THE POST-GIRL



EDWARD C. BOOTH

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THE POST-GIRL ***

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BY

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CHAPTER I

When summer comes Mrs. Gatheredge talks of repapering her parlor, and Ginger gets him ready to sleep in the scullery at a night's notice, but the letting of lodgings is not a staple industry in this quarter of Yorkshire, and folks would fare ill on it who knew nothing of the art of keeping a pig or growing their own potatoes in the bit of garden at the back.

Visitors pass through, indeed, in large enough numbers between seed- and harvest-time (mostly by bicycle), staring their way round the village from house to house. But all that ever develops is an occasional request for a cup of water—in the hope, no doubt, that we may give them milk—or an interrogation as to the road to somewhere else. Steg's reply to the latter, through a long succession of summers, has waxed into a set formula, which he prepares with all the exactness of a prescription:

"There 's two rawds [roads] tiv it," he says, measuring out his words carefully against the light of inward understanding, like tincture in a chemist's vial. "A right un an' a wrong un. 'Appen ye 'd as lief gan right un. Wrong un 's a long way round."

These are mere migratory birds of visit, however —here this morning and gone by noon—leaving little trace of their passage beyond a footmark on

somebody's doorstep or a mustard-stained sandwich-paper blowing drearily against the tombstones in the churchyard. Residential visitors are almost unknown to Ullbrig. One or two petty tradesmen bring their wives and families from Hunmouth for cheap sojourn during the summer months, but they are more residential than visitors, recurring each year with the regularity of harvest, and blending as imperceptibly with Ullbrig life as the water with Jevons' milk. They have become to all intents and purposes a part of us, and are never spoken of as "visitors"—they are merely said to be "wi' us again" or just "coom back." The class of visitor which is lacking to Ullbrig is the pleasure-seeking variety which comes for a month, is charged unprotesting for lights and fire, never lends a hand to the washing of its own pots, and pays town price for country butter. Our local designation for such guests—when we get them—is "spawers."

The word is apt to strike chill on urban understandings when heard for the first time. I remember when Ginger sprang it upon me on the initial occasion of my hearing it, I was filled for a moment with an indefinable sense of calamity.

"Well," were Ginger's words, greeting me and leaving me almost in a breath. "Ah wish ah mud stay longer wi' ye noo, but ah mun't. We 've gotten spawers i' 'oose [house]."

I shook his earth-worn hand with that degree of comprehensive warmth which should suggest

sorrowing sympathy to a mind quickened through trouble, but nought beyond fervor to the ruder tissues of health.

"There 's always something ... for some of us..." I said oracularly.

"We mud as well 'ev 'em as onnybody," Ginger remarked, with what I took to be rare resignation at the time, and we parted.

It was in the green, early days of July, when the corn waved slumberously back and forth over the hedge-tops, beating time to soundless adagios like a sleepy-headed metronome, and as yet there were few scorched patches in summer's rippling gown of emerald silk, that the Spawer arrived. Steg was one of the first to give tidings of his advent to Ullbrig, and after him Mrs. Grazer, who met him on his way home, bearing the intelligence laboriously with his mouth open, like a brimming pail of milk.

"'Ev ye 'eard 'ow Mester Jenkison' mother' sister-in-law 's gettin' on, Steg?" she asked him, before he was ready to speak first.

"Ay," says Steg, with a watchful eye upon his own intelligence, set momentarily down, and waiting his turn.

"'Ow is she, then?"

"She 's deead."

"Nay! Is she an' all! Poor owd woman!"

"She is that!" says Steg, warming with a sense of

triumph to the work, as though he had the credit of her demise. It is good to be the bearer of tidings, and feel oneself a factor in the world's rotation. "She deed ti morn [this morning] at aif-past six."

"An' when 's t' buryin'? Did y' 'ear?"

"Ay, they telt me," says Steg.

"It 'll be o' Thosday, ah 's think."

"Nay, bud it weean't," Steg replied, mounting up another step by contradiction toward the top rung of his ladder. "Wensday. There 's ower much thunder about for keepin'." Then he struck up still higher without loss of time. "They 've gotten a spawer up at Clift," he said.

The intelligence was a guest at every tea-table in Ullbrig the same day, Steg and Mrs. Grazer having done wonders in its dissemination under wholesome fear of forestalment. Mrs. Grazer beat Steg by a short head at Shep Stevens', but Steg cut the triumph away from under her feet at Gatheredge's. To all intents and purposes they ran a dead heat at the brewery, only Mrs. Gatheredge's superior riding put Steg's nose out on the post.

"Steg 'll 'a telt ye they 've gotten a spawer up at Clift Yend," she said, with diabolical cunning, just as Steg's mouth was opening for the purpose, snatching the prize from his very lips.

"Nay, Steg 's telt us nowt," repudiated the brewer. "Steg 's nobbut just this minute walked i' yard. Ev' they an' all? Up at Clift Yend?"

"'E come o' Monday," Steg chimed in morosely, picking up what odd crumbs of attention were left him from the purloin.

"O' Monday, did 'e? There 's nobbut one on 'em, then?" said the brewer interrogatively.

"That's all," answered Steg, left in undisputed possession of the field by the departure of Mrs. Grazer into the internals of the brewer's house by the back.

"Ay.... So there 's nobbut one on 'em, then? It 'll be newspaper man fro' Oommuth [Hunmouth], ah 's think—'im 'at was 'ere last back-end."

"Nay, bud no," Steg answered, with decision, plucking up brightly at the sight of unspoliated pickings. "It 's a right new un this time."

"'E 'll be fro' Oommuth, though," said the brewer, going down squarely on the bilge of a beer barrel after a cautious look backward.

"Nay, an' 'e 's not fro' Oommuth naythur," said Steg, with zest.

"Why! Where is 'e fro', then?" asked the brewer, in genuine surprise. Visitors to Ullbrig who don't come from Hunmouth can hardly be conceived to come from anywhere. We divide the world into two constituents, town and country, Hunmouth being the town.

"Ah nivver thought to ask," said Steg, after a thinking pause; "bud 'e 's not fro' Oommuth.... Ah 'm none so sure," he added, straining the chords of his

actual intelligence for the sake of a little extra effect, "'t 'e 's not fro' Lunnon!"

"Ah think not, Steg," said the brewer quickly, rejecting the probability without consideration, like the blind man's box of matches pushed under his nose in Hunmouth.

"Ah think not," the brewer repeated. "Lunnon 's a long way off 'n Clift Yend."

"Ay, but ah 'm none so sure, ah tell ye," Steg urged, real conviction growing in him out of contradiction, as is the way of all flesh. "'E 's lived a deal i' furrin parts, onny'ow," he said craftily, making a counter demonstration to relieve pressure on the main issue, and retiring under its cover from the assailed position.

"Which on 'em?" inquired the brewer, with disconcerting directness.

"T' most part on 'em, ah think," Steg replied, boldly.

"France, 'as 'e?" asked the brewer, testing this broad statement of fact by the application of specifics.

"Ay," said Steg, with a big bold affirmative like the head of a tadpole, thinning out all suddenly into a faint wriggling tail of protective caution—"ah think so."

"Jarmany?" asked the brewer.

"Ay," said Steg again, "... ah think so."

"Roo-shah?" the brewer went on judicially,

suddenly of a mind to turn this interrogation into a geographical display, but with a keen eye for the limits of his territory.

"Ay," repeated Steg, gathering such momentum of assent that he had buried his reply in the brewer's second syllable before he could stop himself, with his tail sticking out by the interrogation mark—"ah think so."

"Hitaly?" queried the brewer, pausing through a futile endeavor to pronounce whether America was a foreign part or not. "Choina? Hindia?"

"Nay," Steg demurred, with wily scruple, "ah 'm none so sure about t' last."

"'E 's traviled a deal, 'owseumdivver," said the brewer. "What 's brought 'im to Clift Yend, ah wonder ... of all places i' world. 'E 's not for company, it seems, bi t' looks o' things. Did y' 'ear owt why 'e 's come?"

"Naw," said Steg. "They say 'e writes a deal of 'is time."

"'Appen 'e writes for t' paper," the brewer suggested.

"Nay, ah div n't think that 's it," Steg said, taking the brewer's conclusion into his own hands like an ill-sharpened pencil and repointing it. "'E 's nowt to do wi' papers, by what ah can mek oot. 'E 's ta'en rooms for a month at start, wi' chance o' stoppin' on if 'e likes 'em, an' 'e 's brought a hextry deal o' things wi' 'im. 'E 's brought a bath...."

"A bath!" said the brewer blankly, interrogation and interjection in visible conflict over the word. Complete house furnishing in Ullbrig stops at the wash-tub. Beyond this all is vanity. "What diz 'e want wi' a bath?"

"Nay..." Steg said, declining any conflict on the unaccountabilities of strange men from far places. "Ah 'm nobbut tellin' ye same as they 've telt me," he added half-apologetically, in fear lest he might be accused of sympathies with false worship. "It 's a rare great bath an' all, by what they say—like one o' them big drums wi' a cover tiv it. Ye 've nobbut to gie it a ding wi' yer 'and an' it sets up a growl same as thunder. Onny road, that 's what Jeff Dixon says, an' 'e ought to know. 'E wor dingin' it all last neet."

"Some folks 'as fancies," said the brewer, with impersonal scorn.

"Ay ... an' ah was nigh forgettin'..." Steg struck in. "'E 's gotten a 'armonium comin' an' all. It 'll ought to be 'ere before so very long, noo."

"A 'armonium!" exclaimed the brewer, trying the word incredulously upon his understanding. "Nay," he said, after testing it with his own lips, "nay, ah think ye 're wrong this time, Steg."

"A pianner, then," Steg hazarded, after staring fixedly for a space with a wrestle going on laboriously behind his eyes. "It's all same thing i' yend."

"Nay, nor a pianner naythur," ruled the brewer,

refusing the substitute with equal disregard. "Folks dizz n't tek 'armoniums nor pianners about wi' 'em fro' place to place i' that road. It 'll be a concerteeny ye 're thinkin' on, 'appen."

"Nay, it weean't," Steg said slowly.

"What'll it be, then?"

"It 'll be a pianner," he said, carrying the contention relentlessly in his mouth as a dog does a bone, and, seeing that, the brewer did not risk wresting it from him by force.

"'Oo says it will?" he inquired, temporising warily after this convincing display of faith.

"I do," said Steg, toll-gathering masterfully for himself.

"Ay, bud 'oo telt you?" demanded the brewer.

"Gyles' lad," said Steg.

"An' 'oo telt 'im?" the brewer continued, pursuing the inflexible interrogative path to fundamentals.

"Arny."

"Arny Dixon?"

"Ay, 'e did."

"Arny Dixon 'issen?"

"Ay, Arny Dixon 'issen. There 's not two of 'em."

"Arny Dixon telt Gyles' lad and Gyles' lad telt you, ye say?"

"Ay, ah do," said Steg, with a voice that cried for no abatement of its responsibility.

The brewer gave one thigh a moment's respite off the hard cask, and after that the other.

"Well!" he said, sententiously. "There 'll be time enough an' all, Steg. Them 'at lives longest sees most, they say."

"Ay!" Steg assented, with equanimity.

A shadow fell across the brewer's yard; an irresolute, halting shadow—the shadow of one with half a mission and two minds.

"'Neet, James," greeted the brewer to the yard-end, and the shadow deepened, falling finally over an adjacent beer barrel with a couple of nods and an expectoration.

"We 've gotten company up at Gift Yend, then," it said.

CHAPTER II

Where the roadway splits on the trim, green prow of Hesketh's high garden-hedge, dipping down like the trough of a wave and sliding along the cool, moss-grown wall beneath a tangle of leafy rigging towards the sunlit opens of Cliff Wrangham, Father Mostyn, deep in his own thoughts, came suddenly upon the Spawer, going homeward.

He was a tall, lithe figure of young manhood, in snowy holland, with the idle bearing of one whose activity is all in the upper story; eyes brown, steadfast, and kindly, less for the faculty of seeing

things than of thinking them; brows lying at ease apart, but with the tiny, tell-tale couple-crease between them for linked tussle—brows that might hitch on to thought with the tenacity of a steel hawser; a jaw fine, firm, and resolute, closing strongly over determination, though void of the vicious set of obstinacy, with a little indulgent, smiling, V-shaped cleft in the chin for a mendicant to take advantage of; lips seemingly consecrate to the sober things of this life, yet showing too a sunny corner for its mirthmakings and laughters beneath the slight slant of moustache—scarcely more tawny than its owner's sun-tanned cheeks where it touched them. Father Mostyn awoke suddenly from his musing to the awareness of a strange presence, encompassing it with the meshes of an inquiring eye. Before the Spawer could extricate his glance from the toils of its inadvertent trespass, the dread "Ha!" had completed his enslavement and brought him up on his heel sideways at the moment of passing.

"... A stranger within our gates!" Father Mostyn observed, with courteous surprise, rocking ruminatively to and fro on his legs in the roadway, and dangling the ebony staff in both palms. He drew a comprehensive circle with its ferrule in the blue sky. "You bring glorious weather," he said, contemplating the demarcated area through rapt, narrowed lashes, and sensing its beneficence with the uplifted nostrils of zest.

The Spawer unlocked his lips to a frank, boyish smile that lighted up his face in quick response like the throwing open of shutters to the sunlight. Also, just a little emanative twinkle that seemed to suggest previous acquaintance with the Vicar over some Cliff Wrangham rail.

"To be truthful," he laughed, "it 's the weather that brings me. One feels it almost a sin, somehow, to let such a sun and sky go unenjoyed. The rain always comes soon enough."

"Not till we 've prayed for it," Father Mostyn decided with prompt reassurance, making critical diagnosis of the sky above. "... Prayed for it properly," he hastened to explain. "Indiscriminate Ullbrig exhortation won't do any good—with a sky like that. You can't mistake it. The meteorological conditions point to prolonged set fair." He dismissed the weather with a sudden expulsion of glance, and put on his atmospheric courtesy of manner for personal approaches. "... A pilgrim to the old heathen centre of Ullbrig?" he inquired, diffusing the direct interrogation over the Spawer's holland trousers. "Brig, the Bridge, and Ull, or Uddle, the Idol—the Village of Idols on the Bridge. The bridge and the idols have departed ... the church is partly built of stones from infidel altars ... but the heathen remain. Large numbers of them. Do you come to study our aboriginal habits and superstitions? ... A student of Nature at all?"

The Spawer exchanged a happy negative.

"Hardly a student," he said, rejecting the title with pleasant demur. "I 'm afraid I can't lay claim to that. A lover, perhaps," he substituted. "That leaves ignorance free scope. Love is not among the learned professions."

"Ha!" Father Mostyn commented, considering the reflection, like the scent of a cigar, through critical nostrils. "A lover of Nature; with a leaning towards philosophy. You come far to do your love-making?"

"Fairly far—yes. I am fond of the country," the Spawer explained, with simple confession of fact, "and the sea."

"We have not much country to offer you hereabouts, I fear," Father Mostyn said, looking deprecatingly round it. "We have land." He leaned interrogatively on the proffered alternative. "If that 's any good to you. A fine, heavy, obstinate clay like the rest of us. We are sweaters of the brow in these parts. We find it an excellent substitute for soap. All our life is given over to the land. We are born on it, brought up on it, buried in it. We worship it. It is the only god we bow to. Notice the back of an Ullbrig man; it is bent with devotion to the soil. We don't bend like that in church. To bend like that in church is idolatry. So we go to chapel and unbend instead, and hold mighty tea-meetings in honor of Jehovah. Notice our eyes too; take stock of them when we give

you 'Good day' in the road. There is a peculiar, foxy, narrow-grooved slant in them through incessant following of the furrow. You can't mistake it. You don't need any pretensions to metoposcopy to read our faces. We are of the earth, earthy. When we turn our eyes towards Heaven, we are merely looking for rain. If we turn them up again, we are merely looking for the rain to stop. Our lives are elemental and our pleasures few. To speak ill of one's neighbor, to slander the vicar, to deride the church, to perpetuate heresy, to pasture untruths—*spargere voces in vulgum ambiguas*—to fly off at a tangent on strong beer—these are among our catalogue of homely recreations.

"If you were staying here to study us for any length of time—but I suppose you are the mere sojourner of a day, gone from us again in the cool of the evening with the night-moths and other flitting things?"

The Spawer laughed lightly.

"Not quite so soon as that," he said. "And you make me glad of it. No; I am pitching my tent in this pleasant wilderness awhile."

Father Mostyn opened his roomy eye to the reception of surprise.

"Ha! Is it possible? Within measurable distance of us?"

"At Cliff Wrangham."

"Cliff Wrangham!" The ecclesiastical eyebrows

elevated themselves up out of sight under Father Mostyn's cap-rim. "So near and yet so far! Friends?" he added, as the eyebrows came down, casting over the word a delicate interrogative haze.

The Spawer cleaved its meaning.

"I am making them," he said. "At present I am merely a lodger."

"Merely a lodger," Father Mostyn repeated, using the words to nod over, as was his wont. "And Mrs. Dixon, I suppose, is our landlady? Ha! I thought so. She has the monopoly hereabouts. A tower of nonconformity in a district pillared with dissent—but a skilled cook. A cook for an abbot's board. Only describe what a dish smells like and she will come within reasonable approach of its taste on the table. You won't have much fault to find with the meals—I 've tried 'em. Her chicken-pies are a specialty. There 's not a single crumb of vice in the whole crust, and the gravy glues your lips together with goodness. The pity is they are not even Protestant pies, and are impiously partaken of on Fridays and other holy fast days. You need never fear for a dinner. All you have to do is to go out into the yard and point your finger at it. We possess an agreeable knack of spiriting poultry under the crust hereabouts without unnecessary formula. It is inherited. Beef will give you trouble, and mutton; both in the buying and the masticating. We kill once a week. Killing day falls the day after you want steak in a hurry—or has

fallen some days before. That is because we sell first and slaughter second. Our Ullbrig butchers leave nothing to chance. They keep a beast ready in the stall, and as soon as the last steak 's sold by allotment, they sign the execution warrant. Not before, unless the beast falls ill. In the matter of fish we are better off. We don't go down to the sea in ships for it—we should come back without it if we did. We get it at Fussitter's. Ready tinned."

"Ready tinned!" said the Spawer. "It sounds rather deadly, does n't it? It puts me in mind of inquests, somehow."

"Ha!" Father Mostyn made haste to explain. "You must n't buy it out of the window. That 's where the deadliness comes in. The sunlight has a peculiar chemical action upon the tin, liberating certain constituents of the metal exceedingly perilous to the intercostal linings. Insist on having it from under the counter. Ask for tinned lobster—as supplied to his reverence the vicar...." He wrote out the instructions with his right forefinger upon the left-hand palm. "To be kept in a Cool, Dark Place under the Counter. The crayfish brand. Nothing but the crayfish brand. Ask for the vicar's lobster—they 'll know what you mean —and see that you get it."

"Would n't one of Mrs. Dixon's pies come in rather handy there, even on Friday?" the Spawer suggested.

"Ha!" said Father Mostyn, with a luminous eye.

"I see you realize the danger of them. The sin that comes in handy. That 's it! That we may have strength of grace to turn away from the sin that comes in handy! ... Your tent has been pitched in the wilderness before?"

"Many times."

Father Mostyn made expressive comment with his eyebrows.

"Ha! I thought so. A misanthrope?" he asked, in genial unbelief. "Shunning company for solitude!"

"On the contrary, I find solitude excellent company at times."

"A literary man?"

"No." The Spawer parted pleasantly with the word, unattached to any further token of enlightenment.

"A visitor at large, I suppose!" Father Mostyn substituted, holding the conclusion under his nose with the delicate non-insistence of a collecting plate in church. "Here for rest and quiet."

The Spawer shook his head.

"Again no," he answered. "Rest and quiet are for the wealthy." Then he laughed himself free of further dissimulation. "I will be frank with you," he said. "I am none of these things. I am a poor beggar in the musical line."

Father Mostyn's eyebrows arched.

"The musical line!" he exclaimed. "The musical line drawn through Ullbrig! Geography upheaved!

Mercator confounded! One might just as well expect the equator. And yet ... I felt convinced ... a disciple of art. You can't mistake it. But in Ullbrig. Is it possible?"

He wagged the staff in his hands to appreciative wonder, waltzing back and forth over three paces as though he were performing the first steps of a minuet.

"A singer?" he said, with a beaming eye of discovery. "Surely.... You have the singer's eyes."

"Alas!" said the Spawer. "I have not the singer's voice."

The gaze of the Vicar went suddenly thin.

"But the eyes!" he said; and then, with a quick readjustment of vision: "At least ... there can be no doubt.... An executant? You play?"

The Spawer sighed.

"Yes," he admitted, with smiling resignation. "I suppose I play."

"The piano, of course?" Father Mostyn conjectured, taking assent for granted. "Ha! ..." His face melted in smiles, like golden butter, to rapt appreciation at the vista of glorious possibilities that the instrument conjured up before him. He lingered over the contemplation down a long-drawn, eloquent "M-m-m-m," gazing out upon the infinite plains of melody with a brightened eye. "You are not relying on our aboriginal stone age pianos, of course," he said, recalling his eye to the actual, with a sudden

recollective jerk.

The Spawer showed a sunny glint of teeth.

"Hardly," he replied. "As soon as the railway people remember where they saw it last, I hope to have one of my own."

"One of your own. Ha!" Father Mostyn's eye glistened to enthusiasm again. "I judged so. Beautiful! Beautiful!" The ebony staff shook to internal humor at a thought. "Fancy Mozart on an Ullbrig piano! ... or Bach! ... or Beethoven! ..." He wagged the unspeakable with his head. "I 'm afraid you won't find any music hereabouts."

"Thank Heaven!" the Spawer breathed devoutly. "I was afraid perhaps I might!"

"Ha!" Father Mostyn caught quickly at the inference and translated it. "I see; I see. A musical monastic! Coming into retreat at Cliff Wrangham to subject his soul to a course of artistic purification and strengthening!"

The Spawer accepted the illustration with a modest laugh.

"Well, yes," he said. "I suppose that 's it—only it 's rather more beautiful in idea than in actuality. I should have said myself, perhaps, that I 'd come into the country to be able to work in shirt-sleeves and loosened braces, and go about unshaved, in baggy-kneed trousers, without fear of friends. I 'm half a monastic and half refugee. In towns so many of us are making music that one never gets a chance to

hear or think one's own; one's ears are full of other people's. So I 've run away with my own little musical bone to a quiet place, where I can tackle it all to myself and growl over the business to my heart's content without any temptation to drop it for unsubstantial shadows. Instead of having to work in a stuffy room, with all the doors and windows closed and somebody knocking at you on the next house wall, I have the sea, the cliff, the sands ... and the whole sky above me for my workshop. It will take me all my time to fill it. If a melody comes my way, I can hum it into shape without causing unpleasant remarks. Nobody ever hears me, for one thing; and for another, they would n't bother to listen if they did." Father Mostyn's glance flickered imperceptibly for a moment, and then burned with an exceeding steady light. "I can orchestrate aloud in the open air, singing flute, clarinet, oboe, bassoon, ophicleide ... tympani ... just whatever I please, without any risk of an official tap on the shoulder. In a word, I can be myself ... and it 's a treat to be oneself for a while. One gets tired of being somebody else so long, and having to go about in fear of the great Unwritten."

"We have our great Unwritten here too," Father Mostyn told him. "I doubt if any of us could write it if we tried. Ullbrig is weak in its caligraphy. We do most of our writing in chalk. It suits our style better. The pen has an awkward habit of impaling the paper, we find, and carrying it back to the ink-pot."

"Don't teach me anything of Ullbrig's great Unwritten," the Spawer put in quickly. "Let me violate it with an easy conscience."

"By all means," Father Mostyn invited him genially. "It will be a chastening mortification to our pride. We are swollen with local pride—distended with the flatulence of dissent. A little pricking will do us no harm. I should have thought, though," Father Mostyn went on, "that you would have sought to feed your muse on richer fare than turnip-fields. I imagined that mountains and valleys, with castles looking over lakes and waterfalls by moonlight, were more the sort of stuff for stimulating a musician's fancy. Is it possible there can be music lying latent in our Ullbrig soil?"

The Spawer smiled a sympathetic appreciation of his perplexity.

"I think there may be," he told him. "Anyhow, I have come to make the experiment, and I 'm very well satisfied with it so far."

"Heaven be with you," Father Mostyn prayed with fervor. "It passes the mind of man to imagine the conversion of friend Joseph Tankard into a symphony, or friend Sheppardman Stevens as a figure in a sonata. You have your labor."

"I am not dismayed," the Spawer laughed, with light-hearted confidence.

"And you are staying here for any length of time —a month, at least, to start with? ... I would suggest

three, if you wish to study the district."

"It might very well be three before I leave; certainly not less than a month."

"Excellent! Your soul is my cure while you stay. It will be my duty as parish priest to pay you parochial visits. I hope, too, that it will be my privilege to receive your full musical confession. And as soon as ever you grow tired of the company of solitude up at the Cliff End, just drop down to Ullbrig and try me for an antidote, any time you happen to be passing. If you 're tired, or want something to drink, don't hesitate to make use of the parish priest. That 's what he 's for. Just call in at the Vicarage as you would at the Ullbrig Arms; you 'll find the attention as good, and the welcome greater. After eight o'clock you can be almost sure of catching me ... without there be sick calls. A pain in the umbilical vicinity is an excellent worker for the Church. Unfortunately, it passes off too soon, and then we are apt to forget that we called the vicar out of bed in a hurry one morning...." The first stroke of three fell across his words from the church tower round the corner, and on the instant his genial eye was wreathed in priestly mysticism as with the spirals of incense. The mantle of a mighty mission descended upon him, and he gathered its folds in dignity about his being. "Ha!" he said, grasping his staff for departure, and verifying the time from a handsome gold chronometer, "... I must leave you. They 're

waiting.... Priestly duties...."

He did not specify who were waiting or what the priestly duties were, but exhaled the spirit of leave-taking in an ineffable smile without words, and vanished round Hesketh's corner—a vague, ecclesiastical vapor. A few moments later, by the time his Reverence could have comfortably reached the belfry, the creaking of a bell-rope overtook the Spawer on his way homeward, and the tongue of the stagnant hour-teller roused itself once more in public reproof of schism.

A mile and a half of roadway lies between Ullbrig and Cliff Wrangham. As near as may be it stretches straight to the halfway house, like a yard of yellow ribbon measured against the rod. From there the rest of it rolls away to the Cliff End in sweeping fold of disengaged material and the gateways set in. There are four of these, with a music all their own as they clash behind you, wagging their loose, worn, wooden tongues, that sometimes catch and are still with one short note, and sometimes reiterate themselves slowingly to sleep upon the gate-post behind you as you go. The first lets you by Stamway's long one-story farm-house, before Stamway's three front windows, hermetically sealed, each darkened with a fuchsia and backed with white curtains drawn as tight as a drumhead, and Stamway's front door, an arm's length behind the wooden palisading, that Stamway has never gone in

or come out by since he happened through with some of the parlor furniture thirty years ago—our front door, as Father Mostyn himself tells us, being no better than the church door for all the use we make of it. Beyond Stamway's third window is Stamway's big semi-circular duck-pond, where Barclay of Far Wrangham suffered shipwreck one night in November, being found water-logged up to his knees, and crying aloud (as it is attested):

"Lord 'ev mercy on me an' gie me strength ti keep my legs while tide gans down." Adding when rescued: "Ah nivver knowed sea so 'igh i' all my days, nor rise so sudden. She mun 'a done a deal o' damage, Stamway. If ah 'ad n't been strongish o' my feet, like, ah sewd 'a been swep away, for sure."

"Nay," Stamway told him bluntly, who does not hold with dissipations in any shape or form, being a strict Good Templar himself, and never known the worse for liquor more than six times in the year. "It 's Red Sea i'side of ye, ah think, 'at 's most to blame. It 's drowned a deal o' Phaarahs in its time. Gan yer ways 'ome wi' ye, an' div n't say nowt about matter ti onnybody. They 'll know very well wi'oot."

The second gate gives you your first foot on Dixon's land. The house stands endwise to the sea, set deep in a horseshoe of trees; a big, hearty, whitewashed building under bronze red tiles, two stories high in front, that slope down backward over the dairy toward the stackgarth till they touch its

high nettles. If you are approaching it with heelless boots and an apologetic tread, beware of the dog. The door opens under the low scullery roof, with the sink to your right hand as you go in, where the whole family takes turns at the *papier-maché* basin before tea. To the left of the scullery lies the kitchen. You go in as you go in at Stamway's: scrape your boots over a spade, knock both heels alternately against the outer wall, skate inwards over two mats, and give a twist sideways, watching the kitchen floor anxiously the while to see whether the mats have done their work or will betray you.

The kitchen takes up the whole end of the house, facing two ways. The first window watches the lane across the red tile path and the little unclassified garden; the second comes on the broadside front of the house, facing south, where the sun is a gorgeous nuisance after mid-morning in summer, fading all the flowers on the figured print blind drawn down against his intrusion. It is one of six that look out upon the little green lawn of ragged grass, where invisible hens are desperately busy under its long blades all day long, and chase the moths with vehement beaks above the tangle at even. A rude rail fence bounds it in front, that gives way at times when you dangle both legs on it, and tints your trousers with a rich, powdery, green bloom where it darkens under the trees by the orchard corner. Beyond this, dipping below the sunk stone

wall and the dry nettle-grown ditch in which the ball buries itself instinctively whenever you hit it, is the big grass field for cricket, with the wickets always standing. And beyond this, sweeping away in every direction to right and left, go the great lagoons of corn, brimming up to their green confines, and Barclay's farm shimmering on the distant cliff hill against the sky-line; and the dim Garthston windmill turning its listless sails over in dreamy soliloquy across three miles of fattening grain and green hedge and buttercupped pasture, with the cry of cattle and the chorus of birds, and the hum of wings and the fiddling of hidden grasshoppers; and the celestial sound of the sea, two fields off, lipping the lonely shore, and the basin of blue sky above, with a burning round sun for trade mark; and the stirring of lazy leaves, the cluck of poultry, the soothing grunt of distant pigs, outstretched on the pungent straw and intoxicated with content, the solaceful shutting of unseen gates, and all the thousand things and doings, and sounds and sights and scents that lie expressed in the words Cliff Wrangham and Dixon's by the sea.

And here the Spawer came in the early days of July, big with musical enthusiasm and the themes for his second concerto.

They made the two end windows over to him, adjoining the orchard; the best sitting-room—that is not even used by the family on Sundays—with the

best bedroom above; and he was very happy indeed. The diminutive front door, all out of plumb under its three drunken panes of different colored glass, and buried a yard deep behind its porch of flowering tea, cut him off figuratively from the rest of the house; and the little staircase, starting straight upward for the square yard of bedroom landing from the sunk mat, cut him off in effect. Its tread is so steep and so unwonted that it put him in mind of augmented seconds whenever he went up or down, and the first step gives the door so little turning space that you have to mount your foot upon it and twist round, with the sneck in your stomach, to get into the Spawer's room. A little faded, old-world, out-of-the-world room, like a faint last century sigh, dear to the Spawer's heart on the first day; doubly dear on the second. The dearest little room in all the world, perhaps, before the third. Even the irresistible tide of modernity flowing into it through the Spawer's possessions settled down in clear, hushed pools, as though the turbulent current of Time had found rest here at last and was still. In its nostrils the sweetest breath of decay; the pleasant, musty incense of crumbling mortar and horse-hair, and curtains heavy in their folds with the record of departed harvests; of air kept piously secluded under lock and key, through a sacred life of Sundays, and never disturbed in its religious brooding by any thoughtless gusts of worldly wind. On its walls a choir of pink roses,

seeking the ceiling in prim devotion—such a paper as you shall no longer find at any shop in these days of Lincrusta and Tynecastle and Anaglypta and Japanese leathers, though you pile gold on the counter in pyramids and exhort the covetous glint in the salesman's eye through tears.

From the hook in the center of the ceiling hangs the big brass duplex lamp, beneath which the Spawer bends his head by the hour together, orchestrating his concerto over a busy Jacob's ladder of full score; or, in more material mood, where he draws up his chair to Mrs. Dixon's immortal productions in pastry, with the little brass bell to his right hand, that gives forth a faint, far, meadow-tinkle when he swings it. Whereupon the twins, who have been waiting for the sound of it all the time, under orders, barely a nose-width out of sight round the corner, take up its expiring message with a business-like scuffle of boots and run loudly to the kitchen in double harness, shouting as they go: "Mek 'aste wi' ye an' all. Bell 's gone."

By the left wall, abacking the staircase, the two-headed horse-hair sofa, consecrate to Dixon, beneath the framed print of the Ponte dei Sospiri and the twin china shepherds staring hard at the mantelpiece off their Swiss brackets; where Dixon fills his pipe at night when the Spawer's work is over, and puts a cheery retainer on the conversation with his familiar:

"Noo then ... ah 'll tell ye."

And tells him in a confidential whisper, after a look at the door:

"They say Lunnon 's a rum place!"

Or, "Ah 've 'eard tell o' some queer goings on i' towns!"

Or, "Ye 'll 'a seed a deal o' strange sights i' France, ah 's think!"

And goes to bed slapping his knees and saying: "Well, ah don't know!" till Mrs. Dixon tells him, "Now, you 've been talking your nonsense again," knowing well the tokens.

And for the rest, dispersed indiscriminately about the room, there are Daudet's "Jack"; Tolstoi's "Sonate à Kreutzer"; half a dozen old leather-bound volumes of Molière, opening of themselves at "Le Bourgeois," "Le Malade," or "L'Avare"; Turgenieff twice over in French yellow; Swinburne's "Songs before Sunrise"; a litter of Brahms in his granite Simrock livery; of Grieg in pale pink Peters; of red brick Chopin; of Bülow's Beethoven; of Tschaikowsky; of Rachmaninov; of Glazounow; of Balakirev—of Young Russia, in a word; of Hans Huber; of Smetana; of Dvorak; of loose MSS. and blank music paper—all strewing the chairs and sofa and table in ideal confusion, so that before the Spawer may sit down on one seat he must mortgage another. A letter-weight bust of Chopin on the round antimacassared table by the window; by its side a signed Paderewski; on the mantelpiece the genial

Bohemian 'cellist, piercing the soul of the little room with his glowing eyes from under the well-known silvery nimbus, and apostrophising his "dear young friend," Maurice Ethelbert Wynne, in neatest English through copper-plate German characters; Sarasate on the sideboard by the big cupboard undermining the staircase, where the Spawer's table-bass goes off in heat apoplexy, a bottle a day.

Elsewhere of literary features a few; of singers, of artists, of actors even. Lastly, after an octave of days, comes the piano too, and takes up the far angle by the window corner, its treble truss touching the steel fender, its bass abutting the sill.

And the Spawer sets to work in earnest.

Not the Spawer of hitherto. No longer the smooth-browed son of leisure, with laughter held lazily captive in the meshes of his moustache and an unencumbered eye for the clear draughts of gladness, but a purposeful demon with conspiring brows and deadly-looking hands clawing the keys with a sinuous throttle in each finger, that draw forth a pencil murderously from time to time, like a stiletto, to stab thought upon the paper with the unpleasant despatch of assassination.

A pause for the day's dip and dinner, and on again; and a pause for a stroll and tea, and on again; and supper and a chat with Dixon, and on again. Till Dixon slaps his thigh when he comes back from anywhere and hears it all in full progression, and

asks:

"What! Is 'e still agate [on the go]?"

Pushing his hat from his brow to reply:

"Mah wod! It 's a caution, yon!"

For a second octave of days.

And then a strange happening, to check the buoyant current of the Spawer's activity.

Very late one night the shadow of his head lingered upon the figured print blind, drawn loosely down over the wide-opened window, and the piano poured its unceasing treasury into night's immeasurable coffers. Already, in the long musical decade since Dixon's departure, he had risen to readjust the smouldering wicks, and gone back to a new lease of light at the keyboard. The light was failing for the second time as his fingers, slowing dreamily, sought the final shelter of Chopin. By many winding ways they came at length to the hushed haven of the seventeenth prelude, with the muffled A-flat bell booming its solemn death-message over the waters, and the little tear-laden boat of melody cradling its grief to silence on the ripples below.

The bell tolled no more; the little boat lay tremulous upon the echoes, and in the lingering stillness that followed, before yet the player's fingers had dared to break that sacred communion with the keys, fell all abruptly a sudden human sob.

A sudden human sob out of the darkness beyond

the blind. So near and real and necessitous that the Spawer's elbows kicked backward from the keys, and the pedals went off like triggers under his feet as he spun round to the window. And yet, so far, so remote in probability, that even while he turned, he found far easier to account for it as some acute, psychical manifestation of his own emotions, rather than the expression of any agency from without. Through faith in this feeling, and no fear of it, he flung up the blind abruptly, and thrust forth his head with a peremptory "Who's there?"

Outside, the world lay wrapped in a great breathing stillness. Night's ultramarine bosom was ablaze with starry chain of mail. From the far fields came faint immaterial sounds, commingled in the suspended fragrance of hay, in warm revelations of ripening corn, in the aromatic pungency of nettles, and all the humid suffocation of herbs that open their moist pores at even. Distant sheep, cropping in ghost-like procession across misty, dew-laden clover, contributed now and again their strange, cutting, human cough. Came, as the Spawer listened, the slow, muffled thud-thud of some horse's hoofs on the turf, as it plodded in patient change of pasture, and the deep blowing of kine along the hedge-bottoms. But these, with the soft sound of the sea, spreading its countless fans of effervescing surf upon the sandy shore, were the only answer to his challenge.

He threw it out again, with the mere indolent

amusement of casting pebbles into a pool, and swung one leg over the sill. Night allured him with all her mystic altar lights. He was of a mind to sit there and fling open his soul like a lattice to her seductive minstrelsy; drain deep draughts of celestial gladness from the overflowing tankard of stars. In the dead black porch of flowering tea, with one pale planetary flame shining through its tabernacled branches, no stir. No stir in the square black rug of long grass, softened in its centre to grey silver-point. No stir in the massed shadow of trees, uprising rigid like dim marine growths in a dense ocean of azure.

"Well?" he asked of the stillness, swinging his leg with a complacent tattoo of heel against the brickwork, and smiling indulgence at his own little extension in folly. "For the last time! One ... two ... three. Or must I fire?"

The stars twinkled him in irresistible summons to the sea. Even the sea itself raised its supplicative song a little louder, he thought, as he listened, and called "Come!" The night was too full of blessings to be suffocated untimely beneath the blankets; all his senses were making outcry for its bounty, and the soul of him hearkened. Just one stroll to the edge of the water and back before bed. It was no new thing for him to do. He reached his hat from its insecure slant upon the pile of music topping the piano, and clasped the sill with both hands for descent.

As he did so, in the still pause presaging the act,

he heard the frenetic tugging of someone at the sticky orchard gate, that takes six pulls to open and three and a kick to close, ever since Jabe Stevens painted it drab, with black latch pickings. He heard the quick repeated pant of the pulls; felt in a flash the desperate occasion that was urging them; felt the very prayers surging about him on their way from a soul in turbulent tussle against destiny, and next moment was down on his feet before the window with a clear, arrestive "Hello!"

The click of the liberated latch; garments in swift full stir; a prolonged rending, like the descent of some four-octave chromatic, and a sudden breath-held, death-like stillness fell upon his landing. For a moment he could elucidate nothing by the look. Sight was sealed up in yellow lamplight. Two steps forward and the bondage was burst. He made out the line of flat wood stakes bounding the orchard to its half width, whence rough green rails complete the demarcation; and the gate, thrown three quarters open; and by it, the dim, motionless figure of a girl.

CHAPTER III

All that had been silence before was swallowed up at a gulp in the sudden deeps of discovery. The Spawer, with legs planted forcefully apart, chin thrown

forward, and sidelong listening ear, tugged at the tawny end of his moustache. It is not altogether a child's task, whatever may be thought to the contrary, to address discreetly a panting feminine figure in the darkness at five paces, that has drawn the undesirable fire of our attention nearing midnight, and may be either a common garden thief or a despicable henroost robber; or a farm wench, deflected by the piano on her way home; or a mere tramp, bungling the matter of a free straw bed, and in trouble because appearances are against her; or none of these things at all, but something quite other, utterly beyond the scope of divination. And since it is neither generous to approach distress through the narrow portals of suspicion, nor desirable to doff one's hat in premature respect to what may turn out, after all, mere unworthy fraud, the Spawer held his peace a while in courteous attendance upon the girl. Before him her black silhouette remained rigid, stilled unnaturally, like a bird, in that last tense moment of surrender beneath the fowler's fingers. She stood, part way through the gate, with averted head—one hand straining the gate-post to her for strength and stay—the other clutched to quell the turbulence at her breast. In such wise, for a short century of seconds, discoverer and discovered waited motionless the one upon the other.

Pity for the girl's confusion, after a while, moved

the Spawer when it seemed she meant to make no use of the proffered moments. He broke up silence with a reassuring swing of heel, though without advancing.

"I 'm sorry if I frightened you," he said, in an open voice, devoid of any metallic spur of challenge or odious trappings of suspicion. "I did n't mean to do that.... But..." He paused there for a moment, with the conjunction trailing off in an agreeable tag of stars for the girl's use, and then, when she caught her breath over a troubled underlip, took it up himself. "... We 're not accustomed to callers quite so late ... and I came out in a bit of a hurry. Is there anything I can do for you?"

Beautiful question of solicitude for a guilty conscience, that he smiled over grimly as he said it. He knew well enough that the very utmost he could have done for her would have been to keep the other side of the sill till she made good her escape. And he knew, too, that some part of her must have suffered tear by a couple of yards or so, but that was a matter might very well wait over awhile. For the present, all he wanted was a little enlightenment; later, the floodgates of compassion could be liberally loosened if required. He despatched his words, and dipped a hand into his trouser's pocket, making a friendly jingle of keys and coppers. The unperemptory tone of his voice, the kindness of the undiminished distance he kept, and this last show of leisurely dispassion did

their work and raised the girl's head.

"Oh, I 'm sorry ... and ashamed!" she gulped, battling forth into the open through a threatening tumult of tears. "It 's all my fault ... every bit of it. I ought never to have come." She stopped momentarily, midway through her words, gripping on to fortitude in silence as to a hand-rail, till the big looming sob had gone by. "... So close. And I ought n't to have come ... at all, I know. But it 's too late now. Wishes won't do any good. Oh ... forgive me, please."

Her voice, even in the listening stillness of leaves, was almost inaudible, but there was the rare mellow sweetness of blown pipes about it such as the Spawer had not been prepared to hear at this time, and in this place. The musical ear of him opened swiftly wide to its magic like a casement to some forerunning spring breeze; and his heart stirred on a sudden to wakefulness—keen bird with a most watchful eye. Whatever else, it were absurd to couple vulgar delinquencies with so soft a mouthpiece. He flung the lurking idea afar, and a delightful flame of wonder grew up within him, illuminating possibility.

"Certainly," he said, in answer to her petition, striving to lull the girl's alarms with his manner of easy consequence. "I 'll do my best. But tell me first what for."

"For ... for what I 've done," said the girl

unsteadily, each word tremulous with a tear. "I did n't mean—to disturb you. I ought to have spoken—when you called—first of all. But I could n't—somehow—and I never expected you—by the window. I thought—perhaps—the door. And I feel so mean—and miserable—and wretched...." Her voice suddenly went from her to an interminable distance, falling faintly afar like the unreal voice that wanders aimlessly about the slopes of slumber. "And oh, please—will you give me a glass of water?"

With that, and a residuary shaky sigh of her little store of breath left over, her head fell limply forward. There was no mistaking this last tell-tale token of physical extremity; and he was by her side in a moment.

"Hello!" he called on the way, encouraging her by voice to resolution, till he reached her, "what a great iron-shod beast I am, jumping out and scaring you in this fashion. Hold up a little. You 're not going to give up the ghost on my account, surely!"

She made a futile effort to move her lips for reply, and lifted her head in the supreme spurt of conscious endeavor, but it tumbled straightway across the other shoulder uncontrolled, and swung a helpless semi-circle before her breast. She would have been down after that, all the length of her, but that his arms were quick to intercept the fall. The shock of sudden succor checked her in her collapse.

"Thank you," she panted, in a voice that stifled

its words, and striving, in a half-unconscious and wholly incompetent fashion, to free him of the necessity of her further support. "... I 'm better now."

Words came no more easily to her under recovery than under the original discovery, though he knew well enough that it was because her lips were overburdened with them, and through no poverty of desire.

"Better?" he echoed, transplanting her own convictionless admission into the pleasantest prospect possible. "Come, come! That 's gladdening. There! ... Do you think you can stand all right?"

He loosened the clasp of his arms for a moment, and she swayed out impotently in their widening circle.

"I think so," she said, giving desperate lie to proof positive under the strenuousness of desire.

He laughed indulgently, and caught her in again.

"Capital!" he said, "if only you were trying to sit down. But you must n't sit down here. See." He took a tighter hold of her. "... If I help you—so.... Do you think you can manage to the door? It 's only a step."

He urged her into motion with a gentle insistence of arm, and set her the example of a leisurely foot forward. For the first time he felt the exercise of her power in resistance.

"Oh, no, no!" she told him, turning off the two little panting negatives in their sudden hot breath of shame, and stiffening at the suggestion of advance.

"No?" he queried, in audible surprise. "You 're not equal to that? But you must n't stay out here. You need to sit down and have something to pull you up." He brought the other arm about her in a twinkling. "Here, let me lift you," he said. "I 've helped drunken men up three flights of stairs before to-day, fighting every bit of the way. I ought to be able to tackle you as far as the door!"

Before she could absorb the intention through his words he had got her begirt for the raising. The consciousness, coming upon her at such short notice, in company with the action itself, found her without preparation other than a gasp of blank amaze. Then her hand went out to stay him.

"Oh, let me!" she said, with a horrified desire to avert this fresh imposition upon his credulity or good-nature. "I can walk—very well...."

She finished the petition in mid-air, and the sound of his amused, wilful laughter just beneath her ears, as he waded with her through that odious short sea of lamp-light to the black porch.

"There!" he said, to another note of laughter, lowering her carefully till her feet found the square slab of scoured stone, with the scraper set in it, and strove hastily to reassert themselves. "That 's better than bartering in yes's and no's. Thank you for keeping so beautifully still and not kicking me; you could if you 'd tried. So!"

He steered her down the narrow darkness of the

porch, with his hands protectively upon her elbows from behind, through a rustle of leaves and the springing of flexible branches. She went before him, without any words. Only when his arm slid past her to throw open wide the door did she seem about to offer any furtherance of demur. But the dreadful publicity of burning wicks lay forward, and the still more dreadful publicity of his face lay behind against retreat, and she went dumbly round the door, and so into the room. He could feel the sudden shrinkage of her being as the full force of the episode surged back upon her in a vivid hot wave out of the lamp-light, and was sorry. She would have dropped down, in the penitential meekness of submission, upon the triangle of chair that showed itself from beneath a litter of the Spawer's music immediately by the door as they entered, but his arm resisted the tell-tale bend of her body.

"No, no," he said, realising her desire for the penance of discomfort rather than the comfort of repose, and jerking the chair out of consideration, "... not there." He thrust the table far out into the room with a quick scream of its castors at being so rudely awakened, and pushed her gently to the sofa.

"That's better," he said, with a great evidence of content, as she sank back upon it before solicitous pressure. "The cushions are hard, but the passengers are earnestly requested to place their feet upon them." He drew in the table again, so that she might

have its rest for her arm or her elbow, and deferring the moment for their eyes to make their first official meeting, bustled off to the sideboard. "Please excuse the grim formality of everything you find here," he continued, in light-hearted purpose, and commingling his words with an urgent jingling of glass, "but I 'm a musical sort of man, and like the rest of them, a lover of law and order. A time and place for everything, that 's our motto, and everything in its place. It 's a little weakness of ours.... Therefore"—his voice suddenly went cavernous in the recesses of the big cupboard—"... where on earth 's the brandy? Ah!" he emerged again on the interjection smiling, as on a triumphal car. "Here it is. Now I 'm going to give you a little of this ... it 's better than any amount of bad drinking water, and does n't taste half so nasty. Oh, no, no, no"—in answer to the intuition of a quick protesting turn of head from the sofa—"... not much. I won't let you have much, so it 's no use asking. Only as much as is good for you. Just a lit—tle drop and no more." He measured out the drop to the exact length of the accented syllable, and the stopper clinked home under a soft, satisfied "So-o-o!" The syphon took up the word, seething it vigorously into the glass, and next moment his arm had spanned the table to an encouraging: "Here we are! Take a good pull of this while it fizzes."

A soft, tremulous hand, nut-brown to the wrist,

stole out in timid obedience over the table, and the Spawer perceived his visitor for the first time.

If the mere sound of her voice had aroused his wonder, the sight of the girl's face added doubly to his surprise. A face as little to be looked for in this place and at this time, and under these conditions, as to make quest for orchids down some pitmouth with pick and Davy lamp. He could not maintain the look long, for before satisfying his own inquiry he sought to establish the girl's confidence, but he noted the wide generous forehead, the big consuming eyes, burning deep in sorrowing self-reproach and giving him a moment's gaze over the uplifted tumbler; the dispassionate narrow nose, sprinkled about its bridge and between the brows with a pepper-castor helping of freckled candor; the small lips, parted submissively to the glass rim over two slips of milky teeth; the long, sleek cheeks; the slender, pear-shaped chin; the soft, supple neck of russet tan, spliced on to a gleaming shaft of ivory, where it dipped through her dress-collar to her bosom; the quick throbbing throat, and the burning lobes of red, like live cinders, in her hair.

As to the girl herself, her whence and where and whither, the Spawer could make no guess. She wore a shabby pale blue Tam-o'-Shanter, faded under innumerable suns, and washed out to many a shower, but on her head it appeared perfectly reputable and self-supporting, and identified itself

with the girl's face so instantly and so completely that its weather-stain counted for preciousness, like the oaten tint of her skin. A storm-tried mackintosh-cape, looped over her arms and falling loosely down her back from the shoulders, and the print blouse, evidenced by her bust above the table and her sleeves, and the serviceable skirt of blue serge that the Spawer had caught sight of in the cleft between the table and sofa, completed the girl as revealed through her dress. Everything about her was for hard wear and tear, and had stood to the task. There was not a single button's worth of pretension in the whole of her attire; not a brooch at her throat, nor a bangle on either of her wrists to plead for her station. She had dipped her nose meekly into the tumbler and was letting the sparkles play about her lips momentarily, with dropped eyelids; then the glass went down to the table, and her eyes opened wide upon the Spawer as though casting up the full column of her liabilities, resolved to shirk nothing.

"You don't drink," he said, with a voice of solicitude. "I have n't made it too weak for you? ... Surely! I took great care—I might have been making it for myself. Or is there anything else you 'd rather have?"

He found her soft voice entangled in his inquiry, and stopped.

"... Ever so much," he drew up in time to hear. "But it 's not that..." The frank lips were wrestling to

pronounce sentence upon her crime, but they broke down in the task and transferred their self-imposed judgment to him. "I don't know what you must think of me..." she said.

The Spawer laughed light-hearted indulgence upon the admission.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I hardly know what to think myself, so it 's no use saying I do. I thought perhaps ... poultry, first of all; but your voice does n't sound a bit like poultry, and I 'm sure you don't look it. And I don't think it was apples either, though you 'd got the right gate for those. Besides, apples don't count ... that way. I 've gathered them myself at this time of night before now, and been hauled back over the wall by a leg. We don't think anything of that."

"It was the piano," she explained unsteadily, and for a moment the steadfast flames in her eyes flickered under irresolute lids.

"The piano?" The Spawer raised his voice in amused interrogation. "Heavens! you were n't going to try and take that away, were you? It took ten of us and a bottle of whiskey to get it in, and threepence to Barclay's boy for sitting on the gate and telling us by clockwork 'Ye 'll get stuck wi' 'er yet before ye 're done,' and half-a-crown to the man that let the truss down upon my toes. Surely you were n't thinking of tackling an enterprise like that single-handed, were you?"

For the first time he drew forth the faint fore-

glimmering of what the girl should be like in smiles; a sudden illuminated softening of the features, as when warm sunlight melts marble, that spread and passed in a moment.

"I was listening," she said.

"But that 's a dreadful confession." His eyebrows went up in tragic surprise and his voice departed to the mock-horrified aloofness of a whisper. "Listeners never hear any good of themselves, you know, and never come to any." He slipped from the pseudo-serious with a sly laugh. "Tell me the worst," he begged. "How much did you hear?"

"Oh! I don't know...." She searched his inquiry for a space with her luminous eyes. "Only very little. Perhaps ... perhaps I 'd been half an hour."

"Half an hour," he said, "with the classics. Lord! you 've been punished for your offence."

"But I was n't by the window all the time," she made haste to assure him. "I was standing in the lane ... by the kitchen gate." And then, with the vial of confession in her fingers, she let it drain before him in dropped sentences. "And I did n't mean to come any nearer than that. All I wanted was the music. Only ... when you played ... what you played last..." Her voice stumbled a little with her here, but she picked up the falter with a quick, corrective tilt of the nose, and walked more wardedly down the path of speech, her eyelids lowered, like one who moves by spiritual impulse. "I felt ... oh! I don't know how I

felt—as though, somehow, somebody were beckoning me to the window, where the music was. And so I came. And then, when I 'd got there, all of a sudden things came back upon me that I knew I 'd known once ... and forgotten. I saw my mother ... as she was ever so many years ago, before she died, playing to me ... and crying over the keys; and the old room—ever so plain—that I could hardly remember, even when I tried. And all at once a great lump came up into my throat. I could n't help it.... And I sobbed out loud—as I 'd sobbed before when I was a little girl. And then..."

The tears, never wholly subjugated since their first turbulent rebellion, rose up swiftly against her words at the recital here. She made a valiant endeavor to ride through the tumult on her trembling charger of speech, but memory plucked at the bridle, and unhorsed her into the hands of her besetters; a fair, virginal captive—beautiful under subjection.

"And then..." he said, catching up the girl's own words, and simulating a careless stroll towards the window to give her time, "... *I* came in—came out, I mean." He flicked a chord off the treble end of the keyboard in passing that drew the girl's eyes towards him at once, watchful through tears. "But we won't talk about that part of the business, if you 'll be so good as not to mind. One of us needs kicking very badly for his share in it, and knows he does." He

stooped down to resolve the chord briefly with both hands, and spun round, outspread against the piano, with his fingers behind him, touching extreme treble and bass. Only an inactive tear or two on the girl's lashes marked the recent revolt, and the way to her eyes lay clear. He sent his words pleasantly out to them at once in friendly hazard. "You don't mean to say you 're a neighbor of mine?" he suggested, smiling interested inquiry from his spread-eagle pinnacle by the piano, "... and I have n't known it all this time?" For who was this strange nocturnal visitant of his, with a soul for the sound of things? "... Or are you..."—the alternative came twinkling in time to join the previous inquiry under one note of interrogation—"just a ... spawer, I think they call it, like me?"

The girl shook her head at the latter suggestion.

"It 's my home here," she said.

"At Cliff Wrangham?" he asked, and brought his right leg over the left towards her, in attitude of increased attention.

"No-o."

She must have felt a sense of isolation in abiding by that one word; as though it were a gate snecking her off from the Spawer's friendly reach in conversation, for she passed through it almost immediately and added the specific correction: "At Ullbrig."

"Ah!" His internal eye was soaring over the

Ullbrig of his remembrance in an endeavor to pounce upon stray points of association for the girl's identity. "I 'm afraid," he said, "that I don't know my Ullbrig very well. It 's a part of my education here that 's been sadly neglected. But you were n't going to walk back there alone? To-night, I mean?"

She looked at him with mild surprise.

"Oh, yes," she told him.

"Jove!" he said. "Are n't you afraid?"

"Afraid?" She gathered the word dubiously off his lips. "What of?"

"Oh," he laughed. "Of nothing at all. That 's what we 're most afraid of, as a rule, is n't it? Of the dark, for instance."

She smiled, shaking her head.

"I 'm not afraid of that," she said.

"Ah," he decided enviously, "you 're no newspaper reader. That 's plain." Then taking new stock of inquiry. "But we 're not in the habit of passing by ... at this time, are we?" he asked. "I thought all good people were between the blankets by nine in the country?"

A queer little flame of resolve began fighting for establishment about her lips, like the flickers of a newly-lighted taper, that burnt up suddenly in speech.

"I was n't ... passing by," she said, the flame reddening her to candor.

"No?"

"I came ... on purpose."

The Spawer's eyebrows ran up in a ruffle of surprise and friendly amusement.

"Not ... to hear me?"

She clasped her teeth in repression upon her lower lip, and nodded her head.

"And you 've actually trudged all the way out from Ullbrig?"

"It 's nothing," she said apologetically.

"But at night!" he expostulated, in friendly concern.

"There was no other time..." she explained. "Besides ... I thought—They said ... it was only after supper."

"Only after supper?" echoed the Spawer. "What 's that? Indigestion? Nightmare?"

"The music," she said.

"I see." He laughed, nodding his head sagaciously. "So they 've got my time-table. And I thought I was n't known of a soul! What an ostrich I 've been!"

"Everybody knows of you," she said, in wonder he should think otherwise.

"I 'm sure they do," he assented. "What sort of a character do they give me? ... Would just about hang me at the Assizes, I suppose?"

"They say you 're a great musician..." she said, with watchful eyes of inquiry.

"Palestrina!" he exclaimed. "However did they

come by the truth?"

"... And no one can play like you...."

"Yes?"

"... And you 've come here away from people to compose a great piece ... and don't want anybody to ... to hear you."

The tide of her words ebbed suddenly there, leaving her eyes stranded upon his. The same thought came up simultaneously to them both.

"And so ... that 's why you did n't come."

She dropped her eyes.

"I knew it was mean," she said humbly, "taking things when your back was turned. I felt like stealing, at first. I could n't listen for shame."

"And what 'll be to pay for it all ... when you get back?" said he.

The fringe of her lashes was raised while her eyes reconnoitred, and dropped again.

"Nothing," she told him.

"And no questions asked?"

"No."

"And nobody sitting up for you, ready to put the clock on half an hour, and point a finger at it when you return?"

"No-o...." She twirled the tumbler jerkily between soft thumb and forefinger. "They think I 'm in bed. And I did go," with a sudden resurrection of self-righteousness. "Only"—the self-righteousness went under here—"... when they were all asleep ... I

slipped out and came to Cliff Wrangham."

"So-o-o!" said the Spawer, spraying his comprehension hugely this time with the word, as though it were a shower-bath to enlightenment. "That 's the secret of things at last, is it?" His eyes were spinning on the girl like peg-tops in delicious amusement. "And I suppose I 've got to guard it with my life's blood?"

A grateful face flashed thankfulness up at him for its relief from the necessity of appeal.

"Here 's the bond," said he. "Subscribe, and say done." He threw out an open palm of contract across the table, and the small hand crept into it with the timorous, large-hearted trust for an unfamiliar shelter. "And I 'm afraid," he said self-reproachfully, "that you 've torn your dress?"

"Oh, no, ... a little." She made-believe to look at her skirt between the table and sofa, and take stock of the damage done. "It 's nothing."

"At the time," said the Spawer, "it sounded terrible enough. I hope it is n't as bad as the sound."

She drew up what appeared to be the ruined remnants of a phylactery, and held it above the table-edge for his scrutiny, saying: "It does n't matter," with a hopeful smile.

"But that 's awful," he said distressfully.

"It 's only an old skirt," she explained, making light of the raiment with true feminine instinct, lest perhaps he might think she had no better. "I can soon

mend it."

"Shall I fetch you a needle and some cotton?" he asked, in a penitential voice. "I have both upstairs."

The girl's eyes made a quick clutch at the needle and cotton, but her lips hung back meekly to a suggestion of pins, with some murmur about "trouble."

"Trouble!" said the Spawer.

He spun the word up in contemptuous disregard as though it were a shuttlecock, and slipped blithely up the little staircase. A second or so later, when she had heard him drop the matches and rake over the carpet for them with his finger-ends, and weave sundry spiderous tracks across the ceiling, he was down again triumphantly extending the objects of his quest.

All too quickly the girl whipped the serrated edges of serge together, while he watched her—with a busy back and forth of needle—snapped the thread round a determined small finger, shook the skirt into position, and rose (conscientiously sheathing the needle in the cotton bobbin), showing parted lips for gratitude and farewell. The latter, taking the Spawer somewhat by surprise, awakened all at once his dormant solicitude.

"But you 're not going ... now!" he said. The girl said softly, "If he pleased." "Why, you have n't half finished!" he exclaimed, pointing to the desolate tumbler, its contents untasted. The girl looked

remorsefully at the object of her neglect, and said, still more softly, "If he did n't mind...."

"Not in the least," the Spawer reassured her. "But are you quite sure," he said anxiously, "that you 're strong enough to start back—just yet? Do you think it 's altogether wise?"

The girl thought it so wise that the Spawer had no alternative but to accept the cotton bobbin from her, a thing which his fingers (in their concern for her welfare) showed a certain disinclination to do.

"At least," said he, "you 'll let me see you back as far as Hesketh's corner?" But the girl said, "Oh no, please ... and thank you.... I 'm accustomed to walk alone," so once again he felt constrained to abide by her decision, not knowing how many secret considerations might have gone to the making of it.

"But ... look here," he said, in a conclusive spurt of candor, brought about by the imminence of their parting; "... we 're not saying good-by for good, are we?"

"I—I hope not," said the girl, and something stirred her lips and lashes as though a breeze had blown across them.

"Well, I hope not too," said the Spawer. "For that would make me feel sad. I must n't keep you any longer now, I know, for I don't want you to get into trouble; but it 's awfully good of you to have come, and believe me, I 'm really grateful. If there 's anything in music I can do for you, I want you to

know that you 've only to ask, and it shall be done for you with pleasure. Honest Injun. You won't forget, will you?"

The girl said she could never forget ... his kindness.

"It 's a promise, then?" said the Spawer.

Again the little unseen breath blew across her features at the question, and to his surprise he could have almost sworn to tears upon her lashes when he looked up for affirmation in the girl's eyes. To cover any confusion that his words might have wrought, he put out a friendly hand for parting.

"All right," said he, in voice of cheerful agreement. "So *that's* settled," though a dozen questions were fighting for first place on his lips as he said it. The little brown hand stole for the second time into the shelter of his own with a solemnity that, at other moments, he could have laughed at, and a moment later the Spawer was left gazing at the orchard gate, thrown three quarters open, as he had done in that first memorable moment, with the girl's soft footsteps merged every second more deceptively in the starry stillness of night.

CHAPTER IV

Whatever the Spawer might choose to say of himself

for purposes of humor (not, I am afraid, an invariable pole-star to truth), he was no sluggard. By agreement, dated the first night of his arrival, Jeff Dixon was to get a penny a day for bringing up the bath-water and having him into it at seven in the morning. Something short of the hour Jeff would stumble up the little steep staircase, with his tongue out, behind a big bucket of cold water (the last of three drawn to get the full freshness of the pump), and anticipating a few minutes in his statement of the time, make preliminary clamor for the Spawer's acknowledgment before departing to fetch the hot. From which moment forth the Spawer was a marked man, whom no subterfuge or earthly ingenuity could save. Once a drowsy voice begged Jeff to be so good as to call again.

"An' loss my penny!" cried Jeff, with fine commercial scorn at the suggestion. "Nay, we 'll 'ave ye oot o' bed an' all, noo we 've gotten started o' ye."

And tramped diabolically downstairs after the second bucket.

But though a little comedy of this sort, now and again, served to test the validity of the agreement, and show the Spawer that nothing—short of repealing the penny—could save him from the inexorable machinery that his own hand had set in motion, there was little real need of the bond, except to guarantee that the bath-water should be up to time. More often than not Jeff came upon a man

alertly drawn up in bed, with a full score spread across his knees, who had been writing and erasing hard since sunrise.

Early in the morning after the girl's visit the sun peeped over the Spawer's sill according to custom, and the Spawer jumped out of bed to let him in. Already Nature's symphony was in full swing—a mighty, crescive, spinning movement of industry, borne up to him on a whirr of indefatigable wings. The sun had cleared the cliff railings and was traveling merrily upward on an unimpeded course, though still the grassland lay grey in the shadow beneath its glistening quilt of dew, and every spider's web hung silver-weighted like a net new-drawn with treasure from the sea. He stayed by the window a space, and then let go the curtain with an amused, reminiscent laugh.

"I wonder who on earth she is?" he said.

He scooped up the bulky armful of music-sheets that constituted his present labors at the concerto, and went back to bed with them. But though he made a determined desk of his knees and spread the papers out with a business-like adjustment of pages, the work prospered but poorly when it came to the pencil. After a short spell of it he sat back in bed, with his hands locked under his neck staring at the window. For the events of last night were a too inviting vintage to be left uncorked and untasted, and out of this glowing wine of remembrance he

attempted to win back the girl's face, and did not altogether succeed. He reclaimed certain shifting impressions of red lips exaggeratedly curled; of great round eyes; of multiplied freckles about the brows and nose; of a startling white throat beyond where the sun had dominion; of a shabby blue Tam-o'-Shanter and a perfect midnight of hair—but all of them seen grotesquely, as it might be at the bottom of the cup, with himself blowing on the wine.

"The thing is," he decided, "I was a fool not to stare harder and ask more questions. This comes of trying to act the gentleman."

Duly before seven came Jeff Dixon stumbling up the staircase, and dumped the first bucket down at the Spawer's door with a ringing clash of handle.

"Noo then," he called under the door, when he had summoned the Spawer lustily by name, and hit the panel several resounding flat-handers (as specified in the agreement). "It 's tonned [turned] seven o'clock, an' another gran', fine day for ye an' all. Arny 's gotten ye some mushrooms—some right big uns an' some little conny [tiny] uns, a gret basket full oot o' big field. Will ye 'ev 'em for breakfast?"

"Will I?" The Spawer shot together the loose sheets gathered in attendance upon an idle muse, and tossed them dexterously on to the nearest chair, as though they were a pancake. "Ah, me bhoy! me bhoy!" he called out, in the rich, mellow brogue of one whose heart was on a sudden turned to sunlight.

"Ay, will ye?" inquired the mouth behind the door-crack.

"Ay, wull Oi?" echoed the voice of glowing fervor. "Wull Oi, bedad! me bhoy? Mushrooms, ye say! Is 't me the bhoy for mushrooms! Arrah, thin, me bonny bhoy, is 't me the bhoy for mushrooms!"

After a pause: "D' ye mean yes?" asked the mouth dubiously, and with meekness.

"Ah, phwat a bhoy it is to read the very sowl o' man an' shpake it! Yis 's the word, bi the beard o' St. Pathrick, iv he had wan (which Oi 'm doubtin'), an' a small, inconsiderable jug o' rale cowld boilin' wather whin ye retoorn convanient wid yer next bucket, me bhoy, bi yer lave an' savin' yer prisince!"

"Will yon little un wi' yaller stripes do?" says the mouth, brimming with the enthusiasm of willing, and making from the door-crack for immediate departure.

Whereupon, in receipt of the Spawer's agreement, the boots stumbled down the stairs again, as though there were no feet in them, but had been thrown casually from top to bottom. A minute or so later, when they had staggered up with the second bucket, and been cast down again to fetch the jug, and come back with it, the owner of them bestrode all these accumulated necessities laid out upon the little landing, and let himself into the Spawer's room —a blue-eyed, fair-haired Saxon of thirteen, with white teeth and a quick smile, sharpened like a razor

on the cunning whetstone of the district.

"'Ere 's yer cold," said he, stooping to lift it in after him. "An' 'ere 's yer warm," bringing to view the steaming wooden pail, with as much reminiscence of milk about the water as we have to pay for by the gill in town. "An' 'ere 's yer rale cold boilin'. 'Ow div ye fin' yersen this mornin'?"

"In bed," says the Spawer, "thanking you kindly, where I put myself last night."

"Noo then, noo then!" with that indulgent tone of grown-up wisdom which is the birthright of every baby in Ullbrig, and on which it practises its first lisp; "are ye agate o' that road already? Ye mun 'a got the steel i' bed wi' ye, ah think—ye seem strange an' sharp, ti-morn." He pulled the bath from its hiding under the bed, set the mats about it, and brought the pails over within reach. "Noo, it 's all ready an' waitin', so ye 'ad n't need to start shuttin' yer eyes. Let 's see ye movin', an' ah 'll be away."

The Spawer made a feeble shuffle of legs under the blankets, and smiled with the seraphic content of one who has done his duty.

"Nay, ah s'll want to see ye on end, an' all," Jeff said sternly, "before ah gan mi ways. Come noo, Mr. Wynne—one, two, three!"

Thus adjured, the Spawer found strength to raise his eyelids after a few moments of bland inertness under Jeff's regard, and turned out affably (with them down again) on to the pegged rug alongside.

"That 's better," said Jeff, with conciliatory admiration.

"Is it?" the Spawer inquired sweetly, sitting down on the bedside to think over the matter, and rubbing form contemplatively into his hocks. "Oh! ... Then get me the third razor from the right-hand side of the case, and I 'll kill myself. Also the strop and the brush and jug and soap-tube...."

"D' ye mean a shave?" asked Jeff, with some curiosity.

"Merely another name for it," the Spawer told him.

"What div ye want ti get shaved for?" Jeff persisted.

"Oh!" ... The Spawer sifted a few replies under rapid survey, as though he were rolling a palmful of grain, and picked out one at random. "... For fun."

"Ah thought ye was n't gannin' to shave no more while ye 'd gotten that there piece o' yours written!"

"Whatever put that idea into your head?" asked the Spawer, in surprise.

"You," said Jeff, with forceful directness. "It was you telt me."

"I? How wicked of me to tell such a story," the Spawer said warmly.

"Ah do believe you 're gannin' after some young lady or other," Jeff declared, by a quick inspiration.

"How dare you," said the Spawer, rising from the bed in protest, "try to put such ideas into the head of

an innocent young man, old enough to be your father. Hither with the razor at once," he commanded, "and let 's shave your head."

But inside, out of sight behind all this laughter, he sent a knowing, sagacious glance to his soul.

"The young divil!" he said.

He shaved, like the Chinese executioners, with despatch; whistled blithely through his bath as though he were a linnet hung out in the sun, and was downstairs as soon as might be. The little room greeted him cheerfully in its cool breakfast array, holding forth a great, heavenly-scented garland of wall-flowers and sweet-williams and mignonette—for all the world like some dear, diminutive, old-fashioned damsel in white muslin—and his eye softened unconsciously to an appreciative smile. There, too, was the sofa consecrate to Dixon. He looked at it with a more conscious extension of smile —thinking, no doubt, of Dixon. Then he shook the bell for breakfast, being an-hungered, and smelling the mushrooms.

The door flew wide to Miss Bates' determined toe, as she entered with the mushrooms in company with the bacon and toast and steaming hot milk and coffee on the big, battered tray of black Japan, securely held at either foremost corner with a salmon-colored fist.

Now Miss Bates was Dixon's orphan niece, whose case deserves all the pity you can afford to

give it, as we shall see. Left quite alone in the world by the death of her father (who had no more thought for her future than to fall off his horse, head downwards, in the dark), she was most cruelly abducted by her wicked uncle to Cliff Wrangham (much against her will—and his own), and imprisoned there under the humiliating necessity of having to work like one of the family. You must not call her the scullery-maid or the dairy-maid or the kitchen-maid, but rather, with the blood-right to give back word for word and go about her day's work grumbling, you must appoint her a place among the ranks of unhappy heroines—reduced, distressed, and down-trodden beneath the iron-shod heel of labor. She was, indeed, the persecuted damosel of mediæval romance, brought up to modern weight and size and standard—not the least of her many afflictions being that she was forcibly christened Mary Anne by heartless parents, while yet a helpless infant, and that nobody called her anything else. Her lips were full of prophetic utterances as to last straws; as to what certain people (not so very many miles away) would find for themselves one morning (not so very far ahead) when they got up and came downstairs, and said, "Where 's somebody?" and never an answer, and no need to say then they were sorry, as if they had n't been warned!

"Now who," the Spawer inquired craftily, dipping a liberal measurement of spoon into the

mushrooms, and smiling confidentially at Miss Bates, who was balanced gently by the door, with its edge grasped in her red right hand, and her cheek pressed touchingly against the knuckles—"who is the prettiest girl in Ullbrig?"

Miss Bates threw up her nostrils at this direct challenge of romance, and squirmed with such maidenly desire to insist her own claims through silence, that the tray in her left hand banged about her knees like distant thunder.

"Cliff Wrangham allus reckons ti count in wi' Oolbrig," she said, coyly.

"But leaving Cliff Wrangham out of the question," suggested the Spawer, in a voice of bland affability.

Miss Bates' knees stiffened.

"Ah see no ways o' doin' it," she declared, tossing her head as though she were champing a bit.

So the Spawer was left smiling over his cup, knowing no more about the blue Tam-o'-Shanter than ever. He enjoyed his mushrooms very much, and went twice to coffee. Then, breakfast over, he crossed over to the piano, ran his hands over the keys, and set himself to his daily occupation without loss of time.

Thick saffron of sunlight filled the little room. Down below the window-sash, about the shelterless roots of the rose-tree, moored along the wall line in barge-like flotilla and at anchor over the hard,

sunbaked path, lay gathered the Spawer's faithful band of feathered friends, awaiting recurrence of the bounty so liberally bestowed upon them at meals. Each time the blind stirred they uprose in spires of expectant beak, whereat the Spawer, squinting sideways, would see the window space set with jeweled, vigilant eyes, while afloat on the wavy green border of grass beyond the pathway a snow-white convoy of ducklings drew their bills from beneath fleecy breasts and got under soft cackle of steam, ready to sail for the window at the first signal of crumbs.

After his departure, for an hour or more nothing but sunlight stirred the Spawer's blind. Then the voice of Miss Bates was heard in close proximity outside, and the next moment the Spawer's first crop of Cliff Wrangham letters was extended to him in Miss Bates' gentle fist.

"Three letters, a post-card, an' a fortygraft," said Miss Bates, relaxing the proprietary clench of thumb (tightened recently for dominion over the downcast Lewis), and suffering the Spawer to gather them from her confiding hand with all the romantic symbolism of a bouquet. "It 's good to be you an' 'ev letters sent ye wi'oot nobody pesterin' where they come fro'. Will there be onnything for 'post' to tek back?"

"Let 's see..." said the Spawer, skimming the postcard more rapidly than Miss Bates had done before him. "Is he waiting?"

"It 's not a 'e," Miss Bates replied, with no manifest relish of the fact. "An' she 's stood at kitchen door. 'Appen she 's waitin' to be asked twice to come in an' sit 'ersen down—bud she 'll 'ave to wait. Once is good enough for most folk, an' it mun do for 'er."

The Spawer finished the post-card, tossing it on the table, and forced his fingers beneath the flap of the next envelope.

"What?" said he, with a smile of amused surprise. "Is the postman a lady, then?"

"Nay," repudiated Miss Bates, stripping the amusement off his surprise, and treating the question in grim earnest. "She 'd onnly like to be. It 'd suit 'er a deal better nor tramplin' about roads wi' a brown bag ower 'er back."

"It sounds charming enough," said the Spawer, throwing himself with a diabolical heartiness into the idea. "What sort of a postman is she?"

"No different fro' nobody else," Miss Bates gives grudgingly, "though she 's 'ods [holds] 'er chin where most folk's noses is. They gie 'er six shillin' a week for carryin' letters to Cliff Wrangham an' Far Wrangham an' round by Shippus—an' it mud be ten bi t' way she sets up."

"Six shillings a week," the Spawer mused wonderingly. "Just a shilling a day and be a good girl for nothing on Sunday. She 'll need all the pride she can muster to help her through on that."

"There 's twenty for t' job onny day she teks into

'er 'ead to leave it," Miss Bates reflected, with callous indifference. "She's n' occasion to keep it agen [unless] she likes."

The Spawer put down the first letter and opened the second. It was a bill. "There 'll be no answer to this," he said grimly, and passed on to the third. He gave one glance at the green Helvetian stamps under the Luzern post-marks, and toyed with it irresolutely unopened. "I don't think the post need wait," he said, this time casting the office considerately into the neuter gender.

"Ah 'll tell 'er to gan, then," Miss Bates decided, with a foretaste of the asperity that would characterise the dismissal.

"Please," said the Spawer. "With my thanks for her kindness in waiting."

"There 's na kindness in it," Miss Bates disclaimed. "She 's got to gan back, onny road. An' 'appen she would n't 'ave offered bud ah was ower sharp to call of 'er before she 'd chance to get away. She mun gan 'er ways ti Far Wrangham, then."

The Spawer had opened the third envelope, and Miss Bates was blowing herself out in great gusts like a strenuous candle, fighting hard against extinction, when she heard herself suddenly recalled.

"After all," he said, "I 'm going to be a woman and change my mind. Who writes quickly writes double, and saves two pages of apology. Then I can get back to work with a clear conscience."

"Ah 'll tell 'er she 's got to stop, then," said Miss Bates. "An' if ye 'll ring bell when ye 've finished, Lewis 'll let me know, an' ah 'll come for letter. Ye need n't trouble to bring it."

She blew herself out to total extinction this time, and the Spawer, throwing a leg over the table-end, turned his attention to the letter in hand—a thin sheet of foreign note-paper, covered on three of its pages with a firm feminine handwriting. He read it very carefully and earnestly, his eyes running from end to end of the lines like setters in a turnipfield, as though they followed a scent, till they brought up to a standstill by the signature. Then he took up the photograph.

It was the face of a girl, and he studied it in such stillness and concentration that his eyelids, lowered motionless over the downward gaze, gave him the semblance of a sleeper. Without being beautiful, the face had beauty, but though it took all its features under individual scrutiny, it seemed, less as though he were concerned with their intrinsic worth than that he was searching through them the answer to a hidden train of inquiry. Whether he came near it or not would be difficult to tell. The smile with which he looked up at last and dispersed the brooding cloud of concentration might have been purely recollective, and with nothing of the oracular about it; for it set him straightway to pen and ink and writing-paper, staying with him the while, and

through the next few minutes the sound of his industry was never still. Not until well over on the fourth page did the pen stay behind in the ink-pot, as he sat back to review what was written. Then the pen was rapidly withdrawn again, to subscribe his name, and he addressed the letter:

"Miss WEMYSS,
Luzernerhof,
Luzern,
Switzerland."

With this in his hand, and the big bath towel and red bathing drawers slung over his arm from their drying place on the hot sill, he made off down the baked pathway, whistling pleasantly like a new pied piper —a whole throng of feathered followers at his heels. By the wooden gate, where the red-tiled pump-walk makes junction with the front path at the kitchen end, Miss Bates waylaid him, holding out damp semi-wiped fingers, and saying an expectant "Thank ye."

"What for?" asked the Spawer, trying to dodge on either side of her ample bosom with an active eye for the kitchen door.

"For t' letter," said Miss Bates, unperturbed, "if ye 've written it. Ah 'll gie it to 'er as she gans back."

"Back where from?" inquired the Spawer, with a sudden thirst for information.

"Fro' Far Wrangham," Miss Bates told him, "... wi' letters for Barclay. But she 'll call again on 'er way 'ome, an' ah 'll see she teks it an' all, then."

"Thanks..." the Spawer decided on consideration, "but I think I 'll see her myself. I want to ask about posts...."

"There 's nobbut one," Miss Bates interposed hurriedly, "an' it gans out at 'alf-past four."

"That 's not the one I mean," the Spawer explained, and tacked on very quickly: "Which way does she come back?"

"It 's none so easy ti say," Miss Bates parried. "She mud come back bi Barclay's road ... or bi—bi"—the task of devising a second route being somewhat beyond her powers at the moment, she fell back upon a generality—"bi some other road," adding for justification: "She 'd come thruff [through] 'edge an' all if it suited 'er."

"It 's on my way, anyhow," the Spawer determined lightheartedly. "I 'll sit on Barclay's gate and take my chance."

He had been sitting on Barclay's gate some time, and would have sold all share of interest in the chance for a wax vesta, when suddenly he heard the stir of someone swiftly coming, and turning a leisurely head—with a hand laid ready to drop to his feet when they should reach the gate—became in a moment keenly alert to an object that showed now and again through the green hedge: a moving object

that was neither a bird, nor a blossom, nor a butterfly, ... but a blue Tam-o'-Shanter.

CHAPTER V

And the face beneath it was the face he had been trying to remodel this morning, out of the obstinate stiff clays of remembrance. There were the dear, kissable, candid freckles, powdered in pure gold-dust about the bridge of the nose and the brows—each one a minstrel to truth; there were the great round eyes, shining smoothly, with the black-brown velvety softness of bulrushes; there were the rapt red lips, no longer baffling his gaze, but steadfast and discernible; there was the big beneficence of hair; the oaten-tinted cheeks, showing their soft surface-glint of golden down where the sunlight caught them; the little pink lobes; the tanned russet neck, so sleek and slim and supple, and the blue Tam-o'-Shanter topping all, as though it were a part of her, and had never moved since last the Spawer had looked upon it.

In every other respect she was the same girl that had sat in Dixon's place on the sofa last night. She wore still the simple skirt of blue serge, cut short above her ankles for freedom in walking (showing too, at close quarters, a cleverly-suppressed seam running down to the hem on the left side, like a zig-

zag of lightning), and the plain print blouse, pale blue, with no pattern on it, ending at the throat in a neat white collar borrowed from the masculine mode, and tied with a little flame of red silk. Only the light rain-proof cape was wanting, but over her shoulders, in place of it, was slung the broad canvas belt of a post-bag that flapped bulkily against her right hip as she strode, with her right hand dipped out of sight into its capacious pocket. She came swinging along the hedge at a fine, healthy pace, as though the sun were but a harmless bright new penny, making rhythmic advance in a pair of stubborn little square-toed shoes, stoutly cobbled, with a pleasing redolence of Puritanism about their austere extremities; and so into the Spawer's presence, all unconscious and unprepared.

The sight of him, waiting over the gate, with his elbows ruling the top bar, his chin upon linked fingers, and a leisurely foot hoisted on to the second rail, broke the rhythm of her step for an instant on a sudden tide of color, and brought the hand out of the bag to readjust the shoulder-strap in a quick display of purpose. But she showed no frailties of embarrassment. She came along with simple self-possession to the greeting point, giving him her eyes there in a queer little indescribable sidelong look that a mere man might ponder over for a lifetime and never know the meaning of—a queer little indescribable, smileless, sidelong look, sent out

under her lashes, that had nothing of fear or favor, or friendship or salutation, or embarrassment about it, but was pure, unmingled, ingenuous, feminine, stock-taking curiosity, as though she were studying him dispassionately from behind a loophole and calculating on his conduct with the most sublime, delicious indifference. The Spawer could have thrown up his head and laughed aloud at the look. Not in any spirit of ridicule—angels and ministers of grace defend us!—but with fine appreciative enjoyment, as one laughs for sheer pleasure at a beautiful piece of musical phrasing or an unexpected point of technique. If he had opened the gate with a grave mouth and let her through, not a doubt but she would have passed on without so much as the presumption of an eyelash upon their last night's relations, and never even looked back over a shoulder. But he stood and barred the way with his unyielding smile, and when she came up to him: "Are n't you going to speak to me?" he asked meekly.

At that the quick light of recognition and acknowledgment poured through the loophole. Not all the gathered sunbeams, had the girl been of stained glass, could have flooded her to a more surpassing friendly radiance than did her own inward smile. No word accompanied it, as if, indeed, with such a perfect medium for expression, any were needed. She drew up to the gate, and casting herself into a sympathetic reproduction of his attitude at a

discreet distance down the rail, shaded a glance of gentle curiosity at him under her velvety thickness of lashes.

"To think," said the Spawer, looking at her with incredulous enjoyment, "here I 've been waiting innocently for the post, and wondering what it would be like when it came, and making up my mind it never was coming—and it 's you all the time."

"Did n't you know?"

"Sorra a word."

"I wanted to tell you all the time ... last night, who I was."

"I wanted badly to ask."

"But I dared n't."

"And I dared n't either. What a couple of cowards we 've been. Let 's be brave now, shall we, to make up for it? I'll ask and you shall tell me. Who are you?"

She dipped an almost affectionate hand into the post-bag, and extended it partly by way of presentation.

"I 'm the post-girl," she said.

He looked at the bag, and then along the extended arm to her.

"Really?" he asked, visibly uncertain that the post-bag was not merely part of a pleasing masquerade, or that the girl might not have put herself voluntarily under its brown yoke for some purpose as inexplicable as the trudging to Cliff

Wrangham by starlight.

"Really and truly," she said. "I know I ought to have told you ... at first. But I thought, perhaps..." She plucked at a blade of grass, and biting it with her small, milk-white teeth, studied the bruised green rib with lowered eyes. "... Thought perhaps you 'd taken me for somebody different. And I was frightened you might be offended when you knew who it was."

In the clear frankness of her confession, and the soft, inquiring fearlessness of eye with which she encountered his glance at its conclusion, there was no tincture of abasement. As she stood there by the gate, with the broad badge of servitude across her girl's breast, she seemed glorified for the moment into a living text, attesting eloquently that it is not toil that dishonors, and that the social differences in labor come but from the laborer. In such wise the Spawer interpreted her, and embraced the occasion for belief with an inward glad response.

"But why should I be offended at the truth?" said he at length, his eyes waltzing all round hers (that were vainly trying to bring them to a standstill) in lenient laughter. "And how on earth could I take you for somebody different," he asked, drawing the subject away from the awkward brink of their disparity, "when you 're so unmistakably like yourself? Sakes alive! Nobody could mistake you."

She lowered eyes and voice together, and made with her fingers on the rail as though she were

deciphering her words from some half-obliterated inscription in the wood.

"I want to tell you," she began, and the dear little golden freckles on her nose seemed to close in upon each other for strength and comfort, "how very sorry I am ... for what happened last night."

"You can't be sorrier than I am," the Spawer said. "It 's been on my conscience ever since. I was a beast to jump out as I did, and I admit it."

"I don't mean you," the girl cut in, with quick correction.

"Who then?" asked the Spawer.

"Me..." said the girl. "You were as kind as could be. Nobody could have been kinder ... under the circumstances ... or helped me to be less ashamed of myself."

"Please not to make fun of the poor blind man," the Spawer begged her, "... for he can't see it, and it 's wicked."

"Oh, but I mean it," said the girl. "I never got to sleep all last night for thinking of the music, and how badly I 'd acted."

"To be sure," said the Spawer, "your acting was n't altogether good. If, for instance, you had n't mistaken your cue when I came out through the window, I should never have known you were there at all."

"Should n't you?" asked the girl, with the momentary blank face for an opportunity gorgeously

lost.

"Indeed, I should n't."

"All the same ... I 'm glad you did," she said, with sudden reversion of humility.

"Ah. That 's better," the Spawer assented. "So am I. It shows a proper appreciation of Providence."

"Because," the girl proceeded to explain, "when you 're found out you feel somehow as though you 'd paid for your wrong-doing, don't you? And, at least, it saves you from being a hypocrite, does n't it?"

"Oh, yes," said the Spawer, with infectious piety. "Capital thing for that. Splendid thing for that."

"Father Mostyn..." she began. "You know Father Mostyn, don't you?"

The name brought an uncomfortable sense of visitorial obligations unfulfilled to the Spawer's mind.

"Slightly," he said, the diminutive seeming to offer indemnity for his neglect.

"Yes, I thought so. He said you did," the girl continued. "You 're going to call and see him sometime, are n't you?"

"Sometime," the Spawer acquiesced. "Yes, certainly. I 'm hoping to do so when I can get a moment to spare. But I 'm very busy." He shifted the centre of conversation from his own shoulders. "Father Mostyn ... you were saying?"

"Oh, yes! Father Mostyn 's always warning us against being Ullbrig hypocrites. But it seems so hard

to avoid." She sighed in spirit of hopelessness. "I seem to grow into an Ullbrig hypocrite in spite of everything."

"Never mind," said the Spawer consolatorily, casting a glance of admiration along the smooth, sleek cheek and neck. "It looks an excellent thing for the complexion."

"That?" The girl ran a careless hand where his eye had been without making any attempt to parry the compliment. "Oh, that 's being out in the rain. Rain 's a wonderful thing for the complexion. Father Mostyn says so. But it can't wash these away," she said, touching the little cluster of freckles with a wistful finger. "These are being out in the sun."

"I was looking at those too," said the Spawer frankly. "I rather like them."

"Do you?" asked the girl, plucking up at his appreciation. "Yes, some people do—but not those that have them. Father Mostyn says they 're not actually a disfigurement, but they 're given me to chasten my pride. He says whenever I 'm tempted to look in the glass I shall always see these and remind myself, 'Yes, but my nose is freckled,' and that will save me from being vain. And it's funny, but it 's quite true."

"You know Father Mostyn well, of course?" said the Spawer, his question not altogether void of a desire to learn how far this estimable ecclesiast might be discussed with safety.

"Oh!" The girl made the quick round mouth for admiration, and held up visible homage in her eyes. "Father Mostyn's the best friend I have in the world. He 's taught me everything I know—it's my fault, not his, that I know so little—and done things for me, and given me things that all my gratitude can never, never repay. It was he allowed me to go round with the letters."

"That was very good of him," said the Spawer, with a tight mouth.

"Was n't it?" the girl said, showing a little glow of recognisant enthusiasm. "At first uncle was rather frightened—frightened that I ought not to do it, but we all thought six shillings a lot of money to lose (that 's what I get); and Father Mostyn said most certainly I was to have it."

"And so he gave it," said the Spawer. "Jolly kind of him."

"Oh, no! he did n't give it," the girl corrected, after a momentary reference to the Spawer's face. "Government gives it ... but he said I was to have it—and I have."

"And what did uncle say?" asked the Spawer amicably.

"Uncle? Oh, he said it was the will of Providence, and he hoped it would soon be ten; but it's not ten yet, and I don't think it will be for a long time. There were others who wanted the six shillings too, as badly as I did—and deserved it better, some

of them, I mink. At one time I felt so ashamed to be going about and taking the money that seemed to belong to such a number of people who said they had a right to it, that I asked to give the bag up; but uncle seemed so sad about it, and said it was flying in the face of Providence to give anything up that you 'd once got hold of, and Father Mostyn said it was a special blessing of Heaven bestowed upon me (though I 'm sure I don't know) ... and so I kept it. It was a struggle at times, though—even though Father Mostyn used to walk with me all the way round by Shippus to keep up my courage.... And that reminds me," she said, showing sudden perception of responsibility, "I have to go that way this morning."

"What! have n't you got rid of all your letters yet, then?"

"All except two," she said, and thrusting open the flabby canvas maw with one hand, peered down into its profounds as though her look should satisfy him of their presence by proxy. "They 're for Shippus."

"And you have to walk round by Shippus ... now?"

She nodded her head, and said a smiling "Yes" to his surprise, letting fall the canvas and patting the bag's cheek with the consolatory dismissal for a dog just freed from dental inspection. Then, more reluctantly, as though the saying were as hard to come at as a marked apple at the bottom of the

barrel, she said ... she must really ... be going. They would be expecting her. She 'd been kept rather long at Barclay's as it was, writing something out for him. And made to come through the gate.

"And, by Jove ... that reminds me," said the Spawer. "So must I."

She drew a covetous conclusion from his bathing equipment, and the blue sky, showing so deep and still beyond the cliff line, and was already half turned on a leave-taking heel (a little saddened, perhaps, at his readiness to assist the separation), when she found him by her side.

"But which way are you going?" she asked, for the sea lay now at their backs, and the Spawer, as was evident (and as we all know), had been going a-bathing.

"The same way as you are," he answered, "if you 'll have me."

And when Miss Bates (who had been watching them all the time from the end attic window, with Jeff's six-penny telescope stuck to one eye and a hand clapped over the other) saw this result of the girl's abominable scheming, she became very wroth indeed; filled to the brim and overflowing with righteous indignation that her sex could sink thus low. She snapped the telescope together so viciously that she thought she had cracked it, and when she found she had n't she was wrother than ever as compensation for this false alarm, and almost wished

she had.

"Ay, ye may set ye-sen up at 'im, ye gret, cat-eyed, frowsy-'eaded 'ussy!" she said, hurling the javelins of her anger at the blue Tam-o'-Shanter (every one of which, so far as could be discernible at that distance, seemed to miss), "bud if ye think 'e 'll be ta'en wi' yer daft, fond ways ye think wrong an' all. Ay, *you*, ah mean. Ah 'd be sorry to set mysen i' onny man's road like yon, mah wod. Think shame o' ye-sen, ye graceless mynx. Ah know very well 'e 's wantin' to be shut o' ye."

And after much further vehement exhortation to this effect, flung herself gustily down the staircase, slamming all the steps in descent, like March doors, and carried the full force of her indignation into the kitchen, where she swept it from end to end, as though she were a tidal wave.

"Out o' my road!" she cried at Lewis, innocently engaged in fishing the big dresser with a toasting-fork for what it might yield; and before he could stop spinning sufficiently to get a sight of his assailant (though he had no doubts who it was), was on him again: "Away wi' ye an' all."

And had him (still revolving) round the table.

"Let 's be rid o' ye!"

And licked him up like a tongue of avenging flame by the big range.

"Div ye want to throw a body over?"

And was ready for him by the door.

"Noo, kick me if ye dare."

And whipped him out through the scullery like a top, with a parting:

"Tek that an' all."

Which he took, like physic, as directed; and ten minutes later, seeing his mother emerge from the calf-house, and being in possession of ample breath for the purpose, put Miss Bates' injustice on record in a historic howl.

CHAPTER VI

The sun had slipped away through Dixon's stackgarth and twilight was subsiding slowly in soft rose amber, like the sands of an hour-glass, as the Spawer wheeled round Hesketh's corner. Against a tremulant pink sky the lich-gate stood out in black profile, edged with luminous copper; the church tower was dipped in dull red gold as far as the luffer of the belfry; and the six Vicarage windows gleamed bloodshot from behind their iron bars when he came upon them for the first time. A group of happy children, playing at calling names and slapping each other down the roadway, stopped their pastime on a sudden and ran up to take awed stock of this presumptuous stranger, who dismounted before his reverence the Vicar's as though he actually meant to

open the gate.

At the first contact of bicycle with the railings, the gathered gloom about the Vicarage door seemed suddenly to be sucked inwards, and the eddying dusk reshaped itself over the priestly dimensions of Father Mostyn.

"Ha!" The word rang out in greeting like a genial note of prelude blown on Gabriel's trumpet. "There you are. Capital! capital! I made sure we should find you not so far away." He waltzed down the narrow path to open the gate, balancing both hands as though they held an invisible baby for baptism, and its name was "Welcome." One of these—a plump, soft, balmy, persuasive, clerical right hand,—he gave to the Spawer by the gate; threw it, rather, as Noah might have thrown his dove across the face of the waters, with such a beautiful gesture of benediction that in settling down upon the Spawer's fingers it seemed to confer the silent virtue of a blessing.

"The bicycle too," he said, wagging humorous temporal greeting towards it with his left. "Capital! capital! I thought we should n't be walking to-night. There 's no evening post, you see, in Ullbrig." He flung the gate backward on its hinges as far as it would go. "Come in; come in. Bring your bicycle along with you. Not that anybody would dare to violate its sanctuary by the Vicarage palings, but the saddle would absorb the dew and—let me help you."

All the time, from the gate to the doorway, his

hands were hovering busily about the bicycle without once touching it; yet with such a consummate suggestion of assistance that the Spawer with very little prompting could have sworn before Justices that his Reverence had carried the machine into the hall unaided.

It was a big, bare hall—square, flagged in stone, and ringing to their footsteps with the sonority of a crypt. From the ceiling depended a swing-lamp of brass at the end of a triple chain. On the left-hand side stood a hard ecclesiastical bench of black oak, primarily provided, no doubt, for the accommodation of those visitors to whom the privilege of a front room audience would be denied. On the right side filed a long line of austere wooden pegs in monastic procession. A canonical beaver obliterated the first of them; two more held up the dread square mortar-board against the wall between them, diamond-wise, each supporting a corner. For the rest, some sticks and umbrellas—with the ebony divining rod of far-reaching reputation conspicuous among them—completed the movables of the hall. The bicycle followed the mesmeric indication of Father Mostyn's hands into place along the wall under the hat rack, and the priest saw that it was good.

By a magnificent act of courtesy he relieved the Spawer of his cap, and swept his own black mortar-board down the rack to make place of honor for it—

though there were half a dozen unoccupied places to either side. Then, taking up a matchbox from the oak bench, which he shook cautiously against his ear for assurance of its store, he invited the Spawer to follow him, and threw open the inner door.

"The Vicar, you see," he explained, as his shoulders dipped into the dusk over the threshold, "is his own servant in addition to being everybody else's. He acts as a chastening object-lesson to our Ullbrig pride. We don't go out to service in Ullbrig. We scrub floors, we scour front-door steps, we wash clothes, we clean sinks, we empty slops, we peel potatoes—but, thank God, we are not servants. Only his reverence is a servant. When anything goes wrong with our nonconformist inwards—run, Mary, and pull his reverence's bell. That 's what his reverence is for. Don't trouble the doctor first of all. Let 's see what his reverence says. The doctor will go back and enter the visit in a book, and charge you for it. If anything goes worse—run, Mary, again. Never mind your apron—he won't notice. Pull the bell harder this time, and let 's have a prayer out of his reverence to make sure—with a little Latin in it. The pain 's spreading. For we 're all of us reverences in chapel, each more reverend than his neighbor; but in sick-beds we 're very humble sinners indeed, who only want to get better so that we may be ready and willing to go when the Lord sees fit to take us. Or if it 's a little legal advice you 're in need of—why pay

six and eightpence to an articled solicitor? Go and knock up his reverence. He 's the man for you—and send him a turnip for his next harvest festival."

Genially discoursing on the Ullbrig habit as they proceeded, with an occasionally guiding line thrown over his shoulder in bolder type for the Spawer's assistance: "... A little crockery to your left here. Ha! ... mind the table-corner. You see the chair?" he led the way into the right-hand room—a room larger than you would have dared to imagine from the roadway—lighted dimly by one tall, smouldering amber window of many panes; heavy with the smell of tobacco, and heaped up in shapeless shadow-masses of disorder. Two great bales of carpet stood together in one corner like the stern roots of trees that had been cut down. On the grained side-cupboard to the left hand of the fireplace were glasses—regiments of glasses—of all sorts and shapes and sizes and qualities. A cumbersome early-century round table, rising like a giant toad-stool from a massive octagonal stalk, apparently constituted the larder, to the very verge of whose circumference were cocoa-tins, marmalade jars, tea-cups, tea-pots, saucers; sugar-bags red and blue; some cross-marked eggs in a pie-dish; a brown bread loaf, about three parts through, and some cold ham.

And yet, despite the room's disorder, entering in the wake of those benignant shoulders; treading in the constricted pathways delineated by those

sacerdotal shoes (virtually and spiritually sandals); wrapped about with the atmosphere of genial indulgence thrown forth this side and that from those priestly fingers, as though they swung an invisible censer—one lacked all power to question. A swing to the left, the fault of the chair was forgiven; a swing to the right, what fear of treading on crockery; a swing to the front, were he swinging a lanthorn now the way could hardly be better lighted.

Such was the power of Father Mostyn.

So, swinging and censing, and asperging and exhorting, and absolving and exorcising till all the ninety-nine devils of disorder were cast out, the priest passed through to the window.

"Ha!" said he, with the keen voice for a conviction realised, when he came there. "I knew we should catch sight of Mrs. Gatheredge somewhere about. By Fussitter's steps for choice. She suffers dreadfully, poor woman, from a chronic enlargement"—he paused to slip his fingers into the rings of the shutters—"of the curiosity. I believe the disease is incurable. It will kill her in the end, I 'm afraid, as it did Lot's wife. Nothing can be done for her, except to protect her as much as possible from harmful excitement. If you don't mind the dark for a moment"—the first shutter creaked upward—"we 'll fasten ourselves in before making use of the matches. The strain of looking into his reverence's room when he lights the lamp and has a guest inside might prove

too much for her—bring about a fatal congestion of the *glans curiosus*. His reverence, you see, has got to think for others as well as himself. Ha! that's better." The second shutter closed upon the first like the great jaw of a megalosaurus, swallowing up the dwindling remains of daylight at a gulp. "Now we can light up in all good Christian faith and charity."

He struck a match, and so far as the Spawer could observe—since the Vicar's back was turned—appeared to be setting fire to the stack of papers on his writing-table. After a moment, however, when the flame had steadied, he drew it forth transferred to the wick of a composite candle, which he held genially horizontal while he beckoned the Spawer forward by virtue of the signet finger.

"That 's it," he said, wagging appreciative grease-drops from the candle. "Come along! come along! Let's see if we can't manage to find some sort of a seat for you. We ought to do—I was sitting down in one myself not so long ago." Still wagging the candle and performing an amiable bear-dance on both feet in a revolving twelve-inch circle as he considered the question on all sides of him, presently he made a pounce into the central obscurity and dragged out a big leather-backed chair by the arm, like a reluctant school-boy. "Here we are," says he, rejoicing in the capture. "The very thing I had in my mind. Try that. You 'll want to beg it of me when you 've known its beauties a time or two. That 's the chair of chairs,

cathedra cathedrarum. There 's comfort for you!"

Negligently wiping the leather-work with a corner of his cassock, he declared the chair open for the Spawer's accommodation.

From the fender, bristling with the handles of saucepans, all thrust outward like the quills of a porcupine, he commanded a block tin kettle—and a small spirit-lamp. Other journeyings to and fro provided him with water in a glorious old John Bull mug, with a lemon, with a basin of lump sugar, with two spoons, with whiskey, with a nutmeg and grater, with cigars, contained in a massive case of embossed silver, with cigarettes, of which the Spawer was constrained to acceptance, having previously disappointed Father Mostyn by a refusal of his choice Havanas; with tobacco in a fat, eighteenth-century jar, lavishly pictured and proverbed; and with a colored, clay churchwarden as long as a fiddlestick, that looked as if it would snap brittly in two of its own weight at the first attempt to lift it. Lastly, all these things being accumulated one by one, and laid out temptingly on the little round table, with the blue flame established at the bottom of the kettle, and tapering downwards to its junction with the wick like a sea-anemone, Father Mostyn permitted himself to sink back hugely upon the chair, lifting both feet from the ground as he did so, in supreme testimony to the full ripe fruits of ease.

"Well," said he, setting his fingers to work in the

depths of the tobacco jar, "and what about the music?" His tongue appeared reflectively in his cheek for a moment, and his keen eye fixed the far wall on a nice point of remembrance. "Let 's see.... A symphonium?"

The Spawer adjusted the balance gently: "A concerto."

"Ha! a concerto." Enlightenment swept over the Vicar's face like a tide of sunlight, and his shoulders shook as with the laughter of gladsome things. "Beautiful! beautiful! To think of our stubborn Ullbrig soil's being made to yield a concerto. Had it been a turnip now. But a concerto! Ullbrig knows nothing of concertos. It would know still less if you were to explain. Explanations only confuse us—besides being an unwarrantable violation of our precious rights of ignorance. Tell friend Jevons you 're at work upon a concerto, and see what he says. He 'll tell you, yes, his son 's got one." Father Mostyn cast the forefinger of conviction at him. "Depend upon it, that 's what he 'll tell you. His son 's got one. A beauty with bells that he gave eighteenpence for. Meaning one of those nickel-silver mouth-organs such as we can't go to Hunmouth Fair without bringing back with us—unless we plunge for a concertina. It 's got to be one or the other, or people might n't think we 'd been to Hunmouth Fair at all, and that 's a light too glorious to be hid under a bushel. But it 's all one in name to us whatever we

get. We call it a 'music.' Whether it 's a piano, or a fiddle, or a song, or a symphonium, or a sonata, or a Jew's harp, or a concertina, or a sackbut—the definition does n't alter. We call it a 'music.' 'So-and-So 's gotten a grand music.' 'It 's a grand music, yon.' That 's our way."

The little black cat of a kettle, after purring complacently for a while over the blue flame, suddenly arched its lidded back and spat out across the table.

"Ha!" Father Mostyn turned gladsomely at the sound. "There 's music for you. Come; you 're a whiskey man? Say when and fear not."

"If you don't mind, I 'll say it now," said the Spawer, with laughing apology.

"No?" His Reverence held out the uncorked bottle by the neck, persuasively tilted. "Think twice, my son, before committing yourself to hasty judgments." Then seeing the Spawer was not to be moved: "A glass of sherry, then? Benedictine? Capital! You won't beat Benedictine for a standard liqueur. Apart from its pleasant effect upon the palate, it has a valuable corroborant action on the gastric juices, and tends to the promotion of chyme."

All in speaking he produced the familiar flagon from the sideboard, poured out a cut-glass thumbful of amber. This act of hospitality fulfilled, he turned, with no diminished zeal, to the serving of his own requirements. He sipped warily from an edge of his

smoking glass to verify his expectations of the flavor, nipped his lips for a moment in judicial degree, and subsided slowly upon the chair in a long breath of rapture, extending the tumbler towards the Spawer for wassail—"here 's success to our concerto, and may your days be long in the land with us. We 're a stiff-necked and obstinate generation, who worship gods of our own making, and have more than a shrewd idea that the devil 's in music (we know for certain he 's in the Church); but we bake good pies for all that, and our nonconformist poultry can't be beaten."

The Spawer laughed. "And our postman?" he asked.

CHAPTER VII

"Ha!" Father Mostyn played upon the note momentously, as though he were throwing open the grand double gates of discussion. "Pamela, you mean! I knew we should come to that before long. No help for it." He subpoenaed the Spawer for witness to the wisdom of his conclusions with a wagged forefinger. "But Pamela 's not Ullbrig. Pamela was n't fashioned out of our Ullbrig clay. She 's not like the rest of us; comes of a different class altogether. You can't mistake it. Take note of her when she laughs—you 're a musical man and you 'll soon see—she covers the whole diapason. Ullbrig does n't laugh like that. Ullbrig laughs on one note as though it were a plough furrow. There 's nothing of cadence about our Ullbrig laughter—that 's a thing only comes with breed. Notice her eyebrows, too, when she 's speaking, and see how beautifully flexible they are." The Vicar warmed to the subject with the enthusiasm of a connoisseur.

"No—there 's nothing of our clay in Pamela's construction. Pam is like charity; suffereth long and is kind. Envieth not; vaunteth not herself; is not puffed up. Doth not behave herself unseemly;

seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil. Ullbrig does n't understand Pam any more than it understands the transit of Venus or the rings of Saturn. Pam 's above our heads and comprehension. Because she goes to church on Sunday, and does n't walk with our Ullbrig young men down Lovers' Lane at nightfall, we say she 's proud. Because she 's too generous to refuse them a word in broad daylight, when they ask for it, we say she 's forward. Because she never says unkind things of us all in turn behind our backs, and won't listen to any, we say she 's disagreeable. Because she does n't read the post-cards on her way round, and tell us whether Miss So-and-So ever hears from that Hunmouth young gentleman or not, we say she keeps a still tongue in her head—which is our Ullbrig idiom for a guilty conscience. That we had only a few more Pams—with due gratitude to Blessed Mary for the one we 've got."

"As a postman," said the Spawer, entering into the Vicar's appreciation, "she 's the most astonishing value I ever saw. The girl seems to have a soul. Who is she? And where does she come from?"

Father Mostyn's brows converged upon the pipe-bowl in the hollow of his knee, and his cassock swelled to a long breath of mystery. "Who is she? and where does she come from? ... Those are the questions. *À priori*, I 'm afraid there 's nothing to answer them. So far, it seems to have been Heaven's

wise purpose to reveal her as a beautiful mystery; an incarnate testimony to the teaching of Holy Church —if only Ullbrig knew the meaning of the word testimony. She came to Ullbrig, in the first place, with her mother, as quite a little girl, and lodged with friend Morland at the Post Office. I believe there was some intention on her mother's part of founding a small preparatory school in combination with poultry farming at the time. Yes, poor woman, I rather fear that was her intention. She seemed to think it would yield them both a livelihood, and give Pamela the benefit of new-laid eggs; but she died suddenly, the very day after Tankard had agreed to let her the cottage down Whivvle Lane at four and sixpence a week—being three shillings the rent of the cottage, and eighteenpence because she was a lady. Ha! that 's the way with us. To try and do you one; do your father one; do your mother one; do your sister one; do your brother one; but particularly do one to them that speak softly with you, and his reverence the Vicar. Him do half a dozen if you can, being an ecclesiast, and so difficult to do." He wiped the smile off his mouth with one ruminative stroke of his sleek fingers—you might almost suppose he had palmed it, and slipped it up his sleeve, so quickly did it come away. "She died suddenly, poor woman, before I could get to her. Cardiac hæmorrhage, commonly, and not always incorrectly, called a broken heart. No doubt about it. They sent for me

three times, but it happened most grievously that I had tricycled off to Whivvle that day to inquire into a little matter concerning the nefarious sale of glebe straw—(I 'm afraid I shall have to be going there again before so long; the practice shows signs of revival)—and she was dead when I got back. We buried her round by the east window, where the grass turns over the slope towards the north wall. You can just see the top of the stone from the roadway." He indicated its approximate position with a benedictory cast of the signet hand. "After paying all funeral expenses, it was found that there remained a small balance of some thirty pounds odd —evidently the tail-end of their resources—in virtue whereof, friend Morland's heart was moved to take Pam to his bosom, and give her a granddaughter's place in the family circle. Thirty pounds, you see, goes a long way in Ullbrig, where we grow almost everything for ourselves except beer and tobacco. One mouth more or less to feed makes hardly any appreciable difference."

"But were there no relatives?" the Spawer suggested.

Father Mostyn shook his head significantly.

"And you were n't able to trace the mother's movements before she came to Ullbrig?"

"No further than Hunmouth." His Reverence tried the edge of the Spawer's interest with a keen eye through drawn lashes, as though it were a razor

he was stropping. "Following up a theory of mine, we traced her as far as Hunmouth. But for that, if we 'd taken friend Morland's advice, we should have lost her altogether. As I predicted, we found she 'd been living for some time in small lodgings there.... There was some question of music teaching, I believe."

"Music teaching?" The Spawer leaned on the interrogative with all the weight of commiserative despair.

"I rather gathered so. She gave lessons to the landlady's daughter, I fancy, in return for the use of the piano, and she had a blind boy studying with her for a while. His family thought of making him a church organist, but unfortunately for all parties concerned, the boy's father failed. Yes, failed rather suddenly, poor man, and cast quite a gloom over the musical outlook. Then Pamela seems to have acquired diphtheria from a sewer opening directly under the bedroom window, and had a narrow squeak for it; and after that her terrified mother fled the town with her, and brought her into the country. There 's no danger of sewers in the country, you see. We have n't such things; we know better."

"And that's what brought them to Ullbrig?" asked the Spawer.

"That's what brought them to Ullbrig. What brought them to Hunmouth is still a matter for conjecture. I called upon the doctor subsequently who attended Pam there, but he could give me no

information about them, beyond the fact that his bill had been paid before they left."

"I should have thought, though," said the Spawer, tipping his lips with golden Benedictine, and sending the bouquet reflectively through his nostrils, "that she would have left letters—or something of the sort—behind her, which might have been followed up."

"One would have thought so, naturally. But no; not a single piece of manuscript among all her possessions."

"That," said the Spawer, "looks awfully much as though they 'd been purposely destroyed."

Father Mostyn's lips tightened significantly, and he nodded his head with sagacious indulgence for the tolerable work of a novice.

"Moreover, in such books as belonged to her the flyleaf was invariably missing. Torn bodily out. Not a doubt about it."

"To remove traces of her identity?"

The Vicar slipped his forefinger into the pipe-bowl and gave the tobacco a quick, conclusive squeeze. "Unquestionably."

"But for what reason, do you think?"

His Reverence sat back luxuriously in the arm-chair, with fingers outspread tip to tip over the convex outline of his cassock, and legs crossed reposefully for the better enjoyment of his own discourse. "In the first place, she was a lady. Not a

doubt about it. No mere professional man's daughter, brought up amid the varying circumstances incidental to professional society, and trained to consider her father's interests in all her actions—(the little professional discipline of conduct always shows)—but a woman of birth and position. Belonging to a good old military family, I should say, judging by her bearing, with a fine, sleek living or two in its gift for the benefit of the younger branch. Depend upon it. She would come of the elder branch, though, and I should take her to be an only daughter. There would be no sons. Unfortunately, a painful indisposition of a lumbaginous nature prevented my extending her more than the ordinary parochial courtesy at the first, and she died within a fortnight of her arrival. Otherwise, doubtless she would have sought to tell me her circumstances in giving the customary intimation of a desire to benefit by the blessed Sacraments of the Church—but there 's no mistaking the evidence." He recapitulated it over his fingers. "She was the daughter of a wealthy military man, a widower, who had possibly distinguished himself in the Indian service (most likely a major-general and K.C.B.), living on a beautiful estate somewhere down south—say Surrey or the Hampshire Downs."

"Could n't you have advertised in some of the southern papers?" suggested the Spawer.

"Precisely. We advertised for some time, and to

some considerable extent, in such of them as would be likely to come under the General's notice—but without success. Indeed, none was to be expected. Men of the General's station in life don't trouble to read advertisements, much less answer them—and if, in this case, he 's read it, it would n't have changed his attitude towards a discarded daughter or induced a reply. Therefore, to continue advertising would have been merely to throw good money after bad.... Ha! Consequently the next step in our investigations is to decide what could be responsible for her detachment from these attractive surroundings, and her subsequent lapse into penurious neglect. It could n't have been the failure of her father's fortune. A catastrophe of this sort would n't have cut her off completely from the family and a few, at least, of her necessarily large circle of friends. Some of her clerical half-cousins, too, would have come forward to her assistance, depend upon it. But even supposing the probabilities to be otherwise, then there would be still less reason for her voluntary self-excision. Though under these circumstances, one might understand her never referring to her family connection, it 's inconceivable to suppose that she should have gone to any particular trouble to conceal traces of the fact. To have done so would have been a work of supererogation, besides running counter to all our priestly experience of the human heart and its workings. No. In the resolute attempt to cut herself

off from her family the priestly eye perceives the acting hand of pride. Not a doubt about it. Pride did her. The pride of love. No mistaking it. The headstrong pride of love. Faith removes mountains, but love climbs over 'em, at all costs. Depend upon it, she 'd given her heart to some man against the General's will, and run away and married him. Marriage was the first step in her descent."

"Or do you think..." hazarded the Spawer, with all humility for intruding his little key into so magnificent a lock of hypothesis, "that marriage was a missing step altogether, and she tripped for want of it?"

Father Mostyn received the suggestion with magnanimous courtesy—almost as though it had been a duly expected guest. "I think not. Under certain conditions of life that would be an admirable hypothesis for working purposes. But it won't fit the present case. In the first instance, we must remember that those little idiosyncrasies of morality occur less frequently in the class of society with which we 're dealing, and that when they actually occur, the most elaborate precautions are taken against any leakage of the fact. Moreover, let's look at the actual evidence. All the woman's linen—the handkerchiefs, the underclothing, the petticoats, the chemises, and so forth—were embroidered with the monogram 'M.P.S.,' standing, not a doubt about it, for Mary Pamela Searle. Some of the child's things, bearing the

identical monogram, showed that they 'd been cut down for her; while one or two more recent articles —of a much cheaper material—were initialled simply 'P.S.' in black marking-ink. It 's necessary to remember this. Now, if we turn from the linen to the books I spoke about and contrast their different methods of treatment, we shall find strong testimony to the support of my contention. On the one hand, linen, underclothing, chemises, petticoats, pocket-handkerchiefs, and so forth, marked plainly 'M.P.S.' and 'P.S.' On the other hand, a Bible, a book of Common Prayer in padded morocco, evidently the property of a lady; a Shakespeare; a volume of Torquato Tasso's 'Gerusalemme Liberato,' in levant; an old-fashioned copy of 'Mother Goose'; and one or two other volumes, all with the fly-leaf torn out. No mistaking the evidence. Searle was her rightful married name, and there was no need to suppress it. For all intents and purposes, it suited her as well as another. Besides, pride would n't allow her to cast aside the name of her own choosing. Pride had got too fast hold of her by the elbow, you see, for that. Keep a sharp look-out for the hand of pride in the case as we go along, and you won't be likely to lose your way. It will be a sign-post to you. Searle was the name she 'd given everything up for—her father, her home, her friends, her family, her position—and it had been bought too dear to throw aside. It was the other name pride wanted her to get rid of. That 's

why the fly-leaves came out. Depend upon it. They were gift-books belonging to her unmarried days. The Shakespeare was a present from her father; Torquato Tasso came most likely from an Italian governess; some girl-friend gave her the Prayer-book —perhaps as a souvenir of their first Communion. The Bible would hardly be in the nature of a gift-book. People of social distinction, brought up in conformity with the best teachings of Holy Church, and abhorring all forms of unorthodoxy as they would uncleanliness, don't make presents to themselves of Bibles. That 's a plebeian practice, savoring objectionably of free-thinking and dissent. The Bible is not mentioned or made use of by well-bred people in that odious popular manner. No, the book would figure in her school-room equipment as part of a necessary instruction, but no more.

"... Ha!" His hand, on its way to the round table, arrested itself suddenly in mid-air as though to impose a listening silence. "... There goes friend Davidson—keeping his promise. I thought it was about his time. He gave me his sacred word he would n't touch a drop of liquor in Ullbrig for three months, so now he has to trot off to Shippus instead." The Spawer listened, but could get not the faintest hint of the delinquent's passage. "So now," Father Mostyn took up, starting his hand on again with a descriptive relaxation of its muscles, as though the culprit had just rounded the corner, and there were

nothing further of him worth listening for, "... we 've got the whole case in the hollow of our hands. We see that the breach with the family was brought about by her own act, and that that act was marriage. But it was n't merely marriage against the General's consent or sanction. Marriages of disobedience and self-will are nearly always, in our priestly experience, forgiven at the birth of the first child; more especially, of course, if it happens to be a son.... Therefore we must find a stronger divisional factor than a marriage of disobedience. Ha! undoubtedly. A marriage of derogation. No mistaking it. A marriage of derogation. She married beneath her. That 's an unpardonable offence in families of birth and position. We can forgive a daughter for marrying above her, but we can't forgive a daughter for marrying beneath her—even when she 's the only daughter we 've got. Moreover, this case was badly aggravated by the fact that there was no money in it. She fell in love with some penniless scamp of a fellow, with an irresistible black moustache and dark eyes—there are plenty of 'em knocking about in London society, who could n't produce a receipted bill or a banker's reference to save their lives—got her trousseau together by stealth; had it all proudly embroidered with the name she was about to take; kissed her father more affectionately than usual one night ... and the next morning was up with the lark and miles away." He

kept casting the ingredients one after another into the hypothetical pancheon with a throw of alternate hands—the right hand for the sin she had committed; the left hand for the penniless scamp of a fellow; the right hand again for her trousseau; the left hand for the elopement, and so on, with all the unction of a *chef* engaged upon the preparation of some great dish, and stuck the spoon into it with a fine, conclusive "Ha!"

"After that," said he, interrupting the sentence for a moment to give two or three reclamatory puffs at his pipe, "the rest 's as plain as print. She 'd made a bad bargain with her family, and she 'd made a worse with her husband. Depend upon it. Searle was a gambler—an improvident, prodigal, reckless rascal —who tapped what money she had like a cask of wine. As soon as Pamela was born, the wretched woman began to see where things were drifting. She dared n't suggest retrenchment to her husband, but she began to practise a few feeble economies in the house and upon her own person. No more silks and satins after that. No more embroidered chemises. No more fine linen. Nothing new for Pamela, where anything could be cut down. Nothing new for herself, where anything old would do. Cheapen the living here, cheapen the living there—until at last, thank God! in the fourth year of his reign, this *monstrum nulla virtute redemptum a vitiis* takes to his wife's bed —not having one of his own—and does her the

involuntary kindness of dying in it. So our Blessed Lady leads Pamela and her mother to Ullbrig by gradual stages, and there, the mother's share in the work being done, she is permitted to fall asleep. Ha! Friend Morland"—he approached the tumbler to his lips under cover of the apostrophe, and sought the ceiling in drinking with a rapturous eye, "... you never drove a better bargain in your life than when you acquired a resident daughter of Mary with a premium of thirty pounds. Look at all the blessings that have been specially bestowed upon you for her sake. Look at the boots that get worn out in tramping backwards and forwards to the Post Office since Heaven put into our heads the notion of buying penny stamps in two ha'penny journeys, and calling round to let you know we shall be wanting a post-card in the morning. Did our young men do this before Pam's time? And where do we carry all our boots and shoes to when they have n't another ha'penny journey in their soles? Not to Cobbler Roden. Cobbler Roden does n't shelter a daughter of Mary. Cobbler Roden does n't shelter a daughter of anybody—not even his own—if he can help it. Not to Cobbler Dingwall. Cobbler Dingwall does n't shelter a daughter of Mary. Heaven sends down no blessing on Cobbler Dingwall's work. We find it 's clumsy and does n't last. No, we don't take 'em to any of these. We take 'em to Shoemaker Morland. That 's where we take 'em. Shoemaker Morland. He 's the man. All

the rest are only cobblers, being under no patronage of Blessed Mary, but friend Morland 's a shoemaker. Moreover, the Post Office has n't lacked for lodgers since Pam came to it—there 's the schoolmaster there now. A strange, un-get-at-able sort of a fellow, to be sure, whom I strongly suspect of nursing secret aggression against the Church; still a payer of bills, and in that respect a welcome addition to the Morland household."

"Friend Morland, then," said the Spawer, "combines the offices of shoemaker and postmaster-general for Ullbrig?"

Father Mostyn forefingered the statement correctively.

"Those are his offices. But he does n't combine them. He keeps them scrupulously distinct. One half of him is postmaster-general and the other is shoemaker. I forget just at the moment which half of him you 've got to go to if you want stamps, but you might just as well try to get cream from a milk biscuit as buy stamps at the shoemaking side. Apart from these little peculiarities, however, he 's as inoffensive a specimen of dissent as any Christian might hope to find. Without a trained theological eye one might take him any day for a hard-working, respectable member of the True Body. His humility in spiritual matters is almost Catholic. You 'd be astonished to find such humility in the possession of a Non-conformist—until you knew what exalted

influence had brought it about. He repudiates the Nonconformist doctrine that the Divine copyright of teaching souls goes along with the possession of a fourpenny Bible. His view on the question is that the Book 'takes overmuch understanding to try and explain to anybody else.' On this point, with respect to Pamela, I 'd never had any trouble with him. She 's been born and brought up in the Church; she 'd true Church blood in her veins. Her mother was a Churchwoman. Her grandfather, like the gallant old soldier that he was, was a Churchman; a strong officer of the Church Militant, occupying the family pew every Sunday morning, who would have died of apoplectic mortification at the thought that any descendant of his should ever sink so low as to sit on the varnished schismatical benches of an Ullbrig meeting-house. All which, when I put it before him, Friend Morland saw in a clear and catholic spirit. It 's true for a short time he wished to make a compromise—at the instigation of his wife, undoubtedly—whereby Pamela was to attend church in the mornings and meeting-house in the evening—a most odious and unscriptural arrangement, quite incompatible with canonical teaching. However, special light of grace was poured into his heart from above, and he perceived the aged General in such a vivid revelation trembling with martial anger at this act of indignity to one of his flesh and blood, that he woke up in a great sweat two nights successively,

and came running before breakfast to tell me that the spiritual responsibility of a general's granddaughter was proving too much for him, and he 'd be humbly grateful if his Reverence the Vicar would take the matter on his own shoulders, and bear witness (should any be required) that he (John William Morland) had in all things done his utmost to act in conformity with what he thought to be the General's wishes. So I made him stand up in the hall and recite a proper *declaratio abjurationis* before me then and there, gave him his coveted *ego te absolvo Joannes*, and received Pamela forthwith as spiritual ward in our most Catholic Church."

"But is she going to consecrate all her days to the carrying of letters?" asked the Spawer, in a voice of some concern. "*A dieu ne plaise*."

Father Mostyn knocked the ashes cautiously out of his pipe into a cupped palm and threw them over the hearth. "There 's the rub. That 's what I 've been wanting to have a little talk with you about. Her bringing up has been in the nature of a problem—a sort of human equation. We 've had to try and develop all her latent qualities of birth and breed, and maintain them in a state of exact equilibrium against the downward forces of environment. Just the slightest preponderance on one side or other might have done us. Two things we had to bear constantly in mind and reconcile, so far as we were able, from day to day." He ticked them off on his

fingers like the heads of a discourse: "First. That she was a lady; the daughter of a lady; the granddaughter of a lady. Second. That she was become by adoption a daughter of the soil, dependent on her own exertions for her subsistence and happiness. At one time, so difficult did the two things seem to keep in adjustment, I had serious thoughts of taking her bodily under my own charge and packing her off to school. But after a while, I came to reflect that it would be an act of great unwisdom—apart from the fear that it might be making most impious interference with the designs of Providence. Providence plainly had brought her, and to send her off again for the purpose of having her trained exclusively in the accomplishments of a lady would simply have been contempt of the Divine laws and a deferment of the original difficulty to some more pressing and inopportune moment. My work, you see, was here in Ullbrig. His Reverence is tied to the soil like the rest of us—ploughing, sowing, harrowing, scruffling, hoeing, and reaping all his days—though, for the matter of that, there 's precious little ear he gets in return for his spiritual threshing. Moreover, there 's always the glorious uncertainty of sudden death in the harvest field; and then what would be likely to happen to a girl thrown on her own resources at the demise of her only friend and protector? Would she be better circumstanced to face the world bravely as a child with his Reverence

helping her unostentatiously by her elbow and accustoming her to it, or as a young lady in fresh bewilderment from boarding-school, with his Reverence fast asleep in the green place he 's chosen for himself under the east window? Ha! no mistake about it. His Reverence has seen too many nursery governesses and mothers' helps and ladies' companions recruited straight from the school-room, with red eyes and black serge, to risk Pamela's being among the number. Out in the world there 's no knowing what might happen or have happened to her. Here in Ullbrig, you see, she stands on a pedestal to herself, above all our local temptations. Temptations, in the mundane sense of the word, don't exist for her. One might as well suppose the possibility of your being tempted from the true canons of musical art by hearing Friend Barclay sing through the tap-room window of the Blue Bell, or of his Reverence the Vicar's being proselytised to Methodism by hearing Deacon Dingwall Jackson pray the long prayer with his eyes shut. No; our local sins fall away from Pamela as naturally and unregarded as water off a duck's back. Such sins as she has are entirely spiritual—little sins of indiscrimination, we may term them. The sin of generosity—giving too much of her favor to the schismatical; the sin of toleration—inclining too leniently towards the tenets of dissent; the sin of forbearance—making too much allowance for the

sins and wickednesses of others; the sin of equanimity—being too little angered by the assaults and designs of the unfaithful against Holy Church—all beautiful qualities of themselves when confined to the temporal side of conduct, but sinful when thoughtlessly prolongated into the domain of spirituals, where conduct should subordinate itself to the exact scale of scientific theology. Spiritual conduct without strict theological control is music without bars; poetry without metre; a ship without a rudder; free-will; nonconformity; dissent; infidelity; agnosticism; atheistic darkness. Ha! but our concern for her future is n't on these counts. The question that 's bothering us now, as you rightly put it, is: Is she going to consecrate all her days to the carrying of letters?"

"As a career," commented the Spawer, "I 'm afraid there 's not much to recommend it. The office of post-girl seems, from what I know about the subject, peculiar to Ullbrig. There 's precious little chance of promotion, I should think. She might slip into the telegraph department, perhaps, but from a place like Ullbrig even that 's something of a step."

"I was n't so much thinking of the telegraphic department," Father Mostyn explained, "... though, of course, it had suggested itself to me. But I 'd been thinking ... it came upon me rather forcibly ... partly since your arrival ... after our first little talk together ... and I wondered. Of course, the telegraph

department could be held in view as a reserve. But I 'd rather got the idea..." a certain veil of obscurity seemed to settle down upon his Reverence at this point, as though a sea-mist were drifting in among his words. "You see," he said, suddenly abandoning the attempt at frontal clearance and making a detour to come round the thickness of his difficulty, "Pamela 's altogether a remarkable girl. She 's not the least bit like the rest of us. She can do everything under the sun, except kill chickens. She can't kill chickens; but she can cook 'em. And she can make Ullbrig pies till you could swear Mrs. Dixon had done 'em. And she can bake bread—white bread, as white as snow for Friend Morland's delicate stomach; and brown bread as brown as shoe-leather and mellow as honey for his Reverence the Vicar. Three loaves a week without fail, because there 's nobody else in Ullbrig can make 'em to his satisfaction—and she wanted to have the paying for 'em herself into the bargain. And she can paper-hang and paint. She and his Reverence are going to undertake a few matters of church decoration shortly. And she can milliner and dressmake. If it was n't for Pamela, Emma Morland would soon lose her reputation as our leading society *modiste*. Not even the brass plate would save her—if she polished it three times a day. Ullbrig does n't want brass plates; Ullbrig wants style. So when Ullbrig goes to Emma Morland for a new dress and Pamela 's not there, Ullbrig says, 'Oh, it does n't

matter just then, it 'll call again.' Ha! says it 'll call again. But what I wanted to illustrate ... with regard to telegraphic departments, of course ... you see ... her remarkable versatility. Not only that..." the old fog showed signs of settling over him once more, but he shook it off with a decisive spurt. "She 's inherited music from her mother in a marked degree. It seems to come naturally to her. I think you 'd be surprised. What little bit I 've been able to do for her I 've done —taught her the proper value of notation, the correct observance of harmonies, clefs, solfeggio, scales, legato, contra punctum, and so forth. The amazing thing is the way she 's picked it up. Not a bit of trouble to her, apparently. What I should have done without her at the organ—she 's our ecclesiastical organist, you know—I dare n't think. And it occurred to me ... I felt it would be such a pity to let the chance go by ... if we could only induce you.... You see, she 's not exactly an ordinary girl. Different from the rest of us altogether.... And I thought if we could only induce you to give her the benefit of a little musical advice..." He paused inferentially.

"With a view," asked the Spawer, "to what is diabolically called the profession?"

Father Mostyn caught the note of dissuasive alarm.

"Ha! not exactly the profession..." he said. "I was n't so much meaning that. But I thought, you see, she 'd appreciate it so much ... and there 'd be no fear of

her abusing your favor in the slightest degree. Unfortunately ... I 'm afraid you 'd find our piano rather below par ... the Ullbrig air has a peculiar corrodent action upon the strings. Tuning 's no good; indeed, it only seems to unsettle 'em. But if ... sometime when you 're here you would n't mind my asking her in ... just for a short while?"

"Not the least bit in the world," said the Spawer. "And for as long as you like."

"Ha!" The fog lifted off Father Mostyn's utterance in sudden illumination of sunlight, and he rubbed his knees jocosely. "I thought we should manage it. Capital! capital! We must fix up a sort of a soirée some night. That 's what we must do. Fix up a sort of soiree some night and feed you. We won't speak of dining; that 's a word we leave behind us when we come to Ullbrig. But we 'll feed you, and give Pamela a chance to display her culinary skill. Of course, we know all about our little business of last night, so we need n't speak darkly...."

"The deuce we do!" exclaimed the Spawer, laughing. "And I 've been thinking all the time we did n't."

Father Mostyn spread his fingers with priestly unction.

"That," said he, "is one of our fatal Ullbrig errors; always to think that his Reverence does n't know things. No matter how many times we prove to our cost that he does, we go on acting upon the

supposition that he does n't. It 's a source of endless trouble to us. Of course, in the present instance, we absolve you. Your tongue was honorably tied. Pamela told me all about it this morning—she was full of the music and your goodness, and the desire to tell me what she 'd done before silence made a hypocrite of her. Indeed, she was horribly afraid, poor girl, that she was becoming an Ullbrig hypocrite already. As though there were a grain of hypocrisy in the whole of her nature. But that 's what we must do. We must rig up a sort of soirée some night and feed you."

How the soirée and the feeding were going to affect the vital question of the girl's future did not altogether transpire—though this one subject carried them henceforth into the small hours, and the Spawer used no inconsiderable skill to elicit some clear understanding on the point, and when finally the Spawer slid away from the Vicarage gate under a deep July skyful of stars, the words floated in mystic meaning about his ears like the ringing of sanctus bells.

And as far away as the very last gate of all, when the Spawer turned his head back towards the scene of his evening, he seemed to hear the bells wafting to him over the corn, as though languid with pursuit:

"... Feed you. Feed you. Feed ... you."

CHAPTER VIII

Pam had grown up in the sight of Ullbrig, variously loved and hated for her self-same virtues; and on a day when the time seemed not yet ripe (for fear some more enterprising spirit might pluck it green), the men of Ullbrig and of Whivvle, and of Merensea and of Garthston, and of Sproutgreen and of Ganlon, and of Hunmouth even, arose, gave a pull to their waistcoats, and took turns at offering themselves before her on the matrimonial altar. That, as you may imagine, made Pam more enemies than ever.

Who the first man was to win the honor of her refusal has not been established on a sufficiently authoritative basis for publication in this volume, but after him came a constant stream of postulants. She could have had any man she liked for the lifting of her little finger; hardly one of them got married but took the wife he did because he could n't take Pam. George Cringle, indeed, from Whivvle way, boldly challenged her to marry him while his own banns were up with the daughter of the Garthston miller.

"Oh, George," said Pam, when he stopped her by the smock-mill on the Whivvle road and made his views known to her; too much shocked by his dreadful duplicity to exult over her sister's downfall as an Ullbrig girl might have done. "However could

you."

"Ah could very well," said George resourcefully, misconstruing the reproval into an encouraging query about how the thing was to be done. "An' ah 'll tell y' t' way. Ah 'd send my brother to let 'er know ah 'd gotten chance o' betterin' mysen, an' wor gannin' to tek it, an' we 'd 'ave me an' you's names called i' Oolbrig Choch. Noo, what div ye say?"

Pam said "No," and preached one of the prettiest open-air sermons you ever heard. It was on love and marriage; telling how true love was essential to happiness, and how marriage without love was mere mockery, and how the man that betrayed the affections of a girl by demeaning her in the sight of another was not worthy to be called man at all; and how, if George did n't care for Rose, he ought never to have soiled his lips with the falsehood of saying he did ("Ay, ah do, bud ah care for you a deal better," said George); and how he ought to try and make himself worthy of Rose, and she of him; and how, if he really felt that that was impossible, he ought to stand forth boldly and proclaim so before it was too late ("Ah 'm ready, onnytime ye tell me," said George); but how Pam knew that George was a good fellow at heart ("Ah div n't say there is n't them 'at's as good," said George, modestly, "if ye know t' place to look for 'em"); and how, doubtless, he did n't mean any harm ("Ah-sure ah div n't"); and so on ... much as you 've seen it all put in books before, but infinitely

more beautiful, because Pam's own dear face was the page, and Pam's lips the printed words; and George stood and watched her with his own lips reforming every word she said, in a state of nodding rapture.

"Gan yer ways on," he begged her, when at last she came to a stop. "Ah can tek as much as ye 've got to gie me."

"I 've finished," said Pam.

"Ay; bud can't ye think o' onnythink else?" he inquired anxiously. "Ah like to 'ear ye—an' it mud do me some good. Rose could n't talk i' that fashion, ah 'll a-wander. Nay; Rose could n't talk same as yon. Not for nuts, she could n't. She 's a fond 'un, wi' nowt to say for 'ersen bud, 'Oh, George! gie ower.' What did ye tell me ah 'ad to prawclaim?" he asked, with a crafty attempt to lure Pam on again. "Ah want to mek right sure ah en 't forgotten owt."

Whereupon Pam wrought with her wavering brother a second time...

"Ay; it 's all right what ye 've telt me," he said, in deep-hearted concurrence, when her words drew to an end once more. "Ah know it is. Ye 've gotten right pig by t' lug, an' no mistek.... Well? What div ye say? Mun ah send my brother to tell 'er ah s'll not be there o' Monday week?"

Pam ground her little heel into the dust for departure, and threw up her head with a fine show of pitying disdain.

"Some day, George Cringle," she told him in

leaving, "you may be sorry when you think of this."

"Ah can't be na sorrier nor ah am to-day, very well," George admitted sadly, "... if ye mean 'No.'"

"I do," said Pam, with emphasis.

"Well, then," George decided, "there 's nowt no more for it. Things 'll 'a to gan on as they are."

Which they did.

Any other girl might have been ruined with all this adulation; all these proposals open and covert; all these craning necks; these obvious eye-corners—but Pam was only sorry, and sheer pity softened her heart till many thought she had merely said "No" in order to encourage a little pressing. And indeed, Pam said "No" so nicely, so lovingly, so tenderly, so sorrowfully, so sympathetically, and with so little real negation about the sound of it, that one woke up ultimately with a shock to realise the word meant what it did. Some even found it difficult to wake up at all.

"What div ye keep sayin' 'Naw' for?" asked Jevons, with a perplexity amounting to irritation, when he had asked her to be the mother of two grown-up daughters and a son, ready-made, and Pam had not seen her way. "Ah s'll be tekkin' ye at yer wod, an' then 'appen ye 'll wish ye 'd thought better on. Noo, let 's know what ye mean, an' gie us a plain answer to a plain question. Will ye 'a me?"

"No..." said Pam again, shaking her head sorrowfully. Not N-O, NO, as it looks here in print—

hard, grim, inexorable, forbidding; but her own soft "No," stealing out soothingly between her two lips like the caress of a hand; more as though it were a penitential "Yes" in nun's habit, veiled and hooded—a sort of monosyllabic Sister of Mercy.

"See-ye! There ye are agen," said Jevons, convicting her of it with his finger. "Noo, what am ah to mek on ye?"

"Oh, nothing at all, please," Pam begged of him, with solicitous large-eyed humility through her thick lashes. "Don't bother to try. It 's not as though I was worth it ... or ... or the only one. You 'll be sure to find plenty of somebody elses ... There are just lots of girls ... older than me too ... who 'd be only too glad to say 'Yes' ... and be better for you in every way."

"Ay, ah know there is," Jevons assented, with refreshing candor. "Lots on 'em. Bud ah mud as lief finish wi' you sin' ah 've gotten started o' ye. T' others 'll 'ave to be looked for, an' ah can't reckon to waste mah time i' lookin' for nawbody. Work gets behint enough as it is. Noo, let 's come tiv a understandin'. 'Ave ye gotten onnything agen me?"

"Oh, no, no," said Pam, all her sympathies in alarm at the mere suggestion, lest it might have been derived from any act or word of hers. "Indeed I have n't."

"Well," said Jevons himself, stroking down the subject complacently. "Nor ah div n't see rightly i' what way ye sewd. Ah 'm a widdiwer—if that 's owt

agen a man? Bud if it is, ah s'll want to be telt why. An' ah 've gotten a family—so it 's no use sayin' ah en't. Bud it 'll be a caution if there 's owt agen a man o' that score. There 'll be a deal o' names i' Bible to disqualify for them 'at say there is. An' ah 've gotten seummut ah can lay my 'ands on at bank onnytime it rains—though it 'll 'a to rain strangelins 'ard an' all before ah do. Ah 's think ye weean't say 'at that 's owt agen a man?"

"Not a bit," said Pam conciliatorily. And then, with all the steadfast resolution of her teens: "I shall never marry," she told him.

Only girls in their teens—taking life very seriously because of them—ever say that. When they get older they commit themselves to no such rash statement, lest it might be believed.

Ginger's turn took place in the Post Office itself. He had been waiting for it for six weeks, so, of course, being fully prepared, it caught him at a disadvantage when it came. As he slipped into the Post Office his prayer was for Pam, but after he 'd got inside and remembered what he 'd sworn to do if it were, he prayed it might be the postmaster, until he thought he heard him coming, when his heart sank at another opportunity lost, and he changed the prayer to Pam again. He was still juggling with it from one to the other, with incredible swiftness and dexterity, when there was a sudden ruffle of skirts and Pam stood waiting behind the counter, with her

knuckles on the far edge of it, in a delightful transcription of the postmaster's position.

"Well, Ginger," she said, nodding her beautiful head at him. (Ginger being also a surname, it was quite safe to call him by it.) "Do you want a stamp?"

"... Naw, thank ye. At least ... ah 'm not partic'lar. Ay ... if ye 've gotten one to spare..." said Ginger. "Bud ye 've n' occasion to trouble about it o' mah account. It's naw consequence. Ah 'm not so sure ah could lick it, evens if ye 'ad to gie me it; my mouth 's that dry ..."

"Let me get you a glass of milk, then," said Pam promptly, showing for departure.

"Nay, ye mun't," Ginger forbade her in a burglar's whisper, waking up suddenly to the alarming course his conduct was taking—as though he had come so far in a dream. "Milk brings me out i' spots i' naw time, thank ye ... an' besides, ah can do better wi'out. Wet's comin' back to me noo, ah think, an' ah s'll not want to use stamp while to-morrer, 'appen ... or day after; if then. 'Appen ah s'll sell stamp to my mother, when all 's said and done ... thank ye.... Did ye see what ah did wi' penny? It ought to be i' one o' my 'ands, an' it 's not no longer. Mah wod!" He commenced to deal nervous dabs at himself here and there as though he were sparring for battle with an invisible adversary, and one, moreover, he feared was going to prove the master of him. "Ah en't swallered 'er, ah 's think. There 's a

strange taste o' copper an' all...."

"What 's that on the counter?" asked Pam.

"Ay ... to be sure," said Ginger, with a mighty air of relief, picking up the penny and putting it in his pocket. "There she is.... Mah wod, if ah 'd slipped 'er —she mud 'a been finish o' me. Well...." It suddenly occurred to him that he 'd been a tremendous time in the shop delaying Government business, and his teeth snapped on the word like the steel grips of a rat-trap. "Ah 'll wish ye good-night," he said abruptly, and made a bolt to go.

"Are n't you going to pay me, Ginger?" Pam asked from across the counter, with the soft simulation of reproach.

"What for?" Ginger stopped to inquire with surprise.

"For the stamp I gave you," said Pam.

"Ay ... noo, see-ye. Ah wor so throng wi' penny ah nivver thought no more about stamp. Did ye notice what ah did wi' 'er?"

He seemed to be shaking hands with himself in all his pockets, one after the other.

"In your waistcoat," said Pam. "That 's it.... No; see!"—and as his hands still waltzed wide of the indicated spot, shot two little fingers over the counter, stuck straight out like curling-tongs, and into his waistcoat pocket and out again, with the stamp between them. "There you are," she said, holding it up before his eyes in smiling triumph as if

it were a tooth she 'd extracted.

"Ay..." said Ginger, divining it dimly; "ye 're welcome tiv it."

That touch of her hand on his waistcoat, and the little waft of warm hair that went with it, had almost undone him.

"Don't you want it?" asked Pam, scanning him curiously.

"Not if you do, ah don't," said Ginger. "Ah 'll mek ye a present on it."

"Oh, but..." said Pam, with the tender mouth for a kindness, "it 's awfully good of you ... but we 've got such lots of them. As many as ever we want and more. You 'd better take it, Ginger."

"Ay, gie it me, then," said Ginger, holding his waistcoat pocket open, "'Appen ye weean't mind slippin' it back yessen, an' ye 'll know ah 've gotten it safe." The little warm waft went over him again, and he shut his eyes instinctively, as though to the passage of a supreme spirit whose glory was too great to be looked upon by mortal man. "Diz that mek us right?" he asked hazily, when the power had gone by, and he awoke to see Pam looking at him.

"Yes," said Pam, feeling it too mean to ask for the penny again after Ginger's recent display of generosity. "That makes us all right, Ginger, thank you."

"Same to you," said Ginger. "Ay, an' many on 'em." Then he knew his hour was come. "Ah want to

know ..." he begged unsteadily, gripping himself tight to the counter's edge, and speaking in a voice that seemed to him to boom like great breakers on the shore, and must be audible to all Ullbrig, let alone the Post Office parlor—though Pam could hardly hear him, "if ye 'll remind me ... 'at ah've gotten seummut ... to ask ye?"

"I will if I can only remember," said Pam amiably, slipping a plump round profile of blue serge on the counter and swinging a leg to and fro—judging by the motion of her. "When do you want me to remind you, Ginger?"

"Noo, if ye like," said Ginger.

"This very minute?" asked Pam.

"Nay, bud ah think not," said Ginger, backing suddenly in alarm from the imminence of his peril. "It 's not tiv a minute or two. Some uvver day, 'appen, when you 're not busy."

"Oh, but I 'm not busy now," said Pam, stopping her leg for a second at Ginger's recession, and setting it actively in motion again when she spoke, as though to stimulate his utterance.

"Ah 'm jealous y' are, though," said Ginger, with a rare show of diffidence at taking her word.

"Indeed I 'm not," Pam assured him. "I promise you I 'm not, Ginger. Do you think I 'd say that to you if I were? Now, what is it you want to ask me?"

"Can ye guess?" Ginger tested her cautiously, with a nervous, twisted smile—intended to carry

suggestion, but looking more as though he 'd bitten his tongue. Pam thought over him for a moment, and shook her head.

"I 'm not a bit of good at guessing," she said.

"'Appen ye 'd be cross if ah telt ye," reflected Ginger. "Ay, ah 'd better let it alone while ah 'm right. Ah mud mek a wuss job on it."

"Oh, Ginger, you aggravating boy," cried Pam, spurring a dear, invisible heel against the counter to urge him on, and slapping the oilcloth with her small flat hand till Ginger's ears tingled again in jealous delight. "... Go on; go on. You must go on. You 'll have to tell me now, or I 'll never be friends with you again—and I shall know you don't care, either."

"Well, then," Ginger began, pushed reluctantly forward by this direful threat, "... it 's this." He held on to it as long as he could, taking breath, and then when he felt he could n't hold on any longer, he suddenly shut his eyes and let go, saying to himself, "Lord, help me!" and to Pam, "Will y' 'ave me?"—so quickly and indistinctly that it sounded like a cat boxed up under the counter, crying "Me-ow."

"Oh, Ginger," Pam apostrophised him mournfully, when she 'd begged his pardon three times, and he 'd mewed after each one until at the third she 'd received the inspiration to know what they all meant. "I wish you 'd asked me anything but that."

"There wor nowt else ah 'd gotten to ask ye,"

Ginger said gloomily.

"Because..." Pam proceeded gently to explain, "I shall have to say 'No.'"

"Ay, ah thought ye would," Ginger threw in. "Ah know very well ah 'm not good enough for ye."

"You 're every bit good enough for me," said Pam, with swift tears of championship in her eyes, drawn there by his masterstroke of humility. "And you must never say that again, please, even if you don't mean it. It 's very, very good of you indeed to want me, Ginger. It 's awfully good of you; and I 'd as soon say 'Yes' to you as to any I 've ever said 'No' to. I 'm sure you 'd do all you could to make me happy...."

"Ay, that ah would," said Ginger, snatching hopefully at the small bone of encouragement. "Ah 'd try my best. Is it onny use me askin' ye agen after a while?—say to-morrer or Friday? Ah sewd n't think owt about trouble."

Pam shook her head regretfully.

"I 'm afraid not," she said. "But you must n't imagine, Ginger, it 's because I don't care for you, or because I doubt you. It 's myself I doubt, if I doubt anybody, not you. If I could only be a hundred Pams instead of just a miserable one, I 'd have said 'Yes' to all those that asked me. I know I should. You can't think how it troubles me to have to keep on saying 'No'—but what am I to do? Everybody asks me to marry them ... at least, a few do ... and as I can only marry one, I 'm frightened it might be the wrong one.

It 's so easy to make a mistake—unless you 're very, very sure. And I'm not; and I feel I might end by making both of us unhappy...."

"Ah 'd chance that," said Ginger, with resolution.

"But there ought to be no chance about it, Ginger," Pam reproved him gently. "Nobody ought ever to marry by chance. People that only marry by chance can only hope to be happy by chance—and that 's a dreadful idea."

"Ay, ah see it is," said Ginger hurriedly. "Ah beg yer pardon."

"Well, then," said Pam, "... you understand me, don't you, Ginger?"

"Ah 'm jealous ah do," said Ginger despondently.

"And you 're not angry with me ... for what I 've said to you?"

"Nay, ah 'm not angry wi' ye," said Ginger. "Ah 'm only sorry. Ah misdoot ah s'll not be i' very good fettle for my supper when time comes."

"You 'll shake hands, though," said Pam, catching a certain indication that he was about to depart without.

"Ay, ah sewd like, sin' ye 're good enough to ask me," Ginger acknowledged eagerly, blundering hold of her fingertips, and dropping them like hot coals as soon as he felt the desire to linger over them. "'Appen ye 'll let me ... shek 'ands wi' ye ... noo an' agean," he asked Pam humbly, turning his coat collar up to go—not that there was any rain at the time, but that the

action seemed somehow, in his conception of things, to befit the hopeless finality of departure.

"Whenever you like, Ginger," Pam promised him, with moist lashes.

"Thank ye," said Ginger, making for the door. "Ah div n't know ... at ah s'll trouble ye so offens ... but may'ap it mud save me ... fro' gannin altagether to bad if ah was ... to shak 'em noo an' agean."

And with a husky farewell he dipped out of the office.

CHAPTER IX

So Ginger went over to the great majority of those that loved Pam and lost her, and in his own hour was as sick a man as ever you might wish to meet outside the chapters of a mediæval romance, where gallant knights are wont to weep like women, and women stand the sight of as much blood, unmoved, as would turn the average modern man's stomach three times over. But anything like a complete account of all the hopeless loves that had Pam for their inspiration would crowd the pages of this book from cover to cover, and still leave material for a copious appendix, and any amount of lesser contributory literature. "Pamela Searle: her Time, Life, Love, and Letters," including several important and hitherto

unpublished meat-bills rendered to Mrs. Gatheredge by Dingwall Jackson, with a frontispiece. "'Pamela Searle,' being a barefaced attempt to confound the thinking public as much as possible on the subject of this fascinating character, and present her to them in an altogether novel and unreliable light, as a means of catching their pennies—(truth being worse than useless for the purpose)—with a vindication of Sheppardman Stevens from sundry charges that have been customarily laid against him."—"'Ullbrig, Past and Present'—(also 'Rambles Round')—fully illustrated; containing a special chapter on Pamela and Father Mostyn in the light of recent investigation. Compiled to serve as a guide-book to the district." "'Pamela Searle, the Ullbrig Letter-Carrier; or, What can Little Ladies do?' A tale and a lesson. By Mrs. Griffin (Good Children Series, No. 105.)."

It is no secret that the Garthston parson wanted Pam as badly as he wanted a new pair of trousers, and would have had her at a moment's notice if she 'd only asked him, but she never did; and he wore the old pair to the end. And the Merensea doctor wanted her too—the same that came in for six thousand pounds when his father died, and married his housekeeper—but Pam went very sad and soft and sorrowful each time he asked her (which was generally from his gig, driving some seven miles out of his way, by Ullbrig, to reach an imaginary patient

on the Merensea side of Whivvle), and said "No," just the same as she said it to everybody else, with not the least shade of an eyelid's difference because he happened to be a doctor—which was the girl all over. No supplicant that ever supplicated of Pam was too mean or too poor, or too ridiculous or too presuming, in her eyes, ever to be treated with the slightest breath of contumely. When poor Humpy from Ganlon, whose legs were so twisted that he could n't tell his right from his left for certain without a little time to think, asked a Ganlon lass to have him, she screamed derision at him like a hungry macaw, and ran out at once to spread the news so that it should overtake him (being but a slow walker, though he walked his best on this occasion) before he had time to get home. When he asked Pam to have him, Pam could have cried over him for pity, to think that because God had seen fit to spoil a man in the making like this, human love was to be denied him; and though, of course, she said "No," she said it so beautifully that Humpy could hardly see his way home for the proud tears of feeling himself a man in spite of all; and if, after that, there had been any particular thing in the whole world that twisted legs could have done for a girl, that thing would have been done for Pam so long as Humpy was alive to do it.

Lastly, two years before the Spawer's arrival, the old schoolmaster grew tired of teaching and died,

and there came a new one in his place; a younger man, pallid and frail, with the high white student's forehead, worn smooth and rounded like the lamp globe he 'd studied under; the weak brown moustache and small chin, and a cough that troubled him when the wind was east, and took up his lodgment at the Post Office. Every day he sat four times with Pam at the same table—breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper. Every morning, when the clock struck ten, he manoeuvred over his toes for a sight of the roadway through the school-room window, and if the veins in his forehead swelled and his jaw muscles contracted:

"Ah knaw 'oo yon 'll be," went the whisper round behind him.

Once he was ill, drawing the breath into his lungs like great anchor chains dragged through hawse-holes, and Pam nursed him. Dressed the pillows under his head; laid her cool hand on his hot forehead; gave him his medicine; sat through the night with him, clasping courage and comfort and consolation into his burning fingers, wrote letters for him; read for him. "Noo we s'll be gettin' telt seummut before so long," said Ullbrig to itself. "A jug gans to pump adeal o' times, but some fond lass 'll brek it before she 's done,"—but the schoolmaster consumed in stillness like the flame of a candle. There were days when "Good morning, Yes, No, Please, Thank you, and Good-night" would have

covered all that he said to Pam directly—and even then the veins in his forehead and the tightening muscles about his jaws reproved him straightway, as though he had already said too much. If, by any chance, Pam addressed him suddenly, the blood would mount up to his forehead and the outlines of his face would harden, like a metal cast in the setting, before he spoke, till it almost looked as though he were debating whether he should give her any reply. And the reply given, he would take the first opportunity of turning his back. Indeed, there were times when he barely waited for the opportunity, but clipped his sentence in the middle and threw an abrupt word over his shoulder to complete the sense of it, while Pam stood sorrowfully regarding the two familiar threadbare tail buttons and the shine about the back of the overworked morning coat, whose morning knew no noon, wondering if she 'd said anything to offend him. Once, when he had swung round more abruptly than usual, giving her the reply so grudgingly that it fell altogether short of her hearing, as though he had cast a copper to some wayside mendicant for peace's sake, Pam—who could never bear to leave anything in doubt that a word might settle—asked him softly if he were angry with her. The question fetched him suddenly round again, with the appearance of warding a blow.

"Angry with you?" he repeated. There was the

hoarseness of suppressed emotion about his voice, and his lip trembled.

"You are angry with me now, though," said Pam mournfully, "for asking you."

And indeed, by the way he had turned upon her and spoken, he seemed like a man brought to the sudden flash-point of passion by some injudicious word.

"I am not angry with you," he said, in the same constrained, hoarse voice, and said no further, but put his shoulders between them again as though the subject were too unimportant to be discussed.

Then Pam made a discovery.

"He does not like me," she told herself, and without showing that she held his secret, she set herself in her own quiet, gentle fashion to verify the fact by observation. He was never a man of many words at any time, but she saw he was never a man of so few as when he was with her. He had words for the postmaster; he had words for the postmaster's wife; he had words for Emma; he had words—stray, detached, pedagogic schoolroom words, read up aloud from the chalkings on an invisible blackboard —for the villagers. But for Pam—Pam saw herself— he had only the constrained, hard words between his teeth like the enforced bit of a horse, that he champed fretfully in the desire to break away from her.

No. Pam knew what it was. He liked the

postmaster because they could talk the papers over together, and predict terrible things about the country to each other; and he liked Emma because Emma was so straightforward and sensible and earnest looking—even if she was n't pretty, which perhaps, after all, she was n't—and never said silly things she did n't mean; and he liked Mrs. Morland because nobody could help liking her—she was so kind and motherly and sympathetic and talkative, and so full of allowances for other people. But Pam! ... Well, he did n't care about Pam because ... oh, because of heaps of things, perhaps. It was n't any use trying to put them all together. Because he thought she was a silly, empty-headed gad-about, who cared for nothing but showing herself around the countryside ... (but that was n't true a bit; he knew it was n't!) ... and being asked if she 'd have people....

Pam doubled up one little hand in anguish, and stared at an invisible something in front of her—that seemed to be a bogey by the startled look she gave it —with a bitten underlip twisting and struggling like a red live thing to be free; and a drawn grey cheek—till the great round tear-drops gathered in her eyes and fell hotly on her knuckles one by one.

But that was only for a moment.

Then Pam dashed the tears aside and shook her glorious head with new-found resolve. Pam would be brave; and strong; and steadfast; and still; and

modest; and nobly feminine; and true. And would show him by her actions that he had done her a wrong in his heart.

Pam was still engaged upon the work of showing him when the Spawer took up his quarters at Cliff Wrangham.

CHAPTER X

On the morning following the Spawer's session at Father Mostyn's, before James Maskill had yet flung himself round the brewer's corner, his Reverence threw open the blistered Vicarage door and sallied forth genially to the Post Office in a pair of well-trodden morocco slippers, screwing up his lips to inaudible cheery music as he went, and holding in his left hand a round roll of grey stuff which, judging by wristbands of a similar texture that showed beyond the crinkled cassock sleeves, appeared to be a reverend flannel shirt. Jan Willim was chalking their price on a pair of virgin soles when he heard the insidious slip-slap of heelless leather take the cobbles like the lipping of an advancing tide, and he put his head hurriedly round the little clean kitchen door at the sound of it.

"Noo, 'ere 's 'is Rivrence," he announced, with the loud double-barrelled whisper intended to do

duty as a shout on the one side and be inaudible on the other, "... an' it 'll be Pam 'e 's after.... Noo, Pam lass!"

"Ha! The very girl I wanted to see," his Reverence told her, as Pam slipped her frank face deftly behind the counter to receive him, like a beautiful honest marguerite, fresh plucked and button-holed, with a friendly upward "Yes-s-s?" prolonged through her ivory petals, pink-tipped, and' a peep of rosy tongue. "The very girl! How 's Government this morning, John?" he inquired obliquely of the deferential shadow brooding by the inner door, where the sound of straining shoe-leather bespoke the presence of somebody striving to keep silence on his toes.

"She 's very well, ah think, yer Rivrence, thank ye," responded the postmaster, stepping forward the necessary six inches to show himself respectfully before the Vicar in the act of speaking, and retiring when his words were ended.

"Busy, is she?" asked his Reverence affably, commencing to unroll the grey bundle of flannel on the counter with a leisurely ordering of his hands—Pam lending assistant touches here and there.

"Ay, she 's busy," said the postmaster, showing again in the door-frame, and wiping his fingers on his apron, lest their inactivity might seem like disrespectful indolence before the Vicar. "Bud it 'll be slack time wi' 'er an' all before long. Theer 's not so

many stamps selt i' 'arvest by a deal, nor so many letters written. Folks is ower throng i' field."

"Ha! No doubt about it. The harvest field is a fine corrective for *cacoethees scribendi*," said his Reverence, disposing the shirt on the counter lengthwise, with limp, outstretched arms, for Pam's inspection, as though it were some subject on an operating table. "Buttons again, you see, Pam," he told her, pointing out where they lacked.

"My word, I see!" said Pam, running over the outlines of the article with a swift, critical eye. "And wristbands and collarbands as well. You want some new shirts badly. You 've only four now, with the one you 've got on—and that," she said, turning up his cassock sleeves to get a look at it, "is almost past mending. See how thin it is.... And will you have pearl buttons, then?" asked Pam, composing the shirt to seemly folds under soft, caressing fingers, and following every move of her hands with a fascinating agreement of head, "... or plain white?"

"Ha! Plain white ... by all means," said Father Mostyn. "Large plain white for his reverence the vicar—as large and as plain and as white as we can get 'em, that lie flat where they fall, and don't run all over the floor and try to find the crack in the skirting-board. Pearl buttons are for the young and flexible (incidentally too, for the profane), and not for aged parish priests, whose knees are stiffened with a life of kneeling.... Shirts and pearl buttons

must n't let me forget, though," he admonished himself, drawing the solitary, backless cane-bottomed chair under him from below, and sitting to the counter with one hand drumming on its oilcloth and the other gripping a spindle, "what I really came about."

"No," said Pam, watching his lips.

"We had a visit from our friend of the Cliff End last night."

Pam's eyes were drawn for a moment to sundry faults in the folding of the shirt, and her fingers busied themselves with their correction.

"Yes," she said, looking up again. "But you did n't have any music? ... Did you?" she asked, with the sudden eagerness for a coveted opportunity gone by.

"All in good time—all in good time, dear child," Father Mostyn exhorted her indulgently. "Last night we made music with our mouths, but the next night we 're going to make a little with our fingers. Bach! Scarlatti! Beethoven! Mozart! Schumann! Palestrina! ... And then we shall have to have you with us."

"Me?" asked Pam, with swift, desirous incredulity.

"You," said Father Mostyn.

Pam plunged her face into her two hands straightway (which was a characteristic trick of hers at such times), as though the beauty of this thing were too great to behold. After a moment she let her fingers slide away into her lap of their own weight

and threw back a brave head with the smile of tears about it, and the little double shake that remained over to her from the short while ago when her hair had fallen in sleek, black curtains on either side of her cheeks each time she stooped.

"Does he know I 'm to be there?" she inquired.

"To be sure he does, dear child."

"But it was your idea ... to ask me," said Pam.

"It was my vicarage," said Father Mostyn.

Pam made pot-hooks with her fingers.

"Yes..." she said, as though the word were only the beginning to a puzzled objection, but her breath went out in it in lingering, and she let it stand by itself as an assent. "What did he say?"

"When?"

"When you told him ... I was to be there? Perhaps he did n't say anything?"—with anxiety. "Did he?"

"And supposing he did n't?"

"Then perhaps it would mean he did n't want me. And perhaps it would n't ... but it might."

"Ha! Might it? Let 's make our mind easy, dear child. He said lots of things."

"About me?"

"Certainly. It was you we were discussing."

There was only one question possible to ask after this on the direct line, and Pam drew up short, confronting it with a sudden air of virtue.

"I don't want to know what they were," she said.

"There 's no earthly reason why you should n't," Father Mostyn told her suavely, "so far as that goes."

"Is n't there?" asked Pam; and then quickly: "... Of course, I did n't think there would be. Why should there?"

"Ha! Pam, Pam, Pam!" said his Reverence, raising his hand from the counter, and wagging a monitory loose forefinger at her. "All the doctrine of Church Catholic can't drive the first woman out of you quite, I fear. Curiosity in that little breast of yours is a blackbird in a linnet's cage, and may break away through the bars."

Pam looked up from her pot-hooks sideways and laughed the soft, musical confession of guilt.

"All that was said about you last night," his Reverence assured her, "had to do with your music...."

"But you never told him," said Pam, locking her knuckles with a sudden alarm against the impending disclosure, and straining them backwards over her knee.

"To be sure I did."

"Oh!" said Pain, and dipped her face into her basined fingers a second time. "... That 's dreadful. Now he 'll come to church."

Father Mostyn stroked a severe, judicial chin. "Is that so dreadful? ... to go to church? You would n't have him go to chapel?"

"No, no," said Pam. "Not if he did n't want. But

he never went ... anywhere before. And now he 'll laugh."

"In church? ... I think not."

"When he gets outside."

"Why should he laugh when he gets outside?"

"Because.... Oh!" Pam twisted her fingers. "Because of me."

"And why, pray, because of you?"

"Oh ... because.... Not because you have n't taught me properly, because you have, and been clever and kind, and more painstaking than I deserved ... ever. But because ... what must my playing sound like to him, when he plays so beautifully?"

"Pride, dear child, pride!" Father Mostyn cautioned her with uplifted finger. "Let 's beware of our pride. The Ullbrig pride that can't bear the humiliation of being taught."

"I 'm sure I try," said Pam penitentially.

"Let's try harder, then," said his Reverence, with affable resolve. "Never let 's cease trying to try harder. The laughter you speak of is most assuredly a miasma; rising from the deadly quagmires of your own pride. If our playing merits the fate of being laughed at, why should we wish it to receive any better fate, or fear its receiving its just deserts. Is n't that a virulent form of Ullbrig hypocrisy?"

"I did n't mean it to be hypocrisy," said Pam sadly. "And I did n't think it swas till you showed me.

Only ... somehow ... I can't help it. I seem to be growing more and more into a hypocrite every day."

"Ha!" said Father Mostyn, welcoming the admission, "... so long as we recognise the sin, and the nature and the degree and the locality of it ... and have strength to confess it, dear child, salvation is still within our clasp. It 's only in sinning without knowing it that the deadliness lies. And that 's what the Church Catholic is to protect us from.... Are you listening, John?"

"Ah catch seummut o' what 's bein' said, yer Rivrence," the postmaster acknowledged cautiously, manifesting a certain diffidence about showing himself to this appeal, "... bud ah 'm not listenin' if it 's owt 'at dizz n't consarn me."

"The Catholic Church," Father Mostyn instructed him solemnly, "concerns all men—even shoemakers —and you would be well advised to catch as much of what you hear her saying as you can. Truth may come to us some day by keeping our ears open to her, but be sure she won't come to us without."

"Ah expeck she weean't," said a depressed voice from the shoemakery. "Thank ye."

"You 're welcome, John. And now"—Father Mostyn turned to Pam in lighter vein—"enough of spiritual meats for our soul's digestion, dear child. Far from laughing at you, as your little momentary lapse from discipline permitted you to imagine, our Cliff End friend was most genuinely interested in

your musical welfare; inquired diligently concerning your state of proficiency; whether—"

"Oh!" Pam had been torturing her ten fingers over her knee while the list proceeded. "Did n't you just tell him I knew nothing at all?" she begged pathetically.

"Patience, dear child, patience!" Father Mostyn adjured her, with episcopal calm. "I did better than that. I told him the truth. Ha! told him the truth. Told him you were willing at heart to learn, but headstrong, and apt to be careless. Explained where the grave shortcomings lay."

"... About the thumbs going under?" Pam prompted anxiously.

"Ha! ... and your fatal tendency to depart from the metronomic time as adjudicated by the old masters. Have no fear, dear daughter. I told him all your musical offences that I could remember at the moment. He knows the dreadful worst, and has most kindly promised to lend a helping hand and assist us to make better of it if the thing can be done."

Pam gulped, with her eyes fixed on Father Mostyn, as though she had been swallowing one of Fussitter's large-size three-a-penny humbugs.

"Does a helping hand ... mean lessons?" she asked, in a still, small voice, after the humbug had settled down.

"Not so fast; not so fast," Father Mostyn reproved her. "I feared what my words might induce. Let 's

beware of the fatal trick of jumping at conclusions. It does not appear at present what a helping hand, in its strictest interpretation, may mean. You see ... we 've got to remember ... our friend is n't like the common ruck of 'em. No mere bread-and-cheese musician, dependent on the keyboard for his sustenance, but a dilettante ... a professional patron of the muse, so to speak, who is n't solely concerned with its sordid side of pounds, shillings, and pence. I told him he 'd have to let us feed him the next time he came to see us. Not dine him ... but feed him. And he seemed to cotton to the idea. So now, dear child, what are we going to do about it?"

"Oh!" Pam pressed a hand flat to each cheek and fastened a look of round-eyed, incredulous delight on Father Mostyn's face. "Is it to be a party?"

"Not altogether a party." Father Mostyn pursed up his lips dubiously over the word. "Let 's beware of confusions in our terms, dear girl. Not a party. Nothing set or fixed or formal. Not a dinner. No, no; not a dinner. A feed. That 's what it 's to be."

"Yes," said Pam, sticking close to the suggestion as though she were afraid of losing it, and nodding her head many times with an infinity of understanding. "I know. A feed. What sort of a feed?"

Father Mostyn's judicial eyebrow shot up like the empty end of a see-saw.

"That 's what we 've got to settle. I rather fancied.... You see—the weather 's so hot ... we must

consider. My idea was ... I thought, perhaps ... we 'd have something rather cooling. Something, say, in the nature of a cold spread.... But anything you like, dear child," he allowed her. "Just think out for yourself—when I 've gone—the very best you can do for us, and we 'll subscribe to it in success or failure when the time comes. And now, let 's settle when the time 's to be. When can we manage it, think you?"

"To-night? ... were you thinking of?" said Pam.

"Ha!" Father Mostyn wagged his hands free of all part in the proposal. "I was thinking of nothing. But to-night 's a little too precipitate, dear child. To-morrow night, then, let us say, and I 'll ride up to the Cliff myself some time this morning, and take the invitation."

So it was arranged, and the post rattled up over the cobbles, and his Reverence departed, after a genial word with James Maskill.

"Ha! Here comes the joyful-hearted James," he said to the figure of the postman, that showed hot and angry through the doorway, gripping the neck of his red-sealed canvas bag as though it were a doomed Christmas turkey, and waiting sullenly sideways for his Reverence to pass by. "No need to ask how the joyful-hearted James is. Fit and smiling as ever. Not even the burden of other people's letters can disturb his equanimity. Splendid weather for you, James. Don't stand; don't stand. Come in, and let 's see what you 've got inside your lucky-bag this

morning—anything for the Cliff End at all? Eh, Pam?"

Thereupon James brushed past the reverend cassock buttons with a grunt like a felled ox, that might have been apology or anathema, or neither, and brought down the post-bag on the counter like a muffled thud.

"No," said Pam, when she 'd taken it from him with a smiling nod of recognition and thanks, and run its contents deftly under her fingers. "There 's nothing for farther than Stamway's this morning."

"And nothing for his Reverence?"

Pam ran over the letters again before his Reverence's eyes, to show him that she was n't merely making use of the word "No" to save her a little trouble, and shook her head.

"Ha! Capital! capital!" said his Reverence, preparing to go. "At least, it means there 's nobody petitioning for new drain-pipes or a cow-shed roof by this post."

"Ay," pronounced the postman darkly after him, watching the retreating shoulders with an explosive face like a fog-signal. "Yon sod ought to 'ave 'is dommed neck screwed round an' all."

"Sh! James, James, James!" cried Pam, biting a lip of grieved reproof at him across the counter, and seeking to melt his hardness with a sorrowing eye. "How can you bear to say such wicked things?"

"Ah sewd run after 'im an' tell 'im o' me, if ah

was you," James taunted her, free of any anxiety that the challenge might be accepted. "'E weean't 'a gotten so far."

"You know very well I would n't do it," said Pam.

"Ah know nowt about what ye 'd do," James denied obstinately, shaking admission away from him like raindrops gathered on the brim of his cap-shade. "Nor ah don't care."

"You know very well I would n't do that, anyhow," said Pam, with a trembling lip for the injustice. "And it 's wrong of you to say I would."

"Ah know ah 'm a bad 'un," said James. "Let's 'a my letters an' away."

"You 're not a bad one," Pam protested, with a more trembling lip than ever, "but you try to make people think you are. And some of them believe you."

"They can think what they like. Folks is allus ready to believe owt bad about a man," said the postman bitterly, "wi'oot 'im tryin'. Ah sewd 'ave seummut to do to mek 'em think t' other road, ah 'll a-wander, ne'er mind whether ah tried or no. Nobody 's gotten a good wod for me."

"I 've got a good word for you," said Pam.

There was silence over the postman's mouth for a moment, and in that moment his evil genius prevailed.

"Ye can keep it, then," he said ungraciously, swinging on his heel. "Ah nivver asked ye for it."

And the silence was not broken again after that. Pam went on sorting her letters steadily, but every now and then she turned her head to one side of the counter, and for each stamp on the envelope there were a couple—big, blurred, swollen, and rain-sodden, with a featureless resemblance to James Maskill about them—that danced before her eyes.

Only, later in the day, when there was no postmaster to prejudice matters with his presence, Pam heard James Maskill whistling the Doxology outside the door with his heel to the brickwork, and she slipped round and took him prisoner by his coat lapels.

"James..." she said softly, and the Doxology stopped on the sudden, as dead as the March in Saul. "You did n't ... mean it, did you?"

The postman dropped his eyelids to their thinnest width of obstinacy, and said nothing. Pam waited, looking persuasively at his great freckles (so unlike her own), and still holding him up against the brickwork, as though he were Barclay, in need of it on Saturday night.

"You did n't really ... think I would do such a thing.... Did you now, James?" she asked him, after a while, trying to gain entrance to his heart by a soft variation on the original theme.

"There 's some on 'em would," James muttered evasively through his lips, when it seemed that Pam meant going on looking at him for ever. "... Ay, in a

minute they would."

"But not me," Pam pleaded.

"Ah did n't say you," James answered, after another pause. "Ah said ah did n't know."

"But you do know, don't you?" Pam urged him. "You know I would n't; don't you, James?"

The postman changed embarrassed heels against the brickwork.

"'Appen ah do," he said, with his eyes closing.

"Say you do," Pam begged. "Without any 'happen,' James."

There was an awful period of conflict once more, in which James showed a disposition to clamp both heels against the brickwork together, but this second time his good genius conquered.

"... Do," he said, with his eyes quite shut; and Pam let go the lapels.

"I knew you did," she said, but without any sting of exultation about the words—only pride for the man's own victory—and went back to her work again (which had reference to hard-boiled eggs and chickens) with a brightened faith in the latent goodness of humanity.

And when James was standing on the cobbles before the Post Office that night, loosing the knot in his reins prior to departure, Pam slipped out with a neat little parcel done up in butter paper, and put it into his hands.

"Ay, bud ye 're ower late," said the postman

tersely, with no signs of the recent softening about him, and sought to press it back upon her. "Bag 's made up."

"But it is n't for the bag," said Pam, resisting the transfer. "It 's for you, James."

"What 's it for me for?" demanded the postman, with the old voice of ire.

"To eat," said Pam. "It 's a chicken pasty I made on purpose for you, with a savory egg and a sponge sandwich. The egg 's in two halves with the shell off, and it 's quite hard. You can eat it out of your fingers if you like. I thought they 'd be nice for your tea."

The postman exchanged the parcel from hand to hand for a while, as though he were weighing it, slipped it after deliberation under the seat, gathered the reins, gripped the footboard and splasher, pulled them down to meet him, treading heavily on the step, till the whole cart appeared to be standing on its side, and rocked up into place with a send-off that looked like shooting him over the saddler's chimney. For James Maskill to thank anybody for anything was an act of weakness so foreign to his nature that there were few in all the district who could accuse him of it; and from the present signs Pam did not gather she was to be among the number.

"Good-by, James," she said wistfully, stepping back from the wheel as he sat down—for James Maskill's starts were sudden and fearful events, not unattended with danger to the onlooker, "... and I

hope you 'll like them."

"Kt, Kt!" was all James vouchsafed (and that not to Pam) out of a threatening corner of his mouth; but as the bay mare leaned forward to the traces, and Pam gave him up utterly for lost, he turned a quick, full face upon her. "Good-neet ... an' thank ye," he said. And in a smothered voice that seemed to issue from under the seat, turning back again: "Ah 'll try my best."

Then he set his teeth and brought the whip down hissing venomously, as though desirous to get clear of the sound of his own words and weakness. The bay mare sprang up into the sky like a winged Pegasus, taking James Maskill and the trap along with her, and before Pam's eye could catch on to them again, they were gone in a cloud round the brewer's corner.

CHAPTER XI

Then for two days there were six very busy girls in Ullbrig—busier, indeed, than any other six girls in the world, I think, and their name was Pam. They cooked things in the little clean kitchen that gave forth a savor like all the flesh-pots of Egypt; things that turned Jan Willim's nostrils sideways in his head through trying to smell them from the shoemakery at

work with his head down, and elicited a constant sound of snuffling outside the Post Office as of pigs that prize their snouts under the stye door at feed time. They went abroad with baskets, whose white napkins Ullbrig's fingers itched to lift, and pushed open the blistered Vicarage door without knocking, and passed in. They were seen to pay calls at Mrs. Fussitter's, and then Ullbrig sent bonnetless emissaries after them, with their bare arms wrapped up in harden aprons, to inquire:

"Ye 've 'ad Pam wi' ye just noo, en't ye? ... Ay, ah thought y' 'ad. Ah thought ah seed 'er... Ah 's think she 'd nowt to say for 'ersen, 'ad she?"

You may judge, then, if Pam was busy.

But in the end the things that had to be done were done, and the appointed hour came to pass, and Pam slipped through the Vicarage door with the final basket, and did not emerge again, and the shutters were drawn in both windows.

("Ay ... see ye ... look there! ... If ah did n't think they would," said Mrs. Fussitter, when all hope had gone with the second. "They weean't let onnybody tek a bit o' interest i' them, ah-sure. Ah mud just as well 'a gotten on wi' my work nor waste time ower them 'at dizz n't thank ye.")

And lastly, the Spawer rode down from Dixon's when the dusk was falling, to enjoy the ripe fruits of all this preparation. They heard the sound of his bell, percolating the stillness from Hesketh's corner like a

drop of cool musical rain, and Pam said: "Here he is," in a whisper, almost awestruck, and bit her nails between her white teeth with a sudden enlargement of eye, as though they 'd been lying in wait for a burglar all this time, and the burglar had come.

And for a moment her heart failed her. She did n't know what to do. For how was she there? Why was she there? By what right was she there? What folly or blind presumption had led her to be there? Why had she ever consented to be there?

Suppose it was all a mistake, after all, and he did n't really expect her. What would happen then? What should she do if his face dropped discernibly when she showed herself, and he became cold?

Oh, he would be terrible cold.

And what would he be thinking of if his thoughts made him look like that? Would he be thinking of the same things as the schoolmaster?

Oh, no, no, no! Would he?

Would he turn his back upon her, and talk over her to Father Mostyn as though she were a mere wooden palisade? What if she was a lady, as Father Mostyn found necessary to remind her at times when she did n't act like one? How was he to know that?

And even if he did know it, what did it matter? If the thing itself was wrong to start with, how was it bettered because a lady did it?

Besides ... she was n't a lady.

She knew very well she was n't. She was just the

post-girl. And he 'd been most good to her in the past; had shaken hands with her and talked French for her (that she was trying hard to learn, with Father Mostyn's assistance, out of an eighteenth century grammar that his father's father had used), and promised to play to her whenever she wanted.

Oh, yes ... she knew; and was very grateful. But that was different now. Then (and he knew it, too) she had been trying to get out of his way. Now she was thrusting herself into it. She was taking advantage of his own kindness to claim friendship and equality out of it, like the impudent beggars that make your one favor the plea for asking a dozen. Friendliness was one thing; friendship was another.

Oh, what should she do? and how should she meet him?

It was a terrible moment.

And then Pam suddenly bethought herself, and dipped her face swiftly into the font of her two joined hands—as though for baptism by resolution—and prayed.

It was very silly of her, of course—though, for the matter of that, lots of people do the same thing when they are in trouble—particularly girls; and Pam was only a girl, we are to remember.

Perhaps she did n't exactly pray so much as think aloud in her thoughts, so that God might hear His name and listen to her if He would. Very quickly and earnestly, and without any stops at all, as though

the words had been in her great heart to start with, and she 'd just turned it upside down. And no sooner had they turned out than she heard the Spawer's two feet strike the ground outside like a dotted crochet and a quaver in a duple bar as he jumped from his bicycle, and heard Father Mostyn throw open the front door and say "Ha!" and the Spawer give him back sunny greeting in his familiar voice of smiles (that she seemed to know almost as well as her own —if not better), and immediately her fear left her as though it had never been; and she knew he was expecting her and would be glad to see her, and had come more on her account than on his own, and would put out his hand as soon as ever he saw her, and smile friendship; and her appetite for this joyous double feast returned.

Then she threw up her head and shook it, and slipped out into the hall (she 'd been standing out of sight in the door-frame during her momentary disquietude), with her lips a little apart as though for the quickened breathing of eagerness that has been a-running, and her white teeth glistening between like the pure milk of human kindness, and her cheeks aflush with the transparent golden-pink of a ripening peach, and her head thrown back, and her chin tilted forward, and her two eyes gazing forth—each under an ineffable half-width of lid; and nobody a penny wiser about the prayer.

"Ha! Come in; come in," Father Mostyn was

saying. "'Take stock of our lamp. Ha! the glory makes you blink. That's better than the reprehensible Ullbrig habit of carrying lighted candles with us to see who 's at the front door, and setting our guests on fire while we shake hands; or inviting 'em into darkness and bidding 'em stand still and break nothing until we 've got the shutters up and can strike a match. Tell Archdeaconess Dixon when you get back that his reverence has a twenty-four candle-power lamp lavishing its glory in the hall—just for shaking hands and hanging your hat up by—it 'll do her good to know!" The Spawer, who had already been passing his recognitions to Pam over Father Mostyn's shoulder, leaned across the bicycle and shook hands with her to her heart's content in his own happy fashion—a fashion that had nothing of offensive familiarity about it, nor any chill of reserve, but was as sunny as you please and honestly affectionate. Had he pulled her ear or patted her cheek or kissed her, it would have seemed to come quite naturally to the occasion under the circumstances, without any suggestion of impropriety. But he did n't do any of these things—nor did he call her by any name—which Pam noticed. He simply shook the little brown handful of fingers that had been so busy on his behalf these two days, and smiled upon her.

"Pam, dear child," his Reverence was saying, "how 's the table getting on? Ready to sit down to, is

she?"

Then he turned to the Spawer.

"You 've brought your appetite with you, Wynne?" he charged him, with solicitous interrogation.

"All there is of it," the Spawer affirmed pleasantly. "They advised me to up at the Cliff (if it 's not betraying confidences)." A rendering of the vernacular less literal, perhaps than elegant. "Noo, ye 'll get some marma-lade!" had been Miss Bates' reflection on the subject. "... So I 've been keeping it up to concert pitch all day."

"Come along, then," said Father Mostyn. "Let 's all go and take the table as we find it. No use waiting for formality's sake. We 'll manage to get a feed off it somehow."

And spreading out a benedictory semicircle of arm, whose left extremity was about Pam and whose right fell paternally on the Spawer's shoulder, he gathered them both before him like a hen coaxing her chickens, and so urged them invitingly to the feast.

Ah! but that was a feed to remember. The glorious, never-to-be-forgotten first of many of its kind. The same old room it was in which the Spawer had sat with Father Mostyn two nights ago, but you could never have known it without being told. There was no longer any need to walk like a prisoner in shackles, sliding one foot past the other for fear of

treading on crockery, or balancing outstretched arms as you went against the dizzy inclination to sit down. All the things by the side of the wall and the skirting-board (including the cobwebs) were either gone or unrecognisably reduced; cunningly compressed into semblances of Chesterfields and ottomans and settees. And all about the room were traces of Pam's taste and explorative industry; everything that had a good side to show showed it, and even those that had n't had been coaxed by Pam's alluring fingers into looking as though they had.

You may guess if the Spawer tried politely to make believe he did n't notice any change in the room.

But the crowning glory of the place and of all Pam's achievements—it was the table. Four candles lighted it and a brass lamp, and they were every one lighted to start with. There was a chicken-pie in a Mother Hubbard frill, with its crust as brown as a hazel-nut, and just nicely large enough to feed half a dozen, which is a capital size for three; and a noble sirloin of beef, fringed with a hoary lock of horse-radish, and arching its back in lonely majesty on an oval arena of Spode; and there was a salad, heaped up high under the white and yellow chequer of sliced eggs, and a rosy tomato comb, in a glorious old oaken bowl as big as a kettle-drum, china-lined, bound with three broad hoops of silver and standing on three massive silver claws; and there were some

savory eggs, deliciously embowered in their greenery of mustard and cress, and a tinned tongue, tissue-papered in white and red, and garnished with stars and discs and crescents as though it had never known what it was to sleep in darkness in an air-tight tin under Fussitter's counter; and some beetroot, brimming in a blood-red lake of vinegar; and whipped creams, and a trifle pudding, all set out on snowy white damask amid an arctic glitter of glass and silver and cutlery. Except the cheese, which was a Camembert, and went by itself on the grained side-cupboard, where all the tumblers and wine-glasses had been congregated before.

And they sat down to table.

Father Mostyn took his place at the head, in the ecclesiastical high-backed arm-chair of oak, facing the beef and the window, with the big buck-horn hafted carving-knife to his right hand and the carving fork to his left for insignia of office, each of them rearing its nose over a monstrous cut-glass rest, shaped like a four-pound dumbbell. Pam sat on his left. And the Spawer sat exactly in front of Pam on the other side of the table; whenever they raised their eyes they were looking at each other. While they were drawing their serviettes across their knees, Father Mostyn keeled abstractedly over the arm of his chair towards Pamela with his eyelids curiously lowered, as though he were trying to catch sight of a fly on his nose, and named her in a spirit of gentle

musing:

"... Pam ... dear child?"

Then Pam threw up her chin fairly and squarely and fearlessly, after the manner of one who had nothing to be ashamed of, looking into the Spawer's eyes without flinching, first of all, and thence to the very gates of Heaven over his shoulder and crossed herself, and lifted her clear, bell-like voice in pronouncement, and said:

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Whereupon Father Mostyn crossed himself too—with easy familiarity, as though he were sprinkling surplus snuff off his fingers; being a priest, and in the profession, so to speak—his neck stretched out the while like that of a Christmas Eve turkey, and his nose thrown up raptly over the beef; after which he let his serviette slip through his knees, and took hold of both arms of his chair, and flung himself recklessly out over them at right angles, first to one side of the table and then to the other, in bland survey, like Punch delivering his immortal gallows oration, and said:

"Pam, dear child.... What are you giving us?" as though Pam had not reiterated every dish to him half a dozen times that very night.

"... There are the herrings," she suggested, assuring herself by a sight of them, with a hopeful slant of inquiry for his Reverence's approval.

"Ha!" Father Mostyn cast up recognisant eyes to Heaven as though he had not understood this signal act of mercy to form one of the items of Pam's grace, and must needs now add a special acknowledgment. "Beautiful! beautiful! Pass them along, dear child. A plebeian fish at three a penny, but one of many virtues, whose sole faults lie in its price and name. Fortunately, those are faults not likely to affect the epigastrium. Wynne, my boy." He received the dish from Pam's fingers and transferred it magnificently over the roast beef to the Spawer's side of the table; a gesture that made rare caviare of it at once, "... let me persuade you. Herring olives prepared according to the recipe of my late maternal uncle, Rear-Admiral Sir Alexander Cornelius...."

And so they entered upon it, with little thin, crustless sandwiches of brown bread and butter (Pam's making) to accompany the olives, and the Spawer went twice without shame,—just as Pam had arranged he should,—and it acted beautifully. You would never have known she 'd risen from the table if you had n't been watching to see what became of them. And after that they turned their eyes towards the beef with one accord, and Father Mostyn uttered a dread "Ha!" and seized it between knife and fork like an executioner, and whipped it over and stuck the fork critically into the undercut, holding his nose very high, and knitted at the brows, and looking terribly down the sides of it through his lashes, and

drew the knife (another awful moment for Pam) and melted in a rapturous smile as the blade sank easily, out of sight, and said:

"Beautiful! beautiful! ... Cuts like a bar of butter, dear child."

In such wise they embarked upon the beef stage, and laid siege to Pam's succulent salad, with its tender, juicy greens and its mellifluous cream sauce. Then the pie passed in turn, nobly supported by the savory eggs, and similarly succeeded all the other items of the feed—(a glorious procession)—the stewed plums, the custard, the trifle pudding, the port-wine jellies, the whipped creams, and the cheese, with the wherewithal to wash them down and cleanse the palate for its discriminating duties—St. Julia winking rosily in the tinted claret glasses by the sides of Father Mostyn and the Spawer; simple lemonade in a tumbler for Pam to put her lips to.

And all the while they talked. At least, the Spawer and Father Mostyn did. Pam said less with her lips, but her eyes were always present in the heart of the conversation—so frankly and sweetly and freely communicative, and with such beautiful brows of sympathetic understanding playing above them that one never felt any need of the spoken word. Indeed, one did n't even notice it was n't there. That was because she possessed the unconscious subtle faculty of extending her words through manner; of perfuming them, as it were, with her own

sweet, ineffable identity, so that what had been a mere brief-spoken monosyllable, unmemorable of itself, became through her a complete sentence in physical expression, memorable for some beautiful phrase of neck or lips, or brows, or all of them together, perhaps, in one melodious gesture.

And after they 'd saturated themselves through and through with the talk of things musical till the girl's eyes were wonder-worlds, swimming gloriously aloft amid whole systems of consonant stars, and the priest was a-hum in every fibre of him with fragmentary bars and snatches of quotation under the gathering force of musical remembrance, like a kettle coming to the boil. After all this they passed in procession over the echoing flagstones into the far room, where was the little sprightly old-fashioned spinster of a Knoll piano, exhaling still a faint pungency of ammonia from its recent ablutions, with new candles in its sconces and an open copy of Rossini's Stabat Mater laid suggestively on its desk, and all its yellow ivories exposed in a four-octave smile of seduction.

And here Pam brought those familiar etceteras of hospitality with which the Spawer had already made acquaintance; and filled the pipe as unconcernedly and as skilfully as though she were a seasoned smoker; and sliced the three rounds of lemon for his Reverence's glass.

And they made music—glorious music—on the

little short-compassed upright. They had the concerto, of course—what was written of it—which Pam, nursing intent clasped hands in her lap, with her head erect and her red lips folded and her eyes aglow, adjudged more beautiful the more she heard it. Oh, what a glorious thing it was to be a composer, and have one's head filled with beautiful music in place of other people's ordinary humdrum ideas! And Father Mostyn passed a rhapsodical hand over his shining scalp and said: "Ha! ... makes one long for a few hairs to stand on end in tribute to it. Such music as that seems somehow to be wasted on a bald head."

And they had the A-flat prelude again, that sealed Pam's eyes with the great round tears of remembrance. And the Black Study they had; and some of Bach's Englische Suiten; and bits of Beethoven, the Waldstein; and the III; and part of the "Emperor"; and snatches of Brahms—all just as they came into the Spawer's head, with little illuminative discourses to accompany them—a sort of running verbal analytic programme, as it were. And Father Mostyn gave them reminiscences of Mario and Grisi and Braham and the great Lablache, and sang "I am no better than my Fathers," from Elijah.

Not a bit better, really—if indeed as good.

And the Spawer furnished humorous illustrations of all the great players. De Pachmann, with the high, uplifted finger and exquisite smile; and the statuesque Paderewski, sitting stonily at the

piano; and the oblivious Rubinstein; and the imperious Liszt; and the pedagogic Von Bülow; all of them as funny as could be, with real musicianly insight at the back of them; most felicitous examples of instructive comparative criticism.

And Pam had her first lesson this night, and was quite ready to begin the second when that was over; and there seemed not more happiness in Heaven.

CHAPTER XII

It was midnight when Pam breathed guarded good-by over her shoulder to Father Mostyn and the Spawer in the roadway, and let herself noiselessly out of their sight through the post-house door.

Up above, in the bedroom that lay over the passage, a rhythmic sonorous sound gave token that the postmaster, at least, was enjoying the abundant fruits of blessed repose. In darkness Pam tiptoed to the little clean kitchen, and cautiously lighting the candle that her own hands had left ready for her on the corner of the dresser, held it gently about her on all sides in final inspection, for the observance of any little neglected duties that might be the better for doing before she took her way to bed. To one side of the fireplace there was the little clothes-horse standing—more, by right, a pony—gaily caparisoned

with clocked hose and plain; long stockings and short; grey woollens; unstarched collars; and sundry inspiriting pink and white frilled trappings, that should have given mettle to the sorriest nag alive. Through the internal brightness of remembered music Pam's practical mind went out instinctively to the stockings. She set down her candle, and ran them one by one like gloves over her left hand as far as the foot, working her fingers within the hidden-most recesses of toe and heel for any signs of the wanting stitch. Out of some dozen pairs it wanted in three that forthwith did not return to the little clothes-pony, but went over her left arm in token of unsoundness. With these dangling at her skirt she made quick, noiseless tracks over the kitchen floor to acquire the necessary paraphernalia of repair—for nobody ever recognised the superiority of time present over time past or future better than Pam, or, recognising it, put the recognition to more practical account—and slipping a purposeful finger through the ringed handle of the candlestick, prepared to fetch worsted from the kitchen parlor.

She took the knob in her hand and entered naturally enough, opening the door gently first of all, against any grease-sputtering displacement of air, and keeping watch on the candle's behavior as she brought it round from the shelter of her bosom and passed it in front of her across the threshold. Quite two steps forward she had taken with her eyes on the

little yellow flame, before something strange about the feel of the room plucked peremptorily at her attention as though with live fingers, and brought her up on her heel, gazing in front of her, to an involuntary quick-drawn breath of surprise. On the wool mat, in the centre of the square table where they gathered at meals, stood the lamp, still burning dimly, and in the obscurity beyond the lamp, the blur as of a second globe, where a human head lay bowed in the supporting hollow of two pallid hands.

Head and hands of the schoolmaster, beyond a doubt. How well Pam knew them; the long nervous fingers, that always flew to his throat when he addressed her, as though to throttle back the lurking dog of his dislike; the high, bulging forehead, with the compressed temples and the pulse in their veins; the whiteness and brightness of the scalp where the hair should have been. Oh, how Pam had studied them times out of number, like some strange, unlearnable lesson, trying to get them into her head and realise what they meant, and why—but never, perhaps, with her soft eyelashes fringing a greater perplexity than when she looked over them to-night. Never before had Pam found him—or any other of the household—awaiting her arrival when she returned from a late sitting with Father Mostyn. Was he troubled? Was he ill?

It was but a momentary glimpse of him that she caught, with head and hands together; but in that

one moment he seemed all these things. The next, while Pam was revolving in her mind whether she should speak his name or cough, or rattle her matches, or depart more softly than she had come—the attitude dissolved. The long spectral fingers slid downwards (so quickly that he might have been merely drawing them across his cheeks when Pam entered) and his body rose from the chair to a standing posture. He gave no look at Pam, though his averted head showed recognition of her presence.

For a second or so there was silence in the room, Pam gazing over her candle at the drawn white face—whiter and more drawn than usual, it seemed to her—with the guilty thought beating within her that once again she had brought herself before this man unwelcomely. Then, seeing that she was the intruder, and that he, risen to full height from the chair, showed no signs of addressing her, or even of actively ignoring her, but stood passive, as though she had summoned his attention and he was simply giving it, without prejudice to any explanation she might wish to make—begged his pardon (for Heaven knows what) in a voice of infinite apology and contrition.

"I hope I have n't disturbed you..." she said. He bit his lip over a strained short "No."

"I did n't mean to. I only came in for some worsted ... Emma used it last. A grey ball with three needles in it, the color of uncle's stockings. May I

look for it? ... It 's by the Bible, I think."

Without a word he turned on his heel to the sideboard where the big everyday reading Bible lay, and commenced a silent search. Something about the desolate droop of his thin, threadbare shoulders and the weary aimlessness of his seeking, sent (as his rear prospect always seemed to send) a thrill of spontaneous pity through Pam's heart. Why she pitied him, or exactly what there was about the shiny obverse of him to stimulate the emotion, not for the life of her could she have told.

He was some considerable time with his coat-tails turned towards her, and seemed, by the laborious stooping of his shoulder, quagmired in his search, she suggested—with such gentleness of breathing as would not have rocked the flame of her candle—that perhaps ... if he would let her ... she might be able....

Immediately he spun round from the side cupboard as though she had struck him, with the needles flashing in his hand.

"Is this your worsted?" he said.

"Oh ... thank you so much!"

Her eyes corroborated the color in an instant, and she started forward with grateful extended hand to relieve him of the necessity for coming more than halfway across the kitchen to meet her.

He took the words, but his eyes refused to admit the look. "No thoroughfare" seemed eternally writ up

over them. Pam gazed a second at the stern intimation, and then, cuddling her candle to her for departure, turned—softly, so that he might not construe one single grain of anger into her going—for the door. Halfway there she looked back irresolutely over a shoulder, hesitating whether to speak or not.

"Your lamp ... is getting low," at length she ventured. "I think, perhaps ... it may want a little more oil. Shall I refill it for you?" she inquired solicitously. "The smell may give you a headache."

For answer he stooped over the table on both hands and blew out the convulsed flame with two short breaths. A thin, acrid column of smoke from the red wick commenced to wend its way upward, like a soul in tedious migration.

"I am going to bed," he said,

Pam's quick ear caught the sudden collapse of utter weariness in his voice as he said it. Something in the sound of it smote her soul to pity, as though she had had a momentary sight of his shoulders.

"You were not ... sitting up ... for me?" she asked —begged would be a better word.

"Why should I sit up ... for you?" he asked her; and his two hands went up to his collar.

"I don't know ... why you should," she said, plucking her reply to pieces, petal by petal, in soft embarrassment, as though it had been a flower. All the working of his lips, it seemed to her, could not

conceal the sardonic amusement her answer stirred in him. Red shame rushed up the slim column of the girl's neck and plunged for hiding in the roots of her hair. "... And of course ... you did n't," she hastened to add.

"Of course."

Whether he repeated her words in mere unconcerned assent, or pressed upon them with the hard knuckle of sarcasm, or was using them interrogatively, Pam could not make sure, nor dared she ask, though she delayed awhile with her eyes fixed for solution upon his face.

"I 'm glad you did n't," she said gently, and in silence led the way into the little clean kitchen. "You will want a fresh candle," she said, putting her own down once more on the dresser, and reaching the empty holder, that by household consent was allowed to pertain to his exclusive use.

Out of a drawer in the dresser she produced a piece of newspaper; tore off a strip; narrowed its width by folding; bound it neatly round the base of the candle; pressed the candle securely into its socket; lighted it from her own, and handed it—after its flame was sufficiently established—to the waiting man.

He took it awkwardly and tardily enough, rocking so long in silence on his feet before acceptance, with head thrown forward and chin bearing heavily over his collar, that for some

moments Pam had doubts whether he was not fast asleep and about to fall prone across the outstretched candle and her. But roused at length, as it would seem, by her prolonged gaze of inquiry, he lifted his head and extended an uncertain hand—a hand so uncertain, indeed, that at the first attempt it went wide of the candlestick altogether. At the second, more through Pain's management than his, thumb and finger closed upon it and he turned to go. The look of his dazed eyes and the dry, white lips that rubbed impotently sideways upon each other to shape a soundless "Thank you," sent a great surging tide of solicitous alarm through Pam's bosom. She was after him in a moment.

"Mr. Frewin ... Mr. Frewin.... Are you ill?"

CHAPTER XIII

His foot was already on the first step when she urged her bated voice of inquiry after him. He stayed for a moment so, as though he lacked strength to ascend or purpose to speak, and then turned upon her very slowly.

"You ask that," he said, compressing his words through bloodless lips, hard and set. "Don't you know? Can't you see?"

The fixed, meaningful way he looked at her, as

though his face were a written answer, and she could read it if she would, and the strange, underlying emphasis of his question, took Pam altogether by surprise. Did n't she know? Could n't she see? All the dread sicknesses under the sun seemed to swathe him and envelope him in their hideous mantles as she gazed ... a fearful kaleidoscopic counterpane of ailments. Which of all these had her blindness overlooked?

Did n't she know? Could n't she see?

"See what?" she begged, in the whispered hush of a voice that besought an answer it scarcely dared to hear. For, framed in the narrow dark inlet of the staircase, with the candle casting corpse-hollows over his eyes, and sinking his cheeks under shadow, and sharpening his nose, and hardening his nostrils—to the girl's disturbed imagination he seemed dead and coffined already. "Oh, tell me, please!—what I ought to see. Oh, I am so sorry! Is there anything you want? Is there anything I can get you?"

"You know what I want," he said, and Lazarus, wakened from the dead, might have spoken his first words in just such a voice.

"*I* know what you want?" repeated Pam, falling back a little dismayed before the directness of his charge, and the black inability of her mind to meet it.

"... You," he said.

"Me?" said Pam again, more vacantly still, taking

the word from him, and trying it in turn, like a key, upon all those sayings that had gone before, to see which of their several senses it might fit and open. Then, all of a sudden she saw the door it opened, and the threshold it led over, and let the key fall, as it were, from her hands, and covered her face hotly with her ten small fingers. "Oh, no, no, no!" she panted. "You don't mean that."

She opened a place in her fingers to look at him through, in the silence that followed, like a fawn staring startled from out the high stalks of a thicket, and let both hands slip downward to her skirts with the limp fall of bewilderment. To think this was the secret of his disfavor; this the reason for all his anger, and all her self-interrogations. That he loved her.

He laid down his candle on the dresser beside her own, and ran the finger of his left hand looseningly round the inner rim of his collar, as though it had suddenly grown tight about him.

"Why not that?" he said, in a voice so low and natureless and hoarse that it might have issued from a man of straw, for all the tone it gave.

"Because ... oh ... because of everything," Pam told him, with troubled eyes and lips and fingers. "I never expected it. It 's all so sudden."

"Sudden," he said.

Pam moved her lips in mournful affirmation. It cut her to the quick to hurt him.

"I 'm afraid so," she said, laying the words soothingly over the raw in his soul. "... Terribly sudden."

"... When it 's been going on ... for two years. Ever since ... I came. You call that sudden?"

"So long as that?" said Pam, in open-eyed amaze. "Oh, I never knew it. Indeed I did n't. I had n't the faintest idea."

He passed his hand across his forehead with a look of pain.

"... And I thought I could n't keep it from you—even when I tried. I fancied you read me through and through, and understood what I wanted to ask of you—but could n't, till now. You looked as though you did. Did n't you? Don't play with me. Tell me. You must have known."

Pam shook a head of pitying negation.

"It was n't that I did n't try," she told him, "... for I tried my best. But I could n't. I never thought ... you cared one little bit about me. If I 'd thought you cared for me ... there are lots of unkind things I 'd never have done that I did do, without thinking. I, would n't have followed you into the room when you were alone, and looked at you, and tried to make you look at me, and spoken to you. Never. You 'll believe I would n't when I say so, won't you? All the time I was only trying to make friends with you—that I was already, though I did n't know it. And all the time you thought ... that I saw what was the

matter with you, and knew why you would n't look at me, and what you meant when you turned your back. But I did n't. Indeed I did n't. Oh, how spiteful and cruel you must have thought me," she said, with the beautiful wetness of tears about her lashes. "And I did n't mean it for cruelty a bit. I meant it for kindness. It 's all been a mistake from the first."

"Is it a mistake ... now?" he asked.

"A mistake now?" said Pam, and looked at him for a moment; and then drew a breath, and looked at him again; and drew another breath, and still looked at him; while her lower lip broke loose and fluttered a little, like a hovering butterfly, and stopped, and fluttered a second time, and her lashes fell by an almost imperceptible shade—less a falling of the lashes, indeed, than a falling of something not definable—a thin, gauzy, darkening veil of trouble, it seemed to be, over the very look itself. "I hope not," she said; but her voice and her eyes and her lips belied the hope she spoke of. "We understand each other now ... don't we?"

"What do we understand?" he asked huskily.

"I thought you knew," Pam said, setting her gaze on him, in intrepid wonderment to think he should comprehend so badly, or so soon forget. "I 've just ... been telling you."

"I know nothing," he said, and then in a sudden husky outburst of avowal: "There is only one thing I want to know. I 've told you what it is. Have you

nothing to say in return?"

The unavailing exertion of trying to raise his lead-heavy voice clear of a low whisper made him stop to cough—the hard, dry cough that weeks of patient nursing and nights of anxious solicitude had taught Pam to know so well.

"Nothing ... that I should like to say," Pam answered unsteadily. "Nothing that you would wish to hear me say. I thought ... I 'd said everything. Oh, please ... don't ask me to say any more. It might only make things worse."

He swallowed time upon time in slow succession.

"And this is the end of all my waiting?"

"If you 'll let it, please, it is," Pam begged him, very pleadingly for herself; very sorrowfully for him.

"I can't let it," he blurted after a while. "You don't know what you are asking of me. I can't give you up."

"But I 'm not yours to give," Pam protested, with an awed voice, at this unexpected assumption of possession.

"Whose are you?" he cried

"Nobody's, of course," Pam said, in meek submission, "except my own."

"You could be mine ... if you would," he told her, grappling with his throat again. "Just for the saying of a word you could. I 've waited for you for two years. Is one word too much to give ... for two years'

waiting?"

"Ginger waited for me longer than that," Pam said, very simply. "And I said 'No' to Ginger."

"Who was Ginger, to want you?" he exclaimed. "You could never have married Ginger."

"I did n't," said Pam quietly. "But Ginger loved me."

"I love you," he said fiercely.

"Ginger loved me first," Pam maintained stoutly. "And others loved me before Ginger. If I 'd said to them what they wanted me to say to them and what you want me to say to you, there would never have been any question of your asking me."

"Why did n't you let me die ... when I had the chance?" he demanded bitterly. "But you were kind to me then. You took advantage of me. You were kind when I was ill and could n't help myself. Death stood as near to me as I stand to you ... but day and night you stood between us both and saved me."

"Oh, no, no!" Pam disclaimed hastily, in twofold fear and modesty, shrinking before the acceptance of such an obligation. "It was n't I that saved you. It was you yourself that got strong and better. I only sat by you and did what little I could; but it was nothing at all ... really."

"Nothing at all," he said, and clenched his fist in assurance. "It was everything. Why did I get stronger and better—but for you? Because you were by me, and because I wanted you ... and could n't bear to

leave you. Look," he said, standing back from her suddenly, as though to give her full view of his statement, "do you know there were times ... times when I could have turned my face to the wall and died for the mere wishing?"

"But you would never have done that," Pam whispered, in hushed alarm.

"Why should n't I have done it?" he asked her, "... when death was so easy and living so hard? You alone stopped me from doing it. The thought of you and the sight of you, and the hope of you. Often and often I was looking at you ... when you thought I was asleep."

"Sometimes I saw you," said Pam.

"... And making up my mind whether to die ... or risk living ... for your sake. But I never could die ... because of you. And once, when you had been a long while gone ... I said to myself: 'How easy to slip off now ... before she comes back' ... and just as I was wondering whether there would be time ... you came in, and stooped over me and kissed me. How could I die after that? Once I made up my mind to kiss you back ... but my lips had n't strength. You saw them move, and asked me if I wanted a drink, and I said 'Yes'; but I did n't. And you cried over me, too."

"I was sorry for you," said Pam. "I wanted you to get better."

"Are n't you sorry for me now?" he asked. "... Now that my mind is ill ... as my body was then?"

The terrible earnestness of his love troubled her. Love before she had witnessed in plenty, but never love like this. It was as though she stood with clasped hands before some burning homestead that her own unintending fingers had fired, and saw the fierce wind fan the flames, and heard the cry for succor from within ... and could do nothing. Oh, it was horrible! For a while they looked at each other and said nothing, for each feared speaking; he, lest he might divert Pam's answer; Pam, because she had no answer to divert.

"Well?" he said at length. "Have you nothing to say to me?"

Pam only shook her head. What had she to say, and how could she say it when her own great heart was hammering away like a stone-mason in the place where her voice should have been.

"Not even a word?" he said, with a broken sob. "Won't you say ... you 'll try and care for me ... if I can make you? Is it too much to ask that?"

Pam put her hands to her face.

"Oh ... I don't know. What am I to say? What am I to do?"

"... Do nothing," he said bitterly.

"But I want to do something," Pam protested desperately—though her own shrinking conscience told her how little. "... And I don't say I won't try. But perhaps ... I could never learn. I don't know. How am I to know? And if I say I 'll try ... and can't in the end

... what a dreadful thing for us both.... Oh, are you quite sure there 's nothing short of love that will do?" she asked, with the lameness that can get no further, and wrenched her hands, and looked at him in helpless appeal.

"That means you won't try?" he said; and she could see his hand close tight upon the dresser.

"Oh, no, no, no ... I will try!" Pam cried, charging blindly down the open roadway of consent, for fault of any other way to turn. "... If you wish it, I 'll try. But oh, please, it is n't the least bit of a promise ... and you must n't ... must n't build on it. And you must n't try and force me to learn ... or be angry with me if I 'm slow ... or can't. Perhaps I can't. Oh, it may very well be that I can't ... for all my trying.

"... And even ... if I ever grew to care anything for you ... in the way you want—and I dare n't think or say. It all seems so sudden and unreal. It seems as though I were dreaming it. Last night—half an hour ago even—I never thought you wanted to speak to me or have anything to do with me at all, and now—you 're asking me to try and love you. And even if I grow to care for you in that way (and I don't know. Oh, you must n't think I 'm promising) I should n't want ... I mean it would have to be ... oh, for a long time. Years, perhaps. Longer than ever you cared to wait. I told ... somebody once, when they asked me—what you 've been asking me, that I never meant to

get married. And if I did ... it would be like acting a story to them—as they said I was doing at the time. And I 've said 'No' to such lots of others too ... and now to say 'Yes' to anybody (and I 'm only saying half 'Yes'—only a quarter 'Yes'—to you) seems, somehow, like breaking faith. It seems mean ... and unfair. And anyway it could n't ... could n't possibly be yet. Could n't be for ever such a long time. Perhaps you 'd never want to wait so long as that."

"Wait?" He thrust out his hand desperately to shut this dangerous back-door of her concession. "With you at the end of my waiting ... I would wait till the Judgment Day."

The dreary, dogged patience of the man's passion chilled Pam. It rose up high in her mind like an awesome black monument of Patience, and cast its great shadow over the brightness of her life—on and on and on interminably, out of sight to the dull sun-setting of her clays. If she could have recalled her words then. If she could have had the strength, the moral strength, to throw him aside from her then and there—at never mind what momentary cost to their feelings. All her soul, she knew, was striving impotently to cast off the encumbrance of him—but the strength was lacking. Strength to be cruel; strength to be kind. Because she could not bring herself to deal the one smart blow that the moment required with her own hand ... she was throwing herself contemptibly upon the protection of the

Future; making herself the Future's ward, and trusting, in some blind, unreasoning fashion, that her guardian would be responsible for her when the time came, and do for her what she had lacked the daring to do for herself, and free her without consequence (if so needed), and deal happiness all round with that lavish hand for which the Future is, and has been, and ever will be, so extolled.

Wild, fatal fantasy of Pam's—that she shared in common with every man, woman, and temporising child of this self-deluded, procrastinating world. For the Future is that dread witch that, appearing first under the guise of a sweet and amiable old lady, turns suddenly into the red-eyed, horrid old hag of to-day.

But alas! The compact was drawn and signed and sealed. What consequence that Pam imposed a hundred feverish reservations and supplications, and qualifications and amendments, and loopholes and contingencies upon her little old lady in the signing—and seemed to be granted them every one? Into this little old lady's house she signed herself for all that, and henceforth all her goings and comings, and sleepings and wakings were no longer her sweet own, as heretofore, but under the authority and subject to the control of the little sweet amiable old lady—who was only biding her good time (as you may be sure) to snap into the horrid, red-eyed hag we wot of, and fall upon Pam with the black venom

of her malignant nature.

All through the remaining hours till dawn and daylight the cough of the schoolmaster rang out monotonously, dull and muffled, from beneath the bedclothes like a funeral bell, and Pam, the only other awake in that household to hear it, lay and listened to its tolling with great, wide eyes staring at the darkness of the ceiling, and at the darkness beyond the foot of the bed, and at the darkness where the door was, and sometimes passionately into the smothered darkness of her own pillow, and said to herself, with a wondering horror:

"When daybreak comes ... shall I wake?"

CHAPTER XIV

Green July, gliding smoothly on the noiseless axles of its diurnal wheels, gives way at last to golden August, and beneath the assiduous burning of the sun the cornfields begin to brown like the crust of a pasty under the brasing iron. It is the mystic eve of harvest, that consummation of the farmer's year, and all the countryside is palpitating with it. Everywhere the talk is of cutting, and men, on meeting, cast anxious eyes from each other's faces to the sky and ask:

"Will it 'owd [hold], think ye?"

And while this vast metamorphosis of color is creeping over the land, and the countryside seems beating like a breast towards the consummation of its great purpose, Pam and the piano and the Spawer and Father Mostyn grow daily into a bond of deeper sympathy, and the wondrous ripening process, so visible in externals, is going on no less surely within their own hearts. On the little cracked Vicarage piano Pam practises assiduously, and such is her zeal for the labor, and such her sense of loyal gratitude to the setter of it and her desire to fulfil his instructions that, by sheer force of love alone, she keeps pace

with what he teaches and wins his admiring praise for her progress. Sometimes they gather at Father Mostyn's, cutting into chicken-pies one night and finishing them off another. Sometimes Father Mostyn and Pam walk up to Cliff Wrangham for the benefit of the better piano, and compare the Archdeaconess's cookery—without comment, and very kindly—and are set back by the Spawer, filled with music and affection.

A state of things which greatly indignates the orphan Mary Anne, who cries aloud to herself:

"Is there nawbody good enough for 'im at Cliff Wrangham bud 'e mun gan 'is ways an' fetch 'em fro' Oolbrig?"

And every morning, with the habit of second nature, the Spawer goes forth and sits on the lane gate about Pam's time, and feels a sense of emptiness somewhere—as though he 'd gone without his breakfast—when she does n't come. But when she does, and he sees her hat or her blue Tam-o'-Shanter sailing briskly along the hedgerow, his released expectancy curls up into smiles like stretched wire, and he strolls to meet her as though his face had never known doubt, and accompanies her henceforth to the end of her journey, so that the girl's brisk walk, divided now between the two of them, is a gentle amble scarcely quicker than Tankard's 'bus that daily rumbled through Ullbrig.

Their communion on these occasions, as at all

times, is simple and sacred. The perspicacious reader who has been preparing for tender dialogues full of love and its understanding will have to suffer the penalty of his perspicacity, for the sweet trivialities of love are in no way touched upon. They talk of music; of struggles with "flesh" of technique; of composition; of the meaning of music—if it has any. They talk of French, and they talk French, of the recognised question and answer pattern, till Pam gains quite a vocabulary of sea-coast words, and could make herself understood intelligibly—and certainly prettily—to any Frenchman on any cliff you like to name. And they talk quite sincerely about the sea and the blueness of it; and bend down their heads for the better appreciation of this great round bubble of color; and draw each other's attention to clouds, to bees, to butterflies, and nameless insects fluttering by. At other times, the Spawer talks to her of his student life abroad and of his present-day ambitions; the sort of glory he covets and the sort of glory by which he sets no store. And the talk is of composers and schools of composers; and players and schools of players—thick as shoals of herrings—till Pam, who never forgets a precious word of what this deified mortal tells her, but can reproduce its exact use and inflection for her own hearing at any future time, is full to the red lips with critical discernments and differentiations, and could astonish any wandering, way-logged musician who might, for

the sake of illustration, be presumed to find himself in the district, and open subject of his own business with this sweet girl stranger under her Government bag.

Sometimes, towards the end of an evening at Father Mostyn's, the Doctor drops in upon them casually, introducing himself with the invariable "Don't let me distairrb ye"—though it is known he comes for whist. Music appeals to him about as meaningfully as a German band to a stray dog; and being a Scotchman, he says so in the fewest words wherein this hard truth can be contained, nor ceases to manifest a lurking distrust of the piano until they are safely squared round the card-table, and the cards are being cut. In his own Scotch way he is as fond of Pam as can be, and on the strength of this tacit affection asks her bluntly to do whatever he may happen to be in need of at the time.

"Ye 'll hae to gie me another match, Pam," he says unconcernedly, as he deals, without looking at her. "A 'm no alicht yet."

And when she offers it to him, already lighted, he merely holds his pipe-bowl towards her from his mouth, as a matter of course, scooping up his cards and drawing vigorously, while Pam applies the flame, till combustion is effected, when he draws his mouth away.

"Clubs are trumps," says he.

Pam does n't mind his disregard of her in the

least, for you see he does n't mean anything by it, being a Scotchman; but she would enjoy these games better if the exigencies of play did not always pit her against the Spawer, inasmuch as she and he, being the two weak members of the quartette, can never be partnered against such past masters as his Reverence and the Doctor. Eventually, since it proves itself the most equable division of the table, she comes to be the accepted partner of the latter, who does not hesitate to acquaint her, with cutting directness, of any discrepancy in her play.

"What the deil made ye lead trumps, Pam?" he demanded of her, in blank surprise, on one occasion. "Did ye no see me look at ye last time Father Mostyn led them?"

He is a typical hardy Scotsman, all sinew and gristle, and raw about the neck, and thinks little—if indeed at all—concerning dress. For the most part, you will see him bicycling about the roads in meagre knickerbockers that were trousers when he first came to Ullbrig, blue stockings, and heavy-soled boots, with the tags sticking off them like spurs. In other respects, he is a reader of profane literature and avowed sceptic. Between him and his Reverence the Vicar is a standing feud of opinion, which finds vent in many an argumentative battle royal. At the end of one of these tremendous conflicts, that would almost be hand-to-hand at times but for the pacific whiskey-bottle between them, the Doctor rises to his feet,

buttons his coat-collar as a preliminary to departure, and cries vehemently:

"Hey, mon, but there 's na driving sense nor reason into ye. Hand over the whiskey, and I 'll be gone. Ye 're as stubborn as Balaam's donkey."

"Ha! with the same authority, dear brother," his Reverence answers blandly.

"And what authority will that be, pray?" asks the Doctor, bending the stiff neck of the whiskey-bottle towards his tumbler, as though it were his Reverence he had hold of.

"Divine authority, dear brother," says Father Mostyn. "Divine authority."

"Divine authority," says the Doctor. "... Wi' yer meeracles. Mon, hae ye ever hairrd a donkey speak?"

"Ha! frequently, frequently," murmurs his Reverence, focussing a distant point of space through his eyelashes, and waltzing softly, without animus, to and fro in his foot radius.

"Ah 'm no speakin' pairsonally, ye understand," the Doctor says, with a tinge of remonstrance for levity, "but it will hae been in the pulpit ye have hairrd it. Mon, hae ye never read Hume on the Meeracles? Are ye no conversant wi' your Gibbon? D' ye pretend to tell me ye are ignorant o' such men as Reenan and Strauss, and Bauerr and Darrwin, and Thomas Huxley?"

"Estimable people, no doubt, Friend Anderson," the Vicar tells him imperturbably. "... Estimable

people."

"Ah doot ye 've read a wurrd of them," the Doctor pronounces bluntly.

"So much the better for me, dear brother. So much the better for me."

"Mon," says the Doctor, exasperated by this equanimous piety that all his own exasperation cannot exasperate. "... Ye 're a peetifu' creature, an' ah feel shame tae be drinkin' the whiskey o' such as you. Ye go inta chairrch and fill a lot o' puir eegnorant people wi' mair ignorance than they had without ye, teachin' them your fairy tales about apples and sairrpints, and women bein' made oot o' man's ribs (did one ever hearr the like!). Let's awa', an' mind dinna tek inta yer heid ta fall sick this week, or it 'll go harrd wi' ye if ah 'm called."

"Ha! We can die but once, Brother Anderson," the priest tells him cheerfully. "Even all the science and medical skill in the world can't kill us more than that."

And so the moments of these four pass, and the harvest hour approaches, inwardly and outwardly, until at last ... one day...

But in the meanwhile, for all this life of external happiness that Pam shared with others, she was serving her silent apprenticeship in the house of the little old lady. Even when he was furthest from her the schoolmaster clung close to her mind. Each time she laughed, each time she looked into the Spawer's

face, each time she spoke with him she saw inside her—but as plainly as though she had been looking at him in the flesh—the dark figure of the schoolmaster regarding her in mute reproof, with hands to throat and beating temples. The brightest moments of her happiness, indeed, threw this shadow blackly across her mind like the gnomon of a dial when the sun shines clearest. Whenever she returned now from Father Mostyn's or the Spawer's, he was always there sitting up for her. Heaven knows why, for they had little enough to say to one another. He never pressed himself upon her, but by leaving himself to her good pity she felt the claim of him tenfold—lacking the power to withhold what, perhaps, on demand, she might have summoned courage to deny. Always he was dumbly set, like those canvas collecting sheets on Lifeboat Saturdays, for the smallest coppers of her kindness. If she had not looked into the larger kitchen before bed she knew he would never have revealed himself, but she had not the heart to ignore one as little courageous for the winning of her love as she was herself for its defence. At times the thought of what the future had in store for her troubled her so darkly that she knew not how best to shape her present moments. Therefore, in place of shaping, she merely whittled—for every cut this way, a cut that; for every chip off one side, a chip off the other; so that though the rough wood she worked on wore nearer down to her

fingers, it assumed no shape. Through fear of having been too cruel one day she was constantly over-kind the next; and then, what she had lacked to charge in cruelty to him she charged extortionately to herself, paid the bills in silence, and said never another word. But though she could meet these little daily expenditures, there was a great bill slowly mounting, she knew, which should of a surety one day be presented to her. And who should pay that? Who should pay that?

While the music is at Father Mostyn's and the Spawer's she feels to a certain extent in harbor against the evil day. But what shall happen when this harbor is denied her, and for fault of its protection, she must sail out into the open, unprotected sea? What will betide her then? What is life coming to?

Alas! She is soon to know.

One day....

CHAPTER XV

One day the Spawer wakes up suddenly to consciousness, like Barclay in the hedge bottom, and discovers, as his friend Barclay has not infrequently discovered before him, that he is occupying a strange and uncomfortable position. It was on a Tuesday when he made the final effort and awoke definitely

to an actual sense of his location, but he had been blinking at it unseeingly for some while before that. The previous morning Father Mostyn had taken leave of Ullbrig for his few days' annual pike fishing with the Rev. the Hon. Algernon Smythe Trepinway in Norfolk, and this sudden break in the continuity of existence had served as an alarum to the Spawer's long slumber. He woke reluctantly, but with purpose, took his morocco red bathing drawers, his towel and his stick, and without pausing to any appreciable length at the lane gate, plunged across the two fields towards the cliff.

It was a glorious, steadfast blue day. Not a cloud as big as the puff of my lady's powder-box showed itself in any corner of the sky. No breezes, even of the softest, filtered through the hot hedges, or cooled the parched tips of the burning grass blades. Without intermission the sun poured his golden largess down upon the earth from on high, so forcefully that wherever the sunlight rested, it was as though a great hot hand were imposing its weight. Yesterday the harvesting had set in with a vengeance, and now the whole air was a-quiver with the whir of busy blades, whose tireless activity seemed the very music made for slumber, and lulled all other moving things towards somnolent repose.

The beach lay out dazzling in its unbroken smoothness, like white satin, and deserted quite. Not another footstep than his own had been, or in all

probability would be, there that day to tread destructive perforating tracks over its beautiful surface of sand. Up and down, for something like a dozen clear miles of coast, or so far as his eyes could show him, he seemed, like a second Robinson Crusoe, monarch of all he surveyed. The true spirit of the solitude of the lower Yorkshire coast is here. There is no elaboration to the picture; it is plain and lacking detail. Of foliage by the sea there is not a leaf, excepting mere divisional hedges. Fields in cultivation and out of it run to the very edge of the cliff—a sombre cliff of soft, dark earth, stained here and there to unprepossessing rusty red, with trickling chalybeate streams, and showing terrible toothmarks of the voracious sea, that feeds its way inland on this part of the coast at the rate of a yard a year. Looking over the brink of it you can discern as many as half a dozen paths, in various stages of subsidence, that less than that number of years ago led people along the cliff top as the path you stand on leads them now. In other places you may see huge slices of grass land, descending like great steps downwards to the shore in their progress towards ultimate devourance, while warning fissures across the existing pathway show where, perhaps this very winter, another step will be detached and added to the never-ending stairway of demolition.

In a sheltered inlet, where the sea has swept up a thick white carpet of bleached sand, the Spawer

pitches his bathing camp this morning. On other occasions he has trod down here more gladsomely; the sea, murmuring its musical cadences upon a lonely beach, has not made music to him in vain. But for him to-day the sun is a little dim, the sea a little jaded. The inward content that stood interpreter between his soul and his outward worldly joyance is gone from him, and he stands somehow like a stranger in the presence of strange things. Here on the seashore, he has come to play a duet more full of emotion, and more crowded with difficulties than any he knows within the province of music, for it is a duet with his own soul.

In a sense, dimly and vaguely, he has comprehended for a day past, a couple of days past, at the most—Lord help him—a week, that this duet was inevitable. He has been, indeed, since these several days, two men. The second was better than the first, but not much. The second of them held the strings of the conscience bag (slackly, however) and rattled it ominously—though more as a warning, if the truth were told—to give the first his chance of escape. In the heart of the second (if heart it could be called) there lingered a sneaking sympathy with the delinquent first, as for a younger brother. And now, after a mutual game of hide-and-seek, when the one would not look while the other showed, and the other would not show while the other was looking, through a kind of desperate conviction that

something must be done, they had sneaked their two ways down to the beach this morning, prepared (though only badly) to declare themselves to one another, and come to some understanding, though whether this understanding should be creditable or discreditable to both or to either was yet unsettled.

By what subtle, imperceptible paths has he outjourneyed the territory of that great happiness which seemed so lately his, to find himself all suddenly in this unpleasant no-man's land of the imagination? By subtle, imperceptible paths indeed. By the touch of hands; by the gazing of eyes; by the inflection of voice. Time was, in the early days it was, when he could look on Pam's fascinating sprinkling of freckles with an eye as purely interested, and as purely disinterested, as though they had been the specklings of a wild bird's egg. He had begun by making a friend of her. He had come ultimately to regard her as a sister, to whom he had acted in all good faith the strong, reliant, reliable, affectionate, unemotional elder brother—who could have kissed her, and thought no more of that kiss, nor prepared his lips for kisses to come. And now ... what was he going to make of her next? ... of himself? Who but a brother can act the brother? Who but a father—even though he doddle benevolently on his legs and have respectable white hairs—can be sure of acting the father to any daughter not his own? What are the sexes but phosphorus and

sandpaper for the kindling of love's emotion? Already the phosphorus had not wanted signs of impending ignition. Just a very little more rubbing of this friendly intercourse—a day or two ... a week at most ... and the flame would burst out for them both to see. So here let him settle it. What was he going to do?

He did not know what he was going to do.... There were complications.

Complications of his own allowing, remember. Why had he not let it be plainly understood—as soon as his relations with this girl grew—that he was a man with a claim upon him?

Ah! If only he had.

Why had n't he? Had he shirked it? If he had shirked it, then he was indeed guilty.

He did not think he had shirked it ... at least, with intention.

But the idea had come to him. Come to him more than once. Did he not on one occasion at Hesketh's corner make the resolve to tell the girl that he was going to be married?

Yes.

Then why did n't he?

Because he could think of no expression at the time to relieve the news of a certain primitive brutality—a blunt statement quite out of accord with the moment and the mood.

Thought must always be in some measure of

accord with the moment and the mood. You could not say, for instance: "Good morning. What a beautiful day. I am going to be married."

But he had thought the same thought subsequently.

True.

Why had he not acted on it?

Partly for the same reason. And then again ... it seemed so easy in thought and so difficult in effect. He was frightened he might bungle it, and make it sound like an unpalatable caution to the girl. "Don't set your aspirations upon me. I warn you. I am not for you." Faugh! The idea—in this girl's case—was revolting.

Because, therefore, of a little unpleasantness on account, he had run up a long score—prepared to declare himself bankrupt when occasion arose, and involve the girl in his own insolvency. Was that it?

He had certainly avoided anything that might be odious to the girl ... or painful to her feelings—but he had had no ideas of involving her. God forbid!

And the other? The Absent One? What had been his feelings towards her? Had he thought his conduct such as to merit her confidence in him?

He had not thought it undeserving of her confidence. Their relations were of long standing. Before now he had kissed some mutual girl friends in her presence. She had smiled.

Supposing he had kissed them in her absence ...

and she had come subsequently to hear of it? Would she have smiled? Of course he had told her in his letters all about the post-girl—and their present relations?

He had told her the postman was a girl.

Exactly. But what sort of a girl.

Was there more than one sort of a girl? A girl, it seemed to him, was a girl all the world over. The definition was plain enough.

Had he said she was a pretty girl?

Why should he have said that?

Why should he have avoided it?

He had n't avoided it. It was only one of the things he had n't ... specified. Why should he specify a "pretty girl" any more than he should have specified an "ugly one"? Besides ... prettiness was all abstract, and relative, and indefinable. When we called a thing pretty we only meant that it excited that particular degree of emotion in our own mind. Other people might decide upon it as ugly.

Exactly. Had he, by any chance, spoken of Cliff Wrangham as a delightful corner of the world's end?

He believed he had.

And he had mentioned Father Mostyn?

Certainly. He had alluded to him.

In affectionate and laudatory terms?

He did n't know about affectionate and laudatory terms. Perhaps he had. He had spoken of him as he bad found him. Father Mostyn had always

been kind. In writing he had no doubt alluded to that kindness.

More than once?

Doubtless more than once. Kindness was not such a common quality that it would not bear a little repetition.

He had mentioned the Doctor.

Some of him. His stockings, he believed, and his strange happiness in speaking the truth.

How often had he met the Doctor?

Perhaps half a dozen times.

And the post-girl?

Let him see....

Exactly. He could n't count the number. He had mentioned with some small degree of detail a man who was but a cypher in his visit, and he had overlooked altogether the figure which was its numerator, so to speak.

Suppose he had put the case, as it stood, before a referee, chosen from the Sons of the World. Suppose he 'd said, for instance: There was a fellow once, engaged to a girl. The girl went with a maiden aunt by marriage to Switzerland for the aunt's health. It was arranged that while they were there the fellow was to go into obscurity by the sea-coast and complete some great compositional work he had the vanity to think he could achieve, and that, after the girl's return, either towards the end of November or the early part of January, these two were to be

married. But during this obscurity the fellow came upon an altogether unusual sample of a post-girl. She was supposed to be derived from a family of importance; had all the inherited gifts of a lady; the low, musically-balanced voice; the symmetrical, graceful figure and carriage; beautiful teeth and a smile like dawn. Suppose everything about the girl appealed to this fellow tremendously. Suppose they became ... well, call it friends. Suppose he taught her music and French, and met her as often as possible. Suppose all his moments were occupied in thinking of her. Suppose the life he had left and the life (presumably) he was going back to were receded so far away that he could scarcely distinguish them, or his obligations to them. Suppose that the girl was to all intents and purposes his little cosmos, out of which he indited letters to the Other Girl—letters that made no mention of the existing state of things. Suppose, now, he laid this case, just as it stood, before any man of the world. What, did he imagine, would that man of the world decide upon him? What would he think of him?

Another man of the world, perhaps.

Probably so. And suppose this other girl had been his sister, and he had been some other man, and the circumstances were as they were, and some enlightened friend had informed him of them. Well?

On the face of it, he might be tempted to step in and send the fellow to the devil.

And in his own case?

In his own case? Summarising like that, without any partiality, but condensed into a cold-blooded abstraction, he supposed he might seem deserving of being sent to the devil, too—if he were not there already. Every case looked black when it was formularised. The facts had accumulated without his perceiving them. It was easy now to go and roll them up like an increasing snowball of accusation against him, but at the time they had seemed slight enough. When he had scribbled off the letters it had been with a consciousness of the shuffle, but with the inward resolve, clearly defined, to atone for it by a longer letter next day, or some other day.

And he had done so?

Unfortunately, no. Fate, there again, had seemed against him. But the intention had not been wanting—it was the flesh only that had been a little weak.

In the light of present understanding, then, if by the mere wish he could blot out not only the remembrance of this weakness but the actuality of it, he would wish the wish?

No reply.

Eh? He would wish the wish at once—was n't that so?

Still no reply.

Perhaps he had n't quite understood. Put it another way. Suppose, since the doings of these latter days were not entirely creditable to him, when

viewed dispassionately, was he prepared to wish that he had never come to Cliff Wrangham?

He could n't honestly wish that. It was n't fair to Cliff Wrangham or the Dixons. He 'd had a very happy time there and done good work. Cliff Wrangham was n't to blame.

Since Cliff Wrangham was n't to blame, then, would he be prepared to wish that he had never come across the post-girl?

He 'd have been bound to come across her.

Not if, for instance, she 'd been ill, and somebody else had brought the letters.

He would n't wish anybody ill for the mere sake of saving his conscience.

Supposing she had been away, then?

Away where?

Anywhere.

But she had n't been away, and so there was an end of it. He was n't dealing with what might have been, but what was.

And what was?

He did n't know. He only knew that he would n't wish his worst enemy to be on the rack as he 'd been on it all last night, and this morning. He had n't slept a wink.

Why had n't he slept?

Because he could n't sleep.

But surely that was funny.

It was n't funny at all. It was hell.

How could that be? If he found now that he 'd been taking a wrong moral turn, all he had to do was to turn back. His way was easy.

Was it?

It was ... if he were sorry he 'd gone wrong. Was he sorry that he 'd gone wrong?

Of course he was sorry. The difficulty was he 'd gone such a deuce of a long way wrong.

Ah! Longer, perhaps, than he 'd said.

Not longer than he 'd said, but quite long enough, without saying a word. To turn all the way back, at this stage of the proceedings—with explanation or without—was a desperately hard thing to do.

If duty compelled it, nevertheless?

Why should duty compel him to do anything so unpleasant?

But surely that was a strange way to speak of a duty which merely implied his obligation to the Other Girl. Presumably, as things stood, he loved her.

Presumably he did.

He had come to love her of his own free will? It was not a case where he had been "rushed"? There was no solicitous mother or obliging sister in the case?

None at all. Only he had had larger opportunity to cultivate her acquaintance than in the general run of affairs. She was a distant connection of his by a

remote marriage, who, in view of her extreme personal connection with the family, had generally ranked as a cousin. In the days when he had had prospects from his uncle they were constantly thrown together, and it was in those days that he engaged himself. All the family looked with favor upon the match, and even encouraged it. Then this wretched old uncle took it suddenly into his head to be actively interested in the nephew's welfare. Wanted him to throw music to the winds as being unworthy of his high prospects, and went the length of telling him in a letter of six words or so to choose between music and the mammon of unrighteousness. Fool, perhaps, that he was, he chose for music. All his family rounded on him at once—or such family as it was; thank God, there was n't much of it—and wrote abject letters to the mammon, telling him how headstrong poor dear Maurice was, and how darling uncle must please give him time, and not be too severe upon his wicked indiscretion. Maurice, dear misguided boy, loved darling uncle very dearly, and would be shocked one day when he came to his senses, and saw how deeply he had grieved him.

And the Other Girl? Did she share the family reproaches?

On the contrary, she said he had acted nobly. He offered her her freedom, of course, as soon as he relinquished the mammon, but she would not accept it.

Had she said to him, for instance: "Dear Maurice, there have been times when I have been troubled to know which of you I loved; you or your uncle's money. And now that the horrid money 's gone, I think it 's you."

Yes, she had said that.

Did he tell her that it was n't for beggars to be choosers, and that if she cared to have a musical pauper she could have him, and there 'd be nothing to pay but his bills?

He believed he had made some witty allusion to that effect.

What did he call pauperdom?

He called two or three hundred a year pauperdom. With the assistance of a few pot-boiling songs under somebody else's name, including, to his shame be it said, a percentage of semi-sacred effusions with angels fluttering in the treble, and organ obligato, he generally managed to supplement this. He also wrote a few elementary teaching pieces for a certain educational firm, under the reassuring title of Ivan Fedor Ivanowitch, which returned him a pittance. There was no demand for his two symphonies or his orchestral suite or his first piano concerto in *fa diese*. That 's why he was writing another. Altogether, taking one thing with another, his income might be set down—except to the Inland Revenue—at about three hundred and fifty pounds a year. A man could n't be much poorer than that, and

talk, Heaven help him, of marriage.

And the Other Girl? Had she expectations at all?

He hoped not, for her own peace of mind. She had this aunt by marriage. Perhaps she might be able to call a couple of hundred pounds per annum her own some day. But it would n't be much more.

And how long had she been engaged to him?

Oh, he could n't exactly say. Six or seven years. It had been an early and a lingering engagement.

Taking his statements into admission, one thing seemed very clear. He was under a strong moral obligation to the Other Girl.

He had never denied it.

Perhaps not, but his actions—judged superficially, of course—had shown a large tendency to overlook this obligation. However, let the past bury the past. He saw now the right way, and where he had strayed from it. Henceforth, since his sole desire was to purge his spirit of its temporary faithlessness, and gain grace to win back his claim to the Other Girl's confidence, henceforth his path lay clear.

Where?

Where? Surely he had no necessity to ask that?

On the contrary, he did ask that.

But there could be no doubt in his mind. Any way that did not lead him back into the old temptation was the right way.

If coming across the post-girl was temptation,

there was no way in this district that did lead the right way.

Then he must depart to where there was.

Leave Cliff Wrangham altogether?

Precisely.

Why should he leave Cliff Wrangham—that is, before the Other One returned? Was he an infant that he must be packed off into the corner in disgrace, because he could n't be trusted?

He had proved himself an infant by the mere fact that he was no longer to be trusted. In other words, he had broken his trust.

He denied it. He 'd broken nothing.

When a nursemaid, who 's been warned, lets a child....

Oh, damn the nursemaid and the child, too! Serve it jolly right if she did. He was n't a nursemaid.

Perhaps not. Perhaps he was just a low, common blackguard, after all.

Perhaps he was.

He had his bath, but the salt water was all unfriendly, and there was no stimulus in its waves. It seemed to have deserted him at this hour of dark temptation. In ceaseless tussle the two of him returned along the sands and slowly back to Dixon's. Out of the drifting current of reasonings two things at least seemed clear. The conscience-bearer was dimly arguing for departure; the shuffling second

self, that had been actively dodging investigation all this while, was trying to invent counter-arguments for delay.

The very life he was leading had become dear to him. He had lost slowly the desire to regain touch with the big centres of artistic activity, and seemed to be living somehow a purer life, in which he worked solely (or at least, thought so) for Art's own sake. The ultimate success of this concerto troubled him little. Before, he had been building much on it, as the most promiseful fruit of his muse. Now, if it were scouted, if he and all his labors were scouted, there was the blessed sense of being able to return here for solace and shelter. The Dixons would be sorry to lose him, he felt sure; glad to have him back. The Vicarage door would open as soon as his figure came on to the vicarial territory in front of the iron rails; the bland, beneficent hand of his Reverence would receive him, like the lost lamb gathered into the fold. God bless the Vicarage! His heart warmed, and his eye—a little emotionalised, it might be, by the crisis he was passing through—moistened as he thought upon that smallpox-blistered door, and the happiness that had been behind it. And last of all ... there was Pam. What a soft and soothing cataplasm she was for all the soul's inflammations; for all the chafing irritation of spirit brought about by contact with a rough world. Her breath was balm, and her voice like a soft south wind blowing through the

strings of a lute. All her freckles would cry aloud in welcome; her lips would disclose the pure, milky greeting of those white teeth; her hands—that he had, with amusement and exalted joy, watched struggling in their dear, feminine tirelessness with the contrary humors of Father Mostyn's keys—he knew what those hands would do when she heard of his return. They would clasp themselves and go beneath her chin. He had not noticed her for nothing. And then his mind went on to the shortening of the days; to the harvest gathered; to the crisp September; to the autumn, with its long, cosy evenings in the Vicar's room, and the music; to the winter; to Christmas; to the meetings; to the happiness; to the sea....

And by Christmas ... perhaps ... he would be married.

Married!

Married and far away. All these days would be but a remembrance. Father Mostyn and Pamela something less, and something infinitely more, than the figments of a dream. He would be building up a new life for himself; a new habitation for his soul to live in, out of new interests, out of new ambitions (if he had any), out of new environments.

Last of all, out of the mass of arguments and sub-arguments, questions and cross-questions, considerations and counter-considerations, in one of those sudden lucid heavenly flashes of righteousness

with which the soul's lightning has power to pierce, at irregular and unexpected intervals, the cloud of doubt, he received the inspiration of resolve. Departure, the Spawer decided, was the only thing to save him. The necessity was cruel, no doubt—to the Ullbrig girl, perhaps, as well as himself—but in the momentary lucidity of soul he had caught the glimpse of this as his sole honorable path, and he elected now to pursue it. To make the requisite retractions and yet stay on was out of the question. He could not bring himself to exercise those despicable economies of affection—palpable retrenchments even—in his friendship with the girl, lacking which, to remain in Ullbrig was not to stand still but to advance. No amount of mere passive rectitude could check the evolution of facts and circumstances. The world did not stand still because one chastened spirit resolved to hold back from the general march of iniquity. There was nothing for it. He would go.

Then imagination, intoxicated with the virtuous bitter draught he had drained, took wild flight into the future. He was going, truly, but not for long. Pam and this wife of his that was to be should become as sisters. He pictured Pam's coming to visit them. Long, glorious visits they should be. And he and Beatrice should return to Cliff Wrangham. They would make Cliff Wrangham their summer residence, their winter residence, their life-long residence. Exaltation carried

him to the pitch of bigamy even. In his wild desire to squeeze the last drop of happiness from these deadly sweet berries of fancy he was deaf to the voice of reason. He scarcely perceived whether it was Pam or the absent one that figured, in this glorified vision, as his wedded wife. At times, for all the power he possessed to discriminate, it might have been both. Or perhaps, with fine prophetic oversight of worldly institutions, he visioned a sublime state of platonic bliss in which was neither marrying nor giving in marriage. For extreme righteousness knows nothing of reason, nor does it argue. Arguments are but the beatings of its wings to gain impetus for flight, but the flight, once attained, transcends all logic. The sublime picture of married felicity that the Spawer created would have been the scandal of any decent, respectably constituted community. Had there been a dozen Pams, indeed, he would have included them all in this spiritual harem, and yet—repugnant as this indiscriminate scheme of domestic association might appear to the many—there was no taint of earthly impurity in his conception of it.

Fortified with this blest vision of a paradise as reward for the pains of present righteousness, he swallowed a hasty and a tasteless meal, and set off without further thought or delay—lest the strength of resolve might in any way leak from him before his purpose was accomplished—down the Ullbrig road. For he knew that his composure was bearing a

tremendous burden on its back, and he feared, if he retarded too long, it might break down, when ultimately he met the girl, into some stammering, faulty, broken-backed, weak-kneed, incomplete accomplishment of his mission. If possible, he wanted to drop across her as though by pure accident. He did n't want her to detect any traces of labored premeditation in what he had to tell. He held the manner of the news-breaking roughly formulated in his mind, but he was anxious lest she might discern, through any flaw in the outer agreement of his smiles (just sufficiently tinged with regret, he told himself, to be in keeping with the subject of departure, but no more), the horrible machinery, driven by a thousand heart-power, clanking away inside him, and manufacturing this leave-taking to pattern, like rolled steel.

He was so little sure of his capacity to execute his own purpose that, through mere distrust of doing what he wanted to do, he was almost ready to give the project up and declare himself beaten before the battle. And all the while he walked onward he began to accumulate doubts respecting the undertaking of such a delicate operation beneath the searching light of day. He had one revelation of the girl's great eyes fixed solemnly upon his lips, and watching him as he wallowed in his embarrassment, and his soul flinched. For a moment he had desperate thoughts of return. Then he sat, under the white flag of truce, on

a rail. Then he moved slowly onward again, with fixed eyes on Ullbrig, praying he might miss the girl. And with this prayer almost moving his lips, at Hesketh's corner he met her.

CHAPTER XVI

She wore a great hat of coarse Zulu straw, trimmed with white muslin and scarlet poppies, and a pale cream muslin dress, beneath whose hem her neat shoes and trim, black ankles showed themselves so demurely, like sleek twin witches of seductive enchantment. In her left hand she carried a snowy-topped basket emblematic of Faith, Hope and Charity —particularly this last—while the thumb of her cotton-gloved right hand was tucked, at the time of their recognition, into a green crocodile leather belt. She was just passing the corner, indeed, as she caught sight of the Spawer, and had to fall back on her heel to verify the impression; then she stood waiting for him, swinging the basket in front of her skirt with both hands, and showing the glad smile for a welcome and unexpected meeting. All the gloomy necessities of the encounter were packed up and stowed away at the back of the Spawer's being with the first slight shock of realisation. Almost spontaneously he discarded his reflections as though

they had been impersonal and bearing no reference to the girl before him, and advanced upon her with the sunny face that seemed never to have known the clouds of disquietude.

"How funny," said Pam simply, as he came near. "... I was just thinking about you."

"I can see you were," he laughed.

"Can you?" asked Pam, smiling, but a shade incredulous.

"By your ears," he told her.

Pam put her fingers to them.

"It is the sun," she said, nipping a little crimson lobe between cool white-cottoned fingers. "Yours burn too. Were you thinking about me?"

"Perhaps."

"Were you? What were you thinking?"

"Tell me first what you were thinking about me?"

"I was thinking whether I should see you if I looked up the Cliff Wrangham road. But I never thought I should. And you?"

"I was thinking the same thing."

"Were you really? Did you want to see me ... about anything?"

It was the Spawer's opportunity to say what he had come to say, but like a faint-hearted jumper, feeling he had not bite enough for his purpose, he burked the hurdle.

"I don't know that I wanted to see you ... about

anything," he answered, covering up his momentary hesitation with a smile, "... but I was perfectly agreeable to see you about nothing at all."

"Perhaps you 're coming to the post?" Pam hazarded.

"Nothing so reputable," said he. "Fact is, I 'm afraid I 've broken loose to-day. I 'm on the laze."

"You lazy!" laughed Pam, in incredulous amazement.

"Oh, horribly lazy, dear girl," he said. "If you don't know that you don't know me. It comes on at periods. I can't yet decide whether my hard work is sheer activity of a guilty conscience, or my laziness is the collapse of a conscience too highly taxed, but the one follows the other as night follows day. I 've not done a stroke of work since getting up. This morning I washed myself and bathed—you 'll say that's a good work done. This afternoon I determined to stroll inland and see if there was anybody disposed to take pity on my sad idleness. What a pretty basket!"

Pam held it up for his inspection.

"May I lift the cover?"

Pam nodded and laughed, showing all her white, small teeth in assent.

"Bottles," said he, taking a peep under the snowy serviette. "We 're well met. Which way are you going?"

"I 'm going to Shippus," said Pam, with a little wistful accent on the "I 'm," expressive of solitude.

"The very thing," said the Spawer. "And we won't touch them till we get there. Not a drop. Will you take me with you?"

"Will you go with me?" said Pam, a light of desire suddenly dawning in her eyes at his half-bantering suggestion.

"If you 'll have me."

"I 'll have you. But perhaps you would n't care ... it's a sick call."

"I don't care what it is," said the Spawer, "so long as it 's nothing catching. Tell me it 's not smallpox and I 'm with you."

"Oh, it is n't smallpox," Pam reassured him. "It 's only poor old Mr. Smethurst."

"Come," said the Spawer, relieved, "that does n't sound so alarming. I 'll risk it. And are the bottles his or ours?"

"His," said Pam, as the Spawer disengaged her of them, and they commenced to walk forward together. "Poor old gentleman. There 's a lemon jelly and a bottle of port and a bottle of whiskey. Those are from Father Mostyn—the very same that he drinks himself." Her eyes kindled luminously at the mention. "Is n't it good of him? Nobody knows but me what lots of things he gives away ... and what lots of things he does for people. He 'd do anything for anybody. They don't understand him in Ullbrig a bit. I did n't always, but I do now. They talk about his house, and say it wants painting. And of course it

does. And they say he 's a Roman Catholic, and gets paid by the Pope for every conversion he makes; but that 's not true. He 's nothing at all to do with the Pope. And then they laugh at him because he goes down on his knees in church, but as he said one day to Mr. Stevens (Sheppardman): 'You touch your hat to me because I 'm his reverence the vicar, but you 're too proud to bow to the Lord Jesus.' And it 's not a matter of what he does in church. They ought n't to go by that—and they can't truthfully, because they 're never there to see. It's what he does in Ullbrig. If anybody 's ill, it 's always him they send for, and he always goes, whether it 's by night or day. When they 're well he talks about their hypocrisy and their sinfulness, and about their pride—you 've heard him, have n't you? But when they 're ill ... oh, you would n't know him. He 's as gentle as a woman. He looks at their medicine, and feels their pulse, and smooths their pillow; and oh, he talks so beautifully. When little Annie Summers died of diphtheria he sat up all the night after the operation, keeping her throat clear with a feather (that was very dangerous, of course, and he might have died of it), and when she was dead her father told him: 'I 've never given you a good word all my days, Mr. Mostyn,' and Father Mostyn only shook his head and told him: 'Well, well, John, give it me now.' And when poor old James Marshall was dying they sent for Father Mostyn, of course, and James told him he was a bit

fearsome he had n't done the right thing in spending so much of his time at chapel. And Father Mostyn said: 'Make your mind easy, James, there are no churches or chapels up there.' Old Mr. Smethurst used to go to chapel, too, when he was well enough to go anywhere, but as Father Mostyn says, we can't help that. The wine will do him as much good as if he had been to church. And it was a long time ago. He 'll never go there any more."

"Is he so ill as that?" asked the Spawer.

"He 's dying," said Pam.

The little tremor of her lip, and the sudden moistness about her eyes—though he had witnessed these wonderful manifestations of her tender nature before on many an occasion—went to the Spawer's heart in the present instance like an arrow. Pam's tears were in everybody's service. Not idle tears, but tears that seemed the sacred seal of noble self-sacrifice and devotion.

And to think he was so soon going to remove himself from the soft-dropping springs of their sympathy.

"What a ministering angel you are," he said, looking at her lightly enough, and yet—though Pam could not know that—with a kind of tightness about the throat.

"I 'm afraid I 'm not an angel," the girl regretted. "Not a bit of one. I wish I were."

"On the contrary," he said, "wish nothing of the

kind."

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because Ullbrig would miss you so. Angels' visits are few and far between, and when they come they don't bring bottles. Be what you are," he told her. "A lay angel."

"Don't you believe in real angels?" Pam asked him ingenuously. "Dr. Anderson does n't."

The Spawer smiled.

"Kindness is the greatest angel in the world," he said, and looked at her. "I believe in kindness."

"So do I," said Pam.

"And do you never, never get tired of doing kind actions?" he asked her curiously. "... Surely you must."

Pam gave him a quick look and dropped her lip, as though a little lead-weight of admission were upon it.

"Sometimes I do," she admitted, and turned her face away from him as though the thought of her own offend-ing troubled her. "But somehow ... kind acts always seem to pay for themselves, don't you think?"

"Do they?" he asked hazily.

"Why, yes," Pam said, after a moment, just a little shaken in her confidence by his question. "The more you don't want to do a thing, the more you 're glad when you 've gone and done it—a kind thing I mean."

The more you did n't want to do a thing the more you were glad when you 'd gone and done it. How did that apply to him?

"... Father Mostyn says you must beware of doing kindnesses for the mere gratification of being thanked. He says that's a deadly sin—one of the prides of charity. There are a lot more, but that 's the worst. What do you think?"

"What do I think? Gracious!" laughed the Spawer, "I dare n't contradict his Reverence. I think so too."

"But you! You 're quite different from me," the girl objected. "I could n't be kind at all if it were n't for Father Mostyn. All my kindnesses have been taught me by him." Such is the power of loyalty and loving adherence, that transfers its own virtues to the object of affection. "But you. I don't think you can help being kind. Some people can't. You seem to do things from the heart somehow, as though they came naturally to you; but me, I do all mine from the head, because I 've been taught what things are kind and what things are cruel. And often I make mistakes too." She was thinking of the schoolmaster. "But you never do."

Did n't he? What were all his trumpery smiles and petty kindnesses, his smooth words and minor generosities, but little errors of excess in a grand sum of cruelty, that had brought the total to an amount he dared scarcely contemplate, and were compelling

him this day to cancel these labyrinthine workings of arithmetic by a wholesale application of the sponge?

"That," said he, looking leniently upon her, "is because your kindness, little woman, won't let you find flaws in mine. But there are flaws in it—great flaws."

"Where?" asked Pam, with the earnestness of a child.

"All over," said the Spawer.

"You have always been kind to me," said Pam.

"Don't let 's talk of that," he responded cheerfully, affecting—double-dyed hypocrite that he knew himself to be—a sublime disregard of such kindnesses as had been his, which but served to illuminate his conduct in the girl's eyes with letters of celestial gold paint.

"May n't I talk to you about it ... ever, please?" the girl asked him.

"Oh, if it 's a question of pleases," he said, with laughing concession, "I would n't deny you for worlds. Talk away, dear child."

Did he realise how much store the girl set by these diminutive titles of affectionate address? Did he know that each time he called her "Dear child" and "Dear girl" and "Little woman" (mere friendly substitutes for the Pam he never used) her heart leaped up in responsive gladness? Did he know that each of these designations, so lightly uttered by him, was a nail driven into the door against his departure,

and that door the girl's own heart? Surely and truly he never knew it, or even our hero, Maurice Ethelbert Wynne, for all his blackguardism, would have shrunk from the usage of them.

"Now I don't know what to say," Pam said.

"Why ever not?"

"Because you told me to talk away."

"How like a girl! Wants to do a thing until she 's bidden, and then ... be hanged if she will. You contrary little feminine."

All the same, as soon as he adjured her not to mind, but to say no more about it, she found plenty to say in a sudden gush respecting his past kindness to her. He had been so good to her. She had told Father Mostyn to be sure and tell him how grateful she felt to him for all his goodness.... Had he? But she had been dying to tell him herself too. And somehow, whenever she had begun, he had always turned her off so kindly that she had never done any more than tell him that she wanted to tell him, and never told him; but to-day, when he had spoken about *her* kindness, she felt she must tell him about his. There had been no reason why he should have been kind to her. He had done it all so beautifully ... that there seemed nothing in it, and at times she 'd almost believed that there was nothing in it either, and that it was just happening so, and no more. But when she 'd come to look into it she saw exactly how much there was, and how it could have happened

otherwise—oh, quite otherwise—but for his great kindness in preventing it. Why had he been so good to her? It was n't—as he 'd tried to make out—that there was anything to gain, because she 'd nothing in the world to give him except her thanks—and until to-day he 'd never even accepted those from her. Father Mostyn had told her, as he 'd told her himself, that he did n't give lessons to anybody else ... and that she was his only pupil. She 'd tried not to feel proud about that, because it was no merit of her own, but simply his own goodness; but she could n't help it. Father Mostyn said you might feel proud if your pride were pride of loyalty—as pride in the Church, or in the goodness of another—and in that way she 'd felt proud. But it was difficult dealing with prides; they got the better of you somehow. He 'd given her music because he said he knew where to send for it, and could get it down quicker—being known to the people—but that was just so that she need n't have to pay for it. And he 'd made her a present of Erckmann-Chatrian's "L'ami Fritz" and "Le Blocus," and a beautiful French Dictionary....

"Well," he asked her, "... where 's the goodness in that?"

"It was all of it goodness."

"Nothing of the sort, dear girl. It 's all pure selfish pride."

Oh, no, no, no! Pam could n't believe that.

Oh, but she must believe it. He 'd given her

lessons solely for his own pleasure—not hers—because teaching her had interested him, and it was a sort of recreation. And he 'd taught her French for the same reason, and for the pride of being looked up to as a great French authority. And he 'd given her books and music so that she might say what a kind, generous fellow he was,—oh, she must n't make any mistake about the matter; it was precious little goodness she 'd have found about him. Oh, he was a bad one at heart!

So, arguing agreeably on the subject of goodness specific and general, they walked along the high-road lane that leads to Shippus.

Thus they came at last upon a group of two or three detached cottages along the roadside, white-washed and blinding, with thatched roofs and tarred palings, and a profusion of giant nasturtiums clambering over the doors and licking at the window-sills with a great yellow-scarlet blaze, as though the porches were on fire. Here Pam slowed up, and held out her hand for the basket.

"Shall you be long?" the Spawer asked, giving it to her.

"Perhaps you won't care to wait?" she suggested wistfully, though offering him his liberation.

"Trot along," said he, smiling back refusal of the proffered freedom. "I 'll hang about outside for you. Only promise me you won't slip away by the back."

He smiled and raised his hat to her with that

delightful blending of familiarity and homage which had won the girl's heart from the first. There were points about his kindness which she could not touch upon, even to him, and this was one. Other men might have made her position unbearable, but he never. The raising of the hat itself meant nothing, for she knew it was an instinctive recognition of her sex which accomplished itself, in his case, even when the sex was adequately disguised beneath harden aprons and masculine caps; but the action as he performed it had none of the odious insinuating gallantry to which the Saturday Hunmouth trippers had accustomed but never reconciled her. With no man had she ever been so intimate as with this one; and yet no man had ever so helped her to preserve her own modest self-respect.

Ah, Pam, Pam, Pam! Do you see that queer little hunched-up shadow, carrying a shapeless lump of a basket, that keeps close by your side as you cross the road and lay your finger upon the latch of the tarred wooden wicket? It is the little old lady, as plain as plain can be. She makes no noise; her footsteps merge in yours; but day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, she never leaves you. The time approaches when she shall rise up in her hideous deformity and declare you a prisoner in her dwelling. And you shall gaze upon the features of an altered world through wet windows of running tears.

CHAPTER XVII

Outside the Spawer strolled gently to and fro along the white, staring roadway, stopping always a little short of the cottages lest his constant recurrence in face of the window might seem like an embargo upon Pam's moments. To a casual observer he looked, in his light flannels and straw hat—tilted a little over his nose for facing the sun—the typical figure of a summer lounger, with no endeavor beyond indolence, and no thought above keeping cool. But within, his brain was busily clanking and clamoring, like an overpressed newspaper office; editing, sub-editing, inserting, deleting, putting all his conduct into orderly columns and making ruthless "pi" of it. One item of intelligence alone remained stable amid the vast jumble of worthless, inconsequential paragraphs:

DEPARTURE OF THE SPAWER.

He was still pacing up and down the roadway, his eyes engrossed in some systematic method of placing his toes, engaged on the task of convincing himself that he had let no real possible opportunity slip during their walk of acquainting the girl with the inevitable, when the atmosphere of a sudden lighted

up, as it were, and he saw the red poppies over the gateway, stooping somewhat at the latch.

"What! So soon?" he asked; and again, by the apparently spontaneous mental process, he threw off his heavy mantle of musing, and smiled as though he had nothing to think of but happiness. "Come! You 've let me off handsome."

Then he saw that Pam's lips looked a little troubled, and her eyes sought his face with trepidation.

"It 's not that..." she said, watching his gaze like a compass. "... I 'm not done yet. But they ... they saw you were with me ... and ... and won't you come in?"

"It 's awfully good of 'em, little woman," he said. "Just tell 'em so, won't you? But really, I don't mind a bit. In fact, I 'd rather be out here in the sun."

"I thought you would n't," Pam said, more to herself, as though his reply constituted a refusal of something not uttered, but in her mind only. And still she stood; and while she looked at the Spawer her eyes filled with that sublime wistfulness of theirs that finds no translation in words. "That 's not all," she said, after a pause. "I have n't told you. They know ... who you are."

"Jove!" exclaimed the Spawer. "What a reputation I have in this part of the globe. If only it were universal."

"It's my fault..." Pam confessed.

"There 's no fault about it, dear girl," he made

haste to reassure her. "On the contrary, it 's a jolly kind thought."

"But I 'm afraid ... I told them it was you when they asked if it was. And they know how beautifully you play." Her eyes were absolutely sealed down upon his now, so that not a flicker of their expression could escape her. "... And ... and poor old Mr. Smethurst said there were n't many that could play like you. And I told him, indeed there were n't. And I was telling him how beautifully you did play ... and all of a sudden he said he should just like to hear you play 'Sound the loud timbrel' ... before he died. Did I think you would? And Mrs. Smethurst was frightened, and said: 'Oh, John,' you must n't ask such things of a gentleman like that. He does n't play to such as us.' And he said, oh, so sadly: 'Nay, nay, I suppose I must n't. But I feel he 'd do it if only we dared ask him.' And I did n't know what to say ... because, of course, I know it's a dreadful thing to ask you. But I made a pretence of coming out to see whether you would come in and sit down."

The Spawer wrinkled his brows.

"It 's not so much the asking," he said, with a perplexed smile, "but it 's the doing, little woman. Have they a piano forte?"

"No, no." Pam sank deeper into her trouble. "It 's only a harmonium ... a very old one. I know it 's a dreadful thing to ask you to sit down to a harmonium—and a hymn tune too. I 'd never, never

have asked you to do such a thing for myself—but for somebody else that 's never going to get better again. Sometimes it does sick people you don't know how much good to have their fancies gratified. I offered to try and play it myself, but he told me: 'You can play it and welcome ... but it won't be him.'"

"Little woman," said the Spawer, "no one knows better than you what an act of martyrdom it is for a pianist to sit down to a harmonium and humble himself to a hymn tune. But because it 's you that have asked me, for your sake and through sheer pride—to show you how good I am—I 'll do it. It sounds good, but it's sheer, downright pride, remember. Only pride could get through with it. Now; lead on, kindly light."

He took hold of her indulgently by the arm, and for a few paces walked so with her. To the girl that touch was the crowning patent of his nobility and goodness; to him it was so magnetically charged with the dangerous communion of red, warm blood that he let go of it by slow, imperceptible degrees, but with no less the feeling that he was discarding a deadly temptation. The warmth of a woman's body is an enervating atmosphere to the moral fibres of a man when that body is the object of his renunciation, and his fibres are slackened to start with. And the proud illumination about the girl's eyes as she went forward at his instigation was like the high, bright blaze of a lighthouse for holding him prisoner to its

beacon against all the futile beating of his wings.

Through the tarred gate and under the trailing flames of nasturtium Pam led him into the cottage of the dying man. It was a kitchen living-room they stepped into. All about the threshold and nasturtium porch was enveloped in its own stifling atmosphere of hot leaves and baking—as distinct from the corn-scented suffocation of the outer air. The kitchen itself seemed congested with a close, oveny odor; the accumulated smell of many meals and many bakings, never expelled, and the peaty reek of a place where the fire burns day in, day out.

In a high-backed wooden chair by the warm side of the oven sat the dying man, not so nearly dead as the Spawer had pictured him, perhaps, but obviously stricken. He sat, an old withered figure, with the strange inertness of body characteristic of the aged and the very sick, alive seemingly no lower than his head, which moved slowly in the socket of a grey plaid muffler, wrapped about his neck and tucked away beneath the lapels of his dingy green-black coat. There was a red cotton cushion propped under his shoulders. His legs, motionless as the padded legs of a guy, and as convincing, looked strangely swollen and shapeless by contrast with his white and wasted face. At their extremity a pair of lifeless, thick ankles were squeezed into clumsy country slippers, whose toes never once, during the course of the Spawer's visit, stirred away from the red spot on the hearthrug

where he had at first observed them. The invalid's breathing was the labored wheezy usage of lungs that bespoke asthma and bronchitis, and the hands that clasped the arms of the wooden chair might have been carved in horn. A couple of crooked sticks placed in the projecting angle of the range showed his extremity in the matter of locomotion. To the Spawer, whose experience with the dark obverse of life's bright medallion was restricted, and whose acquaintance with death and death's methods was more by hearsay, as of some notorious usurer, the picture was not a pleasant one. He had rather been left out in the pure sunshine with his own tormenting thoughts than be brought face to face with the actual draught that all men mortal must drain. And yet, he told himself, this was the sort of thing that Pam was almost daily sacrificing some portion of her young life to; giving generously a share of her own freshness and healthfulness and vitality to keep burning these wan and flickering flames. Wonder of wonders, the magic chalice of a woman's heart, that can pour forth its crystalline stream of love and comfort and consolation, and yet not run dry.

An elderly woman, in a print dress, whose hands were nervously fidgeting with the jet brooch at her throat, and who seemed employed in watching the door with a smile not devoid of anxiety, curtseyed with painful respectfulness at the Spawer's entrance, and dusting the surface of a wooden chair, begged

him to be seated. If he had lacked Pam's assurance that his presence was coveted he might have almost reproached himself for entering at some inopportune moment. A great air of formality seemed to enter with his advent, and stiffen all about them—he felt it himself—as though they were on the brink of some important ceremony with whose procedure they were unacquainted, like Protestants at High Mass. He took the chair, however, with the utmost friendliness and thankfulness he could assume, and tried to sit down upon it with a pleasant air of relief, as though it were a welcome accessory to his comfort, and he were grateful. He was very anxious, for his pride's sake, to do Pam credit.

"Ah!" he said, seeming to welcome the discovery of the fire as something, in these chill times, to be glad for, and addressing himself to the sick man, made pleasant allusion to it. "You keep a bit of a blaze, I see," he said.

"Ye 'll 'a to speak up tiv 'im a bit, sir," the woman instructed him deferentially. "'E weean't a 'eard ye. 'E 's gettin' that deaf it 's past mekkin' 'im understand at times."

The man's head turned slowly in its grey woolen socket, as though he had caught the fact of his being in question, but was out of the reach of the inquiry, and seeking by the petition of his eye to be informed.

"'E 's speakin' about fire, gentleman is," the woman told him.

"What fire?" the sick man asked, in a frail, piping voice—a voice that a three-days' chicken might almost have challenged.

He asked the question mechanically, with his eyes on the Spawer, but his interest lay somewhere beyond the borderland of earthly things, as though his mind, through much solitude of wandering, had strayed in advance of his body towards the bourne of them both, and was recalled to the flesh with increasing difficulty.

"Kitchen fire," his wife explained to him. "Fire i' grate yonder."

The man followed the line of her knotted, bony forefinger, and let his eyes fall on the wasted red cinders, so symbolical of his own condition.

"Ay," he said, after a moment, when it had almost come to seem that the connection between finger and fireplace was quite lost. "Fire 's a bit o' company to me. We 've been good friends a goodish piece noo, but ah s'll not need 'er so much longer, ah 'm thinkin'."

"Ye div n't know what ye 'll need," his wife admonished him, with the sharpness of personal anxiety. But to the Spawer she added, catching at her brooch: "Cough troubles 'im a deal o' nights noo. Doctor says 'e misdoots 'e 'll see another winter thruff. 'E 'd seummut to do to get thruff last."

The sick man knew, with the dumb instinct of a dog, that his case was being discussed. He fastened

his eyes on the Spawer's face to see whether it would give him any clue to the words that were being uttered. His wife's, by experience, he knew would tell him nothing; but a stranger's might.

"Ah 'm about at far end," he piped, in his placid, piteous harmonic of a voice, that issued between his lips with a sound like the blowing of a cornstraw. "Ah 've been a sad, naughty slaverbags i' my time, bud ah 'm done noo. It's 'arvest time wi' me, an' ah 'm bein' gathered in, ah think. Doctor 's patched my bellows up a deal o' times, bud they weean't stan' mendin' no more."

"Why weean't they? Ye 've breathed a deal freer last few days," his wife tried to instil into him. "It 's 'is 'eart as well," she told the Spawer. "Doctor says it 's about worn out. Ay, poor man, poor man! What a thing it is to sit an' watch 'im gan, ah-sure. An' 'im so active as 'e was. Bud cryin' weean't alter it, for ah 've tried, an' it 's no use. It 's Lord's will, an' we mun just be thankful 'at 'E 's spared 'im as long as 'E 'as, wi' me to look after 'im an' see 'e gans off comfortable. There 's monny 'at is n't blessed so well as that."

The sick man fastened his eye on the Spawer again.

"Ye come fro' Dixon's?" he said inquiringly; and when the Spawer gave him an illuminative "Yes"—"Ay," he said, through his thin lips. "It 's long enough sin' ah seed 'im. Mebbe ye 'll do me the

kindness to gie 'im mah respecks when ye get back. Monny 's the time 'im an' me 's met i' Oommuth market an' driven wum [home] i' Tankard's 'bus together.... Ah 've been nowt bud trouble tiv 'er sin' day she wor fond enough to tek me, an' she would n't 'a tekken me then, bud ah begged ower 'ard. An' ah 'm nowt bud trouble tiv 'er noo."

"Ay, an' ah 'd tek ye agen lad," the thin, worn woman told him, with an assurance that was almost fierce. "Ne'er mind whether ye 're a bad un or no. Ah 've nivver rued day ah tekt ye—though ye 'd gie'n me twice trouble ye did. Ah mud 'ave looked far to fin' a better, an' then not fun' [found] 'im. Let ye be as drunk as ye would, ye nivver gied me a bad wod nor lifted 'and agen me."

"Nay, ah nivver lifted 'and agen ye," the man assented. "Ah 'ad n't need. Bud that 's little to my credit. Ah trailed ye thruff tribulation. What time ye was n't workin' to mek good what ah 'd wasted ye was weepin' an' waitin' o' me. There 's scarcelins a Saturday neet, at one time, ye set oot wi' a dry eye."

"Ay, bud ye nivver stayed away ower Sunday," his wife claimed, with pride. "Ye was allus back an' to spare when Oolbrig bells got set o' ringin'. An' it's not ivvery man's wife about this district 'at can say same of 'er 'usband."

The sick man listened to her, and a pale, wintry smile flickered across his face and over his frost-nipped lips. Years ago, perhaps, it had been a smile

as full of sunlight as the Spawer's own, and dear to the woman's heart. Perhaps her soul had pined for that very smile, and drunk of its remembrance, in the dark hours that clouded her life from time to time. The sick man turned his eyes upon the Spawer, while yet the feeble ray illuminated them.

"Ah did n't chose so badlins," he said, with a tinge of the dry humor that sparkles mirthfully in the men of these parts like the crackling of blazing twigs under a pot. "Nay, ah got best o' bargain when she fastened 'ersen. Chosin' a wife 's same as chosin' a mare or owt else, an' there 's a deal o' ways o' chosin' wrong. Don't tek notice o' way a lass gans on tiv you, if ye want to pick a good un—for they 're all t' same when they 're carryin' on wi' a man. Good uns an' bad uns acts alike then. Div n't tek a woman 'll 'at fin's ower much fault wi' 'er neighbors—syke a woman 'll fin' plenty wi' you when she 's gotten ye fast. Ye want to 'ave a sharp eye when ye gan coortin'. There 's some on 'em 'at gans coortin' by neet, 'at scarcelins knows look o' their lass by day. That 's no way. Don't tek on wi' a lass because she carries a 'ymn book. Onny lass can carry a 'ymn book. Tek one 'at 's gotten all 'er 'ymns i' 'er 'eart. Don't trust yersen tiv a lass 'at wastes all 'er time i' runnin' after ye. Think on it 's 'er feythur's time she 's wastin', 'appen, an' when she 's gotten ye she 'll waste yours. Ay, an' try an' pick a wench 'at dizz n't mind doin' what she can to mek it a bit brighter for them

'at 's gannin' quick down shady side o' life. 'Appen she 'll do t' same when it comes tiv your ton [turn]."

All these things the Spawer promised to bear in mind when the time came, with the despicable hypocrisy that assumed, as a cloak, the smiling improbability of any such occurrence. Cad that he felt himself, he dared not look at Pam, seated apart on a chair by the door leading into a small scullery beyond. Like Peter he kept denying—by inference, at least—the facts of a case that would so unpleasantly involve him. Like Peter, each successive denial smote him to the heart; he wept in spirit over his own spirit's weakness. And yet, as he asked himself very naturally, even as he held his smile towards the old man, and studiously away from the girl that fulfilled (either in actuality or in the guilty similarity set up by his soul) every condition of the old fellow's warning—was this the proper moment to declare to her what he had to declare to her? Could he for the first time acquaint her with facts for which she was all unprepared before strangers? No, no, no. Later on, he swore it, he would fulfil his afternoon's mission. He was merely a musician, he told himself, using destiny as his fiddle, tuning the strings of circumstance to the tune needed of him. So, catching sight of the little despicable harmonium for the hundredth time, with the suddenly sparkling eye for a revelation, "What," said he, in accents of surprised pleasure that even deceived Pam—(though he dared

not have thought it)—"a harmonium?"

The old woman whipped off its meagre tippet of oilcloth in a twinkling, and displayed its poor double octave of discolored celluloid with a toothless smile of proud possession.

"Mester bought it," she said. "He was allus fond of a bit o' music."

How was she to know, poor soul, the strickening effect that fatal use of the diminutive had on the sensitive fibres of the Spawer's nature? Not from his face, surely, for he smiled pure sunlight.

They dusted the keys for him, and a chair, and put up the fragile desk, that subsided like a schooner before the blast, with its masts bending, and the Spawer sat down and did his best.

Heavens, what a best!

The very tone of the instrument that cried out under his touch shook his soul and almost frightened his fingers from the keys. So raucous it was; so noisily sanctimonious; so redolent of blind musicians; of street-corner meetings; so unblushingly bald; so callous; so unsensitive; so ostentatious; so utterly awful. Every nerve, fibre, and tissue of musical organization was offended; it was a crying offence against every instinct of musical art. And all the while, as though the soul itself were not being sufficiently punished by humiliation, the body was being subjected to the physical indignity of working its legs like a journeyman scissors-grinder.

Ye gods! the tragic absurdity of it all. To musical natures less cultured, to senses less susceptible than the Spawer's, there would have been the rising of throats and the wetness of tears during this scene, for, truth to tell, it lacked none of the elements of moving pathos and tragedy. The dying man; the care-worn woman; the girl with the compassionate lips; the musician bending over his task of devotion; the hymn tune evolved into harmony by his shaping fingers from the low humming of the girl's lips:

"Sound the loud timbrel o'er Egypt's dark
sea;
Jehovah hath triumphed, His people are
free..."

the half-drawn blind—so soon to be drawn down to its full; the sun beating on the window and on the red-tiled floor....

Not one witness in a thousand, drawn independently to consider the scene, would have pierced to the heart of the pathos, and grasped through the tearful confusion of their sympathies, that perhaps the most beautiful focus-point of emotion was in the seated figure of the musician, castigating his musical soul with biting thongs for the sake of one girl and a dying man, and showing no sign.

And what recompense of moral gratification did

he receive in return for his act of artistic abnegation? Little enough, it must be confessed, that the Spawer could discover. The old man looked older, he thought; the old woman's prefatory smile of appreciative pride had been quenched by the music, and her attitude when he turned round upon her was the incomprehending silence of respect. All her face, so to speak, had fallen to pieces like an over-shortened pie, with no concentration of interest to hold up the crust of its expression. Perhaps the very harmonies with which the Spawer had clad the naked melody of a hymn tune had so baffled their decaying, primitive hearing that they had failed to recognise it in its new garb. He had done better, possibly, to play the melody out for them with one finger. Pam's face alone compensated him. She, he knew—and was glad to know—was too much awakened to the scope and magnitude of music to have derived anything approaching personal pleasure from a crude performance such as this; but she had realised what nausea it must have been to him, and in the light of a sacrifice alone she had rejoiced in his achievement.

Well, however, the achievement was over, and they were ready to go any time now. The old woman replaced the oilcloth over the harmonium with a look of relief (or so the Spawer thought, but he thought wrong), and Pam was just opening her lips to suggest departure when the old man piped out in

his faltering treble:

"Ay, bud ye 'll gie me a chapter before ye gan, lass, weean't ye?"

Pam turned a troubled eye part-way towards the Spawer, as though it were accompanying a thought of hers on its own account; but she stopped it before it reached him, and dropped submissive hands.

"Would you like me to?" she asked gently.

"Ay; ah s'd tek it kindly if ye would."

"You don't mind?" she asked the Spawer softly; and with his assent, readily given, "I will," she said.

"Gie 'er the Book, lass," he ordered his wife; and the careworn woman lifted it from beneath a pair of folded spectacles, and delivered it reverently into the girl's receiving fingers.

"What shall I read you?" Pam asked, setting the book on her knees, and turning over the pages, now backwards, now forwards.

"Ah 'll 'ave that bit o' John," he told her, "about mansions an' such-like, if ye 've no objections."

"Is that the fourteenth chapter?" Pam suggested inquiringly. "Did n't we have it last time?"

"Ay, an' we mud as lief 'ave it this," he decided placidly. "It 'll be none the wuss of a time or two. Book 's not same as other things. There 's allus seummut fresh in it for them 'at gans tiv it wi' a right 'eart. Ah s'd 'a done better if ah 'd ganned tiv it when ah 'ad use o' legs Lord gid me. It 's ower late to larn me to walk straight i' this wuld noo, but 'appen ah s'll

be about ready to scrammle along to next, when time comes."

"The fourteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John," Pam announced, as signifying that she had found the place, and smoothing down the page with her soft finger, lifted her voice and read:

"Let not your heart be troubled.... Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

When Pam said: "If it were not so ... I would have told you," one felt it must be so indeed. Such lips could never lie. And as the girl's clear voice rose and filled that little kitchen—so compassionate, so truthful, so natural—the full sublimity of the picture of a sudden swelled up in the Spawer's soul and mounted to his throat. The ingredient elements of the scene were unchanged, but now how exalted. He saw, in a flash, as though his spiritual eyes had been opened, the true pathos of the picture: the dying man, seated so motionless in his chair, with his faded blue eyes gazing into Heaven through the blind; the worn woman, the better portion of whose years and loving energy the man was taking to the grave with him; the sweet, purifying sunlight bathing the world outside; the girl with the lips of celestial compassion, drawing old truths from the battered and thumb-marked Bible, distilling them anew in pure liquid sound, and dropping them so coolingly into the

overheated kitchen of death. All these he saw—acutely with his inward vision, dimly with his material—and wondered, as he saw it, that the girl could proceed so courageously and so unfalteringly on her consolatory path. He himself would have fared along it badly, and knew it. But it was not the last time he was to marvel at the girl's self-possession when circumstances demanded, and perhaps this second time he would remember it even better.

"Ye 'll tek liberty to call agen, mebbe," the old man invited him as they stood finally for departure, "... if ah 'm not mekkin' ower free to ask ye; but it 's a lonely road when a man draws to yend of 'is days. Busy folk can't reckon to be treubled wi' 'im—an' i' 'arvest an' all. Ah wor no better mysen when ah 'ad my faculties. Ye 'll be stayin' wi' Dixon a goodish while yet, mebbe?"

At the direct question the Spawer's resolution spun round and made as though to turn tail. There was just a slight pause—quite inappreciable to the others about him, but painfully magnified to himself—while he struggled whether to ignore the opportunity or seize it like a man, and sign irrevocably the bond of his departure.

"Perhaps..." he was quibbling with the reply even yet, while speaking, not knowing whether to evade or to grapple with his chance. Then he grappled suddenly, but always with that frank, pleasant smile of his that showed no inkling of an

inward perplexity. "... On the other hand," he said, "... it 's possible I may be going any time now—any day even." He sensed rather than saw the quick turn of the girl's eyes upon him, and knew, too, in what kind of mild, protesting surprise she was looking at him. She could not credit that he should first communicate such an important piece of intelligence to strangers, without having prepared her by a single word, and was wondering sorrowfully whether it were not an excuse to evade any promise of visiting the old man again.

"It all depends," the Spawer explained, throwing his explanation over the truth of the matter like a pleasant nebula, "... on a letter. I 'm expecting to hear. One can't stay for ever, you know," he added amiably, "even where one 's happy."

"Nay, nay," the old man acquiesced mournfully. "When a man comes to my years 'e fin's that oot tiv 'is sorrer. Well, well; ah awpe [hope] when ye think fit to change ye 'll change for t' better, young gen'leman, an' ah thank ye for yer company an' yer kindness." He turned the faint flicker of his long-ago smile upon Pam, like the sunlight stealing over an autumn landscape.

"Pam 's not likely to change yet a bit," he said, with a sense of comfort in the thought, as though the girl were a true staff to rest on in time of trouble. Pam shook her head reassuringly. "Nay, Pam mun 't change yet a bit," he admonished her. "She mun stop

an' see t' old man 's time oot, ah think. 'E weean't keep 'er so long noo, but 'e 's a selfish old chap; 'e dizz n't want to part wi' 'er no sooner nor need be. She 's been as good tiv 'im as if she 'd been 'is own bairn. Ay, an' better. There 's not monny bairns 'at 'ud 'a done as much—an' said as little. Nay, nay; they 'd 'a telt 'im 'e was a treublesome old feller long sin'. Good-by, lass; good-by—an' gie my respecks tiv 'is Rivrence when 'e comes back."

His eye kindled momentarily as the girl laid light fingers on the horny right hand and stooped and kissed him. But the light of this died out of them as soon as he had done speaking, and the pressure of her clasp relaxed. As they passed out of the kitchen his gaze followed them dimly from afar, seeming to inquire who were these figures departing, and whence came they and what their errand, and in what remote, unintelligible degree their presence concerned himself.

CHAPTER XVIII

For a short space the Spawer and Pam walked along in silence, but sharing the same thought, as though they made joint use of an umbrella. The stillness of a great Sunday had fallen over them; like communicants of the Blessed Sacrament of Charity,

they walked away a little hushed, each treasuring the remembrance of the other's goodness; each trying to retain undissipated those elusive sky-colors of exaltation that at length must melt and fade away, however carefully cherished, into the dull grey of daily life.

And between here and the joining of the roads at Hesketh's corner the Spawer was pledged to sign the document of departure. In two odd miles of green-bordered laneway he was to waft all their charitable illusion on one side with the rude hand of resolve, like the intrusive fumes of rank tobacco, rather than the blessed clouds of incense, and make a clear path for his shuffling feet to walk in.

He stole a look down the side of his nose at the girl by his elbow. If her clear face had been a window, and he a contemptible urchin whose purpose was a stone secreted in the palm of his hostile hand, he could not have put it behind his back with greater shame or remorse when she looked up at him.

"Hello!" he said, drawing up in their equable stride with a fine pretence of awakening consciousness to the trend of their steps. "Where on earth are we hurrying off to so fast?"

The girl drew up too, and sought his face inquiringly.

"Home ... are n't we?" she suggested, with a gentle stirring of surprise at his need for the

question.

"Are you so anxious to get rid of me?" he asked.

"I? Oh, no ... I was n't thinking about that."

"Let 's think about it now, then," he prompted agreeably. "Truth to tell, little woman, you 've made me feel such a very good little boy—so smug and pious—that I dread going back to the corrupt and naughty world yet a bit. I feel I only want just a little time for my wings to grow. So don't spoil an angel for a penn'orth of tar. Give me a chance to become a cherub, that 's a dear girl. What do you say to a turn as far as the cliff at Shippus? I 'm not sure that I shan't be able to fly by the time we get there. Don't stand in the way of my flying, please."

Pam stood swinging the empty basket against her skirts, with a hungry look towards Shippus and a lingering duty-pull towards Ullbrig. Inwardly, ah! if he 'd only known how she was dying to accept this invitation without demur.

"I don't know ... I should like," she admitted, and asked: "What time is it, please?"

"Ah, what a girl for strict time it is, to be sure," the Spawer made answer banteringly, pulling out his watch. "Always one, two, three, four; one, two, three, four. But strict time 's not always music, piccola mia, don't forget that. And music 's like life, no good at all without a little 'tempo rubato.' Five o'clock, dear child—and there 's a green fly on your chin." He stooped forward, put his lips towards it, and puffed it

lightly away. What a pretty chin it was, seen so near too, and how almost like kissing it it had seemed—though not quite. Ah, not quite. (What would she have said if he had, now?) "There," he exclaimed, as the green fly floated out into space, "... excuse my taking the liberty of blowing, but I was n't sure of my touch. I did n't want to defile your chin with a murder, by accident. Well, what do you say?"

"Five o'clock 's rather late," was what the girl said, but there was as little backbone in the suggestion as in the body of a sawdust doll. "I 'm afraid ... tea."

"The very thing," the Spawer decided. "Let 's have tea at Shippus together, and walk back like giants refreshed. Come; what do you say to that? I say beautiful! beautiful! What do you say?"

Apparently the girl said "Oh!" and having said that, seemed able to say no more.

"Very well, then," the Spawer declared, artfully taking the "Oh!" for assent. "Come along and let 's tell 'em to put the kettle on, and be sure to give us tea-leaves out of the canister."

He took possession of the basket again, that she released into his hands as token of submission to his will.

"You won't ... lose the cover cloth, though, will you?" she besought him, when he showed a tendency to swing it too freely.

"I 'll stuff it in my pocket," he promised her,

suiting action to his words. "And then I shall be sure to have it safe with me at Cliff Wrangham when you want it."

Then slowly and happily they retraced their steps towards the sea.

Being a Tuesday, and harvest-time to boot—the sacred Sunday feeling of silence covered Shippus too beneath its beneficent mantle. Moreover, week-days are the only Sabbaths that this place ever knows. As soon as the church bells of Ullbrig announce to the landlady of the Royal Arms (which is four fifths of Shippus, as everybody knows) the hour of divine service, she throws open the dingy business door, and listens for the welcome rumble of the first brake load of travelers who have driven out the thirteen odd miles from Hunmouth to be supplied with the drink that would be denied them (by the devout act of a Protestant and religious Government) at their own door. There is nothing at all royal about the Royal Arms except the name. It is disclosed with the remaining few cottages of Shippus at a quick turn of the road—an irregular, dirty-washed building—presenting, apparently, nothing but back doors. Indeed, there is no front entrance at all, that I know of. And the Spawer approaches the Royal Arms and orders the Royal Arms to put the kettle on and lay the table for two, with ham and eggs and anything else they think likely to tempt an invalid. And the Royal Arms, which is the austere-faced lady who

looked sternly at them on their arrival through the small-paned window of what might be the scullery, after suggesting that he should accompany her to the hen-run and pick his fancy, promised tea faithfully in twenty minutes. She could also promise it in fifteen, if he liked, but not faithfully.

On a backless bench, close by the cliff edge, Pam and the Spawer sat together in blessed community of spirit, and solaced their souls in the blue sea before them. The sun, sinking behind their backs, cast their two shadows far out on to the sands below, above the black silhouette of the cliff. Right out to sea, on the straight, blue line of the horizon, a ship stood up in snowy purity, like an iceberg. Over one corner of the sky a smudge, as though a finger dipped in soot had drawn it across the azure, broad at its base, thinned away to where it joined itself by a fine thread to the funnel of a distant steamer. The chalk cliffs of Farnborough rose up above the water in white marble, and the little alabaster finger of the lighthouse showed clear, like a tiny belemnite.

And after they had spent their twenty minutes in contemplation of the scene and wandered to and fro a little along the trampled margin of the cliff, they retrace their steps and make their way into the tea-room of the Royal Arms.

It is a long, low-ceilinged room, that promises little in the way of table luxuries, and keeps its word. A great, bare table runs up the centre of it on

trestles, looking like a crocodile; scaly with the involute rings of many glasses, and discolored with the spillings of many liquids. At the far end, in a corner by the window, is an aged piano—more aged than any the Spawer has ever come across, he thinks. He gives an exclamation of amused greeting when his eyes first fall upon it, and throwing up the lid, shakes hands with it most affably. Probably it has never known respectability since the hour of its birth—or at least since it went into the world from the factory. It has been a pot-house creature—changing from pot-house to pot-house, from vaults to cosy, from cosy to smoke-room, and from smoke-room to private bar—until its landing here from Hunmouth three years ago. It has the cracked, dissipated, nasal voice of a chucker-out, accustomed to hurl vile-chorded epithets against a roomful of rowdy soakers, and knows nothing of tune, never having heard any. But such as it is, it is a distinct discovery and an acquisition to the present company.

"My good fellow," the Spawer tells it, "it is plain you know nothing of my friends Brahms and Beethoven—to say nothing of Chopin. Later on I must certainly introduce you. It would n't be fair to them to leave you unacquainted when such a fine opportunity offers."

But for the present they take their places at the end of the crocodile table, where a cloth has been spread, with a pewter tea-pot stand; a glass bowl of

some very azure and crystallised lumps of sugar; a dried seed-cake, set out on a tri-colored tissue paper doyley; some treacly marmalade; some butter; and a meagre miscellany of cheese-cakes. Ah, how different from Pam's cooking and Pam's management, all these —and yet, under the circumstances, quite enjoyable too, as a sort of super-exalted jest. An under-sized girl in a full-sized apron, who tilts the end of a big tray at such an angle upward, in front of her, to sustain it at all, that she appears, on approach, to be walking on her knees, ministers to their needs. She gives Pam an oppressed greeting, for Pam knows her and she knows Pam, but her eye is mainly occupied with the Spawer. She is visibly impressed with his importance, but the impression, like all else about the Royal Arms, does not run to superfluous courtesy. When he addresses a remark to her that she has not heard, she tilts up her chin, sideways on, and screwing her lips to inquiry says: "Eh?" or "M'm?" When he asks for a knife she demands: "En't ye got one?" and when he removes his elbow to look, sees for herself he has n't, and tells him, "Ah thought ah 'd setten two," as though that explained everything. The Spawer thanks her liberally for all she does for them, but never once can he succeed in forcing a "Thank you" from her in return.

But it 's all very jolly and entertaining. Pam pours out the tea.

"Sugar and cream mine for me, dear girl," the

Spawer bids her, "while I tackle the ham."

"How many do you take?" Pam asks him.

"As many as you like to give me," the Spawer tells her. "I promise I won't complain."

"I 'll give you one and a bit, then," Pam says. "Then you can come again if you like."

"How good of you," says the Spawer.

And altogether they are very happy indeed. They eat part of their ham and eggs with dreadful deadly Bengal metal forks, and cut them with leaden-looking knives, bone-hafted, that are warranted "Real Sheffield Steel," without compromising any particular maker by name.

And they urge each other to fresh helpings of the dried seed-cake, that probably began its public career last Bank Holiday; and partake of the fly-blown cheese-cakes, so great is their exaltation. At times too, those necessary words are almost upon the Spawer's lips. The moment seems propitious. Only let him swallow this mouthful, and he will tell her ... he will say to her:

"Dear girl..."

Then the Dear Girl smiles, or the Dear Girl turns her head, or the Dear Girl forestalls his words with words infinitely more desirable, or catches his eye, and sends it back with as guilty a feeling as though he were a top-story lodger trying to sneak down the staircase for a bucket of coal, and intercepted with his nose at the door and the bucket in his hand.

CHAPTER XIX

And meanwhile, as he removed himself more completely from the girl by resolve, they came closer to each other in spirit. At the piano against the window, looking out upon a poultry-run and the profile of three meagre swing-boats, the Spawer sat down and made music, and the music—even from this cracked, tin-plate, pot-house piano—seemed to sum up all the goodness, all the charity, all the kindness, all the happiness of the day; give it a pure and hallowed expression, as the night's thanksgiving prayer gives blessed articulation to the hidden processes of the soul. It was a mantle, this music that the Spawer made, enfolded about them both. Their two lives, at this moment, were silver streams of content, that met in melodious estuary, and flowed henceforth with one broad current towards the infinite.

Ah! Dangerous state of exaltation this, when souls seem severed from the body, and feel no clog of their fleshy burthens binding them to sordid earth. When spirits are so emancipated from the material that a breath can almost blow them; when life seems to have lost all root in worldly soil, but is merely the blessed sweet odor, hovering above the blossom of

existence. While the Spawer played the sky deepened. It seemed to descend like a beneficent angel from heaven and clasp the swing-boats in a celestial embrace, so that they slumbered with the deep peace that comes from above. Pallid harvest stars opened places for themselves in the curtain of blue dusk and peeped down upon the scene. Night threw down her lawny veil of mist, that wound the world dreamily in its filmy folds and hid the realities of existence. The life of toil and labor, the life of matter and the life of fact—these lives were no more, they were merged in a delightful life of dreams. To think was to do. Activity was merely a beautiful unfolding of the soul, delivered of all gross physical exertion, like the expansion of a cloud or the dreamy convolution of a puff of white steam. Pam and the Spawer were no longer flesh and blood; they were the disembodied souls of themselves. They were their own thoughts, disencumbered of the flesh, merged delightfully into each other, and moving by volition amid a world of dreams. Everything that lay about them was symbolised into sublime moral truths, into doctrines of love and charity. All the world, all their doings, were dreams.

They dreamed they left the piano and bought more tea-biscuits at six a penny, and wandered forth (without any consciousness of legs) to redeem their promise to the donkeys. After much wandering, they dreamed they found them and fed them. Divine

symbolism of love. And the girl dreamed she kissed their noses and said many good-bys. Kissed the donkeys' noses? Did she really kiss *their* noses? Or were these kisses, cashed upon the donkeys' noses, but the kisses of love and happiness drawn upon the bank of universal love about them, and paid into the treasury of their joint content? And she wound her soft dream arms about the donkeys' necks. But in this nebulous state of bliss, where all thoughts, all actions, all love, and all happiness seemed shared in common, and indivisible, like the particles of gases that shift and move and change their relative positions, but do not alter their substantial bulk, it might have been that her dream arms wound about the Spawer's dream neck. They dreamed their way to the cliff edge to take farewell of the sea, that lay out with a silver-grey sheen upon its blue depth. On the same seat they sat again, with their backs to the contracting shapelessness of the Royal Arms and the west, whose dusky cheek the setting sun tinged to crimson like the blush of a beautiful Creole. The penetrating eye of Farnborough looked out at them from across the water, took stock of them and closed itself once more. Anon it looked this way again, to see if they were still there, and there they were. Many strange scenes of love, in all love's aspects, has the far-seeing eye of Farnborough witnessed in its day, by the side of the water along this coast. What it does not know of these emotions—as well as of the

comedies and tragedies of death—is not worth knowing.

They dreamed, these two did, that they rose again and wandered a little along the cliff line. They dreamed they saw a faint phosphorescent pallor away over the water, and the Spawer dreamed he said:

"It is the moon. Let's see it rise."

So they dreamed themselves on to another seat, and sat together and watched the moon push its red rim, like the edge of a new penny, above the misty horizon. And they watched it turn to gilt as it rose and threw aside its veil of mist, and mount up at last like a beautiful goddess with a fair white body. They dreamed themselves back to the old bench once more, at the head of the zigzag steps, cut in the face of the cliff for descent to the beach.

"Let us sit down here a bit," the Spawer said; and they dreamed they seated themselves.

The eye of Farnborough looked out searchingly for the bench, and found it at last, with this twain on it, and said "Aha!" and winked itself out again. In the growing light of the moon the girl's silvery face shone forth from the shimmering mist like a planet. Was he going to tell her here what he had to say? ...

Or was he going to wind his arms about her and kiss her, kiss her, kiss her? Would she resent? or would she melt into his embrace like a drop of water in strong wine? Ah, torture of temptation. St.

Anthony scarce suffered by comparison with this. The moon, the sea, the vastness of the night, the stars, the winding mist, the exaltation—rising up like fumes from their communion of this day—were all commingled in his soul, making his emotions infinite. He was a poor weak mortal, suffering the Olympian passion of a god. One moment his arms were almost about her—though he never stirred. The next he was holding up his purpose like a burning crucifix before his passion's eyes ... and all the while the girl sat with her face to the moon, and he with his face sideways upon hers.

Then the prolonged silence woke the girl to a sense of something impending—that sense, so fine and subtle in her sex, that tells it, by one quick touch, as of an antenna, what man must exercise all the processes of his reason to discover.

"Shall we ... be going back?" she suggested, part rising, with a tentative hand upon the seat, for she felt the silence as the dangerous filaments of a web that was being woven about her for some sort of captivity.

"Oh ... if you are tired of this..." he responded.

"I am not tired of it," she said.

"Let 's stay a little longer, then," he proposed. "Shall we?"

"If you like..." the girl said.

The submissive rustle of her sinking back sounded like a sigh. They were very dreamy the two

of them.

And again the temptation of St. Anthony commenced. What devils were struggling for possession of him? Why was he delaying matters? Every moment threw the girl more upon his hands. He had only to drop his voice, to whisper, to put out his dream arms, to enfold her, to stifle her lips under dream kisses.... And with what object this?

Ah!

Love is no analyst; does not profess to be; does not want to be. Pure love and love unworthy are one and the same at the crisis. Whether the flame is the flame of an evil incendiary or the spontaneous flame of pure affinity ... it is all one when it burns. She was there; there by his side. There to be taken ... or there to be left. Should he take her? Should he leave her? And while he temporised thus with the devils, before ceding the keys of his inner soul ... the girl was on her feet again.

"Perhaps we ought to be going ... don't you think?"

Fool that he was. The moment was by again. This was no time for his arm.

"Plainly ... you are in a hurry to be rid of me." His laugh was infectiously frank and free. "Am I such poor company?"

"It 's growing late," the girl said, evading the dangerous quicksand of his question. "I 'm afraid ... they 'll be wondering what's got me, at home."

"Ah, is it such a naughty girl as that? Don't they trust her?"

"They don't know where I am. I did n't tell them."

"Do you always tell them?"

"Not always...."

"Good girl. She shall have a white mark for telling the truth."

"But ... this afternoon I did n't know ... that I was coming here. They may be anxious."

"Suppose we walk as far as the other seat before going back. Would that make them very, very anxious?"

"Perhaps we might walk as far as that ... if you wish."

And they walked—a whole legion of devils in attendance upon the man. The searching eye, gazing keenly along the cliff from seat to seat, found them once more at the second, and blinked knowingly. "The old, old comedy," it told itself. But for all that, it was not quite the old, old comedy of the true Shippus sort. The devils were practically in possession of the dream-Spawer's soul, but the dream-Spawer was so completely detached from the real Spawer's body that no physical manifestation took place. The dream-Spawer, floating to and fro above the small, pitiful, carnal presentment, like a balloon in oscillation, wound dream arms about the girl, pressed dream kisses upon her lips, felt her own

dream arms wind celestially about his neck; suffocated all remorse, all scruples, all purpose, all resolution, beneath kisses soft and seductive as the roseate clouds of a July sunset ... but there was no contact with the earthly Spawer. All this the vast dream-Spawer did, but the small earthly Spawer beneath stood still and looked at the sea.

And a little later the searching eye from Farnborough, stealing a sly glimpse at the second seat, said a sudden "Hello!" and gazed in unconcealed, wide-open surprise. "H'm!" it reflected, in a tone of considerable disappointment. "So they 've gone at last. Sorry I could n't see the end of that business. Wonder where they are now."

But it had other little episodes to keep its eye upon—Merensea, Farnborough, and even Spathorpe way—and could not afford to waste time in useless regrets.

CHAPTER XX

The crisis was over, but the danger of relapse remained. The dream had not been broken, it had merely been prolonged. Slowly or suddenly, the awakening was bound to come. Every step of the homeward road that they took was unwinding their dream like a skein of worsted. And now, incredulous

as it may seem, with the homeward end in view, the Spawer recommenced to apply himself, by a kind of feverish rote, to the preparation of the task that he had been so ready to cast down.

They passed the group of cottages where—ages and ages ago, one blazing August afternoon—they had called to visit a dying man. He would be dead now. The Spawer had troubled his last moments with a hymn-tune on a cacophonous harmonium that emitted a discordant clamor like a flock of geese in full prayer; and the girl had read him a chapter out of St. Mark—or was it Matthew or Luke?—John perhaps. What a pious, smug-faced fellow he had felt himself in those days. Almost fit for heaven. And in these! He gazed, with the girl, at the little yellow square of light as they passed, that showed where the scene had taken place, and thought of Now and Then. All the air was saturated with moonlight. It looked too thick to breathe. A great exhalation rose up from the pores of the earth, tremulous as a mystic bridal-veil worn on the brow of Nature. The hedges swooned away on either side of them. The sky drooped dizzily. Sounds, filtered and languorous, percolated through the supernatural stillness, with a strange distinctness and purity. The cries of children at play, robbed of all earthly meaning and wondrously tranquillised, as though uttered from the far-away abode of the blest; the barking of dogs; the call of shepherds; the coughing of sheep; the lowing

of cattle; the unexpected cry of birds; the beating of metal on some distant anvil, like the ringing of an angelus bell; the slamming of remote gates—all spiritualised and purified, as though they came from one world, and these two occupied another. There was a melancholy and solitude about the earth that made them feel as though they were among the shades; as though they were dead (very peacefully), and the sun would never rise upon hard realities again; but as though, from now henceforth through eternity, their souls might wander in misty moonlight.

And still they walked, and still he had not told her. Still his soul was divided in conflict between the desire to relapse himself to the dream and the necessity to meet that promissory I.O.U. of honor which he had given to himself. All the time he was practising overtures; trying phrases in his mind by which he could approach the subject casually, without allowing the girl to perceive the degraded tortuous trail over which he had been crawling to it on his moral belly all this morning, and all this afternoon, and all this evening. From the thick moonlight, as they walked, other shades detached themselves of a sudden, as though they had but that moment been fashioned out of the tremulous mist, met them walking more slowly, and were absorbed into the mist again on the Shippus side behind them, like ink-spots in blotting-paper. Silent couples,

walking wordless and sometimes apart, but wrapped in their own amorous atmosphere, and always with that strange, lingering communion of step, that concentration of purpose, as though a magnet were drawing them forward in slumber. And already, here and there, through the hedges and through branches of distant trees and in the moonlit sky, were gleaming the dull yellow of blind-drawn casements and the scintillating beams of naked lamps that betokened Ullbrig.

And still he had not told her.

A bat, fluttering blindly over the dusky hedgerow and steering itself erratically on its course like an uncertain cyclist, flew almost into the girl's face and wheeled off abruptly, so that she felt the waft of its wing on her cheek and gave a little cry of surprise.

"What is the matter with you, dear girl?" The Spawer turned quickly at the sound. "You have n't twisted your foot?"

"No, no." The girl held up a face of reassurance in the moonlight. "It's nothing ... only a bat."

"And what did the naughty bat do to her to frighten her so?"

"It did n't frighten me really. I thought it was going to fly in my face. It startled me at first ... that's all."

"It was a bad, wicked bat to fly in her face and startle her at first." He took hold of her arm. At the

touch of that round, warm, live member all the blood in her body seemed to jump to issue with his, and combine, as though one great pulsing artery fed them both. "Come along," he said lightly, striving with his voice to palliate the tremulous danger of their union. "I won't have this dear girl frightened. I will take care of her."

She made no demur, either to his words or to his touch, but came along by his side; so warm, so wonderfully alive, so spiritually silent.

"Will she trust him to take care of her?" he asked her softly. And after a moment: "Will she?" for she had not answered a word. She said "Yes" very faintly, with the faintness of happiness.

"It is a good girl," he said caressingly, "... and she shall be well taken care of." He pressed confidence into that supple trunk of arm. "But she must try and be as kind to me as she can ... now." He waited to give her the opportunity of asking him, Why? but she did not. She was in the ethereal state that takes everything for granted. "Because ... well ... because she did n't believe me this afternoon. She thought I was only telling tarradiddles. Now did n't she? But it was n't tarradiddles at all, at all. It was something far worse than tarradiddles."

He felt the sudden thrill of awakening alarm run through her; but still she said no word, asked no questions, left everything to him.

"What does the good little girl say?" he asked her

—oh, so lightly! With his hand on her arm, with the pain of parting quite merged in the warm consolatory current of their common blood, penance seemed a light, a meaningless thing. What was departure but a delightful occasion for kisses and comfort ... till the dread moment came? The good little girl trembled a little, he thought, but said nothing. "Does n't she say she 's sorry? Come, come. Surely she 's not such a heartless little girl as not to say she 's sorry?"

This time the girl twisted a swift, startled face of inquiry towards his own half-bantering smile.

"I thought..." she began, and stopped with the abruptness of fear.

"Yes, yes; I know you did," he laughed. "I told you so. You thought I was just telling a great big fib, did n't you? ... because I did n't want to bind myself to the ordeal of any more harmonium."

"You don't mean ... you 're going away?"

"Should you be very sorry?" he asked her.

She did not speak, but seemed, in the moonlight, to be looking at him as though she were trying to absorb his meaning, to see if there were any other sense below the surface of his words.

"Are you really ... going?" she asked him, after a while.

The intentness of her look and the wondrous depth of her great eyes—stirred now to troubled speculation—sent his purpose reeling aslant again.

"Ah!" He gave her arm a protesting squeeze. "She 's not going to give her sorrow away until she 's quite sure there 's genuine necessity for it. She 's a very wise and very cautious little woman. She wants good security for any small advances of commiseration. If I did n't know for certain that her name was what it is ... I should be inclined to think they called her Rachel or Leah or Abigail or Zipporah—with something of Benjamin or Isaacs or Ishmael about it. Never mind. I will trust her with my gold watch, and she shall give me what she likes on it. Yes, little Israelite ... it was the truth that this unfortunate Gentile spoke this afternoon. He knows it was ... because he does n't speak it so often but that he can tell the taste. He 's been loafing about happily for a long time ... but the eternal policeman Destiny has given him the office to move on, and it seems he 'll have to move. It 's no use getting cross with the law. Is she sorry for him now, this little Usurer?"

"But you 're not going away ... at once?" she asked him, in a startled voice.

"My gracious! What an out-and-out extortioner she is," the Spawer exclaimed, with an assumption of admiring tribute. "She won't advance me a cent of sympathy until she knows the term of the loan. If I say I 'm going at once, she 'll give me a better price of pity than if the advance is to drag on over an indefinite period of weeks." He made pretence to throw his chin in the air and laugh with pleasure.

"Honestly, little Rebecca," he told her, looking down once more, "I don't want to humbug a penny more out of you than you think you ought to give. At present I can't say when I go ... whether I have to go to-morrow, the day after, the day after that ... or next week even. It all depends on a letter. I 'm a condemned man, under indefinite reprieve." He paused for a moment, balancing whether he should say the next thing on his mind. "As a matter of fact, little woman...." He turned his face towards her with the engaging air of candor that seemingly could not deny itself. "... It 's no use trying to stuff you. You 're too sharp to take a dummy watch with the works out, or a gilt sixpence. So ... as it 's not a bit of good trying to be anything else ... I 'll be frank with you. I 'll tell you a secret. It 's a big one—all about myself. Do you think you can keep a secret?"

"I 'll try," said the girl, with her eyes fixed apprehensively on his lips.

"Well, then..." he said. "I 'm in your hands. I 'm going to do a very silly thing."

Did a tremor of apprehensive pain, like the very ghost of a shiver, run up the arm that he held? or was it his own mind, that through a feeling of sympathy sought to attribute its knowledge to hers?

"You 'll think me a frightful ass, no doubt, when I tell you what it is. Can you guess?"

The girl seemed to concentrate her look upon him, but whether the true answer had flashed across

her mind, or whether the flash of divination merely served to dazzle her and make her ignorance still darker, so that she looked for enlightenment from him, he could not tell; but she said "No," and gave up his riddle with a shake of the head.

"I wish you 'd guessed," he said. "It throws it all on to my shoulders. Now I shall have to hoist the confession up like my own portmanteau, and perhaps look a bigger ass than ever, with my knees all bent under it. Anyhow, here goes—one, two, three ... I 'm going to be married.

"Well?" he inquired, after a pause. "Won't you say you 're sorry now? It 's all my own silly fault, I know, and I deserved to be married for being such a fool ... but still—can't you squeeze one little drop of pity for me?"

"Are you really going to be married?" asked the girl. She spoke in a very level and, it struck him, a very unemotional voice.

"Great goodness, little woman," he exclaimed, "what an unbelieving Israelite you are! Do you think I do a wholesale and export trade in tarradiddles? You did n't use to suspect me before, even when I told you I was a great composer. Won't you believe me now, when I 'm willing to confess myself an awful idiot? On my word and conscience, then ... I 'm going to be married."

"I hope ... you 'll be very, very happy," said the girl.

For her, he thought the words and the wish somewhat prosaic. At this moment she lacked one of those beautiful little emotional touches with which she could illuminate the simplest saying to poetry. Her voice, soft though it was, and so full of sympathetic interest, yet struck him with a painful feeling of matter-of-fact. He and his marriage seemed suddenly stuck up in hard, unpoetic affirmation, like the tin price-shield in a pork-pie. The subtlety of artistic suggestion was altogether lacking, all the romance was gone. The thing he had wished delicately hinting at, a mysterious romantic melody for *celli con sordini*, to suit the orchestra of the evening and of their mood, was become a commonplace tune for a drunken cornet to play outside a public-house door on Saturday night. All at once he began to feel that the coverlet of dreams was fast slipping away from him. The moonlight was clearer: the hedges harder in outline. In spite of the hand that lay on the girl's arm, as though to retain that part of the dream at any rate, they were no longer spiritually united. There was an intangible, invisible, impalpable something between them as keen as the sword of flame at the Gate of the Garden of Eden. Like many another martyr before him, in his crucial hour the roseate illusions that had fortified him to his purpose were floating away from him now, and leaving him only his actual senses to realise externals and apprise him of the horrible

pangs of suffering. Before, he had been temporising at the stake; trying the rope to see how its bondage felt, without allowing the cruel loops to cut into his flesh; posturing as martyr before the girl in mind only—but now he had made the girl a participant of his purpose.

And the worst of it was that he must profess that the parting meant nothing so very much to either of them. He must not insult the girl by suggesting that his going affected only her—that she would deeply feel the loss of him who felt her loss so little that he was leaving her for another. And yet! And yet!

O Lord! And yet! All his present life was but a meaningless series of disjunctive conjunctions; words of contingency and speculation; ifs, buts, supposes, peradventures, perchances, and the like.

"I say ... you 're very silent, little woman," he remarked, after a while. "Don't be hard on a fellow because he 's down on his luck. You 're not offended with me, are you?"

"Offended with you?" she said. "Oh, no, indeed. What should make me offended ... with you?"

He made believe to laugh.

"Well, I don't know what should. Only ... perhaps because you 're disappointed to find that I 'm just as much an ass as any other man. Oh, music 's nothing to do with it, believe me. A man may play like an angel on the piano—as I do—and yet play as giddy a goat as any on four legs, in real life, as I 've

done. But what 's done is done. I was younger in those days, perhaps. All the same, I 'm not too old for a little sympathy. Say something to me, won't you?"

"I hardly know what to say," said the girl. "I was trying to think."

"Say something to give me a little courage, then," he suggested; "something to strengthen my knees a little. You don't know how white-livered and weak-kneed it makes a man feel when the marriage noose is round his neck, and he seems to hear the bell tolling, and sees the chaplain getting out his little prayer-book, and knows his hour 's approaching to be launched into eternity."

Even to himself he recognised how beautifully his words were serving the purpose of concealing truth with truth. No girl on earth—certainly not the girl by his side—could have probed his utterances, in that candid voice of his, and said: "You are speaking the truth. You are going to this wedding like a weak-kneed cur, and all the time you are trying to cling to me for comfort and consolation—and yet trying not to demean yourself in my eyes by letting me know it. I am the girl you love, and you are trying to experience the pleasure of my love vicariously; by proxy, as it were. If I were in the other one's place, and she were in mine, not all the waters of the world would keep you apart from her."

No, no. His smiling, semi-serious words were like a rosewood veneer over deal wood, and there

was no penetrating them.

They were close on Hesketh's corner now. He had told her all, and he had told her nothing. Words —hundreds, thousands, millions of words were still wanting to make the parting as it should be.

And all at once he felt the power of the dream returning; the impulse to take the girl in his arms; to kiss her; to tell her that he was but jesting, and that he loved her above everything and everybody in the world; pawn all his future, with its honor and duty, for the pleasure of that one glorious avowal. How could he let her depart out of that empty leave-taking without a word, a sign, when his heart was like a vast sea, and she the spirit moving on its waters? Even as he thought of it his fingers tightened possessively upon the girl's warm arm; his lips dropped persuasively; the words seemed to rise to his mouth as easily as bubbles to the surface of water, for the mere thinking.

"You have not said ... you are sorry I am going yet," he told her. "Are you sorry?"

Did the girl tremble? Her face was turned away from him. Was she laughing or was she crying?

"Are you sorry?" he asked her again pleadingly, conveying by inflection what he wished her answer to be; his lips lower towards her still.

"Yes..."

He caught the word, but it was more like a shiver—as though all the tissues of her body had

conspired to give it tremulous birth, like the whispering of a tree. Her head was still turned from him.

"Very sorry?" he pressed her. "Tell me. See; lift up your face..." His own face sank lower, as low as the hat brim. "... You are not crying?"

He released his hold of the girl's arm, slid his hand about her and drew her to him by the waist. Into that warm socket she yielded submissively, like a child into its cradle. She was his now; his in all but the asking. They were still walking, but their walk was the ghostly stepless progress of a mist moving across the meadows. The dream was back again, and the gloriousness of it. He put out his left hand, with the basket hanging from its wrist, and took the girl's soft warm chin to pull it gently towards his lips.

"Pam..." he said.

Out of the yellow moonlight, or out of the denser substance of the hedges, or out of the earth at their feet, was shaped suddenly the motionless figure of a man. Whether he had been there from the first, or had come there by approach, or had overtaken them, appeared not. As though he were a black pestle in an alchemist's mortar, he seemed deposed there, without movement or volition of his own. At sight of him all the dream was precipitated in sediment of actuality, that fell down to the ground in fine, imperceptible residue, like the shattered particles of a bubble. The Spawer's arm slid to his

side, and they dropped apart several paces, guiltily.

"It is the schoolmaster," Pam said, awakening out of the sleep with a voice of sudden terror, under her breath. "... I must be going."

The Spawer commenced to hum, and craning his neck up to the moon as though he were aware of this orb for the first time, made pleasant allusion in a clear, uncompromising voice to "A jolly fine night." The man was on Pam's side of the road. As they reached him the girl stopped.

"They have been looking for you," the man said.

"I am here," Pam answered, in her old clear voice.

The man did not move. He remained there motionless, seeming to take the words as an intimation that she would accompany him. Pam held out her hand for the basket that the Spawer was swinging with an assumption of negligence and ease.

"Thank you," she said.

The dark figure of the man embarrassed all speech. The Spawer handed the basket over into her hands without a word.

"And the serviette..." he said, drawing it from his pocket.

Pam received it from him and thanked him again.

Then there was a slight pause.

"Good-night!" she said.

"Good-night!"

They shook hands with a strange and ludicrous politeness.

Had they been naughty children, and this stranger the angry parent of one of them, they could not have parted under a deeper cloud of ignominy and disgrace.

CHAPTER XXI

The "Good-night" so soullessly inflected, that the girl gave to the Spawer with her tepid fingers of politeness, was to her the leave-taking of all her happiness. In joy she was an orphan. Her heart was choking her as she surrendered herself to the sombre shadow in the roadway; the black anchor that seemed to hold her fast now at the end of an iron cable. If she could have died then, in her mingled agony and shame, sorrow, mortification, and sickening despair, she would have wished it. For a while no word was spoken. She and the gloomy figure of the man walked towards Ullbrig together, very far apart, without looking at each other, almost as though they were ignoring each other's presence. A great silent wall of division rose up between them, a barrier of disgrace, on the shady side of which walked Pam. Through all this silence was going on a mighty struggle. The man, with throbbing neck and veins of whipcord in his forehead, was desperately striving to find his pretext to scale the barrier or break through and speak to the girl on ground of common understanding, but a sense of shame for what he had seen withheld him. Great waves of heat

and cold swept him alternately. That which he had witnessed chilled him with a horrible fear for the terrors of that which he had not witnessed, and yet fired him to torrid anguish. That embrace that had struck him sickly to stone in the roadway ... was it the beginning, or was it the end? Had the girl been playing him false all through? With the magnified doubts of his class concerning the evil magnetism of musicians and the slackness of their scruples, his heart was wrung with horrible apprehensions as to how far the Spawer possessed this power, and how far he had used it. Was this girl—whom he loved with a pure, blind, white-heat passion—was she, while scorning his approaches, so deeply infatuated with the visitor from the Cliff that she coveted rather to be the temporary toy of the one than the honored wife of the other? The doubt stung him to the quick. He wanted to speak, yet dared not for fear his words might betray this thorny crown of his torture. Oh, what he would have given to know the history of that walk from Shippus to Ullbrig; what would he not have given to be able to wipe it out of all their lives and memories as though it had never been.

"Let me ... carry your basket," he said awkwardly, after a while. He tried to round his voice mentally before using it, to file down its roughness of emotion; but it came out hoarse and unequal in spite of him.

To the girl, troubled with her own personal

misery and the gnawing misery of speculation as to how much of her weakness he had witnessed, and what he was thinking of her, and the acute irksomeness of his presence at this crisis of her life, when she sought only solitude, the mere relinquishing of the basket seemed like another surrender. She clung to it in spirit, as though it were a straw on the black waters of her foundering.

"It is nothing ... thank you," she told him. "I can carry it."

He felt the resistance to his offer, and the motive that urged it, and the blood swept up about his head again. The girl, though she did not look at him, saw the hands go up to his throat.

"You were ... not carrying it ... before," he hazarded.

"We are so near home." The girl hesitated, and there was a tremble in her voice. "You may carry it, if you like," she said, and handed it to him.

"Thank you."

He took it from her with an awkward scuffle of untutored politeness. Even as he felt the pride of the possession he felt the shame and degradation of it too—to walk by the side of her as the Spawer had done; to carry her basket as the Spawer had done; to try and delude his poor, anguished soul with these fragments of a banquet to which he had been an uninvited spectator (a guest never), and make himself believe he was in some sort enjoying her

favor. Ah, poor fool! poor fool! By his side walked the phantom figure of the Spawer, communing with the girl, and his miserable guard of flesh and blood was powerless to prevent it, or intercept the messages of remembrance passing between them. Ah, if he could; if he could. All his life was bound up in the girl. He had wrestled for her in body and soul. On his knees he had prayed for her, begging God to give her to him, to incline her heart, to soften her, to pour into her breast the grace to love him. He had got out of his bed to pray for her in the sleepless night-time when she ... had been dreaming-of this visitor, perhaps ... And now.

"Have you been fair to me?" he asked her suddenly, in a low drenched voice. The words rushed up to his mouth on a tide of hot blood.

The girl had felt the imminence of the attack. She had been, in spirit at least, a participant of the man's agony; had felt the blood rushing up again and again with its impulsion of speech.

"What do you mean?" she asked faintly, and turned her head aside momentarily, as though to the gust of a strong wind.

"Have you been fair to me?" he asked her again.

For very fear he dared not alter these words that he had once uttered and was sure of, lest the alteration might involve him too much.

"I have not been unfair..." she said.

She put out the defence like an arm that almost

recognises the justice of the blow aimed, and makes no real effort to ward it.

"You have been very unfair," he said hoarsely. "You know you have been very unfair. Even your voice betrays you." He was on the point of calling upon his eyes for corroboration of her unfairness, but he stopped himself with an effort that the girl heard and understood. "You made me a promise," he said. "One night ... what did you promise?"

"It was n't a promise," the girl protested. "I never promised you anything. I told you I dared not promise ... and I could n't promise ... and I did n't promise."

"It was a promise," he said again. "If it was n't a promise ... it was your word, and I trusted your word. You said there was no bar to my loving you. You told me ... and you know you told me, that I might go on loving you, and try to win ... your esteem. All this time I have been believing you and your word.... Are you going to tell me now that I 've misjudged you?"

He spoke very rapidly and jerkily and hoarsely, as though he were himself ashamed of this necessity to put his thoughts into words and hear them.

"I only said it because ... it was because you pressed me so hard. You would not take my answer. You looked so ill." The slow stream of tears was trickling through the broken pauses of her speech. "It was you that put the words into my mouth. You told

me it would kill you if I said there was no hope. How could I say there was no hope? I could n't; I could n't. You forced me to say that you might go on loving me ... but I told you it was n't a promise."

Her tears were running with her words now. She wept for herself and for this man. The thing she had been dreading, it had come to pass. She was an Ullbrig hypocrite, a deceiver, a faith-breaker, an actor and a worker of lies.

Ah, miserable little sinner, whose only sin perhaps, had she known it, was the sin of an overflowing, over-generous heart ... her day of reckoning was upon her now, and her tears were bitter.

They walked along in silence for a step or two. Though the man by her side was burning to burst forth in a fiery Etna of denunciation and reproach, to subjugate her and gain dominion over her by the sheer conflagration of righteous anger, he dared not, lest she might admit his charges, confess herself a sinner, and own an unconquerable disregard of him. To be allied to her by an indefinite hope, frail as a silkworm's thread, was heavenly compared with the blank severance of despair. He was a retainer upon her favor, and must keep his place. What authority he held, to assume authority over her, came from her.

"You told me ... I might love you," he said, straining his voice to breaking point in his fierce

desire to hold it steady and keep its control, "... that there was no other bar—no other bar. Have you been making a mock of me all this time?"

"No, no." He knew the girl's two hands were together in their agony of protestation, but they both spoke with their faces unturned, each looking before them fixedly. "Believe anything of me ... but that," she begged him. "I have never mocked you. I would never mock you."

He hesitated a moment, and then:

"Are you ... making a mock of yourself?" he asked her.

The question shook her first like a wind, and then stilled her suddenly.

"What do you mean?" she asked him.

"Are you making a mock of yourself?"

They were at the first of the houses now, in the little high street, and there were figures moving about between them and the Post Office; figures that might stop; figures that might speak; figures that might peer into her tear-stained face when the light of some yellow window shone on it.

"I cannot go on ... like this," she said, with a half-sob and a shiver. "I 'm not fit to meet anybody. Let us turn back."

They turned back, facing the moon. The girl walked with her white, troubled face set before her, glistening under its tears, like a second moon. The man, stealing one covert look at it, saw that no

resumption of this subject was likely from her quarter. She was in the clairvoyant state of trouble that would have led her to Shippus again, unchecked, without a word.

"You say you have not made a mock of me," he took up again, in his monotonous, tightened voice, "... but you are making a mock of somebody. Who is it? Is it yourself?"

"Why am I making a mock of somebody?" the girl asked.

"Is it fair to yourself?" he said, and his voice grew tighter and tighter, "... to be taking walks down the Shippus road ... at night ... with a stranger? You know ... what sort of a reputation the Shippus road has at night-time. You know what sort of company ... you are likely to meet ... what sort of company you have met to-night." His voice so constricted about his throat that it seemed like to strangle him. "Is it fair to yourself ... putting me out of the question altogether ... that you should give people ... give them the opportunity of saying ... saying things about you?"

The girl had no answer but the faster flow of her tears. She knew well enough that he had spoken no more than the truth. Judged from an external standpoint, she looked no better than her misguided sisters—farm wenches and hinds' lasses—that wandered to their shame by the hedgerows under the shades of night. And for this, and all her other delinquencies, and all her other sins, unhappinesses,

and penances of suffering ... she wept.

"I think too much of you ... ever to risk bringing you within reach of people's slanders. I would rather cut my hand off ... than that I should hear you spoken lightly of. To me ... your character is more sacred than my own. I would guard it with my life if need be. But what is it ... to others?" The reins of his passion slipped his grasp a little; the girl's tearful endurance encouraged him to speak more forcibly. "What do men of towns care for the character ... of a girl? They come to-day and they go to-morrow. What does it matter to them whether they leave shame ... and broken hearts behind? A girl's heart is a plaything for them ... and when they have broken it ... they throw it aside. There are plenty more hearts to be broken in the big cities."

Like all others of his untraveled kind, he had the wild, generic idea of cities and of the large places of the earth as being seats of sinfulness and iniquity. Wickedness filled them and saturated the dwellers therein. Outside Ullbrig, and the little bit of Yorkshire contiguous with which he was acquainted, the rest of the world (of which he had the fleetingest personal knowledge) was Sodom and Gomorrah. All the men who came from afar, and had the faint traces of fashion about their raiment, were men of danger; ministers of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Perhaps, in his own narrow track of ignorant bigotry, he was not so very far from the truth after

all; but it shocks one's cosmopolitan soul to have to subscribe to such tenets. Not because of what they contain, but because of the uncatholicity of the formula—a very stocks, indeed, for the confinement of one's belief.

"What does it matter ... to him ... whether he makes you food for people's tongues? All he cares about is his own pleasure and gratification. The attentions ... of such a man ... are an insult in themselves. He will know you down here, for his own purposes ... will flatter you ... will walk with you; but would he know you in the towns? Would he walk with you ... before his fine friends? No, he would not. He is treating you as though you were a rose by the roadside, to be plucked and cast away the moment he is tired of you. Your friends are not his friends. You ought to see it ... and know it. You have no right to be associating yourself ... with a man whose acquaintance ... is so ambiguous. Does it matter to him that you are seen with him ... along the Shippus lane by night? Does he care whether you are the talk of every corner and gateway? Does he ask for you honorably ... as I do, and seek to guard your reputation by every means in his power? No, no. When your name has become a byword he will go back to his fine ladies and forget all about you."

"It is not true. You are wrong," Pam struck in tearfully, catching at the breast furthest away from him and pressing under it with her rounded hand as

though to hold up her weak and trembling body, "... wickedly wrong. You have no right to say those things ... and I have no right to listen to you. You think ... because ... because you saw us at Hesketh's corner, and we were together.... But you are mistaken. He met me ... as I was going to Mr. Smethurst's, quite by accident, and went with me. And then ... we had tea ... at Shippus together, and music, and stayed to watch the moon ... and came back. It was every bit my fault. He does n't know anything about Shippus lane ... and I thought of it, but I dared not tell him. How could I? He has been kinder to me than anybody else in the world—except Father Mostyn. He is a gentleman, and I know it as well as you ... and so does he. Is a gentleman wicked because he 's a gentleman? All the things he has done for me ... he has done without ever taking advantage of his kindness by a single word. Other men have done things for me ... and asked me to love them or marry them at once. He has never played with my heart as you say, or tried to make love ... or make me unhappy. He is too proud to do such things. You are wrong ... wickedly wrong. Because ... you love me ... you think everybody loves me. He likes me ... but he does n't love me. I wish he did. Oh, I wish he did! But I 'm not good enough for him ... and I know it. There has never been any question of his loving me. He is engaged to marry somebody else ... and he may leave Ullbrig any day. When he told me he was going

... I was so unhappy that I began to cry. I could n't help it. I did n't think he would notice ... but he did ... and tried to comfort me. And then ... then ... you were there and saw. And I love him," she said, almost fiercely—certainly fiercely for Pam—"I love him. I love him, and I tell you. Because he has been kind, and taught me things, and played to me. I love him in the same way I love Father Mostyn. What if he would n't walk with me before his friends? He has walked with me so kindly here ... and made life so happy for me ... that it will be like death without him. Oh, I wish I were dead now! I wish I were dead now that he 's going!"

And turning aside by Lambton's gate, close on Hesketh's corner, she laid her two arms upon the top rail, and lowering her forehead, poured forth her wet sorrow into the loose folds of her handkerchief, with her back upon the man. He stood, mortified and helpless, while the girl's figure shook in the silent agony of wringing forth her tears. Even from her grief he was shut out. He could not touch her, could not solace her, could not draw near upon her. He was but a beggar, permitted by her bounty to sit at the gate of her heart; a wretched, love-stricken leper, whose confessions of homage were as unpleasant to her as the sight of raw wounds. And now she had turned the tables upon his whining reproaches. It was he that stood guilty, not the girl—and yet his guilt was mingled with an exultant sense of triumph

too, at the news she had told him. The Spawer was going; this evil weaver of charms was under order of departure. Till then he would hold his tongue; bear with the surging of his love. When once this stumbling-block on the pathway to the girl's heart was removed he could renew his approaches—fill the void, even, that this stranger should leave in it.

"I was actuated ... only by desire for your happiness," he told Pam, after he had suffered her to weep awhile without interruption. "What I have said to you," he tugged at his collar, "has been said ... through love and for love."

The girl raised her head, wiped her eyes with the damp ball of her handkerchief, and put it away into her pocket.

"Let us go back," she said. And not another word passed between them that night.

"'Ave ye brought 'er back wi' ye?" Emma Morland called, coming to the passage end by the big clock, to inquire of the schoolmaster when they entered by the front door, and catching sight of Pam: "Goodness, lass, where 'ave ye been to all this time? We was beginnin' to think ye mud 'a gotten lost."

"I went to take Mr. Smethurst ... his wine," Pam said.

The schoolmaster passed through into the little kitchen.

"Ay, bud ah s'd think 'e 'll 'a drunken it all by this time," Emma exclaimed, with not unkindly

sarcasm. She had a reputation, even well deserved, in the district of a tart tongue when occasion called for it—which it frequently did—but to Pam her asperity was something in the nature of a loving shield. She could say the hardest and flintiest utterances to Pam, and yet convey the sense of kindness through them. Her hand, indeed, was bony, but its grasp was tender. "An' 'ow did ye find t' old gentleman? No better, ah s'd think."

"No."

"Nay, 'e 'll nivver be no better i' this wuld, ah doot. They gied ye yer tea, it seems."

"No-o."

"What! En't ye 'ad it, then?"

"Yes, thank you, Emma."

"Where?"

"I had it at Shippus."

"At Shippus. Well, ah nivver! Did ye gan by yersen?"

"I met Mr. Wynne."

"An' 'as 'e been wi' ye all time?"

"Yes."

"'Ave ye onnly just come back?"

"... A little while ago."

Miss Morland's opinion was expressed by a pause.

"Come in an' get yer supper. It 's all sett'n ready."

"I don't want any supper ... thank you, Emma."

"Not want yer supper? What 's amiss wi' ye?"

"Nothing. At least ... I have a headache."

"Ye 'ad n't a headache when ye started."

"It 's the heat. It was very hot in the sun. Where 's uncle?"

"I' t' parlor."

"And aunt?"

"Ay."

"Say good-night to them both for me ... will you, Emma?"

"What ... are ye away to bed?"

"I think ... I shall be better there."

"That 's soon done wi' ye, onnyways."

Emma came closer and took a keen glance into the girl's eyes.

"Ye look to me as though ye 'd been cryin'," she said. "'Ave ye?"

Pam pretended not to hear the question. Moreover, she was quite prepared to cry again at the slightest opportunity. Emma took her by the arm.

"You 're all of a shake," she said, and held the girl under scrutiny. "Pam lass," she said, and dropped her voice to a terrible whisper; "there 's nowt ... nowt wrong wi' ye? Ye 've not been gettin' into trouble?"

"Emma!"

Pam shook herself free of scrutiny with a burning face of repudiation.

"Thank goodness!" Emma said devoutly. "Bud it can 'appen soon enough to onny on ye." Emma testified freely at all times to the frailty of her sex,

from which weakness, however, she dissociated herself, as a woman possessed of the superior lamp of wisdom and common-sense kept always burning. And indeed, it shone so conspicuously in her window that any bridegroom of burglarious intentions would have been singularly intrepid not to have been scared away by such a plain indication of this virgin's alertness. "Onnyway," Miss Morland decided, "... seummut 's come tiv ye beside a 'eadache. 'As 'e been sayin' owt tiv ye?"

"Who?"

"Either on 'em."

"How can you, Emma! ..."

"'Ave they?"

"No...."

"Ay ... bud ah 'm none so sure."

"Good-night, Emma."

"Good-night, lass."

But before the others in the parlor Emma spoke with happy unconcern:

"Come yer ways an' let 's 'ave supper," she said, with her head through the door. "Pam weean't be wi' us; she 's ganned to bed. Ah telt 'er she 'd better. Lass 's gotten a 'eadache, plain to see, wi' trampin' about i' sun this afternoon-lookin' after other folks' comfort. Ah div n't want 'er settin' to, to side things away when we 're done. She would, for sure, if she set up. Ah 'd to say good-night to ye both for 'er, she telt me."

And that same evening, during a moment of the schoolmaster's absence, the shoemaker delivered himself of a strange remark to his wife and daughter. He was struggling with the big black Book at the time.

"'Ave ye noticed..." he inquired, in a confidential undertone, and gazing at Emma and his wife over the thick silver rims of his spectacles, "onnything about our Pam, latelins?"

Emma Morland looked up sharply.

"What sewd there be to notice?" she asked, as though the idea were charged with the sublimated essence of the ridiculous.

"Div ye think ... there 's owt betwixt 'er an'..." he jerked his thumb in the supposed direction of the absent one, "t' schoolmester?"

"Div ah think stuff and nonsense!" Emma Morland said.

"Ay, bud ah 'm tellin' ye," the postmaster insisted. "Noo, mark mah wods. Ah 've watched 'em a goodish bit o' late, an' ah 've seed a little o' seummut when they did n't think there was onnybody to see owt."

"What 'ave ye seed wi' ye, then?" Miss Morland inquired sceptically, but with a sharp eye.

"This much," the postmaster told her. "Ah 've seed 'em talkin' together a dozen times when they did n't use to talk one. Ah 've knowed time when they 'd set i' a room while clock ticked round almost,

an' them nivver say a wod—or they 'd gan their ways oot after a while, mebbe. Watch an' see if they 'll set i' a room aif a minute noo wi'oot speakin'? Ay, an' ah 've seed 'im kickin' 'is 'eels about passage end for 'er, when 'e did n't think ah knowed owt about 'im, an' she 's come down tiv 'im i' end. Ay, an' ah 've tekt notice on 'im when she 's ganned out o' room. 'E 's all of a fidget to be up an' after 'er, an' get a wod wi' 'er on 'er way back. Ay, an' 'e sets up for 'er when she comes back fro' Vicarage. It 'll be a rum 'un if 'e wants 'er—an' ah 'm ready to lay 'e diz, onny time. Ah div n't know as all could wish better for 'er, so far as my own inclination gans. 'E 'd mek 'er a good 'usband, an' 'ave a good roof to gie 'er, bud ah 'm jealous t' General 'ud 'ave to be considered. An' ah 've my doots whether 'e 's man to think ower much about syke [such] as schoolmesters."

"T' old 'umbug," Miss Morland ejaculated—though whether in reference to the schoolmaster or the General or his Reverence the Vicar, would be a difficult point to decide.

But the subject, temporarily suspended by the entrance of the schoolmaster himself, took deep root in the family imagination—deeper root, still, indeed, in the well-nourished soil of Miss Morland's common-sense, and testing the hypothesis by what she had seen of Pam's conduct to-night, and finding it in accord, she prepared herself to wait and watch events with an eye as keen as that of one of her own

needles.

CHAPTER XXII

Up rose the sun in the morning as though nothing had happened, and spinning over the red and thatched roofs of Ullbrig, took stock of the harvest fields, the wheat in sheaf and stock, the oats outstanding; measured the work to be done with a jocose eye as though he had said "Aha!" and rubbed his hands in anticipation of a glad time.

Into Pam's bedroom he peeped—prudently, through a corner of the white blind—and found the girl open-eyed upon her bed; thrown across it transversely in abandonment of disorder, with her moistened handkerchief clasped like a snow-ball in one hand. It had been a night of anguish and unutterable torture. She had wept, she had prayed, she had resolved, she had renounced, she had slept—at once the mere fact of sleeping had awakened her—she had tossed from pillow to pillow, turned them incessantly to find some coolness for her fevered cheek; she had risen, and watched from her window the slow arrival of day; had seen the firmament of stars sliding away in the west, like the giant glass of a cucumber frame. The doings of the day before were a delirium. In her dreams the schoolmaster, the

dying man, the Spawer, Emma Morland, the tea-room at Shippus, the donkeys, the moon—were all mixed up in a horrid patchwork mantle of remembrance. The Spawer was going. There would be no more music; no more French; no more walks and talks in the morning; no more evenings at the Vicarage; no more evenings at Cliff Wrangham. In the days when they had touched upon this final parting with the light inconsequence for a thing far distant—as people speak of death—she had entered into schemes for the continuance of all the studies that he had inaugurated. She should go to Hunmouth for piano lessons. She should have conversational French lessons *chez* M. Perron, whose brass plate and dirty windows she had seen often on her visit to Hunmouth. Ah, but that was when the Spawer had been with her. It had been bitter-sweet at times to dwell on future sadness, with the warm hand of present happiness to take hold of, as a little child likes to peer round the bogey-man's corner, holding tight to its mother's fingers.

Now!

Ah, now! All was different. She wanted to die. Life was n't worth living any longer. Now she knew for herself the feeling that the schoolmaster had suffered and told her of: the dull undesire to live, the carelessness of existence, the agonies of hopeless despair. She knew it, but it made her pity him no more. The thought of him, sleeping within a mere

yard or two of her, through a couple of frail thicknesses of bricks and mortar, filled her with horror and repugnance. All the night through his cough had come to her at intervals, telling of that one undesirable companion of her sleeplessness. She was being left to him. Like a shadow now he would dog her steps. And with the instinctive fear that he would finally overcome her, in spite of all, that she would drift powerlessly to him, for lack of anchor to hold her firm, or impulse to move, she shuddered tears into her pillow, and clenched the coverlet with tightened fingers.

For there was only one man in the world for her, and he was going. She loved him; she loved him; she loved him. She knew that she was not for him or he for her; that he was above her on the ladder of life, treading cruelly upon her fingers, as it were, without knowing it, and she too proud to cry out; that this love of hers could never be consummated. But she loved him for all that; drove the sharp knowledge of it into her shrinking soul with the vindictive pleasure of a spur.

She knew now, now that he was going and it was ended, that she loved him with all the love of which her soul was capable. Would he have had to plead at her skirts ... as the schoolmaster had pleaded? No, no, no! She knew it. She would have kept him waiting no longer at the door of her heart than at the door of the Post Office itself. Had he just

come to her and looked at her, and said "Pam" ... oh, she would have known. She would have known and gone into his open arms without shame, like a bird to the nest. But she was not for him; never had been; never would be. She had no anger against him because she was smitten. He was above all anger. She had no silly impulses of passion to declare herself deceived; no reproaches because he had never before pronounced himself a man pledged. Her own heart had been so pure that it saw no impurity in his. Even when he had put his arm about her and drawn her to him, and uttered her name and looked at her ... there was nothing in that to cast dishonor upon the other girl. It was only that he had detected her suffering, had understood that she was weeping and unhappy at his departure ... had put his arm about her to give her comfort, as though she 'd been a little child. It was a beautiful act of tenderness and compassion ... nothing more. Poor girl! poor girl! She was sick with the misery of love, that, not knowing whence came this sudden sorrow, multiplied causes without end; shames, ignominies, degradations. Even the scene with Emma Morland, that would have slipped away from her like water off the breast-feathers of a swan, had her heart been sound, was branded now into her remembrance with the sear of red-hot iron. Emma's look; her inquiries; the grasp of her hand; the drop of her voice; her anxious whisper —somehow, wretched girl that she was, she seemed

in some fashion to have deserved them; to be guilty of some great unknown shame; to be a lost sister, sinking like sediment through the clear waters of life to its dregs, touching here and there as she descended. The day was full of terrors for her; the morning meeting with Emma and with the schoolmaster; the facing of her uncle and her aunt; their solicitude about a headache that had never been. More Ullbrig hypocrisy to wade through; more shame of lying and untruth.

From her bed she rose at length, a soulful picture of trouble; replaced the fallen pillow and drew up the blind. An echo of its sound of cord and creaking roller reached her faintly from elsewhere, with a muffled cough, and telling her that her own activity was being duplicated by the ever-vigilant shadow, struck pain across her mouth. The slide window was already part open, but she flung it to its extreme width, and resting her hands upon the white-painted sill, put out her head with red lips parted, and tried to air her bosom of its close, suffocating atmosphere of trouble that she had been breathing and rebreathing all through the hours of this night. Down below, under a thin attenuated mist, lay the little patchwork kitchen garden of potatoes and onions and peas and kidney beans, and the dingy vegetable-narrow frame, like a crazy quilt. And beyond that, away to her left, rolled out the fields in the face of the sun to Cliff Wrangham ...

where he was. From her place she could distinguish the misty shadow, like a frost picture on a pane, that proclaimed Dixon's. How often, in the days that were gone, had she opened this casement and looked just so across the fields, and said to herself: "Will there be any letters for him this morning? ... and shall I see him?" But now she looked across and said: "I dare not see him. God send there may be no letter this morning." All the world looked strange to her. It seemed that her eyes, like the eyes of an infant, were not yet trained to correct the images formed upon her retina.

Poor girl! poor girl! She had been so happy once. So very happy with her six shillings a week, and no desires beyond the desire to be at peace with her neighbors and return good for evil.

At last she lighted her little oil stove, that had once been the supreme of her ambition throughout a month's saving, and set her can of bath-water to boil. Every morning she made the complete ablution of her body ... and in summer sometimes twice. In this respect, at least, there was nothing of the Ullbrig hypocrite about her. As Father Mostyn told the Spawer, and more than once, for Pam was a subject to his liking:

"Ha! different class; different class altogether. No mistaking it. You can trust her inside and out. Does n't dress herself first and then put a polish on her face with a piece of soapy flannel, taking care to rub

the lather well in. Ha! that 's our Ullbrig way. Leave the neck for Sunday, and rub the soap well in.

"But, thank heaven, that 's not Pam's way. Can't mistake it. Has the instincts of the bath. Tubs herself like an officer of dragoons. No mistaking the derivation of that. It does n't come from the people; it's a pure blood inheritance; a military strain. She keeps her body as clean as her mind. You could put her in a duchess's bed, and her grace need n't be frightened of going in alongside of her. Ha! beautiful, beautiful! the grace of cleanliness that is next to godliness. Her body would almost get her into heaven."

And indeed, St. Peter is scarcely the man I take him for if he would n't.

Leighton's Psyche unwound herself from long veils of diaphanous drapery on the brink of a marble bath, and immersed herself in azure water without soap—so far as the artist indicates in the picture. Pam's setting was a big, round, sponge bath, scrupulously enamelled white by her own hand; she did not stand pensive by its side, as though wondering whether to-morrow or the day after would do as well; she unwound herself from no sensuous mists of lawn; she held an active-service towel in her hand, rough like a tiger's tongue, and in place of the diaphanous draperies the steam from the hot water rolled and curled and licked about her lovingly as she poured it into the bath, and tried it

with fingertips of no indecision—but she was Psyche for all that. Her body was as sleek and supple as the picture Psyche; her flesh, where the sun had not browned, was as white as alabaster and as sound as a young apple; her limbs as shapely as any that Leighton's brush could have given her. When she stood up, with her firm, round bosom thrown out, and dipping the big Turkey sponge into the wash-basin of cold water, pressed it to her with both hands as though she were hugging the desire of her heart, while the water slid down her snowy torso, tinged with warm glow of pink now, like marble, and ran, still clinging about her limbs and body, to her feet; and dipped again, and again pressed, and again and still again, till the water at her service was exhausted, she was the best, most beautiful type of English girl; unforced in growth, but developed gradually in pure air and pure thought; not one member of her corporeal republic in advance of the other, or of herself; all of them, indeed, reserved in their development rather than in advance of it, but awaiting only the ripening. The beautiful picture of a girl on the threshold of womanhood, and waiting in all chastity to be called, without any indecorous rush to be in advance of the summons. Ah, girls, girls, girls! Always anxious to be women. Do not struggle so inordinately to be ripe for the market. Do you think man is such a poor judge that he does not know the merits of green fruit, or so witless that he

does not know the dangers of the ripe? Keep your thoughts and bodies green, like oranges for shipment, for indeed you are perishable fruit.

The stimulus of the bath restored to some extent the freshness of the girl's mind, and gave to her sorrow a cleanly, less bedraggled emotion. From her eyes she swilled away all traces of the night's tears. Thank Heaven, she renovated very easily; a porcelain girl could not have ceded the dust of trouble more completely. She showed no redness about the lashes; no swelling of the lids; no dark hollows above the cheek-bone. Her flesh had not sickened in the least. A little press of the fingertip on its plumpness, and lo! it sprang back alive and responsive, like a cushion, with a little pink blush at the salutation; it did not respond with doughy sluggishness. Her lips had lost none of their fire of ruby; they had not consumed at all to grey ash; there was no dryness to show how great the flame had been, no withering like the dried leaf of a rose. Moist and elastic they looked as ever; the beautiful downward pull about their corners—as though an invisible Cupid were trying hard to bend this bow of his—might be more divinely accentuated, but that would only be to an acute observer who, holding the secret of the girl's sorrow as we do, searched keenly upon her face for the outward signs of it. Her cheeks were still as smooth and creaseless as ivory; her brow like a tablet on which nothing evil could ever be written. The

same old Pam she looked and seemed to everybody but herself. Ah, if only one's mind would wash like one's body—what blissful sinners we could be.

And with the strangely awakened desire for cleanliness, the feverish thirst of a mind to counteract by outward purity its inward contamination, the desire even to change all the old garments of yesterday's turpitude, to invest herself in a new atmosphere, to give herself a new mind and a new body and a new environment, if she might, she drew on her legs black cotton-silk stockings of the sort she wore on Sundays; buckled them with the best pretty blue silk garters of her own making (Emma had a pair like these too), clad herself in linen of snowy white, unfolded from her neat store in drawer and cupboard; and hid all this dazzling envelopment under a pretty pale print frock that could have stood up of its own cleanliness—cool and fresh and rigid as an iceberg. And round her throat she clipped a snowy collar, and tied it with a crimson bow of silk. To be cool and clean, and be conscious of it. Let the mind burn, if it will, so long as the body does not reproach us.

Thus she was clad at last, and came forth to face the day, diffusing little wafts of cool print and white linen at every movement of her body; little breaths, fresh and unperfumed, smelling of nothing but young girlhood and cleanliness, that the nostril curled gratefully to inhale and retain, as reviving to the

spirit as puffs of breeze blown into some burning valley from snow-clad mountains.

Slowly the early hours of the day wore on, and shaped themselves, outwardly at least, to the semblance of all other days that had gone before. Days in Ullbrig are as alike as pennies. This might have been yesterday, or a day out of last week, or a day out of last year. Only the change in oneself and one's outlook told of the relentless passage of time. They sat at breakfast in the second kitchen, this strange assortment of table company. The girl, like a star plucked from heaven, cleansed with the dew, and exhaling the freshness of skies and dawn; the postmaster, with his genial honest face of shrewd stupidity, brown as snuff and wrinkled like morocco leather, who cut bread with his knife and thumb and shoved it home with the haft, making a pouch of one cheek while he talked out of a corner of the other; who stirred his cup with the noise of a grindstone, and looped his thumb round his spoon while he drank to prevent its slipping down his throat. Mrs. Morland, with her relaxed face of maternal good-nature, like a well-buttered muffin, who looked as though she lacked the energy for long-sustained anger, which, in truth, she did. The vigilant Emma, sitting bolt-upright, as a sort of human cruet, vinegary and peppery—whose acidulated conversation almost lent the zest of pickles to the meal. And last of all the schoolmaster, peering

ruminatively—not to say furtively—into his plate as though it were a book he pored over. When he masticated there were muscles that worked in his temples and imparted an air of grave, cerebral activity. His cough troubled him this morning, and his face bore the haggard evidences of sleeplessness.

No word of allusion to last night's matter passed between these two, but the constrained silence of each towards the other was like a finger laid inexorably upon this page of their past. He was present when the postmaster inquired of Pam about her headache, but recorded no expression of sympathy. Perhaps Pam's crimson blush deterred him; but he lingered, brushing his hat in the passage before departing for school, and when Pam happened to make a journey into the front parlor he interposed himself by the door against her return. Pam finding him there, still brushing his hat as though he were an automatic hat-brusher, stopped in the doorway coming out, and stood before him without speaking —not angrily or resentfully or reproachfully—but decidedly with the unhappiness of awakened remembrance upon her downcast face and trembling lip.

"I only wanted..." he began, in a low voice, almost inaudible, "... to tell you. Last night I—I said things to you ... that perhaps I ought n't to have said. I can't remember now exactly what I did say, but I 'm ... I 'm very sorry I said anything."

Pam told him it did n't matter the least bit. He was n't, please, to trouble.

"I did it for the best," he explained, "... at the time."

Pam said ... she was sure he did. He was n't, please, to think about it. It appeared, however, the only thing he was capable of thinking about. He seemed to have a difficulty in tearing himself away from it; brushing his hat the while. It is fortunate school started when it did, or he would have worn all the remaining nap off.

"Will you please try ... and forget what I said to you ... and forgive me?"

Pam said ... she had forgotten already. A shade crossed over his face to think that she should so soon have forgotten words that had been so vital to him at the time, but the forgiveness that accompanied it relieved the momentary disquietude.

"I hope..." he suggested—and in the pauses he brushed his hat fiercely—"... that it will make ... no difference to us. I hope we shall be ... as we ... as we were before."

Pam hoped so too, an invalid hope that walked slowly, and touched the walls of silence for support as it went.

"Noo," said the postmaster triumphantly, in the clean little kitchen, holding up a hand to enjoin attention, and jerking his thumb violently in the direction of the parlor door, whence the brushing of

the hat and the low murmur of voices could plainly be heard. "What did ah tell ye? There they are agen, whisperin' an' mummelin'. As soon as ivver 'e got agate wi' 'is 'at i' passage Pam started to be after 'im."

"Sh! Be still wi' ye, then," said Miss Morland, going nearer to the door. "Div ye want to mek 'em think we 're listenin' tiv 'em?"

But even while she spoke the sound of the hat-brush ceased, and the subsequent shutting of the front door announced that the schoolmaster had departed to his duties—having told Pam that after this morning these duties would be at an end until harvest was over.

CHAPTER XXIII

Half an hour later the mail cart rattled up before the two-fold Governmental door over the big round cobbles, and the fiery figure of James Maskill, red and shining like a new-boiled lobster, fresh from his sun-bath, invaded the Post Office, blowing the sweat off his mouth on to the floor in a fierce "Bf-f-f!" with a shake of the head, and slammed the letter-bag on to the counter in a strenuous but not aggressive greeting.

"Noo," he said to the postmaster, mopping his face at him with a red handkerchief, and "Noo,"

again to Pam, mopping the inside of his cap. "Mah wod! Bud it 's gannin' to be warm to-day, before it's done."

"Will you have a drink, James?" Pam asked him.

At the sight of that ominous bag, so full of deadly inertness and possibility, her heart had thumped her like a stone in a box. Yes or no; yes or no; yes or no?

"What of?" James asked her straightway.

"Of ... of ... what would you like?"

"Nay ... 'appen ah 'm best wi'oot," James decided, a great mantle of modesty falling over him at this suggestion of choice.

"Not if you want one, you 're not," Pam said.

Her fingers were burning, and her heart was dreading the opening of the bag. Was there? Was n't there? Was there? Was n't there? She put her hand to her side again. James only thought she slackened the grip of her belt.

"Ah could do wi' un," he admitted reluctantly, "so far as that gans."

"Milk ... would you like?" Pam suggested.

"Nay ... ah mun't mix 'em," he declared oracularly, and licked his parched lips with a smack of apprehension.

"Mix what?" Pam asked.

"Ah 've 'ad one ... o' t' road," he explained. "Bud 'appen yon barril 's thruff by noo. She wor drawin' a bit thick last time ye asked me."

"Ye 're best wi'oot, Jaames Maskill," came the voice of Emma Morland, from the interior of the Post Office, "... this time o' mornin'."

"Ay, ah think ah 'm, mebbe," said the postman, plunging hands into his pockets and screwing up his mouth for a broken-hearted whistle.

"Gie 'im a glass o' lemonade," said the voice again. "'E can 'ave that an' welcome."

"Will you have a glass of lemonade?" asked Pam.

"Ay, ah 'm willin', if it suits ye," the postman acknowledged.

A hand appeared at the inner door holding a lemonade bottle and a thick tumbler (the latter looking as though it had once held marmalade in Fussitter's window), and a second hand, when Pam had possessed herself of these, held forth a boxwood lemonade opener.

The postman drew forth the effervescing liquid thirstily into his profounds, with his red chin mounting up step by step as though it were going upstairs, and a great fizzling sound from within as if he were a red-hot man, and let the glass rest on inverted end upon his lips for a space, to make sure it had yielded its last drop, and set it down on the counter with a great breathed "Ah!" of appreciation, holding his mouth open while the sparkles needled his inside.

"Noo let 's away," he said, "... or we s'll be 'avin' old Tankard prawtestin' us to Goovinment agen."

He said this because Pam had already opened the bag and was sorting the letters with quick, nervous fingers. Those for James Maskill's district went to the right hand of her; those for her own to the left. Her heart began to beat furiously. Now the impulse seized her to spread out all these letters over the counter and to furrow with both hands among them for the letter she feared to find. She knew by an instinct so strong that she never for a moment questioned it, what characteristics the fatal letter would possess. In her mind's eye she saw, with such clearness that her actual eye could scarcely add aught to the confirmation, the thin foreign envelope, the green stamps, the familiar superscription. She went cold and she went hot. Her ears burned, and there were strange noises opening inside them like whistles and hummings, as though in protest to the insupportable outer silence, the imperturbable calm of the Post Office. But the postman was watching her, and the postmaster from his high deal stool. It seemed as though they were all three silently concentrated upon the appearance of that fatal missive. Her emotions hastened, delayed, evaded, shuffled, ceased; but before these two onlookers her fingers went on regularly as clockwork.

Right, left. Right, right, right.

Left, left.

Right....

Left....

James Maskill, watching her, thought she hesitated there for an almost inappreciable moment, as though she had detected her fingers in blundering, and expected to see her transfer the letter from her own pile to his. But she had not blundered. No, no; she had not blundered. The distribution of the envelopes went on again apace, as though she were dealing hands from Fate's pack. Left, right; left, right; left, left, left. She allotted the last letter, and pushed James Maskill's budget towards him across the counter with a heroic smile, enough to make his eyes water. It was the smile such as a dying martyr might bequeath to those she loved, and by whom she had been loved. All was death and the coldness of it underneath, but at times like these death, coming from within, drives out the soul from its earthly tenement, and as it lingers on the threshold of the flesh before departing, the flesh is glorified. Many smiles had Pam given the postman in his time ... but this one clung to him—so far as anything seemed to him—that she might almost love him. That smile accompanied James Maskill throughout his morning's round. Ullbrig, looking beneath its blinds and through its muslin curtains, and out of the cool, gauze-protected windows of its dairies at the toiling figure of the postman—hot, perspiring, and dusty—could have little imagined that he was the carnal receptacle of a smile; that he held Pam's last look enclosed in his secretive body as though it had been

the precious pearl and he the rugged oyster. But so it was. He scarcely noticed the shining of the outer sun, to such extent did the internal brightness light him.

And meanwhile, while James Maskill fed his heart upon that one smile and thought what a treasury of bliss it would mean to possess the possessor of it, the possessor walked along, a miserable bankrupt of happiness. Scarcely another smile remained to her. She had given him that one, but it was about her very last. Under the broad brown strap of her letter-bag she strode, with her lips locked and her soul as far away from her eyes as though the body were a house in the hands of the bailiffs; the key elsewhere; the occupants dispersed. For all the sun beat upon the red poppies in her hat till the straw cracked again and planted burning kisses on her neck, she was almost cold, from her feet in their black cotton-silk stockings upward. Once or twice even, she could have shivered for a thought. And the burden of the bag! Strange that one letter should make such a difference.

All about her the harvest was in full swing; the reapers whirling from seen and unseen quarters like the chirruping of grasshoppers. The morning's mist was quite absorbed; the scene was as clear and detailed as one of those colored Swiss photographs, with a blue sky, showing perhaps here and there a little buoyant white cloud floating cool and motionless in it, like ice in wine. Towards Garthston

way the moving sails of the self-binder beat the air above the hedges. Half a dozen fields distant a pair of red braces, crossed over a calico shirt, struck out clear and distinct as though the whole formed a banner. Now and again she heard "Helloes," and looking, saw remote figures hailing her through their trumpeted hands. When she raised her own hand in response they made semaphores with the twisted bands of straw or shook rakes in the blue air. It was not many harvest fields that would have liked Pam to pass along the road without noticing them. From their side of the picture they saw the scarlet poppies dancing lightheartedly on their errand, and took the friendly uplifting of the girl's arm for token of the smile they never doubted would be there. If they could but have seen the smile of their blissful imagination at close quarters—a mere strained drawing back of the lips—as significant of pain as of pleasure, it would have furnished them with ample material for their harvest-field converse.

Ah, yes. She was very sick and wretched and unhappy. All the natural spring was out of her step. She wanted to walk flat-footed, with both her hands hanging and her chin down; but by sheer resolve she held her head high, and broke the dull concussion of her step with that lissom responsiveness of toe which was now the vanished inheritance of her happiness. She did not want to meet him ... this morning. She did not feel equal to it. She prayed, as she walked,

that she might have this one good favor bestowed upon her in her trouble: the blessed privilege of avoiding him. Without the culminating straw to her sorrow, the letter in her bag, she could have met him ... perhaps ... with some amount of courage and confidence. But now ... to have to be the bearer of what she bore ... and repeat all the history of her misery in this summarised form; to give him the letter ... be witness while he read it even; hear him tell her definitely that he must go ... that all was over! Oh, no, no, no! It was too much for her to sustain. And she did n't want to break down before him again. She did n't want to degrade herself in his sight. It was one thing to shed tears at a sudden intelligence ... but it was another to be always shedding them. If she showed tears again ... he would suspect her. Had he been another girl she could have wept her weep out upon his shoulder. That was admissible between girls. But because he was a man ... she could not weep. There were no friendships possible between men and women; it was love or nothing. She must just let her heart break—if only it would—in silence and solitude.

All in thinking upon her trouble, her step, accommodating itself spontaneously to the mental retardation of her progress, grew slower and slower. The nearer she came to Cliff Wrangham, the more time she needed to prepare herself. If possible she must try and slip round through the Dixon's paddock,

cut across the stackgarth, and leave the letter with one of the twins—if only she could come upon them —without being seen. They would be sure to be somewhere about. Then she tested her stratagem by all sorts of contingencies. Suppose Miss Bates came upon her instead, and asked her to wait ... for any letters in return. Suppose ... he was out in the lane ... waiting anxiously for the very letter she so feared delivering. She might leave it at Stamway's, and ask Stamway's if they 'd let Arthur drop across the fields with it ... as she was in a hurry to get back. And she would give Arthur a penny.

And now her step was slowed almost to a standstill. George Middleway even could have run her down. All the activity was up above; there was none left for her legs. Already she was past the halfway house in the little elbow of road before you get first sight of Stamway's. It is a part enclosed; except from the immediate fields, which were untenanted, she could n't be seen here in the pursuit of wasting Government time. The next turn would bring her into sight again; she would be under the eyes of Stamway's; Dixon's would be able to follow her progress henceforward, all but a yard here or a yard there, to the paddock stile. Before she came into public view again ... she ought to think; she ought to make sure. And one cannot think, standing erect in the roadway like a scarecrow. It looks suspicious, even to the suspicious eye of self—that at these times

suspects everything. Instinctively she drew into the shelter of a hospitable gateway. There, at least, she could profess for her own satisfaction that she had succumbed to the midday lassitude; was listening to the music of the reapers, with her arm over the rail and her foot on one of the lower bars.

Was the past a dream? ... or the present? Had the Spawer ever been? ... or was he ever going? Which was easier to realise? The joyousness of then or the misery of now? Should she wake up to discover that all her unhappiness was a nightmare, that there was no question of the Spawer's going, no dread of a letter? She dipped her hand, almost unconsciously, into the bag to see if, perchance, the whole affair was an unsubstantial fabric of fancy.

Ah, no! No fancy; no fancy. She had not wakened yet. There were the two letters at the bottom of the bag; the one for Stamway, the other ... it came out with her hand. She had not wilfully drawn it, but it seemed to cling to her fingers. Oh yes, how well she knew its motley of stamps and postmarks; how well the superscription in that familiar feminine hand. She held it before her eyes, and gazed at the writing as though she would have wrested the invisible scribe out of it; called up the astral body of the girl who, in these shapely lines, and all innocently and unknowingly, had dealt her happiness such an irreparable blow. Who was she? Where did she live? When, where, and how had he

met her? Did she love music? Had he taught her? Had he taught her French? Was she beautiful? Ah, she was sure to be. And a lady. That would be a fashionable way of affixing the stamps. And young. Rich too, perhaps. She must be, for poor people could not afford to spend long holidays in foreign places like this. Assuredly the writer of these words did not tramp the country roads with a bag over her shoulder for six shillings a week.

Something white and moving grew into the corner of her unconscious eye as she gazed in absorption upon the fatal envelope—a cow or a horse or a sheep or a cloud, over the hedge line.

But no; it was not a cow. It was too erect for a cow; too tall for a sheep; too progressive for a cloud. There was a patch of color about it too, somewhere. Cows did not wear ribbons, or sheep or clouds.

It was a figure; the figure of a man; a man in white; a man in flannels—the Spawer.

All at once her dormant consciousness awoke with a start to his imminence, as though her eye had been giving no warning of his approach all this while. She turned round, and a great spreading sickness of guilt took hold of her. Her blood seemed rushing all ways, like an anthill in confusion. The hand with the letter dropped suddenly, as though it were a wounded wing. It was the right hand that held it now, and the bag was on her left side. Had he seen her? Could she pass it into the bag without

notice. He was horribly near ... and looking at her. Her heart pitched downward like a foundering vessel into the trough of her fear.

Into the pocket at the back of her her guilty hand crept, trembling and craven, and lay there, in its thief's refuge, burning unbearably like the firebrand of her infamy.

CHAPTER XXIV

The hot sunlight about the Post Office was savory with the smell of Yorkshire pudding—you might have almost imagined that it was the house itself a-cooking—when Pam returned, beneath the sling of the empty letter-bag.

On other mornings she would take her way in through the two-fold Governmental door; announce her arrival in musical pleasantry to the postmaster in his little shoemakery; hang up the flabby letter-bag on its peg behind the counter; pop in upon Emma Morland, if she were at work in the trying-on room, to commend her diligence or express surprise at the amount of the work achieved, or ask in what way she could be of assistance; give a look into the little clean kitchen to feel the pulse of the oven, and proffer herself for some kind service to her aunt-by-courtesy, as red as boiled beetroot, and fitting her clothes as

tightly as if she 'd been a bladder set before the hot grate. But this morning the girl made no parade of arrival. She drew nearer to the house by the shadow of its walls, and let herself meekly in through the spick-and-span household door—white painted, with fashionable brass knob and knocker—that gives entrance between the twelve-paned parlor window beyond the scraper and the smaller eight-paned window of Miss Morland's trying-on room, whose austere starched curtains (drawn in primly at the pit of the stomachs with pink sashes to reveal the polished oak cover of the sewing-machine, and sundry dress fabrics in course of construction, casually displayed) always proclaimed any particularly sacred rite of disrobement proceeding within its sanctuary by being discreetly pinned.

Whereat, though man's religious fibres might be stirred to their utmost, it was useless his stopping to spell out the familiar capitals of Emma's card with all the earnestness of the anxious (and short-sighted) inquirer after Truth.

Up to her bedroom she stole, a soft-toed figure, by the best Sunday staircase, with white holland over the carpet. If she were dead they would bring her down this staircase in her coffin. She wished she were dead. She was dead in all but the flesh—and in truth she looked but the phantom of her former self —but the ghost of the girl that had gone out this morning. All the color was struck out of her blanched

cheeks as though a hand had smitten them white, and no blood returned to reproach the blow. Her eyes were fixed in front of her whichever way she walked; it seemed something horrible had been stamped upon them and set over them for seal. Her lips were hard and rigid; wax-work lips, artificially colored, upon a wax-work mouth. It looked as if such a mouth could never open in speech; it was a mold, a cast, struck off the face of grief. Slowly, but very surely, the old Pam was being squeezed out of her bodily habitation. As a house in the hands of new tenantry loses its old outward characteristics and takes on new features of blinds and curtains and window-palms, so this body of Pam's in the hands of its new possessor was beginning gradually to display evidences of the invisible occupant that, hidden behind its walls, wrung fingers and wept, and spent its moments in the torturing austerities of self-examination and penance.

... Once in her bedroom, the hardness fell off the girl's face as though it had been stucco; the hidden occupant came to her trembling lips, looked out of her eyes, gazed forth upon the outer world, as an escaped prisoner might, full of horror of his position, and dreading every moment the summons that should announce his discovery. But there were no tears this time. Tears are but the petty cash of woman's trouble account; the noisy silver and copper, which make a great jingle, are parted with

and never missed. Pam's trouble was no longer in silver and copper, not in gold even. It was in silent bank-notes. All the tears in the world could not liquidate such a liability. One might as well attempt to compound with a handful of irate creditors out of the loose coin at the bottom of one's pocket. Besides, it was not sorrow now, it was horror. In trouble women weep; but in horror they stare with open eyes, for fear the thing dreaded may come upon them when they are unaware. So children, who rain tears at a dog by day, will lie abed silent at night, with their great, dry eyes fixed upon the darkness, and fear to cry or close them. Tears, scalding tears, were all about the hot lashes of the girl's eyes; but into her eyes themselves they did not enter. Like a thief she had stolen round her own door; like a thief she pressed it to, with a hand over its sneck, and shot the little catch under the lock; like a thief she listened—she, who had feared nothing before but herself and her own conscience; feared everything now.

The big grandfather's clock downstairs went "Br-r-r-r-r!" It was a way he had; he meant nothing by it; but it sent the girl's hand to her bosom this morning as though she had heard in the sound the announcement of her whereabouts to the world at large. Now she strained her ears for the sounds of feet, the calling of her own name, the approach of pursuers ... but there came none. Only down below

were audible the muffled intermittent click click click of Emma's industrious machine; the tapping of the shoemaker's hammer; the sound of the little kitchen poker thrust energetically through the bars of the grate to rouse the sleepy fire to its duty by Mrs. Morland; the clash of saucepan lids and the jangle of a pail. Satisfied that her entrance had been unobserved, and that the clock's warning had been in vain, she unslung the post-bag from her shoulder and hung it over the foot of the bed; removed her hat of red poppies, and laid it on the chest of drawers.

What had she come for? For a moment even she herself seemed scarcely to know, standing by the bedside with dangling head as though she had been some wild driven creature fleeing for refuge, of which now, in possession, she knew not to make what use. Then as she stood, her right hand crept round to the back of her, found the entrance to her pocket, burrowed its way out of sight into its depths like a mole; delved there for a while, lay still, and came forth into the open, dragging its prize—something white and square and unsubstantial, that crackled resentfully under the holding. An envelope; a letter.

In the stillness of death the girl held this helpless prey of her fingers under gaze and stared at it. She did not read. It was no act of curiosity. It was the horror-struck stare of a face that had been seeking confirmation of its guilt and found it. She did not

look at details of writing or of the address; she fastened her great eyes upon the thing in gross—the four inches by three of her everlasting turpitude. She had not given it to him. Into her pocket it had gone; in her pocket it had stayed. She had stolen it. She was a thief; a thief; a thief!

On her soft, clean bed she threw herself and lay face downwards, without a tear. In her grief, as in everything else that she did, she was beautiful. Her light dress of print gathered under her and wound about her body as she rolled, and outlined the supple firmness of her figure with something of gusto in the task. In abandonment there seemed no bones in it; it was supple as a salmon; as lissom as a wand cf green lancewood. Backward or forward, this way, that way, it looked as though you might have bent it and broken nothing—not even its heart. Her ankles, dear indices to a fascinating volume, so sleek and tight and flexible, lost nothing by their encasement in black cotton-silk; into the little soft leather Sunday shoes her feet fitted like a hand into a glove; press your thumb and finger anywhere and the leather would gently resist you. Poor little shoes, that had walked so happily in their time, how very still and lifeless they lay now, side by side on the white counterpane, with their soles still fresh and lemon-colored, turned pathetically towards the foot-rail. This burden at least is too heavy for you, little patient smugglers. And little arms that had swung so

blithely; how resistless you are now. Many lovers have sought to be enfolded within them in their time, but you have repulsed them all. Now is come a lover whom you cannot repulse. They shall clasp him, unresisting, and he shall enter them. Shame is your lover. He has been in your waking dreams all this night past, seen dimly and distorted. Now you have him face to face. Lie still in his arms and be mute before the hot caress of his kisses. Your Gingers and your James Maskills, your doctors, your parsons, your schoolmasters, your Jevons, and your Steggisons have sought you in the flesh, but this lover has found you through the spirit. Now that the spirit is surrendered the flesh lies prone enough.

Poor beautiful flesh. Even Shame's kisses cannot corrupt the beauty of it. In this moment of its weakness and surrender, if the Spawer could but be witness of you, it is probable (only you do not know it) that your defeat would gain you the victory. For the weakness of a woman is her strength, and to see beauty so overthrown, by a lover less relenting than himself, rouses a man's best instincts of honor and protecting chivalry.

But the Spawer is three good miles away, and cannot enter damsels' bedrooms as the sun does. Perhaps, as human nature is constituted, it is well. If you cried on him he could not hear you, and with that label of your guilt between your fingers, though you knew he could hear you, you dared not cry.

Poor child! Poor child! So young, so beautiful, and so wicked! So dreadfully, horribly wicked!

To say that she thought would be to convey a wrong impression of her state. Thought, like her eyes, was wide open, but it did not think—any more than her eyes saw. It stared—stared fixedly, without blinking, at the consciousness of her great wickedness.

Dreadful images passed over the darkened curtain of life, like the pictures of a magic-lantern.

In Sproutgreen a poor girl had taken some clothes that did not belong to her. Only a bodice (very much worn), an old skirt, a vest or two (she was badly off for vests), and some stockings. She had not meant to take them, she said ... but all the same she had taken them, and they had sent her to prison.

That picture showed on Pam's screen too.

She had not meant to take it. No, no; but she had taken it. Why should n't she be sent to prison? Why should the one poor girl be made to suffer and she go free?

A man in Hunmouth had stolen a leg of mutton from a butcher's shop when the butcher's back was all but turned. If he 'd only waited a moment longer or set off a moment sooner all would have been well. But his wife was starving and he was in a hurry. He wanted the mutton ... it was noble of him to risk himself for a dying wife. But the law recognises no nobility in theft, and sent him to prison.

That picture showed on Pam's mind too.

She was n't starving; there was no excuse for her, even of pity. She had stolen something she did n't want. She was a thief, unworthy to receive the weight of honest people's eyes. Looks now, the lightest of them, smiles and glances, were all insufferable burdens deposited upon the bowed shoulders of her shame.

Poor girl! poor, unhappy girl! Wrong from first to last. Seeing the world upside down. Cast forth from the cool leafy oasis of hope into the burning desert of despair. If she could have taken but one peep into the man's heart the rain of blessed relief would have fallen in abundance; she would have kissed that dread letter for token of her forgiveness; would have risen, smiling in glory, like the sun through April clouds.

But she could not see. These two souls, surcharged with their vapors of unshed trouble, that only needed to come together to combine and pour forth all their misery in one great shower of gladness and rejoicing—these two souls lay asunder.

While the girl stared dumbly into the blackness of her pillow, the man gazed with the vacant stare of a harmless idiot over Dixon's first gate. If his state had been hopeless before, he told himself, it seemed doubly hopeless now.

To be sentimental by moonlight was one thing, but for a man ostensibly in the marriage-bespoke

department to manoeuvre a wide-awake girl into the laneways of emotion was a very different thing indeed. All their yesterday's sentimentalism was so much trade discount knocked off their relations; he was at cost price now, and something under. The whole time of their interview this morning she was unmistakably trying to shake him off; had been inventing urgent reasons why she must be getting back; had n't a word to say for herself beyond transparent excuses to get away; could n't say what she was going to be doing this afternoon; could n't say what she was going to be doing to-night; could n't say whether she should see him to-morrow; could n't say, apparently, whether she 'd ever see him again; had almost torn herself away from him in the end. What was he to think? What was he to say? What was he to do?

He was a sick man now, and no mistake. His very internals tormented him, as though he were a storm-tossed, drifting ship, and he saw land and the girl receding from him hopelessly on the horizon. How to reach her? How to get back to her? How still to save himself?

Alas, during these moments of wounded love and pride, for the Other One!

CHAPTER XXV

In one swift headlong descent of crime Pam had suddenly arrived at the awful pitch of robbing Her Majesty's mail.

She had vague terrorised notions of the penal code and the shameful penalty of her crime, but her horror for what the world would inflict upon her, to ease its conscience of the various offences it commits itself, was exceeded by the horror with which self regarded self. And she had horror, too, of the unutterable horror that would prevail in this house, so still and peaceful at present, supposing her crime were brought home to her and exposed. She saw the awe-struck face of the postmaster, sitting with his mouth open and empty of words under the incredible calamity of her shame; she saw Emma Morland looking at her, part in anger, part in unbelief, part in compassion; she saw James Maskill obstinately refusing to meet her eye, and pretending to whistle in shocked abstraction; she saw her one act extended and dramatised to its very close at Sproutgreen Court-house, as clearly as though her soul were a theater, luridly lighted, and she were sitting in the pit ... a horrified, helpless, untearful spectator of her own downfall.

All suddenly the course of the drama was disturbed. There was a sound of doors downstairs; voices mixed in question and answer. She held her breath and listened. Her heart gave a great bump

and seemed to stop altogether. So vivid was her conception of her crime that her mind accepted these noises as indisputable notification of its detection. All the world was astir about the stolen letter. The policeman was there; the machinery of the law was in motion. They were come to take her. They would all be waiting for her below. She saw them in a blinding group, with the stragglers beyond, about the Post Office door; children flattening their noses and sticking their tongues grotesquely against the panes for a sight inside; licking their fingers and drawing slimy tracks over the glass. And then she heard her name uttered—that hateful name that was become now as a second word for sin. The sound of it sent a shudder through her to the soles of her lemon-colored shoes.

"Pam...." It was Emma Morland's voice that called her. "Pam! Are ye there?"

Instinctively she clutched the tell-tale letter in her hand and scrambled off the bed. Her first thought was for the little dressing-table. She pulled up the looking-glass (ah, that was no liar); rubbed her cheeks with her hands to try and soften their haggardness; smoothed her hair rapidly; shook out her skirts, and passed on trembling legs to the door. Her name met her a second time as she opened it, from a few steps further up the stairs, and more urgently uttered.

"Pam! ... Are ye there?"

Her mouth was dry; her lips felt cracked like crust; her tongue a piece of red flannel, but her voice might have been less unsteady—as it might also have been louder—when she answered.

"I 'm here," she said, and with an effort to divert suspicion and appear unconcerned; "... do you want me, Emma?"

A guilty person would never ask: "... do you want me?" A guilty person would know too well, and not dare to risk the question. Don't you understand? Cunning, you see, was coming to her help—now that she was enlisted in the devil's own army. When the crime is once committed, when we have taken the infernal shilling and the devil is sure of us, he does not stint his soldiers with the armament of craft.

"Did n't ye 'ear me callin' of ye?" Miss Morland inquired, with some sharpness of reproof at having been kept at the occupation.

"... I can't have done," said Pam. "... Have you been calling long?"

"Ah 've been callin' loud enough, onny road," Miss Morland protested. "What 's gotten ye upstairs?"

Pam's fingers tightened their hold of the letter in her pocket.

"... I 've been..."—she cast a beseeching look around the room for inspiration; the devil furnished her at once—"washing myself."

"Goodness wi' ye! En't ye washed yersen once this mornin'?"

"I 've been ... having another. It 's so hot outside."

"Ye mud be a mucky un bi t' way ye stan' i' need o' soap an' watter. Ye do nowt else, a think. Come down wi' ye noo an' set dinner things, will ye? It 's about time."

Only that! Not detection; not discovery and shame. Only to lay the dinner things. And she had been paying for that moment with all the horror and heart-burning and trembling of knees for the real shame itself. What prodigality of terror! What an outrageous price to pay, for a mere worthless alarm!

Now it seemed to her her body was turned to glass. Every thought within her she felt must be visible through its transparent covering, as though she had been but a shop-window for the display of her delinquencies. Down at the bottom of her pocket, smothered beneath her handkerchief, and her hand most frequently over that, lay the object of her crime. She dared not turn her back for long lest they should see it through her clothing. If it had been buried under the red flags of the kitchen their eyes would have been drawn to it and found it. They had lynx eyes, of a sudden, all of them. They pricked her through and through with strange test-glances, as though they were trying the flesh of a pigeon with a fork. When she put her hand to her pocket to reassure herself, at some horrid suspicion, that the letter was still there ... their eyes taxed the action

and charged her at once, seeming to say: "Ah! ... what 's that? Did something crinkle?"

Even the handkerchief, in which she had placed her trust to hold down and choke the evidence of her guilt, narrowly missed betraying her outright into the hands of her enemies. It was after dinner. They were all rising from the table, and for some reason, Pam could not say why—unless it was that she felt some concentrated look upon her from behind and wished to perform a trifling act of unconcern to divert suspicion—but all at once she found herself with the handkerchief in her hand, and heard, at the very moment that her own fear shot like a dart through her breast, the keen voice of Emma:

"See-ye; what's that ye 've dropped o' floor? A letter bi t' looks on it."

In a flash Pam spun round upon the white square upon the red tiles. The schoolmaster had already perceived it, and come forward to relieve her of the necessity for stooping; his hand was outstretched when she turned, but she almost flung herself in front of him and snatched the letter from under his fingers. It was a dreadful display of distrust and suspicion. Her breath came and went, between shame for her act and terror for the alternative, while she stood before him, thrusting the letter into the pocket at the back of her, with a face like a flaming scarlet poppy, and a breast rising and falling, as though he had been seeking to wrest the missive

from her. As for Emma Morland, accustomed as she was growing to novel demonstrations of the girl's character, this present act so eclipsed all previous records, and ran so counter to everything that experience had ever taught her of Pam, that she gasped in audible amazement. The schoolmaster, on his side, awkwardly placed—as one whose undesired services seem to savor of meddlesomeness—flushed up to the high roots of his hair, and then slowly, very, very slowly, commenced to whiten all over till his face, his lips, his neck even seemed turned, like Lot's wife, into salt.

If Pam had but allowed him to return the letter, it is quite probable that he might have had the good feeling to raise it from the floor and hand it to her with his eyes upon hers, as a guarantee of good faith. On the other hand, it was equally probable that he might not. In any case, the risk would have been truly a heavy one to run. But now, though Pam had saved herself from open detection, it was only at the cost of a suspicion that henceforth would keep its wide eye upon her every action. Love is a terrible detective; it has no conscience; knows no more than a criminal to discern between right and wrong. Everything that it does it does for love. The things done are nothing. The thing done for is all. Back into Pam's pocket went the accursed germ of crime and misery which she must hug so closely—though she would have given her unhappy soul to be rid of it.

But there was no safety in her pocket now; all her confidence in a personal possession fled from her. Her hand seemed sewn into her dress, by its anxiety to keep assured of the letter's safety. For everything that she did with her right hand she did half a dozen with her left.

And even that tried to betray her.

"What 'a ye done at yersen?" Miss Morland asked her tartly, when she saw her collecting the glasses lamely off the table with the left hand, and the other one missing. "... 'A ye cutten yer finger?"

"No...."

Pain jerked it quickly into use and showed desperate activity with it. Also, she cast a fearful look over her elbow, lest she should see the condemnatory square of white lying on the floor at the back of her, blinking maliciously at her discomposure. The letter seemed, in her imagination, suddenly instinct with the diabolical desire to work her ruin. She could no longer trust it about her. Up to her room she betook herself at the first favorable opportunity—which was the first that Emma's back happened to be turned. In the low, long drawer of the wardrobe, deep beneath confidential articles of personal attirement, she buried it in the furthermost corner, as far as arm could reach. Then she squeezed the drawer to again noiselessly, and standing back, applied her gaze in terrible assiduity to see whether the wardrobe showed any outward and visible signs

of having been tampered with for improper purposes. There was nothing suspicious that she could discover. The knobs spun wickedly, and winked at her in devilish confraternity:

"Aha, not a word. Trust us. We know; we know!"

The afternoon drew on with a humming and a droning, and a buzzing and a whirring, and a tick-tacking and a hammering, all mixed up sleepily together in thick sunlight, like the flies in Fussitter's golden syrup. The postmaster slept on his little bench in the shoemakery, with his head back against the wall, and his mouth open like the letter-box outside, and Ginger Gatheredge's left boot between his knees, sole upward, and a hammer in one hand and the other thrown out empty—with the sort of mute, supplicating gesture towards the inexorable that one associates with rent-day. Mrs. Morland had slipped out to Mrs. Fussitter's, and would be back in a minute—without committing herself to say which. Emma was in the trying-on room, with her mouth all pinned up; there must have been, at one moment, a dozen tucks in at least. The schoolmaster was in the second kitchen. Pam was in the first. She knew where he was; her ears were alert to every sound in the house, but she did not know that he was keeping guard over her with a terrible check of concentration and listening apprehension. She was frightened he might be going to seek a conversation with her, but she need have no fear of this had she only known. He

was as frightened of such a meeting—for different reasons—as she. Suspicion was consuming him again in silence, like the old former flame of his love. He dared not trust himself to words; he could only listen. Only desired to listen and keep always near her. He trusted her no more than if she 'd been a declared pickpocket. Love without any foundation of faith is a terrible thing, and his love was a terrible thing. He had loved her before as he would have loved an angel; his own unworthiness alone had made him fear for the getting of her. Now he loved her no less—deeper, indeed—but it was the love for a beautiful and treacherous syren. His love was as unworthy as he believed hers to be. He knew not to what extent she would practise her deadly deceptions, and in holding himself prepared for any, his mind outstepped them all. He opened a book—it was a volume of Batty's hymns—and laid it on the table to be ready as an excuse, should any be needed. And there he sat, with the flat of his face strained towards the kitchen beyond, where he heard the girl astir.

For a while, so far as Pam was concerned, in her solitary occupancy of the kitchen, she was free from actual alarms. Only her mind troubled her; asking her how she was going to repair this great wrong that she had done—for she had no wilful intention of retaining the letter. All her mind was concentrated upon the hazy means of its safe delivery. All her

fears were lest shame of discovery should fall upon her before she could make redress. And these fears were not groundless. The task of redress seemed more difficult as she looked at it. In the first place, the letter bore the date of its Hunmouth stamping conspicuously on its face. Had the Ullbrig office had the stamping of its own letters, how easy it would have been to re-stamp over the old postmark. But coming and going, all the letters were stamped in Hunmouth. Oh, why had n't Government trusted them with the stamping of their own? So much better it would have been—so much better. Yet since there was no possibility of altering the tell-tale postmark, what was to be done? If she took the letter as it was ... he might remark the date, remember having come upon her when she was reading something, remember having seen her put something hurriedly into her pocket, remember her confusion when he asked whether there was any letter for him ... piece it all together and learn that she 'd robbed him.

And till he got this letter ... he would stay at Cliff Wrangham.

And there might be other things in it besides.

Money, for instance. Notes that She wanted him to put into the bank for her. That made Pam feel very ill. Notes—bank-notes! Those would mean transportation ... or something, for life, would n't they? The kitchen felt of a sudden so small and hot

and cell-like that she could bear it no longer. She slipped out feverishly into the garden. There, among the potatoes and cabbages she made a turn or two, but it was such an unusual thing for her to do, and she was so afraid lest its strangeness might set other eyes to industry concerning her altered state, that the fear that had driven her out drove her in again. Back she came from under the burning sun into the stewpot of a kitchen. And there, all at once, she heard a horrible sound from overhead that stunned her intelligence like a cruel box on the ears. The next moment she was racing up the little twisted staircase with the horrid stealth and the concentrated purpose of a tigress. To her bedroom she fled on swift, noiseless feet; crouched by the door for a moment to make sure, and prepare her spring, and pounced in terrible silence upon the curved figure of the postmaster's daughter, on her knees by the fatal drawer of the wardrobe.

CHAPTER XXVI

"What are you doing there?" she panted breathlessly.

"Lawks, lass." The figure of Miss Morland sprang upward like a startled Jack-in-the-box and caught at the open drawer to prevent an overbalancement on to her back. "What a start ye gied me, comin' in on a

body like that. Y' ought to 'ad more sense. Ah thought ye wor far enough."

"You have ... no right here," Pam said, desperately trying to justify her entrance. "This is my room. You have no right in my room. What are you doing in that drawer? You ought to have ... asked my permission."

For a moment Miss Morland's face was a kaleidoscope of conflicting emotions. Her mind apparently was in such rapid progress that her words could n't descend, like passengers at the door of a railway carriage, until the train had sufficiently slowed up.

"Oh, mah wod!" she ejaculated, rising to her feet at length in rare display of dudgeon, and wiping the unworthy lint of Pam's carpet off her knees as though it were contamination. "Things is come tiv a pretty state when ah 've to ask ye whether ye 've ganned an' putten mah red petticawt i' your drawer by mistake. Mah wod, they 'ave an' all. Ye mud think a body wanted to rob ye. What 's come tiv ye?"

Even now, with that fatal drawer thrown open, and the signs of rummaging visible about the surface, Pam dared not retreat from her standpoint. (Oh, my Heaven! it was n't her standpoint at all. She had n't made it. Had n't wished it. Up till now Emma had had the run of this room unchallenged. But Pam was but a poor, unresisting tool in the hands of her terror.) She dared not give Emma permission to

continue the search. She dared not say she was sorry. She dared not abate one jot or tittle of her loathsome simulated indignation. She could n't breathe until that drawer was safely shut.

"If you had asked me..." she began.

"Ah don't want to ask ye nowt," Miss Morland said contemptuously. "Ye tell me nowt bud lies."

Pam's lip quivered with fear and reproach. How much did Emma suspect? How much did she know? How much had she seen?

"You have no right ... to say that, I think, Emma," she protested.

It was less a protest than a tremulous feeler, to sound the depths of Emma's knowledge. But she quaked for results.

"No, ah en't," Miss Morland acquiesced, with the terrible force of agreement that means so much dissent. "Ah s'd think ye was just comin' upstairs to get yersen washed again, when ye dropped o' me."

"I will look for the petticoat ... if you wish," Pam offered humbly. "But I don't think it 's here. Which one did you say it was, Emma?"

"Ah did n't say it was onny un," Miss Morland declared, repudiating the olive branch. "Ah don't want ye to look for owt. Ah 'll do wi'oot petticawt sin' ah 'm not fit to be trusted. Ay, an' ye need n't trust me. Ah don't trust you. Ah know very well ye 're agate o' seummut ye 'd for shame to be fun' [found] out in. Where 's waiter ye washed i' this

mornin' before dinner? An' 'oo's been liggin' [lying] o' t' bed? Cat, ah s'd think. Folks is n't blind if ye think they are.... Noo, get yersen washed agen. Ah 'm about tired o' ye."

At which Miss Morland slammed to the drawer peremptorily with her knee, and flounced past Pam in a fine show of injured pride and indignation. And Pam never questioned the justice of her wrath. Emma was right to be angry. Pam had treated her shamefully, shamefully, shamefully. Oh, never did she think in the hours of her happiness that she would ever have come to treat Emma like this. To suspect her; to approach upon her by stealth; to use harsh words to her; to offend her so needlessly and so cruelly.

All the same, as soon as the feet of the postmaster's daughter had departed downstairs, telling the tale of their indignation loudly to every step on the way and banging it into the door at the bottom, the girl dropped on her knees, opened the drawer anew, and commenced to examine the depth and nature of Emma's exploration. Heart, soul, and body, suspicion now was eating her up piecemeal. With the lapse of her own trust she trusted nobody. Carefully she turned up the articles one by one, to see how far signs of recent disturbance extended. Thank goodness, they were mainly at the top. She sent her wriggling right arm to that furthermost corner at the bottom of the drawer, and the letter

was there; there (relief and reawakened misery) flat as she had laid it.

But this incident had shaken Pam's nerve. Her faith in the room was shattered, and in agony of spirit she cast her eyes about on all sides of her to decide where now she could best deposit this horrid possession. Thoughts of sewing it into a little flannel band and wearing it across her breast occurred to her. But all sorts of dreadful things might happen. She might fall; she might faint; some sudden accident might overtake her; she might drop down dead even, or dying; willing hands might tear open her dress-body and exhume this frightful secret from its shallow grave. To such an extent did she foresee disaster of this sort, that the mere wearing of the letter seemed a courting of it. It was like shaking her fist in the face of Providence.

And then of a sudden she bethought herself. In the front parlor downstairs was a little inlaid brass and mother-of-pearl writing-desk that Father Mostyn had given her. Once she had made regular use of it for such small writing as she had, but now never. It had become elevated from an article of use to an article of household adornment; one of those penates —ornamental fetiches, with which all rustic parlors abound. To open it almost was an act of profanity, except for Pam. Pam had one or two little treasures of a personal nature that she was guarding zealously, and the household law could be stretched a point to

allow her a sight of these possessions from time to time, so long as she did not abuse the privilege. True, there was no key—but then, respect of sacred tradition was as good as any key. Nobody had ever looked into the desk but Pam since its sanctification. Why should they look now? Down to the front parlor she worked her way, disguising the directness of her journey with the cunningest side errands, doublings and confusings of her tracks.

It was but the work of a moment to open the desk, but quick as she was about it the door of the second kitchen, that led out into the passage, opened in the meanwhile, and she heard the schoolmaster emerge. There was no time to dwell upon the details of the letter's concealment. Between the two leaves of the desk she thrust it, pushed the desk back into its place, reinstated the china shepherdess on its polished top, and picking up the crystal letter-weight, with the vivid picture of Southport in colors beneath its great magnifying eye, engrossed herself in the examination of this—her scarlet neck and burning ears turned resolutely towards the doorway.

For some moments, standing silent, a statue of guilt surprised, with her heart turning somersaults inside her and her voice miles away had it been called upon—she almost believed that the schoolmaster had entered the parlor. It seemed she was conscious of his presence advancing behind her; could feel his eyes boring through and through her

like live coal. So tense was her feeling, and so imperative the summons of that unseen gaze, that in sheer self-defence she was constrained to lay down the letter-weight and turn round quaveringly to meet her accuser.

But there was none to meet. The room was empty of any but herself. For all she knew, the whole circumstance—from the opening of the kitchen door to the schoolmaster's entrance—was a mere fabrication of her tortured nerves. And now she would have liked to bring forth the desk anew and do her hiding over again more thoroughly, but she dared not, lest she might be disturbed in real fact. Minutes she waited there, with her hand on her bosom, listening for the selection of a moment that should seem propitious. "Now," she kept urging herself; and "now," "now," "now!"

But whenever she extended an arm some warning voice within her cried: "Wait ... what was that?" At times it was but the creaking of her own corset; the straining of her leather belt; the rustle of her dress. But it always arrested her short of her intention; it always seemed that the house woke into movement the minute she sought to revise her work.

And last of all, when she had wasted enough favorable moments for the doing of her work twenty times over, she grew frightened that this continued propitiousness of circumstance was too good—like summer weather—to last. Every moment now must

see its break-up and dissolution; every moment added to her risk. And in this she was right. Of a sudden the sewing-machine stopped with a premonitory abruptness, and she heard its owner astir. With a haunting sense of dejection and misery for what she had failed to accomplish, Pam whipped from the room back to the little clean kitchen.

And the moment after that, her chances for this time present were ruthlessly snatched away from her. The postmaster awoke to find his neck and his left arm and both his legs asleep, and something wrong with his swallowing apparatus, and became very busy all at once on his little bench. Mrs. Morland came bustling back from Fussitter's and said, "Good gracious! yon clock 's nivver right." Not that she doubted for a moment that it was, but as a kind of reproof to Time for having slipped away from her this afternoon, and got home so much in advance of her.

And Emma Morland emerged from her trying-on room, and came into the little clean kitchen, apparently searching for something, and resolutely keeping her gaze clear of Pam. Pam knew at once what she wanted. It was not anything that eye could see or hands could lay hold of; not pins or petticoats or needles or darning thread. It was counsel and advice, locked up so securely in Pam's own delinquent body, and because of her conduct this afternoon, the girl for very shame and contrition

dared not offer to give it. She besought Emma's eye with a pathetic, supplicating look to be asked some favor, however slight, by which she might hope to work back her slow way into Emma's good graces, but that eye knew its business to a hair's-breadth, and went doggedly about it without stumbling into the least collision.

Last of all:

"Do you ... want me, Emma?" Pam asked, in an almost inaudible voice of sorrow and repentance.

"Eh?" said Emma sharply, turning as though she had not rightly heard, and could not imagine what possible subject should lead Pam to address her. "Did ye say owt?"

"Do you want me, Emma?" Pam begged again humbly.

She would have liked to throw herself at Emma's feet and pluck the hem of Emma's skirt, and cling there till Emma poured upon her the benedictory grace of forgiveness.

"What sewd ah want ye for?" Emma asked incomprehendingly. "Naw; ah can do wi'oot ye, thanks."

No; she could do without her, thanks. She who had been so glad to have Pam's help and assistance in the past; who had never done a stitch on her own account without discussing it first with Pam, and whom Pam had always loved to help, could do without Pam now. Pam was no longer necessary to

her; was no longer worthy to render assistance. No longer, for very shame, would she be able to enter Emma's little trying-on room, and know the happiness of helping; no longer be able to enter Emma's own heart and talk with her as to a sister.

It was all ended. The lights of life were dropping out one by one like the lights of Hunmouth when you drive away from it along the roadway by night. Into the great darkness of shame she was journeying; it seemed all the old landmarks were being left behind her. In a strange land she would soon find herself. She was on its borders now—but a twist of the road, and her old life would be for ever lost to her.

And then suddenly a vivid flash of resolution shot out and pierced her darkness with golden purpose, like a shaft of sunlight into the dense heart of a thicket. Why should she go on suffering like this? Why should she go on bearing her shameful burden of secrecy and silence round all these tortuous paths and byways of indecision? If she had an aching tooth, would she tramp through the wet and the wind in ceaseless rounds, of which the dentist was the fixed centre? This very night she would take the letter up to the Cliff and leave it at Dixon's. Let him think of her as he would. It was better to bear honorable open pain than ignominious secret torture. The simplicity of the resolve came upon her like a revelation. To think she could have

been beating about the threshold of this decision so long without the courage to enter. But that is always the way. When the pain of the tooth first takes us we submit to its suffering. It is only when it has broken our spirit that we are driven on weak legs to the fatal brass plate, and bemoan the many hours of wasted anguish that might have been saved had we made use of the true light when it first illuminated us.

Alas! Pam was not at the dentist's yet, and there was still more suffering for her in that aching molar of crime.

CHAPTER XXVII

Soon all was abustle at the Post Office in preparation for the departing mail. The kettle commenced to throb upon the red embers of the little kitchen fire, and pushing out a blithe volume of steam through its pursed lips, appeared to be whistling light-heartedly at the immediate prospect of the cup that cheers. From the second kitchen came the melodious clink of the cups and saucers and tea-spoons; gladsome tea-table music, heard at four o'clock on a hot summer's day, with its queer cracked thirds and minor intervals and faulty diatonics. James Maskill rattled up to the Post Office door again, over the great round cobbles, and tying the reins up into a loop,

stimulated hot and dusty letter-bringers to frantic final efforts with fierce cries that he was on the point of departure.

"Noo then, ye need n't gie ower runnin' if ah 'm to tek it."

"Ah s'd sit down, if I was you, an' watch me gan."

"Ay, theer, ye 'll 'ave to mek use o' yer legs."

"Noo, ah 'm just away an' all, so ye know."

Whereupon, at Pam's invitation, he retired to partake of a cup of smoking tea on the Post Office counter—that reappeared immediately upon his forehead in the form of globules—and doubling up plum-bread and butter by laying it flat on his great outstretched palm and closing his hand upon it, slipped it down his mouth cornerwise, as easily as posting a letter. Every now and then he gave his tea-cup a vigorous stir to shake up the sugar in it, and darting to the door of the Post Office, scanned the street up and down for distant letter-bearers on its horizon.

"Noo then," he cried out at Ding Jackson, lurking onward from afar. "'Ow much longer div ye think ah s'll wait for ye?"

"Ah don't know, an' ah don't care," Dingwall Jackson responded irreverently.

"Don't ye?" shouted the postman, with sudden ire.

"Naw," Ding Jackson shouted back at him, going better. "Ah 've no letters."

"Ay, bud ye 'll know if ah get 'old on ye," James Maskill cried threateningly, shaking a doubled fist like a great red brick at him, and as heavy. "An' ye 'll care too. Ye dommed saucy young divvle."

"Gie ower sweerin'," cried Ding Jackson, as loudly as he could. He almost twisted his interior in the effort to publish the postman's offence throughout Ullbrig. "Feythur, James Maskill 's sweerin' at me."

"Ay, ye sewd try an' curb your tongue, Jaames," the postmaster counselled him as he scowled back to his teacup. "It's a 'asty member wi' all on us, an' stan's i' need o' bridlin'."

"Ah 'll bridle 'im," said James morosely, stirring up the sugar again, this time like the dregs of discord. "... When ah get 'im. An' ah know very well where ah can leet of 'im" [alight on him].

At other times this wicked conduct of James's would have grieved and disappointed Pam, particularly in the face of his recent struggles and improvements, but to-day she felt no right to be grieved. Indeed, this sin seemed so inconsiderable by the side of her own that she envied the postman his comparative state of sinlessness. To call somebody a "devil" (which Ding Jackson undoubtedly was, at any time that you used the appellation to him; morning, noon, or night), what was that? But to steal something from somebody who 'd been your best friend. To be a thief. She knew by her sorrows what

that was. And James Maskill had been reproved and shamed and corrected for the one, while she, for the other—that could have sent her to prison and shamed her before Ullbrig for ever—she was here, acting the saintly hypocrite.

Oh, no! Whatever James Maskill did now she could never reprove him. The very worst that his temper could do would always be above that level to which, through her sheer sinful tendency, she had sunk. James would never steal. James would never be a thief. From that hour forth she looked up to James Maskill with a new-born reverence and respect, as to one whose life was pure and hallowed.

"Thank ye," said the hallowed one, thrusting the cup and saucer and plate through the kitchen door, and holding them there until he should feel himself relieved of them.

"You 're very welcome, James," Pam answered him, in the softest voice that was left to her. Even her voice, it seemed, was becoming hard and sinful and metallic in these days, to match her soul. "Will you have any more?"

"No, ah s'll 'a my tea when ah get back," the hallowed one responded; and in a lower tone, according to custom: "Is there owt 'at ah can do for ye o' my way?"

Dear, faithful, honest, good-hearted fellow! How he loved her, Pam told herself bitterly. How he trusted her, vile character that she was. How his

goodness ought to stimulate and strengthen her own, and draw her back, if so might be, to the old paths she had trodden once.

"No, thank you, James," she said after a pause—in which James only imagined she was trying to think of something.

"Not to-night?" said the hallowed one.

"Not to-night ... thank you," Pam told him.

If a kiss would have been any good to him ... and he 'd asked for it, he would have got it then. Poor James! Lost a kiss because he never dreamed of thinking it would be there, or asking on the off chance.

"Ah 'm still ... tryin' my best," he assured Pam, round the door-post. "Ah 'm not same man ah was, bud that d ... Dingwall, ah mean, gets better o' me yet. Ah know ah s'll not be right while ah 've fetched 'im a bat across 'is lugs. Nor 'e won't, saucy young ... sod. Bud ah 've not gidden up tryin'."

He had not given up trying. And she—was she trying?

Oh, James, James, James! After many days you are bringing back her soul's bread to her. Pray that she feed upon it and be strong. She needs it.

"Good-neet," said James.

"Good-night, James," said Pam.

The postman raised his voice.

"Good-neet, Emma."

"Good-neet, Jaames Maskill," Emma responded.

"Good-neet, Missis Morland."

"Good-neet, Jim lad."

"Good-neet, agen," James said to the postmaster.

"Neet, James. Ye 'll 'ev another nice jonney," the postmaster told him.

"Ay, neet 's about best part o' day, noo," James responded.

He took up the bag, and lingering, cast one extra "Good-neet" over his shoulder towards the door-post once more, in his second and softer voice. It did n't seem for anybody in particular, but more as though he had it to spare, and might as well leave it at the Post Office as anywhere. Pam's voice, however, registered acceptance of it from within, with the grateful inflection for a very welcome gift.

"Ay, good-neet," said the postman, giving her another forthwith; and after hesitating on the impulse of a third, hardened his mouth, swung the bag off the counter by its narrow neck, lunged out into the lurid sunlight, pulled the cart down to meet him, sprang into his place, said "Gee" and "Kt," and was round the brewer's corner in a twinkling, leaving golden clouds behind him.

And as soon as tea was over and the things were cleared, and the house commenced to slip into its peaceful evening mood, she set her plans in motion for the carrying out of her resolve. Viewing the recent discredit into which her washing had fallen with Miss Morland, it required all her nerve to brace

herself for a visit of this nature to the bright bedroom overlooking the garden; but stealing a moment when Emma was absent, she did it, changed her light dress for a darker of navy blue, and descended, prepared to receive all Emma's scorn now that it could no longer deter her from her intention. But Emma was nowhere visible when she reached ground-floor again; her accumulated reserves of meekness and charity had been vainly stored. And now her first object was to secure the letter. She reconnoitred the rooms once more, with the end that she might possess herself of it, and hold it in readiness for the first suitable moment that might offer her a chance of departure without being seen. Such departure would not be yet, of course. It would not be till the dusk was well fallen, and the moon on the rise. Until that time there was always the fear of coming into collision with the Spawer about Dixon's farmstead. Above all, she must avoid that. And meanwhile, the letter must be in her keeping against all chance that the one moment most favorable to departure in all other respects should be the least favorable for the procurement of the letter itself.

To her consternation and dismay, she found that the parlor, though she had imagined it to be unoccupied when she listened outside the door, was held in the hands of the schoolmaster. He was seated, reading deeply at the round table, with his elbows on the edge and his hands over his ears,

when she wavered upon the threshold. This first frustration cast a terrible shadow over her. She did not know where to go to keep vigil. If she dallied too openly about the house, there was ever the dread that it might involve her awkwardly with one member or other, and rob her of her chance a second time, just at the very moment that the schoolmaster should leave the coast clear. Apparently he had not heard her push the half-open door and stop dead upon the outer mat, for he had never raised his head. Dejected and anxious, she stole back to the little kitchen and twisted her knuckles by the window, watching the slowly deepening sky—so reflective of her own sinking gloom. From here the postmaster's approaching steps drove her into the second kitchen. From the second kitchen the sound of Emma Morland, humming a hymn-tune severely through her tightened lips, and advancing by the passage door, drove her back again, and—as Emma still pushed her advance—up the corkscrew staircase for the second time this night.

"Where 's Pam?" Miss Morland inquired acutely of the postmaster, when she entered—not that she was in active pursuit or need of her, but that the girl's absences now were always a source of suspicious inquiry and speculation.

"En't ye seed 'er?" the postmaster asked innocently. "She 's nobbut just this moment come oot o' kitchen an' ganned upstairs."

"Ay, to wash 'ersen, ah' s'd think," Miss Morland reflected shrewdly to herself. "Ah 'd gie seummut to know what lass 's after."

At that moment, if it could have been revealed to her, the lass was after listening at the top of the staircase with a twisted ear to their solicitudes concerning her whereabouts. Once upon a time, she told herself while she did it, she would never have listened to anything that anybody said, whether she had been the subject of it or not. But now, listening seemed part of her natural defence; she listened with no interest in the thing heard, except only as a means for her own intelligence and safety. At the first sound of words her suspicious ear was up like a cat's at the chattering of birds.

From her place at the head of the twisted stairs she was driven into her bedroom once more by Mrs. Morland. Then, when calm had been restored to the recently ruffled atmosphere of the post house, and it was possible to probe by ear to the uttermost corners of it, she slipped out a cautious head, chose her moment, and stole down by the Sunday staircase. Very gently she pressed upon the parlor door with her cushioned fingers ... very gently ... gently, gently, just so that she ... gently ... gently ... could catch a glimpse.

Ah!

The treacherous door had cracked, all at once, like a walnut-shell under her boot-heel. She was

halfway up the stairs again in a trice; holding her palpitating heart and listening terribly over the bannisters for the sounds that should proclaim discovery of her attempt. But none came. Baffled, goaded with desire, half-crying with fear of her enterprise's failure, and yet unable to cry because she lacked the tears to cry with, being only able to pull painful faces; desperate to achieve her purpose and terrified with her own desperation, she was up and down the staircase after this a dozen times; back into her bedroom, listening at the head of the corkscrew stairs; holding her ear to every point of the compass. But never dared she essay entrance of the parlor. That door, just ajar on its hinges, held her more effectually at bay than had it been bolted with great bolts and locked and barred. Dusky night descended, the time was getting ripe for her purpose ... and still she lacked the letter.

Then the greater terror out-terrorised the lesser. Fear of what the consequences might be should she not achieve her purpose to-night drove her downstairs for the last time, and into the parlor. With an air of reckless innocence that pretends it has nothing to be afraid or ashamed of, she pulled the door wide and strode into the room. In the simulation of guiltlessness her bearing for the moment was almost defiant, as though she were braced for going into some hated presence. And indeed, for all the assuring silence of the parlor, she

advanced with the full expectation of seeing the schoolmaster's figure looming forth from the table, with his hands to his ears and his back to her, as he had been on her first arrival. But no black shadow interposed itself between her and the window; the chair was empty; the room was void. Gone all this while.... And she in her terror had been letting the precious moments slip through her fingers like water. Her heart, in spite of the misery of her lost opportunities, gave a great bound of exultation when it found the way of its purpose clear.

She sprang across the room and laid hold of the desk. The pleasure of feeling it in her possession again after all her dividing anguish; this union of purpose with opportunity; this path unto righteousness—were more glorious than untold riches. Tremulously she deposed the china shepherdess, and opening the desk thrust in her feverish fingers.

And then, all of a sudden, her heart seemed to stand still. A great sinking, swaying sickness seized her.

The letter was not there.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The letter was not there.

Like a wild animal bereft of its young, when the first shock of discovery had had its way with her, she set herself with both hands to rummage the contents of the desk, as though sheer frenzy of desperation alone could restore to her that which was lost. Scarcely even did she regard the objects that her delving brought to the surface, but dug and tore at them all with a blind, consuming energy that revealed the unreasoning horror of her mind; turning and returning and overturning; now above, now below; selecting each thing seemingly with the prefixed idea to reject.

It was not there. The letter that all her life and honor hung upon, that she had thought to place there with her own hands, was not there. It was gone. There did not remain a trace of it. On the floor, upon her hand and knees, she sought distractedly, stroking the carpet with passionate solicitude to deliver her the letter that was not hers—as though it were a great, rough-coated beast that she was coaxing.

And there, on her hands and knees, the schoolmaster came upon her. Through the thick walls of her engrossment she never heard him; care she had thrown to the winds.

Still groping and coaxing, and peering over the floor in the fast gathering dusk, she saw for the first time the shadow that watched her. It said no word at the moment of her rising. Slowly and tremblingly she

rose upward, like a faint exhalation, a phantom. Had she continued her vaporous ascent through the ceiling, and through the bedroom ceiling above that, and through the red-tiled roof, and forth into the great eternity of dissolution and nothingness, it would scarcely have been out of keeping with the strange slow spirituality of her rising. All the passionate heat of her search cooled before that presence; her body, that had been so assiduous in its enterprise, froze suddenly to ice; the very life seemed to have been smitten out of her, and her rising but the last muscular relaxation of a body from which the soul had fled.

"Are you ... looking for something?" the shadow asked her, after a terrible moment's silence, when the girl's guilty heart seemed trying to cry aloud and betray her.

It was the old schoolmaster's voice that uttered the question; the tight, hoarse whisper that seemed to strangle his throat in the utterance like a drawn cord. And it was the old schoolmaster's figure that waited upon her answer; the remorseless, condemnatory figure with its hands to its collar, that always, whatever she did, threw her in the wrong. All their intervening relations seemed cut out and done away with. They were back again, splicing their lives at the point where these had broken off on that memorable night in the kitchen. He was above her once more, on the great high judgment seat, and she

... down here—a poor, frail, inconsequential sinner—struggled and wrestled in the bondage of silence before him.

"I?" She spoke in an unsteady voice, all blown to pieces with short breaths, as though she had been running fast and far. "No, no! Only something that I ... that I ... I thought I 'd dropped. Nothing at all ... thank you. It does n't matter."

She wanted to pass him quickly on the strength of that denial—a lie on the face of itself—and get away somewhere, to her bedroom again, before he could question her further; but he stood there without moving, as he had stood in the moonlight, and she dared not advance. She had the fear within her that he might yield her no place.

"You ... will not find it on the floor," he told her.

"I don't ... know what you mean," she found strength to say—but only just.

"The letter," he answered. "You are looking for a letter."

In dead silence, like an executioner's axe, the charge fell, and seemed to sever her anguished head of evasion at one sharp blow from its trembling trunk. She had no power for struggling now; her life of tortured anticipation and mental activity was at an end. It was only a poor, soulless, quivering girl's body that the schoolmaster had in front of him. He might bend and bruise it as he listed; it should show him no resistance.

"It was a letter you were looking for," he taxed her again, his voice gaining severity, it seemed, from her admissive silence, as though he meant forcing her to confess with her lips what she had hoped to let her silence say for her.

"... Have you ... got it?" she inquired, in a dry, empty whisper.

Had she spoken the words with a hollow reed under her lips the tone would have been no more empty.

"It is safe," he said.

And something in the malicious utterance, something significant of exultation for a victory unfairly come by, revealed to the girl in a flash, when, and by what abominable means, it had come into the man's possession.

"You took it," she cried at him, flinging the accusation into his face as though it were a glove from the hand of outraged honor. "You stole it out of my desk!" With all the rapid process of moral despoliation that had been at work upon her during these latter days, and with all the resultant complaisance for crime, the old indignation rose up strong in her against the idea of a mean, petty theft like this. It seemed she might never have sinned or known sin herself, so clear and righteous was her moral eye become of a sudden. "You thief!" she threw at the man. "Coward and thief!"

He made no attempt to resent or defend himself

against these puny javelins of her anger. Possession of the letter was so impregnable a position that he could afford to let her expend her ammunition fruitlessly against the walls of his silence.

"And if I did take it?" he asked her merely, in tones of gathering assurance.

"It was not yours to take," she panted at him. "It does not belong to you. Give it me back. You have no right to it."

"It belongs to neither of us," he said, yet without anger. With such a power as this letter in his pocket gave him, he had no need of anger. And of justification he sought none. "My right is as much as yours ... and I am prepared to stand by it. Call me a thief if you like; mere names won't hurt me ... your own harsh treatment has hardened me too much for that. We are both of us thieves."

"... I was going to take it back to-night..." the girl protested, part in asseveration of her innocence, part in supplication that he should restore her the letter.

"Perhaps you were," he said, with a callous indifference to her intentions that boded ill for his own. Apparently he was little concerned with the girl's atonement or questions of restitution. "But I have something ... to say to you first. We cannot talk here. Put on your hat ... we will go outside."

His assumption of authority and dominion roused the last red cinders of the girl's independence. Now that her back was to the wall and further

retreat was impossible, the energy, hitherto dribbling away in futile skirmishes, accumulated itself in frontal activity. She was shamed—bitterly, horribly shamed—but even shame has its pride.

"Give me the letter..." she said doggedly, and held out her hand.

"Put on your hat..." he told her. "We will talk about that outside."

"I will not go with you. Give me the letter first. If you give me the letter I will go."

"You shall have the letter back ... in good time. Not now. If you speak so loudly they will hear us. Put on your hat."

"I will not put on my hat."

"... I think you will."

"When will you give me back the letter?"

"When ... we have come to an understanding."

The word "understanding" tolled out across the dreary wastes of her consciousness like a death-bell.

"... Will you give it me to-night?"

"We can discuss that."

"Give it me now ... and I will go with you."

"No; I cannot give it you now. You have had your way ... in other things. I must have mine, for once, in this. Put on your hat."

She would have gone on her knees to anyone else in the world that should have obtained this dominion over her, but before this man, no. To beg of him, her shame was ashamed. Knowing what he

had been wanting of her all these months—what he was wanting of her now—she dared not plead for a single concession; dared not put herself under the yoke of one small favor. Doubly she was at a disadvantage before him. All her wiles of womanhood; all her tears; all her soft persuasions; her clasping of hands; her dove-like wooing with the voice ... all that dear pedlar's basket of feminine graces to win the hearts and minds of man must be left undisplayed. To this man, of all men on earth, she must not plead.

"If I will not put on my hat?" she said.

She dared not bind herself in direct negation to the refusal, but she suggested the act—drawing pride for it indirectly—with the twofold intention of expressing a contemplated resolve she was far from feeling, and of arriving at some knowledge of the degree to which the man was prepared to push his ill-gotten power.

"But you will," he said.

There was something so black about the insinuation—as though he himself were anxious to save her the sight of what might be in store for her if she persisted—that she dared hazard no second contingency. They remained for a second or two in silence, and the slow melting of her obstinacy into consent was as palpable during these moments as the melting away of a fragment of ice on a fishmonger's slab. No other word passed between them then. Very

quietly the schoolmaster opened the door and stood by the wall while the girl slid by him, cowed and trembling.

The postmaster, sitting on the high Governmental stool in the Post Office, with his back to the window and his newspaper held up above his head to catch the last red reflection from the darkening sky, staring upward at the crowded firmament of print through his great glasses as though he were star-gazing, heard the front door close, and looking over the ribbed glass screen into the roadway, saw Pam and the schoolmaster pass together in the direction of the brewer's corner.

"Emma," said he, putting his head in at Miss Morland's door next moment; and more urgently still, not discerning her there at first in the dusk: "Emma lass, are ye theer?"

"Ay, ah seed 'em," said the severe voice of his daughter. "Div ye want lamp noo?"

CHAPTER XXIX

That same night the Ullbrig chimes were as clear to hear at Cliff Wrangham as though they 'd rung in Dixon's stackgarth, and Dixon shook his head.

"Yon 's a bad sound," said he dubiously. "Ah 'm jealous we s'll be gettin' some rain before morn."

And while all Ullbrig slept (save two), and all Cliff Wrangham (save one), a great, black, umbrella-shaped cloud pushed up its head into the sky above where the sun had sunk, like a mammoth mushroom. Soon there were no stars left behind Ullbrig church for the tower to show against; half the sky was black as ink and the mushroom still growing. Out of the advancing darkness came wafts of cool, wet wind that shook the sleeping, windows and casements gently, as though to awaken them to preparation, and bid them: "Be ready—we are coming." And almost while their breath was whispering the warning, the first rain drop spat sideways against the Spawer's window, and after that the second and a third and a fourth. And thenceforward, through the hours till daybreak—that never broke at all—the silence seethed with the steadfast downpouring of rain.

All over the country-side this night there would be white faces peering out through the streaming wet windows, for your farmer is a light sleeper where his crops are at stake; and men's low, calamitous voices heard discussing the swift change in their prospects; and stocking-feet stirring muffled about boarded floors; and bedsteads creaking as occupants sit up in them, and roll out with sudden-roused anxiety or throw themselves flat again in the despondency that knows too well to need any ocular confirmation of its fears; and the sounds of masters, calling urgently

upon men by name in the great attic above, to inquire whether this, that, or the other had been safely done last night before turning in.

For three days the rain fell, almost without intermission. At times, for variation, great big-bellied clouds of white mist rolled over the land from the sea, and hid it, and rolled away again. They heard the booming of the minute-gun from Farnborough, and the hoot of passing steamers. More than once, during these three days, the Spawer extended his excursions—with fitful energy of action—right beyond the confines of Dixon's farm, and showed a set face of purpose towards Ullbrig. But it was all mere moonshine. The thought of his advent in Ullbrig village, with his streaming mackintosh and soaking cap and be-muddied boots, deterred him from his folly in time. And whenever he turned back it was always with a certain consolatory pious pain of renunciation, as though he had just got the better of a great temptation, and had gained a victory instead of losing one.

CHAPTER XXX

Early on the morning of the fourth day, which was a Saturday, Barclay was sighted in his spring cart, driving down to Ullbrig to catch Tankard's 'bus; the farm lad sat by his side to hold up the great gig umbrella, with cylindrical slashes in its cover, through which a cow could have jumped, and two or three of its complete ribs showing. Dixon, standing at the pump in his white waterproof and leggings, his corn-sack headgear, and his six-penny telescope, as though he 'd been a skipper, and Barclay's cart (with miniature waves of water curling off at its wheels) an apparently friendly craft, hailed him as the farm lad consigned to his master the care of the umbrella, and clambered down to throw open the lane gate.

"Noo then."

"Noo then," said Barclay in turn, showing his face, and waving the reins at him with the right hand.

"Ye 're not cuttin' owt to-day, it seems?" Dixon inquired jocularly.

"Nay, ah 'm waitin' while it ripens a bit. Ah thought ye 'd 'a been agate leadin' yours by noo."

"Ay," said Dixon, "... 'appen we may if rain dizz

n't lift. We mud as well 'ave it damp as dry, ah think. 'Ow diz it suit ye noo, this tee-tawtal weather?"

"Nay, it dizz n't fall t' be no wuss nor it is. That 's 'ow it suits me," Barclay responded. "It 's no use stayin' i' 'oose, watchin' crops waste. Ah 'm away to Oommuth."

"To buy a bit o' band, ah 's think?" Dixon hazarded, with an internal twinkle.

"Ay, a bit o' band 'll not come amiss i' 'arvest time."

"Don't loss it o' yer way back, onny road," Dixon charged him. "Shall ye come wi' Tankard?"

"Ay," said Barclay oracularly. "Gen ah don't come later, ah shall."

... And drove away in the sloppy channel of the lane, with the clash of the gate behind him for farewell.

The farm lad, returning after a while in sole charge of the cart, with the umbrella totally inverted over him, using one of its rents as a window, held further parley with Dixon at close quarters by the same gate—that Dixon opened for him to save a dismount—concerning his master's departure, and the world in general. The conversation brightened Dixon's face as it proceeded, and sent him back to the house with a sparkle in his eye, as though he 'd been asked to pronounce judgment on a glass of XXX, and could say "Proper stuff this!" with all his heart.

"Noo, ah 've gotten to larn seummut ti morn, onny road," he announced to the household assembled in the big kitchen, from whose window the stack of faces had been interestedly observant of this second conversation. And in response to the very general inquiry: "What 'a ye larnt, then?" answered with another: "What div ye think?"

"What sewd we think, an' all?" Miss Bates demanded rebelliously. "Folks like me 'as no time to think."

"Nay, they 'd do better if they did," Dixon assented, with his imperturbable geniality.

"Ay, or they 'd do less, 'appen," Miss Bates snapped at him.

"Ah don't know i' what way," Dixon decided amiably. "Noo, div ye gie it up? Ah bet ye weean't guess, onny on ye."

"Sun 's shinin' i' Oolbrig, 'appen," Arny suggested.

"Feythur Mostyn 's gannin' to slart [daub] a sup o' paint ower t' front of 'is 'oose," Jeff said.

"Nay, ye 'll none on ye get gain [near] 'and it," Dixon said, not desiring, however, to give them too much rope, lest they might. "It 's a weddin'."

"Ay, an' ah know 'oo's it is!" Miss Bates cried, emerging suddenly at the open door of her rebellious silence, to demonstrate the superiority of her intelligence, and shaking it at him as though it were a broom. "It 's Pam's, an' she 's gannin' to marry

schoolmester."

"Ay, that 's right enough," Dixon said, with the perceptible reluctance of admission that would have wished the news—or Miss Bates' guess—to have been otherwise, particularly in view of her triumphant: "Ah knowed very well."

"'Oo telt ye she was, though?" Jeff demanded of his father, with Thomasine unbelief.

"Barclay lad, just noo."

"An' where did 'e get it fro'?"

"Nay, 'e 'd gotten it off too well for me to ask 'im owt o' that. 'E telt me it wor ower village 'at schoolmester 'ad asked Pam to 'ave 'im, an' she 'd ta'en 'im. Ah 'm not sure schoolmester 'issen 'ad n't telt a goodish few."

"Ay, 'e 'll want to tell 'em an' all," Miss Bates agreed gustily. "'E 's been after 'er long enough. Mah wod! Ah 'd 'a seed 'er somewhere before ah 'd 'a looked at 'er twice, all time she 's been snuffin' 'er nose at me. They want giein' marriage, both on 'em. Ah sewd 'a 'ad to be asked a good few times before ah 'd tek up wi' a man same as yon—old enough to be my feythur, very nigh."

"Ay, it teks all sorts to mek a wuld," Dixon pronounced drily. "We s'll see what sort on a man teks up wi' you, 'appen."

"'Appen," said Miss Bates, with great reservoirs of meaning wisdom dammed up behind the accent of that word. And then, not finding quite sufficient

satisfaction in this inflectional superiority, could not resist the temptation to cry out: "Bud 'e 'll 'ave to be different fro' be yon sort of a man, onny road."

"When 's weddin'?" Arny asked.

"Nay, ah can't tell ye owt more, wi'oot mekkin' it up," Dixon said. "Pick what there is for yersens. Ah lay, ye 'll manage to fin' seummut fresh in it." And looking towards the mid-parlor door: "'As 'e come doon yet?" he inquired.

"Ay, a goodish bit sin'," Miss Bates said. "Bud ah thought it was women 'at did all gossipin'!" she declaimed angrily, seeing the blessed standard of intelligence-bearer thus being wrenched from her grasp and carried into the Spawer's breakfast-table by another. And raising her voice more loudly as the figure of Dixon disappeared from the kitchen on its coveted errand: "Ay, ye can talk aboot women talkin', mah wod! Ye can an' all. Bud what aboot a man's tongue 'at must needs gan off as soon as it 's gotten to know seummut, an' tell it to ivverybody? Ah 'd for shame to show mysen so throng wi' other people's news!" And thus commencing to whip up the top of indignation within her, till it hummed loudly and threateningly, found an effective lodgment for her hand all of a sudden on the side of Lewis's cheek. "Put yer mucky fingers gain-'and that bacon, if ye dare!"

So the Spawer was not the only one to whom the news of Pam's engagement came as a blow, only he

lacked Lewis's privilege of crying for it.

CHAPTER XXXI

Sunday morning opened out scowlingly, with an angry watery look that saw no pleasure in anything. There was no rain, but there were great black clouds heaped up in the sky, every one containing a thunderstorm, if not a couple. Such clouds they were as you can make for yourselves by dipping a thumb in ink and smearing circularly over paper. Between the superimposed piles of them at times, as they rifted, the cold grey light poured down upon the level landscape below like pailfuls of water. The chill drops still spangled everywhere from the recent rain. Every bird that flew out of the hedges scattered diamonds in its passage. The grass was bowed down beneath its watery burden, drop upon drop was strung on the bended blades. The trailing porch of flowering tea hung weightily over the door, ready to discharge its accumulated wetness down any neck that passed under. On all the window-sills were long, tremulous watery rows of jewels. The whitewashed walls of the house were soaked and mottled; everywhere about the path and laneways were great pools of gathered water, shivering under the breath that blew over them now and again, in apprehension

of more.

A very day, indeed, for hot coffee, odorous ham, and smoking mushrooms—as all these ministrants to the stomach's comfort on the Spawer's breakfast-table there are—but the Spawer only looks at them in staring disregard.

This last blow about Pam has struck him so suddenly and so forcefully that he can only keep feeling himself over, and wonder what bones are broken, and how many. His pride, he knows, has suffered a nasty shock. All along he has been reckoning upon the girl as though she were an actual possession, to be left or taken at his own sweet will; a fixed star in the firmament. And lo! now he finds she is very much of a planet, with a path of her own, that has swum into his ken and swum out again, leaving the astronomer stuck in the mud with his telescope to his eye, a pitiable object of miscalculation.

And by turns he is incredulous and despairing, and hopeful and indignant and irate. She is not going to be married. It is a lie. There is no truth in it. She is going to be married. The shadow-man, the moonlight, the parting, her avoidance of him—all point to the truth of it.

Pam was marrying a pair of bell-bottomed trousers and a shabby morning coat. Horrible! horrible!

Oh, the sting was bitter! The disappointment

supreme. Even his love for the girl was so steeped in the sense of humiliation and of grief that she should have fallen to such extent below the standard of his measurement, that at times almost he failed to tell whether he really loved her any longer, or was possessed only of pity.

He could n't believe it. On his soul, he could n't believe it. He knew it was true, but he could n't believe it. On Sunday morning, wet or fine, he must go to Ullbrig and learn the truth. Father Mostyn would be sure to know and tell him.

And meanwhile he had to garb himself with the extra scrupulousness of attire for covering his torn pride. Now that he was humbled he must be very proud. He must show no tell-tale flinchings. He must laugh with the lazy, half-contemptuous humor, as though this little rustic world ... Morbleu! ... this little pasture of bucolic clods ... this fallow field of earthen intelligences ... you understand? ... this pitiable place called Ullbrig, meant no more to him in serious reality than Jarge Yenery's straw hat. If this thing were so, as he knew and dared not believe ... it should be buried in his bosom and heaped under a thousand simulations of indifference. Neither the girl nor any in Ullbrig should have the gratification of knowing that he had ever acted to her as other than the friend.

CHAPTER XXXII

It lacked yet some minutes to service time when the Spawer passed up the path to church. In the porch old Obadiah Beestman, with a bell-rope in one hand and a bell-rope in the other, and his right foot slung in the noose of a third, was still ringing his dismal ding, dang, dong, as the Spawer entered. Obadiah is also clerk and sexton too, and is shrewdly suspected by his Reverence of Nonconformist proclivities into the bargain.

He nodded solemn greeting to the Spawer as the Spawer arrived—the ringing of the bells being to Obadiah as much a part of the morning's devotion as the Prayers and Litany—if not more—and told him, "Onny on 'em to left 'and." By which he meant that the Spawer was at liberty to occupy any pew that caught his fancy, without fear of trespassing upon rights or being disturbed. Not a soul, so far, was in church. The Spawer picked his favorite pew, with its faded green cushion and family of hassocks—the grand patriarch standing a foot and a half high, and sloped for the knees to rest on without unnecessary bending; with others of various shapes and sizes, down to the baby sawdust-stuffed buffet, no bigger than a bath bun. Once upon a time, some God-fearing household of the Established Faith had come here week by week to worship, and brought these

hassocks to kneel upon, and this cushion for ease in sitting, and had died or gone away, while the tokens of their devotions were lapsed into possession of the church. In his old right-hand corner, with his shoulders fitted into the angle of the high pew-back and side, he sat and turned over the books within reach; hymns, ancient and modern, commencing at page twenty; prayer-books, decorated with rude designs of the human body, with poems against theft, and so much inscribed with names of ownership that the nine points of law and possession were merged in them quite; some small, some large; all clammy and smelling of the vault. Up and down the woodwork of the pew, and the hymn-books, and the green cushions, were the glistening tracks of lethargic but progress-making snails. All over the damp walls of the church they ran too, like luminous hieroglyphics of death and decay; and over the mural tablet in marble to the memory of Francis Shuttlewell Drayman, one time vicar, who served God in this church faithfully for forty-nine years, and was given rest as a reward for his labors on February 19, 1799. Also Hannah, wife of the above, who departed this life in search of her beloved husband, August 5, 1804.

As the Spawer sits and ponders over these things, trying to assimilate them by a sort of spontaneous process with his own state—and find one common key which shall fit all the varied wards

of the locks of life—the worshippers begin to assemble. Mrs. Hesketh, holding her youngest by the hand and piloting it (whether a boy or a girl does not exactly make itself apparent to a superficial observation) up the aisle in front of her, at the manifest peril of falling over it, and trying by jerks of the arm to shake its stare off the Spawer, which, however, requires a stronger arm. They disappear into a pew somewhere under the lectern, where much sibilant whispering begins to issue immediately upon their incarceration, as though they were cooking something; and every second the big forehead of the infant, surmounted by its sailor hat, shows itself as far as the eyebrows over the pew back and goes down suddenly, as though its supports had been sundered. Old Mary Bateman shivers up the aisle too, on the far third-class side, with her brown charity shawl drawn tightly over her shoulders and clasped into the pit of her stomach by invisible hands wrapped up in it, as though she were cold and hungry, and the pinched, alms-house look of humility about the lips of her bowed face befitting a pauper. Being entirely dependent for everything in life upon the mercy of God, and having a very proper value and appreciation of it—which is too infrequently the case with people able to earn their own living—she has long since discarded pride as an unmeaning and useless appanage, and walks humbly before the Lord and her fellow-beings (if they will

kindly pardon the liberty of her calling them such) as the devoutest Christian might desire. At Sacrament she will wait until the last lip has left the cup, and only presume to approach the table when sought out and summoned there by the priestly forefinger. And after death she will go underground in a nice deal coffin, as being cheaper and more perishable, so that she may the sooner mix her dust with the soil and make room for somebody else when the time requires. After her comes Mrs. Makewell, who deems it advisable to show herself occasionally beneath the priestly eye, as a reminder that she is still able to go out charing ("God be praised, your Rivrence") at eighteenpence a day, with her beer; also as a midwife when requested; and will give his Reverence judicious samples of her bronchitis during pauses in the service, knowing that his Reverence hears every cough and scrape and clearing, and bestows port wine upon the worthy. While she is trying to fasten herself into her pew there are sounds of a massive sneck being lifted somewhere round the chancel where the vestry is, and the scuffle of loose boots that are too big for the control of the feet that don't fit them echoing over a flagged floor. This, the Spawer knows by experience, is the choir. He even sees them peering round from the far end of the choir stalls and pushing each other out into the chancel, and hears the strident hiss of much whispering, which at closer quarters would resolve

itself into:

"See-ye! Old Moother Bateman! old Moother Bateman!" with an unpublishable effusion upon the subject of this unfortunate from the pen (or the lips, as he would n't know what to do with a pen if he had it) of the Ullbrig bard. "Gie ower shovin', ye young divvle." "Look at Spawer fro' Dixon's, like a stuffed monkey in a menagerie." "Let 's chuck a pay [pea] at 'im."

The sound of the massive latch resounding acutely through the empty building a second time puts a death-like stop to the chancel activity, and an august step heard passing over the flagstones in lonely majesty of silence announces beyond all doubt that his Reverence has arrived. At the same moment the Spawer, with a strange, nervous fluttering about his heart—as though he were about to face some great audience in his musical capacity—hears the whispering echo of light footsteps going up the winding stairs of stone from the door in the porch to the organ loft. If he had been a gargoyle, or a sculptured effigy of Peter, his ears would have heard that tread, and known the maker of it. Every step of the way he followed her progress. Now she had two more left, and then the loft door. The two were taken, and the loft door creaked on its hinges. She was in the church and behind him. By an instinct as unerring as that which guides a homing bird he felt, with a painful throbbing of the throat, the fact of his

recognition. He knew, almost as well as if he had been looking at the scene from some high point of vantage—higher even than the girl's—that she was gazing down upon him from the organ loft. And with this consciousness was poured into him from a vial more bitter the knowledge of her sudden start; the constrained tightening of her lips; the light suddenly extinguished in her eye at sight of him; all her being standing still like a human apostrophe and saying:

"He here!"

Yes; he was here. Miserable wretch that he was; he was here.

Into his shoulders he drew his neck; wedged his head down firmly, and sat without moving in the corner of his pew. On other Sundays he would have looked round at her and smiled his greeting upward. But not now. He dared not risk any such greeting now, lest he should look to find the girl's face turning from him. Without any shadow of doubt, their alienation was complete. He who had been regarded as a friend at the first was come to be regarded as a persecutor now. Even his presence there this morning was a persecution to the girl; a menace to her. She could trust him no longer. She suspected his intentions of dishonor, and was striving to hold at arm's length a man who hung about the skirts of her encouragement. He renewed his suspended breathing with a measure of relief when he heard the sliding rattle of the manual doors, and knew that her eyes

were removed from him at last.

And then he knew that another figure had gone up to the organ loft with the girl, and was contemplating him from on high; a silent, spectral figure, whose flesh seemed constituted of pale moonlight; and whose garb was the shadow of night.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"Ha! this is beautiful of you," his Reverence said, coming up to the Spawer after the service and enfolding his hand in that warm, balmy, beneficent softness of palm. "To come three miles on a morning like this for the sake of worshipping in the true Faith. Beautiful! beautiful! quite an example to our Ullbrig laggards, it 'll be talked of. Ullbrig has only three yards to come ... and it does n't come those, as you see. When Ullbrig comes, look for the Millennium or port wine—generally port wine. There 's no mistaking the symptoms. Mrs. So-and-So's liver 's no better. Put on your best black dress and go to church this morning, Janie; a bottle of his reverence's port would do her good. Take care and sit where he can see you and sing as loud as you can. Show him how capitally you can find all your places, and don't stare about you when he 's preaching. That 's our Ullbrig way. Go to church to get something out of it if you

can. 'His reverence gets paid for preaching; we ought to get something for going. That 's only fair.' See what his reverence the vicar 's to put up with in a place like this. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*. That 's our motto; which, being rendered according to Ullbrig theologians, means: Nothing done without good value given for it in return. If Nonconformity had n't its tea-urns and its bath buns it would n't hold sway over Ullbrig another twenty-four hours. Plenty of hot tea and big bath buns, with plenty of flies and currants in 'em; that 's the way to subjugate the heathen bucolic beast. Music's no good—any more than the Church. We 're dogs with bad names to start with, both of us. Musicians are unscrupulous, dissipated vagabonds, such as you, that live by their wits, as everybody knows. Vicars of the Established Church are children of Satan and prophets of Baal. We 're both in the same boat. And," said he, picking up the dismembered mortar-board from its place by the water-bottle, "this morning we shall have to swim for it. You can't go back to Cliff Wrangham in the teeth of a storm like this that 's brewing."

"It 's awfully good of you..." the Spawer began. "But really, I counted the risks when I came. I 'm ready to take my chance."

"Ha! not a bit of it! not a bit of it!" his Reverence objected, lifting up his forefinger. "You shall take your chance with me. It 'll be a dry chance, if frugal. We don't get so many faithful here that we can afford

to treat them with indifference. Come along with you. We 'll lock up and make a bolt for it. I daresay we can find something in the larder to serve us in lieu of lunch if the storm sets in. And judging by the sound of it"—a prolonged peal of thunder spread itself out above them and shook the hollow fabric of the church to its uttermost corner—"it 's going to be a stayer."

Together they made the round of the building, closing up all the swing windows against the deluge that must inevitably come, and giving the lock of the exterior vestry door two turns as the clerk had admonished them, set the thick fibre mat close against the lower chink to oppose any intrusive swill of water, and did what they thought best in such cases as those where a diamond pane lacked in the leaded windows; removing the hassocks from below, and spreading a mouldy cushion or two to absorb the bulk of what wetness came through.

They had only just completed the last of their preparations when a vivid streak of lightning flashed in the yellow, murky air like a knife-blade, and seemed to rip up the great baggy canopy of water suspended above them at one slice. A roar of enraged thunder followed the deadly thrust, and the rain fell whizzing to earth next moment like arrows.

His Reverence gathered up his cassock in both hands as far as the knees, and screwing up his mouth and aiming a way for himself with one eye through

the thick downpour to the Vicarage gate—but a dozen paces or so from the porch—made a game dash for cover.

"Ha! capital! capital!" his Reverence was saying at the other side of the close, bruised, blistered, and by this time rain-soaked door, wiping the drops off his chin and nose-end, and running the handkerchief round the inner rim of his Roman collar. "That 's one of the beauties of living by your own porch. The elements have n't any terrors for you," and stamping his feet upon the flags to shake out the legs of his trousers, where he had rucked them over his shoes, he led the way into the sanctum sanctorum, so full for the Spawer with memories of by-gone happiness.

A dual sense of gladness and sadness possessed him as he walked forward. Here he was very close to, and here he was very far from, the spirit of Pam. Out of every tile he trod on some brooding remembrance of the girl rose up as though his foot had dislodged it; wound about him like the sorrowing smoke from a funeral pyre and dissolved. In every corner of the room they entered, the spirit of the girl seemed to linger. All about the room were the visible tokens of the girl's presence—tokens so acute that to each of them his mind's eye supplied the absent figure of the girl as she had been at the actual moment of its accomplishment. Here she was stooping to straighten the antimacassar of a chair; here she was smoothing a cushion; here she was adjusting the objects on his

Reverence's writing-table.

And because the Spawer's heart was full of the girl, they did not touch upon Pam first of all. Instead, they talked of the storm, of the thunder, of the crops.

And all the while his Reverence was making excursions to various corners of the storm-darkened room; opened the cupboard door and plunged his hands with a rattle into a hidden knife basket; tried the blades on his thumb, and sprang them critically against his palm for selection; jingled amid silver forks, and counted them to his requirements, large and small; brought forth glasses, tumblers and wine glasses, and liqueur; then casters and bottled condiments; plates and napery, and laying them on the far end of the big dining-table, cleared that space near the window for their ultimate disposal.

"Let 's see ... one, two ... did I bring the forks? To be sure. What am I thinking of? Capital! capital! I 've been so long in other people's clover, you see, that I 'm forgetting how to graze on my own meagre grassland. That 's better—and the salt. Well! and what 's the concerto been doing all this time? Made headway, has it?"

He picked open a folded table-cloth by its two corners, and shook it out of its stiff, snowy creasing.

The Spawer told him that he was afraid ... it had n't been doing much. To tell the truth (that candid truth at which the Spawer was becoming such an adept), the weather had corrupted him. First of all it

had been too fine ... and then it had been too wet. This rain had unsettled him. It had washed out all his inspiration. He 'd only felt inclined to stick his fingers in his pockets and shiver over fires. The keys were too cold and damp. There was no warmth about them.

His Reverence gathered the cloth, and spread it over the table. "Indeed? I suppose you 've not seen much of Pamela ... since I left?" he asked casually.

The Spawer's heart hit him under the chin.

"Pam?" he replied, as though for the moment nothing had been further than this girl from his thoughts. "Very little. Let 's see. One ... no, twice, I believe. Yes; twice to speak to since you 've been away."

"Ha!" said his Reverence, and smoothed the cloth scrupulously down all its creases and over the corners of the table.

What did that oracular "Ha!" mean? Did it mean that his Reverence knew the whole history of those two times—or suspected it? ... or knew nothing; suspected nothing? There are moments when an ambiguous monosyllable is more potent than the wisest of words—and this was one of them. The Spawer waited a little space, while his Reverence passed his smooth palm backwards and forwards over the snowy surface, in the hopes that he might add something to that unexplanatory "Ha!" But his Reverence said nothing. He might have been waiting

too.

"I 've heard, though..." the Spawer began, feeling the discomfort of that monosyllable like a drop of cold water down his neck, and stopped there suggestively.

"Ha!" His Reverence passed a concluding hand over the table-cloth, and straightened himself with puckered mouth and portentous brows. "... Unfortunately true. Unfortunately true. Yes."

"Unfortunately" true! The Vicar, then, was his ally.

"... At first," he said, professing suddenly that the destiny of two drops, trickling slowly towards each other on the window-pane, was of more moment to him than the matter of the girl, "... at first ... I hardly believed it. I suppose, though ... you say there 's no mistake."

His Reverence shook his head, and passed over to the cupboard again.

"A very great mistake," he said, stooping on one knee and speaking into the cavernous recesses of the shelves; and after a moment: "A very great mistake," he said. "I 'm not surprised at your incredulity. Of course, being ignorant of circumstances, you 've nothing but your judgment to guide you—and plainly judgment would lead you to pronounce against such a form of proceeding. Yes!" He raised himself from the floor with the twisted face for a rheumatic twinge in his knee, and returned once

more to his table preparations. "I must admit that the girl has disappointed me. Of course ... ever since the beginning—as Ullbrig will tell you if you care to pay it the compliment of asking (which I don't suppose you will)—this has been a contingency to reckon with. But I 'd hoped. You see ... it 's different. Things latterly had looked so favorable. I thought the musical experiment was likely to succeed. Ha! and the French too. Yes, yes; the French too. It seemed to have stimulated the girl to aspirations altogether beyond Ullbrig. I thought we 'd trained her palate to require daintier food in every respect than Ullbrig could give her. And then ... all at once ... to be beaten on the post. Of course—" he drew attention to what followed with a quiet gesture, as though it were really quite obvious enough without the superfluous emphasis of pointing out—"... it would be quite possible for me to forbid the thing—veto it completely and put a stop to it once for all. But then..." he screwed up his mouth for a moment's reconsideration of what such an act would effect, "for the present I have n't quite found my justification for this extreme measure."

"He is ... a schoolmaster?" the Spawer hazarded.

"Exactly; our Ullbrig schoolmaster. A worthy enough man, no doubt, in his own particular way—but it is n't the way I had in my mind for Pam. I believe he excels somewhat in free-hand and rule of three. These are his specialties. His father—if my

memory serves me right—" here the Vicar appeared to interrogate his memory through fringed lashes, "... was a—ha!-small greengrocer and mixed provision dealer—Knaresbro' way, I believe. Of course, under ordinary circumstances, I should have had no alternative but to nip the whole affair in the bud; pack Pam away, if need be, and arrange meanwhile for the fellow to be transplanted in some peculiarly far and foreign soil. But as it is ... that seems an unnecessary setting of the mills to grind without grist. If we stop this marriage..." His eye roamed over the table, where knives and forks and spoons and plates and glasses commenced to array themselves with a semblance of order beneath his fingers. The Spawer's eye shifted, as a meeting seemed imminent. "... Perhaps, when I 'm dead and gone, she may contract a worse. Situated as she is, without friends or society, we can't hope to place her in life as by right and reason she should be placed. Perhaps, if one could only finance the girl, and secure fashionable influence for her, and float her upon the social sea, she might repay the investment cent for cent. But on the other hand ... there 's always a fear. Knowing nothing of the temptations of society life, she might fall to the first barrel like a lame pigeon. Besides, the girl shows no hankerings after the flesh-pots. There 's not a pinch of mundane salt in her nature. So why apply it with one's own fingers, and spoil her in the seasoning? Ha! why indeed?

Therefore, as things stand, she must be sacrificed. This man wants her and she wants him—more strongly than even I 'd supposed—and when all 's said and done, we might only make worse of it if we tried to twist human nature to our own preconcerted theories. At least, the fellow has no positive vices—they are mostly negative. He is steady, sober, respectable; a hard worker, likely—so far as one can foresee—to provide the girl with a certain home for life. For an indefinite period they may remain at Ullbrig, where—except for those inevitable little disturbances which we may expect under conditions of matrimony—her existence will be but slightly changed. Of course, she will have to relinquish her postal duties, but her parochial work will suffer no modification.

"Ha! now for the larder. Let 's see what there is to pick. Do you feel anything in the lobster way? Here 's a pie that Pam 's cooked and stuffed into the larder for me—knowing I should be back too late to lay in stock for Sunday. Dear girl. Why in the world could n't she think as beautifully for herself as she does for others? And here 's his reverence's brown loaf, and some beet, and some herring olives. Come, come! We shan't do so badly."

"You only got back last night?" the Spawer inquired.

"Last night only," his Reverence rejoined, dispersing his various acquisitions about the table.

"Came along with Friend Tankard from Hunmouth. Poor Friend Tankard! I think he gets slower and slower. Some day, mark my words, he 'll set out from Hunmouth, and never reach Ullbrig at all. That 'll be the end of him. However, he did just manage to pull us through this time, and for the rest of the evening I was interviewing our errant sister. But she stood firm. I tried to shake her on all points; had her in tears even. Yes, poor girl, had her in tears. She rained copiously, but it only seemed to water the roots of her resolve. She used the tears of my making to beg to me with. Ha! Let 's see ... to be sure! The beer. You 're a beer man, at least, are n't you?—even though you stop short of whiskey. Capital! capital! I 'm going to offer you a little specialty of my own. It 's a local beer—not Ullbriggian, by the way—but from the district, and you 'll say you never tasted its equal. Foams like champagne and bites like a nettle. Mild withal."

He disappeared from sight on this new errand, and returned, after a remote sound of clinking, with half a dozen bottles of his specialty, three by the neck in each hand.

"Here we are! If the light were n't so bad, I 'd ask you to examine the color. But that 's no use. We 'll let that go, and judge by the taste alone.... And so—" By a skilful intonation he cleared his voice of the beer, and skipped back to the old topic where they had been before. "... In the end we allowed the matter to

stand, and deferred judgment."

"And they will be married..." the Spawer began.

He was thankful beyond measure that the Vicar picked him up without delay, for his voice went suddenly as husky as bran.

"Not yet! not yet!" his Reverence said. "That's quite another thing. Though, for that matter, the girl wished to prevail over my scruples even there, and persuade me to an actual date and definite consent. But no. They must possess their souls in patience until I 've had opportunity to study them under these new conditions. I 'm prepared to let her go, since her happiness requires it, but I 'm not going to throw her. Besides ... a little object lesson of this kind appeared to me desirable. As I pointed out to Pam, the man's conduct in the matter left much to be desired. Had he been possessed of the natural instincts of a gentleman he would have approached me first, before intruding himself upon the girl's affections."

"Of course," the Spawer acquiesced hurriedly.

He loathed himself for a cowardly renegade as he did so, but the priest's eye, to his guilty vision, fixed him with such a meaning glance of severity that he felt anything short of verbal agreement would betray him.

"Of course," Father Mostyn repeated, with renewed emphasis. "The proper way—indeed, the only way for a gentleman—would have been to approach me in the first instance, and receive my

sanction before unsettling the girl with a suit which subsequent events might prove to be undesirable. But there, of course, you have the man, unfortunately. I daresay his nature would be quite unable to appreciate the niceness of the point—even if you explained it to him. Now you and I"—here the terrible condemnatory look seemed to be fixed on the Spawer again—"know these little matters by instinct, as it were. Such things as those are in our blood. We don't work out our conduct by free-hand and rule of three. It 's inbred in us. We act upon them as spontaneously as a pointer points. Ha!" He ticked off the first and second fingers of the left hand with the magnetic index-finger of the right. "Bread ... corkscrew..." and hesitated at the third as though uncertain whether there did not exist some still further necessity. "Ha! to be sure," he said, and wagged his shoulders, "cheese." He ambled genially out of the room again, and returned presently with a loaf of white bread on a wooden trencher, a corkscrew, a lever, and a dish of Cheddar.

"Now, come along! come along!" he said, all his being fused in the glowing warmth of hospitality, and sending forth its comforting rays even to the Spawer's chill fibres. "There 's nothing to wait for—except grace from Heaven. That's it. Draw up your chair and make yourself at home."

And bending his head over the tinned lobster: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy

Ghost."

CHAPTER XXXIV

And now, thinks the Spawer, with the fine egoism of wounded love, there is not in the whole world a heart so heavy as his.

But he is wrong, for here in Ullbrig hangs a heavier.

Heaven knows Pam had sinned in a hard market, and bought her iniquity dear. Other people, worldly people of experience and sagacity, know how to obtain all their sins below par, at the expense of the widow and orphaned. Pam, knowing nothing of this moral stock-and-share market, was paying for her shares with everything that she possessed. To the last penny of her self-respect she was paying for them. Of all moral and conscientious coinage she was void and bankrupt. There was nothing left her now but the body she lived in—all its beautiful furnishment of soul had been distrained and bundled out by the bailiffs long ago. And the body was mortgaged.

For this marriage—that to the Spawer looked but a callous flaunting of her bliss before his stricken eyes, a cruel demonstration of how little she was dependent upon him for any share of her happiness

in life—what was it but a foreclosure? She who had preached the gospel of true love, of the necessary unity of the body and the soul in marriage; who had proclaimed to Ginger that "there must be no chance about it, Ginger! ..." she who above all girls knew a love as free of carnality as any earthly love can be—she was selling her body now for its price.

Would she ever forget the night of horror that saw the compact made. The lonely, dusty highroad to Hunmouth, with its wide grass borders sloping down to the ditch bottoms, between the trimmed, stunted hedgerows, where the schoolmaster led her; the rising moon; the sickly, suffocating mist of harvest; the dim stars. And there, backward and forward over the powdery road, she had fought that last fateful fight for her soul's freedom—and failed.

Give her the letter back ... only give her the letter back ... and she would try to love him in earnest. She would force herself to love him. This time she should not fail. Give her the letter back. It was not his; it was not hers. Come with her himself if he doubted, and see her hand it in at Dixon's door. She swore she would give it. He did not understand. It had been all a mistake. She had not meant to take it. If he only knew the horror she had felt of herself. Oh, she promised! she promised!

But the man would have no promises. She had made him promises before and broken them. Here was the letter—here in his possession—and here it

should remain, for witness against her, if need be, until the thing was settled. Let her call him what she would now; abuse him as she liked; hate him—all was one. This night she must let it be proclaimed in the family that they were plighted. As soon as Father Mostyn returned, she must plead for them both with him. Not until she had pledged herself publicly beyond all prospect of withdrawal would he give the letter up. Promises availed nothing. He was done with promises. If she would not accept him on these terms it was a plain proof that she did not mean to fulfil them, and unless she was prepared to fulfil them she must abide by the consequences.

And more tears; and more entreaties; and pitiable shows of rebellion, quickly subdued; and petty resistances; and tortured turnings to and fro over the road; and at last surrender.

At last surrender!

Death even, had death been his condition, she would have accepted sooner than this dire alternative. Only one idea possessed her now—that the Spawer should never know the presumption of her love.

But the letter! Till he got that ... he would not go at all. The longer its restitution was delayed, the longer must she endure her agony.

Strange reversal of misery. In the beginning she had suffered with the sickness of his going. Now, in the end, she suffered doubly with the sickness that

he should stay. Of a truth, she was snared in her own wicked net. The sin that she had committed against him was turned into an all-sufficing punishment more than meet for the offence. And when would she be able to ease her pain in delivering the letter?

She did not know. Since that night of shameful surrender no further mention of the letter had passed between these two guilty partners, and because of the cruel mercy at which this man held her she would ask him nothing. To appeal to him respecting his intentions respecting her—to inquire of my lord's pleasure, as though she were a bond slave, purchased with gold ... no, no, she could not! When he deemed the time ripe to return her his ill-gotten seal of authority—once it had stamped the bond to his service—let him do so, and she would take it. Till then, let them both keep silence respecting their compact.

Hardly a word, indeed, passed between them on any topic. And by trifling, wordless actions the schoolmaster tightened his hold upon the girl's shrinking muscles, and held her to him as in a vice. Mere little attentions of courtesy they were, for the most part, that the household regarded—and kept watch for—with significant looks to one another, seeing in them the pleasant ripples on the seductive surface of true love—but to the girl they were but bolts being driven home, one by one, into the padlocked door of her prison. For she was this man's

prisoner in thought, word, and deed. Whenever she moved, he moved with her. If she hid herself from him in her bedroom, be sure he was keeping safe guard over its door from his own. If she changed rooms, he was after her like thought. In all except the derision of the outer world she was a felon, convicted, imprisoned, and under close surveillance; unworthy a grain of trust or credence. When he handed her an apron, or helped her into her mackintosh, she felt the act as keenly as though she were being given a gaol garb to wear. Oh, the degradation of it all! lacking only the degradation of men's eyes. But for that one pair of eyes which held her to her purpose, she would rather have gone to a real prison than suffered this horrible incarceration. And yet, it was plain to see, the man was only doing his best to gain her love. He had trapped her like a bird, cruelly, no doubt; but now that she was his, and caged, he was ready to whistle to her, to give her sugar; gild her captivity the best he knew how. Her love to him was like the lark's song; he had snared her for that, and counted on hearing her sing to him. Once she was his, and he would save her life with his own if it might be. But meanwhile, teaching her and taming her, he made sure that the cage was secure; passed his fingers feverishly over its wires a hundred times a day to assure himself that he had overlooked no loophole for her escape. There were letters for Ullbrig during those days of rain, and he proffered to

take them in the girl's stead. With a rain like that there was nothing to be feared. But the girl would not. To his cruelty she had had to submit, but to his kindness never. So they went, the two of them—for though he could venture to leave her behind, he dared not be the one left—battling through the downpour beneath mackintoshes and umbrellas, with their heads down, the whole roadway apart, exchanging never a word. And Ullbrig, safe at home, behind its starched curtains, saw the letters come thus, and smiled.

Truly, many waters cannot quench love.

Sunday—that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday, that seemed like the climax of the girl's shame, when to her horror she had found the Spawer in his pew beneath her; bless Heaven for the timely storm that kept them apart—Sunday came and went.

Monday replaced it; a promiseful, rainless day. All the sky was heaped up with great broken masses of cloud from yesterday's storm, that a persistent warm breeze swept over the cliff edge and across the sea, in ceaseless waves of sunlight and shadow. Throughout the day figures were moving about the fields, turning the limp and soddened sheaves to catch the wind. Still the breeze blew, and the countless host of clouds—like another Exodus of the Children of Israel—passed steadily over the land from the west to the east; to the brink of the sea and beyond. By evening they were nearly all gone over.

Only detached bands of them here and there rode up silently from the great west, as though they had been horsemen of a rear guard, and moved slowly across the sky in the wake of that mighty passage. And as the last of these departed, the sun, like a great priest garbed in glorious gold vestments, rose to his height on the far horizon with arms extended to Heaven, and pronounced a benediction over the land.

Rest in peace now, oh, Ullbrig farmers! Have no fear, oh, faint-hearted tillers of the soil! Rejoice, ye harvesters, for the Lord God of the harvest-field is come into His own again. The corn shall ripen in the ear; there shall be reaping, binding, and gleaning, and an abundant return for all your labors.

That same night, while the land lay still under the sacred hush of that benediction, in the little front parlor, all flushed glorious with the exultation of the sun's message, the schoolmaster returned to Pam what, on just such as evening as this—millions of ages ago, in some remote epoch of the world's history—he had taken from her.

Not a word accompanied the restoration. In silence the girl's hand went forth—with not even her own eyes watching its shameful errand—to meet it and receive that precious, hateful pawn that she was redeeming with her body. For some seconds they stood, maintaining their respective attitudes in that surreptitious transfer; the man with bent head and averted gaze as he had given; the girl with high,

rebellious bosom for a great grief, and her chin shrinking in the nest of it, while the recipient hand at the back of her worked slowly downward in the depths of her skirt-pocket.

Then suddenly, before the man had time to realise or utter the words his mind was slowly coining, the girl's high breast fell in the convulsion of silent sobs. With both hands pressed to her cheeks, and the tears streaming fast through her spread fingers, she brushed abruptly by him.

At the door, for he had something to say, he spoke her name and laid a restraining hand upon her shoulder, but she shook it off with the hateful shudder for a serpent, and passed swiftly from him up the Sunday staircase.

CHAPTER XXXV

All throughout the rest of that evening the schoolmaster had employment in guarding Pam's bedroom door. At times, drawing long breaths to suffocate his beating heart, he listened at its keyhole, applied his eye even, pressed his hot face flat against the woodwork, and strove to elicit some filterings, however attenuated, of its occupant and her concerns.

But the door was as uncommunicative as a

gravestone. Had he not seen the girl go in, and heard her close the lock upon her entombment, he would have been sick with apprehension and doubt; ready to believe that she had eluded him, and that he had lost her. More than once, as it was, he tapped at the door, but no response came to him, and he was fearful to intensify the summons lest he might betray his presence to those downstairs, and bring about an enforced relinquishment of his watch.

Evening gave place to night, and the yellow harvest moon arose. Sounds of supper things stirring and searches after Pam drove him from the landing into his bedroom. Emma Morland, less timorous of knuckle than he, and less furtive of intention, came boldly up the staircase, calling Pam's name, and rapped—after finding the door locked—a peremptory summons upon its inmate.

"Come; what 'a ye gotten door fast for?" he heard her demand of the languid voice of response that had raised itself faintly at the summons, like a wounded bird. "Is n't it about time ye came doon an' gied a 'and wi' supper things? Ah 've yon blouse to finish by to-neet, think on."

Then the wounded voice stirred itself wearily again.

"What! another?" Emma Morland cried, with more of resentment in her tones than sympathy. "That meks second ye 've 'ad i' t' week. Ye nivver used to 'ave 'em. What 's comin' tiv ye?"

"Well! ah declare!" she exclaimed, after further parley of an apparently incomprehensible and unsatisfactory nature. "It 's a rum un when a lass like you starts tekkin' tiv 'er bed, 'at 's nivver knowed a day's illness in 'er life! There mun be seummut wrong wi' ye, ah think—a decline, or seummut o' t' sort. We s'll 'a to be fetchin' doctor tiv ye, gen ye get onny wuss. Will ye let me mek ye some bread-an'-milk? Some gruel, then? Some tawst an' tea? Ye weean't? Ye 're sure ... noo? Well, then; it 's no use. Ah 've done my best. Good-neet tiv ye, an' ah 'ope ye 'll be better i' t' morn. Don't trouble aboot gettin' up no sooner nor ye feel fit. 'Appen ye 'll sleep it off."

So she was safe in bed, then. Through the sorrow his love felt at the unhappiness in which it had involved the girl—for love it was—nothing short of love, and great love at that, could have moved this nervous, self-secluded man to such courageous acts of infamy—he drew relieved breath at the intelligence. Now he could relinquish the closeness of his vigil without fear.

He would have followed Emma Morland down the staircase with less ease of mind, perhaps, could he have seen the dressed figure of the girl, curled up on the quilt, with her face plunged in the pillows; and been able to follow the fevered hurryings of her thought. For the languid, wing-wounded voice he had heard was but a lie, like all the rest of her in these days. It was no headache she had—heartache,

if you like—but no headache. What her seclusion sought was thought, not oblivion; action, not restfulness.

With the letter back at her breast again, all was undone once more. The door of the last few days seemed opened, as with a key. With this restored to her, and in her arms, all her courage came back; all her old steadfastness and fortitude; the blinded eyes of her spirit seemed opened. This very night, while the household slept, she should steal forth—as she had stolen forth in that first early dawn of her happiness—and make restitution of the letter. Under the door by the porch, or in at that familiar window—if only it were left unfastened—she should slip it. And with this letter must go a second—that she would write—making full confession of the offence, and humbling herself before him for his pardon and forgiveness. No longer did she desire to be clad in his presence with the garments of hypocrisy. Let him look upon her in the nakedness of her sin, for her soul's true chastening. Let nothing be hid from him. Rather now his proper scorn and loathing than his ill-gotten favor, as her unrighteousness had once sought to retain it. For his favor was no more hers, at this time, than the letter she held. Both had been gained by hypocrisy and fraud. Both must be restituted for the completion of her atonement.

And then her soul, walking forward with face glorious, saw the atonement done ... and passed

beyond ... and stopped.

After the atonement.... What?

Lord have mercy on her! What?

Should she come back to this house, return to this bed, go on living this life of shame and dishonor, give herself ultimately into the arms of this man? Should she celebrate the sacrament of atonement this night, only to enter upon a fresh course of unrighteousness to-morrow?

Oh, no, no, no! She could not. A thousand times no! She could not.

By fraud he had got her. By cruelty he had broken her resistance. If she were going to pay openly for her sin, by just atonement before the proper tribunal, why need she pay a hundredfold in secret to this unrighteous extortioner? What she had undertaken to do she had done. She had bound herself by no promises, for he would not accept them from her. She had tied herself to him publicly, and pleaded with Father Mostyn as though she had been pleading for her life's blood; had submitted to the degradation of this man's authority ... only for the letter that she held. Rather than give herself up to him she would cast herself over the cliff and seek refuge in death.

And so thought ran on with her, and the further it traveled the further it seemed to take her away from the scene of her guilt and the man who had wronged her.

Yes, slowly but surely—as though, all along, it had been aware of its destination, and kept it only from the girl herself—her mind, traveling over its miles and miles of railed purpose, arrived at this dark terminus. She would go.

She wept when she saw at last where it was she must alight, and said good-by to herself as to a dear friend. But the parting was inevitable, and weeping, she bowed to it. To pour new wine of life into this old burst bottle of hers, how could she? Without open proclamation of the truth, her life in Ullbrig would but be days and hours and minutes of wicked, unbearable deception. But in a new place, away from the old sin and the old temptation, she might better succeed. She could never be happy again; that she knew. Happiness was gone from her for ever, but she could be good. Goodness should be her adopted child, in place of the one she had lost. The Spawer was good; like him she would try—oh, how patiently—to be.

Maddest of madness. The girl thought she was arriving at it all by processes of reason; she was merely delirious. Grief had been a five-days' fever with her, and this was the crisis. But there were no kind hearts to understand her sickness; no gentle hands to restrain her. Delirium, that she took to be reason, dictated "Go," and she was going.

Vague dreams of vague work in vague towns blew through her comprehension, like drifting mists

from the sea. She would go here; she would go there; she would get work as a dressmaker; as a cook; as a clerk in some other post office; as a secretary ... as God knows what.

Night drew on as she fashioned her plans. One by one the familiar sounds acquainted her exactly with the progress of it. In the darkness of her pillow, before the moon got round to her window, she needed no clock. She heard the clatter of pottery; "good-nights" exchanged in the kitchen; creaking of the twisted staircase to the postmaster's stockinged feet, with the hollow bump of his hands as he steadied his ascent; the amiable gasping of Mrs. Morland, gathering up her forepetticoats and laboring in the wake of her husband's ascent; the unutterable sound of the schoolmaster's footsteps, that sent pangs through her, each one, as though he were treading all the way on her heart; the cruel catch of his bedroom door, so hard, remorseless, and sinister. In such wise he had shut the door of his compassion on her soul's fingers, and heeded not. And last of all, the sounds of bolts shot beneath; journeyings of Emma to and fro between the two kitchens. Now she would be extinguishing the lamp; now she would be lighting her candle; now she would be putting the kitchen lamp back for safety on the dresser by the wall; now she would be coming upstairs ... ah! here she came. The flickers of her candle winked momentarily in the keyhole of Pam's

door, as though she were listening at the head of the staircase to gather assurance of her sound repose. Then the keyhole closed its blinking eye, and there ensued the click of Emma's own latch.

At that last culminating sound, Pam's heart turned palpitatingly within her, part exultant, part terrified; seemed almost to come into her mouth like a solid materialised sob. Now all the path was clear. Its clearness dismayed her. Soon slumber would prevail over the post-house, and act sentinel to her purpose. But though purpose, standing like a bather by the brink of wintry waters, shivered at the prospect of immersion—yet did not falter. Purpose had vowed to go, and purpose was going. Another hour the girl kept stillness upon her bed, and the half of an hour after that, listening until the rhythmic *ronflement* of the postmaster's snore was established, and the intervals between that horrible menaceful cough—short at first—had spaced themselves out into ultimate silence. Then from her bed she rose.

Stealthily, seated on the side of it, she unlaced her shoes and laid them on the quilt, that her feet might be noiseless upon the floor. Then, letting the weight of her body slide gradually on to the rug by the side of her bed, she moved forward, balancing with outstretched hands. The clear beams of the moon filled her white bedroom by this time, as though it were day. And now that the actual moment of flight was upon her, its keen, constricted space in

eternity acted like a pin-hole lens, through which, magnified, she saw the difficulties of her task.

What, in the nature of personalty, should go with her? She would have need of her bath, of her big sponge, of her toothbrushes, of her dentifrice and powder, of her brushes and comb, of her night-gowns, of her dressing-gown, of changes of underlinen, of her blouses, of her best dress, of her Sunday shoes, of her walking-boots, of pocket-handkerchiefs ... these only concerning her toilette.

And she would have need of her mother's books, and her own little library; her own little stock of French grammars and easy reading books; the music that he had given her ... heaps and heaps of precious, inconsiderable gifts and souvenirs that in this hour of severance her soul clung to tenaciously, as to dear, human fingers.

Alas! of such latter, it seemed, she had none to cling to.

But all these things she could not convey with her. Flight could not hamper itself with baths and books, and boots and blouses. All that hindered it must be cast aside. And these things ... the only trifling landmarks in life to remind her who she was, and what small place she held in the great waste of existence ... these must be cast aside too.

These must be cast aside!

What a severance!

How would her soul know itself without these

familiar tokens? Without these, without Ullbrig, away in strange places, in strange surroundings, she might be anybody. She was no longer Pam. She was simply a life ... an eating and a drinking; a sleeping and a waking. She wept.

Stealthily withal, but bitterly, and without any abatement of her purpose, like a child weeping its way to school, that never dreams of contesting the destiny that drives it there.

Yes; all these dear things of her affection must be left behind. For the present, at least. But they were not robbers in this house; they were honest people, who had loved her in the past, and been kind to her. They would guard these things for her, and if some day she wrote to them and asked as much, they would cede them to her without demur. Only what she positively needed must she take with her. A night-dress, her tooth-brushes, her sponge (that, at least, would squeeze up), a collar or two, some stockings, one change of linen, one brush and comb, one extra pair of shoes. Just such a parcel as she could carry without causing too much fatigue to herself, or too much comment from others. And she would need money.

How much had she?

In her purse she had four shillings, sixpence, and coppers; in the pocket of her old serge skirt, three half-pence. Five shillings odd to face the world with. Oh, it was very little!

But in an old chocolate box she had one pound ten shillings in gold, and a fat five-shilling piece—all her recent savings; the proceeds of little works for his Reverence, and dressmaking assistance for Emma. From various parts of her bedroom, she gathered all the items necessary for her outfit and essayed upon her most terrible enterprise of all—the descent of the staircase.

Slowly, slowly, slowly ... oh, agonisingly slowly ... she turned the handle of her door and opened it upon its hinges. In those early days she had done this same thing—with trepidation, indeed, and compression of lip—but never with the blanched horror of to-night. To stumble now, or betray herself; to arouse the house to her flight, and be caught disgracefully in the act—with nothing but shame and exposure as recompense for her anguish—that must not be. And yet all the boards cried out upon her, sprang up, as though she had startled them sleeping, and called: "Pam! Pam! What! is it you? Where are you going, Pam?" And she dared not hush them.

And the wooden walls, when she laid a guiding hand upon them, rocked and yielded to her weight; it seemed they must inevitably shake the sleepers on their beds. And the stairs—treacherous stairs—each one of them tried to betray her; promised fair to her foot, and called out when she confided to them her body: "Noo then; noo then! where 's ti gannin' to this time o' neet? Mester Morland! Mester Frewin! y'

ought to be stirrin' alive noo! There 's this lass o' yours away seumweers wi' a bundle o' claws [clothes]." Oh, the slow sickness of it; step by step, foot by foot, stop by stop, rigid as a statue, cold of heart as of clay, burning of head, tingling of ears. But at last her feet found the friendly kitchen mat, solid on the red-tiled floor.

Long, standing there, she listened, panting and sifting the overhead silence for the slightest sound that might betide discovery of her flight. But none could she catch, though the meshes of her hearing were drawn painfully fine. The worst of her task was over. Now were only a few concluding things to do ... and then the going.

The moon filled the little clean kitchen and the kitchen parlor—all this back part of the house, indeed—with its great white beams, as it had filled her bedroom upstairs, and gave her no need of lamp or candle. Speedily moving over the red tiles in her noiseless stockinged feet, she acquired her few remaining necessaries from drawer and cupboard, made up her effects into as neat a parcel as they would let her, put on her old, faded, blue Tam-o'-Shanter, laid her brown mackintosh ulster on the dresser, and got ready her thick-soled walking shoes. Now she had only a little writing to do, and she could be gone. First of all, with her tears intermittently running, she must write her letter to Him. And she must write also to Emma Morland.

And a line must be left for the postmaster, and one for Mrs. Morland, and a farewell to the man upstairs, who had wrought this havoc with her life. And Father Mostyn ... he must not be left in ignorance. And James Maskill too ... poor hallowed James, who looked so sadly at her in these days; and Ginger. At this sad hour of her parting, her heart wished to make its peace with all against whom it had offended; all that had offended it; all that had showed it kindness. To everybody that had given her a good word or a bad she felt the desire to leave a little epistolary farewell. But she could not write to them all now. Later, perhaps. To do so would be to keep her hand at work with the pen till daybreak, and now every moment was of importance. Ullbrig would be early abroad to-morrow. Eyes would be scanning the earth from every quarter long before sunrise. Not the most that her heart wished to do now, but the least, for her purpose, that it might, must be her rule. She would write to the Spawer; he, at least, must be written to. And to Father Mostyn, and to the schoolmaster, and a word to Emma.

So deciding, she got pen and paper and ink, and set herself to this final task in the broad white band of moonlight over the window table.

With writhings, with fresh tears, with bitings of the pen, with painful defections of attention to the regions upstairs, in the flood of clarid moonlight, she coped with her labor. But at last that too, like all

suffering in the world, had an end. The letter was written and sealed. And next, more fluently, was penned the epistle for his Reverence; and succeeding that, her farewell to the schoolmaster; and her sorrowing penitence to Emma. The first two she gathered to herself; the second two she left, displayed on the table, to be found of their respective addressees in the morning.

And now she was on the brink of departure. All her work in this house had been accomplished except the mere leaving of it. She had looked upon this as easy, by comparison, but how truly hard it was. Dear little kitchen, that swam away from her eyes as she gazed upon it—like a running stream under the moonlight. So the glad current of her past was racing from her. Dear little blurred dresser—friend of hers from her childhood upward. She stooped her lips to it on an impulse, and kissed its hard, scarred cheek again and again, in one last sacred farewell. Never more, perhaps, should her eyes rest upon it. Dear little warm-hearted oven, that had done her so many good turns in the past. Sometimes, perhaps, it might have been a little too short with her tarts, and a shade crusty with her pies—a little hot-tempered with herself even, but that was nothing. What were its faults by the side of hers! She held its round, bright knob in a lingering grasp. "Good-by, little oven.... Oh, little oven, good-by! Do your duty better than I have done mine ... and take profit by me. Be

kind to Emma ... and Mrs. Morland ... for my sake ... and brown your very best."

And to the little fender also, her soul said good-by; and to the lamp that had lighted so many nights of her happiness in the great agone; and to the brass boiler tap; and to the warming-pan. All over the house she would have liked to wander, raining her mild, sorrowful tears ... and saying her spiritual good-bys to these dear, inanimate friends of her vanished happiness; but it might not be. Into her mackintosh she stole at length—that rustled like marsh flags, for all her care—slipped on her shoes, gathered up her parcel, and passed out of the kitchen on cautious tip-toe. But a few more moments and she had renounced the comfortable roof of red tiles that had made so pleasant a shelter over her head these years past. Now there intervened no shield between that dear head and the stern, starry sky; so severely calm and clear and dispassionate. No hope from there, dear child, though you lift your lips to it and invoke its mercies. Others too, as tender—though not more fair—have confided themselves so, and sunk in the great world's ocean beneath these self-same stars.

And thus, with one long, drenched, searching gaze of tears, sideways up the wall of the house that had held her, good-night and good-by!

CHAPTER XXXVI

The schoolmaster, never a sound sleeper at the best of times, this night slept his worst. Being but a novice in practical iniquity, and lacking yet the reposeful assurance that lulls the veteran evil-doer upon his pillow, and gives him slumber unknown of the godly, who have consciences to lie upon their breast like lobster, he tossed hotly between his sheets. Sleep came to him, indeed, but it was a troubled sleep, blown across his mind's sky in fitful patches, like the clouds that had scudded seawards over the land this day, and gave him no repose.

Thoughts, like teetotums, spun too fast for the mind's eye to recognise the figures on them. But always the basis of his delirium was Pam; the ceaseless desire of her possession; his love of her; his remorse of the evil that had been done to get her; her horror of him that his act had inspired in her; wild resolutions to atone to the girl for his past iniquity by his future dedication to her worship; to justify the means by the end, and make her bless him at last for the sin that had brought them together.

So his mind was spinning on its unchecked dizzy orbit in space through the hours, like a star through the centuries, when all at once, with a shock that shuddered him from head to foot, some unseen power arrested its flight as with an omnipotent hand,

and left him wide-eyed and wakeful on his bed; no star at all now, but the bed-bound, trembling body of a man, filled with sudden fear and apprehension.

What had happened? Had his being just wrested itself from the bonds of a horrid nightmare? Had he been dreaming or thinking when the shock came? He could remember nothing, whether it had been dream or reflection, to which he could attribute the alert horror of this moment. It had dropped upon him from somewhere without himself; as though it had been a mighty, soundless peal of thunder, shaking his soul to its foundations. His thoughts he could recall with equanimity; there was nothing in them to cause him fear—and still fear filled him, the more greatly for having not form nor expression. Fear, or apprehension, filled him to such extent that the cold, tingling fingers of terror crept up his scalp, from neck to forehead, brushing all his hairs the wrong way; and a great, boiling sweat burst out next moment upon his face and body. So men have been made aware at times of the doings of death, and the schoolmaster, recalling cases of the kind, drew himself up palpitatingly in his bed. On the cane-bottomed chair by the head of it, it was his nightly custom to set his candle, which he thus extinguished, with a hand thrust out from between the sheets. Thrusting out the same hand now, he possessed himself, in agitated haste, of the match-box, struck nervously for a light with the match's

unphosphorused end, and with the red tip of phosphorus on the unsand-papered side of the box; and lastly, after much work of the sort, drew into existence a fitful, wavering flame, that died in giving light to the candle. Then he pulled forth his watch by its chain from under the pillow, and holding it out from him, fixed a disturbed eye upon its face. Half-past twelve.

Half-past twelve! No more than that! Ages he seemed to have been battling with the fever of thought. Could the watch be true? He pressed it to his ear, and heard the active click-click, click-click heart go beating in its busy little body. It had not stopped then. It spoke the truth.

He replaced it under the pillow, and remained drawn up in bed, with both arms outstretched on the coverlet, as though debating action—though what to do, or what might be supposed to be required of him, he knew not. His heart, thumping against his ribs, gave abundant evidence that he had been rudely roused—if otherwise he had had any inclination to doubt. And there was the relaxed weakness about his legs, too, and his limp arms, that bore witness to the sharpness of the shock. Had the shock come upon him standing, his first instinct would have led him to sit down. Over and over in his mind he kept turning this awakening like a strange, unknown coin, seeking to find some decipherable superscription upon it, and learn what it might presage. It had come upon him

suddenly. It was like to a clap of thunder without noise; the boom of a gun; the slam of a door. Something whose sound he had not heard, but whose shock had stirred him. Yet all he could think of was death. Somebody was dead; somebody was dying; somebody was going to die. To such extent did the idea of death possess him that it seemed to expire from him like a mighty stream, whose fount was in his brain. The whole room was filled with the awesome presence of it. Death was at the bed-foot; at the window curtain; shrouded the candle. And then, of a sudden, thoughts of death and thoughts of the girl, circling round each other, came into horrible collision, and commingled, and lo! death and the girl were one.

In his guilty state of mind, he was an easy prey for terror. He tried to rid himself of the idea with a hundred assurances drawn from pure reason. How could she be dead? She had never died before ... why should she die now? She was sleeping safely in her own bed, not four yards from him. Draw a bee-line through the wall at his head, through the landing beyond, and through the wall of the girl's room, and there she should surely be. Only last night he had been speaking to her; hardly more than four hours ago he had heard her voice. Death could not have come to her so soon. The idea was nonsense. But like a child, terrorised by things unseen, that the wisdom of grown-up logic cannot pacify, the more he

reasoned the more his unreasonment grew. For all this ill-gotten authority over her that he had been wielding so unmercifully these days past ... to what might it not have driven her? Desperately he listened —with his face turned toward the wall—as though death were a thing audible, like the tick-tacking of the big clock in the passage below. But the tick-tacking of the big clock, and the irregular thudding of his own heart, and the long-drawn snores of the postmaster, were all that he could hear. This trinity of sounds hung like a creaking door before his hearing. He was sensible of a deep and deadly silence beyond, flowing like the sea of eternity; but despite his desperate fishing, he could draw up nothing from its depths. Last of all, wrought to the supreme pitch of suspense, he threw aside his coverings, slid from the bed, and stole across the room towards the door—a miserable figure of inquietude in his thin, bare legs and short scholastic night-gown, that took him pathetically somewhere by the bone of the knee. Again, at the door itself he listened for a while, trying to cancel those three intrusive factors—the snore, the clock, and his own heart—and base his calculations on the silence beyond; but he could not. If he would gain any reassurance for his disquieted spirit, he must go forth and inquire deeper of the surrounding stillness than this.

And he went forth, and saw the moonlight

bathing all the landing through the little staircase window and issue idly in a pale, phosphorescent stream round the three sides of the girl's part-opened door.

Like a wide-mouthed statue of horror, he stood marble in the white moonlight and stared. Her door was open; her door that had been closed and locked upon her last night was open now—open so emptily and with such desolation, while the moonlight flowed placidly through it, like sea-water through the hollow hulk of a submerged vessel—that it seemed as if never it could have held the live, blood-warmed body of the girl. For a moment, the shock of what he saw was twin to the shock of what—so short a while back—he had failed to see. Then in his little, wasted cotton night-dress and his bare legs as he was, he started forward into action, pushed open the panels unhesitatingly with his fingers, and entered.

All to itself the moonlight possessed the room; filled it from floor to ceiling, from corner to corner. There was no girl. Her bed had been merely laid upon from the outside; she had not slept in it. There was her night-dress untouched in its embroidered case. Except for the callous, white moonlight, that showed him these things without a thought for his anguish, the room was empty as a sieve. The girl had gone; gone where and why and when, he could not tell. Whether with thoughts of death, or thoughts of flight, or thoughts of treachery—he could not tell.

The discovery flew to his head like the vintage of bitter grapes. He searched madly about the room; threw up the white valances of her bed, lest perchance she were but hiding from him; opened her cupboards and beat his hands wildly among the darkness of skirts and hanging garments for some clasp of fugitive flesh and blood; part shut the door to assure himself she was not lurking behind its hinges, with her face in her hands and her forehead against the wall.

But she was not. He knew she was not when he searched. She was gone! she was gone!

And thence, with his thin, worn, calico lapels blowing about his legs, he scurried down the twisted staircase to see what the lower regions had to show him.

As soon as his feet flinched on the bristles of the fibre mat, they showed him all that they had to show. The two letters spread out side by side on the window table, white as driven snow in the moonlight. It needed no slow investigation to assure him what they were. Gravestones did not more certainly indicate what lay beneath them than did these two pallid envelopes. He was on them at once, like a hawk. "To Mr. Frewin," he read on the first, in Pam's neat, well-known script, and ripped it open regardlessly, as though he were gutting herrings. So did his heart beat at him from within, and so did his brain contract and swell, and so did his apprehensive

hand tremble, that for some seconds the piece of paper, for all the words he distinguished on it, might have been a white, waving flag. But in the end he got control over himself, and wrested the girl's last message to him from the paper on which, to all intents and purposes, it was scarcely dry.

"When you get this..." he read. Ah! that familiar, time-worn overture for stricken messages of grief. How many miserables, by water-sides, by lone lochs, by canals, reservoirs, and railways, have prefaced their journey to eternity with these four words. Scarcely a suicide so unliterary that, at this last moment, he cannot call them to his aid for epitaph to his misery. As soon as the schoolmaster read them, he knew all. Death or departure ... this was the end.

"... When you get this" (he read), "I shall be far away from Ullbrig, and you will know why. If you had done differently with me, I might have done differently with you. But it is too late now for regrets. After the sin you have forced me to share with you, I could never, never love you. The future frightens me. For all you have made me suffer I forgive you freely, but I pray God we may never meet again. I have been as wicked as you, and for this reason I dare not join our wickednesses, for fear of where they may lead us. Please forgive me for the things in which I have sinned against you, and beg God to forgive us both for the things we have done

against Him. Pray for me too, as I will pray for you. Perhaps your life may be all the brighter and better for my absence. Strive to do your best that it may be so; and please remember, if at any time you are tempted to think hardly upon me, that I am not angry with you, and that I do not blame you. Good-by for ever. PAM."

That was all the letter told him—but it was enough. His face was like the face of a snow-man when he had finished reading. Not only was he smitten to the heart with the lost love of the girl, after all his lavish outlay of unrighteousness and sin, but now she was gone, and he was here in Ullbrig to bear the brunt of his deed. For he had no misconceptions as to his true position in the matter, as Pam had. He knew his conduct for what it was, and his hold over her for what it was, and the world's judgment for what it would be. Her very going was a declaration of the thing he had held over her in his wickedness, and would have never dared employ. The worthless blackmail with which he had threatened her had served its purpose only too well. To such extent had the girl believed its power and feared it, and accredited him with the intentions of its use, that she had been terrorised into flight from him. And now the full responsibility of his act pointed at him with awful finger. To-morrow, tidings of the girl's departure would be out. Tongues would be busy. She

who had been going to wed the schoolmaster had loved him so little that she had fled from him. Why had she fled from him? Because he had held a letter over her head that he had robbed from her desk—a letter belonging to neither of them—and by withholding it from its proper owner, and threatening the girl, he had got her to submit to his terms. When once that became known he was a ruined man. His love was ruined; his life was ruined. The death that had so terrorised him already must have been none other than his own. For rather than face this terrible exposure and degradation, he would die. He was a wild and desperate man now, holding the slipping cable of life and honor in his hands. To avert this catastrophe, to find the girl—at scarcely anything would he stop short. But what must he do? Where seek her? How act?

To cast his eye on the second letter was to seize upon it as he had done the first, and tear open its contents without a moment's hesitation. Emma Morland would never know what had been left for her this night, and beneath this envelope there might lurk a confession of the whole history of the girl's departure, with his own share writ incriminatingly large; at the least, some word or sentence that might give him a clearer clue to her intentions than her own letter to him. But he was disappointed. Beyond beginning: "Dearest Emma," this second epistle told him nothing that he consumed to know. It was a

mere farewell of sorrow for all the sin Pam had committed against Emma, particularly during these last few days, and a pathetic begging for forgiveness. Emma did not know how unhappy Pam had been—Pam hoped Emma would never, never know such unhappiness. She was not the girl Emma thought her. She was a living lie, full of wickedness and deception. The only thing for her to do, she felt, was to blot out such a horrible lie from the face of Ullbrig and be gone. Then followed assurances of undying love to Emma, and to the postmaster and to Mrs. Morland, with a list of such things as Pam bequeathed to Emma for her own use and possession. To all intents and purposes, it was Pam's last will and testament, pathetically worded enough, had the man been in any mood for pathos other than his own. To the postmaster, Pam left this; to Mrs. Morland, that; to James Maskill, the other; to Ginger—if he would have it—some further token of her affection. Only the schoolmaster's name was absent. And at the end was Pam's own name, blurred and spotted with the tears that had fallen fast at this juncture.

But for these the man had no heed. He had read the letters, and they had told him nothing; now he must decide quickly, as he valued his life.

And first, he could accomplish nothing as he was. The remembrance of his ungarbed condition came upon him suddenly, and he cursed himself for his bodily unreadiness—although his mind had as yet

no commission for his limbs to execute. Up the twisted staircase he pattered again, employing his hands on the steps in front of him like paws, to accelerate his pace, and thrust himself wildly into his clothes. Then he scurried down again to the little kitchen. There he sorted his own boots from the disorderly gathering for the morning's clean, strapped up their leather laces with the speed of desperation, stuffed the two letters into his coat pocket, caught a cap from the row of pegs where the postmaster's official regalia hung, and scuffled down the passage to the front door.

There was no mistaking signs of the girl's flight, or the way by which she had fled. For him there was no necessity to work back the big square bolt, or turn the traitorous key. Pam's fingers had done that service already. He was out in the street with scarcely a moment's delay, on the whitewashed step where Pam's own feet had rested less than fifteen minutes ago—could he only have known—closing the door upon him by stealth, as she had done, and looking up and down the roadway, divided lengthways between its far white band of moonlight and its nearer black shadow, with its serrated line of broken roofs and chimney-pots—like the keyboard of a piano—as she had looked before her purpose made its final plunge.

Which way had she gone? he asked himself, in frenzied supplication. For all he knew, she had been

gone an hour, a couple of hours, three hours ... four hours. Even now, while he was making this vein-bursting struggle to come abreast with her and stave off that awful exposure of to-morrow, it might all be ended. Destiny might have this shameful history written to the full in the book of record, and the book inexorably closed. Perhaps the girl's purpose had been maturing all these days past. Perhaps her plan had been prepared from the first ... and in abeyance, pending restitution of the letter. Fool that he was ever to give it! Why had n't he adhered to his first project, and given it to her only when they were in sight of the house, and he was with her, or left it there himself by night, with a message that it had been overlooked in a corner of the post-bag? Now what had she done with it? Had she restored it? That would mean the Cliff Wrangham road she must have taken. Or had she fled with it, bearing all traces of her guilt with her? That might mean any road ... the Hunmouth road, the Garthston road, the Merensea road. Or had she gone to cast herself upon the protection of the Vicar? Accursed old busybody! who had drilled and questioned and cross-examined him about the wedding like a school-thief under suspicion. There was probability about this latter surmise, and at least, to put the speculation to the test would not take him far out of his way. Full of the wild, unrestrained desire to do something, with tumultuous, incredulous hope in the desire, he

quitted his place on the doorstep, and set off in madman's haste for the Vicarage.

But the moon poured down in sublime, unpitying indifference upon its unlighted windows. The house was as still and unawake as the church at its side and the white graves beyond. Baffled, he stood and glared hatefully, with his hands twitching about the upturned collar of his coat, and his face working as though the house were human and he would have throttled it. Of all men in the world to help him, here, behind these luminous opal windows, was the man, and he knew it, and was powerless to evoke his assistance, grinding his teeth together in the fierce agony of despair.

Motion took him in the legs again, and drove him down the narrow, crooked side-street towards the low road and Merensea Hill, between the rows of tumbled cottages, with their yellow window squares. He could have drummed on them with his fingers, and in his desperation and need of assistance would have done so, but fear withheld him. As he ran, he heard troubled night-coughs rap out sharp at him here and there, where some aged sufferer drew breath badly, and wrestled for such stagnant air as was contained in the sealed chamber. The buzzing of some big eight-day clock, too, chiming a belated hour, he heard, and the fretful crying of a baby, being lulled to sleep by its weary mother. Heaven knows where his run would have ended in this

direction, for it was become so blended and amalgamated with his consciousness that he could have as soon stopped running as the feverish urging of his thoughts. But at the bottom of the street, where the road dips its lowest before making the sharp ascent of Merensea Hill, he saw the dark figure of a man, and death could not have stopped him sooner. It was only Bob Newbit, smoking his black cutty, with his hands in his belt, and a coat thrown over his shoulders, come out to watch over the fire of the brick-kiln that glowed red in the field across the roadway, but all men were one man in their power to read the schoolmaster's dark secret, and do him harm. He saw the burning end of the cutty turn his way, and without waiting to know whether he had been perceived, or give the chance of a hail, he turned on his tracks again like a hare, and was forging up the street through the square lighted windows towards the Vicarage.

This time, without stopping in his breathless course, he went by. One way was as good as another to him, who had no reason for going any. He would keep on to Cliff Wrangham.

At first, panting doggedly onward, he ran this way as he had run that. If his clothing had been on fire instead of his brain, like this he would have wildly run, seeking flight from the agony that consumed him.

But conviction came upon him as he ran. It

seemed incredible he could be making all this desperate endeavor for nothing. It must surely end by repaying him with positive result. Little by little the mad, fitful uncertainty gave way to the madder flame of assurance. Of all madness, this fixed madness is the most to be feared. Now he was merely pursuing the girl, who was along here in front of him. At times, turning his ear before him as he lunged onward, he seemed to hear elusive footsteps; thought he saw her flitting aside into gateways and hedgerows to escape him. Once he staggered halfway across a grass close because, he saw her standing in the middle of it, trying to deceive him by her motionlessness into thinking her some inanimate thing. When he came near she was a pump-well. Then he saw that he had relinquished the substance for the shadow. She was on the roadway there, in advance of him; her skirts flying, her hands to her hat. And he lumbered back over the soft grass, soddened by the recent rain, to the roadway, and resumed his forward pursuit.

Full of fresh strenuous desire to press ahead, and worn out with this unaccustomed exertion, he passed, half running, half walking, with his hand bound over his heart, and his breath drawn up convulsively, like a child with the croup—through the final gateways, one after another. Now he was in the little end lane, making a poor pretence of caution. Now he waw by the stable; now he was by

the iron wicket. The hope that had been his while he ran stopped dead as his flight stopped. By the little iron wicket, and still under cover of the kitchen-garden wall, he stayed, gasping, and dared not go further, or look at the front of the house, for fear of what he should see—the sight of all its moonlit windows looking out with the calm, self-communing gaze of the blind, that know nothing of what they gaze upon. As the Vicarage had faced him, so this house should face him. It was the end. He knew his doom.

And knowing it, he found strength to see, and saw.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Saw the magnified yellow window thrown over the pathway and out across the tangled grass to the mouldy green railings, from the Spawer's room. Here was life at last. Thank God! Here was life at last.

His heart gave a convulsive leap of exultation within him. Could it be mere coincidence that of all Ullbrig and Cliff Wrangham this man should be unnumbered among the sleepers? Could it be that the late light, flowing from that little low window beyond the porch, had no concern with his own misery and the girl's flight? He could not think it.

Here was his journey's end. Let him take the girl red-handed in shame, if need be. Shame, even, counted for nothing in his love of her. Had she been dyed to the neck in iniquity he would have wished her, and followed to the world's end for her, without the lash of his own sin to whip up the pursuit.

Slowly, with his eyes fixed on the sidelight from that fateful window, he advanced; arms outspread for caution, doubling inwards from his middle at each step, and making a semi-circle upon the grass to get sooner and deeper sight into the room. All at once his eye cleared the obstruction of trailing porch, and he stopped here, as though to take in fresh supplies of cautious reserve and get leverage upon the position. Then, more laboriously he worked forward again; his head far in advance; his knees bent; his arms like a baboon's, extended to the ground—as though at an alarm he would clutch at the long grass and draw himself into its shelter. The piano-end came into view. Its keyboard of chequered ivory lengthened as he approached upon it; next he gained sight of the mantel-shelf; and last of all ... with his finger-nails clenched into his palms for self-repression ... the man.

He was seated on an end of the table, with his back towards the window, and appeared to be reading or scrutinising something beneath the powerful light of the big hanging lamp. What it was he bent his head over the schoolmaster could not see,

but his acute, tormented vision saw something else that discharged itself at once in lightning of revelation through the whole length and breadth of his being, and blinded him for a moment with fierce, flashing passion and exultant joy. The room was heaped up under the confusion of a departure. There were books stacked together carefully on the table; music in fat portfolios; there were garments folded and unfolded; coats and trousers; boots on trees; and to give crowning evidence to his deduction, a big leather traveling portmanteau, open of lid, beyond the fireplace. Ah! was it any longer a coincidence, these two departures? Thank God he was in time. The Lord had not deserted him. It was the Lord that had brought him here this night.

Meanwhile, the Spawer kept his attitude, with bowed head of absorption beneath the lamp; and the man watched.

Yes; he was going. The schoolmaster had made no mistake. A child, looking in at the open window, would have declared as much. Of a truth, Maurice Ethelbert Wynne had had his last decisive bout with that big bully Destiny. No mistake about it, he had been badly beaten. All through the hours after supper he had been collecting his effects together; packing the big trunk down here, that it might be more easily conveyed to the spring cart on the morrow; packing the smaller portmanteau upstairs. Upstairs to-night for the most part his work had

been, only quitting it at long intervals to bring down further contributions for the yawning leather trunk. And now, on this last occasion of his descent, he had been made aware, for the first time, that a couple of letters lay on the keyboard of the pianoforte, by the bass end, near the window.

At the beginning his eye had rested upon them, and accepted their presence as a matter of course, without any further inquiry or speculation, quite content with seeing them. It was a customary place for him to leave things of the sort, only he did n't remember having left anything there lately. By the way, what letters would they be? More out of idleness than real curiosity, he put out his hand and took them up.

The first, addressed to him in that firm, feminine handwriting—almost masculine—beneath a wealth of green stamps and postmarks, he recognised at a glauce. But it had not been opened. Strange that! Which of all her letters had escaped him like this? When had it come? How long had he overlooked it? Still asking himself the questions, he turned his eye upon the second letter. That too, was addressed to him in a handwriting he knew no less surely—though with less familiarity: the soft, neat, girl-like script of Pam, and that, too, must be unopened, for it was the first he had received from her. From Pam, of all people in the world. What had she to say to him? Perhaps this letter would explain the other. Very

nervous of finger, he tore open the envelope.

A curious little letter it was, perplexingly short, that puckered up his brows and left him more puzzled after its perusal than before. It appeared to be, in some sort, a confession for an imaginary crime that the girl had committed—though wherein lay the enormity of it, or the necessity for this present epistle, not for the life of him could he perceive. Pam, indeed, whose own guilt was so vivid that a word was sufficient to depict it, had thought that the same word could reveal it to all the world. Her letter was like the answer to a riddle, with the question lacking. Apparently, the Spawer told himself, the girl had failed to deliver a letter—the letter accompanying this, he presumed—and it had preyed terribly upon her mind. He was to forgive her, as she felt sure he would forgive her if he could only know what suffering it had cost her. And then followed an outburst of affectionate gratitude for all the kindness he had lavished on her; his never-failing goodness and patience. These she should never forget. With a concluding appeal to him that he should try and think as leniently of her as he could.

Think as leniently of her as he could! Miserable topsy-turveydom of life, where all one's acts turn upside-down in the acting, and one's deeds misrepresent one with the deliberate purpose of political agents. Here he had been holding himself a supplicant upon the girl's mercy, and lo! all the

while, it seemed their positions were exactly reversed, and it was she who imagined herself an offender against him! This letter of the girl's troubled him. Did it mean she had never been sure of his friendship? Did it mean she had altogether overlooked the signs in his conduct that should have told her he would have forgiven anything ... to her? Had all their relationship been built up of vain imaginings and misunderstandings? If ... for instance...

But he would have no more "ifs." Already he had had too many. What might have been and what was were as asunder as the Poles. Let him not revive the old unworthy desires under the cloak of If. What did the second letter say?

He opened it more slowly than the first—as though he felt a little the shame of going before its presence, and did not anticipate much happiness from this interview of pen and ink. But as he read, it seemed he could not tear his eyes away from their fascinating occupation. If Pam's letter had added cloud to his confusion, this letter was explicit indeed —and yet dazed him at the same time with an overwhelming sense of unreality.

The freedom that he had felt himself unable to ask of the Other Girl, in this letter she was asking of him. All the old stock-in-trade arguments of love that he had thought once of bringing to bear upon her, she was bringing to bear on him. Their attachment,

she pointed out, was a mere boy-and-girl attachment, that had never taken deep root in their later lives. He had offered her her liberty once, but he would know that all her sense of loyalty had refused the gift at the time. But now it was different. Another stronger love had come into her life, and she would not disguise the fact from him—it had more to offer. She was not cut out for the wife of a composer. He would know that, really, without her telling him. She could never be helpful to him; never even give him the full measure of sympathy that the creative mind needed. In a word, love and worldly position had been laid together at her feet and she dared not proceed with this flat, stale attachment of theirs, that had neither reason nor riches. It was always a woman's privilege to change her mind, and she would avail herself of it to accept the liberty he had offered her before. Friends they had been, all this while—never lovers at all—and friends, she trusted, they would never cease to be. There was a little blot of tears at the end, a slight incoherence of phraseology in a sentimental reversion to their happy past ... but only slight—only very slight. Love had been dead between them long ago. She was reconciled to that. But this letter was its official funeral—and it is a strong woman whose tears can resist the appeal of a burying.

And this was the letter the Spawer read with face bent down, while the man outside kept watch.

No wonder he sat motionless on the corner edge

of the table, as he had first seated himself, poring over that magnetising something that the watcher, for all his watching, could not see. For what did this letter mean to him? Nothing at all now, in hard fact, perhaps ... but yet ... what tantalising riches in speculation. Here were his trunks, and here was he, all ready for dutiful departure—and in his hands was the instrument of reprieve. His duty had been remitted him. From that duty he was free. Who should say what was his duty now? Had he a duty at all—to himself, or anybody? Or was he, by virtue of this relinquishment, become a mere jellyfish, without volition, to float this way or that at the mercy of the tides? What was there to take him from Ullbrig now? What was to keep him? If he stayed? If he went? If this letter had come sooner! If this letter had only come sooner!

And the whole thing began over again.

All the old fever of reasoning set in anew with him, and rose up to its height. All the old desires. All the old wild hopes. He had been tired when he came downstairs, less with physical fatigue than with the dull, sleepless lassitude of established despair—but now he was very wide awake. His eyes revolted at the thoughts of being closed perforce upon a pillow; they wanted license to keep open house for his brain all night through. Suddenly, too, came upon him the nervous appetite for activity; the desire to give a bodily articulation to the movement of his mind. He

felt as though he could have set off, and walked the globe round, and been back again here by to-morrow's breakfast. And submitting to the feeling, he rose all at once from his place on the table, turned down the twin burners of the swing lamp, picked up his cap, squeezed his way out through the two doors and the narrow porch, and set off towards the sea.

He walked with a brisk, purposeful step, for the night was chill beneath the white moon and the many cool stars. Part way across Luke Hemingway's big ten-acre field, at a sudden turn of his head towards some recumbent, cud-chewing cattle, his eye-corner caught the tail-end of an upright figure, vanishing into the hedge at some distance behind him. There was nothing, of course, when he looked, to confirm the impression, beyond the clear-defined, moonlit path along which he had come. But his eye retained such an obstinate remembrance of its own delusion, that at a few yards further on, choosing his moment, he turned on his heel again. And again, strangely enough, his eye seemed to be just eluded by the vanishing figure of a man. Had he been nervously given, he might have felt tempted to walk back and scrutinise the hedgerow that had thus twice afforded refuge to his shadowy pursuant. But for one thing, his mind was too busy for nerves to-night, and knowing, moreover, the strange receptive sensitiveness of the human eye, and the assurance with which it attests, as realities, mere miraculous

figments of the brain, he passed on—reserving the right to turn again when he had given his visual informant an opportunity to forget its impression.

After a longer interval, therefore, he looked back again, on the pretext of stooping to his shoe-lace, and three times after that. Twice his eye attested to the presence of a furtive figure, that seemed to drop to earth in the thick fog grass when he turned, only now he knew that his eye did not deceive him. He was being followed.

That the discovery did not tend to add much zest to his midnight ramble—even had there been any before—the Spawer would have been the last to deny. It is an unpleasant thing, at any time, to have one's back turned towards a stealthy follower of undeclared intentions, but moonlight and a lonely coast add still further unpleasantness to the situation. However, the fact remained, and it was no use getting into an unnecessary fuss about it. To turn back openly would not remedy matters much, or give the Spawer any particular advantage over his unknown pursuer. He decided, therefore, keeping cautious vigil over alternate shoulders as he walked, to push on to the cliff, without betraying the least sign of suspicion, and see to what extent this figure would press pursuit. So, quickening his step imperceptibly, and setting up a blithe, not too noisy whistle of unconcern, he came to the cliff, the shadow following.

The wind and storm of the past few days had troubled the sea, that thundered up in ugly assailment of surf about the cliff's soft earthen base, for the tide was rising. Awhile he stood, at the point where he had come upon the path, watching the great waste of chill waters with one eye, and the spot where the figure had vanished, with the other. The keen gaze of Farnborough gleamed out at him in sudden recognition, and here and there little intermittent pin-points of yellow pricked the horizon where boats rose and fell upon the bosom of the sea. Then he lifted his leg leisurely over the gate-stile, by which he had been standing, and sat for a moment astride of it. From this perch he commanded the hedgerow—that ran down to the cliff edge at right angles—on both sides, and could not be approached without his observance. But whatever object his follower had, it seemed certainly, so far at least, that it was unconnected with any ideas of direct encounter. There had been no attempt to gain on him; their relative positions now were what they had been at the first moment of discovery; and it seemed he might sit here till daybreak without his shadow's making any advance in the open. Suddenly, an idea to test the situation came into his mind, and on the instant he acted on it. The man, whoever he might be, was about fifty yards or so inland, on the shady side of the hedge, and watching the Spawer's conspicuous, upright figure keenly, no doubt. All at

once the Spawer brought his second leg over the rail, descended, stepped quickly some paces inland, and drew into the hedge. Though the moon fell on him, the hedge was straggling and untrimmed, with somewhat of a dry ditch at its bottom, and long grass. Standing here, unobtrusively, it would take an active search to come upon him, and such a search would not only show him his pursuer, but give him some shrewd idea of the man's intentions.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

It was not long that the Spawer had to wait. He had scarcely subsided into his position, indeed, when he heard, on the other side of the hedge, the rapid "rff, rff, rff," that told where long grass was being torn aside to the passage of hurried feet. The fellow was running, then. It flashed across the Spawer's mind grimly, as he listened to the sound of him, that he did not think himself of such interest to any mortal man. And almost before he had time to gratify his ironic humor with a smile, the mortal man had scrambled desperately over the stile, flinging himself to ground on this side of it with such a thud of precipitation that he had to preserve his equilibrium with spread fingers in the grass. Next moment he pushed himself upright again, ran hesitatingly

forward some paces, stopped dead, and commenced to beat about in a wild, blind search on all sides of him, as though he were dazed with the loss of his quarry. For a moment it came into the Spawer's head as he watched him that perhaps the man was mad or drunk. Certainly there seemed little of rationality about his actions. At times he ran; at times he cast himself so close upon the edge of the cliff that the Spawer's flesh crept cold, and he wondered whether he ought to stand by and see a deluded fellow-being submit himself to such dangers. If he went over there, with the boiling sea beneath, it was little chance he would ever come up again—till the tide brought him. But after a moment or two, the Spawer grew reassured that this catastrophe was not likely to happen, and continued watching in silence.

He was a furtive, unprepossessing-looking fellow, it struck the Spawer. His coat-collar was buttoned up to his neck, lending a particularly sinister touch to his appearance, and the coat itself hung upon him loosely, as though he had no shoulders, and bagged with an empty flatness about the waist, as though, too, he had no stomach. It was a tramp's coat, with tails—such as no honest rustic would wear—but had found its way here, through a nameless course of degradation, from the towns. And they were tramp's trousers too, that looked as though any minute they might come down; loose, lifeless, shapeless trousers, whose bottoms his boots trod on

at every step. Otherwise, he wore a dark cloth cap, pulled tightly over his scalp, with its neb scowling down to his eyebrows, and his breath came and went vindictively—or so it seemed to the Spawer—as though he had been baulked of something, and was panting more through rage than exertion.

And all at once, puzzled to fit some kind of a key to the fellow's strange conduct, what enmity or what design he could have against him, the Spawer's mind harked back to the two letters he had received this night, and to the enigmatical epistle of the girl, and in a flash he knew his man.

But though he knew him, whatever the recognition might serve him in despatching theories of robbery and violence, it served him little for enlightenment. Added, indeed, to his perplexity, instead of subtracting from it. For what object had caused this man to follow him—him, his poor, crushed, and trampled antagonist—to the sea to-night? Had he not injured him enough, but that he must needs track him in this despicable fashion, and play spy upon his doings? All the hatred and unreasoning disregard that the unsuccessful have for the successful rose up within him at the discovery. Of the schoolmaster's virtues he knew nothing; sought to know nothing. It was enough for him that to this man he was indebted for his soul's humiliation; that this sinister-looking figure had supplanted him for occupation of the dearest territory in the world; and

he rejoiced with a cruel and unhallowed joy that this, his vanquisher, had been given over thus into his hand.

Ten to one, were he only to make no sound, he could succeed in eluding discovery, for the fellow showed no aptitude in search, but success of this sort was not what he desired. He had been contemptibly dogged for some purpose or other, and he would have full revenge of the man's shame. Very quietly he stepped out of his shelter and showed his tall figure in the moonlight.

"You appear to be looking for something," he said.

At the sound of his voice, the man spun round eagerly on his heel, as though his first emotion had been of pure incredulous joy that his quarry was not lost to him. Shame succeeded upon that, to think of what the Spawer had been a witness, and his forward impulse was checked momentarily into a falling back on the heel that had urged him. Then, just as quickly, anger succeeded upon shame. Those chance words, uttered so carelessly, but with such a frigid tone of scorn—as though the Spawer in mind towered above him like an Alpine summit, and his lofty contempt was snow-capped—roused his wrath to desperation.

"You know what I am looking for," he said hoarsely, and advanced with both hands up at his coat-collar.

Could the Spawer have had but one glimpse into the surging hot mind of the man at this moment, and seen of what wild charges he stood accused, he might have turned the sword of his words into a ploughshare, and tilled honestly for enlightenment. But in his own mind it was he who had been wronged. And besides that, the fierce, unexpressed hostility of love was between them. Even had there not been this present cause of quarrel to kindle anger, they would have been rampant for the fray like two rein-bucks.

"I know what you are looking for?" he asked, and his voice moved contemptuously away from the suggestion as he might himself have moved (so the schoolmaster thought) from the contaminating touch of an unclean beggar. A clear, well-pitched, musical voice it was—so different from the schoolmaster's hoarse, toneless utterance—and its very superiority, seeming now to take conscious pride in itself, stirred up the listening man's worst hatred. In birth, in station, in presence, in voice, in possessions, and in love, this tall, insufferable figure prevailed. "You make a mistake..." he heard it say to him. "I know nothing at all about you, except that you have been dogging my footsteps for this last quarter of an hour. I know that. If you have anything to add to it, I am ready to hear you."

The lean, shabby figure of the schoolmaster flinched visibly in the moonlight at each fresh

phrase, as if it had been a whip-lash that his antagonist was curling about him. With both hands clenched at his coat-collar, he seemed almost to be hanging on to resolution against a groan.

"Yes," he blurted out fiercely at last, releasing his hands at the same moment from this occupation, and crying out his confession like a wild triumph of delinquency; "I have been following you. You may know it."

"I do know it," said the Spawer.

"I say you may know it," the schoolmaster repeated, raising his hoarse voice another tuneless semitone up its chromatic of passion. "I don't care."

"Don't care," the Spawer told him coolly, "as you may be aware, got hanged. I would advise you to take profit by his example."

The schoolmaster's hands flew back to his collar again with one accord.

"You thought you were safe from me," he forced through his unsteady lips. "You thought you were free to do as you liked."

"I certainly thought I was free to walk along the cliff without being persecuted with these attentions," the Spawer cut into him.

"Yes; you thought ... you could trample on me!" the schoolmaster hissed at him venomously.

"I have not the least desire to trample on you," the Spawer assured him frigidly. "I would not tread on a worm if I knew it. There is room in the world

for us both—if you 'll be so good as to make use of it."

"You think..." the schoolmaster cried passionately, "that because you come from big towns, and live in fine houses, and wear fine clothes ... that you can do what you like in the country."

"It seems I am mistaken," the Spawer apostrophised sarcastically. "In the towns, at least, we have the police to defend us from molestation by night."

"You think," the schoolmaster shouted at him, as though to beat down his words and tread them and his opposition underfoot, "... you think we country people are fit subjects for your scorn. You think you can walk over our feelings, and trifle with all our happiness as though we were mere paving-stones for your own evil enjoyments. You think we are the dirt beneath your feet."

"Indeed?" the Spawer remarked. "I never thought half so much about you as you suppose."

"You have thought it," the schoolmaster cried at him; "and you are thinking it. Every word you say to me is an insult. You want to tell me that I am beneath your notice, and that your contempt is too good for me. You think you can mock me indiscriminately, and make a fool of me."

"Not at all," the Spawer responded carelessly. "I have my own business. You can do that quite well enough for yourself."

"But you are wrong!" the schoolmaster shouted, in a voice almost inarticulate with passion, and the terrible cooped-up storm of hopes and fears. "You are wrong. You thought you could kick me aside like a dog, and leave me to the derision and contempt of Ullbrig. You thought you could break up an honest man's happiness for your own wicked diversion, and steal off like a thief with it. But you are wrong. You are wrong." He was almost weeping—though the Spawer did not know it—with the insufferable fever of desperation. Had the Spawer known it, he would have had mercy, and surrendered this wordy victory rather than fight to the finish with the poor God-forsaken, love-forsaken, self-forsaken devil that cut and lunged so furiously at him. But the only conclusion respecting this encounter, glimmering at the far back of his brain, was that the man was consumed with the fire of an unworthy jealousy, and he took joy in piling up its fuel—even at the risk of burning his own fingers. "But you are wrong! You are wrong!" the schoolmaster reiterated at him.

"It seems I am wrong in many things," the Spawer assented. "But that 's scarcely surprising; since I don't know who in the world you are, or where you come from, or what the devil you want with me."

"You know who I am," the schoolmaster shouted at him. "And you know what I want with you."

"Not in the least," the Spawer told him, "unless it

is relief, but if so, you have a strange way of asking for it."

"You know it is not relief!" the tortured figure exclaimed. "If I were starving, I would go to my grave sooner than ask a penny of such as you—that have n't the heart of a dog. You want to put me off with words and sneers and scorns, but I won't be put off. You shan't put me off. I have stood everything that I will stand."

"You have certainly stood long enough," the Spawer remarked. "Don't stand any longer on my account. If you have said all you wish to say, perhaps you will kindly tell me which way is your way, and leave me free to choose the other."

"I have not said all I wish to say," the man cried, opening and clenching his fingers. "You shall not shake me off, for all your pretending. I have found you in time, and I will stick to you for the rights you want to rob me of. You shall not slip me. Where you go I will go. You shall not get away."

The Spawer pulled his moustache, and looked the man up and down.

"Really..." he said, after a while. "You are a smaller man than I ... but you tempt me very much to kick you."

In a second, at that threat of action, the pent-up torrents of the schoolmaster's rage and anguish burst forth from him. Anything was better than words. He rushed up wildly to his adversary.

"Kick me!" he cried fiercely, shouting up with hoarse voice of challenge into the Spawer's face. "Kick me! Touch me. Lay a hand upon me. You say you 'll kick me. Kick me."

He pressed so hard upon the Spawer, with arms thrown out and flourishing wildly, that even had he wished it, the Spawer would not have had purchase to kick him. Instead, he receded somewhat from their undesirable chest-to-chest contact, striving by gentle withdrawal to mollify the man's mad anger. For he had seen into his eyes, and their look startled him. Not for himself—he was in every sense the man's better, and could have wrought with him as though he were a schoolboy's cane—but for the man. It was borne in upon him suddenly anew, with terrible conviction, that the fellow was mad; the victim of some fierce hallucination—whose fixed point of hatred was in himself—and he repented now that he had goaded him to such a cruel pitch. And still the man pressed upon him. "Kick me!" he kept saying, utterly deaf to the Spawer's temporising and persuasive utterances. "Kick me. Touch me. Lay a hand upon me."

To lay a hand upon him now, even in mere pacification, meant an inevitable struggle, and such a termination was too unseemly to be thought of. As it was, matters had gone altogether beyond their bounds. To have chastised the fellow with scorn had been one thing, but to be involved in a retreat before

the hoarse breath of a passionate madman was another, utterly outside all dignity. Sooner or later, too, he would have to stand or be forced over the cliff. The thought of the boiling sea below, to which, in the concentration of his faculties upon this ignominious encounter, he had been paying no heed, recalled him hotly, and he stole an anxious glance over his shoulder to learn where he stood.

And at that very moment he stood on the cliff edge, and it slipped and gave way with him. Wynne flung up his arms, beating the air with them like wings, to regain his balance, but he could not. An arm clutched out after him, whether to push or clasp him he did not know. Half spinning as he went, he doubled out of sight backward; and if anything were needed, apart from the anguish of his own mind, at that awful, inevitable moment, to add to the horror of his going, it was the schoolmaster's long, horrid scream.

CHAPTER XXXIX

That scream—having no part with the man's self, but tearing forth from him as though it were a liberated fiend—curdled the schoolmaster's own blood. This culminating horror of a night of horrors took hold upon the pillars of his reason, like a blind, despairing

Samson, and overturned the temple quite. Before, he had had just the madness requisite to carry out what unaided reason could never have accomplished; but now, madness filled him like thick, suffocating smoke, and extinguished his last guiding spark of lucidity. From head to foot he was mad; mad with a terrorised madness that is one long mental scream, like the unrestrained scream of his lips. First, as the man went over, and his own cry rang like a terrible knell in his head, he dropped to his knees, and bound wild hands upon his eyes, to blot out the horror from them. Again and again and again, with insufferable rapidity, he saw—for all his binding—the horrid vision of the Spawer's beating arms; the sickening collapse; the sudden emptiness of sky. Again and again and again his own cry tore out in his ears. If his brain had been one great slate, and this cry the screech of a perpendicular pencil torn across it, it could not have scored it more terribly. All his hallucinations were reversed and turned against himself. His mind had no mercy upon him; he was a murderer. This was the death that came to him upon his bed. The horror of now fitted the horror of then like a bolt. He was a murderer, fore-ordained. The hot brand of Cain was on his brow. Twice the fatal cliff called upon him to come and look over at the scene of his crime, but twice he heard the surging of the sea below, and twice he dared not. Then the irresistible magnetism of his own murder drew him,

and he crept forth the third time on all fours, and peered awfully over upon a small projecting shelf of the cliff. Close down by the roaring surf the Spawer lay stretched on his back, and looked with his dead face up at him. As he had fallen, so he lay. His head was to the sea; his feet toward the cliff at which they had struggled so desperately for hold; his right hand, by the force of rebound, had jumped across his breast, and seemed placed in mocking attestation upon his heart; his left lay limply from him without a bend, its palm turned upward, its fingers partly closed; his chin was thrown up, white and ghastly; his face a little sideways upon his cheek, as though in renunciation of this dark, wicked world, and seeking slumber. A very different figure of a fellow, indeed, from that proud six-footer of scathing independence that had mocked this miserable onlooker from above. And yet, how terribly triumphant. Even on his back, without a word between his lips, or a look in his eyes, he had more of majesty at this dread moment than life could ever have given him.

And so thought the man who, blindly seeking but to prevail, had put death's conquering sceptre in his hands. For the one moment of his guilty gaze he saw with clear eyes, freed from madness—as people are free from worldly thoughts that take their look upon the dead. But the moment passed, and his madness descended upon him once more, like the

cloud of a whirlwind. It swept him to his feet, and drove him blightingly before it—anywhere away from the scene of that awful fall and cry. Before, he might have killed himself, but now, with the horror of death before his eyes, and ringing in his ears, he dared not die. Over gate and by hedgerow, through field and fence; beating and battling a mad passage for his flight against the armed hosts of standing corn; pitching blindly over stooks in the stubble; turning and doubling; falling headlong and regaining his feet with terrified fighting-fists, as though in conflict with unseen adversaries, so his madness drove him, like a leaf before the breeze.

CHAPTER XL

Out of the dark womb of Eternity—and with all the penalties and discomforts incidental to birth—Maurice Ethelbert Wynne was born again.

With pangs, with anguishes, with flashes of light, and alternating darkness; with terrible struggles to lay hold of this elusive state called life, that seemed floating somewhere about and above him, if he only could secure it, he drew shuddering breath of consciousness at last upon his little six-foot couch, and saw, through tremulous eyelids that were yet powerless to open themselves, a multitude of

round things shining.

They were so many, and their light so marvelously great, that he went off through pain into darkness forthwith, and abode there for a space. Thence, after awhile, he commenced to struggle inwardly again for the life he had once laid hold of, and groping, found it; and looked through his impotent lashes once more, and at once the multitude of round things shining fell in, and hurt him, and a second time he let life go quite quietly, and relapsed into his darkness. But the taste for life, once awakened, cannot be so inanimately surrendered. Cost what cost in pain, lips will keep returning periodically to the cup—each time with further strength of fortitude for pain—till in the end hands are strong to grasp and retain, and life, sipped at first, is gulped with eager mouthfuls. And so, slowly but surely, the Spawer returned again and again to his multitude of hurting things, and looked upon them diligently, and patiently learned their shape, and studied them, and knew them in the end for moons. Vague, shadowy remembrances of a former life, or premonitory forecasts of the life he was now about to live, floated—not in his mind, for he had as yet no concentrated point of consciousness that could be called a mind—but, dispersed and uncollected, all about the dark void of his being. Names that he did not know for names flitted hauntingly about him, like bats—names that, as

though he were a mere baby, he had not the strength or the capacity to utter, but that he somehow recognised and knew. One name, in particular, came to him in his dusky sojourn, and abode with him; a blessed, dove-like messenger of a name, whose presence was peace. When it departed from him he was troubled, and sought for it, as a blind kitten seeks after the breast. When he found it again he was content with his darkness; quite content to lie and be conscious that he was alive.

Then, to names succeeded shapeless dreams; after-shadowings or forecastings, as the case might be, snatched by violence from Eternity, and bringing him pain. Shadowy figures in conflict he seemed to see; men running; men pursuing; men wrestling; men falling—not men, as men are, but men as his infant mind conceived them, dark and formless and blurred; men like trees walking, whose movements disturbed him painfully; men crying; men screaming. When they screamed, instinctively he sought the shelter of darkness once more, for he could not bear the sound of that scream. It frightened him from life. Yet after awhile, he would be back at the moons again, nibbling at them industriously with his intelligence, like a mouse at cheese. They were moons now, he knew quite well. He did not know them as such by name, but he understood the substance of the things seen, and thus feeding on them and deriving nourishment, his consciousness

thrived. One by one it diffused itself through the darkened channels and subways of his being. It reached his ears, and he heard a great buzzing, and a roaring and a beating—as though all his brain were being churned within him. It reached his limbs, and his being strove to stir them, and after many trials succeeded insignificantly, whereupon, with his lips he groaned. Centuries thus, it seemed, he floated, a mere helpless log upon the tide of existence, clutching at things he could not hold, bumping against consciousness for moments at a time, and being drifted off again into the dark; in reality it was scarcely minutes. Then, of a sudden, something icy cold and wet fell with a rude slap over his face.

The shock roused him, and the coldness contracted spasmodically the relaxed tissues of his thinking. All his brain, diffused hitherto vastly throughout space, seemed to shrink up at that Arctic contact, like metal in a mould, and occupy the narrow limits of his head, throbbing painfully at the restriction imposed upon it. Thought, in this cramped environment, became agonisingly congested. His head was a sort of Black Hole of Calcutta, in which thought seethed for outlet. Where one idea before had attenuated itself throughout the centuries, now centuries of thinking were compressed insufferably within the space of one moment. Life, that had been unoccupied, teemed all at once with the fever of activity. A hundred incidents seemed in progress

within him at one and the same instant. His lips were useless to him for speaking, but from somewhere in his throat came a voice that poured out from him unceasingly, as though it were a tap, accompanying with narrative the course of events. Still, though all the forces of life and thought were humming at high pressure inside him, was he powerless to burst the fetters of his body. Like an iron man he lay, with his one arm extended, and his one arm bent, and his chin thrown upward, and his legs stretching from him to their limp extremities—miles and miles and miles away. Over and over again in mind he got the victory over this unresponsive flesh, and rose with it, and looked about him at the encompassing multitude of moons; and over and over again his mind returned dejectedly to its recumbent habitation, and knew itself deluded. The desire for movement was become a nightmare. All his being wrought in motionless agony to wake up his dead limbs to life, as his soul had been wakened. The horror of this inactivity grew upon him and focussed itself to a great, loud, liberative cry that should cut his bonds like a knife and loose him from this awful lethargy. But though the cry was within him, all prepared, his lips could not utter it. He was lead-weighted; feet, hands, legs, eyelids—not a member to help him.

And then the cold wetness fell upon his face and forehead a second time, and with a terrible spasm of anguish he pushed his cry. All heaven seemed to ring

with it in his tortured imagination; he could not have conceived that the bulk of his effort had been wasted mentally before it reached his lips, and that the residue of physical impulse would scarcely have sufficed to deflate a kitten's lungs. Just another cry or two like this, thought he, as he rested from the exertion of it, and he would burst forth from his bondage and be free.

And again, with titanic intention, and the merest inappreciable flattening of his diaphragm, he launched his pitiable mew.

And this time it suddenly seemed to him that he had awakened some external sympathy on his behalf; that other forces were being brought to bear upon him from without—how, or whence, or why, he knew not. Voices—or his mental equivalent for voices—seemed disturbing the atmosphere of his being; besieging him, trying to lay hold upon his voice and give him a ladder to outer life. The moons too, as he stared at them through his eyelashes, appeared moving about in agitated disorder this way and that above the high wall of blackness that fronted him. Then, something detached itself from the wall-top, and slid downward with a rattle. He was here! He was here! Did n't they see him? In went his stomach feebly again, and he ejected his agonised sigh. And while desperately he sought to aid the outer assistance, and proclaim his dire need—of a sudden his attitude changed. The moons swam

backward overhead, the black wall rose above his sight. What his paralysed limbs had failed to accomplish of themselves, was being accomplished for them. Arms were under his neck, hands were beating his cheeks, voices were calling upon him.

And all at once, with a great spasm, his eyes rolled round into their right position—it seemed he had been gazing out of the backs of them this while—and the blindness fell away from him like the stone of a sepulchre; and his ears burst open; and the calling voice came clearly through into his understanding.

Oh, surely that was Pam's dear voice! None other in the world would have had sweet power to penetrate such a darkness as his. And his lips dissolved, that had seemed glued inseparably together, and let him move them over the girl's name.

"... Pam ..." he said.

CHAPTER XLI

Yes, it was Pam's own self that knelt beside him and sustained him, her arms wound supportingly about his helpless body, his head on her knee, and shed tears of warm thankfulness over his lifted face, and caressed him eagerly with her voice.

"I thought you were dead..." she said tremulously.

His response flickered elusively to and fro at the bottom of the Spawer's being, like sunlight deep down a well; but he merely watched it with curious philosophic content, as though quite sufficiently satisfied to know that it was there.

"Where am I?" he inquired listlessly, after a moment, and then, out of sheer gratitude to the girl, without waiting to be told, subsided into peaceful slumber upon her knee.

So long as she was there to hold him and nurse his head, what more could a man want? To sleep with Pam for pillow ... ye gods! But his period of blissful oblivion was short. The beating and the calling recommenced, and he was forced into opening his reluctant eyes.

"You must not..." he heard the girl beseech him.

"Oh, indeed, you must not! Try to come to yourself. Are you hurt? Do you think you can stand?"

He heard the questions plainly enough—in his grave he would have heard questions that that voice put to him—but their import excited him little. What did anything matter, so long as Pam was with him? She would look to everything. Trust Pam. All he did was to dwell pleasantly upon the sound of her voice inside, and seek to slumber to it, as a child is soothed by singing. But though his soul longed for this peace, she would not grant it, but plied her questions anew with strange, inexplicable unrest. He had never known Pam so unrestful.

"Are you hurt? Do you think ... you can get up ... if I lift you? Shall I lift you? Will you let me lift you?"

He fished about listlessly for a moment or two in the depths of his well, and brought up the word "Eh," as being both easy to catch and to utter.

"Eh?" he said, without the slightest desire to be told for information's sake, and made as though once more to settle his head.

But she rubbed his cheeks vigorously with her hand, and roused him with her voice anew.

"Oh, please, please..." he heard her beg him, with tears. "Try to wake up now and answer me. Don't go back again. You must n't go back again. Do you think you can stand if I lift you? Do you?"

"Where am I?" he asked again, in the same apathetic voice.

He did n't care where he was. Wherever he was, Pam was with him. That was good enough for his taste. He merely wanted her to nurse him, and soothe him, and lull him. All speculation, all curiosity, had been knocked out of him by his fall. The heavens might have opened now, and the sight of angels descending would have caused him no wonder.

"You are down the cliff!" Pam told him, shouting the words in his ear, with the twofold object of reaching his remote understanding and rousing him by sheer strenuousness of voice. "You must have fallen. Don't you know what's happened? Can't you remember?"

He was down the cliff. He must have fallen. Did n't he know what had happened? Could n't he remember? Of a sudden—yes, of course he could remember. He was down the cliff. He must have fallen. The schoolmaster had pushed him. He 'd been fighting with the schoolmaster in a dream, and got pushed over. What did it matter—a dream? He 'd often got pushed over in dreams.

"Can't you remember?" came back to him, in echo of the girl's voice, and he told her: "Yes, he could remember." Furthermore, to prove his good intentions, he asked her with his eyes shut: "Where are the moons?"

"There 's only one," the girl shouted into his ear.

"That all?" he said, fishing hazily for the words

as before.

"It 's up there—there in the sky." She let down his head a little, so that the moon might come into his line of vision. "There ... do you see it?"

He saw it and shut hie eyes, turning his head away from the light.

"All right," he said, and added a dreamy "Thank you."

Something boomed out behind him, and he saw the girl's hand go up defensively above his head. Next moment cold trickles were wriggling down his face. Some rested on his eyelashes and blurred the moonlight.

"What 's that?" he asked complacently.

"It's the sea..." the girl cried into his ear, and wiped the wet tenderly from his face and lashes with an end of sleeve drawn into her palm by her fingers. "The tide is coming up. We must not stay here any longer. We shall be drowned if we do."

"Oh!" he said. Drowned, would they? What was drowning to a man who had been dead? And then, quite irrelevantly—its irrelevancy even puzzled himself, in a placid kind of way—"are there any mushrooms?"

"Oh, yes, yes," the girl told him eagerly. "Lots and lots of them. But not down here; up at the top. We must get up to the top first."

"I 'm the boy for mushrooms," he said, and thought he smiled knowingly, but it was only his

inside that smiled. The face of him never moved a muscle.

"See ... I am going to lift you!" the girl shouted. "Let me put my arm about you ... like that. Yes. And now like this. Now ... so. Do I hurt you?"

My Heaven! Did she hurt him? The groan that followed needed no conscious bidding to find the outlet of his lips. His immobile face was broken suddenly into seams of pain, like the cracking of a cast.

"Oh ... my poor darling! My poor darling!" the girl cried, lowering him a little, in an agony scarcely less than his own, and the tears started from her fast. "Have I hurt you? I did n't want to hurt you. But we can't stay here. However much it hurts we can't stay here. We must get you moved. I can't let you drown for the sake of a little pain. Come! try again. You 'll help me, won't you? Now. Is that better? Is that better? Am I hurting you now?"

And again she raised him. In a measure the first pain had paved the way for a second, and being prepared for it this time, by twisting his face he was enabled to bear the lifting; but it was agony. Such complete change of posture seemed to shake up all the dormant dregs of his discomfort, like the lees of a bottle. His body was become no more than a mere flagon, for the contents of mortal anguish. His heart beat as though it had been knocked loose by the fall. All the inside of his head had been dislodged, and

bumped sickeningly against the walls of his skull. His ribs were hot gridirons. His back was on fire. But at least he stood unsteadily upright. Within the compass of the girl's arms—as once, on that first night of their meeting, she had been within his—he stood rocking helplessly to and fro; his knees trembling treacherously beneath him, only saved from sinking by the uplifting power of the girl's embrace. Suddenly it seemed to him, with a warning buzz in his ears, that the darkness was coming on again. A great weakness crept over him and enfolded him.

"Let me ... sit down..." he said faintly. He thought that by sitting he might elude the enveloping embrace of the darkness.

"No, no; not here. Not just here..." the girl implored him. "Not so near the edge. Try and walk. Please! ..."

And then the darkness closed upon him swiftly, as he stood in her arms, like a great engulfing fish.

But it disgorged him, almost at once. It seemed his own pain deterred it. And slowly, what time he suffered untold agonies of body, the girl half pushed, half carried him from the perilous edge of their narrow shelf, toward the cliff side; weeping to herself for the pain she knew she was inflicting; talking all the while to interpose her soft, tender voice between himself and the keen edge of his suffering. Did she hurt him now? That was better, was n't it? Oh, that

was beautiful! Just another step like that. And now just one more. And now just one to finish. And now just a little one to bring him round here. And got him propped up in the end—though Heaven knows how—with his back against the ugly black slope of cliff, and his face towards the sea, that bit with raging white teeth against the miserable crust of their refuge, and roared and snarled mercilessly for their devourance.

And there, resting awhile, with the assistance of his own pain that had roused him, and the stern sight he saw, the girl assiduously coaxed and fretted, and rubbed his apathetic consciousness, like a cold hand, till it returned at last some vital warmth of understanding. As far as his loosened brain would allow, all the doings of this night came back to him, remotely remembered. Through clouds of intervening suffering he called back his quarrel with the schoolmaster; the words, even, that had been uttered; his horrid plunge over the cliff, and that sickening arrest at the bottom. And before these things had happened, came back to him his love for the girl, and his loss of her; his resolution and his irresolution; his night's packing, and the letters he had received. Even it occurred to him that the big lamp would be still burning—unless its oil were exhausted by now. It was all unreal and incomprehensible, but he remembered it and never doubted. This was no new life, but the old—to whose

jagged splinters of breakage he was being so painfully spliced. What a wonder his breakage had n't been beyond all repair! How on earth had he come, neck downwards from that great height—a height it would have sickened him to contemplate jumping—and yet been spared? The mill of his mind ground slowly, by fits and starts, and not over-fine. All its mechanism seemed dislocated and rusty and out of order; in mid-thought it would be brought up suddenly with a horrid jolt that seemed like taking his head off. The noise of its working, too, was almost deafening.

"What are you doing here?" he asked vaguely, all at once, of the girl, who, with one arm about him, was seeing how far he might be trusted to keep his own balance against the cliff. It was a question that had been glimmering at the bottom of his well for some time past—only, so far, he had never been able to perceive clearly why she should not be here as well as anywhere else. But now the strangeness of her presence forced itself upon him.

"I was on the cliff..." she said, speaking in quick gasps, as the result of her exertion, "and heard you fall. At least ... I heard you cry out. You cried out ... did n't you? as you fell."

"Yes..." he admitted slowly, for the mills of thought were grinding again, and he knew whose cry had brought him succor. Murderous, cowardly cur! Friction of anger set up in his mind and heated him

—who knows? ... perhaps for his own good. Anything, only to rouse him.

The girl shuddered at that cry's remembrance.

"... I heard you. I was by the boat ... and I knew something dreadful had happened ... and ran back, and looked over the cliff ... and saw you, and scrambled down to you. But we must n't waste time. Not a moment. If once the tide gets over here.... Do you think you can let me leave you ... for a minute? I must find a way up the cliff. So." She withdrew her hand from him, holding it outstretched, however, for a moment, with fingers close upon him, in case he might show any dangerous subsidence. But he did not. "Are you all right now? Do you think you can keep just like that?"

He assured her he was all right, and could keep just like that. He was by no means convinced in his own mind that such was the case, but he felt his acquiescence due to the girl, and gave it.

And she, with a final adjusting touch of finger, that was a caress all told, consigned him timidly to his own insecure care, and turned her energy upon the cliff.

Even as she looked up its black, forbidding side, smooth and sheer, and clayey with the recent rains—and remembered the desperate abandon of her descent—her heart forsook her. Calmly, first of all—trying to stimulate her bosom to courage by deliberateness of action—she sought of the cliff for

some mode of ascent; desperately, after awhile, when none forthcame, flinging herself at the slimy earth, kicking with feet for a foothold—that slid down with her when she used it, as though she had been trying to scale butter; tearing with her hands at straggling tufts of grass, that pulled out by the wet roots, soft and sodden—struggling, scrambling, fighting.

And at last the fearful truth was borne in upon her—or perhaps, more accurately, the seal was put upon the truth that her bosom had secreted when she sacrificed herself over the cliff-edge for this man's saving—and with tears, not of terror, but of bitter defeat, she came back to him. Oh, the agony of that confession! Yet with death so close upon them, it was no moment to offer the cup of false hopes. However she tried to screen the knowledge from him, death would shortly tell him everything.

"It is no use..." she said, her tears streaming, her hands all muddied, that she wiped hopelessly on her skirts. "... I can find no way."

"Oh," he said, so apathetically, that for a moment she thought he had not understood. But it was only the mills that were grinding.

"It is all my fault," the girl burst out bitterly. "If I had run to the Dixons' at once ... they would have been here now ... and saved you. But I never thought. I was in such a hurry.... Oh, forgive me ... forgive me, please!"

And into her hands, for the man's sake, she

sobbed as though her heart would have burst. It was so dreadful for him to be lost like this, when she had been so near to saving him. For herself it mattered nothing, who had so little to lose. And though she strove to extinguish the thought, there was a kind of proud, defiant exultation at being drowned in such company. Oh, God forgive her such wicked thinking! Her heart, so anguished during these latter days, could not, in its wildest moments, have wished a more companionable death than this.

After awhile, the mills of the man's mind, slowly moving, ground a little grist for his lips to get rid of.

"... Can you get up the cliff by yourself, if you leave me?"

He seemed to be talking to her out of the closed chamber of dreams. What he uttered reached her, indeed, but there was something between them yet, like a wall, that both were sensible of.

"But I would not ... I would not!" she cried impetuously.

"But could you?"

"No, no, no ... I could not!"

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite. I could not. Indeed, I could not."

"Shall we both be drowned?" he inquired.

To the girl the question came with a callousness almost brutal. Moreover, it cut her to the quick to hear how this fall had blunted the keen edge of the man's susceptibilities. It was as though another being

of an altogether inferior calibre were usurping his body. Oh, that for their last agonised moments together this terrible dull veil might be rent, and for dying happiness she might know him as she had known him in the past! And for this she maintained her weeping. But inside, the man was stoking up the furnace of his mills with desperate activity, to get work out of hand before this last. He, too, was filled with ripe grain of thought to be ground, and knew how bruised and blunted he was—and how little near he could place his thoughts to the thoughts of the girl.

"What were you doing ... on the cliff?" he asked laboriously.

All his within was striving to find a short cut to somewhere, but his mouth would not let him.

"... I was going away."

"Oh! Where to?"

"... Anywhere. To Hunmouth ... round by Garthston."

"Why were you going anywhere?"

"Because ... because ... did n't you get the letters? I left them on the piano."

"Oh, yes; the letters. I read them. But I did n't ... know them." "Know them" was n't what he wanted to say, and he struggled for a moment to find the requisite expression, but his mills were not equal to it. "I did n't ... know them," he repeated vaguely.

"Oh ... because ... because..."

And thereupon the girl plunged into the shameful deeps of her wickedness, and made confession. A hurried confession it was, for time pressed, but she cried it in its entirety into his ear—shielding nothing but the absent man ... and her love.

And the mills of the Spawer's mind thumped faster.

"I want ... to ask you something," he said slowly, "... before I die."

"Yes ... yes." The girl was at his lips in a moment, to catch their precious outpouring before death should stop her hearing for ever. "Ask me. I am here."

"I want to ask you..." he said. "You know why I was going back. The other letter was ... from Her. She asks me to set her free. If there had n't been ... been any other one in the case, and I 'd asked you ... to marry me ... would you have married me?"

And in an instant the girl's arms were about the man's neck, and her lips upon his lips, as though they would have sucked the poor remaining life out of his body into her own, and given it an abiding habitation.

"Oh ... my love, my love!" the girl wept, through the wet lips that clung to him. "What do I care about dying now? I would rather a thousand times die to learn that you had loved me ... than live and never know it."

And she poured her streams of warm tears over his face, and wrapped him about with her arms, and bound her body upon him. And in the fusion of that mighty love, the laboring mills of the man's mind burst free.

"Why did you come down to me?" he cried. "For God's sake get away while you have the chance. I 'm not worth saving now ... I'm only the fragments of a man.... But you!"

For all answer she bound him in tighter bondage of protection, as though she were trying to steep their souls so deep in the transport of love that they should not know death or its agony.

"If you leave me..." he urged upon her, "and get up the cliff ... there may still be time."

But she clung to him.

"For my sake, then!" he implored her. "You are my last hope of safety. For the love of me, try and do it. We must not die like this."

And for his sake, with her old desperate hopes falsely revived, she redoubled kisses of farewell upon his mouth and lips, and threw herself passionately against the relentless wet wall of their prison. Now this side, and now that. Now trying to kick out steps with her feet; now trying to tear them with her hands, she wrought at this frantic enterprise, and the man watched her, and knew it to be of no avail. And then, at his urging, she cried out—lifted her own white face to the sullen black face of the cliff, and

cried—cried with words, and rent the air with inarticulate screams. But all was one. Like a thick blanket the cliff, so close upon her, muffled her mouth and I smothered the voice that issued from her.

"It 's no use ... no use," she said, and came back to the man.

And at the same moment the cruel, horrible sea, that had been boiling turbulently about the far brink of their ledge, with occasional casts of foam, thundered against the cliff, as though to the collected impulse of intent, and rushed up, roaring, and gained the summit of their slender refuge at last, and curled a scornful, devastating lip of water over it. They stood for a moment like marble, the two of them, at this clear message from the mouth of death; watching the water slide back after the retreating wave, and pour away at either side of their earthen shelf amid an appalling effervescence, and then the girl woke up again.

"It will not be long ... now," she said, very quietly.

Then she went to the man and laced her arms about him—

"Promise me..." she said, "you will not ... let go of me ... when the time comes."

"I promise you," the man answered, very huskily.

"May I call you ... Maurice ... before we die?" she asked, and her voice faltered at this.

"Please..." he begged her; and she said "Maurice" a time or two.

"Hold me ... Maurice," she said. "I may ... turn coward ... at the end ... but hold me. Don't let me go. I want to die with you."

"I will hold you," he answered, and their arms tightened.

And again the sea thundered, and this time something swirled about their feet. Then they asked forgiveness of each other for inasmuch as they had offended, and received the sacrament of each other's pardon.

And there being nothing else to do, they stood and waited for death.

CHAPTER XLII

On this same eventful evening, the absent Barclay o' Far Wrangham returned to himself by slow stages from nowhere in particular, at some vague, indeterminate point between Hunmouth, Sproutgreen, and Ullbrig, having missed Tankard's 'bus by a small matter of two days and one night.

Out of five golden sovereigns that had gone forth with him, he retained a halfpenny, which, wedged tight in the corner of his trouser's pocket, kept troubling him like a conscience at times. On his

head was a brimless hat that some friendly cattle-drover had exchanged with him on Saturday. A tramp had picked up his overcoat and was walking the high road to London in it; but Barclay o' Far Wrangham still retained the new waggon-rope that had been one of his early purchases in Hunmouth market on his arrival; and with this over his shoulder he lurched onward. He possessed not the faintest idea of destination, but his legs shambled along with him instinctively, like horses that knew their road. They took him safely across fields, and over stiles, and along hedges, and down narrow pathways between standing corn, and through gates—that he hung over affectionately and went through all the most conscientious formulæ of shutting, and still left open behind him. Somewhere short of Sproutgreen he perceived a figure coming distantly down the road in his direction. At a hundred yards away or more he made elaborate preparations for its greeting; wiped his mouth; let down the waggon-rope to the ground, trailing it loosely by an end; took his hat off and reversed it; rubbed the cobwebs from his eyes, and held out an arm like a sign-post in attitude of friendly surprise. There had been a word in his mouth, too, for welcome; only it slipped him at the last moment, but he made an amicable bellowing instead.

"Bo-o-o-o-oh!" he cried, exploding loosely, like a good-natured cannon, whose recoil sent him

staggering backwards over his legs till it seemed he meant retiring all the way to Hunmouth. By a gigantic effort, however, he resisted the backward impetus when it had sent him off the roadway into the shaggy side-grass, and fell forward on his hands. "A-a-a-a-ay!" he shouted genially. He was brimming over with foamy friendship for this dear, familiar stranger. "Noo wi' ye!" and stood up on all fours at the greeting, like a well-intentioned dog, whose muzzle was the battered cleft in his hat-brim.

Thus adjured, the pedestrian drew up with some severity on his aloof side of the road, and gave Barclay to understand, with a grudging "Noo" of inquiry, that he had nothing whatever to hope from him on this side the Jordan. As he had chanced to stop in a line with the dead-centre of Barclay's hat, Barclay could not immediately discern him, and was filled indeed with suspicions of treachery.

"Wheer are ye?" he inquired, after a few moments of futile activity, making valiant efforts to keep his eyelids lifted.

"Ah 'm 'ere i' front o' ye," his unknown friend replied, with small show of favor, regarding this picture of human debasement with scorn.

"Are ye?" Barclay inquired, somewhat foggily, and pushed himself with much effort on to his haunches. "Which way div ah want to be?" he asked.

"Wheer did ye come fro'?" the figure demanded sternly.

"Eh?" said Barclay.

"Wheer div ye come fro'? 'Oo are ye? What 's yer name?"

"Barclay o' Far Wrangham," said Barclay unsteadily, going forward on his hands again.

"Ah 've 'eard tell on ye," the figure remarked. "Gan yer ways wi' ye. Yon 's yer road. Come, be movin'."

For some moments Barclay rocked silently on his all fours, as though thinking deeply.

"Which way div ah want to be?" he commenced again, after awhile, and there being no immediate response, embraced the opportunity for a little slumber.

Having slumbered pleasantly for a space on his hands and knees without interruption, his head swaying in circles close to the grass as though he were browsing, he awoke of a sudden, under consciousness that he had received no response to this question, and working the muzzle of his hat diligently in all directions about him, found to his surprise that he was alone.

The discovery troubled him, first of all, so that he muttered darkly in his throat like distant thunder. Then the brewing turned to sparkles, and he laughed deliciously on the grass, rolling over on to his back, and sprawling with limbs in air as though he were a celestial baby, brought up from the bottle of pure bliss. Lastly, his mind darkened to anger, and he rose

to all fours, roaring defiance after his departed enemy. It took him some time to find his hat after this, which had rolled away from him during his Elysian laughter, but his knee trod on it at last, and the moments expended in its discovery were doubled in his efforts to apply it to his head.

A dozen times he clapped it down, sideways forward, and the same number it rolled off him, and had to be resought.

Last of all: "Nay, ah weean't be pestered wi' ye!" he cried indignantly. "Gen ye can't be'ave yersen proper, an' stay where ye 're put, ye 'll 'a to gan."

And "gan" it did, sure enough, into the hedge bottom.

"Lig [lie] there, ye ill-mannered brute!" he shouted after it, and filled with righteous wrath, picked up the waggon-rope and staggered to his feet for departure.

"Come up wi' ye, ye lazy divvles!" he cried at his legs, that, through their long inactivity, betrayed a certain tendency to let him down. "Div ye 'ear? 'Od up [Hold up]. Dom yer eyes ... if ye weean't do better ah 'll walk o' my knees an' shame ye."

"Gum! it 's tonnin cold," he decided, after some progress.

"Ah nivver knowed it ton so cold of a neet this time o' year," he added, a while later.

And a short way further up the road:

"Gum ... bud ah feel it i' my yed [head]

strangelins!" he declared, and putting up an inquisitive hand to learn the cause of it, was blankly amazed to discover himself hatless.

"Well! of all ... bud that 's a caution!" he said, and stopped as dead as his legs would let him. "Well ... it 's no use seekin' after spilt milk. Noo ah s'll 'a to mek best on it."

The best of it he made forthwith; and to compensate for this frigidity of head he put such warmth of pace into his advancement that at times—with his head a body's length in front of his feet, and his feet churning in the rear like twin-screws—his progress was considerable. To have stopped under a road's length would have been to fall as flat as a pancake. Nothing short of the most gradual arrest could preserve his equilibrium, and as the easiest solution of the problem was not to stop at all, he forged ahead till the wind whistled on either side of his ears. And this constant freshness, combined with the exposed state of his head, so sobered and revivified him that, by the time he was passing through familiar Ullbrig, he already knew what houses were which, and who lived in them; the day of the week; how long he had been absent; and was commencing, in common with the history of all these nocturnal or matutinal returns, to see the evil of drink, and speak openly of wine as a mocker.

Moodily pursuing this well-trodden path of his conversion, he slammed his way through the gates,

one after another, and passed Dixon's sleeping farmstead with a covetous eye upon its moonlit windows.

"Ay, you 've not slipped fi' pun [five pounds] doon yer belly this 'arvest-time, Jan Dixon," he reflected, as he turned his back to the scrambling white house, so calm and self-contemplative in the moonlight, and cut across towards the cliff. All his loquaciousness leaked out of him now, in sight of the goal which he had been three days aiming at and missed up to the present, and he tramped along with the impersonal passivity of a cow being driven to market; untroubled as to fate, and almost thoughtless. The sea shook the cliff, as he walked, with seismic shivers, and boomed noisily in his ears; but he 'd known it off and on now for forty years, and minded it—particularly at such moments as this—as little as the buzzing of his own eight-day clock. Of a sudden, however, the sea-surge bore up a sound to him—a small, shrill, penetrating sound, that pierced his passivity to its vital marrow, and caused him to throw up his head, with a gaping mouth to all quarters of the compass about him, for the sound's location. He was sufficiently sober by this time to realise how very drunk he had been, and in the desolating flatness of life's Sahara—lacking any pleasant green oases of illusion—that he was laboriously traversing now, he knew the sound to have been produced by real, living, human lips; for his own brain was far too stagnant to create fancies.

Therefore he eased the wain-rope to the ground, and holding up his open mouth to the sky, as though it were an ear-trumpet, he listened for a repetition of this discordant note in Nature.

And again it came: small, faint, embosomed in the roaring surge, but cutting as a diamond.

This time he had no doubt. It came from over the cliff, and had the despairing ring of death and danger in it, that not even returning prodigals like Barclay can by any means mistake, though they 'd gone away with twenty pounds in their pockets instead of five. And bellowing response at the top of his lungs, he ran to the cliff edge.

"A-a-a-a-ay! 'Ello! Noo wi' ye! What 's amiss?" he cried, and dropping on hands and knees, thrust his head recklessly over the brink of it.

And again the cry rang out from almost straight below him—shriller and more terribly charged this time with the agony of animated hope.

"Lord Almighty!" said Barclay; "it 's a lass."

CHAPTER XLIII

To this day the tale of that eventful midnight is told in Ullbrig. How Barclay, returning from Hunmouth market, where he had sold three beasts and a score of sheep, and drunk the money, heard Pam's last

despairing cries for assistance, beaten out of her by the sea itself. How he ran to the edge of the cliff, and looked over, and saw the two drenched figures sticking to the side of it like wet flies against a pudding basin. How, even while he watched them, the sea boiled up again as though it were milk, and rose bubbling above where they were, and made him shut his eyes with a groan for what he might not see when the milk subsided. How, praise God, they were still there when the water sank down. How he untackled his waggon-rope, shouting courage to them all the while, and made a loop to one end, and hitched the other to the adjacent stile-post, and cast the slip-knot down the cliff. And how, for an age, while he swore at them from above, the girl would not come up before the man; and the man would not come up before the girl. And how, owing to considerations which he did not then know or understand, namely, that the man was powerless to give any help to his own ascent, and the girl feared their rescuer might be unable to haul him unaided—the girl slipped the noose under her shoulders, and struggled and clambered up the cliff-side while Barclay pulled upon her. And how, almost before she was on the top, she had detached the securing loop and thrown it down to the man. And how he had just had time to slip it over his neck and under his shoulders before the next sea came, cursing and swearing because of the loss of them, and seethed up

three parts of the cliff, so that the foam of it slashed their faces. And how they felt the rope first slacken and then go dead heavy in their hands, and knew the man was off his feet, and would have been swept away but for their hold upon him. And how they tugged together, the two of them, and how, at certain intervals of progression, the girl had wound the slack rope round the post, against all possible danger of slip or relapse. And how, in the end, the man's face showed above the cliff-brink, and how they had toiled him over; and how the girl had thrown herself beside him, and taken him into her arms, and wiped his streaming face, and called upon him by name, with a hundred solicitations and endearments, and kissed him.

Till, in Barclay's own words: "Ah think theer 's one ower monny on us," he told them.

And the tale, continuing, recounted how these two, Barclay and the girl, made a seat with their hands, and bore the man back to Dixon's between them; and how the man, wringing wet though he was, kept falling asleep on the shoulders of one or other of them, and telling Barclay he was the boy for mushrooms, and he 'd eat them now she 'd given him up. And how they got him home at last, and how Barclay took double handfuls of earth and flung them up at Dixon's window, and how Dixon put his head out first of all, and cried:

"Naay, Barcl'y, man! Naay, naay! Next farm. Ye

want to tek more care i' countin' when ye come 'ome this time o' daay."

And would n't believe Barclay's reasons for bringing him down, till Pam joined her voice with his, when he said: "Well! Ah don't know!"—and the whole household stood on its legs that same moment.

And then a mighty fire was roused up in the kitchen, out of the grate's still hot embers, at Miss Bates' blowing, and the blinds were pulled down carefully by Mrs. Dixon, and all extraneous elements —men, and so forth—were unceremoniously banished, and Pam, shivering, crimson-eared, bright-eyed, and hectic—but wildly joyous—let them skin her of her sodden habiliments as though she had been a drowned rabbit, and was rubbed dry with coarse kitchen towels till her white, starved body glowed like a sunset over snow. And Jeff, having been despatched at Pam's instigation to the cliff, and having run all the way there and all the way back, thumped lustily against the outer panels of the kitchen door, and Pam's parcel—looking, oh, so frail and pitiable and shamefaced in its new surroundings —was drawn in by Mrs. Dixon, and its contents bestowed, as the circumstances demanded, upon Pam's own body. And Pam seemed so genuinely overcome with their kindness that all questions of a controversial nature were by one consent avoided; and not a word asked—beyond mere details of the rescue—as to the strange juxtaposition of Pam and

her bundle, and Mr. Maurice Ethelbert Wynne, along the cliff at this time of morning. To such degree, indeed, did Pam's own tearful, lip-quivering emotion of gratitude play upon her two ministrants, that they discharged their self-sought duties in a reflected emotion scarcely less profound than the original; giving the girl tear for tear, and quiver for quiver.

And when they had rubbed and towelled her, they dressed her in the same loving, lavish way, and vied with each other in finding articles from their own wardrobe which might fit the girl; and when they had finished with her, they looked upon her completed presentment as proudly as though they 'd actually made her.

And while Pam was being in this way taken to pieces and readjusted and put together again, Barclay and Dixon did the same by the Spawer, upstairs in his own bedroom; and laid him between the blankets with a hot-water bottle at his feet, that was fetched from the kitchen; and Arny harnessed Punch to the spring-cart and drove off for Father Mostyn and the Doctor—not that Father Mostyn's presence seemed called for on any urgent or spiritual grounds, but that Pam knew what a slight he would think had been administered upon his vicarial office, were he to be left one moment uninformed of such an occurrence as this.

And until the arrival of the Doctor, Pam's courage and good hope had never once deserted her.

He for whom she would have died gladly twice over was saved from death; but now there were other vague things to fear. And as soon as she heard the ominous rattle of the spring-cart's return, that well-known clear-cut voice of the ecclesiast, and the sharp, Scotch, businesslike tones of the Doctor—as direct and straight to their purpose as a macadamised road ... she quailed, and her fortitude left her. It seemed as though the whole atmosphere were charged at once with electrical dangers at lightning-point.

She sat with her face plunged in her hands, by the side of the roaring kitchen fire, not daring to rise, or move, or go out to meet these awful newcomers, lest her movement might precipitate the danger. All her hearing was drawn out from her like wire, insupportably fine, to the doors of that dread bed-chamber. Sounds near at hand, the roaring of the fire, the fall of cinders, the subdued babel of downstairs voices, had no existence for her. Her hearing, as though it had been a telescope, was aimed above them to some distant star, and missed these terrestrial obstacles by miles and miles—but every sound from the far landing, every whisper, every turning of the handle, every creak of the bedroom floor-boarding, was magnified a hundredfold. To support such auricular sensitiveness it felt she needed the strength of a hundred bodies, instead of that poor tortured one.

But at last, lifting her face from her hands with the blanched cheek of high tension for the very worst, she heard the tread of general exodus; the resonant "Ha!" of Father Mostyn, and the Doctor's little sharp-tongued, Scotch-terrier voice, giving out its reassurance to the applicants at the staircase foot.

"Na doot he 's had a narra squeak, an' ah 'm no goin' to say he 's oot o' the wood yet," she heard him tell them. "His back will have had a nasty twist, an' there 's some concussion, but there 's naethin' broken, and no dislocation. Na, na, he 's no sae bad. Shock 's the worrst o' 't. Dinna mek yerselves onhappy, he 'll mend verra nicely. Oh, he 'll mend fine!"

And going on beneath the Doctor's voice like an organ pipe, to support and sustain and enrich it with ecclesiastical authority, was the voice of his Reverence.

"Ha! No doubt about it. Concussion. That 's the mischief. But nothing broken. No fractures or dislocation. No injury to the clavicle, or more important still, to the dorsal vertebra. It's purely a case of shock. Keep him well wrapped up in blankets, get some hot brandy and water for him, and see that the bottle is n't allowed to grow cold. Ha! that's the way. Beautiful! beautiful! We 'll soon bring him round again."

And the tale, as it is told, goes on to tell how in Dixon's kitchen that morning—for day was breaking

now—Pam made long confession of something to his Reverence the Vicar. Nobody in Ullbrig knows for sure what that confession was, except the Doctor, who did not share the Dixons' delicacy in withdrawing, but sat in Dixon's chair on the other side of the fire, with his steaming toddy glass—compounded out of the sleeping man's decanter—and stirred the fire with the poker when it needed it, and was heard quite plainly to level his voice on such direct interrogation as:

"But ye hae not explained ... so-and-so."

Or, "He may thank his guid stairs ye were there to hear-r-r! But hoo cam ye by the cliff at midnight?"

But as Pam would have told him freely anything about her body if illness had required it, and as she could trust him like Father Mostyn's second self, it would have been cruelly, distrustfully invidious to divide her carnal and spiritual confidences on this occasion with so fine a line; and since the Doctor felt no compunction in their acceptance, Pam felt quite tranquil in their bestowal. To these two men she told the history of her past few days, shielding everybody save herself; how she had come to love the Spawer, and how he had told her of his departure; and how she had wept on her bed; and how she had feared facing him that morning, lest she might weep betrayal of herself, and of a love she had no right to let him see, or trouble him with; and how, while she was trying to gain time for her terror, he came on

her before she was aware; and how she had plunged the letter into her pocket; and how she had taken it back with her, not daring to deliver it after that ... and how ... and how...

Here, in her desire to screen the guilty partner of her trouble, her nervous narrative seemed all plucked to pieces. Her words, indeed, were less for the purpose of telling than for the purpose of stopping their own lips from asking.

"... And so ... he said he wanted me ... and he said he loved me.... I know he loved me, because he 'd told me so before. Only then.... And after that...."

But the Doctor, comfortably ensconced in Dixon's fireside chair, with its red chintz cushion in the small of his back, and half a steaming tumblerful of toddy inside him, was in no mood to be put off with such ambiguous verbal impressionism.

"Stop, stop, stop!" said he, holding up an arrestive toddy-tumbler at her. "I haena got the sense o' that. What d' ye say happened to the letter?"

"Oh ... I cannot ... I cannot," Pam said, the tendons of her narrative relaxing suddenly as though never could they be brought to bear her over this part of the history. But in the end, with point-blank questions from the Doctor, and gentle leading-words from the Vicar, Pam passed over that rocking bridge of all that had happened—only, every admission made against the man's interest was coupled with a pleader for his great love of her. And she imparted to

them, with a face glorified, how that, when nothing seemed sure but death, the Spawer had told her his other attachment was broken. and had confessed his love of her all the time, and she had poured out her love of him ... and ... and they knew the rest.

"Ay, it 's a very quairr complaint, this love!" the Doctor reflected, pulling out his pipe, "... an' harrd to diagnose. Ye never can tell. Ye never can tell. But losh! ah thocht ye were clean gyte when ah hairrd ye were goin' ta marry yon fellow!"

But Father Mostyn was n't astonished in the least; waltzed gravely on his feet with a superior, restrained tightness about the corners of his mouth, and a far-away sparkle in his keen grey eyes, as of one to whom revelation is no new thing.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" he mused, when Pam had finished, and was looking with a timid, sub-radiant eagerness from one to the other. "There 'll be a scandal, of course. That 's the proper penalty for not having confided your trouble into the care of Holy Church." Here the Doctor made a savage thrust with the poker through the gratebars, and stirred and stirred up the red coals till they glowed to incandescence. "But better late than never. Leave it to me. Leave it to me, dear child. Our spiritual Mother never yet turned away from any supplicant that sought her with true faith and humility. We 'll do our best for you. Of course, the business is not so bad as it would be if it had been unexpected. But

fortunately, we 've been prepared for it. No mistaking the symptoms."

And the tale, as Ullbrig will tell it to you to this day, goes on to relate how Pam would not return to the Post Office, but took up her post as nurse by the Spawer's bedside, and could hardly endure to let a bite pass her lips thereafter, for her care of him, till he made the mend.

And that same morning, news traveled to Ullbrig that the schoolmaster had been found, roaming and raving like a madman, in the neighborhood of Prestnorth—where a married cousin of his was living—and was in bed now at her house, with brain fever. Not likely to get better, the rumor said, but therein it proved false, for a fortnight later he resigned the mastership of Ullbrig School, and wrote, at the same time, to Miss Morland, requesting that his effects might be despatched to him by carrier as soon as she could conveniently find leisure to undertake the commission. Another letter accompanied it, addressed to Pam in his clear Board School script. In proclamation it was a penitential acknowledgment of his sins; in effect it was a cacophonous outburst of reproach, love, despair, and recriminations. She sorrowed for the man and his hard lot—for if he had loved her so torturingly it was no fault of his own, but he had taught her to fear him, and sympathy can never truly subsist in the same bosom where fear is.

There were those in Ullbrig at first, as Father

Mostyn had predicted, who, with their sharp tongues, whittled the affair to a fine point of scandal; those who considered the schoolmaster an ill-used man, and Pam a conscienceless hussy who had jilted him under circumstances that would not too well bear the stress of investigation; those who whispered; and those who nodded their chins with compressed lips of meaning. But they had the melancholy dissatisfaction of fearing, each one in his own heart, that these things might not after all be true. Before such a man as Barclay it would never have been politic to repeat this primitive creed at any time. A champion of Pam's from the beginning—when he cried reproof upon them for their uncharitableness towards the child—he was doubly her champion now; strode up and down over the district like a mighty sower, spreading seed of her heroism broadcast from both his hands. And so it came to be that the real history of the girl burst its early grain of scandal, as though it had been sprouting wheat, and sent up its produce into the clear blue heaven of truth. To-day, when Ullbrig tells you of that Monday midnight, it only gathers breath of proud inflation to breathe how one of its daughters—by name Pam—went down the cliff for the man she loved, and how Barclay saved them both.

CHAPTER XLIV

But for Pam and the Spawer, the true tale of their history only began after the terrible events that give Pam her place among the heroines of the district. They used its remembrance as a steel on which to sharpen the blades of their present bliss, but it was not an inherent part of their story. That commenced when the horror of this was over; when the Spawer woke up finally, with a lasting wakefulness, on his bed, and saw Pam, and smiled.

Ah! What a beautiful opening chapter that was —full of a golden tremulousness on the girl's side, as of timid sunlight peeping through the curtains of a May morning when a great day is in the balance. For there had crept into the girl's heart while she watched him a strange little dark bird, that fluttered ... and was still, and fluttered again ... and again was still, gathering its strength and grew, and was fledged and flew up—almost into the clear skies of her reason, though not quite—and sang plaintive melodies to her; among others, that the man she thought of as Maurice had made love to her in his madness; that he was not free; that he had never loved her; that she was only tending him back to consciousness for the cruel happiness of finding that his consciousness on the intellectual side meant unconsciousness on the emotional; that he would

remember nothing of his delirious words, and that his love had been but the outcome of bodily weakness. Last of all, she grew to dread his waking for the news it might tell her. When he stirred ... she closed her eyes momentarily, with swift apprehension of the worst. When he lay a long while still, she prayed he might wake promptly and put her out of her misery.

For it was become a long misery of suspense. All her happiness was laid aside like fine raiment; she dared not look at it or think of it; her heart made ready to wear mourning. And oh, the anguish of that moment, when at last—while her swift blood turned suddenly turbid in her veins, and the very breath in her lungs curdled thick to suffocation—he came out of his sleep, and his eyes opened incomprehendingly upon her ... and she, drawn back in apprehension, with her hands clasped up to her lip ... met his gaze, and knew not how to respond to it.

And then that glorious burst of certainty when recognition woke in him wanly and illuminated him like pale glad sunlight, and he struggled to free his arms of their coverings, and held them out to her ... and she had gone into them like a dove descending ... and put her own red, moist lips to his dry ones ... and kissed his lingering soul back to life and happiness.

Ah! To have lived that one brief moment, as Pam lived it, was to have lived a lifetime abundantly.

Now indeed that she knew he loved her for certain, and had had the true sign and seal of it, she was ready to die forthwith, if need were. It was enough to have held his love once in her own soul's keeping, as a child treasures the moment's confidence of some precious breakable vase. Pam was not greedy. She would have been quite content with no more.

But Heaven was kinder to this dear terrestrial angel than that, and filled every moment of her days henceforth with gladnesses as great, and greater. At times she wanted to get right away from everywhere and everybody; Heaven seemed to keep her plate replenished with celestial meats quicker than her soul could consume them. She wanted to dally with the taste of them, and extract their last nutritive juices of virtue. But she ... well, she was only human, after all, and said grace, and ate what was set before her.

In a way, Pam's prayer was almost of gratitude and rejoicing that her love had been given to her in this hour of his weakness. While he lay there, helpless upon his bed, following her mutely with his eyes, the fact of his belonging to her seemed set forth and glorified to an extent almost apocalyptic. In image he was a little child, dependent upon her breasts for subsistence. Every moment furnished her with opportunities for feeding him with the living love that flowed in her own body. Oh, truly, truly, he seemed hers when she nourished him thus back to

life with her ceaseless attentions; with caresses; with sudden fondlings—such as only his helplessness could have made possible; with a thousand ministrations thoughtful and divine. Her thoughts were always of him; her every movement showed him plainly as the motive power. All the love of him that had been gathering in the stillness of her soul flowed out towards him now in a great psychic stream—as warm and broad as a beam of sunlight. From her fingers when they touched him; from her lips when they rested on him; from her attitude when she turned towards him—flowed this constant current of love, love, love. Like a very planet was the life of Maurice Ethelbert Wynne in these days—a luminous orb swimming in pure ether of love. The love of a true, good woman is great and wonderful, but the love of this girl was so great and so wonderful that in the strong tide of it the Spawer lay half incredulous on his bed and blinked. It was no love of laughter; no love of jingling words; no love of triflings or pretty affectations. It was a strong, tense, electric current of unselfish feminine devotion that set the very atmosphere a-quiver. When she came near him he could almost hear it humming æolian music, as though he had laid his flat cheek to a telegraph post.

And in a way, too, he was glad to be thus helpless on his back, for the glory of being cradled in such a love, and learning his love all over again, like

an infant its alphabet, from the lips and looks and actions; the dear, large-hearted ABC Primer of Pam. Her very love of him, issuing towards him from every pore of her body, fertilised the girl's own beauty, like the sap in the lush hedgerows at spring. Her soft, velvet eyes, that had been dark enough and deep enough before, darkened and deepened for the accommodation of this love till they were beyond all plumb of mortal gaze. Her lips, that had been red enough and tender, colored now to a deeper, clearer carmine, with little pools of love visible lurking in the corners of them; love that stirred and eddied when she spoke, and settled down again into their ruby hollows when the lips reposed. Her lashes, that had been black enough, and long enough, and thick enough, lengthened almost under sight of the man; grew black as ebony and so thick that when she looked upon him from above, they lay in unbroken flatness upon her cheek. And her freckles too—those dear little golden minstrels on the bridge of her nose and brow—grew more purely golden, till at times almost they gleamed like minute bright insets of the precious metal itself, and sang love like a cluster of caged linnets. At whiles, when the Spawer looked at her, such a proud and tearful tenderness floated into him that had he been another woman, sure he must have wept. Her confidence in him; her self-sacrifice; her unceasing devotion; her countless ministrations —frightened him for what his own conduct must be

ever to repay them.

"Little woman..." he was moved to tell her, during that first day of his convalescence, "... do you know ... I think I don't ever want to get out of bed or on my legs again."

Pam was plainly alarmed, for it seemed to her he had suddenly caught the desire of death which comes at times to those whose days are numbered. But he made haste to reassure her.

"I just feel..." he explained to her, "... as though I could wish to lie here, like this, for ever and ever and ever, with you by me to look at and make me happy. Kiss me again, Pam, will you? It does me good."

Then Pam stooped over him, as she was always doing, and slipped her linked fingers under his neck, and looked into his face first, and kissed him (praying for him the while, though he did not know that), and buried her face by his, and lifted it to look at him once more, and kissed him again. For who was there now to lay a forbidding hand between their lips? Who should stop her now from telling him she loved him, loved him, loved him?

CHAPTER XLV

And rapidly the Spawer drew back, from its intricate shadowy by-paths, to the great broad highway of

Life.

How it would have fared with him but for that revitalising power of love, if there had been no Pam to cling to and sustain him, no man can positively say. The lonely Maurice Ethelbert Wynne of our latter chapters, void of hope or happiness or aim, might have turned up his hands and sunk under the deep sea without a struggle. But Pam was hands and eyes, and feet and lips, and thinker for them both.

Emma Morland brought the letters round in these early days, but Pam opened them, at the Spawer's express bidding, and read them to him aloud in her musical fluty voice—the voice that had won her a place in his heart before even he had set eyes upon her. And as she read, the Spawer, sitting in the big chair by the open sunlit window, with cushions under him of Pam's placing, would explain to her the various allusions; let her into his life; throw open all its gateways to the girl. In the inmost shelter of his soul he felt as though he needed the comfort of Pam's companionship.

"Nixey" stood for So-and-So, he would explain to her; and "Jack" was the brother of So-and-So—the fellow that did this and that and the other that he 'd told her about, did n't she remember?

And did n't Pam remember? Oh, my Heaven! Pam remembered. Not a word he ever said to her that she forgot.

Then, if there were any letters to answer, Pam

would seat herself at the table, with his writing-case thrown open, and dip deft fingers here, for envelopes; and deft fingers there, for paper; and draw forth the pen, and wield it as though armed for the fray; and would spear the ink-pot with it, and wait upon his words with a persuasive "Yes, dear?"

And the Spawer would make prodigious pretensions of thinking, and not a word come to him sometimes, because of the girl's face. His mind held up its thought as an obstinate cow does milk, and never a drop could he squeeze from it. All he could think of was Pam.

"Oh, bother the letters!" he would tell her. "They stop my thinking about you. Why must I pawn my attention to a horrid old business screed when I want never to take it from you?"

"Don't you?" says Pam gladly, and melts over him with her smile, wrapping him up in such a heavenly mantle of indulgence and love and devotion that he almost feels himself among the saints.

And oh! the joyousness of that return to the outer life, when Pam led the Spawer out at last, she carrying a cushion and a little net-bag of literary food (a French reader and the like); and they betook themselves to the harvest-field, and sat down under the blue sky in the stubble, with their backs against the golden stocks, and watched the elevated figure of Arny riding over the sea of waving corn, like another

Neptune, turning off the wheat from the tip with rhythmic sweeps of his trident; his eyes steadfast upon the tumbling crest of corn beside him; and they contemplated the busy shirt-sleeves of the band-makers, pulling out their two thin wisps of straw from the recumbent "shawves," splicing them dexterously, and twisting them—across their chests and under their arm-pits, till their arms flap like the wings of a crowing rooster—into a stout-stranded band, that they lay out in the stubble alongside the flat heaps of fallen grain; and they watched the harvestmen following, who rake up the loose corn into a round bundle against the flat of their leg, walk with it, so clipped, to the ready-made band, depose it there, stoop, gather the two ends of the band in their strong hands, squeeze the sheaf in with the knee, bind it, make a securing tuck with the straw, and taking up the trim-waisted shock by its plaited girdle, cast it aside out of the path of the reaper on its next round.

And then, when "lowance" time was proclaimed, this stock where Maurice and his Pamela were seated would be made the headquarters of the repast. Here would come the welcome brown basket, and the carpet bag with its bottlenecks protruding; the blue mugs and the tin pannikins; the cheese and the bread; the pasties and the sweet cakes; the tea and the beer. And here would come Dixon's genial voice, greeting them from afar:

"Noo then, Mr. Wynne! 'Ow div ye fin' yersen ti morn? Very comfortable, bi t' looks of ye. Ye 're in good 'ands, it seems."

And when the Spawer grows equal to it, it becomes a daily obligation for them to wander across the intervening stubble and pasture to Barclay's farm—where the sails of his reaper can be seen churning the blue sky above the hedge level, like the paddle of a steamer—just to give Barclay's stocks a turn, and show themselves not forgetful of their deliverer. The time comes, of course, when they must cease thanking him with their lips, but Pam's mere gaze upon him is a gratitude, and Barclay would have missed it, if she failed him one day, as he would miss his pipe or his "lowance."

"Ah," said he, on a certain occasion, looking over with a manifest nice eye of critical observation, and finding no fault, "If ah 'd 'ad a lass like you to tek me at start, ah mud 'a been a better man, an' a richer."

"But there are others," Pam told him encouragingly, "... besides me."

"Ay," Barclay cut in, with a grim humor. "There is. Ower monny, lass. Bud they 'd 'ave to be good uns after ah 've 'ad you to sample. Ah would n't tek onny rubbish noo, an' it 'd 'ave to be rubbishin' stuff 'at 'd tek me. Ah 'm ower well known 'ereabouts. 'Appen ah mud get chance wi' next farm if ah change."

But the seed of resolution germinated in Pam's

breast, and some days later, getting Barclay to herself, it pushed its pure blades through the warm soil all suddenly.

"... Oh, Mr. Barclay," she begged him, going close under his broad chest, and showing the peeping hands of petition. "You won't be angry with me ... please?"

"Nay, that ah weean't," Barclay protested staunchly. "Oot wi' it! What 'ave ah been doin' noo?"

"I want to ask you something," Pam continued, a little more softly, and a little more rapidly. "... Something very particular. I want you to promise something."

"Ay," said Barclay assentively. "Ah can promise ye, lass. Ah can promise onnybody, so far as that gans. But it's keepin' of it 'at's not i' mah line."

"If you promise *me* ... you 'll keep it," Pam insinuated very softly, but with an almost irresistible forcefulness.

"Ah 'm none so sure," Barclay reflected. "Ah know what ye want to ask me."

"What?" said Pam.

"Ye want to ask me to gie it up."

"Yes," said Pam, after a pause, "I do."

"Ah 've tried ... lots o' times," Barclay admitted.

"But not for *me*!" Pam urged. "Not for the sake of anybody. Oh, Mr. Barclay ... you don't know how unhappy I 've been at times about you, of late ... to think that you 've saved my life—and his life—and

put this happiness in our way ... and all the time you 're not taking any care of your own life ... at all."

"Why, lass," Barclay told her, but visibly troubled about the eyes by her solicitude. "Ah 'm sorry ye 've let me be a trouble to ye. Ah 've been nowt bud trouble to missen an' ivverybody. But where would ye be? ... an 'im too, if ah 'd kep' pledge sin' last time ah signed 'er? Eh?"

"I know; I know," Pam admitted. "I 've thought of that, too."

"Ay," Barclay took up, pleased with her admission. "It's a caution when ye come to think on it. If ah 'ad n't been mekkin' a swill-tub o' missen, an' walked back when ah did—it 'd 'a been good-by to ye, an' long live teetawtallers. It just seems as though Lord 'ad called me to Oommuth for t' puppos—though ah did n't know it at time. An' 'ow am ah to know, if 'E calls o' me ageenn, same road ... 'at 'E 'as n't seummut else 'E 's wantin' doin'? Eh noo?"

"Perhaps..." Pam suggested pleadingly, "... perhaps it was n't God that called you, Mr. Barclay ... but it was God that sent you back. Don't you think it might be that?"

"Noo, ah sewd n't wonder," Barclay decided, with obvious admiration for the girl's ingenuity. "But it 'll be a rum un for me to know which way 'E wants me to gan ... or which end 'E 's at."

"... And you 'll promise me, won't you?" Pam besought him, and took hold of his watch-chain.

"You 'll promise me to fight your very best ... for my sake."

"Ay," said Barclay, after a pause. "Ah can bud try."

"You 'll try hard, though?" Pam adjured him—finding too much fatalism in the tone of his promise for her satisfaction.

"No.... when ah say ah 'll try, ah mean ah 'll try!" Barclay reassured her. "Ah s'll try my very best for t' sake of 'oo asked me."

And Father Mostyn and the Doctor are constant attendants upon the Spawer's recovery too, and stay for meals whenever they want them; and tell him when the whiskey flask is running low.

And it comes to be decided that their marriage shall not take place for a year. And meanwhile the Spawer is going to stay where he is; and Pam is to push on with her music, and her French, and with her English, and fill her dear little head with the intellectual fare for which it has always hungered. And she is to do no more letter-carrying. Father Mostyn has inhibited her from that with an *ex cathedra* usage of the great signet. To remain at the Post Office in an official capacity in face of present circumstances would be an act of rebellion towards the Church, and exceedingly offensive to Jehovah. As

the girl's spiritual and corporeal guardian, he charges himself with her care until she can be decently and respectably married. And they will go, all three of them, to Hunmouth at times, by Tankard's 'bus (oh, bliss! oh, heavenly rapture!) for purposes of shopping ... and the sheer pleasure of it.

And the Spawer talks seriously of coming back to Ullbrig after the honeymoon, and fitting up a little place for their own two selves, where they can be near Father Mostyn, and all their old friends; and where he can work earnestly, and without distractions; and where they can escape all the jealousies and soul-corrupting ambitions of towns and places where they "live."

"Oh, little woman!" he tells Pam, "I can't bear to think of your giving up your own dear self, and letting your soul be shaped to the conventional pattern of the world. I want you to be what you are —and for what I love you. You shall see all the big places, of course, dear. We 'll save up our coppers and manage that somehow. But let 's see 'em from the outside. Let 's go and look at them through glass windows, as though they were so many great shops, and come back to our own humble happy life, and break bread and be thankful. The world for us, dear, is just our two selves. We 're two little human hemispheres that go to make our one globe, and if we 're only happy in ourselves ... why, let the other planets go hang! Because you love me I just feel I

don't care how many people hate me. They can hate their heads off. They can cry 'pish' to my music. They can turn aside their faces when I go by, as though I were a pestilence. What I do I want to do now for you. I feel I would rather write a little song that pleases you, love, than compose a Beethoven symphony for the world to bow to. And why? Because, dearest, I know that the world is as ready to kick me as to bestow one ha'porth of its kindness ... but You! All the pleasure I can give to you ... is just an investment, which you can pay back to me in love at a thousand per cent."

"Is n't it funny?" says Pam, though without showing the least appreciation of the avowed humor, "... what love is. I 've thought the same as you, too, but not put so beautifully. I just want us to try and be like what we are now, in our hearts, as long as we live. At times (do you?) I like to think of you as belonging to me ... as though you were every bit mine. And at other times ... I feel frightened of having you. The responsibility seems somehow too great. And then I just think of myself as belonging to you. And all I want ... is to creep into your heart, dear, and for you to shelter me. Oh, Maurice! To think. Six months ago ... three months ago ... I had no thought of you, or you of me! And we might never have met each other; never have loved each other! Is n't it dreadful?"

"What the eye does n't see, darling!" Maurice

tells her, "... the heart does n't grieve. What we never know we never miss. But now we 're going to make up for what might have been, are n't we?"

Pam says yes, they are. "And oh," she says, "if you had n't found me you might have found somebody else, Morrie dear, do you think it possible that I may be standing in the way of somebody you don't know at all ... that you might love better?"

"Very likely you are, dear!" Maurice says, acting Job's comforter. "But anyway, I 'm ready to risk you, and take my chance of what may be for what is."

And this time Pam is ready to risk it too, and does not tell the Spawer, as once she told Ginger:

"There must be no chance in love!"

CHAPTER XLVI

One bright morning in late September, when the sky dreamed as blue as June, and the sun shone August, a stranger passed through into the churchyard by the lich gate, and his Reverence the Vicar, having received telepathic intimation of his presence, along one or other of the invisible slender filaments that connect the Vicarage with the churchyard, emerged shortly from his retreat, like a fine full-bodied spider, and captured his prize by the side wicket, with a "Ha!" of agreeable greeting.

"A stranger within our gates!" he observed, in courteous surprise, rocking to and fro upon his legs in the pathway, and balancing the ebony staff across both palms, as though he were weighing theological propositions. He encompassed the sky with a comprehensive circle of ferrule, and thrusting up a rapt nose to appreciation of its beneficent blue, "You bring glorious weather!" he said.

The stranger acknowledged with marked politeness that the weather was as his Reverence had been pleased to state. He was an elderly man, soberly habited in black, and a compression of mouth that seemed to betoken one whose office exacted of him either deference or discretion, or perhaps both.

"A pilgrim to the old heathen centre of Ullbrig?" his Reverence inquired. "... An antiquarian at all? A connoisseur of tablets? or a rubber of brasses?—in which case we 've nothing to show you."

The stranger said he was not exactly any of these things.

"Ha! ... an epitaph hunter, perhaps?" his Reverence substituted agreeably, as though desirous of setting him at ease.

Nor scarcely an epitaph hunter ... in the precise sense of the word, the stranger disclaimed. He scanned Father Mostyn sideways with a deferential regard of inquiry. "The Vicar, I presume?" he said.

His Reverence acknowledged the appellation by inclining leniently towards it.

"I thought ... I could not be mistaken," the stranger told him. "As a matter of fact ... I had intended taking the liberty of troubling you with a call, after giving a glance round the gravestones here. It is possible, if you would be so kind, that you might be of considerable assistance to ... to me in a matter of some importance."

Father Mostyn wagged the divining rod sagely over his palms.

"A question of the register? Births? Deaths? Marriages? A pedigree in the issue, perhaps?"

"To a certain extent, sir, you are quite correct." The stranger compressed his mouth for a moment. "I may as well be explicit on the point. Indeed, there is no reason, sir, why any particular secrecy should be maintained. I am here to pursue investigations on behalf of Messrs. Smettering, Keelman & Drabwell, solicitors, of Lincoln's Inn, who are acting according to instructions received from a client of some importance. Our object is merely to trace and establish connection with a member of our client's family—considerably to this member's advantage, I may assure you."

His Reverence looked speculatively over the stick as though the last few sentences had escaped his precise observation, and he were trying now to reclaim the import of them.

"... A military family at all?" he inquired.

The stranger eyed him with respectful surprise

and dubiety for a moment.

"... An old family of importance," he admitted slowly. "I should say it might be called a military family." Then he stopped. "Perhaps..." said he, and looked at his Reverence.

"Ha!" said his Reverence blandly. "And the present client? An army man, is he?"

"The son of one, I believe, sir."

"To be sure. Precisely. The son of one. Beautiful! beautiful! One or two fat benefices in the family, do you know?"

"I rather fancy ... there is one attached to the estate. There may be more, for anything to my knowledge." The stranger followed the lead with the resignation of one who plays void of trumps. "If you know anything..." he hazarded.

His Reverence stroked a gorgeous nose of wisdom.

"No mistaking the symptoms. Not a bit of it. Your client seeks recovery of a daughter?"

The stranger demonstrated as much surprise as his discretion and his respectfulness would let him.

"You can inform us ... where she is?"

"Certainly! certainly! We have been expecting you. I thought you would n't be long in reaching us now. To-morrow ... or Thursday, I thought." His Reverence cast a fine finger of effect towards the white headstone, rising from the grass, beneath the east window. "She is there."

"Dead?" said the stranger.

"Your client is just a little matter of thirteen years too late."

"Her married name was Searle?" said the stranger, as though offering the fact for the priest's verification.

"To be sure. On the gravestone. On the gravestone. 'Sacred to the memory of Mary Pamela Searle.' And her father's name, of course, was..."

"... Paunceforth, since you know it, sir, ... of Briskham Park, Hampshire."

"He will be getting an old man," said his Reverence.

"Seventy-four ... or five," the stranger responded, "... and very feeble. He has had one seizure already, and is anxious to make amends, before he dies, for an act of early severity. At one stage of the proceedings there was a child involved. A daughter. Is she still living? If you can give me any information likely to lead to her recovery, I may tell you that expense will be no object at all. No stone is to be left unturned, by our client's instructions, to trace matters to their final step. And I may add that ... as this is now the last surviving branch of our client's family ... and he is a gentleman of considerable wealth..."

"Exactly," said his Reverence. "I think it will not be difficult to conclude matters to your client's entire satisfaction. His granddaughter has been, and still is,

under my safe care.... Just come along with me as far as the Vicarage. There are a few things there in my possession. ... Beautiful! beautiful! Quite an Indian summer we 're having."

And that same day, before dinner, the news is racing all over Ullbrig that Pam's grandfather had sought for her and found her; and that she is to be a real lady at last, and ride horses, and drive carriages, and order servants of her own, and live in a great big house in a great big park, where deer are grazing and peacocks stalk the terraces, and will never come back to Ullbrig any more, but give them all the go-by now, and set her nose up higher than ever; and the Spawer is only marrying her for her money.

Steggison says to himself with a Satanic joy:

"Noo all s'll get a chance at post-bag. She promised me ah sewd 'ave fost try at it if owt 'appened 'er. Mah wod! Bud ah 'll gie 'em James Maskell an' all. They 'll 'a t' run when ah call of 'em—ne'er mind if they weean't!"

And James Maskill stands forlornly with his back propped against the post-house bricks, and a heel hitched up to the wall beneath him, and his hands in his pockets, and his mouth screwed to a spiritless whistle that can't produce the ghost of a sound; staring at nothing, and thinking of nothing; and feeling nothing—for life in front of him is nothing now, and he would n't have the heart to fetch Dingwall Jackson his promised bat across the

lug, even if you caught him and held his head up for the purpose.

And Emma Morland is bursting with pride, and weeping with the misery of losing Pam—for this fashionable interment of Pam in the classic vaults of High Society fills her with a more terrible sense of their severance than a little green grave in Ullbrig churchyard.

And the postmaster makes an impressive chief mourner, standing by the counter with set face and lowered eyes as though it were a coffin, and telling his daughter, when she comes hither to embarrass him with her demonstrations of grief:

"It 's all for t' best, lass no doot. We s'll larn to get ower it i' time."

And Mrs. Morland, her mingled gladness and sorrow commingling to reminiscence, tells, through fond tears, how Pam did this, and Pam did that; and how she 'd always thought of others before herself; and what a strange sad house it would be without her—and wept herself into perspirations, and wiped her tears and her steaming forehead with large double sweeps of her apron. And Ginger went off his food again—for though she 'd never been his, at each new name with which hers was coupled, he felt once more as though he 'd just lost her.

And Pam went dancing up to Cliff Wrangham that day, hugging his Reverence's arm—as sad as any of them, and so joyful that it seemed not earth she

trod on, but the big round prismatic blown bubble of a dream, shivering warningly, all ready to puff into nothing and let her down into nowhere. And when they came to Dixon's, Pam went into the little parlor, and looked at the Spawer, and said, "Oh, Morrie!" in a doleful voice of preparation. For, to tell the truth, though she was come here intended to play a little comedy on him, with a triumphant *dénouement*, her own conviction in things actual (including, for the time, their own happiness) had been so surprisingly shaken that, despite her errand's being presumably of gladness, she looked, as she looked at him, for all the world as though she had seen a ghost.

"Good gracious, darling!" said the Spawer, in concern, when he saw her. "Whatever 's been happening now?"

"Oh, Maurice!" said Pam again, trying hard to win back assurance that he and she were not two mere unsubstantial figments of somebody else's dream, but flesh and blood, and dear and bend to each other. "I 've something to tell you, dear—I mean, to ask you, dear. Do you love me?"

"Do I love you?" repeats the Spawer, with a look of incredulous surprise, and a tinge, in his tones, of severity. "What a remarkable question to ask a man —and at such short notice! Really, Miss Searle ... I must confess you surprise me."

"Oh, but do you, do you?" begs Pam.

"Well, it 's dreadfully, horribly sudden," says

Maurice. "And you put me quite in a flutter. But since you 're rather an attractive girl ... well, yes, I do."

"Oh, but suppose ... suppose..." says Pam, going on....

"Yes, little riddle-me-ree?"

"Suppose ... suppose I was n't what you 've always thought me. Suppose it were found that ... I was n't a lady at all. Suppose I was somebody altogether different from what Father Mostyn said I was."

Sundry speculative shadows rise up in the Spawer's mind, but he is not dismayed, and feels no flinching.

"Well?" says he encouragingly. "And suppose you were?"

"Would it make no difference?" Pam asks tremulously, it must be confessed, for oh ... if now it should!

"Darling," says the Spawer firmly, "not the least little bit."

Pam wants then and there to clasp his avowal and proclaim her mission. Her soul has scarcely strength for further dissimulation, but for the full crop of joy that she hopes to reap in the end, she keeps her hand to the plough.

"Would you want to marry me ... just the same?" she asks.

"More!" says Maurice Ethelbert. "A hundred

times more."

"Why more?" Pam inquires vaguely; her curiosity suddenly fanned to seek the reason of this strange great increase in his affection for her.

"Because," the Spawer tells her, "the less you are to the world, dear, the more you must be to me. The less claim the world can make upon you, the more I feel I 've got you all to myself."

"You would still marry me, under any conditions?" persists Pam.

"Under any and all."

"And you won't let me go?"

"I won't let you go."

"Whatever people say?"

"Whatever people say."

"You 'll hold me as tight ... as you held me when we thought we were going to die ... that night."

"Tighter, darling, tighter."

"Even if..."

"If what?"

"... I should turn out ... just a bit of a lady, after all, dear?"

The Spawer is going to answer, but he stops suddenly, lifts up the girl's face, and looks straight into her eyes.

"Pam!" says he.

THE END

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