts for me at Tintern—God remains. Never with His will need we unloose our hold of the Divine hand."

I looked at my watch again, the time had nearly come for me to tell him; was he not himself making it easy?

"And God's mercies follow us so continually too, Gwladys," continued my brother; "I have had some sorrow, it is true, but still mercy has always gone with it. Think of Owen, for instance. Oh! I have wrestled in prayer for him, and been faithless. Amy often reproached me for it; she said God would make it all right for Owen, that God loved and would always love him. Dear child, how I remember her words; and now, my dear, it seems all coming true, Owen is so steady, so careful, so anxious to succeed, so much liked, he is so honourable too about that money I lent him. Not that I care for it, not in the least, but I like the feeling in the dear fellow, and he is making everything right down in the mine. When I remember how *nearly* he was shipwrecked, and now see good hope of his yet making for the haven; I'm not quite sure yet that the love of God actuates him solely, but it will come, for God is leading him."

I looked at my watch again, it was four o'clock. I must speak.

"David," I said, "do you love God better than any one?"

The agitation in my voice must have penetrated to David's heart at once; he turned round and looked at me.

"I *do* love Him better than any one, Gwladys; but why do you ask?"

"You would never be angry with God whatever He did?" I said, again.

"Angry? no, no; what a strange question."

"I have a reason for asking it," I said.

"Gwladys, you have been keeping something from me; what is the matter, what is wrong?"

David was excited now, he took my hand in his with a grasp which unconsciously was fierce.

"There is something wrong," I whispered.

"Something you have been keeping from me?"

"Yes."

"All day?"

"Yes."

"How dared—" checking himself—remaining silent for a second, then speaking with enforced composure.

"Tell it to me, my dear."

But I had given way, I was down on the grass, my face hidden, my sobs rending me.

"Is anything wrong with the mother? Gwladys."

"No, no, she is well."

"Or Owen?"

"No."

"The mine is all safe, there has been no accident?"

"The mine is safe."

A long pause, I was sobbing, David was breathing hard.

"It isn't, oh! my God, there is nothing wrong with the little lad?"

"It is him."

"Not dead."

"He is dead."

I raised my head now to look at David. David put out his hand to ward me back.

"Don't speak to me," he said, "don't tell me anything more about it yet. I must be alone for a little, wait here for me."

He disappeared out of the doorway, he did not return for two hours; during those two hours I prayed without ceasing for him.

Chapter Seventeen.

Sight to the Blind.

All this time I had completely forgotten Owen. Never once during the whole of that day had I given Owen a thought. His agony and his sin were alike forgotten by me; his very name had passed from my memory.

At the end of two hours David returned to my side, sat down quietly, and asked me to tell him what I knew.

I did not dare look in his face. I repeated as briefly, as impassively as I could, what I had witnessed and heard this morning. To make my story intelligible, it was necessary to mention Owen's forgetfulness of the old shaft; this brought Owen back to my mind, but with only the passing thought essential to the telling of my tale.

To my whole story David listened without a comment, or the putting of a single question. He sat, his head a little forward, his hands clasped round his knee. I saw that the veins had started prominently forward in the strong hands. When I came to the part of my tale where Owen appeared and bent over the dead child, he started for the first time, and looked me full in the face; then he rose to his feet, put his hand on my shoulder, and said—

"Come, my dear; we will go home. I must find Owen!"

"Find Owen!" I repeated, too surprised to keep in my hasty words. "Do you want him so quickly? has he not brought this trouble upon you?"

"Hush, Gwladys, in God's name—this is an awful thing for Owen!"

Once or twice as we travelled back to Ffynon, as quickly as horses and steam could take us, I heard David say again under his breath, "This is an awful thing for Owen!"

His first question when we got back, and mother raised her white, agitated face to his, was—

"Where is Owen? I must see Owen directly!"

"Oh, my boy! he is not here; he has not been here all day. Oh, my dear, dear boy; I am so terrified about him!"

"Not here all day, mother! Have you no idea where he is?"

"No, my son; he left the house when he heard of the accident, and has not been back since. David, you won't be hard on him—you will—"

"How can you ask me, mother? Will you never understand what I feel for Owen?" he said, impatiently, and in pain; then, turning to leave the room, "I am going to find Owen at once!—but stay! where and how is Gwen?"

"Gwen is upstairs; she is very ill; she blames herself most bitterly. She has been asking for you."

"I will see her for a moment before I go. Don't come with me, mother and Gwladys; I will see her alone."

David had been with Gwen for five minutes, I heard Gwen sobbing, and David talking to her quietly, when at the end of that time I entered the room.

"David, Miles Thomas is downstairs; he has been hanging about the place all day; he begs to see you; he knows about everything. Still, he says he *must* see you. I hope nothing is wrong."

"Who is Miles Thomas?"

"A boy—one of the trappers in the mine."

"Oh! of course. I will see him directly."

David and the boy were together for half-an-hour; they paced up and down outside. I saw David's hand on his shoulder, and observed the boy raise entreating eyes to his face. At the end of that time Miles ran away, and David returned to the house. He entered the room where I was trying to prepare some tea for him. Mother was upstairs with Gwen. David came up and put his arm round my waist.

"My dear little woman, I want to lay on you a great responsibility."

"I am ready, brother," I said, looking up, bravely. "Gwladys, there is something not quite right with the mine. I am going down there to-night with Miles. I cannot look for Owen to-night. If all goes well, as I hope, I may be up in the morning. I want you, Gwladys, to try and keep all knowledge of where I have gone from mother, until the morning. She heard me say I would look for Owen; let her suppose this as long as you can."

"And you—you are going into danger!"

"I hope not. I hope I am going to prevent danger; but there is doubtless a possibility of my being too late."

"Then, David," rising selfishly, clinging to him cowardly; "dear David—dear, dear David, do not go."

"What!" said David, holding me from him, and looking into my face. "No, my dear; that is not your real counsel, when I may save the lives of others." Then, seeing that I began to sob again, that I was trembling and broken with grief. "Come with me, darling; I should like to see the little lad before I go away." I led the way upstairs. The baby was lying on my bed—his nursery was used by Gwen. The moonlight—for it was evening—flooded the white bed, and lit up the pale check. This time last night I heard Gwen soothing him into his last earthly slumber; but now, how sweetly did Jesus his shepherd make the baby sleep; the dark-fringed eyes were hardly closed, the lips were smiling.

"He sees at last, my little lad," said David, stooping down and kissing him—he was about to say something more, but checked himself; two tears splashed heavily down on the happy little face, then he went away to my writing-table, and taking out a pen, ink, and paper, wrote hastily a few lines, folded up the paper, and brought it back to me.

"*Whenever* Owen returns, give him that *at once!*"

Then he was gone.

Chapter Eighteen.

Our Father.

But Owen did not come back that night.

We got a nurse for Gwen, who was suffering sadly from her broken leg, and mother and I sat up together by the dining-room fire.

Without saying a word to each other, but with the same thought in both our minds, we piled coals on the grate for a night watch.

Mother ordered meat and wine to be laid on the table, then she told the servants to go to bed, but she gave me no such direction; on the contrary, she came close to where I had seated myself on the sofa, and laid her head on my shoulder.

I began to kiss her, and she cried a little, just a tear or two; but tears never came easily with mother. Suddenly starting up, she looked me eagerly in the face. "Gwladys, how old are you?"

"Sixteen—nearly seventeen, mother."

"So you are. You were born on May Day. I was so pleased, after my two big boys, to have a daughter—though you *were* fair-haired, and not like the true Morgans. Well, my daughter, you don't want me to treat you like a child—do you?"

"Dear mother, if you did, you would treat me like what I am not. I can never be a child again, after to-day."

"I am glad of that—two women can comfort one another."

"Dear mother," I said, kissing her again.

"Gwladys," catching my hand, nervously, "I have had an awful day. I have still the worst conjectures. I don't believe we are half through this trouble."

"Dear mother, let us hope so—let us pray to God that it may be so."

"Oh! my dear child, I was never a very religious woman. I never was, really. I have obeyed the forms, but I think now, I believe now that I know little of the power. I don't feel as if I *could* come to God the moment I am in trouble. If I were like Gwen it would be different—I wish you could have heard her quoting texts all day long—but I am not like her. I am not," an emphatic shake of her head. "I am not a religious woman."

"And, mother," my words coming out slowly, "I am not religious either. I have no past to go to God with. Still it seems to me that I want God awfully to-night."

"Oh! my child," breaking down, and beginning to sob pitifully. "I don't; I only want Owen. Oh I suppose Owen never comes back to me."

"But, mother, that is very unlikely."

"I don't know, Gwladys. You did not see his face when that terrible news was broken to him this morning. He never spoke to me—he just got ghastly, and rushed away without a single word; and he has never been back all day—never once; though that boy—young Thomas, has been asking, asking for him. He said he had promised to go down into the mine. I could not stop the boy, or put him off—so unfeeling, after all that has happened. But *why* is Owen away? It is dreadful—the sudden death of the dear little baby. But I never knew Owen cared so much for him; he only saw him once or twice."

"Mother, I wonder you cannot guess. Do you not know that it was through Owen's—Owen's—well, mother, I *must* tell you—it was partly through Owen that little David was killed."

Mother's face grew very white, her eyes flashed, she left my side, and went over to the fire. "Gwladys, how dare you—yes, how dare you even utter such falsehoods. Did Owen take the child to the eye-well? Did Owen put the wicked bull in the field? How can you say such things of your brother?"

"They are no falsehoods, mother. If Owen had kept his promise to poor Mrs Jones, and had the old shaft filled up, nothing would have happened to the baby."

"It is useless talking to you, Gwladys. I would rather you said no more. Ever since his return you have been unjust to Owen."

Mother, seating herself in the arm-chair by the fire, turned her back on me, and I lay down on the sofa. I was very tired—tired with the tension of my first day of real grief; but I could not sleep, my heart ached too badly. Hitherto, during the long hours that intervened since the early morning, I had, as I said, hardly thought of Owen; but now mother herself could scarcely ponder on his name, or his memory, more anxiously than I did. As I thought, it seemed to me that I, too, was guilty of the baby's death. I had turned my heart from my brother—a thousand things that I might have done I left undone. David had asked me to help him, to aid him. I had not done so. Never once since his return had I strengthened his hands in any right way. On the contrary, had I not weakened them? And much was possible for me. In many ways—too many and small to mention—I might have kept Owen's feet in the narrow path of duty. In this particular instance might I not have reminded him of the old shaft, and so have saved little David's life?

Yes, mother was right. I was unjust to Owen; but I saw now that I had *always* been unjust to him. In the old days when I thought him perfect as well as now. I was a child then, and knew no better. Now I was a woman. Oh! how bitterly unjust was I to my brother now. Loudly, sternly did my heart reproach me, until, in my misery and self-condemnation, I felt that David and Owen could never love me again. Through the mists and clouds of my own self-accusation, Owen's true character began to dawn on me. Never wholly good, or wholly bad, had Owen been. Affectionate, generous, enthusiastic, was one side of that heart—selfish and vain the other. Carefully had mother and I nurtured that vanity—and the fall had come. All his life he had been earning these wages; at last they had been paid to him—paid to him in full and terrible measure. *The wages of sin is death.* Little David was dead.

Owen's face, as I had seen it this morning, returned to me. His sharp cry of bitter agony rang again in my ears. Yes, the fruit of all that easy, careless life had appeared. I saw my brother as he was; but, strange as it may seem, at last, with all this knowledge, with the veil torn away from my eyes, I longed, prayed for, and loved him as I had never done before. I think I did this because also from my heart of hearts rose the bitter supplication—

"Have mercy on my sin too. Thou who knowest all men—Thou knowest well that my sin is as deep and black as his."

The clock struck twelve, and mother, who had been sitting silent, and who I hoped was asleep, moved restlessly, turned round, and addressed me.

"Has not David gone to look for Owen?"

"He said he would go, mother."

"My dear boy—if any one can find him he will. How did he bear the terrible news? Gwladys. I had no time to ask you before."

"I can hardly tell you, mother. He said scarcely anything—he seemed greatly troubled on Owen's account."

"Ah! dear fellow—the most unselfish fellow in the world; and how Owen does love him. You are sure he has gone to look for him?"

"Dear mother, did you not hear him say so?"

"Yes, yes—well. God give me patience."

Another restless movement from mother, then a couple of hours' silence. At two o'clock she got up and made down the fire, then went to the window and looked out, opened her lips to speak to me—I saw the movement; restrained herself, and sat down again. The clock struck three. A slight sound of a passing footfall outside, an eager clasping of mother's hands. The footfall passed—all was stillness. Mother rose again, poured out a glass of sherry, drank it off, filled out another, and brought it to my side. I, too, drank the wine without a comment. Mother returned to her seat, and I went to sleep.

The clock was striking six when I awoke. The window-shutters were open; the place was full of bright sunshine and daylight. I was awakened by mother standing over me. She was trembling and half crying.

"Oh! Gwladys—oh! my darling, they have never come home—the whole night has gone, and they have never appeared. Oh! I am so dreadfully frightened. Yes, Gwladys, though I am not a religious woman, yet I must go to God; I must get God to help me. Come with me, my daughter."

Together we went down on our knees. I clasped mother's hands. We neither of us spoke.

"Say something, Gwladys," said mother.

"Mother—I cannot. I have never prayed aloud."

"Well, a form—some words. I am so broken—so frightened."

"Our Father," I began, impelled to say something quickly by the sound in mother's voice, "our Father—deliver us from evil."

"Ah! there it is," sobbed mother. "That's what I want. Oh! Lord, hear me. Oh! Christ, hear me. I'm a poor, weak, broken-down mother. Hear a mother's cry. Save my boy—deliver my boy from evil. Oh! I have been wrong to think only of getting back the old place as it used to be—it was *my* fault, if any one's, if my Owen forgot to see to the general safety. I urged him so hard; I gave him no rest. But oh! don't punish me too hard—deliver my boy—my boy from evil."

Now, I don't know why I said what I did, for all night long my thoughts and fears had been with Owen; but at this juncture I burst out with an impulse I could not withstand—with a longing I could not restrain.

"That is not fair—you say nothing about David. Ask God to deliver David, too, from evil."

"Gwladys, why—why do you say this?"

"I don't know," rising to my feet, and steadying my voice. "Mother, it is daylight. I will go down to see little Nan—she may tell me something."

Chapter Nineteen.

A Rich Vein of Coal.

I think her prayer, which was literally a cry of agony to her true Father, brought mother some strength and comfort. She grew more composed, and when I ran away to Nan's cottage, she went up to see Gwen.

I had obeyed David's message to the letter. I had not let her know of any possible danger to him. All her thoughts and fears were centred on Owen—indeed, we both had thought most of Owen during the long hours of the weary night. But now David might really seek him; the chances were that the evil he dreaded was averted, that he would come up from the mine with the night shift. He would need a few hours' rest, and then he might really seek for Owen. It had occurred to me as I lay awake in the night, that Owen, who knew nothing of my visit to Tynycymmer, might have gone there himself to tell David, this was quite a likely thing for him to do. In that case, David might go there and bring him back. I fancied his return, I fancied gentle, humble, forgiving words; I thought of mother, sister, brother, starting together on a surer, happier footing, of possible good arising out of this sorrow. In short, as I walked down to Nan's cottage, I saw a rainbow spanning this cloud. How short-sighted and ignorant I was! Did I not know that sin must bring its punishment, that however a man may repent, however fully and freely a man may be forgiven, yet in pain, sorrow and bitterness must the wages his own deeds have brought him, be paid. I entered Nan's cottage; it was early, not more than six o'clock, but Nan was up, had even eaten her breakfast, and was now, when I arrived, washing some coarse delf cups and saucers in a wooden tub. I had learned in my intercourse with this strange child to read her face almost like a book. The moment I saw it to-day my heart sank, Nan had on her very oldest and most careworn expression.

"You are up to fifty, to-day. Nan," I said with the ghost of a smile. For answer, Nan looked me hard in the face, and began to cry.

"Oh! I'm so sorry," she began, coming up to my side, "I've been thinking so much of you all, Miss Morgan, and I've been crying so bitter to the Lord to comfort you."

"I am glad of that, Nan," I said, "but don't let us talk of our trouble now. I want you tell me all you know about the mine; and, first, has my brother come up?"

"*All* I know," repeated Nan, "but Miles said I was not to babble."

"Yes, but my brother has told me there is, or was, danger; you know we always imagine danger to be worse than it is, so do tell me what is wrong; and, first, *has* my brother come up?"

"No, Miss Morgan, not with the night shift. The Squire and Miles are still down in the mine."

"And all the men have gone down as usual this morning?" I asked.

"Oh! yes, and father with them."

"Then there cannot be danger?"

"Well, I don't know—I'm that timmersome, it may seem so to me; or it may be h'all Miles's fancy, but he's rare and knowing, Miles is."

"Well, dear Nan, please sit down quietly and tell me the whole story from beginning to end, what you know and what you fear."

Nan had by this time wiped away all traces of her tears; she was given to sudden bursts of grief, out of which her dark eyes used to flash as bright as though the briny drops were unknown to them. Had I met Nan apart from personal tragedy, I might have considered her tiny form, her piquant old-fashioned face, and quaint words, an interesting study; but now I felt a little impatient over her long delays, and deep-drawn sighs, and anxious to launch her midway into her tale.

"Miles is very knowing," began Nan, seeing I was determined, and would have my way; "Miles is very knowing, and from the time he was a little, little lad, he'd study father's plan o' the mine. I never could make out the meanin' o' it, but long before Miles ever went down into a mine he knew all about levels, and drifts, and headings, and places without number; and he used to say to me, 'Why, our mine is like a town, Nan, it has its main roads, and its crossings, and its railways, and all;' he tried to make a romance out of the mine for me, seeing I was so timmersome, and he never spoke of danger, nor fall o' roofs, nor gas, nor nothing, when I was by; only when they thought I was asleep, I used to hear him and father talk and talk; and somehow, Miss Morgan, the hearing of 'em whispering, whispering of danger, made the danger, just as you say, twice as big to me, and I used to be that frightened I feared I'd die just from sheer old h'age. And at last I spoke to the Lord about it, and it seemed to me the Lord made answer loud and clear, 'Resist the devil and he will flee from you;' and then I saw plain as daylight, that the devil to me now, was the fear of danger to father and Miles, and the only thing to do was to turn and face it like a man, or may be a woman, which sometimes is bravest. So I went to Miles and told him how I had prayed, and what the Lord had said, and I begged of Miles to tell me h'all about everything, all the danger of fire-damp, and explosions, and inundations. Oh! Miss Morgan, he did what I axed him, he seemed real pleased; and for a fortnight I scarce slept a wink, but then I got better, and I found the devil, now I was facing him, brave and manful, did not seem so big. Then I went to Miles again, and I made him promise not never to hide when he thought danger was going to be in the mine, and he was real glad, and said he would faithful tell me h'every thing. Well, Miss Morgan, he was very sharp and had his wits about him, and he heard people talk, and for all Mr Morgan was so pleasant, and so well liked, father said that he was so rare and anxious to win the coal, that sometimes, though he had reformed so much in the mine, he was a bit rash, and then the men grumbled about the coal pillars being struck away so much, and the supports not being thick enough."

"But I spoke to Owen about that," I interrupted eagerly, "and he was so dreadfully hurt and vexed; he would not endanger the men's lives for the world, Nan; and he said that he was an engineer and must understand a great deal more about the mine than the miners. After all, Nan," I continued rather haughtily, and with feelings new and yet old stirring in my heart for Owen, "your little brother *cannot* know, and without meaning it, he probably exaggerates the danger."

"That may be so, Miss Morgan, but in the case of the coal supports it was the talk of all the men."

"I know," I continued, "I have heard that miners were never contented yet with any manager; they were sure, *whatever* the manager did, to find fault with him."

"You wrong us there, Miss, you wrong us most bitter; there is not a man belonging to Ffynon mine who does not love Mr Morgan; there is not a man who does not feel for his trouble. Why, the way he looked yesterday when he saw the little baby, has been the talk of the place; and last night a lot of our men prayed for him most earnest. We all knows that it was want of thought with Mr Morgan, we all loves him."

"Dear Nan, forgive me for speaking so hastily, and do go on."

"Well, Miss Morgan, Miles, he always says that he must learn, if he lives, to be an engineer, he's so fond of anything belonging to it. What 'ud you say, Miss, but he drewed h'out a plan of the mine for himself, and when it was finished he showed it to me and father; it worn't exactly like father's old plan, but father said in some ways it might be more right. Well, Miss, Miles, haven't much to do in the mine, he's what they calls a trapper—that is, he has to shut and open the doors to let the trams of coal pass, so he has to stand in the dark, and plenty of time for thought has he. Well, Miss, about a month ago, Mr Morgan was down in the mine, and he said they was letting a fine seam of coal lie idle, and he said it should be cut, and it stretched away in another direction. Well, Miles, he had to act trapper at some doors close to the new seam, and it came into his head, with his knowledge of the mine, and his own plan, that they must be working away right in the direction of Pride's Pit, which you know, Miss, is full of water. Miles had this thought in his head for some days, and at last he told me, and at last he told father, and father said, being vexed a bit, 'Don't fancy you have a wiser head on your shoulders than your elders, my boy; we are likely enough working in the direction of Pride's Pit, but what of that, 'tis an uncommon rich vein of coal; and, never fear, we'll stop short at the right side of the wall.' Well, Miss, Miles tried to stop his fears but he couldn't, happen what would, he couldn't, and he said to me, 'Why, Nan, the men are all so pleased with the new find of coal, that they'll just stop short at nothing, and the manager is beside himself with delight, and they'll work on, Nan, until they gets to the water; why, sometimes standing there, I almost fancies I *hears* it,' and at last, two nights ago, he said to me, 'Nan, my mind is made up, I'll speak to Mr Morgan.' Then, Miss, you know what happened, and how all day long Mr Morgan never came back, and Miles, he wandered about just like a ghost, more fretted about the mine than he was about the dear little baby, so that I was fain to think him heartless: then at last, the Squire came, and he *would* tell him everything, and the Squire said, 'I'll go down with you at once, Miles; I'll see what I can for myself, and question every man in the mine, and if there appears to be the slightest truth in what you fear, all the workings shall be stopped until my brother returns.'"

A long pause from Nan, then in a low sweet voice, "Late last night Miles came in, and put his arms round my neck and said, 'Nan, darling, the Squire and me, we're going down; we'll put it all right, please God. Don't you be down-hearted, Nan; *whatever* happens. Jesus loves us, and now that I've got the Squire with me, I feels bold as a lion, for I *know* I'm right, there *is* danger.'" Another pause, then facing round and looking me full in the face. "There, Miss, that's the whole story."

"But, Nan, Nan, suppose the water does burst in?"

"Why, then, Miss, every one in the mine will be drowned, or—or starved to death."

"And it *may* come in at any moment?"

"I doesn't know, I means to keep h'up heart, don't let you and me frighten one another, Miss Morgan."

Chapter Twenty.

The Jordan River.

Can I ever forget that day? It seemed the worst of all the ten. Yes, I think it was quite the worst. Before the last of those ten days came, I had grown accustomed to suffering; the burden given me to carry began to fit on my young shoulders. I lay down with it, and arose with it; under its weight I grew old in heart and spirit, as old as Nan. Laughter was far from my lips, or smiles from my eyes.

But why do I speak of myself? Why do I say, I, I? I was one of many suffering women at Ffynon?

Let me talk of it as *our* sorrow!

What a leveller trouble is! There was mother, laying her proud head on little Nan's neck; there was the under-viewer's wife taking me in her arms, and bidding me sob a few tears, what tears I could shed, on her bosom.

Yes, in the next ten days the women of Ffynon had a common sorrow. I do not speak here of the men, the men acted nobly, but I think

the women who stood still and endured, had the hardest part to play.

“Heroic males the country bears,
But daughters give up more than sons;
Flags wave, drums beat, and unawares
You flash your souls out with the guns,
And take your heaven at once.

“But we; we empty heart and home.
Of life’s life, love! we bear to think
You’re gone, to feel you may not come.
To hear the door-latch stir and clink,
Yet no more you—nor sink.”

But I must tell my story. I left little Nan, I went home to mother. I told her, for I had to tell her now, something about David. She was not much alarmed, I don’t think I was either. We thought it probable that David would come up out of the mine at any moment. I think our worst fears and our strongest suffering was for Owen. We sat together, dear mother and I, very anxious, very expectant, very patient. Hour after hour we sat together, waiting for David and Owen. Overhead, poor Gwen suffered and moaned; we did not tell her of our anxiety, she was too ill to hear it. In the room next to Gwen’s, the little baby slept. When my fear and anxiety grew quite unbearable, I used to steal upstairs and look at David’s little lad. Once I took the little icy hand and held it in my own for a long time, and tried to chafe it into life and warmth. I could not do it. No more than I could chase away the fear which was growing, growing in my own hearty. From my window I could see the pit bank. It was an ugly sight, and one I seldom gazed at. I hated the appearance of the ugly steam-engines, and the dusty coal-covered figures. I hated the harsh noise, the displeasing commotion; but to-day nothing comforted me so much as to draw the blinds, which were down, and look towards this same pit bank; the roaring steam, the appearance of quiet, rapid, regular work soothed my fears, and became a blessed and soul-sustaining sight. I felt sure as long as these signs of regular work were going on on the bank, that all must be right in the mine. Still, why did not David return? So much depended on his return, he had promised so faithfully not to remain below a moment longer than was necessary.

As the day wore on, my heart sank and sank, and my fears rose and rose, and at five o’clock on that April afternoon, the blow came. I was standing by my room window, looking toward the pit bank. Suddenly I saw in that familiar scene a change. The greater number of the day crew had come up. I waited to see David’s figure, taller than the rest. The men stood in groups talking eagerly, a number crowded round the mouth of the shaft; out of the houses around, women came rushing, then on the air there rose a bitter sharp cry, and one woman leaving the group, which increased each moment round the shaft, ran, clasping her hands and weeping, towards our house. I recognised her, even as she ran, as the bearer of former ill tidings, Mrs Jones. I went downstairs to meet her. I opened the dining-room door. I called to mother, who was sitting close to the window watching, watching for Owen, thinking little of David. She must know all now, better learn the worst at once.

“Mother,” I said, “Mrs Jones has come, and something dreadful has happened in the mine.”

Then I took the weeping, agitated woman’s hand, and mother clasped her other hand, and we both looked hard in her face, and she looked into ours, and in broken words she told her tale.

How few were her words, but how crushing her intelligence! Just as the men were leaving work, the water had burst in like the sea into the workings; most of the day crew had escaped in time, but fourteen were still below.

“Which?” we asked breathlessly, “who were the doomed ones?”

“Not my son?” said mother.

“Not my brother?” said I.

“Yes,” said the woman, “Squire Morgan is still below—and—and—” bringing out the words with a great gasp, her face, her lips, growing white, “My husband—my George.”

She was silent then, and we three looked at each other in blank wonder and surprise; each was saying in her heart of hearts, “My sorrow is the greatest.”

At last I started to my feet.

“I will go down to the bank and learn more,” I said.

Bonnetless and shawless the next moment I was mingling with the black men, and wild-looking women; I was clasping their hands, looking into their faces, and entreating them to tell me all they knew. One or two turned away from me, one or two muttered that it was the new manager’s fault. Words that made my heart freeze within me, about the blood of husbands and sons being on our heads, reached my ears, then a strong hand was laid on my shoulder, and turning, I recognised through all his coal dust, and blackened face, little Nan’s father, Moses Thomas.

“Come round to my house, dear young lady,” he said, in a gentle tone; then turning to the angry men and women, “Shame on you! cowards! has not Squire Morgan sacrificed his life for you to-day?”

The people shrank back; one woman said, “God bless him!” and Moses Thomas took my hand in his.

Little Nan was waiting for us. In the midst of all my own agony, I almost dreaded seeing Nan’s face, but to my surprise it was quiet. When I entered the house she came up and kissed me. She had never ventured to kiss me of her own accord before, but on this occasion we were equals—nay, on this occasion Nan was greater than I.

“Yes, Miss Morgan,” said Thomas, seating himself and beginning his tale at once. “’Tis very like they is drowned, the Squire, and my lad, and Jones, and eleven more of ’em; and oh! Lord! some was ready, and some isn’t; some was turning to the Lord, and some was just goin’ on in evil; and oh! dear Lord! forgive me, and have mercy upon me!” The man covered his face with his hands, and Nan went down on her knees.

“Lord, forgive father, and lay not this sin to his charge,” she said.

Thomas looked at her from under his shaggy brows, stretched out his hand and stroked her cheek, then making an effort to master some strong emotion, continued his tale.

“Yes, my dear young lady, as I say, ’twas mostly my fault; I felt rare and h’angered this morning, when I went down into the mine, to find that the little chap, unknownst to me, had brought down the Squire. I spoke sharp to the lad, the Lord have mercy on me! The Squire, he had a long talk with me and the deputy, and he wanted the overman to be sent for, but the overman was ill, and I ranks next, and I was rare and vexed, and I laughed at the thought of danger, and I knew the Squire had no knowledge of mines, and ’twas all the little chap’s

conceit. So the upshot of it was we went on with the workin' of the new seam, and I had my h'eye out sharp, and to prevent all chance of danger, I made the men work, as I thought, in a new direction, away from Pride's Pit. Well, the Squire stayed down all day, and two or three times he axed me to stop working until Mr Morgan come back; but I never, no, God knows, I never *thought* of danger. At last it was evening, and I came to the surface, but Miles, being trapper, had to stay down to the last; and the Squire, who seemed mighty taken with the lad, said they would come up together. Well, I had not been to the surface more'n ten minutes, when the news came that the water had burst out of Pride's Pit; most of the men got to the surface in time, but fourteen are below. Oh! God forgive me, God forgive me. My boy, my brave boy was right; if I had hearkened to him, all would have been saved."

At these words Nan went down on her knees again, and looked into her father's face with flushed cheeks and glistening eyes.

"Father, father, *do* you call Miles brave and noble now?"

"Ay, ay, little lass, brave as a lion, my noble lad; how patient he was when I nearly struck him across the face this morning, and how he spoke up so manful, 'Father, I'm not afeerd, but I *know* there's danger.'"

"I'm so glad," said little Nan. "I'm so glad he was brave and noble, and not afeerd; he was follerin' of Jesus. Why, father, if Miles is drowned, he's only gone to Jesus."

"True enough, Nan, he's crossed the Jordan river, and is safe on the holy hill of the better land. No fear for Miles, little lass."

"But, perhaps—perhaps," I murmured, "they are not all drowned; is there no place of escape in the mine?"

"Oh! God grant it, lady; yes, there are rises and levels, they may have got into them, but how are they to be got out? however are they to be got at? Well, if there's a shadow of a chance of this, we miners won't leave a stone unturned to save 'em, no, *not one*, trust us! I must see what can be done!"

Chapter Twenty One.

The Lord was not in the Wind.

I have said that all England knows the story. Still I will tell it, dwelling most on the part that most touched my own heart and my own life.

In doing this I may be selfish, but I can tell this part best.

That night Moses Thomas, with several other brave volunteers, went down the shaft of the Ffynon mine.

The shaft was ninety-two yards deep.

They went down determined to risk life, to save life; but even with this determination, they had little hope of success.

When they reached the mine, the scene that met their eyes was likely to kill that slight hope.

All the workings within a few hundred yards of the bottom of the shaft, were filled with water to the roof. It seemed utterly impossible that a soul now left in the mine could be alive. The water from the old pit had truly come in like a flood, carrying all before it. This being the case, the men were about to ascend to the surface, hopeless and despairing, when suddenly faint knockings were heard on the other side of the coal, at a distance, it was thought, of about a dozen yards.

These knockings sent a thrill of joy through the breasts of the brave men. Every thought of persona! danger was put out of sight, and all night they laboured to cut away the wall of coal, fondly hoping that all the men were safe, imprisoned, but not drowned, and in a few hours they would rescue them. Well, as I said before, the story is known: in the morning five men were reached; four of these five were brought in safety to the surface; but the fifth, a noble young fellow, who had worked splendidly all night for his own rescue, and that of his companions, was killed by a terrific gas explosion, which took place when the coal was worked through.

I was standing by the pit bank when these four men were brought to the surface. I saw women rush forward, and welcome with tears, fervent thanks, and joy, a father, a brother, a husband. I looked in the faces of the four, and turned away with a sick heart, for David was not amongst them. Yes, I was selfish. I could not rejoice in the joy of the few, but most bitterly could I sorrow in the grief of the many.

Mother, who had come down with me in the morning to the mouth of the shaft, quite sure of seeing David, was now weeping hysterically; crying feebly for Owen, who, she said, if present, would surely save David; and mother and I at that time had both that dim idea of the mine, that it seemed to us quite possible that if only men brave enough could be found, they might go even through the water to the rescue.

But what if the nine remaining men were dead! drowned. I knew the colliers were working with might and main, through that slow, torturing passage, the solid coal, to reach them. But what if, after all their efforts, they were only met by death!

Down on my knees in my room, beside the coffin that contained what was mortal of David's little lad, I thought these thoughts of David. Down on my knees, I say, but not to pray. I was in a wild state of rebellion; it seemed to me that the events of the last few days had put the whole world into a state of chaos—a state of confusion so great, that even God Himself could never put it straight again. As this was so, why should I pray to Him? I had never in days of happiness made myself acquainted with God. How could I go to Him in my misery?

I was angry with God. He had been too hard on us. What had we done that He should crush us to the earth?

In a few days what had not befallen us? The sudden and terrible death of David's only little child! Gwen's accident! Owen's disappearance! Now David himself probably dead.

Yes, truly, a whirlwind of destruction had encompassed us; but the Lord was not in the wind.

Raising my head with my mind full of these thoughts, my eyes again fell upon the happy, smiling face of the dead child. The little face seemed to say more eloquently than words, "Yes, God has done all this to you; but He is good—He is very good!"

The face of the baby made me cry; and my tears, without then in any way turning me consciously towards my Father, eased my heart. I was wiping them away, when the handle of the door was turned, and Nan came in. This was no time for ceremony, and Nan made none.

"The men are not all drowned, Miss Morgan; my father and the other workers have heard knockings, very faint like, and a long way off; but still, that is what they want."

"Oh! Nan, is it possible? Is it possible that they'll all be saved? Oh! I cannot believe it!" and I burst into tears.

"Now isn't that wrong and faithless?" said the little girl, taking my hand. "Ain't this a time to exercise faith? Why, there ain't a man there

—no, not a *man*, as won't work with a will. Why, when father come up, he had the blood streaming from his hands. I tell you, Miss Morgan, there's no halting when we looks to bring h'out our brothers and sons!"

"Then, Nan, they may be out to-night?"

"No, Miss; that ain't likely—we mustn't look for impossibles. They are in a stall a long way off, called Thomas Powell's stall; and to get to that, they must work through thirty-eight yards of coal. That ain't light labour; but h'everything that men can do will be done. Why, engineers and miners from all the collieries round are on the spot."

"Nan," I said, "I think I will ask God for one thing. I don't mind telling you, but I have been feeling very bitter against God; but now if He brings me back David and Owen—both of them safe and well—why, then, I will love Him and serve Him always."

Nan was silent for a long time—some thought knitting anxiously her dark brows.

"I don't think I'd make a bargain with the Lord," she said.

"Oh! but, Nan, you cannot quite understand; I have never told you the story of my life. I see now that I never cared for either Owen or David quite in the right way. I want to change all that. Yes," I added, humbly, "I have a great deal to change. I had a beautiful home before I came here; and I grew so tired of it, I wanted to leave it. I know I vexed David—dear, dear David, by wishing to leave Tynycymmer; and then we came here; and he asked me to try, in the little ways a sister can, to help Owen; but I didn't. Oh! Nan, I have not been at all good, and I want to change all that."

"Well, Miss Morgan, from your own words, it seems to me you have a deal to ask the Lord to forgive you."

"Yes, I know I have," I added, humbly.

"Then why don't you ask to be forgiven now—right away?"

"No, I cannot ask now. God is punishing me too hard. I don't love Him now at all."

"You want the lads home first?"

"Oh! yes, indeed. Oh! if I might hope for that, I could love Him—I could serve Him well."

"Eh! dear," said little Nan, "I think I could love Him, even if Miles was gone to Him. Seems to me, for all I'm so timmersome, and I does cling so to Miles, that even if Miles was dead, I could love the Lord. I think father and me, for all we'd grieve bitter, we'd never turn agen the Lord. Why, the Lord's our guide, Miss Morgan; and however rough the way, we'd rayther go that road with Him, than any other in the world without Him. And father and me, we'd soon see that having Miles up in the better land, only 'ud make it more home like. Oh! Miss Morgan, it don't seem to me that yours is a bit the right way."

That night the doctor gave mother a composing draught. She had not slept for two nights; and the sleeplessness, added to her anxiety, had brought on feverish symptoms. Happen what might, sleep was necessary for her, and she was now in bed, wrapped in heavy slumber. After doing what he could for mother, the doctor looked hard into my eyes, but I assured him I was well, which was true—for in body I never felt better. He made me promise, however, to go to bed. I agreed to do so, though sleep seemed very far away. The night was still early, and for an hour or two longer I would sit by the dining-room fire. As mother had done two nights before, I made down a good fire, then sat opposite to it. I sat with my head pressed on my hands, my eyes gazing into the ruddy flames, my thoughts very busy. My thoughts were troublesome—almost agonising. For the first time in my life, my will and God's were standing opposite to one another, opposing one another in grim conflict. My young desire dared to stand up and defy its Creator. The Creator said to the thing that He had made, "*My will be done.*"

The tiny atom replied, "No; not Thy will, but mine."

Thus we were at variance—God and I. I knew I must submit—that God could sweep me aside to perform, independent of me, what seemed good to Him. He could do this, but still my will might rise in rebellion, might dash itself out and die against this rock; but never, no, never submit. I was quite ready, as little Nan had expressed it, to make a bargain with God. I was ready to sell my submission at a fair price. If He left to me that for which my soul longed, then my soul, with its treasures, should be His. But without them—empty, torn, and bare; could that soul go to Him?—go to Him in its desolation, and say, "You, who have taken what I love, who have emptied me in my youth of all light and joy, take me too, and do with me what you will." This I could not do—this deed of submission I could not perform. No, if God would be good to me, I would be good to Him—that was my rebellious thought. No wonder it brought me no rest. No wonder I was tossed about by this wind of desolation; and the Lord—the Lord whom I needed, the Lord who, though I knew it not, was wounding but to heal; slaying, to make me truly live—the Lord was not in the wind. I was sitting so, thinking these thoughts, wondering why trouble had awakened all these depths in me—why I, who only six months ago had been, in every sense, a child, should now feel so old and heavy at heart—when at the window of the room where I was sitting there came a very low tap. At another time such a sound, in the stillness of the night, would have frightened me; but not so now. I went directly to the window, and looked out; then, indeed, my heavy heart gave a bound, for Owen stood without. I could not raise the sash of the window without the possibility of awaking mother; but I went to the front door, and managed softly to open it.

"Is my mother up? Gwladys."

"No, no, Owen," clasping his hands, and trying to drag him over the threshold. "She is worn out—she is in bed, and asleep. Come in, dear Owen."

"No one is up but you?"

"Not a soul."

"Then I will come to the fire for a moment. I am bitterly cold; and could you get me something to eat?"

He crossed the threshold, entered the dining-room—shading his eyes from the light—and threw himself, with the air of one utterly spent, into the arm-chair. So worn and miserable was he, physically, that my first thought—my first thought before I could ask him a single question—was to see to his bodily comforts. I got him food and wine, then going on my knees, I unlaced and removed, as well as I could, his wet and mud-covered boots, went softly upstairs for clean, dry socks, and his favourite slippers. He did not oppose me by a single remark, he submitted to my attentions, ate eagerly and hungrily of the food I gave him. When I had done all I could, I sat down on the floor by his side, and took his hand. I must now begin to question him, for the silence between us, with my ignorance of what he did or did not know, was becoming unbearable.

"Where have you been? Owen. We have wanted you here so dreadfully."

"Have you? I should have been no use to you. For the last two days I have been mad—that was all." He looked like it now. His eyes bloodshot, his face deadly pale.

"But, brother," I said, impelled to say the words, "our David has quite forgiven you."

"Good God! Gwladys," starting upright, "do you want to put me on the rack? How dare you mention his name. *His* name, and the name of his murdered child! Oh! my God! how that little face haunts me!"

He began to pace up and down the room. I feared he would wake mother; but in his passion and agony I could do nothing to restrain him. After a time, however, he sat down more quietly.

"Yes; I have been mad, or perhaps, I am sane now, and was mad all the rest of my life. In my sanity, or madness—call it what you will—at last see myself. How *dared* you and mother pamper and spoil me when I was a boy! How dared you foster my be setting sin, my weak ambition, my overweening vanity. I never loved you for *that*—never. I cared most for David. How could I help it—righteous, humble, noble; judging calmly and correctly; telling me my faults. But, there! how I must blame others, and lay the sin on others. I did love you, my dear,"—laying his hand for an instant on my head—"I used to dream of you when, like the prodigal, I lived in the far country; but, as I say again, what of that! I went to Oxford—oh! it is a long story, a story of sin upon sin. My vanity, fed by petty adulation. I spent money. I got into debt, frightfully—frightfully. I did worse. I got amongst a fast set, and became the fastest of them all. At last came the crisis. I won't tell you of it. Why should you know? But for David, I should have been publicly disgraced—think of that! Your 'hero' brother—you used to say that of me—the conceited lad who thought the world hardly vast enough or grand enough to hold him. David, as I say, saved me. He paid all my debts—he set me free. My debts were enormous; to pay them the estate was seriously crippled. I went abroad. I thought myself humbled then. I did not care what I put my hand to. I had one dream, to fulfil that I lived. I meant to pay back to David the money he had spent on me. I knew of this mine on his property. I knew it was badly worked; that the profits, which might be enormous, were very small. I thought this mine might prove my El Dorado; might give to me the golden treasure I needed. I always meant to be a civil engineer; to this purpose I had turned my attention during my short periods of real work at Christ Church. Now I determined to take up engineering with a will. I did this because I knew that it would qualify me to have the direction of David's mine—to get out of David's mine the gold I needed. For four years I worked for this. I gained practical knowledge; then I came here—you know that part of the story. I told David of my hopes; they excited no pleasure in him. He begged of me to make the mine safe; to use my skill in saving life. I promised him. I meant to perform my word. I did not think I should fail bitterly and utterly a second time. I did not suppose, when long ago I dreamed dreams, and saw visions, that I should rob David, first of his gold, and then of his child; and this last is murder."

Owen paused here, and wiped some great drops from his brow. "Gwladys," he continued, "I see myself now. I am sane, not mad. I see myself at last. I am the greatest sinner in the world."

He paused again; these words have been used hypocritically; but there was no hypocrisy in that voice—in those eyes then; the solemn, slow denunciation came with the full approval of the heart and reason. I could not contradict. I was silent. "Yes," he repeated, "I have come to that—come down to that—to be a murderer—the lowest of all. I am the greatest sinner in the world; and for two days I have been looking at God, and God has been looking at me. Face to face—with that murdered child, and all my other crimes between us—we have been viewing each other. Is it any wonder I should tell you I have been mad?"

"You may be facing God," I said, slowly then. "You may be facing God with all your sins; but you must remember one thing: you, a sinner, are facing a God who died for such as you."

I don't know why I said these words; they seemed to be sent to me. I appeared to be speaking outside myself.

"Thank you," said Owen. Then he covered his face, and was silent for a quarter of an hour; and in that interval of quiet, the knowledge came to me that this penitent, broken man—this agonised, stricken soul, was nearer, far nearer to God than I was. At the end of a quarter of an hour, Owen rose to his feet.

"I heard of the mine accident at a roadside inn, this afternoon; that brought me home. I cannot understand how the water burst in. I had no idea there was an accumulation of water in Pride's Pit. I thought it was properly pumped away—but, there! I should have *known*. I am going down into the mine at once. I know David is in the mine."

"Owen," I said, suddenly remembering, "David sent you that." I put the little note, which David had written, into his hands.

He read it, then threw it, open, on the table.

The hard look was gone from his eyes—they were glistening.

"Farewell, dear, I am going to my duty. God helping me, I will save David or die."

Before I could say a word, he was out of the house; before I could call to him, his footsteps had died away on the night air.

I threw myself on my knees. I did not pray in words, but I prayed in floods of healing tears. Then I read David's letter.

"Owen, there are two sides to everything. What has happened is not bad for my little lad. God has taken him—it must be good for my child to be with God. I try to fix my mind on this thought. I ask you to try to do the same. I know this is hard.

"Owen, you have been careless, and have sinned, and your sin has been punished. The punishment is all the worse for you, because it crushes me. It shall not quite crush me, Owen; I will rise above it. My dear brother, don't despair. If I can and do forgive you, with all my heart, so assuredly will God.

"But, Owen, you are cowardly to shirk your duty. There is danger in the mine. As soon as ever you get this come to me there. Be brave! Whatever you feel, do your duty like a man, for my sake, and for God's sake.

"David."

Chapter Twenty Two.

The Lord was not in the Fire.

And now, day after day, heroic men worked nobly. Without a thought of personal danger, engineers, viewers, managers, miners, private gentlemen,—all laboured for the common cause.

Brothers were perishing of slow starvation, that was enough; brothers, come what might, would go to their rescue.

Perhaps there was seldom seen a grander fight between love and death.

Those who had a thorough knowledge of the mine, soon perceived that thirty-eight yards of solid coal intervened between the imprisoned men and their rescuers. The only other access was completely cut away by so vast a body of water, that it was not unfitly compared to an underground ocean. The obstacles between the rescuers and the imprisoned men seemed at first insurmountable. It appeared to be beyond human strength, either to drain away the water, or to cut through the coal, in time. What was to be done? Moses Thomas, who, whenever he came to the bank, gave me all the information in his power, said that hopeless as the task appeared, the coal was to be cut away from this black tomb without delay. Every strong man in the neighbourhood volunteered for this work, and truly the work was no

light one! The place sloped downwards, about four inches to every yard, and each piece of coal struck away, had to be instantly removed. But fresh and fresh shifts of men plied their mandrils unremittingly; there was no halting or turning back; for three hours, without pause, each man worked, to be instantly followed, when this allotted time had expired, by a fresh volunteer.

"Sleep, Miss," said one brawny fellow, when coming to the surface, he stooped to wash his blood-covered hands. "No, I doesn't want to sleep, while the Squire, and the lad, and the others is starving. I tell you, Miss, I never cried so bitter in all my life, as when I heard them knockings!"

Thus by one mode of egress, all that mortal man could do, was being tried. But scientific men who were present, were too wise to neglect any plan for rescue. It was thought possible, that by means of divers, the imprisoned men might be reached through the water; accordingly two very experienced divers were telegraphed for from a well-known London firm, and as quickly as they could, they answered the summons. I did not know at the time, though I have learned something since, of the dangers these men underwent in this attempt to rescue human life. Having learned, I should like to say a little about them here, for I think no men stood higher in that band of heroes. So great was their danger, that not a gentleman in the neighbourhood would undertake the responsibility of sending them down into the mine, and some even counselled them not to undertake so hopeless a task. But both men instantly replied, that they would never return to their firm without making the attempt, and that they would take all responsibility on themselves. They had never been in a mine before, and very different would be the diving through this black and stagnant water, full of turnings of which they knew nothing, and of obstacles too great to be overcome, from any work they had hitherto undertaken. Indeed, so great was their danger, that those who saw them enter that inky sea, never expected to see them return again; but nothing daunted, the brave men closed their helmets, and commenced the impossible task. Mother and I, with many other women, and children, stood on the pit bank, and as the man who held the line, called out at intervals "fifty feet," "eighty feet," "a hundred feet," what echoes of hope and longing were awakened in beating hearts! I had one arm round mother's waist, Nan held my other hand, and when at last "five hundred feet" was called, and this was known to be within about two hundred and fifty feet of the stall where the prisoners were confined, simultaneously we went on our knees. The hope, the brilliant hope was too dazzling. Dazzling! it seemed to have come. Mother and I had David once more; little Nan, her brother; the under-viewer's wife, her husband. But; alas! it was only the lightning flash in the dark cloud, for at length, after a long period of silence, came the hopeless words, "They are coming back!" Yes, the brave divers had done their best, but were unsuccessful. To reach the prisoners by this means was a failure. As they said themselves, "We are very sorry, we found it was impossible to get on further, owing to pieces of wood in the water, the broken road, mud, and the strength of the swell."

When they appeared again, and had stumbled exhausted to the ground, their helmets, new when they entered, were battered as though they had seen twenty years' service—a convincing proof of the dangers they had undergone.

Yes, this attempt was a failure; but still hope did not die, still brave men toiled, and day after day the coal was cut away so perseveringly, so unceasingly, that at last on the seventh day after the inundation, shouts were made to the entombed men, and—oh! with what thankfulness was the faint answering response hailed. That weak cry, low and death-like, would have given the necessary spur had such been needed. All this time pumps were used, without ceasing, to reduce the water in the workings.

Meanwhile, as day after day went by, each day filled with more of despair, and less of hope, what had become of Owen? He had said on that evening, some days back now, that he would rescue David or die, but still the manager of the mine was not present. At this critical time he had deserted his post, and the control and direction of all that was done, rested with strangers. Suspicion was grave against my brother, he had, to say the least of it, worked the mine recklessly. Though, with the utmost care, water inundations were sometimes impossible to avert, yet in this particular instance, it seemed that with ordinary foresight, by seeing that Pride's Pit was properly drained, or at least by avoiding the working of this particular coal vein, the present accident might never have taken place. Thus, things looked grave for Owen, and he was not at his post. Yes, I knew all this, I heard ugly words about an inquest, by and by; but strange as it may seem, never since his return, had my heart felt so at rest about Owen. I had a feeling, almost an instinct, that Owen had not really deserted his post, that among the volunteers in the mine he might be found, that amongst the bravest of the rescuers he might be numbered. When, with my sisters in this deep deep trouble, I stood for long hours of every day by the pit bank, I saw once amongst the smoke-begrimed and blackened men, who rose after their herculean toil to the surface, a face and form which in their outline resembled his—any other recognition was impossible; but so sure was I that this man was Owen, that I began gradually to watch for him alone. But watch as I would, I only saw him once. I was told afterwards, on questioning eagerly, that this miner slept below, that he refused to come to the surface at all, until the work for death or life was done, and that he appeared to work with the strength and energy of ten other men.

"His name!" I breathlessly demanded.

"Nobody knew his name, he was a volunteer, a stranger it seemed, but there were many such present; he was a plucky fellow, worth a great deal," this was all in this awful and grim conflict his fellow-workers cared for. I told mother of Owen's visit to me that night. I think my narrative comforted her, she asked very few questions; but I think *her* eye too, though she said nothing, had rested on the face and form of the strange miner, and that she too had an idea, and a hope, that Owen was working in the mine. I believe, I feel sure, nothing kept up mother's heart and mine, so much as this hope. Was it possible that we were then learning the truth of that great saying from the lips of the Master—"He that loseth his life for My sake, shall find it?" Ay, for My sake, though I reveal myself through a brother's love.

About Wednesday night, the eighth of the men's imprisonment, thirty-two yards out of the thirty-eight of coal had been cut away. There were now only six yards of coal between the prisoners and freedom, and on the men being shouted to, the joyful news was brought to mother and me from the pit bank, that David's voice was heard above the rest; but, alas! sorrow came to many, while relief and thankfulness to us: there were only five men in the stall, four were now given up for lost. Between these five men and life and liberty, there seemed to me to be but a step, it could not take long, surely, to cut through the remaining six yards of coal, and to release the entombed from a lining grave. I showed my ignorance, my hope was wrong, the trial of my faith was not yet over. Nay, I think the faith that was to be tried by fire was put to the proof during the next two days, in every heart at Ffynon. The experienced colliers said that the real danger had now but begun. The water in the mine was only kept back from the imprisoned men by a very strong pressure of air, beyond this air-tight atmosphere it could not come; five or six feet away from the imprisoned men, it stood like an inky wall, but once break through with the slightest blow of the mandril, the wall of coal at one side, and the confined air would find vent, and the water, no longer impeded, would rush forward, sweeping into certain destruction both captives and rescuers. Unless the water could be pumped away, or the air in some way exhausted, there seemed to be no hope. All the pumps in the neighbourhood were lent, and were plied without intermission, and scientific men put their heads together and agreed to raise air-tight doors, so as to keep back the full rush of the imprisoned atmosphere, when the coal was broken through. But, alas! how faint and sick grew all our hearts, for nothing could now be done rashly, and was it possible that the men could live many hours longer without food?

On the eighth night, food was attempted to be passed through a tube, but this proved a failure, the rush of air through the opening was so terrible, that it was found necessary to plug the hole. The roar of air was as loud as that of a blast furnace, and twice the force of the imprisoned air dashed out the plug, which could only be replaced by efforts almost superhuman.

On the ninth day, I was passing through Gwen's room; she had been in a low fever, brought on by pain, and the violent shock her whole system had undergone. I used to avoid Gwen, dreading her questions, fearing to tell her what had happened. She was taken care of by a clever and experienced nurse, and I thought it kinder to leave her to her care; but on this day she heard my step, opened her eyes, and called me to her side.

"Gwladys."

"Yes, dear Gwen."

"Have they buried the baby yet?"

"Yes, Gwen, he is lying in a little grave in the churchyard close by; he was buried last Saturday."

"Eh! dear, dear, I'd like to have seen his blessed little face first, but never mind! Oh! Gwladys, ain't the Lord good to the little 'uns?"

"I don't know," I said.

"Dear, my maid, and h'all this fiery trial upon you, and not to know. Dear, dear, haven't I bin lying here for days and learnin' h'all about it. Seems to me I never knew *what* the Lord Jesus Christ was like before. Haven't He that baby in His arms now; haven't He put sight into his blind eyes, and shown to him the joys of Paradise; and haven't He bin helping me to bear the pain quite wonderful? I'll *tell* you, Gwladys," raising herself in bed, "I'll tell you what the Lord is—tender to the babies, pitiful to the sick and weak, abundant in mercy to the sinners, and the Saviour of them that's appointed to die; and if that's not a God for a time of trouble, I don't know where you'll find a God."

Gwen brought out these words in detached sentences, for she was very weak; but her feverish eyes looked into mine, and her hot hand held my hand with energy.

"And, my maid," she continued, in an exhausted whisper, "I've dreamed that dream again."

"Oh! Gwen—what?"

"All that dream about the mine, my maid; and I know 'tis coming true. Owen will save David."

I left Gwen, and went into my own room. On my knees, for a brief instant, I spoke to God. "Oh! God," I said, "if you are the only help for a dark day, deliver us. Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, out of the depths, here, we cry to Thee. Lord, deliver those who are appointed to die;" and then, before I rose from my knees, four low words rose from my heart—" *Thy will be done*;" very low, in the faintest whisper—with the cold dew of agony breaking all over me, these words were wrung from my soul; still I said them. Then I went back to the bank. There was a change there, and some commotion—something had happened. Alas! what? My heart beat audibly. I made my way through the crowd, and found myself close to a group of colliers, who had just come up from the mine. Terrible and ominous words smote on my ear. A new danger had arisen. There were signs of the colliers' worst enemy—gas. The Davy lamps could not be lit. Again the plug was blown out of the hole, and the roar of air which came through the opening, prevented the loudest voice being heard.

"There is a power in there which would blow us up the heading like dust," said one.

The peril was too tremendous. Even the bravest of the brave had given way. Dear life was too precious. The men who had toiled, as only heroes could toil, for so many long days and nights, faltered at length. To go forward now, seemed certain and absolute death to both rescuers and rescued.

"The boy is gone," said Moses Thomas, looking Nan in the face. "He has been nine days now without food."

"God help them all; they'll soon be in eternity," said another miner, wiping the tears from his weatherbeaten face.

"This last has daunted us," said a third.

"We have done all that men could do," sighed a fourth, who, worn out from toil, fell half-fainting on the ground.

"To go on now, would be certain death," said a fifth.

Then there was silence—intense silence; not even the sound of a woman's sob.

The despairing men looked at one another. All seemed over. The starving prisoners in the mine were to starve to death. They were to listen in vain for the cheering sound of the mandril—in vain for their comrades' brave voices—in vain for light, food, liberty. The rescuers could venture into no deeper peril for their sakes.

Suddenly the strange miner sprang to the front; fazed his companions with flashing eyes, and called out, in a deep voice rendered almost harsh by some pent-up emotion—"I'm going on, though 'tis death. Shut the doors upon me," he added, "and I'll cut the passage through!"





“I’m going on, though ’tis death.”

p. 211.

Quick as lightning these words chased fear from every heart.

“I’ll go, for another—and I—and I,” said many. And back went the brave men into the dark mine, to cut away, on their hands and knees, at a passage, in many places not three feet high.

I don’t know how it was, but from the moment I heard that brave collier’s voice, I had hope—from that moment the worst of my heart agony was over. I felt that God would save the men. That His will was to deliver them from this pit of destruction. I was able to hear of the fresh dangers that still awaited the brave workers—of that frightful gas explosion, which on Friday obliged every working collier to fly for his life, and at last to return to his noble toil in the dark. Still I was not afraid. I felt sure of seeing David again. And now the tenth day had dawned, and excitement and hope had reached their highest pitch—their last tension. The air-tight doors were fixed in the workings. The men, both prisoners and rescuers, were now working in compressed air. The pumps had much reduced the water; and at last—at last, a breach was made. The pick of a miner had broken through the wall of coal. What a moment of excitement—longing—fear! What a joy, which seemed almost too grand, and great, for earth, when, to the thousands who waited above, the news was brought that science and love were successful—that back again from the arms of a terrible death, would come to us, our brothers and friends. I hardly remember what followed next. I never left the pit bank. I stood there, between mother and Nan, and watched, with straining eyes, that could hardly see—could hardly realise, as men, borne on litters, were carried past; men with coal-black faces—rigid, immovable, as though carved in granite.

Little Miles was brought first. He looked tiny and shrunken; yet I saw that he breathed. Then three men, whom I did not know; but one of

whom was recognised by the under-viewer's wife.

Last of all our David. His eyes were open, and fixed on the blue sky.

When mother saw David, she fainted.

I bent over her, and tried to raise her. No one had seen her fall. The heroes in this tragedy had kept all eyes another way. My own head, as I bent over her, was reeling, my own brain was swimming. Suddenly two strong hands were placed under her head, and the strange miner raised her tenderly in his blackened and coal-covered arms.

"Gwladys, we have saved them. Thank God!" he said.

Chapter Twenty Three.

After the Fire—A Still, Small Voice.

This is the story. The rest England knows; she knows how all the rescued men recovered, she also knows how she has honoured rescued and rescuers.

The last to get well, the slowest to get back again his health and strength, was David. For a time, indeed, for David there were grave doubts and anxieties, which on the doctors' parts amounted to fears.

The previous shock and sorrow may have made the ten days without food, in that gloomy prison, tell more severely on him, for originally he was the strongest man of the five. However, after a fortnight of intense watching, the dreaded fever began to abate, and the burden of life which he had so nearly laid aside, he took up again, with his old cheerfulness and courage.

"I'm glad he's not going to die," said Nan, "he's wanting down on earth still. Oh! ain't he strong," she added; "oh! if you only heard Miles talk of him!"

One day I did hear a little of what David had done, from the boy himself.

"Yes, Miss, he was standin' by me, when the water came in, we felt it running past our feet, he took my hand and said we'd run for the shaft; we run a few steps when we met Jones and two men, Powell and Williams; they said the waters were up to the roof, then we got into Powell's stall."

"Had you any light?"

"Yes, for a while we had candles, then we was in the dark, the water was a few feet away; when we was thirsty we drank the water, but it was very bad. No, we was *not* very hungry, but we was most bitter cold."

"You did not think you were so long in the stall?"

"No, not more'n a week."

"And you were not frightened?"

Here the dark eyes, preternaturally large and eager-looking, gazed hard into mine.

"No, I worn't feared to die. I thought I might die, we h'all thought it. I did want to kiss Nan, and father once, but Mr Morgan—"

"Well, what about Mr Morgan?"

"He spoke so, he said that the Better Land were worth going through anything to reach; he said that may be there were no other road for any of us to heaven, but right through the mine, and he axed us if we was willin' to go through that road to reach it. After a bit we all said we was."

"Well?"

"Then he'd pray to the Lord so earnest, it seemed as if the Lord was nigh to us, and Mr Morgan said He was with us in the stall; then we'd sing."

"What did you sing, Miles?"

"Only one hymn, over and over. We sings it at h'our meetings."

"I know it," said Nan, "I'll sing it now.

"In the deep and mighty waters.
No one there can hold my head;
But my only Saviour Jesus,
Who was slaughtered in my stead.

"Friend, he is in Jordan's river.
Holds above the wave my head;
With His smile I'll go rejoicing,
Through the regions of the dead."

"Ah!" said Miles, "you never'd know wot that hymn's worth unless you was in the mine. Then we heard the men knocking, and that kep up our hearts, and Mr Morgan said we might be rescued; but any way 'twas all right. Towards the end two of the men got queer and off their heads, and Mr Morgan, and Jones, the under-viewer, had a deal of trouble with 'em; then Mr Morgan thought the water might have gone down, and on Friday he went in and tried for a bit to wade through, but it was too deep, and he did not know the mine. Jones would have tried after him, but then we was let h'out. No, I doesn't remember that part. I knows nothing until I felt Nan kiss me, and I thought 'twas Stephie, and that I was in heaven."

All the time during David's slow recovery, one person nursed him day and night—one person, with hardly any intermission, remained by his bedside; this was Owen. And no hand so soothed the sick and weary man, no face brought so peaceful a smile into his eyes, as the hand and face of Owen. As David grew better they had long talks together, but I never heard what they said.

I have one thing more to write here.

Three weeks after the accident, on an afternoon soft with west wind, and glowing with May beauty, I went to visit little David's grave. They had laid him in a very old churchyard, and the tiny grave faced the Rhoda Vale, and could be seen with its companion graves, from the bank of the Ffynon mine below. I had brought some flowers to plant there. Having completed my task, I sat, for a few moments, by the side of the little mound to rest. As I sat there, I saw a man walking quickly along the high road. He mounted the stile and ascended the steep path which led to the graveyard. As I watched him, my heart beat loud and audibly—for this man was Owen. He was coming to visit little David's grave. He had probably never seen it yet. Still I would not go away. I had something to say to Owen, I could say it best here. He came up, saw me, started for a moment, then seated himself by my side.

"Gwladys, this is a fit place for us to meet. I have something to say to you."

His words, look, manner, put any speech of my own out of my head. I turned to watch him.

"There is such a thing, Gwladys, as being guilty even of this—blood-guiltiness—and yet being washed white."

Silence on my part. He laid his hand on the little grave, and continued—

"David, who never told a lie in his life, says he is glad; that if only the death of his child could bring me to his God, he is glad—glad even at that price." A long pause. "I have found his God. Even by so dark a path as my own sin, I have been led to his God and Saviour."

Owen pressed his head on his hands. I saw two heavy tears drop between his fingers.

"You will never know, Gwladys, what the finding of God out of so awful a storm of sin and suffering is like. I looked for Him down in the mine. With every stroke of my mandril, my heart cried, 'Punish me as you will. I do not care what punishment you lay upon me. My life itself is valueless. Only let me find Thee.' But I could not find Him. As I went further and further into the mine, I seemed getting further and further away from Him; my sins were between Him and me. I could not get a glimpse of Him. I was in despair. I worked with the strength of despair. It was no true courage prompted me to go back, when the other men faltered. My life was valueless to me. Then, as you know, we brought the men out. I went to David. I *was* glad that he was saved; but my heart was as heavy as ever. I used to sit up at night and fancy myself drifting further and further from God. My whole past life was before me, and it seemed hateful. Not only the wild, reckless days at Oxford, but the months that had seemed so righteous and proper here. One evening I said to David—

"David, can you forgive me?"

"Ay, lad," he answered, instantly, "and so can thy God."

"No, that He can't," I said. "He never can forgive the death of the baby."

"You wrong Him, lad," continued my brother. "He took the baby away in love. He knew your eyes were shut, and a great shock must open them. Surely, Owen, if the only way He could bring you to His arms was to take the baby first, *that* won't turn Him away now. We must go through death to Him sometimes—the death of another, if not our own."

"And *you* are willing to give up your child for that?"

"Willing and glad, if by so doing you may find Christ."

"David, how you have worked and suffered for me."

"But not in vain," said David, with a radiant smile.

"No, Gwladys, it was not in vain; the brother's love was not in vain; the death of the Son of Man was not in vain. *I have found God.* There is to be a coroner's inquest; things may go hard with me, for I have been much to blame; but I shall tell the whole story. If I am allowed, I shall remain at Ffynon; but wherever I am, I mean to devote my life—my whole life—all my time and all my energy, to the great cause of the miners; to the lessening of their many dangers; to the furthering of their well-being. This is my life-work; I promise to devote my life to the miners of Wales, here, by this little grave."

"Owen, before we leave this spot, I have something to say to you."

"What is that? my dear."

"I want you to forgive me."

"For what?"

"Do you not know—can you not guess? I shut my heart against you; I gave you no true sister's welcome when you came home."

"I thought you changed; I was disappointed. Had you ceased to love me?"

"No, no; never that. But I had dreamt so of you—I thought you perfect. I thought you would come back bringing honour and glory; then I was told—I—"

"I see; your love could not stand the shock."

"No, Owen; my old, poor, and weak love—my idolatry, could not; under the blow it died."

"Go on, my dear."

"Owen, can you ever forgive me? I have been cold, unloving, unsisterly. I wonder, now, looking back on it, that you did not hate me!"

"No; at first I was disappointed. You hardly know how I loved you long ago; how you had managed to twine your little childish self round my heart. When away I thought of you. I longed, almost as much for your sake as for David's, to win back that wretched gold. You were much changed. At first I was much disappointed; at last, I believe, indifferent."

"It is my just punishment, brother. Still, I must say something now. Owen, I love you now. I love you now as I never did long ago; I understand you now. My heart can read yours at last I love you a thousand times better than of old. I don't expect you to respond to it," I concluded, with a sob.

Owen rose to his feet. "One moment," he said; "do you love me well enough not to flatter me; well enough never to flatter me again; well enough to help me?"

"Oh, yes! Oh! if we might help each other!"

"I do respond to your love. Come to me, Gwladys."

Standing by the little grave, he held out his arms and folded them round me, and kissed my cheek; and as I looked up into the dear, beautiful, noble face—it was all that truly now—I felt that my air castle had arisen out of its ashes; my day dream was fulfilled, and I had got back my hero and my darling.

The End.

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